BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY Volume 2: Joshua - Esther

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PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

JOSHUA CHAPTER 1

Jos 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of Yahweh, Yahweh spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 1:2 Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise-

The Messianic prophecy of Dt. 18:18 had a potential Messianic and primary fulfillment in Joshua: "I will raise them up [God 'rose up' Joshua- s.w. Josh. 1:2; 7:10,13; 8:1,3] a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee [Joshua's life was framed to be like that of Moses- e.g. he too was told to remove his shoe when on holy ground, also held his hands up whilst Israel fought their enemies]; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him [Joshua is constantly presented as telling Israel what God commanded him- Josh. 4:8,10,17; 6:10; 8:8: "according to the commandment of the Lord shall ye do. See, I have commanded you"; Josh. 8:27]. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him".

Go over this Jordan, you, and all this people, to the land which I give to them, even to the children of Israel-

This was a primary fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, and we too experience that. For the covenant is not only about 'jam tomorrow'. In a sense, the promises that the seed *would* inherit the land, and that God *would be* their God were fulfilled straight after God said them. He became Isaac's God (Gen. 31:42,53 refer to this), the God of Abraham's son. Time and again God reminds Israel that He *is* their God. And that land in a sense *was* given to the Jewish fathers (Gen. 15:18; Dt. 28:63; 30:5 NIV; Josh. 1:2-9; 21:43; 1 Kings 4:20,21). David could praise God simply because He was "my God" (Ps. 118:28)- an allusion back to the Abrahamic promise. Of course, the *main* fulfillment of

this promise will be in the Kingdom; but in principle, the promise has *already* been fulfilled to Abraham's seed- i.e., us!

Jos 1:3 I have given you every place that the sole of your foot will tread on, as I told Moses-
This meant that according to their spiritual ambition, so would be their inheritance of the Kingdom, as Moses had told them (Dt. 11:24,25). The temptation for them, as for us, was to consider that once we have our small inheritance, our farmstead and secure land, as it was for them- then we need have no wider vision. For to go onwards from that parochial mentality and tread upon the entire land (:4) up to the Euphrates was a vision only worth pursuing if they had a vision of collective inheritance of the Kingdom. To seek to get others there is a call which few really perceive. See on Josh. 3:13.

Jos 1:4 From the wilderness, and this Lebanon, even to the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border-
God's opening commission to Joshua was that the people were to possess the whole land promised to Abraham, right up to the Euphrates. But Joshua ended up drawing up the borders of the land far smaller than these; he didn't even seek to subdue the territory up to the Euphrates, even though God had promised him potential success and even commanded him to do so. See on :3,6,15.

Jos 1:5 No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you-
But these very words are quoted in Heb. 13:5 as the grounds of our matchless confidence that the Lord God will be with us too! As He was with Moses- not just in power, but in wondrous patience and gentleness- so He will be with us too. Not only did God encourage Joshua to see himself as in Moses' shoes; He inspired Jeremiah likewise (Jer. 21:8 = Dt. 30:15,19), and Ezekiel (Ez. 2:3 = Dt. 31:27; Neh. 9:17; Num. 17:10); and He wishes us to also see Moses' God as our God. But if Moses' God is to be ours in truth in the daily round of life, we must rise up to the dedication of Moses; as he was a faithful steward, thoroughly dedicated to God's ecclesia (Heb. 3:5), so we are invited follow his example (1 Cor. 4:2; Mt. 24:45). Note that the promise of Moses that God would not fail nor forsake Joshua, but would be with him (Dt. 31:8) was similar to the very promise given to Moses which he had earlier doubted (Ex. 3:12; 4:12,15). Such exhortation is so much the stronger from someone who has themselves doubted and then come to believe.

We may boldly say that we will *not* be fearful, as Joshua was, because God has addressed to *us* the very words which He did to Joshua: "I will never leave thee nor

forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5,6). In this especially, Joshua is our example. When Heb. 13:13 speaks of *us* going forth outside the camp, perhaps there is a reference to Joshua who dwelt with Moses outside the camp- thus making Joshua symbolic of us all.

Watch out for quotations and allusions within Scripture; there are connections not only between New and Old Testaments, but also (e.g.) between Paul's letters; Peter alludes to Paul's writings, Paul frequently alludes to the words of John the Baptist; Jeremiah often refers to Job's words and experiences. Note the context of the source quotation, because this often sheds light on the passage in which it is quoted. Be aware that many NT passages mix a number of OT passages in one 'quotation'; e.g. "The deliverer will come from Zion" (Rom. 11:26) is a conflated quotation of Ps. 14:7; 53:6 and Is. 59:20. And Heb. 13:5 combines quotes from Gen. 28:15; Josh. 1:5 and Dt. 31:16. Heb. 13:5 doesn't quote any of them exactly, but mixes them together.

Jos 1:6 Be strong and courageous; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them-
God's opening commission to Joshua was that the people were to possess the whole land promised to Abraham, right up to the Euphrates (Josh. 1:4). But Joshua ended up drawing up the borders of the land far smaller than these; he didn't even seek to subdue the territory up to the Euphrates, even though God had promised him potential success and even commanded him to do so. Joshua was to divide up the whole land promised to Abraham, amongst the tribes of Israel (Josh. 1:6). And yet in the extensive descriptions of Joshua dividing up the land, we don't find him dividing up that whole territory up to the Euphrates. He seems to have lacked that vision, and fallen into the mire of minimalism, just content with a utilitarian, small scale conquest, rather than seeing the bigger picture of the potential Kingdom which God wanted to give His people. See on :3,4,15.

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

Jos 1:7 Only be strong and very courageous to observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you. Don't turn from it to the right hand or to the left-
Joshua is repeatedly made parallel with Israel; his victories were theirs; what he

achieved is counted to them. In the same way, the people of the Lord Jesus are counted as Him. Joshua was to be strong and possess the land (Josh. 1:6), just as they had been told to do, using the same Hebrew words (Dt. 11:8). Indeed, Israel and Joshua are given parallel charges, to be strong and of good courage to take the land (Dt. 31:6,7). Both Israel and Joshua are given the same charge to keep the words of the covenant, that they might "prosper" (Dt. 29:9; Josh. 1:7). See on Is. 59:21.

As God charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law, so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people (Josh. 1:7,8 cp. 23:6). Joshua had faithfully followed, and now he became the leader who was to be faithfully followed. Likewise, he led the Israelites in battle whilst Moses stood on the hill with arms uplifted in prayer for his success. And in capturing Ai, it was Joshua's turn to stand on a hill with arms uplifted [also in prayer?] whilst Israel fought.

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

Jos 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein. Thus you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success-
In Ps. 1:1-3, David makes several allusions to Joshua. He speaks of how the man who meditates in God's word day and night will prosper in his ways; and he uses the very same Hebrew words as found in Josh. 1:8 in recounting God's charge to Joshua. But David's point is that the man who does these things will not "walk in the counsel of the ungodly"- he won't give in to peer pressure. The fact that Joshua was wrongly influenced by his peers in later life would indicate that he didn't keep the charge given to him.

Try to memorize Scripture, run through verses as you go about life, play tapes of Bible studies or Bible reading in the background (instead of the mindless radio). Much of Scripture was probably memorized by various contemporary believers. "This book of the

law shall not depart out of thy mouth" (Josh. 1:8) presumably means that Joshua was commanded to keep reciting it to himself in daily life, so that he would be obedient to it. The way Jeremiah consciously and unconsciously quotes and alludes to Job would suggest that he had memorized that book. And many of the Psalms are written in such a way (in Hebrew) as to be easily memorized. David memorized God's law and meditated upon it (hardly the easiest part of Scripture to memorize, at least to Western eyes; Ps. 119:16). He recited it to himself in the night seasons.

As Joshua had been told to be strong and of good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others (Josh. 10:25).

This connection between Joshua and Israel is developed in Is. 59:21, which describes the new covenant which God will make with Israel in the Messianic Kingdom in terms evidently reminiscent of Joshua- as if the new covenant was made with him, thereby enabling him potentially to be part of a Messianic Kingdom even in his day: "And as for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: my Spirit that is upon thee ["Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him" Dt. 34:9; Num. 27:18-23] , and my words which I have put in thy mouth [Dt. 18:18- God's words were put in Joshua's mouth], shall not depart out of thy mouth ["this book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth", Josh. 1:8, s.w.], nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever".

Jos 1:9 Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid, neither be dismayed: for Yahweh your God is with you wherever you go-
The idea being, as discussed on :3, that wherever they went, they would have victory and take the land for themselves. The various towns in our lives may be alcoholism, the struggle to forgive, gentleness, patience, or whatever seems so insuperable. It is God's eager desire that we should inherit the Kingdom, and so we need not fear (Lk 12:32). The command to be strong and courageous is understood by David as meaning "be of good courage, and He will strengthen your heart" (Ps. 27:4; 31:24). It is not so much a call for human strength and bravery, as to open our hearts to the strengthening of His Spirit.

Jos 1:10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying-
"Officers" is literally 'the scribes'. It could refer to those who had a record of the people from the latest census, and could therefore better organize them. But we wonder if it refers to those who had already been set up to keep copies of God's law and interpret it to the people. And yet their work was not academic, just as true Bible study can never be an academic discipline. They were to in practice prepare the people to enter the land and conquer Canaan.

Jos 1:11 Pass through the midst of the camp, and command the people, saying, 'Prepare food; for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land,

which Yahweh your God gives you to possess'-
The "three days" period sends the mind to the Lord's resurrection, which was what gives us ultimate entry into Canaan. Preparing food in advance was a new discipline for people who had lived for decades on the daily provision of manna by God every morning. That this need to "prepare food" should be recorded gives absolute circumstantial credibility to the record. Such a command would have been absolutely necessary. These things really happened. The exodus from Egypt had been in haste, so that they had no time to "prepare food" (Ex. 12:39). They had left Egypt because of push factors. Now, they were to be motivated by the pull factor of the Kingdom, and were not being thrust out in haste, but rather entering the Kingdom on their own terms.

These three days may be those of Josh. 3:1,2. The order to prepare food was given on 7th Nisan, as they crossed Jordan on the 10th. The spies would have been on their mission between the 5th and 8th Nisan.

Jos 1:12 Joshua spoke to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh saying-
They had received their inheritance to the east of Jordan, because they were attracted by the rich pasture there for their many flocks and herds (Num. 32:16,24). This had been on the agreement that they would help the rest of Israel to inherit their inheritances too.

Jos 1:13 Remember the word which Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded you saying, 'Yahweh your God will give you rest, and will give you this land-
After the pattern of the Reubenites, we have been given the promised rest of the Kingdom here and now (Josh. 1:13 cp. Heb. 4:3); but we will, like them, only take possession of that inheritance after we have ensured that our brethren have received their possession (Josh. 1:15). Josh. 1:13,15 present a paradox: the Reubenites were given their "rest", but they would only get their "rest" once their brethren had. Those Reubenites really were symbols of us: for this passage is surely behind the reasoning of Heb. 4, where *we* are told that *we* have entered into rest, but that we must labour if we want to enter into it.

Jos 1:14 Your wives, your little ones and your livestock shall live in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan; but all your mighty men of valour shall pass over before your brothers, armed, and shall help them-
This was no small sacrifice, because it left their much beloved flocks, as well as their women and children, without protection. That is the significance of the agreement that "all" their soldiers were to pass over Jordan. And they were to be in the front line, "before your brothers", forming the vanguard. Further, their inheritances east of Jordan were huge, and included areas inhabited by giants and strong enemies. So the agreement

required them to live by faith in God's protection far more than did the other tribes. Their attempted short cut to the Kingdom didn't work, it ended up with far greater challenge to their faith. And that is true to this day.

Jos 1:15 until Yahweh has given your brothers rest, as He has given you, and they have also possessed the land which Yahweh your God gives them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and settle it, which Moses the servant of Yahweh gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise'-
See on :13. Joshua didn't give the people rest (Heb. 4:8); but he said he had (Josh. 22:4). He failed to fulfil the potential of Josh. 1:13-15- that *he* would lead the people to "rest". The Messianic Kingdom could, perhaps, have come through Joshua-Jesus; but both Joshua and Israel would not. Dt. 1:38 states clearly that "Joshua... he shall cause Israel to inherit [s.w. possess]" the land. Yet by the end of Joshua's life, Israel were not inheriting the land in totality. He didn't live up to his potential. Note, in passing, that God's prophecy here was conditional, although no condition is actually stated at the time. See on :4,6.

Jos 1:16 They answered Joshua saying, All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go-
As noted on :14, the demands on them were a great test of faith. That they agreed and didn't seek to renege on the agreement is therefore the more commendable.

Jos 1:17 Just as we listened to Moses in all things, so will we listen to you. Only may Yahweh your God be with you as He was with Moses-
This was surely an exaggeration, as Israel had not been obedient to Moses "in all things".

Jos 1:18 Whoever rebels against your commandment, and doesn't listen to your words in all that you command him, he shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous-
They now encourage Joshua themselves, perhaps sensing his weakness and nervousness. There is repeated encouragement to be strong and of a good courage and not be fearful (Dt. 31:23; Josh. 1:6,7,8,18). What does this imply about Joshua? He could perhaps have potentially been 'Jesus', as his name means, the Messiah figure. But he failed, perhaps because of his fear, and so this possibility was reapplied and rescheduled to the Lord Jesus. Hebrews effectively makes this point, saying that although Joshua gave the people "rest", in fact he didn't ultimately; and so his work was fulfilled only in the Lord Jesus.

Joshua had been charged to be strong, of good courage, not fearful nor be dismayed. Yet he had a tendency to forget those charges, the implications of his having been called by

God for a purpose; and needed to be reminded of them as he forgot or lost faith in them. Perhaps this is why he is an otherwise surprising omission from the list of faithful men and women in Hebrews 11. And here of course is the challenge to us. We too have been given commissions and callings. Whether it be to raise a Godly family, to establish an ecclesia in a certain place, to overcome a specific vice...the obstacles will flee before us, every place where the soles of our feet rest, will be blessed...if we truly believe in God's purpose with us. Yet like Joshua, we usually fail to have a full faith in this. We get distracted by the views of others, peer pressure, worried by lack of resources, discouraged by setbacks; when it is belief in God's most basic initial promises to us that will overcome them. Joshua's fear is all the more reprehensible when we consider the testimony of Ps. 91. Here Moses speaks about Joshua, the one who dwelt in the secret place or tabernacle of God (Ps. 91:1 = Ex. 33:11), and who therefore was miraculously preserved throughout the wilderness wanderings. Thousands of Joshua's generation died at his side from the various plagues which wasted out his generation during those wanderings; but they never came near him (Ps. 91:5-8). As a result of this, he was commanded by Moses to "not be afraid" (Ps. 91:5), perhaps Moses was thinking specifically about peer pressure, with the assurance that truly God would hear Joshua's prayers (Ps. 91:14,15). His amazing preservation during the wilderness years ought to have instilled a faith and lack of fearfulness within him; and yet the implication is that he did very often fall prey to fearfulness in later life. Just as with us, the circumstances of earlier life are controlled by the Father to give us faith with which to cope with later crises; but we don't always learn the lessons we are intended to.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 2

Jos 2:1 Joshua the son of Nun secretly sent two men out of Shittim as spies, saying, Go, view the land, including Jericho. They went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and slept there.

The spies were sent out "secretly". I'd argue that the sending out of the 12 spies about 40 years earlier was essentially a lack of faith- in the fact that God's Angel had gone ahead of them anyway to spy out the land, and Yahweh Himself had told Israel how good the land was. Likewise here- the spies actually achieved nothing in military terms, because God's strategy for taking Jericho didn't depend upon anything they did nor found out. But their weakness in undertaking the mission was used to save Rahab and her family, just as God works so often. They were instructed to "go see the land", but instead they "go ['went'] and came into the house of a prostitute". The planned reconnaisance didn't happen; the spies learnt nothing that influenced the strategy for taking Jericho. It could even be enquired whether in fact these two "young men" [Heb., LXX "youths"] simply went absent without leave from their mission, and went in to her brothel exactly in order to sleep with her. The missionaries away from home and out of sight of their elders... sleep with a whore [think of the origin of 'the missionary position']. Or try to. We will later note that the word used for 'slept there' has a distinctly sexual sense. In the natural order of things they would hardly have 'slept' much that nerve wracking night, if we take 'slept' as just referring to sleeping

and nothing sexual. Perhaps the secrecy involved a sense that this was in fact not really a very spiritual decision and Joshua was somehow furtive about it. Israel had never known urban life nor perhaps even seen walled cities like Jericho. The spies entered the city at evening time, and the gate was shut. Strangers always attract attention in such places- let alone when the city was in the direct line of attack of the Hebrews. The language / accent of the two spies would've given them away. According to the record in Joshua 2, it seems they entered the city gates at dusk, the gates were shut, and they'd have perceived that they were being watched and had been noticed as suspicious strangers. And so they used some desperate initiative, and dived into a whorehouse nearby to the gate. This was the sort of place strangers would go to, as it would be today. We imagine them entering the house, and meeting the madame of the house. "What do you want?" was as dumb a question as the doctor asking the patient "How are you feeling today?". Rahab was a smart woman, accustomed to strangers, and knew what was going on. Within the first couple of sentences, she'd have figured who they were. And it seems they spoke for a short time, maybe an hour or so, realized they were busted, understood they were in a death trap within that walled city, and threw themselves on her mercy. And there, providence kicked in. James 2:25 calls those men "messengers", with a message Rahab believed. They hardly had an hour to tell her the message, before men were knocking on the door enquiring what Rahab knew about the spies. In that brief time, she believed a very sketchy and incomplete Gospel of the Kingdom. And her works reflected that faith, in telling the men [whom local culture would've barred from entering the house of a single woman] that the spies had come and gone. "That was *quick*!", we can imagine the King's men joking. There was weakness and dysfunction all around this story. The men "lodged" with Rahab (Josh. 2:1)- but the Hebrew term is often translated "slept with..." in a sexual context. In fact, whenever the term is used in relation to a woman, let alone a prostitute, it implies intercourse. As a word it does mean simply to sleep... but it is strange that no other term for 'lodging the night' is used, and that the term in the context of a female or prostitute does usually carry a sexual meaning. Whilst I don't believe the spies did sleep with Rahab, it's strange that no other word for 'lodging' is used. The ambiguity is, I suggest, purposeful. But they and their message were 'welcomed in peace' by Rahab (Heb. 11:31), she 'received' their message and justified herself by works by protecting them (James 2:25). This would contribute to an overall theme in the book of Joshua of Israel's weakness- the land wasn't fully possessed, Joshua appears himself as weak in many ways, he didn't fully follow the admittedly hard-to-follow act of Moses, Rahab believed the very words of promise which Israel didn't believe, the spies were sent out secretly by Joshua with no command from God to do this, when God had promised to go before Israel and give them victory... and yet God worked through all this. Even to the extent of using the weakness of the spies in going in to a brothel and "sleeping" with the madame... in order to save that woman and her family, and the lives of the spies, all in a manner which through human weakness glorified the God of Israel. Rahab had an extensive knowledge of parts of Moses' words and law, and this was the basis for her faith. Yet where did she, a whore in Jericho, get that knowledge from? Presumably from her clients, who would've been travellers who had heard these things and passed them on to her. All this is wonderful encouragement for all sinners- that God has a way of working through sin to His glory, and He doesn't give up so easily with human weakness.

Mt. 1:4 records that Salmon married Rahab. Salmon was of the tribe of Judah, because this is the genealogy through Judah (Mt. 1:2). The two spies who had been

faithful the first time when spies were sent out were Joshua and Caleb- of the tribes of Ephraim and Judah (Num. 13:6; Jud. 2:9). It seems a fair guess that when the two spies were sent out, they were from these same two tribes; see on :23. Salmon was a prince of the tribe of Judah- it's a fair guess that he was one of the two spies who went to Rahab, and he subsequently married her.

Jos 2:2 The king of Jericho was told, Behold, men of the children of Israel came in here tonight to spy out the land!-
Their dress would likely have been unusual, having worn the same clothes and shoes throughout the wilderness journeys. And they would maybe have asked a few people on the street for directions and their accent and language would have given them away. They would have been spotted going in to Rahab's house.

Jos 2:3 The king of Jericho sent to Rahab saying, Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered into your house; for they have come to spy out all the land-
We have an example here of how a king's representatives are spoken of himself personally. This is why the Lord Jesus can be called "God" because he functions as God's representative; but this doesn't make Him God Himself in person in a Trinitarian sense.

Jos 2:4 The woman took the two men and concealed them. Then she said, Yes, the men came to me, but I don't know where they came from-
There are times when circumstances do change the appropriacy of behaviour which in more normal life we should practice. Take lying as an example. To lie is wrong. We should be truthful. Of course. But think of Rahab. She lied- and her lie and acts of deception are quoted in the New Testament as acts of faith! Further, Rahab implied that the Israelite spies were her clients- "there came men unto me" (Josh. 2:4) appears to be a euphemism- and she gave the impression that of course, as they were merely passing clients, how did she know nor care who they were nor where they went? Her male interrogators would've found it hard to press her further for information after she said that. So she not only lied but she gave the impression that the messengers of the Kingdom of God were immoral- in order to protect both them and her. Of course the way she left a red cord hanging from her window, as if almost inviting people to imagine the spies had been let down over the wall from her home on the wall, was a tremendous act of faith and witness by her, but she presumably kept to her story that they were her anonymous clients. For she was still living in her home when the city was taken. Her witness was thus an indirect one to those who wished to perceive it, but it was made within the context of a major series of untruths. The Hebrew midwives lied to the Egyptians- and were blessed for it. And we could give other examples. If we probe further, and ask *why* such lies were acceptable and even required, we find that often those lies were connected with saving life. To do anything that would cause the loss of human life when it is in our power to save it is dangerously close to murder. If it is in the power of our hand to do good, surely we should. Otherwise we are likely to be saying "Be warmed and filled!", yet do nothing. We do of course emphasize the need for prayer- and we have arranged days of prayer and fasting for these cases. But this does not absolve us from the need for action. Rather, it seems, do those prayers open up ways practically for us to seek our brethren's good.

There are times when we marvel at God's way of working. Rahab as a prostitute was the only person who could say with credibility that yes, men came into my home-

but I have absolutely no idea who they were or where they came from. And her male interrogators would have had to avert their eyes from her gaze and shrug and leave her. For they could say no more to that implied comment that "What? You ask me of all women that question?! In my profession you don't ask those questions, didn't you realize that...".

Jos 2:5 It happened about the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I don't know. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them-

Here she moves into telling untruths; see on :3,4 for the discussion of that. For her lies are cited in Hebrews and James as an example of her faith and works in response to that faith. "Overtake" is the word for ability or possibility. She is implying that surely if they are true men, they will have the strength to chase after these spies and catch them. She was an expert in male psychology. And they obeyed her (:7).

Jos 2:6 But she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them under the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof-

We imagine the spies panicked once inside the walled city, with their clothing and accent / language making it so obvious they were foreigners. With the Israelites only a short distance away across the river, everyone was fearful of spies. And they realized they had no way out. So they in desperation ran into a whore house. And it seems Rahab immediately perceived who they were, and figured they were in danger. For they were noticed entering her house in the evening (:3), and the gate was closed in the evening (:5,7), when the pursuers chased after the spies [as they thought]. So she hid them immediately they knocked on her door. Their desperate prayers for deliverance were heard in this unusual way. She would have heard of the Israelites and their God, perhaps from her clients who would have been travellers. And she desperately wanted to connect with their God. But she was stuck in Jericho, and stuck in a life of sin. It would have seemed impossible to make the connection with Him she so desired. But then two of His representatives came knocking on her door.

"The harvest" at this time was the barley harvest (Josh. 3:15), which was traditionally reaped on 10 Nisan; not the wheat harvest, which was at Pentecost seven weeks later (Ex. 34:22). We note that the barley and flax harvests were at this time, and the two crops were harvested at the same time (Ex. 9:31,33). This would explain why Rahab had flax stalks on her roof (Josh. 2:6). This is the kind of internal corroboration within the record which is to me the greatest proof of Biblical inspiration.

Jos 2:7 The men pursued them the way to the Jordan to the fords. As soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate-

As discussed on :5, this had been her challenge to her own people, and they fell for it. They likely searched every house in Jericho for the spies. But not hers, or at least, not too thoroughly. Male awkwardness and embarrassment before a woman like her would have meant they accepted her word and she ceased from being a possible suspect.

Jos 2:8 Before they had lain down, she came up to them on the roof-

Rooftops were consistently associated with idolatry throughout the Hebrew Bible. But here, Rahab learns more of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, having quit idolatry. The spies are called "messengers" in Heb. 11 because they had a message for her; and their message were 'welcomed in peace' by Rahab (Heb. 11:31), she 'received' their

message and justified herself by works by protecting them (James 2:25). But the nature of the situation was such that the "message" they declared to her must have been stated very quickly, before she hid them on the roof. She believed that message and showed her faith by the works of hiding them. So there was a very limited timescale for hearing the message and experiencing peace from believing it. The core of the Gospel is indeed simple.

Jos 2:9 and she said to the men, I know that Yahweh has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you-
See on Ps. 24:6. When she says that she was aware that God had "given you the land" (Josh. 2:9), she uses the same two Hebrew words used repeatedly in Deuteronomy regarding God's promise to give Israel the land of the Canaanites. "Your terror is fallen upon us" is likewise an allusion to Ex. 15:16; 23:27 [the same Hebrew word for "terror" is used by Rahab]. Rahab speaks of how her people are "fainting" in fear- quoting Ex. 15:15 about how the inhabitants of Canaan would "faint" (AV "melt away") because of Israel. Knowing all this, she has the ambition to request the impossible- that *she* would be the exception, that with *her* a covenant would be made. When she says that "we *have* heard" about the Exodus (Josh. 2:10), she may be referring to the prophecy of Ex. 15:14: "The people *shall* hear and be afraid". In this case, her emphasis would have been upon the word "have"- 'yes, we *have* heard indeed, as Moses sung, and yes, we *are* afraid'. Seeking God's face is actually to strive for the unachievable in this life; but it's what we are to do. Spiritual ambition of the type Rahab had lifts us far above the mire of mediocrity which there is in all human life under the sun.

Jos 2:10 For we have heard how Yahweh dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt; and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom you utterly destroyed-
This utter destruction was because Yahweh had hearkened to the voice of Israel (Num. 21:3 cp. Dt. 3:6 s.w.), and Rahab was attracted to a God who listened to prayers and responded so dramatically. Israel's enemies were to be 'utterly destroyed' which is defined as meaning that no covenant be made with them (Dt. 7:2). Rahab desperately wanted to enter covenant with Yahweh, but she saw she was doomed to 'utter destruction' because that was to be Jericho's fate (Josh. 6:21 s.w.). But her desire from the heart was read by God, and responded to in such a wonderful way, beyond any human device; hence in :12 (see note there) she asks for covenant relationship.

Jos 2:11 As soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man because of you; for Yahweh your God-
When the earlier spies had spent 40 days looking around Canaan, they had reported that the people were strong, and they were despised by them, as if they were mere grasshoppers (Num. 13:33). The Canaanites represent all those things which appear insuperable to our inheritance of the promised kingdom. But behind those high walls, were people with melted hearts. But the ten spies perceived the people as so strong that they could never defeat them, whereas Joshua and Caleb perceived how things really were- which is how Rahab described it. The paradox is that the hearts of the Canaanites melted (Josh. 2:11), and this is the phrase used of how the hearts of the Israelites melted (Dt. 1:28). Both sides were scared of each other; but victory could have been with Israel. They wasted so much potential.

He is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath-
She is repeating Dt. 4:39 "The Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below".This was the prophetic hope, that at the restoration (see on Josh. 1:1, where I suggest Joshua was rewritten for the exiles), the Gentiles would come to state that "Yahweh is God" as they had done at times historically (here and Ex. 18:11; Ps. 100:3; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 5:15; 19:19; Is. 45:14,15). Rahab was therefore set up as representative of the Gentiles at the time of the exile.

Jos 2:12 Now therefore, please swear to me by Yahweh, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a true token-
Heb. 11:31 comments that "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace". Rahab's faith was faith in God's grace. For Rahab was an Amoritess and according to the law of Moses there was to be no pity or covenant with them- only death (cp. Dt. 7:2).Rahab had the spiritual ambition to ask that they make a covenant with her- she requests *hesed*, the common term for covenant relationship ("deal kindly with me", Josh. 2:12 cp. 1 Sam. 20:8). See on :10. And the spies made a covenant with her. Grace, like love, finds a way. Remember that she was also aware of what Israel had done to their enemies on their way to Jericho- and she appears to allude to Moses' commands to destroy utterly and *not* make covenant with the peoples of the land (Dt. 2:32-37; 7:1-5; 20:16-18).

The spies apparently didn't give her any token, apart from their word that their lives would be forfeit if hers was lost- if she continued faithful to the covenant (:14). Considering they were completely at her mercy, we wonder why they didn't make any token. Perhaps they had nothing material to give her apart from their word. But see on :18.

Jos 2:13 Please save alive my father, my mother, my brothers and my sisters and all that they have, and will deliver our lives from death-
Rahab apparently lived alone, with her family avoiding her for shame that she was a whore and her home was a brothel. They would have had to significantly humble themselves to accept the gospel of the Kingdom from her mouth, and to have entered into her home in order to be saved.

It seems from Josh. 6:23 that her family didn't include her own children. She had none. It was common for barren women to be divorced, shamed and have to turn to prostitution. Being unable to get pregnant meant there was no issue with contraception. And yet she became pregnant by a prince of Judah and thus an ancestor of the Lord. And so many any miserable, lonely loves have thus been used and transformed. Rahab who was on very periphery came to be "in the midst of Israel".

Jos 2:14 The men said to her, Our life for yours, if you don't talk about this business of ours; and it shall be, when Yahweh gives us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you-
"Kindly and truly" is the language of covenant. Jericho was to be utterly destroyed which meant no covenant made with her inhabitants (see on :10,12; Dt. 7:2). Here they repeat that the covenant has been extended to her, if she doesn't betray them. We note the contrast between Gentile whore Rahab and respectable Israelite family man Achan. He broke covenant (Josh. 7:11), whereas she entered covenant and was faithful to it (Josh. 2:12-14). She took and hid the spies (Josh. 2:6), whereas Achan

took and hid the spoil (Josh. 7:21,22). Rahab saved her family alive (Josh. 2:13,14; 6:22,23), whereas Achan destroyed his family (Josh. 7:25).

Jos 2:15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window; for her house was on the side of the wall, and she lived on the wall-
Heb. "in the wall" may mean her house was between the inner and outer walls. Perhaps the flax stems on her roof had been grown outside the city walls and she therefore had a rope to haul them up to her. This may have been a way of avoiding paying tax on them, which would have been required if they had been brought through the city gate.

Escaping out of a window down the wall was the experience of David and Paul (Acts 9:25). Paul describes it as one of the most humiliating things which happened to him (2 Cor. 11:32). The triple repetition shows the same Divine hallmark of His operation, in the lives of different men separated by centuries.

Jos 2:16 She said to them, Go to the mountain, lest the pursuers find you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward, you may go on your way-
Rahab comes over as in command of the situation, even though she was a Gentile prostitute begging for God's grace. "Three days" may be a non literal period. Ex. 14:4,8 uses the same word for "pursuer" about the Egyptians likewise pursuing Israel in vain- also around the time of Passover.

Jos 2:17 The men said to her, We will be guiltless of this your oath which you have made us to swear-
The next three verses give the conditions for the covenant, but they say that Rahab had "made us swear". She had used her position of power over them to make them enter a covenant of Yahweh with her (see on :10,12).

Jos 2:18 Behold, when we come into the land-
LXX "If we succeed in penetrating into a part of the town".

You shall bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which you used to let us down. You shall gather to yourself into the house your father, your mother, your brothers and all your father's household-
See on :21. This line or rope may have been the "true token" of :12. It seems they gave her the scarlet thread. Perhaps they had worked this out in advance, entering Jericho with the aim of finding someone to believe their message. It was around Passover time, and so this may have been an invitation for Rahab to in essence participate in the Passover ritual, putting the symbol of blood on her house so that she might be saved whilst the rest of the world around her perished. She was being treated as one of the covenant people. Scarlet was associated with the removal of sin (Lev. 14:4,6,51; Num. 19:6) and the Passover blood (Ex. 12:7,13).

Heb. "the cord of this crimson thread" means that "this cord", the rope, was made of crimson thread. Possibly it was the sign she had on her door advertising her home as a brothel, rather like chemists and barbers have always had their specific trade signs. To hang out a red light or cord is a truly ancient tradition for brothels. She was told to display the cord when Israel came to take Jericho- maybe implying she was to take it down, to cease being a whore, but display it again when they returned. We see how God used the symbol of her sin to save both herself and His two men. His saving purpose is so intertwined with human sin and failure even in its worst forms. And that

scarlet thread became to her as the blood of the Passover lamb. This thought becomes even more actual when we consider that there are several stories of brothels on walls, where the clients exited down a scarlet rope. The rope, the symbol of sordid, shameful, secret failure, became the path to salvation for the spies. Just as it was only because she was a whore that she was able to tell the men of Jericho that she didn't know the names of the spies nor where they were from. Only a whore could get away with saying that. And it was her lie, which of itself as an isolated event was a sin because lying is wrong- which came to be seen as an act of faith in Hebrews 11. All this came to its final term in the cross, the symbol of ultimate shame, "cursed is every one that hangs on a tree". But in Christ it became the symbol of ultimate salvation. God indeed doesn't turn away from sin in disgust, but works through and with us. This fits with the suggestion on :1 that the spies perhaps originally went into her house in order to sleep with her. God worked through so much weakness. And remember that Rahab did fall pregnant by a prince of the tribe of Judah.

Jos 2:19 It shall be that whoever goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood will be on his head, and we will be guiltless. Whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand is on him-
This continues the allusions to the Passover legislation, although Rahab and her family were only able to keep the spirit and not the letter of it. As Rahab was a whore and her home a brothel, her family had to humble themselves to accept the Gospel and take refuge in it.

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

Jos 2:21 She said, According to your words, so be it. She sent them away, and they departed. She tied the scarlet line in the window-
Rahab was told to bind the scarlet cord in her window "when we come into the land" (Josh. 2:18). But Rahab bound it there immediately when they left- as if she recognized that her land was already in Israel's hands (Josh. 2:21). Considering the whole town was wondering how the spies had escaped, and she was under suspicion, to leave the escape rope dangling there, indeed to take it up and then place it there again immediately (so :21 implies), was really stupid. She didn't need to do that at that stage. But the joy of the Gospel should make us fools for Christ's sake. But does it, in our postmodern age? When was the last time the joy of the good news we know, lead

you to do something humanly foolish? It could be gathered from Heb. 11:31 that Rahab preached to others the message she had received from the spies- for the inspired commentary there notes that Rahab did not perish with those "that believed not"- *apeitheo* suggesting disbelief, a wilful refusal to believe. What message did Jericho not believe? There was no particular message for them from the words of Moses or Joshua. The message was presumably an appeal from Rahab, to repent and accept the God of Israel as she had done- to cast themselves upon His mercy. And in any case, as a prostitute estranged from her family, either due to her profession or because estrangement from them had led her to it, she must have gone to her estranged family and preached to them, bringing them within her despised house. The question, of course, is: 'Why then was not Rahab killed by the people of Jericho if she openly preached to them about the God of Israel?'. The ancient law code of Hammurabi contains the following statute: “If felons are banded together in an ale-wife’s [prostitute’s or innkeeper’s] house and she has not haled [them] to the palace, that ale-wife shall be put to death” (S.R. Driver and J.C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1956], 2:45). Perhaps she was so despised that she was untouchable, or treated as mad. Perhaps former clients of hers in the city's leadership decided it would be better to let her 'get religion' rather than spill any beans about them. But it could be said that it was a miracle she wasn't murdered for her witness. She certainly ran the risk of it. If men and women with a far less complete understanding of the Gospel could risk their lives for it... what does our understanding and faith convict *us* to do for the sake of witnessing to it? Give money towards it? Risk our lives, health, convenience in travelling for it? Risk our embarrassment and loss of standing in the workplace or family by preaching it...? Our knowledge of the Gospel of the Kingdom is far more detailed than that of Rahab, who picked up snatches of it from her clients, and had at most an hour's pressured conversation with the spies before she had to show whether or not she believed it. If it motivated her to do all she did- what about us?

The book of Joshua was rewritten for the encouragement of the exiles (see on Josh. 1:1). Judah had gone into exile because they had acted like a prostitute, as the prophets make clear. This account of the salvation of a prostitute was therefore for their encouragement. Against all odds, they could be saved out of Babylon, a nation and city marked out for destruction by 'falling' as was Jericho.

Jos 2:22 They left and came to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers had returned. The pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but didn’t find them-

Rahab appears to have knowledge and authority in all this, although she was the underdog. The pursuers and the spies are both presented as doing what she told them to do; as if she, the despised Gentile whore in a condemned city, was exalted to a position of power by her commitment to God.

Jos 2:23 Then the two men returned, descended from the mountain, passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun. They told him all that had happened to them-

"Returned and descended" is the very phrase used of how the faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb, had returned and descended to Israel with the news that they could easily conquer the land (Dt. 1:25). I suggested on :1 that there were distinct connections between those two faithful spies and the spies now being sent out. Israel were being bidden learn from their failure to believe the spies 38 years previously. The Bible continually bids us learn from recorded history.

Jos 2:24 They said to Joshua, Truly Yahweh has delivered into our hands all the land. Furthermore, all the inhabitants of the land melt away before us!
They had begun to melt away after the exodus (Ex. 15:15 s.w.), and the spies may be almost frustrated that Israel had wasted so much time before believing this. For nearly 40 years, the Canaanites had been in this 'melted away' mental state, and Rahab uses the same word to describe them (:9). The prophetic descriptions of hills [nations / cities] and 'the land' "melting" before God (s.w. Am. 9:5,13; Nah. 1:15) are therefore not to be read literally, but rather alluding to this state of mind amongst the peoples within the land promised to Abraham- in the shadow of latter day Divine judgment and the giving of their kingdoms to His people.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 3

Jos 3:1 Joshua rose up early in the morning-
In the days before alarm clocks, special note is taken of this feature of Joshua (Josh. 6:12; 7:16; 8:10). There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1);). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (; Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.
And they moved from Shittim, and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel. They lodged there before they passed over-
Lodging in full view of Jericho would have been a tactical mistake, humanly speaking. Far better, surely, a quick attack by an advanced guard of soldiers, rather than taking the whole nation over Jordan in full view of their enemies waiting for them.

Jos 3:2 It happened after three days that the officers went through the midst of the camp-
The three days spent looking at Jordan was perhaps to encourage them to meditate upon the Red Sea deliverance and to help them make the move in faith. Humanly speaking, sitting there in full view of the men of Jericho was unwise. These three days may be those of Josh. 1:11. The order to prepare food was given on 7th Nisan, as they crossed Jordan on the 10th. The spies would have been on their mission between the 5th and 8th Nisan.

Jericho was protected from the oncoming Israelites by the Jordan river. Rahab mentioned to the spies that the men of Jericho were terrified at the way Israel's God had dried up the Red Sea (Josh. 2:10), implying that they believed Yahweh could likewise dry up the Jordan and take away their line of natural defence. Perhaps Joshua and Caleb envisaged the drying up of the Jordan as already in essence accomplished

when they reasoned that their defence [the Jordan] was departed / held up / turned off from them (Num. 14:9). The whole situation was a purposeful repetition in essence of the Red Sea crossing. Circumstances repeat in life so that we learn faith from the previous incident, at least potentially. 1:11 had foretold they would pass over the river, but they had to go forward in faith not knowing how exactly that would work out in practice. Once they had gone over Jordan, they were entering a hostile country from which there would now be no retreat. This is hinted at in the descriptions of Israel not only passing over but totally passing over (3:17; 4:1). This is the way God works- if we go forward in faith, then the way back to the world is harder. Joshua therefore encouraged them that when God drove back the river it would be as if He had stretched out His hand to strike all the inhabitants of the land (Dt. 7:1). The wonder of our baptism implies that all future conflicts and obstacles to entry to the Kingdom will likewise be overcome.

Jos 3:3 and they commanded the people saying, When you see the ark of the covenant of Yahweh your God and the priests the Levites bearing it, then you shall move from your place, and follow it-

Instead of following the pillar of cloud and fire they had to follow only the ark. The miraculous presence of the fire and cloud was now removed- that had trained them to follow God's leading even when now there was no miraculous sign. Ex. 15:15-17 had reasoned that a division of the waters immediately prior to Israel's entry into Canaan would make the Canaanites fear Israel. There was therefore the hint that a drying up of the Jordan would happen- Joshua seems to have imagined it would, but only the spiritually minded amongst Israel would've grasped the hint from Ex. 15:15-17. This is typical of how God works- those who love His word find hints and encouragements for their faith when facing specific obstacles. Those who are not sensitive to God's word or who are ignorant of it don't find this same encouragement. Hence when Is. 64:3 comments that God did great things for Israel which they "looked not for"- this is an expression of His grace towards the less spiritually perceptive. They should have 'looked for' this miracle- but even although they did not, God still did it. This is comfort, although not without limit, to those who still wonder how and whether they shall pass over to be in God's Kingdom.

Jos 3:4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Don't come near to it, that you may know the path to follow; for you have not passed this way before-

Two thousand cubits is nearly one kilometer. The ark was as it were able to protect itself, without the need of being guarded by soldiers- in fact it was the unguarded ark which was itself a guard to them. In this lies a caveat about 'apologetics' and the idea of defending God and His Truth. He doesn't need it, and so much damage has been done by those who think that somehow, His Truth and glory depends upon them to preserve it. The distance from the ark was to also focus their attention upon it as the means of their crossing over the river- just as our crossing into the Kingdom will be made with total focus on the person of Jesus as our Saviour. We need the appropriate distance from Him so that we may observe His path.

"Space" translates a word which is often used about time, s.w. "a great while to come". The physical distance between them and the ark looked ahead to how the ark, representing the Lord Jesus, was to enter into the rest before they did, but as the guarantee that they / we would follow. If we follow that "path". "The way" "passed" is a phrase often used about the wilderness wanderings (Josh. 24:17 and often in Deuteronomy). Some of the wilderness march was going over similar territory where

they had been before; but the entrance to the Kingdom was to be of a totally different nature. On one hand, we are to live the eternal life now, acting now as we will in the Kingdom. But on another hand, the Kingdom life will not at all be what we have experienced in this life.

Jos 3:5 Joshua said to the people, Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow Yahweh will do wonders among you-
This was calmly spoken in absolute faith. For there was no visible evidence that the Jordan would dry up. They were to sanctify themselves not so as to be worthy of God's gracious action, but rather because they were in the presence of it. These "wonders" are a hint that they are to enter covenant with God as at Sinai (s.w. Ex. 34:10). The command to sanctify themselves recalled the command as they entered covenant at Sinai (Ex. 19:10-15). "Tomorrow" would have been the 10th Nisan (Josh. 4:19), the day when they had taken to themselves a lamb for salvation (Ex. 12:3).

Jos 3:6 Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and walk in front of the people. They took up the ark of the covenant, and walked ahead of the people-
This is now happening on the day following :5, the "tomorrow" there spoken of. It was the Angel and pillar of fire which had "walked ahead of the people" (s.w. Num. 14:14; Ex. 32:34). But now all focus was to be upon the ark, representing the Lord Jesus. The time of following Angels and seeing God's actions as solely through them needs to give way to perceiving His direct presence with us through the Lord Jesus, represented by the ark.

It was God's intention that Moses would go before the people and lead them into the land (Dt. 10:11), but Moses failed, and so it fell to Joshua. But it seems he was nervous, and so God used the ark rather than Joshua personally to 'go before the people' (s.w. Josh. 3:6). All the time we see God setting up potential programs which have to be amended because of human weakness.

Jos 3:7 Yahweh said to Joshua, Today I will begin to magnify you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you-
Just as Moses was given credibility before the people by the miraculous opening of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:31), so Joshua was given similar credibility. Moses achieved the miracle by his rod; Joshua did so by the ark of the covenant. Both times they passed over "on dry ground" (3:17). Clearly Joshua was not of the personality type which would naturally be found compelling as a charismatic leader. And so God gave this to him (Josh. 4:14 s.w.).

Jos 3:8 You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant saying, 'When you come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan'-
More commands to the priests resume in :13. "Stand still" recalls how at the Red Sea, Israel were to stand still and see the saving action of God in parting the water (Ex. 14:13 cp. 2 Chron. 20:17). Only the older ones would have remembered the Red Sea parting. They were all being shown that what was apparently merely Bible story time events were going to be repeated just as amazingly in their own experience.

Jos 3:9 Joshua said to the children of Israel, Come here, and hear the words of Yahweh your God-

This continues to allude to the covenant at Sinai. Although the date was here just before Passover, and Israel first entered into the covenant after Passover. God is not a literalist, and clearly the essence of the Passover and entry into covenant at Sinai were being repeated.

Jos 3:10 Joshua said, Hereby you shall know that the living God is among you-
Heb. "in the midst of you". The God of the living ones, the cherubim which covered the ark and between which was the shekinah glory, was now revealed. For the ark was no longer hidden from view in the most holy place, but openly in view of all. And all Israel could look at it as they passed over. The Lord Jesus uses this phrase in speaking of His abiding presence in the midst of His people today (Mt. 18:20).

And that He will without fail drive out the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Hivite, and the Perizzite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Jebusite from before you-
But they did not drive them all out. Here we have an example of a conditional promise, spoken of as a prophecy. They were made "to know" that surely they could inherit the entire promised land up to the Euphrates, and the seven nations are spoken of surely as a summary of all the tribes. But the experience of the miracle at Jordan didn't have an abiding impression upon them. And so again we see that miracles don't in fact inculcate abiding faith. Pentecostalism needs to reconsider the role of miracles. For faith, according to Biblical history, is simply not predicated upon miracles. See on :16.

Jos 3:11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into the Jordan-
It could be rendered "the ark of the covenant is called the ruler of the whole earth"- as if the ark is personified, encouraging us to see it as representative of a person (the Lord Jesus). Zech. 4:14 likewise associates the ark with "the Lord of all the earth"; and the *eretz* in view is the land promised to Abraham. The Israelites looked across Jordan to a land apparently not under their control. But they are invited to see Yahweh as enthroned between the cherubim, and therefore His entry into Canaan was as it were His taking control as Lord of His own territory. And they as His people were therefore assured of taking the land.

Israel had been taught throughout their wilderness journey that they were 'passing over', the word is used so often in Deuteronomy about their passing through various places on the journey. It is another allusion to Passover, which feast was about to begin. The fact God has brought us over so much day by day in this current journey means that our final crossing over at judgment day into God's Kingdom will just be another stage in the journey, seamlessly part of the process we are currently experiencing, and we should not therefore see judgment day as some huge unknown factor which lies inexorably ahead. They had been taught to speak to others of how they were to pass over Jordan (e.g. Dt. 2:29 "as the children of Esau who dwell in Seir, and the Moabites who dwell in Ar, did to me, until I shall pass over the Jordan into the land which Yahweh our God gives us"; see too Num. 33:51; 35:10; Dt. 4:22,26 "you shall pass over this Jordan"; 9:1; 11:31; 12:10 "when you pass over Jordan"; 27:2,4,12; 30:18; 31:13; 32:47). That's a total of 14 times that they were specifically told they were to pass over Jordan, corresponding to the endless Biblical encouragement we receive that really, we shall inherit the Kingdom. Even if like Israel the words can appear to just drone on in our ears. We too are to live with the

full assumption [not presumption] that by grace we shall enter and inherit the Kingdom. The 'passing over' of the ark was to be seen by them as a guarantee that they too would pass over Jordan, just as we are to see in the resurrection of the Lord and His passing over into Divine nature the guarantee of our personal salvation. The Lord's resurrection thereby becomes utterly central to our assurance of salvation if we are indeed 'in Him'. The 2000 cubits distance may be a hint at the Lord 'passing over' 2000 years ahead of us doing so at judgment day. Note that the Hebrew for 'passed over' is also translated 'to carry over' (e.g. Josh. 4:3,8)- they were carried over by God just as we will be.

Jos 3:12 Now therefore take twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, for every tribe a man-
These men had to be appointed first, and were then used in the ritual of Josh. 4:2-4. They were to take stones with them, which all looked forward to the future reality of Rev. 21:14.

Jos 3:13 It shall come to pass, when the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of Yahweh, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan-
Israel had been encouraged in Josh. 1:3 that "I have given you every place that the sole of your foot will tread on". Wherever their foot stepped could be theirs. And this was now dramatically and visually taught to them. The waters represented the nations, and perhaps specifically their armies, as in later scripture. As soon as the soles of their foot stood in Jordan, then Jordan was theirs, and the flow of the water of the nations against them would be stopped. For Yahweh was Lord of all the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and they were His people.

The waters of the Jordan will be cut off. The waters that come down from above shall stand in a heap-
"Cut off" is a direct allusion to the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 15:8). But I suggested above that the waters represented the flow of nations against them. And those nations were to be "cut off" before Israel (Dt. 12:29; 19:1 and often).

Jos 3:14 It happened, when the people moved from their tents to pass over the Jordan, that the priests who bore the ark of the covenant walked in front of the people-
But at a distance of 2000 cubits, about 1 kilometer. There was a natural fear at who was to go first. God went first. It is a natural human fear and desire that someone leads, goes over first. And the Lord Jesus, represented by the ark, has done that. We are "like sheep", and God realizes that. We have the huge comfort that One has indeed gone ahead first, and we are to follow.

Jos 3:15 When those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark had dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the time of harvest)-
Ps. 114:5 and Is. 43:2 reason that what God did at the Jordan He does in essence in *our* lives. God made the people cross Jordan at the time when it was widest- an example of how (at some times, in some ways) He purposefully tests faith. To cross the Jordan in flood was a heroic and very difficult act, according to 1 Chron. 12:15. Likewise God chose their crossing place as facing Jericho ("right against Jericho", :16)- the strongest opponent, whose spies no doubt were nervously watching the Israelites. Ps. 93:3,4 refer to how the floods lifted up their voice, but God's people walked through them- this is more relevant to the Jordan crossing than to the Red Sea

exodus. Jordan is widest after the Spring snow melt in the Lebanon mountains ("the swelling of Jordan", Jer. 12:5; 49:19)- incidental proof that they crossed Jordan around Passover time, which is when they had crossed the Red Sea. "The harvest" was the barley harvest, which was traditionally reaped on 10 Nisan; not the wheat harvest, which was at Pentecost seven weeks later (Ex. 34:22). We note that the barley and flax harvests were at this time, and the two crops were harvested at the same time (Ex. 9:31,33). This would explain why Rahab had flax stalks on her roof (Josh. 2:6). This is the kind of internal corroboration within the record which is to me the greatest proof of Biblical inspiration.

God arranged circumstances so that they could see the similarities with the Red Sea crossing, and learn from that incident now that the circumstances were repeating. God does the same with us, daily; repeating circumstances, and trying to get us to see how in essence our experiences are repeating Biblical experiences. All the promises that Israel would enter Canaan actually implied this miracle- but it was for the thoughtful Israelite to perceive that.

Jos 3:16 that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up in one heap-
Presumably they froze and congealed, as perhaps happened at the Red Sea. The language of waters divided and gathered together recalls the language of creation (Gen. 1:6,9). Allusions to creation language are frequent in the Bible, to encourage us that what God did then and continues to do in creation, He does in our lives. The new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) involves the same expenditure of energy to create *ex nihilo* the spiritual person within us.

A great way off-
We see here God's sensitivity to human weakness . They were not asked to cross with a wall of water on one side of them, which they would feared could come crashing down upon them. The water of Jordan fled backwards (Ps. 114:3), referring to this creation of a dry riverbed upstream of the crossing as well as downstream of it. "Jordan" is literally 'the descender', and we see here God's power to arrest an otherwise apparently inevitable downward movement, and even reverse it. The water was not merely parted, but driven back upstream.

At Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan-
We naturally see the symbolism; the problem caused with Adam was arrested by God's action. "Zarethan", 'place of piercing', would then allude to the promised piercing of the serpent, the power of sin (Gen. 3:15). There is no city known as Adam, but probably Admah is in view (Gen 14:2). It is spelt "Adam" here in order to direct our attention to the symbolism.

And those that went down toward the sea of the Arabah, even the Salt Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people passed over right against Jericho-
As discussed above, this was therefore in full view of the men of Jericho who for sure had been sent out to report on the Israelite movements. Tactically it would have appeared foolish. But this was an example of how we are "fools for Christ's sake". God works not through human wisdom but through the way of His Spirit. I suggested on :13 that the 'cutting off' of the waters represented the cutting off of all opposition to them. And therefore this miracle was the guarantee that they would successfully displace all the tribes in the land (:10).

Jos 3:17 The priests who bore the ark of the covenant of Yahweh stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan. Then, all the people of Israel passed over the Jordan on dry ground-

As discussed on :13,16, the cutting off of the waters represented the cutting off of all Gentile opposition to them. But this depended upon the priests 'standing firm' or "upright" (Heb.), so that all Israel could inherit the Kingdom. And Israel's history is full of evidence that the priesthood did not stand firm, and all Israel therefore lost the Kingdom because of it.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 4

Jos 4:1 When all the nation had completely passed over the Jordan, Yahweh spoke to Joshua saying-
It is stressed that they all passed over (Josh. 3:17). The salvation was complete.

Jos 4:2 Take twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man-
These twelve man and their stones looked forward to the final reality of Rev. 21:14. We are to see in them symbols of the 12 disciples upon whom the kingdom was to be built.

Jos 4:3 and command them saying, 'Take from out of the middle of the Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the resting place where you will rest tonight'-
The language of rest connects with the potential possibility that Joshua would bring the people to "rest". But Heb. 4:8 is clear that he didn't achieve this, and so all these things come to their ultimate term in a reapplied fulfilment in the work of the Lord Jesus.

Dt. 27:2-8 had commanded that "in the day" Israel passed over Jordan, they were to set up plastered stones with the law written upon them [perhaps just the ten commandments], and put them "in mount Ebal". The location was defined as near Gilgal (Dt. 11:30), where they camped after entering the land. Clearly enough, the ceremony of blessing and cursing ought to have been done immediately they entered the land. But they let secular concerns dominate their spritual obligation to be thankful as God had asked. For when Joshua fulfilled it in Josh. 8:30, this was not "in the day" that Israel passed over Jordan. They had indeed taken stones with them from the Jordan, but had not used them as intended. They didn't plaster them nor write the law upon them. And so perhaps God ammended His intention- which was initially that they would set those stones up in mount Ebal immediately. Instead, He sent the people against Jericho, and then against Ai. Perhaps an instant conquest of Jericho had been originally intended, so that they could proceed to mount Ebal immediately. For later in Joshua we will read of God giving His people unnaturally speedy progress against their enemies, all in the same day. Or maybe His intention was that firstly they ought to have gone to mount Ebal with the plastered stones, and only then attacked Jericho. But they didn't plaster the stones nor wish to proceed immediately to Ebal. And so He arranged the campaign against Jericho and then Ai. We see how God is so eager to accommodate His programs to the weakness of men.

Jos 4:4 Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man-
They had been "prepared" at the time of Josh. 3:12. They look forward to the 12 disciples whom the Lord Jesus likewise prepared to lay the foundations of His new kingdom (Rev. 21:14).

Jos 4:5 Joshua said to them, Pass over before the ark of Yahweh your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you pick up a stone and put it on your shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel-
We note that the two and a half tribes who had taken their inheritance east of Jordan were included in this. Always God was (and still is) careful to inculcate a spirit of unity amongst His people. The stones were not huge, they could each be carried upon a shoulder; God is not at all in the grandiose buildings such as Solomon's temple, but is memorialized in small things like this.

Jos 4:6 This will be a sign among you, that when your children ask in time to come saying, 'What do you mean by these stones?'-
These were probably the stones in view in Mt. 3:9, where John warned the people near the Jordan river that God was able "of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham". They represented Israel, but an Israel which could become living stones. The language here again recalls that of Passover (Ex. 12:26; 13:14), which they were about to keep. But the spirit of it was seen in the events they were experiencing.

Jos 4:7 then you shall tell them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off'. These stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever-
Here we have another example of where "forever" is not to be read as literal infinity. For the memorial has now vanished. The double emphasis upon the waters being cut off is because as noted on Josh. 3:13 the waters represented the flow of nations against them. And those nations were to be "cut off" before Israel (Dt. 12:29; 19:1 and often). And therefore this miracle was the guarantee that they would successfully displace all the tribes in the land (Josh. 3:10). This was to serve as encouragement to subsequent generations in their struggles against the local peoples of the land.

Jos 4:8 The children of Israel did as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan as Yahweh spoke to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there-
The stones were not huge, they could each be carried upon a shoulder (:5); God is not at all in the grandiose buildings such as Solomon's temple, but is memorialized in small things like this. The stones were carried, representing how God carried His people into the land. They apparently lodged at Gilgal (:20).

Jos 4:9 Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood-
"In the midst of the Jordan" could be read as "from the midst...". But if we stick with "in the midst...", we are then to understand that there were two memorials. The twelve stones at Gilgal (Josh. 4:20) where they lodged that night (:8), and another 12 stones left in the midst of the Jordan river. This would then speak of how there was both a visible and invisible memorial to God's bringing His people into the land. Or it could be that the twelve stones were first set up on the dry river bed, and then removed from there to Gilgal. This would have visually symbolized the bringing of all twelve tribes from the river to dry ground.

They are there to this day-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 4:10 For the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that Yahweh commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua-

Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

And the people hurried and passed over-

Their haste is understandable, as their eyes would have been toward the wall of water building up some distance from them upstream, fearful it could come surging towards them. But it may be mentioned to draw attention to the similarity with the first Passover and exodus (Ex. 12:39).

Jos 4:11 It happened, when all the people had completely passed over, that the ark of Yahweh passed over with the priests, while the people watched-

The phrase "completely passed over" is used several times. It looks forward to the total deliverance of God's people into His Kingdom. "All the people" excluded many of the two and a half tribes, but their representatives (:12) were counted as them. "The people watched" because they had never seen the ark before, as it was kept in the most holy place. God had as it were denuded Himself in this great work of salvation. He was enthroned in the shekinah glory between the cherubim. The idea was that it was the ark which had enabled them to pass over into the inheritance of the Kingdom. And God would not cease His working until all His people were in His Kingdom.

Jos 4:12 The children of Reuben, the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them-

There was no small cost for taking their inheritance east of Jordan. Their soldiers

were to all leave their families and flocks defenceless (humanly speaking) and to serve as the vanguard of the assault on Canaan, marching directly behind the ark but in front of the Israelites. Taking inheritance east of Jordan may have appeared initially as an easy way out of showing the faith required to dispossess the Canaanites west of Jordan. But God arranged things, as He does to this day, so that in fact there is no short cut to His Kingdom, no avoidance of showing faith. And in fact attempts to short cut often result in greater faith being required.

Jos 4:13 About forty thousand men prepared and armed for war passed over before Yahweh to battle, to the plains of Jericho-
"Thousand" is often not a literal number in the historical records; especially when used in the context of soldiers, it seems to refer to some military subdivision.

Jos 4:14 On that day, Yahweh magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life-
It could be that Joshua was a not very confident individual who needed constant encouragement not to fear or be discouraged, as given to him throughout Josh. 1. But God used such an uncharismatic figure, endowing him with respect, because that is His style of working.

Jos 4:15 Yahweh spoke to Joshua saying-
The style here constantly recalls how Yahweh had spoken to Moses and he relayed this to Israel.

Jos 4:16 Command the priests who bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of the Jordan-
David's bringing up / going up / ascending of the ark (2 Sam. 6:2) recalls how the ark did not go up into Canaan in Num. 14:44 (s.w.); for the land was not to be given to Israel. But when the time came, the ark was brought up into Canaan (Josh. 4:16,18 s.w.). David felt as if he was as Joshua reconquering Canaan in fulfilment of the promises; for Joshua had failed to bring the people into the promised rest as was potentially possible (Heb. 4:8). This may explain why Paul in Acts 13:21 parallels the 40 years wandering of Israel with the 40 year reign of Saul; and he may speak of Saul reigning 40 years because of this, even if it was not literally true. It creates big chronological problems if we read that 40 year reign of Saul literally.

The ark is described as "the ark of the testimony" because the tables of the commandments (Ex. 25:40) were "the testimony", and sometimes "the ark" is just called "the testimony". Although other things were in the ark, the tables of stone were paramount. The ark represented the Lord Jesus, who was "the word made flesh", with God's word within His heart as the word of God was within the ark. God's covenant word was of the essence in defining His presence amongst men.

Jos 4:17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests saying, Come up out of the Jordan!-
This phrase 'come up out of Jordan' is used of the priests, the ark (:18) and the people (:19). Clearly the people were to perceive that their coming through Jordan into the promised land was due to their identification with the ark. It all points ahead to our entry into the Kingdom because the Lord Jesus has enabled it, and has Himself entered in.

Jos 4:18 When the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of Yahweh had come

up out of the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up to the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks as before-
"Lifted up" is literally "plucked up". The Divine cameraman is zoomed in close up. Their plucked their feet up out of the mud onto more solid, dry ground. Once their feet were out of the mid, the waters started flowing back. We can imagine it made quite a sound.

Jos 4:19 The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho-
The 10th Nisan (Josh. 3:5) was the day when they had taken to themselves a lamb for salvation (Ex. 12:3). It was when the firstfruits were to be offered (Lev. 23:9-15). But the grace of their salvation was impressed upon them; instead of their giving something to God, He gave them the great gift of salvation.

Jos 4:20 Joshua set up those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan in Gilgal-
It seems those stones became abused into a form of idolatry, just as the brazen serpent was. And God particularly hated the sins which were therefore committed at Gilgal (Hos. 4:15; 9:15; Am. 4:4; 5:5). It was there that Israel demanded a king, despite the clear message at this time that the ark was the presence of the "Lord of all the earth". Yahweh was their king who had saved them, memorialized by the stones; and there they demanded a king.

Jos 4:21 He spoke to the children of Israel saying, When your children ask their fathers in time to come saying, 'What do these stones mean?'-
Quoting / alluding to Moses- as Joshua often does. The need to teach their children about this great salvation is laboured here just as much, if not more, as is the Passover remembrance.

Jos 4:22 then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel came over this Jordan on dry land-
"This Jordan" implies that the question would be asked when the children enquired about the meaning of the stones, which were near the Jordan river and the river was in clear view of the questioners.

Jos 4:23 For Yahweh your God dried up the waters of the Jordan from before you, until you had passed over, as Yahweh your God did to the Red Sea which He dried up from before us, until we had passed over-
The Red Sea crossing clearly represented baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), and the crossing of the Jordan is very similar- but it represents our entry into the Kingdom. We can therefore conclude that baptism is an entry in prospect into God's Kingdom; although we must stay the course through the wilderness.

Jos 4:24 that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of Yahweh, that it is mighty; that you may fear Yahweh your God forever'-
The miracle of crossing Jordan was to visually demonstrate the 'cutting off' of the waters of the nations before Israel (Dt. 12:29; 19:1 and often). See on Josh. 3:10. The whole action had been of God's grace, and therefore they were to fear or respect

Yahweh. This will only happen in our experience if we perceive grace to be point of being utterly awed by it, rather than just admiring it in passing.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 5

Jos 5:1 It happened that when all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan westward-

"Amorites" seems a very general term; they were apparently on both sides of the Jordan. Perhaps they were the remnants of those slain during the battle with Sihon and Og, who had fled from Israel to the west bank of Jordan.

And all the kings of the Canaanites, who were by the sea, heard how that Yahweh had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we had passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more because of the children of Israel-

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

As Israel were called to follow the Angel after their Red Sea baptism, so we too follow where the Angel leads.

Jos 5:2 At that time Yahweh said to Joshua, Make flint knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time-

"The second time" is omitted by some manuscripts, and some read "tomorrow". For surely a man cannot be circumcised a second time. There could be the implication that there had been a national circumcision of the nation some time previously, although unrecorded; and now this was to be done a second time.

Jos 5:3 Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins-

Everything about the Jericho battle plan was somehow humanly foolish- to yet again attempt to teach Israel, old and new, that victory comes from following God's way, and His way is humanly foolish. The warriors were circumcised before the battle- and we know from the Biblical record of Shechem how this would've weakened the men- for this was only a week or so before the battle. See on :12. But the point was that they were to enter Canaan only because they were Abraham's seed, and therefore they must be circumcised.

Jos 5:4 This is the reason Joshua circumcised: all the people who were males who came out of Egypt, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness in the way after they came out of Egypt-

"In the way" confirms the impression we have of them being slain one by one at

different places along the route. The "terror by night" and arrows in the day time (Ps. 91:5) consumed them, and their carcasses were left unburied in the scrub (Heb. 3:17). The wilderness journey was a living out of the condemnation of judgment day for those people.

The extent of spiritual despair and apostasy amongst the condemned generation cannot be overstated. They neglected the circumcision of the children born to them then, thus showing their rejection of the Abrahamic covenant. There is good reason to believe that Romans 1 is a description of Israel in the wilderness; notice the past tenses there. Rom. 1:23 charges them with changing "the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like... to four-footed beasts, and creeping things", clearly alluding to Ps. 106:20 concerning how Israel in the wilderness "Changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eats grass" by making the golden calf. The effective atheism of Rom.1 is matched by Ps. 106:21 "They forgot God their saviour". The long catalogue of Israel's wilderness sins in Ps. 106 is similar to that in Rom.1. "Full of envy" (Rom. 1:29) corresponds to them envying Moses (Ps. 106:16), "whisperers" (Rom. 1:29) to "murmurers" (Ps. 106:25), and "inventors of evil things" (Rom.1:30) to God being angered with "their inventions" of false gods (Ps. 106:29). Because of this "God gave them up" to continue in their sexual perversion and bitterness with each other even to the extent of murder (Rom. 1:27,29). A huge rabble of people living in moral anarchy with little law and order, driven on in their lust by the knowledge that God had rejected them... is surely a frightening thing to imagine. The emphasis on sexual sin in Rom. 1 is paralleled by 1 Cor. 10 stressing the frequent failure of Israel in the wilderness in this regard. Against such an evil and God forsaking background that young generation rebelled, to become one of the most faithful groups of Israelites in their history. As such they set a glorious example to the youth of today in rebelling against a world that mocks any form of true spirituality.

Jos 5:5 For all the people who came out were circumcised; but all the people who were born in the wilderness by the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised-

The commands concerning Israel's behaviour after they had settled in the land form a large chunk of the Mosaic Law, and thus these were only relevant to the younger generation and the Levites who were to enter the land of promise (note how only those who were numbered and over 20 at the time of leaving Egypt were barred from the land; the Levites were not numbered). This younger generation were in sharp contrast to those aged over 20 at the Exodus. The extent of spiritual despair and apostasy amongst the condemned generation cannot be overstated. They neglected the circumcision of the children born to them then (Josh. 5:5,6), thus showing their rejection of the Abrahamic covenant.

Jos 5:6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, even the men of war who came out of Egypt, were consumed; because they didn’t listen to the voice of Yahweh. Yahweh swore to them that He wouldn’t let them see the land which Yahweh swore to their fathers that He would give us, a land flowing with milk and honey-

Israel did not obey / hearken to the voice of Yahweh, and He did not hearken to their voice in prayer (Dt. 1:45; 9:23; 28:15; Josh. 5:6; Jud. 2:20; 6:10 cp. Dt. 8:20 s.w.). 2 Kings 18:12 states this specifically. God hearkened to Joshua's voice in prayer (Josh. 10:14) because Joshua hearkened to His voice. It was to be the same with Saul. He didn't hearken to God's voice (1 Sam. 15:19) and God didn't hearken to Saul's voice in

prayer in his final desperation at the end of his life (1 Sam. 28:18). If God's word abides in us, then our prayer is powerful, we have whatever we ask, because we are asking for things according to His will expressed in His word (Jn. 15:7).

Jos 5:7 Their children whom He raised up in their place were circumcised by Joshua; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them on the way-
See on :4. The new generation were raised up by God, not their parents, whom He slew in the desert. They were raised up "in their place" in that they entered the Kingdom which their parents had despised.

Jos 5:8 It happened, when they were done circumcising all the nation, that they stayed in their places in the camp until they were healed-
"All the nation" were circumcised, in that the men represented the women; just as all twelve tribes crossed Jordan, but only in that the soldiers of the two and a half tribes represented those who remained east of Jordan. It is this principle of representation which is hard to grasp for those raised in societies which glorify individualism over collectivism. But it is clearly a principle by which God works, coming to full term in our salvation "in Christ", on account of His representation of us in His representative sacrifice.

Jos 5:9 Yahweh said to Joshua, Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Therefore the name of that place was called Gilgal to this day-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 5:10 The children of Israel encamped in Gilgal. They kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho-
The Lord taught in Jn. 6 that the true manna was His flesh, which He was to give for the life of the world. Some have supposed from Josh. 5:10-12 cp. Ex. 16:35 that the manna fell for the first time on the eve of the Passover, thus adding even more poignancy to the Lord’s equation of the manna with His death. Yet all this painstaking attempt to re-focus the crowds on the spiritual rather than the literal, salvation through His death rather than an immediate benefit for them, patient eating / sharing in His sufferings rather than a kingdom here and now… all this went so tragically unheeded. And it does to this day.

Jos 5:11 They ate unleavened cakes and parched grain of the produce of the land on the next day after the Passover, in that day-
They presumably stole this from the local population, who would have fled before them, back into the walls of Jericho.

Jos 5:12 The manna ceased on the next day, after they had eaten of the produce of the land. The children of Israel didn’t have manna any more; but they ate the fruit of the

land of Canaan that year-
The manna wasn't phased out- it stopped abruptly just before the battle of Jericho (Josh. 5:12). The people would likely have been short of food, and would've been dealing with the problems associated with a new diet- after 40 years! Walking around the city seven times, starting at dawn, would've made the people tired. There was no advantage of shock or surprise by doing this. Planning the final assault for late afternoon was hardly smart either- humanly speaking! But all this was- and is- to teach God's people that victory *His* way involves shedding our human strength, just as Gideon was likewise taught so dramatically. See on :3.

Jos 5:13 It happened that when Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked-
Lifting up the eyes to Heaven is an idiom for prayer. This seems likely in Num. 24:2; Josh. 5:13; Jud. 19:17 and 1 Chron. 21:16 among others. The simple implication of all this is that we should begin our prayers with a conscious imagination and personalization of the Father to whom we pray; "Our Father, *who is* in Heaven" says it all. "God *is in Heaven*, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few (more often translated "little")" (Ecc. 5:2). Ezra, Nehemiah and Solomon all start their major prayers with a reference to the fact that God really *is* there in Heaven.

And behold, a man stood opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, Are you for us, or for our adversaries?-
Perhaps this is a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

The Angels formulate their plans perhaps without knowing whether we will respond suitably to enable the plans to go ahead, or maybe they arrange circumstances whether they know we will obey or disobey, so that we always have the encouragement that if we obey and do our part we will have the pre-arranged workings of the Angels behind us too. The entrance of Israel to Canaan shows this. God had promised in Ex. 33 to send an Angel before them which would drive out the tribes from Canaan; the 'Hornet'- a result of Angelic activity- was sent before them to do the same. Dt. 9:3 describes this: "Yahweh your God is He which goes over (the Jordan) before you; as a consuming fire (the language of Angels- Ex. 24:17) He shall destroy them (the nations)... so shall you drive them out". Thus when Joshua approached Jericho to attack it "there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand... and He said... As captain of the host of the Lord (Angels) am I come" (Josh. 5:13,14). So in prospect the Angels drove out every tribe that was in the land; the people of Israel had to just go in and possess the work which the Angels had done. So when they

failed to drive out certain tribes, this was an example of human failing to be "workers together with God". Thus in prospect, the Angels led them to the promised "rest"- Dt. 25:19; Josh. 1:13; Is. 63:1 N.I.V.; although in practice they did not enter that rest because of their faithlessness (Heb. 3:11-4:11), despite the Angel promising He would lead them there- "I will give you rest" (Ex. 33:4). Was this due to the Angel over-estimating the spiritual strength of His charges? See on Rev. 21:12.

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

Jos 5:15 The prince of Yahweh's army said to Joshua-
The same phrase is found in Dan. 8:11, where the army is the host of God's people and their representative Angels

Take your shoes off of your feet; for the place on which you stand is holy. Joshua did so-
This is evidently reminiscent of the command to Moses in a similar situation. Shouldn't Joshua have perceived this, seeing his life was so clearly framed after that of Moses? For we note he had to wait to be asked to do this.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 6

Jos 6:1 Now Jericho was closely shut up because of the children of Israel. No one went out, and no one came in-
The gates which we saw shutting at dusk every day in Josh. 2 were now shut permanently. But the idea may be that God had shut them in; He was the one who closed that gate (s.w. Gen. 7:16; 19:10).

Jos 6:2 Yahweh said to Joshua, Behold, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the mighty men of valour-
The idea may have been that the king and his mighty soldiers were much feared in the area. But they were to be overcome without any fighting by Israel. The reference is to Dt. 7:24, "He will deliver their kings into your hand and you shall make their name perish from under the sky; no man shall be able to stand before you, until you have destroyed them". But this was conditional upon them not being afraid (Dt. 7:21), and believing that God had already softened them up by "the hornet" (Dt. 7:20). This is

why Joshua was encouraged constantly not to be afraid (seven times in Josh. 1). It seems that he finally came to the level of faith required, although it's unclear whether Israel did. But thanks to his faith, Jericho and its king was given into the hand of Joshua personally.

Perhaps the Lord had this scene in mind when He spoke of the strong man guarding his palace, and being overcome by one stronger than himself, i.e. the Lord Jesus, who was represented by Joshua (Lk. 11:21,22). We are those who then spoil his palace, making the nervous Israelites representative of us all, and making the victory over Jericho solely due to Joshua's faith; see above.

Jos 6:3 All your men of war shall march around the city, going around the city once. You shall do this six days-

Jericho was to be circled for six days before victory on the seventh (Josh. 6:3-5). This recalls Naaman's cure on his seventh dipping (2 Kings 5:10), and the way Elijah was only answered at his seventh prayer (1 Kings 18:43). The intention was that through the six times performing something which had no immediate answer, faith, hope and humility were elicited.

Jos 6:4 Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark-

LXX and :8-14 show that this was to be done on each of the six days. These trumpets were to be blown each day (:13). Literally, "trumpets of Jubilee". The allusion may simply be to the length of the blast made; or the idea may be that these were the trumpets used to announce the year of Jubilee on the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9)- announcing freedom for the slaves and landless, which is who Israel were. It could be that the trumpet blasts were to be understood by the people of Jericho as a call to repentance, which they ignored (Am. 3:6; Is. 18:3). This would then explain why the city was devoted to Yahweh in destruction which was the punishment for a city which turned away from Yahweh (Dt. 13:12-14).

On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets-

To enter covenant was literally 'to be sevened' (Gen. 21:28,30). The city was to enter covenant- through those who didn't want to be in the covenant being destroyed. Rahab wanted to be in the covenant (see on Josh. 2), and was brought into it through the city's destruction.

Jos 6:5 It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout-

This was the victory shout. They were being asked to believe that what was promised had indeed come true, in the spirit of Mk. 11:24. They were asked to believe that they had won- before they had. And therefore by faith, the walls of Jericho fell down, so says Heb. 11:30.

The wall of the city shall fall down flat-

"Flat" can simply mean 'from beneath', or the idea may have been that the rubble would be 'flat' enough for the Israelites to advance over it into the city, straight before them. The same word is used for how Achan hid the silver under or beneath the garment he stole (Josh. 7:21,22). "Fall down flat" is the phrase used of enemies falling down beneath a victorious Israel (Ps. 18:38; 45:5). The mighty wall represented the Canaanites. The same language of a mighty wall falling is used of the destruction of latter day Babylon (Jer. 50:15; 51:44; Ez. 38:20). Joshua clearly represented the Lord Jesus and His conquest of all opposition to Him in the land of the last days.

There are archaeological claims to have unearthed a wall laying flat on one of the levels of excavation. But surely a wall built from flimsy cement would have not fallen down "flat" but would have disintegrated on impact. Our faith is purely in God's word, rather than hinged solely on questionable archaeological evidence. The evidence for the city having been burnt is more solid, and indeed corroborates the later statement that Jericho was burnt.

And the people shall go up every man straight before him-

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

It is unclear whether "the people" refers to the "armed men"; or to the ordinary unarmed people, as I prefer to think. For it would fit the whole theme of a victory being granted to the weak. If there were unarmed people in the mass of Israelites around the city, this would be another example of the strategy being very weak militarily. For masses of unarmed civilians could easily be attacked and panicked. Perhaps they are the "rearguard" of :13.

Jos 6:6 Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of Yahweh-

Upon the ark was the "mercy seat", imagined as the throne upon which Yahweh was enthroned as king, perhaps with the shekinah glory visible between the cherubim which were over it. The trumpets going before it were therefore proclaiming or heralding Him as king; hence the usage of the phrase "Lord of all the earth" in connection with the ark (Josh. 3:11,13). The idea is consistently that Canaan was being claimed as His Kingdom, with Himself as King.

Jos 6:7 They said to the people, Go, march around the city, and let the armed men pass on before Yahweh's ark-

See on :13. We note that the focus of the description is upon the ark. The armed men went before it, followed by the priests and only then the ark. But the description begins with the ark, for this was the central point of the procession. The archaeological excavations reveal Jericho to have only been of 600 meters circumference. The people would have spent the rest of the day looking at the walls, meditating upon them. This was all intended to pique their faith in God, compared to the height of the obstacle. They were being set up to undo the mistake of the previous generation, who had considered the walls of the Canaanite cities an insuperable obstacle.

Jos 6:8 It was so, that when Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before Yahweh advanced and blew the trumpets; and the ark of the covenant of Yahweh followed them-

See on :7. This is rather similar to how the ark stood in the Jordan riverbed until the people had passed over, and then followed them. This recalls how the Angel [who was perhaps dwelling over the ark in the shekinah glory] "went behind" [s.w. "followed"] at the exodus (Ex. 14:19). The word is also used in Dt. 23:14, where

Israel are warned that if they are unclean, then Yahweh will no longer follow them. They of course were bidden follow Him, but He is also presented as following them. And thus God's people hear His voice behind them, urging them to choose the right path (s.w. Is. 30:21); for He is not only their vanguard, but also their rear guard following them (Is. 52:12; 58:8). This indicates not only the mutuality between God and His people; but the sense that we are both following and being followed by Him, as it were sandwiched by His presence.

Jos 6:9 The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the ark went after them. The trumpets sounded as they went-
"Armed men" is s.w. Josh. 4:13, and could possibly refer specifically to the men of the two and a half tribes who were to be the vanguard for the Israelite army. See on :8.

Jos 6:10 Joshua commanded the people saying, You shall not shout, nor let your voice be heard, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I tell you 'Shout!' Then you shall shout-
The command to "shout" was a reflection of the belief Israel were to have in the fact that God *had already* given them the city- for the Hebrew for "shout" usually refers to a shout of victory. The word is translated "... will I triumph" in Ps. 60:8; 108:9. The same idea of shouting in victory over a city which has been given to God's people recurs in Ps. 47:3,5; Jer. 50:15- "Shout against her round about [cp. compassing the walls of Jericho]... her foundations *are* [present tense] fallen, her walls [cp. Jericho's] *are* thrown down". And this speaks of our latter day victory against Babylon- thus making the whole account of earnest relevance to us who live in the last days, and who will see Babylon fall by faith. Notice how literal Babylon fell by the water of the river being dried up, and the walls being opened- just the same sequence of events that occurred at Jericho. Likewise 1 Cor. 3:12-15 likens all the faithful to material which can pass through the fire of judgment- and this surely is a reference to the way that Jericho was burnt with fire, and only the metals along with Rahab and her family came through that fire to salvation. Thus according to the allusion, Rahab and her family represent all the faithful.

Heb. 11:30 associates the circling of the walls with faith: "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been circled seven days". 2 Cor. 10:3-4 is perhaps an allusion to the way that Jericho was taken with such a humanly weak battle plan: "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ". The point of the allusion is for us to see ourselves as those nervous Israelites desperately clinging on to their faith in God's victory rather than human strength. And we each have our Jerichos- habits, life-dominating patterns of thinking, that seem so impossible to shift.

The deliverance at the Red Sea had been intended to teach Israel these very lessons. And the account of the fall of Jericho is recorded in similar language, in order to teach the same lesson. Rahab's house had to be identified by a scarlet cord- like the blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled on the two doorposts and lintel of the Israelites' homes in Egypt. The silence demanded of the people in Josh. 6:10 was surely to recall Ex. 14:14, there the people standing before the Red Sea were assured: "The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent". Compare the command to keep silent whilst *Yahweh* fought, with the common practice of yelling war cries as an ancient army

approached their enemy. All human convention, wisdom and strength, was placed in purposeful opposition to what seemed quite counter-instinctive- to be utterly silent whilst *God* did the fighting.

Jos 6:11 So he caused the ark of Yahweh to go around the city, going about it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp-
There's a distinct theme in the record that actually, God's people didn't do according to His ideal plan, and yet still He gave them the victory. One wonders whether the comment that "So the ark of the Lord compassed the city" (Josh. 6:11) could imply that the entire fighting force of Israel didn't bother doing as commanded on the first circuit of the city- possibly they just sent the ark around it. See on :20.

Jos 6:12 Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of Yahweh-
Joshua was characterized by rising early (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10). This is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

Jos 6:13 The seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of Yahweh went on continually and blew the trumpets: and the armed men went before them. The rear guard came after the ark of Yahweh. The trumpets sounded as they went-
This rear guard could have just been ordinary unarmed people, as discussed on :5. The restoration prophets may allude to this in saying that Yahweh would be Israel's rear guard (Is. 52:12), and Yahweh's glory would be their rear guard (Is. 58:8)- manifest in unarmed, ordinary people. The tribe of Dan was the rear guard of the camp when it was usually on the move (Num. 10:25).

Jos 6:14 The second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. They did this six days-
Verse 10 implies that the people maybe didn't know the battle plan- each day they would've walked around the city in silence, and nothing happened. They were kept on the tip toe of faith and obedience throughout those six days, and may well have wondered whether this was not just some bizarre ritual which would make no dent in the walls of Jericho. The command to "Shout!" didn't come- for six days. The whole exercise was surely to develop their faith. Again, this was the most crazy of battle plans, in human terms.

Jos 6:15 It happened on the seventh day that they rose early at the dawning of the day, and marched around the city in the same way seven times. Only on this day they marched around the city seven times-

As noted above, they would have been exhausted by the end of this. The battle plan was God's and was against all human wisdom, which would have wanted an early morning surprise attack, with troops at their most fresh. Rather than an exhausted group of soldiers later in the day, in full view of the enemy, having given the defenders every warning that a major attack was coming.

Jos 6:16 It happened at the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people, Shout, for Yahweh has given you the city!-
The command to "shout" was a reflection of the belief Israel were to have in the fact that God *had already* given them the city- for the Hebrew for "shout" usually refers to a shout of victory. The word is translated "... will I triumph" in Ps. 60:8; 108:9. The same idea of shouting in victory over a city which has been given to God's people recurs in Jer. 50:15- "Shout against her round about [cp. compassing the walls of Jericho]... her foundations *are* [present tense] fallen, her walls [cp. Jericho's] *are* thrown down". And this speaks of our latter day victory against Babylon- thus making the whole account of earnest relevance to us who live in the last days, and who will see Babylon fall by faith. Notice how literal Babylon fell by the water of the river being dried up, and the walls being opened- just the same sequence of events that occurred at Jericho.

Jos 6:17 The city shall be devoted, even it and all that is in it, to Yahweh. Only Rahab the prostitute shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent-
"The prostitute" is emphasized. Those within her house, a brothel, sound like they were her clients; although we know they were her family. But the language is used like this to emphasize her low moral situation. Her salvation was a strong lesson to Israel. Those whom they would otherwise despise as the lowest of the low, a Gentile prostitute, were to be welcomed into the covenant.

Jos 6:18 But as for you, only keep yourselves from the devoted thing, lest when you have devoted it, you take of the devoted thing-
This was precisely what Saul did (1 Sam. 15:3). Like so many, he failed to learn from Biblical history. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

Understanding God as creator, in its true, deep and thought-through sense, leads to an understanding of grace. That all we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Likewise, to take for ourselves what is God’s is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God. This was Achan’s sin- to take what was devoted to God for himself. And this was why he is described as having ‘stolen’. But from whom? From God (Josh. 6:18; 7:11). The fact God owns everything means that there can be no distinction between what is ours and what is God’s. To think like that is to steal from Him. And hence the power and force of Mal. 3:8: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me”. Have we robbed God in this way, especially in our attitudes and perceptions?

That would make the camp of Israel accursed-
"Accursed" is s.w. "devoted". Jericho and its wealth was to be sacrificially devoted to Yahweh. If Israel took that wealth to themselves, then they too would have to be handed over to Him in destruction.

And trouble it-
Ahab's denunciation of Elijah as "he that troubles Israel" (1 Kings 18:17) effectively accuses Elijah of being like Achan, the troubler of Israel (Josh. 6:18). As Achan brought about Israel's defeat at the hand of her surrounding enemies, so latter-day Israel will blame their similar defeats and the strange drought which will afflict them, upon Elijah. Elijah's response to Ahab's accusation is typical of his theme of the need to throw off the worship of Baal and the other local gods, for that of Yahweh: "I have not troubled Israel, but you... in that you have... followed Baalim" (1 Kings 18:18). The stress upon this may indicate that the latter-day Elijah will seek to turn Israel away from a devotion to Islam - the idol of the surrounding nations.

Jos 6:19 But all the silver and gold, and the vessels of brass and iron, are holy to Yahweh. They shall come into Yahweh's treasury-
The same phrase "of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass" is used of the vessels taken from the Gentile world and dedicated to the tabernacle (Ex. 11:2; 12:35; Josh. 6:19; 2 Sam. 8:10; 1 Kings 7:51). The generosity of others in Biblical history, their right perspective on the wealth taken from this world, was to inspire other believers in later history. And this is how the body of Christ should function today, with members inspiring others to spirituality.

Jos 6:20 So the people shouted, and the priests blew the trumpets. It happened that when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him; and they took the city-
See on :5,11; Rev. 21:12. For "flat", see on :5. Yet according to Heb. 11:30, "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down …". Whose faith? What faith? Was Joshua-Jesus' faith counted to the people? Or was their very weak, hope-for-the-best faith all the same accepted as faith by God's grace?

The people were to shout when the trumpets sounded (Josh. 6:10). But in reality, like a Sunday School play gone wrong, the people shouted, the trumpets sounded, and then the people again shouted (Josh. 6:20). See on :11.

Jos 6:21 They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, both young and old, and ox, sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword-
"Destroyed" is the word for "devoted". But actually not all was devoted; Achan stole some of it. So this is an example of where the Bible records things as they appeared to men, without as it were adding footnotes to clarify. Just as the language of demons is used in the New Testament, although they do not in fact exist.

The animals aren't recorded as being destroyed in later conquests. It's as if God recognized that the totality of devotion to Him which He so desired was just not going to be forthcoming from His people. And so He asked for less, and allowed them keep the cattle, which clearly they were tempted to covet. Yet we need to learn from this, and be inspired to at least try to rise up to total devotion.

Jos 6:22 Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, Go into the prostitute's house, and bring out from there the woman and all that she has, as you

swore to her-
Hebrew tenses are vague, unlike tenses in Greek or English. The idea is that Joshua "had said" this to the two men. Artists have done us a great disservice by presenting the walls of Jericho as having fallen, apart from the section where Rahab's house was. She had already been brought out- perhaps by using the scarlet rope to descend the walls, bringing her into full fellowship with the experience of the spies. But the emphasis is that the spies 'brought her out', and entered her house.

Jos 6:23 The young men who were spies went in, and brought out Rahab with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. They also brought out all her relatives, and they set them outside the camp of Israel-
The family had been warned that they must remain within the house, as if they were keeping Passover (Josh. 2:19 = Ex. 12:22). They were "brought out" as Israel were then brought out from Egypt, the "house" of bondage (s.w. Ex. 20:2). The king of Jericho had used the same phrase in ordering that the spies be brought out from her house (Josh. 2:3). But it was all turned the other way around, which is typical of God's style of working. We see something of God's radical inversion of values in that the sanctuary of refuge in this case was a brothel. Those within it were her family, who swallowed their pride and reconciled with Rahab enough to come within her home; and presumably any others there were her former clients. There would have been a strange compulsion in the witness of a repentant prostitute, warning of judgment to come and salvation within her house. We wonder if some refusd to accept her preaching because they couldn't humble themselves toenter within her home. Their concern about appearances was absurd in that the society whose views they so cared was about to be obliterated. We can easily translate these things into modern relevance.

As the city was closed (:1), the spies would have entered her home at some point before the walls were destroyed. We presume they did this using the red rope hanmging from her window, and that she and her family and converts used that same rope to come to salvation / safety. But red / scarlet is the colour of prostituion, and to this day, 'red light areas' refer to prostitution. The scarlet rope would have been on one hand the sign of her prostitution. And yet she was asked to use this as the sign of her commitment to the covenant, the equivalent of painting blood on the doorposts of the homes in Egypt. And it was through using that rope that those in her house were saved. Whilst of course her sin is not at all justified, the point is that it was through her sin that she had come to hear the Gospel, and she was inviting others to associate with her confession of sin in order to be saved.

Jos 6:24 They burnt the city with fire, and all that was in it-
Insofar as Israel followed their Angel, they had success. We repeatedly read that the cities they conquered were 'sent up in flames' (Jud. 1:8; Josh. 6:24; 8:8; 11:11), surely because they were following the Angel who was himself as a devouring pillar of fire (Dt. 9:3). Yet quite naturally we balk at the height of our calling, to follow the Angel.

Only they put the silver, the gold and the vessels of brass and of iron into the treasury of Yahweh's house-
1 Cor. 3:12-15 likens all the faithful to material which can pass through the fire of judgment- and this surely is a reference to the way that Jericho was burnt with fire, and only the metals along with Rahab and her family came through that fire to salvation. Thus according to the allusion, Rahab and her family represent all the

faithful. And she was a whore, and her family had to humble themselves to reconcile with her and come within her brothel in order to be saved.

Jos 6:25 But Rahab the prostitute, her father's household, and all that she had-
Family, however estranged from them she must have been, were "all that she had", and in a secular sense that is true for even the wealthiest people.

Joshua saved alive. She lived in the midst of Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers, whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation. Here, it seems that the record is being written whilst Rahab was still alive, and so "to this day" was only a relatively short time after the events.

Again we see the spies described as messengers; and Heb. 11:31; James 2:25 say that she believed them. They preached the gospel of the Kingdom and she had faith in it.

I suggested earlier that the prince of Judah whom she married (Salmon) was in fact one of the spies, as the two spies would have reflected the tribes of the faithful spies of 38 years before, Ephraim and Judah (Joshua and Caleb). But Rahab reasons in Josh. 2 as if she herself first became intersted in Yahweh when she heard of what He had done at the Red Sea and to Egypt, informed of it by her clients. She would surely have been a teenager at this time. Now, around 40 years later, she would have been at least in her 50s. And it went with the territory of being a prostitute in Jericho that she would have had a number of children, abortions, miscarriages etc. That she could bear a child at this sage and after that kind of lifestype was clearly only possible with God's help; and we see again how fragile are the human threads through which God has worked out His purpose over the generations.

Jos 6:26 Joshua commanded them with an oath at that time, saying, Cursed before Yahweh is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho. With the loss of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he set up its gates-
The idea was to build it in the sense of fortifying it; for the city was inhabited for quite some time before this curse came true. Was this unnecessarily extreme? However it was fulfilled at the time of Ahab in 1 Kings 16:34: "In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho: he laid its foundation with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of Yahweh, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun". To even attempt to rebuilt Jericho meant a studied disregard of God's word, considering Biblical records of Joshua's words to be merely the words of men. Hiel was from Bethel, where the golden calf was. Jericho had been inhabited after Joshua's time (Jud. 3:13; 2 Sam. 10:5). So this was a conscious rebuilding of the walls with gates in defiance of Yahweh's word. And his sons died during the building work, perhaps 'at some time between the beginning, in laying the foundations, and the ending of the project, in

hanging the gates'. After Abiram died laying the foundations, we would rather imagine that Hiel might have learned the lesson. But he didn't, such was his desire to defy God's word. And so his youngest son died when the project was almost completed and the gates were being hung. The desire to rebuild the settlement as a walled, gated city could have been because of its strategic position near the crossing of the Jordan river. Jericho was on the border of Ephraim but belonged to Benjamin (Josh. 16:7; 18:21), so it seems Ahab had taken it, and wanted to have the city and fortify it as a boundary against the two tribe kingdom.

Jos 6:27 So Yahweh was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land-
The *eretz* promised to Abraham is the land / earth which the Bible focuses upon. "The LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was *noised* throughout all the country" (Josh. 6:27), the *eretz*. Clearly the whole planet didn't know Joshua had invaded Canaan. Many times in Joshua and Judges we read of the people of the *eretz*: "For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the *land* [*eretz*] shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the *earth* [*eretz*]" (Josh. 7:9). Here the Israelites feared being cut off from their place in the *land*. They perceived the world / earth to them as the land where their enemies lived. In Josh. 12:1,7 we meet "the kings of the earth", i.e. of the land, and this must surely be the basis of how we are to understand the references to "the kings of the earth" in Revelation. Dt. 13:7 defines "the peoples which are round about you" [Israel] as being "from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth" (RV). Those peoples which bordered with the Israelites were "the earth" / *eretz*.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 7

Jos 7:1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the devoted things; for Achan, the son of Carmi the son of Zabdi the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things-
The words for "devoted" and "destroyed" are the same. The wealth of Jericho was to be destroyed in that it was devoted to God. Therefore Achan had to be destroyed, because he had associated himself with that which was to be destroyed / devoted. We too must understand that all things are God's. To keep wealth as it were for ourselves will lead to our destruction; we are to devote it to God.

Therefore Yahweh's anger burned against the children of Israel-
The gods of the nations were also understood as getting angry with their people but for whimsical, irrational reasons; or without any explanation. Yahweh is presented as a God of consistent, passionate love for His people; but whose wrath burns because of their moral sin. Such a conception of 'God' was unknown to the surrounding world.

Jos 7:2 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them saying, Go up and spy out the land. The men went up and spied out Ai-
Joshua had himself received that command 40 years ago, and had done so in faith. And clearly that was what he expected of these spies; but as noted on :3, they had more arrogance than the confidence of faith.

Jos 7:3 They returned to Joshua and said to him, Don't let all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and strike Ai. Don't make all the people to toil there, for there are only a few of them-

Shouldn't Joshua have led them into battle in person (Josh. 1:5); he did the second time they attacked Ai (Josh. 8:15). And the spies appear over confident. There were 12,000 men of Ai slain (Josh. 8:25). To assume that they could so easily overcome with an inexperienced force a fraction of their size... indicates arrogance. So the sin of Achan was worked through by God, in a multi faceted way. For they needed the defeat in order to make them more humble. The spies' comment that not all the people needed to "toil" or "labour" to capture Ai betrays a wrong idea that victory was through their labour, rather than God's grace (Josh. 7:3). And so Josh. 24:13 uses the word in saying that Israel were given a land for which they did not "labour" (s.w.). They were taught through Achan's sin that they were not defeating the Canaanites by their strength, but by God's undeserved grace.

Jos 7:4 So about three thousand men of the people went up there, and they fled before the men of Ai-
Apparently the ark wasn't taken with them (:6); another indication of assuming they would win, rather than going in faith. For the ark had been central to the victory over Jericho. The record consistently places it as the central point of the victory.

Jos 7:5 The men of Ai struck about thirty-six of them, and they chased them from before the gate even to Shebarim, and struck them at the descent-
"About 36" reads strangely, as we would expect a round number to follow the word "about". But it's likely from archaeological evidence that the peoples of Canaan were using the sexagesimal system; and 6 x 6 would therefore mean 'a large number', or maybe one hundred, according to the decimal system [i.e. 6 x 6 = 10 x 10].

The hearts of the people melted and became like water-
This was just how the hearts of the Canaanites had been, according to Rahab's words; and it was how Israel's hearts had been when they were first rejected from the land. They were as if they had never conquered Jericho. All they saw was the result of sin; they didn't apparently think of the reason for the judgment. Like the peoples around them, they were thinking of Yahweh as if He were one of the standard deities, who got angry with his people for no reason. They were failing to perceive that Yahweh was only angry with His people if they sinned; and therefore, they had sinned.

Jos 7:6 Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of Yahweh until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads-
This was all a sign of grief, but not necessarily of repentance. As discussed on :6, the obvious conclusion was that they had sinned and were therefore not experiencing Yahweh's blessing. For to flee before enemies was a curse for not remaining obedient to the covenant. But Joshua focuses only upon the judgment, rather than the underlying reason for it. He comes over as distinctly lacking in spiritual perception at this point.

Jos 7:7 Joshua said, Alas, Lord Yahweh, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to cause us to perish? I wish that we had been content and lived beyond the Jordan!-
He lost faith in the promise of Josh. 1:5-7,9. It is similar to the language of Num. 14:3, the faithless complaint of Israel in the wilderness to the effect that God had cruelly brought them over the Red Sea [cp. over Jordan] just to kill them. And as Israel wished they had remained in Egypt, so Joshua wishes the people had remained

east of Jordan. His faith was in tatters. And yet he ought to have had the humility to perceive what had happened- Israel had taken of the devoted thing. He may well have guessed so, but Joshua probably though that such grabbing of a bit of spoil was to be expected, and was surely not such a big item. But it was. And the lesson is that any assumption that we can 'rob God', by assuming our wealth is "ours", is extremely serious to Him.

Jos 7:8 Oh Lord, what shall I say, after that Israel has turned their backs before their enemies!-
Joshua lamented how Israel had fled before their enemies the first time they attacked Ai, alluding back to the curses for disobedience which Moses had recently pronounced to them. Therefore the second time they attacked Ai, Joshua and his people purposefully fled before their enemies; as if recognizing that the curses for disobedience were justified for them. But by doing this, they ended up chasing their enemies, just as Moses had said they would if they were faithful. No wonder that after the victory, the whole of Israel recited the blessings and cursings (Josh. 8:5,20,33-35 cp. 7:8)!

Jos 7:9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. What will You do for Your great name?-
This seems a half hearted attempt to follow the logic of Moses when he was told that God intended to destroy all Israel because of the sin with the golden calf. But Joshua sounds like faithless Jacob, fearful that the surrounding nations will cut him off- as if he considered God's promises about his seed as somehow nullified (Gen. 34:30).

"The earth" here is specifically the *eretz* promised to Abraham; the peoples of that earth / land would surround Israel. In Josh. 12:1,7 we meet “the kings of the earth”, i.e. of the land, and this must surely be the basis of how we are to understand the references to “the kings of the earth” in Revelation. Dt. 13:7 defines “the peoples which are round about you” [Israel] as being “from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth” (RV). Those peoples which bordered with the Israelites were “the earth” / *eretz*.

Jos 7:10 Yahweh said to Joshua, Get up! Why are you fallen on your face like that?-
He is being reminded not to just see himself as part of a community, but to remember his personal relationship with God, and not to have such a low self image. He ought to have perceived why Israel had turned their backs to their enemies; it was because they had broken covenant with God through sin. What God now spells out to Joshua, he really ought to have perceived an stated to God. "Like that" suggests Joshua was fallen on his face not in repentance, as he ought to have been, but just in grief for the Divine judgment which had come.

Jos 7:11 Israel has sinned. Yes, they have even transgressed My covenant which I commanded them-
See on :10. In the same way as Daniel, Isaiah, Ezra, Israel at the time of Achan etc. were reckoned as guilty but were not personally responsible for the sins of others, so the Lord Jesus was reckoned as a sinner on the cross; He was made sin for us, who knew no sin personally (2 Cor. 5:21). He carried our sins by His association with us, prefigured by the way in which Israel's sins were transferred to the animal; but He personally was not a sinner because of His association with us.

Yes, they have even taken of the devoted things, and have also stolen and also deceived. They have even put it among their own stuff-
Understanding God as creator, in its true, deep and thought-through sense, leads to an understanding of grace. That all we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Likewise, to take for ourselves what is God's is to play God, and therefore to steal from Him. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God. This was Achan's sin- to take what was devoted to God for himself. And this was why he is described as having 'stolen'. But from whom? From God (Josh. 6:18; 7:11). The fact God owns everything means that there can be no distinction between what is ours and what is God's. To think like that is to steal from Him. And hence the power and force of Mal. 3:8: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me". Have we robbed God in this way, especially in our attitudes and perceptions?

Jos 7:12 Therefore the children of Israel can't stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will not be with you any more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you-
If Canaan is seen to represent the Kingdom, the things which are stopping us entering the Kingdom are our sins. In prospect, Jesus, the antitype of the great Angel which lead Israel into the land and drove out the enemies in prospect, has vanquished all our sins. When Israel sinned, the help the Angels were giving Israel to help them possess what they had already prepared for them, was taken away. Thus with the first attack on Ai, the Angels had in prospect driven out the people of Ai, but the realization of that was conditional on Israel's obedience. Just as Israel in the wilderness were threatened with the withdrawal of the presence of the Angel, so here.

Jos 7:13 Get up!-
God was displeased with Joshua moping around on the floor. Joshua needed to recognize Israel had sinned, and had taken things devoted to Yahweh- and devote those things to Yahweh by destroying them.

Sanctify the people and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because Yahweh the God of Israel says, There is a devoted thing in the midst of you, Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted thing from among you-
This is not the same as guilt by association. The situation here has been misinterpreted by some to mean that we therefore cannot associate with sinners of the Achan category, lest we become defiled by association with them. But the point is that all the community of believers are in a sense considered at fault because of the failings of some of them. So if there is guilt by association, then it cannot be avoided by not associating with sinful people within the community. For the people of God, the community, is indivisible. We are in it and cannot quit it, if we wish to remain God's people. And in fact the Lord Jesus time and again turned all this around to the opposite- by willingly seeking association with sinners, eating with them, touching the leper etc. He was not thereby condemned, but rather sought to highlight His association with unclean people of God. It was through that willing association that we are saved.

Jos 7:14 'In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. It shall be that the tribe which Yahweh selects shall come near by families. The family which Yahweh selects shall come near by households. The household which Yahweh selects shall come near man by man-
This was presumably achieved by the flashing out of yes / no answers from the urim

and thummim in the breastplate (Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 14:42). The long drawn out process (requiring Joshua to rise early, :16) was surely to elicit repentance and confession from Achan. But instead he hoped against hope that he would somehow not be found out. His lack of immediate confession reflects his impenitence.

Jos 7:15 It shall be, that he who is taken with the devoted thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of Yahweh, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel'-
"All that he has" could mean all his possessions, or it could also include his family. Because surely they knew of his sin, seeing he buried the loot in the tent. And the long drawn out process of :14 had given them all plenty of opportunity to confess what had happened.

Jos 7:16 So Joshua rose up early in the morning and brought Israel near by their tribes. The tribe of Judah was selected-
Joshua was characterized by rising early (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10). This is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

Jos 7:17 He brought near the family of Judah; and he selected the family of the Zerahites. He brought near the family of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was selected-
"Man by man" refers not to all the men, but to the heads of families.

Jos 7:18 He brought near his household man by man, and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was selected-
We note that none of his ancestors had God's name within their names.

Jos 7:19 Joshua said to Achan, My son, please give glory to Yahweh the God of Israel, and make confession to Him. Tell me now what you have done! Don't hide it from me!-
Give glory-
He correctly perceives that repentance is a giving of glory to God's Name. And one is tempted to think that Joshua's appeal to Achan to properly confess his sin was meant to give him the chance of avoiding the 'definite' condemnation promised. However it could be that Joshua accepted Achan had to die, but he urged his repentance because he understood that there would be a future day of resurrection and judgment; and if Achan was repentant, then he would then be saved.

Jos 7:20 Achan answered Joshua and said, I have truly sinned against Yahweh the God of Israel, and this is what I have done-
The summary of his sins, and his appreciation of the psychological processes behind them (:21), is very thorough. But it was only made after the long process of exposing him had finished. All through it, and it would have taken some time (therefore Joshua arose early that morning, :16), Achan could have volunteered his confession. But he didn't; and like the drug addict who completely understands his situation but won't break free, so Achan perceived exactly the process of temptation and sin, but wouldn't really repent.

Jos 7:21 When I saw among the spoil a beautiful Babylonian robe-
This could have been a pagan priestly robe which was attractive to Achan as an idolater. Or since "robe" is that used for the kingly robe of Jon. 3:6, it was perhaps the robe of the king of Jericho. To steal it, when it could never be worn or sold easily, is therefore typical of how the lust of the eyes leads to stealing of wrongly obtaining things which have no practical value.

Two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took them. Behold, they are hidden in the ground in the middle of my tent, with the silver under it-
James 1:13-15 uses a family analogy- a man and "his own lust" beget a child, called sin; and sin, in due time, gives birth to death. Strange, surely, how James makes no mention of a personal Devil or demons as having any part at all to play in this process. It's quite possible that James' language is alluding to a classic example of the thought-lust-temptation-sin-death process which we have in the record of Achan in Josh. 7:20,21: "I *saw* two hundred shekels of silver, I *coveted* them, and *took* them... I *sinned*"- and so he was executed.

Jos 7:22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent. Behold, it was hidden in his tent, with the silver under it-
The speed was appropriate because they realized that they as a nation were defiled by having material which was God's still amongst them. It's all a powerful lesson for us; for all we apparently own is not ours. Ownership, especially in its capitalist sense, is an illusion; all is God's. The Lord's parable of hidden treasure appears to allude to this scene, in an inverse sense. The true treasure we are to find and hide is that of the Gospel, as opposed to material things.

Jos 7:23 They took them from the middle of the tent, and brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel. They laid them down before Yahweh-
"The middle of the tent" could imply that the entire family were guilty and complicent in what he did, which would explain why they also were slain. "Laid them down" suggests the weight of the wealth stolen. We note too that "Joshua", like the Lord Jesus his namesake, was "Yahweh" in a functional sense, although not of course God Himself in person. The material was laid down before Joshua, i.e. before Yahweh, seeing Joshua was His representative. Failure to appreciate this has led to all manner of Bible verses being misinterpreted as proof texts for the mistaken dogma of the Trinity. Likewise "all the children of Israel" surely means their representative elders, and LXX here gives "elders".

Jos 7:24 Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his cattle, his donkeys, his sheep, his

tent, and all that he had; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor-
We see here how the record was written at some point afterwards, for the valley "of Achor" was named after Achan, who is called "Achor" in the Chronicles genealogies. Although the judgment was to be by burning, it was also by stoning- so that all Israel would have a hand in it. The destruction of all he had would be a lesson that the rich man who tried to get richer was being judged by losing absolutely all he ever had. We also learn from this that the people crossed Jordan along with a fair number of animals, and perhaps they also had flocks with them in the wilderness journey.

Jos 7:25 Joshua said, Why have you troubled us? Yahweh will trouble you this day. All Israel stoned him with stones, and they burned them with fire and stoned them with stones-
Ahab's denunciation of Elijah as "he that troubles Israel" (1 Kings 18:17) effectively accuses Elijah of being like Achan, the troubler of Israel (Josh. 6:18). As Achan brought about Israel's defeat at the hand of her surrounding enemies, so latter-day Israel will blame their similar defeats and the strange drought which will afflict them, upon Elijah. Elijah's response to Ahab's accusation is typical of his theme of the need to throw off the worship of Baal and the other local gods, for that of Yahweh: "I have not troubled Israel, but you... in that you have... followed Baalim" (1 Kings 18:18). The stress upon this may indicate that the latter-day Elijah will seek to turn Israel away from a devotion to Islam - the idol of the surrounding nations.

It was Achan who was stoned with stones. The "them" burned with fire could refer to his family, or to his possessions. Perhaps his family were brought close to observe his death, just as the families of those who committed atrocities in the holocaust were made to watch the hanging of their guilty relatives.

Jos 7:26 They raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Yahweh turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place was called The valley of Achor to this day-
This turning from fierce anger recalls how Yahweh likewise did so earlier- because of the intercession of Moses. Here He turned from His anger because of repentance; but earlier He had done so because of the prayer of Moses, which was therefore counted as if Israel had repented at the time of the golden calf. This raises deep questions as to whether our prayers and intercessions can save the impenitent; see on Mk. 2:5. Ezra 10:14 speaks of God’s wrath turning away because those who had married Gentile women divorced them. God’s wrath is also turned away by the death of the sinner- the heads of the sinners in Num. 25:4 were to be ‘hung up’ before the Lord so that His wrath would turn away. A similar example is to be found in Josh. 7:26. Jeremiah often comments that God’s wrath is turned away by the execution of judgment upon the sinner (e.g. Jer. 30:24). In this sense His anger and wrath are poured out or ‘accomplished’, i.e. they are no more because they have been poured out (Lam. 4:11).

The fact that men such as Moses and Jeremiah (Jer. 18:20) turned away God's wrath without these things happening, or simply by prayer (Dan. 9:16) therefore means that God accepted the intercession of those men and counted their righteousness to those from whom His wrath turned away. We shouldn't assume that these righteous men merely waved away God's wrath. That wrath was real, and required immense pleading and personal dedication on their behalf.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 8

Jos 8:1 Yahweh said to Joshua, Don't be afraid, neither be dismayed. Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai. Behold, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, with his people, his city, and his land-
Chapter 7 has presented Joshua as having been so "dismayed" that he lost faith in the promises and encouragement of Josh. 1:3,9. God now continues to encourage him. Although the victory was given into their hand, that was still potential. For obedience was still required.

Jos 8:2 You shall do to Ai and her king as you did to Jericho and her king, except its spoil and its livestock, you shall take for a plunder for yourselves-
God told Israel to totally destroy the spoil from the cities they attacked. But when they failed to do this with Jericho, God told them that with Ai, the next city on the agenda, they were allowed to keep the spoil (Josh. 8:2); even though Dt. 20:14-16 said that this was how they should treat their distant enemies, but *not* cities like Ai which were part of their inheritance. This was an undoubted concession to human weakness. The same concession to human weakness applied to other cities apart from Ai; it became a general policy that "all the spoil of these cities... the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves"; and yet following straight on from this we are told that Joshua "left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses" (Josh. 11:14,15). God accepted those concessions to human weakness, this living on a lower level, as total obedience. The grace of all this is marvellous.

Set an ambush for the city behind it-
Some human strategy was now used to take Ai, whereas the strategy used to take Jericho had been foolishness in secular terms, and was completely Divine, requiring absolute faith. God is coming down a level, in order to meet His weak people and work with them. Although on another level, we can understand that in working with God, often the initiative is with us. All this means that *how* we plan to preach and care for others *does* need to be considered. Time and again, God works through humanly devised good strategies (Josh. 8:1,2; Neh. 4:9 etc.). But I love the way Derek Kidner puts it: "Scripture approves of strategy when it is a tool rather than a substitute for God".

Jos 8:3 So Joshua arose-
"Arose" is s.w. 'raise up'. The Messianic prophecy of Dt. 18:18 had a potential Messianic and primary fulfillment in Joshua: "I will raise them up [God 'rose up' Joshua- s.w. Josh. 1:2; 7:10,13; 8:1,3] a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee [Joshua's life was framed to be like that of Moses- e.g. he too was told to remove his shoe when on holy ground, also held his hands up whilst Israel fought their enemies]; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him [Joshua is constantly presented as telling Israel what God commanded him- Josh. 4:8,10,17; 6:10; 8:8: "according to the commandment of the

Lord shall ye do. See, I have commanded you"; Josh. 8:27]. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him".

And all the people of war, to go up to Ai. Joshua chose thirty thousand men, the mighty men of valour, and sent them out by night-

This was ten times the number which the spies had originally suggested in their arrogance and lack of true faith. However we note that in :12, five thousand were set in ambush. 30,000 is a large number of men to hide in order to set an ambush, although the term "thousand" when describing military matters rarely means literally 1000, but rather refers to some military division. Perhaps there were two ambushes set (see on :14), or there were a total of 30,000 troops but 5000 used in the ambush. My personal preference is to believe that he set out with 30000 but like Gideon, the numbers were reduced to 5000. For "Joshua chose" 30000 men, to fight against 12000 (:12,25), as if to assure victory by reason of numbers rather than faith; so perhaps God therefore chose 5000.

Jos 8:4 He commanded them, saying, Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Don't go very far from the city, but all of you be ready-

"Behind the city" meant on its west side (:9). The specific commands are from Joshua as the general; perhaps they were his interpretation of the command to set an ambush (:2). How that was to be fulfilled was left up to Joshua. The fact he built into the battle plans a retreat before enemies (:5) is therefore a commendable example of humility, recognizing that they deserved defeat for breaking the covenant, but believing that God's grace would turn that into victory, thereby making it an example of what Buechner called "the magnificent defeat".

Jos 8:5 I, and all the people who are with me, will approach to the city. It shall happen, when they come out against us, as at the first, we will flee before them-

Joshua had lamented how Israel had fled before their enemies the first time they attacked Ai, alluding back to the curses for disobedience which Moses had recently pronounced to them. Therefore the second time they attacked Ai, Joshua and his people purposefully fled before their enemies; as if recognizing that the curses for disobedience were justified for them. But by doing this, they ended up chasing their enemies, just as Moses had said they would if they were faithful. No wonder that after the victory, the whole of Israel recited the blessings and cursings (Josh. 8:5,20,33-35 cp. 7:8)! Fleeing before their enemies was perhaps a recognition of the truth of Dt. 28:25.

Jos 8:6 They will come out after us, until we have drawn them away from the city; for they will say, 'They flee before us, like the first time'. So we will flee before them-

Joshua explains to his people the mind of the people of Ai. They would assume that nothing had changed in Israel between the first attack and this second attack. But what had happened was that Israel had repented, and the things as it were stolen from God had been given to Him. This was the difference, and so Ai were to be defeated because they failed to recognize that.

Jos 8:7 and you shall rise up from the ambush, and take possession of the city; for Yahweh your God will deliver it into your hand-

The possession of the city was not because of the clever strategy, but because of God's deliverance of it into the hand of Israel. And yet He gave them the strategy, and

encouraged Joshua to develop it. This is typical of the way He works, a kind of symphony between Divine sovereignty and human volition.

Jos 8:8 It shall be, when you have seized on the city, that you shall set the city on fire. You shall do this according to the word of Yahweh. Behold, I have commanded you-
- see on :3; Jud. 1:8. The very receipt of a command should strengthen our brave obedience to it (Josh. 1:9; 2 Sam. 13:28). But our attitude to God's word determines our obedience to it. This is one dimension of believing that the Bible is indeed written by Divine inspiration.

Jos 8:9 Joshua sent them out; and they went to prepare the ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua stayed among the people that night-
Again "the people" are put for the soldiers; see on :11. The Divine command to set an ambush (:2) was obeyed very carefully by Joshua, as so emphasized (s.w. :4,7,9,12,14,19,21). I discuss on :27 how Joshua was very good at obeying clear commands, but tended to fail when he had to resolve questions on his own initiative.

Jos 8:10 Joshua rose up early in the morning, mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, at the head of the people to Ai-
Joshua was characterized by rising early (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10). This is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

Jos 8:11 All the people, even the men of war who were with him, went up and drew near to the city, and encamped on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between him and Ai-
As often in Joshua, "the people" are paralleled with "the men of war". The idea may be that ordinary unarmed civilians also accompanied them; or that the "men of war" were representative of the people. For it was to be their conquest. The land was to be taken by "them", the people, and not simply due to military actions.

Jos 8:12 He had set about five thousand men in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city-
Verses 12 and 13 appear to be a recapitulation of the situation. This position was that once occupied by Abraham (Gen. 12:8; 13:3), and was clearly chosen to remind the people of their being the children of Abraham and in his position as he first entered the land.

Jos 8:13 So they set the people, even all the army who was on the north of the city,

and the ambush on the west of the city; and Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley-
The idea is that they *had* set the people in these positions; verses 12 and 13 appear to be a recapitulation.

Jos 8:14 It happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hurried and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at the time appointed, before the Arabah; but he didn't know that there was an ambush against him behind the city-
"The time appointed" is in some manuscripts "the place appointed"; and "the Arabah" is in some "the ambush". In this case there would be the idea of two ambushes, one before and one behind the city. This would explain the two different numbers given for the troops involved in the ambushes; see on :3.

Jos 8:15 Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness-
"The way of the wilderness" is the very phrase used of the route taken by Israel after they had been barred from entering the land nearly 40 years previously (Dt. 1:40; 2:1). Joshua was acceptant of the fact that they did not now deserve to enter the land, and was fleeing before his enemies, knowing this was the curse for disobedience to the covenant. He was therefore appreciating that their entrance to the Kingdom was now by grace alone. And so victory was given, and thus in human terms this was all part of the strategy for taking Ai.

Jos 8:16 All the people who were in the city were called together to pursue after them. They pursued Joshua, and were drawn away from the city-
We note that Joshua personally was with the group who fled before their enemies, purposefully accepting that they had broken covenant and were worthy of the condemnation which that involved- of fleeing before enemies.

Jos 8:17 There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who didn't go out after Israel. They left the city open and pursued Israel-
This suggests that the people of Bethel had come to support Ai, perhaps in the gap between the two attacks upon Ai.

Jos 8:18 Yahweh said to Joshua, Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand. Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city-
The javelin would have reflected the rays of the sun and thereby given a message to the ambush to now rise. However there is no doubt that God meant Joshua to imitate the victories of Moses on account of his staff. We see here a mixture of working through human strategy, and yet being given the victory as a result of Divine operation. This was not the optimal way to operate; for before Achan's sin, the 'strategy' for taking Jericho had been complete nonsense in military terms, and had been designed to demonstrate absolute trust in Yahweh for victory. It seems this sign of the javelin was not explained to Joshua ahead of time. He may have wondered how to inform the ambushers of the optimal time to attack; and God now gave him the answer. Or perhaps the exact timing of the signal was from God. And this helps us understand the apparent gaps in God's revealed strategy with us; they are there so that we live by faith.

Jos 8:19 The ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, entered into the city and took it. They hurried and set the city on fire-
The burning of the cities was because of their uncleanness. And yet Jerusalem was to be burned with fire in the end (Jer. 21:10; 32:29). She was going to be proven no better than the idolatrous cities of the Canaanites, whose gods Israel eagerly worshipped. See on :22.

Jos 8:20 When the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way. The people who fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers-
Having no way to flee is typical of the experience of condemnation which is to come upon both Israel and the Gentiles (Jer. 25:35 etc.). Again, as noted on :19,22 etc., we see the destruction of these Canaanite cities as being the prototype for the later destruction of Israel, seeing they proved no better than the Canaanites but in fact worse.

Jos 8:21 When Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and killed the men of Ai-
The smoke signal was clearly planned in advance, as in Jud. 20:38. We note the very secular strategy employed in contrast to the humanly foolish strategy in taking Jericho. God perceived Israel's low level of spirituality, and worked with them according to that level. The image of the smoke of a burning city ascending is used of latter day Babylon's destruction at the hands of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 18:18). The conquests of Joshua point forward to that of his namesake; but insofar as he could have given the people "rest", but he didn't. And so his work was reapplied and rescheduled to the Lord Jesus.

Jos 8:22 The others came out of the city against them, so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, some on that side. They struck them so that they let none of them remain or escape-
But in the end, the same judgment was to come upon an apostate people of God. They too would be left with none to remain nor escape (Jer. 42:17; 44:14). We noted on :19 that Jerusalem was to be burnt for her filthiness, just as the cities of Canaan were at this time. God's people were to be judged as Canaanites. See on :23.

Jos 8:23 They captured the king of Ai alive, and brought him to Joshua-
"Ai" means 'heaps', and the word is used of how Jerusalem was to become heaps (Jer. 26:18). Her king too was captured alive and brought to the leader of the attacking armies. See on :19,22.

Jos 8:24 It happened that when Israel had made an end of killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness in which they pursued them, and they had all fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all Israel returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword-
The soldiers are described as "all Israel", just as in Joshua the armed men are several times termed "the people". The idea is that the soldiers were seen as representative of the people. For the whole people were as it were to be involved in the conquest.

Jos 8:25 All that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai-
Initially the Israelites nonchalantly thought only two or three thousand men were needed to destroy them. But then after the defeat, Joshua took 30000 men to deal with them, and it seems God reduced that number to 5000; see on :3. This wavering in faith and confidence has the ring of psychological credibility to it.

Jos 8:26 For Joshua didn't draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai-
Given the similarities with the battle against Amalek, were his arms held up in fervent prayer? This is a common association with upholden arms. Moses held his hand up, and Joshua led the army into battle, succeeding because Moses had his hands held up in prayer (Ex. 17:10). Now, Joshua is the one holding his hands up in prayer, whilst Israel are in battle. Lesson: We go through experiences which later repeat; and we are in the position of those who had before prayed for us, and are expected to replicate their examples.

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

"Utterly destroyed" is the word used for destruction or devotion to Yahweh. It seems that all the Canaanites had the opportunity for repentance. The trumpet blasts were to be understood by the people of Jericho as a call to repentance, which they ignored (Am. 3:6; Is. 18:3). This would then explain why the cities were devoted to Yahweh in destruction, which was the punishment for a city which turned away from Yahweh (Dt. 13:12-14).

Jos 8:27 Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took for prey to themselves, according to the word of Yahweh which He commanded Joshua-
Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (:31,35; Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

Jos 8:28 So Joshua burnt Ai and made it a heap forever, even a desolation, to this day-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 8:29 He hanged the king of Ai on a tree until the evening, and at the sundown Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city-
We see here that one dimension of crucifixion on a tree was public shame and public instruction. These were all aspects of the Lord's death. Dt. 21:23 had commanded this taking down bodies of criminals from the tree where they were exhibited, by evening; even condemned criminals were to be shown some respect. For after dark wild animals and birds would have eaten them. We see here reflected how God truly takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. We need not unduly fear condemnation, for God doesn't want to condemn people.

And raised a great heap of stones on it that remains to this day-
This was perhaps intentionally to reflect the fate of Achan. He loved the things of the Canaanites, and apparently stole the royal robe of the king of Jericho. So he met the same end as the kings of Canaan, buried beneath a heap of stones. The raising of the stones over the corpse may have been through all Israel as it were stoning him.

Jos 8:30 Then Joshua built an altar to Yahweh, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal-
Dt. 27:2-8 had commanded that "in the day" Israel passed over Jordan, they were to set up plastered stones with the law written upon them [perhaps just the ten commandments, or the lists of blessings and cursings], and put them "in mount Ebal". They were to do this immediately they passed over Jordan so that they might enter further into the land (Dt. 27:3); and the location was defined as near Gilgal (Dt. 11:30), where they camped after entering the land. Clearly enough, the ceremony of blessing and cursing ought to have been done immediately they entered the land. But they let secular concerns dominate their spiritual obligation to be thankful as God had asked. For when Joshua fulfilled it in Josh. 8:30, this was not "in the day" that Israel passed over Jordan. They had indeed taken stones with them from the Jordan, but had not used them as intended. They didn't plaster them nor write the law upon them. And so perhaps God ammended His intention- which was initially that they would set those stones up in mount Ebal immediately. Instead, He sent the people against Jericho, and then against Ai. Perhaps an instant conquest of Jericho had been originally intended, so that they could proceed to mount Ebal immediately. For later in Joshua we will read of God giving His people unnaturally speedy progress against their enemies, all in the same day. Or maybe His intention was that firstly they ought to have gone to mount Ebal with the plastered stones, and only then attacked Jericho. But they didn't plaster the stones nor wish to proceed immediately to Ebal. And so He arranged the campaign against Jericho and then Ai. We see how God is so eager to accommodate His programs to the weakness of men.

Jos 8:31 as Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones, on which no man had lifted up any iron. They offered burnt offerings on it to Yahweh, and sacrificed peace offerings-

Joshua comes over as exactly obedient to specific laws, but see on :27. Ex. 20:25 says that the use of any tool upon an altar would defile it (also see Dt. 27:5). This is how strongly God despises chic externality, and wants us to offer to Him as we are, uncut stones. He wants us, as we are, and not covered by cosmetics. In this we see the deep unspirituality of the altars in the temple, as designed by David and Solomon. I have suggested that although Solomon claims all this was commanded by God, in fact that was merely His assumption. Solomon attempted to get around this law by ensuring that the stones were cut away from the temple construction site (1 Kings 6:7). But this surely was breaking the spirit of the law.

Jos 8:32 He wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel-

Which law commanded to Moses isn't stipulated; perhaps it was the list of the blessings and cursings, or the book of Deuteronomy (Dt. 31:9,24,26) or the ten commandments. We assume from the record that Joshua was literate, a skill perhaps learned from Moses whilst being his personal servant in the wilderness years.

Jos 8:33 All Israel, their elders and officers and their judges, stood on both sides of the ark before the priests the Levites who carried the ark of Yahweh's covenant, the foreigner as well as the native. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of Yahweh had commanded at the first-

Shechem was between Ebal and Gerizim, and perhaps whilst there, they buried the bones of Joseph in the grave of the Abraham family which was there in the area (Gen. 33:19; Ex. 13:19). There is perhaps no mention of Shechem here, because the record wishes to focus upon the solemnity of what was being done in accordance with Dt. 27:2-8, rather than the geography. We note that "the foreigner" was also blessed, and encompassed by God within the term "the people of Israel".

For the blessing of the people of Israel-

Both blessing and cursing was read (:34), but clearly we are to understand that the focus of the Divine record is upon God's desire to bless the people. The whole ceremony is called "the blessing". And the simple takeaway from this is that God wishes our salvation and blessing, far more than His cursing of the disobedient.

Jos 8:34 Afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law-

This suggests that the law which was written on the stones was just the blessings and curses, which were read out at the time. See on :33.

Jos 8:35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua didn't read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the foreigners who were among them-

Joshua comes over as exactly obedient to specific laws, but see on :27. "The foreigners" appear to refer to a distinct category of people who were "among them" but not fully integrated.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 9

Jos 9:1 When all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country, and in the lowland, and on all the shore of the great sea in front of Lebanon, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard of it-
Gen. 15:16 summarizes all these kings as the "Amorites", and says that Israel would possess their land when the time of their iniquity [or judgment for their iniquity] was fulfilled. Israel's victories against them were therefore a judgment upon these kingdoms for their sins. The fact Israel themselves had with them the idols of Egypt when they crossed the Red Sea, and so quickly accepted the Canaanite gods, therefore made Israel the more culpable for Divine judgment. For they had judged others for what they themselves did.

Jos 9:2 they gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel-
Their "one accord" clearly excluded the elders of Gibeon (:3). It would seem there was group think going on here, and Gibeon are presented as being saved because they dared to go against the view of the majority. We note that :1 lists six kings, rather than the usual group of seven kings or kingdoms which are associated with the tribes in Canaan. The Girgashites of Josh. 3:10 are omitted. They may refer to the Gibeonites, or it could be that they too were not of "one accord". The gathering of the local peoples of the land against Joshua-Jesus is clearly going to happen in the last days as well (Ps. 83). The supporters of the latter day beast are likewise gathered with one mind (Rev. 17:13), and I suggest that these also refer to the local peoples within the land of Israel.

Jos 9:3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai-
According to :17, "Gibeon" was a group of towns, not just one city. We note that they are not recorded as having a single king (:11), unlike the other kingdoms listed in :1; rather it seems they were governed by a group of rulers, who came to Joshua clearly with the authority to make decisions on behalf of the whole group of towns.

Jos 9:4 they in their turn resorted to a ruse, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins, old and torn and bound up-
"In their turn" could mean that having heard of the ambush of Ai, they in their turn thought they could be deceptive. For the news of Ai's destruction was very fresh in their minds. If nothing more, we learn that experience of deception inspires us to deceive. And we have to break that cycle. One wonders if "deceiving and being deceived" makes some kind of allusion to this situation (2 Tim. 3:13). But they will go on to quote the words of Rahab, so we wonder whether "in their turn" means that they like Rahab told lies in order to enter into covenant with Yahweh and be saved from destruction.

Jos 9:5 and old and patched shoes on their feet, and wore old garments. All the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy-
There is great detail provided as to their appearance. We are invited thereby to stand

with Joshua and the Israelite elders, looking these people up and down, observing everything about them.

Jos 9:6 They went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, We have come from a far country. Now therefore make a covenant with us-
It is possible that there were two places known as Gilgal at the time, and this may be the Gilgal in the center of the land, rather than the camp first made at the Gilgal by the Jordan.

Jos 9:7 The men of Israel said to the Hivites, What if you live among us. How could we make a covenant with you?-
We get the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the telltale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand... against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature, to know on one level but not on another; and the contradictions evident in the Jesus : Judas relationship and the Samson : Delilah relationship are only explicable by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor.

Jos 9:8 They said to Joshua, We are your servants. Joshua said to them, Who are you? Where do you come from?-
We notice that the Gibeonites try to avoid lying. They skip the key questions by saying they come from far away, and immediately go on to use Rahab's words about the wonder of Israel's God and their desire to fear Him and enter covenant. I will argue on :9,10 that they were to some degree sincere in this. So their attempt to minimize the amount of lies they told could therefore be seen as a reflection of their sincerity in spiritual terms.

Jos 9:9 They said to him, Your servants have come from a very far country because of the name of Yahweh your God; for we have heard of His fame, all that He did in Egypt-
'Coming from a far country for the sake of the name of Yahweh' is the very phrase used in 1 Kings 8:41 in a positive sense, of genuine proselytes who were to be welcomed into Israel and relationship with Yahweh. It seems this is a recognition that indeed there was something genuine about these Gibeonites. They wanted relationship with Yahweh but saw no way to get it apart from being deceitful as they were. See on :10. We note they say nothing about the miracle of the crossing of Jordan or fall of Jericho. They were repeating almost verbatim the words of Rahab, and we wonder whether in fact she had got word to them, or at least they had heard about her and wished to emulate her.

Jos 9:10 and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroth-
These are the words of Rahab. As noted on :9, they were apparently in the same situation as she was. They wanted to accept Israel's God, but saw no way in which they could, without being deceitful. Their imitation of her is perhaps developed by the way in which they too lie in a blessed way, just as she did to the men of Jericho.

Although context is indeed important, it isn't *always* so. The New Testament writers so often quote the Old Testament *without* (apparently) attention to the context

of the words they are quoting. And this is indeed the approach of the Rabbis, who tend to expound each Bible verse as a separate entity. But all the same, in seeking to understand a verse, attention should be paid to the context. Because a word or phrase means something in one context doesn't mean it *always* means this in *any* context. Thus "leaven" can be a symbol of both the Gospel and also sin. And the eagle is a symbol of several quite different enemies of Israel, as well as of God Himself. Another simple example is in Dt. 3:20; the land "beyond Jordan" refers to land on the West of the river; but in Josh. 9:10 the same phrase refers to land on the East. That same phrase "beyond Jordan" means something different in different contexts. We can't always assume, therefore, that the same phrase *must* refer to the same thing wherever it occurs.

Jos 9:11 Our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us saying, 'Take provision in your hand for the journey and go to meet them, and tell them, We are your servants. Now make a covenant with us'-
No mention is made of their king; see on :3. The "ambassadors" (:4) from Babylon also came from a "far country" (s.w. 2 Kings 20:14) to apparently make a covenant with Hezekiah. He ought to have learned from the mistake of Joshua, but instead he liked to reason that these men were like the Gibeonites and should be accepted. Hence he twisted this historical incident into a precedent for wrong behaviour and choices; as we see so often in religious people. See on :18.

Jos 9:12 This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we went out to go to you; but now, behold, it is dry, and has become mouldy-
"Behold" implies they invited the princes to test the bread, which they did (:14).

Jos 9:13 These wineskins which we filled were new; and behold, now they are torn. These our garments and our shoes have become old because of the very long journey-
The obvious contrast was with the way that the garments and shoes of Israel had not worn out after a far longer journey of 40 years. God's actions in our lives are always multi faceted. This was more than a test of their humility, to what extent they would trust their own native judgment of truth as opposed to turning to God's word. It was also a reminder of His gracious provision for them throughout the wilderness years. His actions in our lives are likewise multi dimensional.

Jos 9:14 The men examined their provisions, and didn't ask counsel from the mouth of Yahweh-
"The mouth of Yahweh" implies they had prophets amongst them, or at least God's word expressed through the yes / no decisions of the Urim and Thummim (Num. 27:21). It seems Joshua delegated the examination of their integrity to the princes, who were deceived by the old bread. "Examined" could mean "tasted", as if they ate the old bread and confirmed it was indeed old. Truth can never be arrived at by delegating the examination of it to others. And Joshua and the princes were clearly wrong in not asking for God's counsel in a situation which was clearly not clearly covered by Mosaic legislation.

David apparently learned the lesson from all this. For he did ask counsel of Yahweh when not knowing how to act (s.w. 2 Sam. 5:23); whereas Israel didn't (s.w. Is. 30:1; Hos. 4:3).

Jos 9:15 Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them

live. The princes of the congregation swore an oath to them-
Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27,31,35; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

Jos 9:16 It happened at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that they lived among them-
"Three days" in the Bible is often not a literal period of 72 hours, and we must remember this when attempting to work out the chronology of the Lord's "three days" in the tomb.

Jos 9:17 The children of Israel travelled and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath Jearim-
The ark was to be kept here for 20 years (1 Sam. 7:2), confirming the impression that these people were in fact sincere.

Jos 9:18 The children of Israel didn't strike them, because the princes of the congregation had sworn to them by Yahweh, the God of Israel. All the congregation murmured against the princes-
The obvious question was as to whether the oath to the Gibeonites was binding seeing they had lied; and because Yahweh had commanded them to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan. I suggested on :11 that this incident with the Gibeonites was abused by Hezekiah to justify his acceptance of the ambassadors from Babylon. And I would now further suggest that it was abused by Saul when he slew the Gibeonites. He would have argued that the princes had been wrong to make this covenant, and therefore it was null and void. But God was extremely angry that he thought that and punished the land because of it, indicating the common people had agreed with him (2 Sam. 21:1-9). That later judgment confirms that the princes, although unwise, did the right thing by upholding the covenant. And the subsequent faithfulness of the Gibeonites within Israel was evidence that God worked through human unwisdom in order to save people. For the salvation of the people of Canaan was important to Him, and it could be argued that the six days march and blowing of trumpets around Jericho had been an invitation for their repentance.

Jos 9:19 But all the princes said to all the congregation, We have sworn to them by Yahweh the God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them-
David appears to allude to the incident, in an oblique criticism of Saul's murder of the

Gibeonites, by commending the man who swears to his own hurt but doesn't change (Ps. 15:4). See on :18,26.

Jos 9:20 This we will do to them, and let them live; lest wrath be on us, because of the oath which we swore to them-
This indicates some morality amongst the princes, although they may well have been living in some superstitious fear of consequences for broken oaths, as the Mosaic law doesn't specifically legislate about the situation they were in.

Jos 9:21 The princes said to them, Let them live, so they became wood cutters and drawers of water for all the congregation, as the princes had spoken to them-
It seems this group became the Nethinim, the given / devoted ones; and were consistently faithful within Israel and the temple service, far more so than the Israelites themselves (1 Chron. 9:2; Ezra 2:43-54,58,70; 8:20). See on :23. Wood cutters and drawers of water were specifically mentioned in Dt. 29:11 as the lowest rank of society, and yet able to enter covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Jos 9:22 Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them saying, Why did you deceive us by saying, 'We are very far from you', when you live among us?-
"Among us" could be read as an expression of faith that Israel were already occupying the land and were the dominant group there.

Jos 9:23 Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you will never fail to be bondservants, both wood cutters and drawers of water for the house of my God-
I have suggested on Josh. 1:1 that these records were rewritten [under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. Hence the reference to the house of God, which didn't then exist. This would confirm the idea that the Gibeonites became the Nethinim who served in the temple; see on :21,27.

Jos 9:24 They answered Joshua and said, Because your servants were certainly told how Yahweh your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were very afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing-
As noted above, this was again an allusion to the words of Rahab- who had lied to her own people in order to avoid destruction and enter covenant with Yahweh. They certainly did have a good knowledge of Israel's history, and far more than the average Canaanite, they believed that these stories they had heard were true. Their knowledge of the commandment to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan is another hint that they had received some kind of word from Rahab or had heard the words she had used. The only way to avoid that destruction was to repent and join Israel and accept their God; and this was what they wanted to do.

Jos 9:25 Now, behold, we are in your hand. Do to us as it seems good and right to you to do-
See on :26. The "good and right" thing was clearly not to slay them. Israel had been told by Moses that their doing what was "good and right" was required for them to possess the land (Dt. 6:18; 12:28). The Gibeonites use the same phrase in appealing for Joshua to do what was "good and right" (Josh. 9:25) in not slaying them but accepting them into covenant relationship with Yahweh. The people generally didn't want to do this (Josh. 9:26). It seems God's providence used Joshua's initial unwisdom

in order to give Joshua a chance to do what was "good and right", so that Israel could indeed possess Canaan. We marvel at how God works through human unwisdom and dysfunction, in order to achieve His final purpose of giving His people His Kingdom.

Jos 9:26 He did so to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they didn't kill them-
This implies that the thing which was "good and right" (:25)was not to kill them, although the people generally wanted to do so. See on :18,19. For all his unwisdom, Joshua comes over as having absolute integrity in this matter, and doing the right thing after having made a mess and not inquired of Yahweh as he should have done.

Jos 9:27 That day Joshua made them wood cutters and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of Yahweh, to this day, in the place which He should choose-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

I have suggested on Josh. 1:1 that these records were rewritten [under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. Hence the reference to the Gibeonites serving in the place Yahweh would choose, which didn't then exist. This would confirm the idea that the Gibeonites became the Nethinim who served in the temple; see on :21,23.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 10

Jos 10:1 Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; and that as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them-
Adonizedek King of Jerusalem was the counterpart of Melchizedek. He falsely claimed to be 'Lord of righteousness'. He looks ahead to the latter day antiChrist figure in Jerusalem who will mimic the Lord Jesus, a fake or 'anti' Christ, who is lord of the kings of the earth / land, to be destroyed by the latter day Joshua-Jesus. For it is the Lord Jesus who is to be declared lord of the kings of the earth, and not Adonizedek. In Rev. 17:18 the harlot Jerusalem reigns of the kings of the earth / land in the last days. And this was typified in this history of Adonizedek.

Jos 10:2 The people of Jerusalem were very afraid, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty-
Their humility before Yahweh, as explained on Josh. 9, was therefore the more commendable, seeing they were known as the strongest of the Canaanite cities.

Jos 10:3 Therefore Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish and to Debir king of Eglon saying-
Hoham means “Jehovah of the multitude”, and adds to the body of possible evidence that some tribes had begun claiming Yahweh as their God. This gives significance to the title "Yahweh, God of Israel", not the god of a similar name claimed by some of the Canaanites.

Jos 10:4 Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon; for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel-
There is a parallel between Adonizedek asking others to "come up to *me* and help *me*", and Gibeon in response asking "Come up to *us*... and help *us*" (:6). The theme is developed that all concerned were weak and in need of external help. And the only ultimate external help was in God.

Jos 10:5 Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish and the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together and went up, they and all their armies, and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it-
God worked through Joshua's unwisdom about the Gibeonites in order to gather together the Canaanites and destroy them. If Joshua had been proud and impenitent about his mistake with the Gibeonites, who would have killed them or not gone to rescue them. But he was humble enough to continue going along with God's program

after his unwisdom, and God in turn worked through this- by gathering together the Canaanites and giving Joshua a great victory over them.

Jos 10:6 The men of Gibeon sent to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal saying, Don't abandon your servants! Come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the hill country have gathered together against us-
By treating the Gibeonites as Israel, Joshua was led to a great victory over the Canaanites. Had he ignored their plea for help, this would not have been granted perhaps in the dramatic way it was. The way of love and integrity often leads us to further blessing, within God's wider plan. See on :4.

Jos 10:7 So Joshua went up from Gilgal, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour-
There appears to be a difference between the mighty men of valour, and the "people of war". Perhaps the vanguard refers to the men of the two and a half tribes, who were to go in advance into battle. Or the idea may be that "all the people" were strengthened with bravery / valour, hence LXX "he and all the people of war with him, every one mighty in strength". We note a difference in the attitude now, and that after the victory at Jericho, where the Israelites considered that just two or three thousand of them could overcome the 12,000 men of Ai. Now Joshua takes his entire fighting force with him.

Jos 10:8 Yahweh said to Joshua, Don't fear them, for I have delivered them into your hands. Not a man of them will stand before you-
The continual reassurance of Joshua could imply he struggled to maintain faith in the promises of God which meant he should not fear (Josh. 1:5).

Jos 10:9 Joshua therefore came on them suddenly-
It shouldn't just be the nearness of the Lord's return that makes us urgent. Our decisions to give over each part of our lives, radically, to Jesus should be made not just because life is short and the Lord is at the door; but also because it might otherwise be too late to undo the damage a self-engrossed life has already caused, to the self and to others. Rebekah responded immediately to the call to go marry Isaac, in a story which is clearly to be read as an acted parable of the search for a bride for Jesus. Her 'quick' response is one of her characteristics (Gen. 24:18,20,26,46,64). Abraham likewise "rose up early" after his night time vision, requiring him to offer his son to God (Gen. 22:1,3). Joshua "therefore" started to attack the confederacy of local kings, in the middle of the night, immediately after God had assured him of victory (Josh. 10:9). David could write: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Ps. 119:60). We cannot be passive on receiving the opportunity to serve God. We will urgently seek to do

something with what we have been enabled to do for the Lord: “The servant who got five bags *went quickly* to invest the money and earned five more bags” (Mt. 25:16 NCV).

He went up from Gilgal all night-
From Gilgal to Gibeon was about 20 miles, so they marched all night.

Jos 10:10 Yahweh confused them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth Horon, and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah
We note the confusion between what Yahweh did and what Israel did; because so clearly He was with them giving the victory. It is typical of the victories God won for His people that He uses some elements which could only have been from Him. Here, the mental confusion from Him, and later the hailstones. This was because He so dislikes any boasting in human strength. The ascent of Beth Horon would refer to "Upper Beth Horon", about four hours march away from Gibeon.

Jos 10:11 It happened that as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth Horon, that Yahweh cast down great stones from the sky on them to Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the children of Israel killed with the sword-
The seventh vial records the destruction of Babylon, who receives "the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath" in the form of huge hailstones (Rev. 16:19,21). This equates the nations who are gathered to Armageddon with Babylon, which we will see is primarily a symbol of the powers within the land promised to Abraham, based upon this historical situation. The cup of the wrath of God alludes to Zech. 12:2,3, where the surrounding nations also are "gathered together" and have burdened themselves with Jerusalem are made to drink "a cup of trembling" by reason of doing so. The punishment with giant hailstones recalls how Israel's local enemies were destroyed in the time of Joshua/Jesus.

Jos 10:12 Then Joshua spoke to Yahweh in the day when Yahweh delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand still on Gibeon! You, moon, stop in the valley of Aijalon!-
This reflects amazing spiritual ambition and faith in prayer; he commanded things to happen, so sure of the prayer being heard. However, I suggest on :15 that :12-15 are a citation from the poetic book of Jasher. This would explain the usage of poetic language in an otherwise literal, factual account. This is not to say that we cannot read it literally, although there are many problems with that.

The Amorites fled to the south-west, so Joshua was west of Gibeon at this point. The sun would be in the east over Gibeon, and the moon in the west over the valley of Ajalon. This would only have been the situation before noon, quite soon after dawn, with the moon still not set in the west. So we assume the battle and this prayer were in the early morning; Joshua and his men had marched from Gilgal through the night to launch a dawn attack (:9).

Jos 10:13 The sun stood still and the moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies-
Samson took vengeance on the Philistines (Jud. 15:5; 16:28), when the Law taught that Israel were not to take vengeance (same word) *on each other* (Lev. 19:18), but could do so on their enemies (Num. 31:2; Dt. 32:43 cp. Josh. 10:13).

Isn't this written in the book of Jashar?-
See on :12,15. It has been suggested that this was a book of poems (2 Sam. 1:18), and therefore the language of the sun delaying to go down is therefore to be read poetically. And indeed it is so that figurative language is used, with stars fighting (Jud. 5:20) and the heavens being bowed down (Ps. 18:7-17). But I consider that to be an attempt to water down the miracle, and the context here is simply not that of such poetic language. Hab. 3:11 appears to consider this literal. And we are only eager to do that because it requires less faith to believe. There are a number of references in Scripture to books like the book of Jasher (e.g. Josh. 10:13) which we no longer have available to us. Whether they were inspired or not, we don't know; but the point is, they are no longer available to us because God knows that we do not need them. By contrast, the elaborate rituals of the Mosaic Law *have* been preserved for us; God would not have inspired and preserved books like Leviticus unless they were important for us.

The sun stayed in the midst of the sky and didn't hurry to go down about a whole day-
I have no problem in understanding this in literal terms, although there is another approach to :12-15. See on :12,15. It could even be that the sun returning by ten degrees (2 Kings 20:10) was a correction or compensation for this in the universe. But the sun literally staying still in the sky would have meant the entire solar system, perhaps the entire cosmos, was affected. By the prayer of a man here on earth.

But the comment that so much was achieved "at one time" (Josh. 10:42) may hint at a compression of time to enable it. "The sun stood still" may well be intended to teach that the meaning of time was collapsed by God, rather than that the sun literally stood still (Josh. 10:12,13). And the sun standing still over Gibeon is mentioned in Is. 28:21 as typical of the time when Yahweh will do "His strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act" in the last days. The same may be true when the shadow went back for Hezekiah. The movement of the planets need not have been altered; the meaning of time was simply suspended. Rev. 8:12, also speaking of the last days, says that "the day

shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise". Could this mean that one day and one night last only two thirds of their usual length, whilst the judgments of the fourth Angel are poured out upon the land? I would suggest that the Lord had in mind the suspension of time when he asked that "the hour might pass from him" in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:35); rather than asking to escape the cross in this request, he was perhaps asking for it all to happen in only a moment of real time. Babylon is to be punished with famine in one day; yet famine is a process (Rev. 18:8). In one day her judgments come, and yet also in one hour (Rev. 18:10). Surely the lesson is that time is compressed. The events around Christ's return were prefigured by those at the time of Joshua's conquest of the land. Some of the records of his campaigns require a huge amount to have been achieved by his soldiers within around 36 hours.

Jos 10:14 There was no day like that before it or after it, that Yahweh listened to the voice of a man; for Yahweh fought for Israel-
Israel did not obey / hearken to the voice of Yahweh, and He did not hearken to their voice in prayer (Dt. 1:45; 9:23; 28:15; Josh. 5:6; Jud. 2:20; 6:10 cp. Dt. 8:20 s.w.). 2 Kings 18:12 states this specifically. God hearkened to Joshua's voice in prayer (Josh. 10:14) because Joshua hearkened to His voice. It was to be the same with Saul. He didn't hearken to God's voice (1 Sam. 15:19) and God didn't hearken to Saul's voice in prayer in his final desperation at the end of his life (1 Sam. 28:18). If God's word abides in us, then our prayer is powerful, we have whatever we ask, because we are asking for things according to His will expressed in His word (Jn. 15:7).

For the scope of the miracle, see on :13.

Jos 10:15 Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp to Gilgal-
This seems out of place, for Joshua would hardly have received the long day as answer to his prayer, and returned to Gilgal. Surely he would have immediately continued chasing the Amorites, as described in the following verses. It could be a conclusion of the matter, repeated in :43, and then the next verses explain how the conclusion was reached. That sort of thing happens often in Biblical narrative. But there is the possibility that this :15 concludes a quotation from the book of Jasher (:13). This would then support the argument that the language of the sun and moon standing still is part of a more figurative, poetic account which is being cited from the book of Jasher, a book of songs and poetry. This would help explain why we have an apparent interjection of poetic language in the midst of an otherwise factual narrative.

Jos 10:16 These five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah-
The account of conquest has many connections with Abraham's arrival in the land; for the Israelites were Abraham's seed. Kings fleeing and dying recalls the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fleeing and perishing in Gen. 14:10.

Jos 10:17 Joshua was told saying, The five kings are found, hidden in the cave at Makkedah-
This may have been a specially fortified cave, with food inside it. Some of the caves were like small palaces.

Jos 10:18 Joshua said, Roll large stones to the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them-
The scene recalls that at the Lord's burial. They were pronounced as it were already dead and buried. There may be an allusion or word play upon the fact that through circumcision, God had rolled [away] the reproach of Egypt (s.w. Josh. 5:9). These are the only usages of the word for "roll" in Joshua. If indeed Joshua is making such a word play, then his point is that circumcision, covenant relationship with God, is related to victory over their enemies. See on :19.

Jos 10:19 but don't stay-
The sense of urgency and not wasting time on anything is repeated by the Lord Jesus when sending out His people to preach.

Pursue your enemies, and attack their rearguard. Don't allow them to enter into their cities; for Yahweh your God has delivered them into your hand-
"Pursue your enemies" is a quotation from the blessings for obedience to the covenant (Lev. 26:7,8). See on :18. Joshua had purposefully fled before the men of Ai in recognition that Israel deserved defeat, as they had broken covenant. But he is also confident that by grace, undeservedly, they were receiving the blessings for obedience to it.

Jos 10:20 It happened, when Joshua and the children of Israel had finished killing them with a very great slaughter until they were consumed, and the remnant which remained of them had entered into the fortified cities-
Joshua's enthusiasm of :19 had apparently not been shared by all the people. For Joshua had urged the soldiers to chase the Amorites so that they didn't enter fortified cities.

Jos 10:21 that all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah in peace. None moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel-
Not moving the tongue against a man is language appropriate to dogs. The Canaanites are likened to dogs, now scared of the humans who are now amongst them. The implication may be that there were Gentiles living in Makkedah who weren't destroyed

at that time (:28), but who said nothing against the Israelites. But the LXX gives another perspective: "And all the people returned safe to Joshua to Makeda; and no one of the children of Israel murmured with his tongue". There were no complaints against Joshua [cp. the murmuring of the people against Moses], because there was not a single Israelite casualty.

Jos 10:22 Then Joshua said, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring those five kings out of the cave to me-
This may connect with the way the Canaanites were scared to open their mouths against the Israelites (:21). But the Israelites opened the mouth of the cave and brought out the Canaanite kings. The impression is that Israel were so much in supremacy. There may also here be the intentional modelling of the future resurrection from the tomb / grave, to face judgment- and then to die the second death, represented by their bodies returning to the cave- see on :27

Jos 10:23 They did so, and brought those five kings out of the cave to him: the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon-
Joshua could have been the Messianic king who was to triumph over the kings of the earth / land promised to Abraham. But his victories weren't permanent, and so his potential could have been fulfilled at the restoration, and so the images of being "terrible to the kings of the earth" (Ps. 76:12) and "treading upon princes" (Is. 41:25) are taken from Joshua's work and used by the restoration prophets. But the restoration from Babylon also failed to fulfil all the prophetic potential; and so these things were reapplied and rescheduled to the future work of the Lord Jesus. In this sense Joshua appears to be a type of the Lord Jesus, his namesake.

Jos 10:24 It happened that when they brought those kings out to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the chiefs of the men of war who went with him, Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings. They came near, and put their feet on their necks-
Joshua's conquest of the Canaanite tribes inevitably looks forward to the work of his greater namesake at the second coming. See on :22 for how this came about. Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem, is replete with reference to the latter day anti-Christ figure who will rule there in the last days. He leads a confederacy of Arab nations against Joshua-Jesus, and is destroyed with hailstones (Josh. 10:11)- an event which is the basis for the latter day prophecy of Rev. 16:21. We think too of the "five kings" who fell before the Lord Jesus at the point of Rev. 17:10. Joshua's men placing their feet upon the necks of their enemies is the prototype of all enemies being subdued under the Lord in

the last day; and the way “the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel” at this time (Josh. 10:42) is the basis of many latter day statements to the same effect.

Jos 10:25 Joshua said to them, Don’t be afraid, nor be dismayed. Be strong and courageous, for Yahweh will do this to all your enemies against whom you fight-
As Joshua had been told to be strong and of good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others. As God charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law, so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people (Josh. 1:7,8 cp. 23:6). Joshua had faithfully followed, and now he became the leader who was to be faithfully followed.

Jos 10:26 Afterward Joshua put them to death, and hanged them on five trees. They hung on the trees until the evening-
The Lord's crucifixion had this public element to it. His victory over sin, as a result of His temporary death, was publically and openly proclaimed on the cross. Our preaching of the cross therefore carries with it, axiomatically, this sense of public, open proclamation. For the idea of a body hanging on a tree was of public proclamation.

Jos 10:27 It happened at the time of the going down of the sun that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees-
We see here that one dimension of crucifixion on a tree was public shame and public instruction. These were all aspects of the Lord's death. Dt. 21:23 had commanded this taking down bodies of criminals from the tree where they were exhibited, by evening; even condemned criminals were to be shown some respect. For after dark wild animals and birds would have eaten them. We see here reflected how God truly takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. We need not unduly fear condemnation, for God doesn't want to condemn people.

And threw them into the cave in which they had hidden themselves, and laid great stones on the mouth of the cave-
This was how things had been before they were taken out of the cave to face judgment. I suggested on :22 that this was all a consciously acted parable of resurrection, judgment and then returning to the grave in the second death.

Which remain to this very day-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference

(Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 10:28 Joshua took Makkedah on that day and struck it with the edge of the sword, with its king. He utterly destroyed them and all the souls who were in it. He left none remaining. He did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho-
See on :21. The people of Makkedah were terrified of the Israelites, they were as dogs too scared to even open their mouths against them (:21).

"Utterly destroyed" is the word used for destruction or devotion to Yahweh. It seems that all the Canaanites had the opportunity for repentance. The trumpet blasts were to be understood by the people of Jericho as a call to repentance, which they ignored (Am. 3:6; Is. 18:3). This would then explain why the cities were devoted to Yahweh in destruction, which was the punishment for a city which turned away from Yahweh (Dt. 13:12-14).

Jos 10:29 Joshua passed from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, to Libnah, and fought against Libnah-
"All Israel" could suggest that the ordinary people accompanied the soldiers. Or as often in Joshua, "the people" are paralleled with "the men of war". The idea may be that ordinary unarmed civilians also accompanied them; or that the "men of war" were representative of the people. For it was to be their conquest. The land was to be taken by "them", the people, and not simply due to military actions.

Jos 10:30 Yahweh delivered it also, with its king, into the hand of Israel. He struck it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls who were in it. He left none remaining in it. He did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho-
See on :29. The comment of Josh. 24:13 is that the Israelites lived in such cities, in houses which they had not built. We wonder whether they simply picked up the idols they found there and began worshipping them.

Jos 10:31 Joshua passed from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to Lachish, and encamped against it, and fought against it-
The very same phrase is to be used of how the Assyrians "encamped against" these very same cities and fought against them (2 Chron. 32:1; Is. 37:8). And it was Yahweh who "encamped against" them (s.w. Is. 29;3), manifest in the Assyrians. The Assyrian and Babylonian campaigns against Israel were therefore conscious inversions of Joshua's

victories at this time. The obvious reason for it was that God's people had become like the Canaanites, and were being judged as they were.

Jos 10:32 Yahweh delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel. He took it on the second day, and struck it with the edge of the sword, with all the souls who were in it, according to all that he had done to Libnah-

Striking a city with the edge of the sword and completely destroying all life within it was what Israel did to the cities of Canaan (Josh. 10:32 etc.). But the phrase is that of Dt. 13:15, about what should be done to an apostate Israelite city who turned to idolatry. This explains why the account of Joshua's campaigns list cities like Libnah and Lachish, against which the Assyrians "encamped" and fought against them (2 Chron. 32:1; Is. 37:8 = Josh. 10:31). Israel were judging the Canaanite cities for their idolatry; the fact they committed the same meant that they were more than hypocritical. They had done that which they had judged. And they thereby become a warning for us.

Jos 10:33 Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him and his people, until he had left him none remaining-

God continues His style of bringing the Canaanite kings into engagement with Joshua. Clearly it was His will that Israel should assume full control of Canaan. Lachish has been the subject of extended archaeological research, and all the evidence is that at the time of the conquest, it was heavily supported by Egypt and had many indications of Egyptian presence and culture. Perhaps the shedding of so much blood was psychologically necessary for Israel to feel they were taking vengeance upon Egypt.

Jos 10:34 Joshua passed from Lachish, and all Israel with him, to Eglon; and they encamped against it and fought against it-

The repeated references to Joshua and the people 'passing' from town to town (:29,31,34) are another of the many connections with Abraham when he first entered the land. For he too "passed through the land... and the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12:6 s.w.). Israel were being taught that they were indeed the seed of Abraham, and were to have his faith. Circumstances are at times arranged in our lives, so that we too may perceive the similarities between ourselves and Biblical characters whose faith we are to follow.

Jos 10:35 They took it on that day, and struck it with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed all the souls who were in it that day, according to all that he had done to Lachish-

"On that day" contrasts with taking Lachish on the second day (:32). The idea is that there was no lengthy siege, but the cities fell almost immediately. If indeed literally all

the inhabitants were slain (but see on :39), then the amount of blood shed was huge. This was genocide on a scale perhaps unequalled in Biblical history. Every few days the Israelites were personally slaying thousands of people. The psychological trauma on the murderers would have been huge. For they likely had no very advanced weapons capable of killing large numbers of people very easily. See on :33.

Jos 10:36 Joshua went up from Eglon, and all Israel with him, to Hebron; and they fought against it-
Joshua took Hebron but Israel did not follow up his victory, and the local inhabitants returned; Caleb then took it (Josh. 15:13), but again, by Samson's time, the Philistines were back. See on :37. It's rather like the constant cycle of purges of idolatry throughout Israel's history. The victories of a few great individual reformers failed to touch the people. And that is perhaps the abiding tragedy of God's people.

Jos 10:37 They took it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, with its king and all its cities, and all the souls who were in it. He left none remaining, according to all that he had done to Eglon; but he utterly destroyed it, and all the souls who were in it-
I suggest on :39 that "none remaining" may not be literally true. For Hebron was soon in Canaanite hands again (Josh. 15:39) and was again in Samson's time. The victories of Joshua were simply not followed up by Israel, and this becomes the tragedy of how the victory of the Lord Jesus is also not followed up by us as it should be.

Jos 10:38 Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to Debir, and fought against it-
Again, as lamented on :37, Joshua's victory against Debir wasn't followed up by God's people; for we find the Canaanites again living there soon afterwards (Josh. 11:21; 15:15). Israel were too easily satisfied with a parcel of land to call their own; and that is the danger in modern society too. All wider vision of God's Kingdom and the potential possible is subsumed beneath the mire of mediocrity.

Jos 10:39 He took it, with its king and all its towns. They struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls who were in it. He left none remaining. As he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir and to its king; as he had done also to Libnah and to its king-
"He left none remaining" may not mean that literally everyone was killed. For the phrase is used by Jeremiah of how "none escaped nor remained" in Jerusalem as a result of the Babylonian invasion (Lam. 2:22). And yet clearly some did (see on :35). There was in fact a 'remnant' which remained although in a broader sense 'none remained'.. This would explain why there were still Canaanites who remained after Joshua's campaigns, and who grew up again to be thorns in Israel's side, especially in the period of the Judges.

Jos 10:40 So Joshua struck all the land, the hill country, the South, the lowland, the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but he utterly destroyed all that breathed, as Yahweh the God of Israel commanded-

Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

Jos 10:41 Joshua struck them from Kadesh Barnea even to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even to Gibeon-

This marks the extent of the conquered territory; from Gibeon on the east to Gaza / Goshen in the south west, on the border of Egypt; to Kadesh Barnea in the south east. It would have been strange for Joshua to return to Kadesh Barnea, from where he had been sent out as a spy 40 years previously. "Goshen" could be the town in Judah of Josh. 15:51, but "the country of Goshen" could also refer to the area where the Israelites had lived in Egypt.

Jos 10:42 Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because Yahweh, the God of Israel, fought for Israel-

See on :12. The comment that so much was achieved "at one time" may hint at a compression of time to enable it. The reference appears to be to the effects of this one day, rather than a general statement. For overall, God did not give Israel the land "at one time" in the sense of an extended period, but rather drove the nations out relatively slowly (Dt. 7:22). Or perhaps God's ideal intention for Israel wasn't fulfilled, and therefore according to some later plan of action, He gave Israel the land "at one time" (Josh. 10:42).

Jos 10:43 Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal-

This repeats :15; see note there for why this is.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 11

Jos 11:1 It happened that when Jabin king of Hazor heard of it, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph-
"Jabin" was the generic name for kings of Hazor, like "Pharaoh". The title means "the wise", and we recall Paul's description of how the wise of this world shall fall before the Lord Jesus. After the summary of the southern campaign in Josh. 10:41, we now read of the northern territories. Hazor was in Galilee, Madon is LXX Maron near mount Lebanon, Achshaph is near Tyre .

Jos 11:2 and to the kings who were on the north, in the hill country, in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, in the lowland, and in the heights of Dor on the west-
Dor was in Asher (Josh. 11:1,2; 12:23; 17:11; Jud. 1:27,28). Taanach was within either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But these towns were also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

Jos 11:3 to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite and the Jebusite in the hill country, and the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpah-
There were four places called Mizpah in the Bible. This Mizpah is in northern Israel, and is not the Mizpah in Judah (Josh. 15:38) nor that in Benjamin (Josh. 18:26).

Jos 11:4 They went out, they and all their armies with them, many people, even as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with very many horses and chariots-
They are presented as a fake seed of Abraham, as the sand on the seashore. It is this fake seed of Abraham which will likewise engage with the true seed of Abraham in the battle for the land in the last days. This victory of Joshua was to be an encouragement for those of later times likewise surrounded by armies like the sand of the sea (Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 13:5). This is the purpose and power of Biblical history- to inspire later readers or hearers.

Jos 11:5 All these kings met together; and they came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight with Israel-
Horses and chariots were mentioned in :4 for the first time. They gathered at the flat land around Merom (now known as the Huleh lakes) as this was where the chariots could best operate.

Jos 11:6 Yahweh said to Joshua, Don't be afraid because of them; for tomorrow at this time, I will deliver them up all slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire-
It had taken two days to take Lachish, so this victory over such a huge force within 24 hours... could only be due to direct Divine engagement with the enemy. We note that the idea of "tomorrow at this time" meant that Joshua was already on the march toward this formidable foe. He had gone forward in faith, and God now confirms him

in it, after he has started off on the journey. The "iron chariots" of Josh. 17:18 could be burned with fire (Josh 11:6) because they were wooden but with iron wheels.

Jos 11:7 So Joshua and all the people of war with him suddenly came against them by the waters of Merom, and fell on them-
The element of surprise attack was used by Joshua. He uses human military strategy, unlike the taking of Jericho which was achieved purely by God's tactics, which made no sense in the eyes of the world. For they gave the defenders full notice of their presence and intentions, walked six times around the perimeter of the city in one day before attacking when therefore tired. And the men had just been circumcised and were weak from that, and the manna had just stopped so they had food supply issues. But that weakness was required for God's strength to be made manifest. But after the failure of Achan, God as it were compromised with Israel's weakness, and gave them battle strategies and tactics which were wise in secular terms. He does likewise with us, in accordance with our faith.

Jos 11:8 Yahweh delivered them into the hand of Israel, and they struck them and chased them to great Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim and to the valley of Mizpeh eastward. They struck them until they left them none remaining-
"He left none remaining" may not mean that literally everyone was killed. For the phrase is used by Jeremiah of how "none escaped nor remained" in Jerusalem as a result of the Babylonian invasion (Lam. 2:22). And yet clearly some did. There was in fact a 'remnant' which remained although in a broader sense 'none remained'.. This would explain why there were still Canaanites who remained after Joshua's campaigns, and who grew up again to be thorns in Israel's side, especially in the period of the Judges.

The chasing of the enemy was done in an organized way; to the north west (Sidon), south west (Misrephoth) and east (Mizpeh). As noted on :7, strategy was being used, under God's control. Misrephoth Maim means “the salt-pits" and again we see the similarities with Abraham's earlier conquest of the land (Gen. 14:10). The people, as Abraham's seed, were being encouraged to walk in the steps of faith of Abraham, just as we are. Awareness of Abraham's life is therefore of especial importance to all today who are baptized and thereby become his seed.

Jos 11:9 Joshua did to them as Yahweh told him. He hamstrung their horses and burnt their chariots with fire-
This was quite an act of faith, because such military technology was much sought after and considered invincible. The king of Israel had been commanded to not have horses and chariots by the law of Moses (Dt. 17:16), and Joshua is being treated as the effective king of Israel on God's behalf. This lesson was learned by David in his earlier life (Ps. 20:7), but totally not learned by his son Solomon.

Jos 11:10 Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword: for Hazor used to be the head of all those kingdoms-
He turned back from the pursuit in order to deal with Hazor. He saw it as particularly significant, because he didn't burn the other cities (:13).

Jos 11:11 They struck all the souls who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was no one left who breathed. He burnt Hazor with fire-
See on Jud. 1:8. By Jud. 4:1 there was a powerful Canaanite king there, about 130

years after the death of Joshua. Again Israel did not follow up his victory. It's rather like the constant cycle of purges of idolatry throughout Israel's history. The victories of a few great individual reformers failed to touch the people. And that is perhaps the abiding tragedy of God's people.

Jos 11:12 Joshua captured all the cities of those kings, with their kings, and he struck them with the edge of the sword and utterly destroyed them; as Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded-
Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

Jos 11:13 But as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only; Joshua burned that one-
The comment of Josh. 24:13 is that the Israelites lived in such cities, in houses which they had not built. We wonder whether they simply picked up the idols they found there and began worshipping them.

Jos 11:14 The children of Israel took all the spoil of these cities, with the livestock, as spoils for themselves; but every man they struck with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them. They didn't leave any who breathed-
God told Israel to totally destroy the spoil from the cities they attacked. But when they failed to do this with Jericho, God told them that with Ai, the next city on the agenda, they were allowed to keep the spoil (Josh. 8:2); even though Dt. 20:14-16 said that this was how they should treat their distant enemies, but *not* cities like Ai which were part of their inheritance. This was an undoubted concession to human weakness. The same concession to human weakness applied to other cities apart from Ai; it became a general policy that "all the spoil of these cities... the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves"; and yet following straight on from this we are told that Joshua "left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses" (Josh. 11:14,15). God accepted those concessions to human weakness, this living on a lower level, as total obedience. The grace of all this is marvellous.

Jos 11:15 As Yahweh had commanded Moses His servant, so Moses had commanded Joshua. Joshua did so. He left nothing undone of all that Yahweh commanded Moses-
See on Josh. 8:5; Dt. 18:18. The 'likeness' between Moses and the prophet like unto him was in that the prophet would also speak God's words in a similar way. Josh. 11:15 therefore significantly comments: "As the Lord commanded Moses his servant,

so did Moses command Joshua: and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses". Joshua was a potential Messiah, although his native fearfulness seems to have meant he didn't fulfil the role as he could have done.

Jos 11:16 So Joshua captured all that land, the hill country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, the Arabah, the hill country of Israel, and the lowland of the same-
We have here a summary, effectively stating that Joshua took all Canaan, and then in :18 we have the comment as to how this was achieved- by making war "a long time" with them.

Jos 11:17 from Mount Halak that goes up to Seir, even to Baal Gad in the valley of Lebanon under Mount Hermon. He took all their kings, struck them and put them to death-
"Baal Gad" suggests that Baal was worshipped through the worship of Gad, another god (Is. 65:11). Baal, we thereby learn, was worshipped through the worship of other gods. And this was exactly Israel's problem; they justified the worship of Baal by saying that it was a form of Yahweh worship. In various forms, this has been the abiding temptation for God's people of all ages. To worship their own idols in the name of worshipping Yahweh, to mix the flesh and the spirit, to mix paganism with true worship.

Jos 11:18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings-
Perhaps five to seven years (Josh. 14:7,10). Joshua was there saying that at the point of Josh. 14:10, he has been subduing Canaan for a period of five to seven years [if we include parts of years as a year, as was the Hebrew style of reckoning, or if we consider the wilderness journeys to have been 38 and not 40 years].

Jos 11:19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took all in battle-
This could imply that after what happened with the Hivites, there was the opportunity to make peace with Israel, by entering covenant with Yahweh. The destruction of the Canaanites was therefore because they had refused to accept this, and they are therefore the more culpable for it. I suggest on :21 that even Jericho had the opportunity to surrender and accept Israel's God as Rahab had done.

Jos 11:20 For Yahweh hardened their hearts, to come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, that they might have no favour, but that He might destroy them, as Yahweh had commanded Moses-
There are a number of passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination.

Jos 11:21 Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel: Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities-
"Utterly destroyed" is the word used for destruction or devotion to Yahweh. It seems that all the Canaanites had the opportunity for repentance. The trumpet blasts were to

be understood by the people of Jericho as a call to repentance, which they ignored (Am. 3:6; Is. 18:3). This would then explain why the cities were devoted to Yahweh in destruction, which was the punishment for a city which turned away from Yahweh (Dt. 13:12-14).

Jos 11:22 There were none of the Anakim left in the land of the children of Israel. Only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did some remain-
Samson went to Gaza conscious that his people had failed to drive out the tribes (Josh. 11:22). Judah had captured it in Joshua's strength (Jud. 1:18), but had let the Philistines return. So Samson chose Gaza from spiritual motives; and yet he schemed out his plan to enable him to gratify his flesh.

We see here how absolute terms are used, "none of the Anakim...", when in fact this was not literally the case. This is a feature of Semitic writing. Thus "all" Jerusalem were baptized by John the Baptist, but not literally all of them.

Jos 11:23 So Joshua took the whole land-
However, the land was not taken up to the Euphrates. Clearly God had recalculated the possibilities of Israel, and focused instead on giving them the land between the Jordan and Mediterranean, with a little bit to the east of Jordan. Although it seems even that was not His intention. He recalculated "the river" as not Euphrates, but Jordan. He saw how weak they were. And He does likewise with us in our weakness, recalculating at times what He expects from us, bearing in mind our weakness in not rising up to our potentials.

According to all that Yahweh spoke to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes-
But according to Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4, much land was still not possessed; does 11:23 therefore imply that the land had been possessed only in the perceptions of Israel? How responsible was Joshua for this? Or perhaps we are to see a difference between the fact Joshua "took" the land, and the way that Israel failed to "possess" it. This looks ahead to the way the Lord Jesus "took" the Kingdom for us, but so many fail to possess it.

The land had rest from war-
There is a strong Biblical connection between the land and people of Israel (e.g. "the land rested from war", Josh. 11:23, means the people did). The utter moral defilement of the people may therefore be physically expressed in the state of the land. Thus Ezekiel's descriptions of a fertile and prosperous land are in the context of this being the outcome of a *spiritual* revival of Israel. The 'blossoming' of Israel's land since 1948 is not, therefore, a fulfilment of such prophecies (unless there has been an unperceived repentance of a minority).

JOSHUA CHAPTER 12

Jos 12:1 Now these are the kings of the land whom the children of Israel struck, and possessed their land beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise, from the valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon, and all the Arabah eastward-
These "Kings of the land" form the basis for the 'kings of the earth' [same Hebrew phrase] of later Biblical prophecy. The reference is to the Canaanite rulers, those who rule in the land promised to Abraham, who are in conflict with Israel- rather than to literally every king of the planet. uses upon. “The LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was *noised* throughout all the country” (Josh. 6:27), the *eretz*. Clearly the whole planet didn’t know Joshua had invaded Canaan. Many times in Joshua and Judges we read of the people of the *eretz*: “For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the *land* [*eretz*] shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the *earth* [*eretz*]” (Josh. 7:9). Here the Israelites feared being cut off from their place in the *land*. They perceived the world / earth to them as the land where their enemies lived. In Josh. 12:1,7 we meet “the kings of the earth”, i.e. of the land, and this must surely be the basis of how we are to understand the references to “the kings of the earth” in Revelation. Dt. 13:7 defines “the peoples which are round about you” [Israel] as being “from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth” (RV). Those peoples which bordered with the Israelites were “the earth” / *eretz*.

Jos 12:2 Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon and ruled from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, and the middle of the valley, and half Gilead, even to the river Jabbok, the border of the children of Ammon-
The chapter describes the conquest of two kings (Sihon and Og) to the east of Jordan, and 31 to the West (12:24), making a total of 33 victories against the kings of Canaan- perhaps looking forward to the 33 years of Christ's life in which He overcame every potential obstacle to our inheriting the Kingdom. Their territory is mentioned in such detail in 12:2-5 because the victory against the King of the area meant that Israel were to now go and possess his territory- but they failed to do so fully.

Jos 12:3 and the Arabah to the sea of Chinneroth, eastward, and to the sea of the Arabah, even the Salt Sea, eastward, the way to Beth Jeshimoth; and on the south, under the slopes of Pisgah-
This describes the east side of the Jordan valley. Beth Jeshimoth was where they had encamped in the wilderness (Num. 33:49). Some of the places they had known in their wilderness journeys (cp. our life now after baptism, which is like crossing the Red Sea, 1 Cor. 10:1,2) were revisited and taken by Joshua (Josh. 12:3), and incorporated into God's Kingdom. Perhaps situations and places we know in this life will then become eternally ours when we possess them in God's Kingdom.

Jos 12:4 and the border of Og king of Bashan, of the remnant of the Rephaim, who lived

at Ashtaroth and at Edrei-
Ashtaroth was the capital of Og. We have another example of what was noted on :3. As noted in Num. 21:33; Dt. 3:4,10, some of the places they had known in their wilderness journeys (cp. our life now after baptism, which is like crossing the Red Sea, 1 Cor. 10:1,2) were revisited and taken by Joshua (Josh. 12:4), and incorporated into God's Kingdom. Perhaps situations and places we know in this life will then become eternally ours when we possess them in God's Kingdom.

Jos 12:5 and ruled in Mount Hermon, and in Salecah, and in all Bashan, to the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and half Gilead, the border of Sihon king of Heshbon-
Geshur was still under local control at the time of David (2 Sam. 13:37). And the other areas listed here also remained the long term homeland of the Moabites and Ammonites. The amazing victories of Joshua personally were simply not possessed or made good by the Israelites, and this was their undoing. It all speaks of the failure of probably trillions of human beings in not making good on the personal conquests and achievements of the Lord Jesus. This wasted potential is one of the most tragic features of human spiritual experience since the Lord's death. He as it were bound the strong man, and we His people are to take the spoils. But most haven't done so.

Jos 12:6 Moses the servant of Yahweh and the children of Israel struck them. Moses the servant of Yahweh gave it for a possession to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh-
We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jos 12:7 These are the kings of the land whom Joshua and the children of Israel struck

beyond the Jordan westward, from Baal Gad in the valley of Lebanon even to Mount Halak that goes up to Seir-
Note the parallel between Joshua and his people: "Joshua and the children of Israel struck". It looks forward in type to the victory of Jesus against all those obstacles which stand between us and possession of the Kingdom. Cities, confederacies, giants, military power... all these things crumbled before Joshua-Jesus. But tragically, despite all these victories, Israel did not make good on them, and did not possess what Joshua had enabled them to through his victories.

Eph. 1:14 speaks of our having received a guarantee of the "inheritance... of the purchased possession", language which is very much taken from these records of the conquest and possession of Canaan as Israel's inheritance (see too Col. 1:12 "the inheritance of the saints in light", "you shall receive the reward of the inheritance", Col. 3:24). The Abrahamic promises of possessing the gate of Israel's enemies had an initial fulfilment in these conquests of Joshua, just as in a sense we have in Christ already "obtained an inheritance" (Eph. 1:11), by turning to Christ we "receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18), "an inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Note that the inheritance is 'among' other believers, just as Israel received an 'inheritance among' their brethren (Num. 26:62; 27:7; 33:54; Dt. 18:2; Josh. 14:3; 16:9; 17:4,6; 19:49 etc.). This emphasis upon 'inheritance among' our brethren shows that the experience of salvation is not a totally personal matter. Salvation is collective, the body of Christ has been saved, and our salvation is by reason of being amongst that body. 1 Pet. 1:4 Gk. speaks of our perpetual ['that fades not away'] inheritance being given to us at Christ's return, although it is now 'reserved in Heaven' for us (note too Heb. 9:15 "the promise of eternal inheritance"). All this is the language of Gen. 17:8 and the Abrahamic covenant.

Joshua gave it to the tribes of Israel for a possession according to their divisions-
Each tribe was divided into divisions, and each division was given a specific land inheritance within the tribal area. But it would seem they generally did not inherit as God intended. Hence Ez. 47:29 uses the same Hebrew words to describe how in the intended establishment of the Kingdom after the return from exile, the land would be "divided by lot unto the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these are their portions [s.w. 'divisions']". This is how God works- His word comes true, even if His people fail to fulfil His intentions in one generation. His people in Ezekiel's time also failed, and so in essence the intention will still come true in that each of the new Israel will receive a specific, personal inheritance in God's Kingdom. That specific inheritance is *analogous* to the specific land inheritances intended for each division of Israel's tribes, but in reality the inheritance is redefined in the New Testament [see above] in terms of forgiveness, sanctification etc. This is not to say that we shall not inherit the earth, and

specific parts of it [five cities, two cities, in terms of the Lord's parable], but the essence of inheritance is far more than mere land.

Jos 12:8 in the mountains, and in the lowland, and in the Arabah, and in the slopes, and in the wilderness, and in the South; the Hittite, the Amorite, and the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite-
The idea is that Joshua secured all the land, of whatever terrain and difficulty, and all the tribes which had been there. That he secured the "mountains" is significant, because it was here to where the local population retreated, and the Israelites allowed them to remain there. They didn't follow up the victories of Joshua, just as we fail to capitalize on those of the Lord Jesus. Seven nations were to be destroyed (Dt. 7:1), but Josh. 12:8 lists six as having been defeated. The Girgashites are omitted from the list there. So it seems that only the Girgashites were completely destroyed as was potentially possible. The remaining six were defeated by Joshua, but remained in the land, to be thorns in the flesh for Israel.

Jos 12:9 the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Bethel, one-
These kings are listed in the order in which they were defeated: Jericho first (Josh. 6:1) then Ai (Josh. 7:2) etc. There is archeological evidence for the destruction of Jericho and Ai at this time, but not for the rest of the cities mentioned here. This was surely because Israel didn't follow up on the victories Joshua won in battle against their kings. The territory described in this chapter 12, which is a summary of Joshua's campaigns, excludes the territory of the Arameans, Moab, Amalek and Philistia, which were still part of the land promised to Abraham. God as it were reduced the territory He gave to His people because He knew they couldn't cope with it all, and that those nations were too strong for Israel. But still, they failed to inherit all the land, as Judges makes clear. Just as God makes concessions to our weaknesses, giving us what He knows we can conquer, even though we have failed to live up to our maximum potential.

Jos 12:10 the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one-
But Jerusalem was firmly in the hands of the Jebusites by the time of Saul and David. In some areas, the Israelites followed up on Joshua's conquest, e.g. Hebron; but in others, like Jerusalem, they didn't.

Jos 12:11 the king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one-
"Jarmuth" is 'elevated place'. This is significant, because it was to the uplands to where the local population retreated, and the Israelites allowed them to remain there. They didn't follow up the victories of Joshua, just as we fail to capitalize on those of the Lord Jesus.

Jos 12:12 the king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one-
"Eglon" is literally 'the place of the calf', and the same word is used of Jeroboam's golden calves (1 Kings 12:28). Clearly he was mixing Yahweh worship with that of the local paganism which had never been totally eradicated. And this is the abiding temptation for God's people. To worship their own idols in the name of worshipping Yahweh, to mix the flesh and the spirit, to mix paganism with true worship.

Jos 12:13 the king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one-
"Geder" is LXX "Gerar", again associating the conquest of the land with the earliest presence of the patriarchs there.

Jos 12:14 the king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one-
Zephath ['watchtower'] was renamed Hormah ["devoted"] (Jud. 1:17). They were supportive of David when on the run from Saul (1 Sam. 30:30). What was taken from the world was devoted to Yahweh by the faithful Israelites involved in this area. And that is an abiding principle.

Jos 12:15 the king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one-
Adullam was overlooking the valley of Elah, which was in Philistine hands by the time of Saul (1 Sam. 17:19). The history of these towns is a sad testimony to Israel's failure to make good on Joshua's victory.

Jos 12:16 the king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one-
Bethel reminds us again of the early days of the patriarchs in the land of promise (Gen. 28:19); Israel were being bidden follow in their footsteps.

Jos 12:17 the king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hepher, one-
"Hepher", 'place of shame', was likely renamed that after being conquered by faithful Israelites, who perceived the Biblical connection between "shame" and idolatry.

Jos 12:18 the king of Aphek, one; the king of Lassharon, one-
"Aphek" means 'strong fortress' . The conquests of Joshua look ahead to the conquest of the Lord Jesus over all things which are humanly high and strong (2 Cor. 10:5).

Jos 12:19 the king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one-
One reason we have this list of towns and kings conquered by Joshua might be that his conquest of the land was typical of that to be achieved by the Lord Jesus in the last

days. And perhaps then, these places shall have significance. For Jerusalem is to fall and Israel overrun, however briefly, by her enemies- and then reconquered by the return of the Lord Jesus.

Jos 12:20 the king of Shimron Meron, one; the king of Achshaph, one-
We naturally enquire why so much detail is given of towns which are sometimes hard to locate. Perhaps it was to encourage Israel to make good on the victories of Joshua, and to remind them for all time that these towns had indeed been overcome, and they could do likewise in later times.

Jos 12:21 the king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one-
The victories by Joshua only opened up potentials, because by Jud. 1:27 this was back in Canaanite hands. Israel let the ball drop. As have the body of Christ in many aspects of His victories.

Jos 12:22 the king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam in Carmel, one-
A number of these towns like Kedesh were Levitical cities and some were cities of refuge, perhaps this explains why their conquest is mentioned here.

Jos 12:23 the king of Dor in the height of Dor, one; the king of Goiim in Gilgal, one-
Dor was in Asher (Josh. 11:1,2; 12:23; 17:11; Jud. 1:27,28). Taanach was within either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But these towns were also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

Jos 12:24 the king of Tirzah, one: all the kings thirty-one.
Tirzah became the early capital of Jeroboam and the ten tribes.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 13

Jos 13:1 Now Joshua was old and well advanced in years. Yahweh said to him, You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed-
We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and

our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

The first half of Joshua describes his conquest of the land, and chapters 13-24 the division of the land amongst God's people.

Jos 13:2 This is the land that still remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all the Geshurites-
These areas had had their kings slain by Joshua, but Israel had failed to possess the territory; see on :1. The Hebrew for "remains" is literally 'to swell up', and the idea may be that despite Joshua's victories, the local population in these areas had swollen up strongly again.

The theme of Canaanites 'remaining' is a major one. Joshua left 'none remaining' in many areas. But in the few areas where some did remain, the Canaanites re-established themselves. The theme was to be inverted; the majority of the people of Judah were killed or removed into exile, and only a few 'remained' (2 Kings 24:14; 25:11; Jer. 39:10). And those who went into captivity are likewise described as a remnant (Ezra 9:8; Neh. 1:2 etc). The word is often used in this context. But they were intended to re-establish themselves and take over the land again, inverting what the Canaanites did.

Jos 13:3 from the Shihor, which is before Egypt, even to the border of Ekron northward, which is counted as Canaanite; the five lords of the Philistines; the Gazites, and the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avvim-
"Sihor", 'black stream', is a name for the Nile or the "brook of Egypt" which formed the southern border of the land promised to Abraham. But there is no mention of the Euphrates, which was to form the eastern border of that territory. Clearly God had recalculated the possibilities of Israel, and focused instead on giving them the land between the Jordan and Mediterranean, with a little bit to the east of Jordan. Although it seems even that was not His intention. He recalculated "the river" as not Euphrates, but Jordan. He saw how weak they were. And He does likewise with us in our weakness,

recalculating at times what He expects from us, bearing in mind our weakness in not rising up to our potentials.

Jos 13:4 on the south; all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the border of the Amorites-
"On the south" is LXX "from Teman". Aphek is modern Afka, near Beirut in Lebanon, on the far northern border of Israel. This was a huge swathe of land which had not been possessed.

Jos 13:5 and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal Gad under Mount Hermon to the entrance of Hamath-
The land of the Gebalites was around Tyre in the far north (Ez. 27:8,9). "Baal Gad" suggests that Baal was worshipped through the worship of Gad, another god (Is. 65:11). Baal, we thereby learn, was worshipped through the worship of other gods. And this was exactly Israel's problem; they justified the worship of Baal by saying that it was a form of Yahweh worship. In various forms, this has been the abiding temptation for God's people of all ages. To worship their own idols in the name of worshipping Yahweh, to mix the flesh and the spirit, to mix paganism with true worship.

Jos 13:6 all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, even all the Sidonians; them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only allocate it to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you-
Misrephoth Maim means “the salt-pits" and again we see the similarities with Abraham's earlier conquest of the land (Gen. 14:10). The people, as Abraham's seed, were being encouraged to walk in the steps of faith of Abraham, just as we are. Awareness of Abraham's life is therefore of especial importance to all today who are baptized and thereby become his seed.

Jos 13:7 Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh-
It has been pointed out that there is no such surviving detailed geographical description of any contemporary nation. This reflects the extreme importance of the land of Israel to God. For it was and is to be His Kingdom, and has a special significance to Him.

Jos 13:8 With him the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance which Moses had given them beyond the Jordan eastward, even as Moses the servant of Yahweh gave them:
The boundaries of Gad appear to in practice encroach upon that given to Manasseh (1 Chron. 5:11 cp. Josh. 13:8,7,11,25,30; Dt. 3:10-13). But the tribe of Manasseh had extended their borders northward (1 Chron. 5:23). The territory was given to Israel as

their intended inheritance in the Kingdom of God; but God was open to some flexibility about this. We think of Caleb and Othniel asking for territory as an inheritance. And so it is with our dialogue with God's and His eternal intentions for us.

Jos 13:9 from Aroer, that is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, and the city that is in the middle of the valley, and all the plain of Medeba to Dibon-
The earlier victories in these areas (Num. 21:30; 32:3,34) had simply not been built upon. The land had soon reverted to the local population, just as the reforms of the kings of Judah so quickly were undone. And just as some of our apparent spiritual victories can be revealed in time as the building of the man who built on sand, with only apparently, surface level progress. The city in the middle of the valley was Ar of Moab.

Jos 13:10 and all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites who reigned in Heshbon, to the border of the children of Ammon-
It is often not appreciated that the extent of the area given to the two and a half tribes on the east of Jordan, as defined in Josh. 13:10-12, was roughly the same as the entire territory given to the nine and a half tribes on the west of Jordan. The two and a half tribes saw good pasture land and wanted it there and then, as a king of short cut to the Kingdom of God. But there are no short cuts to the Kingdom. The conditions they were given demanded even more faith from them. Their men had to leave their flocks and families unprotected on the east of Jordan whilst they fought in the front line vanguard of Joshua's army to secure the territory on the west of Jordan. And the territory they were asked to possess was huge, far larger than the pasture lands they initially coveted, and inhabited by giants (see on Josh. 13:30)- which they probably didn't realize at the time.

Jos 13:11 and Gilead, and the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and all Mount Hermon, and all Bashan to Salecah-
This was a huge area; see on :10.

Jos 13:12 all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei (the same was left of the remnant of the Rephaim); for Moses attacked these, and drove them out-
"Drove out" here and in :13 is s.w. "possessed" in :1; see note on :1. This was a huge area; see on :10.

Jos 13:13 Nevertheless the children of Israel didn't drive out the Geshurites nor the Maacathites: but Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine

inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 13:14 Only He gave no inheritance to the tribe of Levi. The sacrifices of Yahweh the God of Israel made by fire are his inheritance, as He spoke to him-
The Levites had no material inheritance because "the sacrifices of Yahweh the God of Israel... are his inheritance... Yahweh God of Israel was their inheritance" (Josh. 13:14,33; Num. 18:20; Dt. 10:9; 18:2). Notice how "Yahweh" is put for what is sacrificed to Him. His very existence is an imperative to sacrifice to Him, despising all material advantage in doing so. Job comments that to make gold our hope and wealth our confidence is to deny “the God that is above” (Job 31:24,28). To trust in material wealth is effectively to proclaim ourselves atheists. We are described as the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5), so all that was true for the Levites becomes true for us. We are not to seek material inheritance. God will provide for us in ways other than our possessing land and leaving an inheritance to our children. The wonder of serving Him is to more than compensate for this.

Jos 13:15 Moses gave to the tribe of the children of Reuben according to their families-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 13:16 Their border was from Aroer that is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, and the city that is in the middle of the valley, and all the plain by Medeba-
The city in the middle of the valley was Ar of Moab.

Jos 13:17 Heshbon, and all its cities that are in the plain; Dibon, Bamoth Baal, Beth Baal Meon-
"Bamoth Baal" is 'the high places of Baal', and we note how often the term "Baal" occurs in the place names. There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land, although the change of name of Kiriath Baal (Josh. 15:60; 18:14) is evidence enough that there was some local attempt to stamp out the

name of Baal in that case. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age.

Jos 13:18 Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath-
Kedemoth was given to the Levites (Josh. 21:37) but was in fact a town which had not been captured from the local population (Josh. 13:18). They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 13:19 Kiriathaim, Sibmah, Zereth Shahar in the mount of the valley-
Zereth Shahar is "the Splendour of the Dawn / sun", surely another name connected with idolatry. See on :17.

Jos 13:20 Beth Peor, the slopes of Pisgah, Beth Jeshimoth-
Josh. 12:8 says that all the slopes were secured by Joshua, but the study of these names indicates that what he won in victory was simply not possessed by Israel. This unwillingness to possess what we have been potentially given by the Lord Jesus... is the greatest tragedy in spiritual life. Every addiction and weakness which might stop a man inheriting the Kingdom has been overcome. It needs to be possessed and lived in, rather than left as a mere on paper victory.

Beth Peor was where Israel had been on their wilderness journeys (Dt. 3:29), and it clearly had not been renamed. The name of the idol Peor remained; see on :17.

Jos 13:21 all the cities of the plain, and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses struck with the chiefs of Midian, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the princes of Sihon, who lived in the land-
The idea is "all the other cities of the table-land, and all the kingdom of Sihon, as far as it extended over the plain".

Jos 13:22 The children of Israel also killed Balaam the son of Beor the soothsayer with the sword, among the rest of their slain-
This Kedesh is called Kishon in Josh. 21:28. We last hear of Balaam returning to Mesopotamia, but clearly coveting the wealth offered him if he succeeded in cursing

Israel. We can deduce from this that Balaam returned to the Midianites, and advised that if they could make Israel sin by worshipping Baal-Peor, then Yahweh would curse them. And he was destroyed with the Gentiles whose presence he clearly preferred to that of God's people. Balaam was a prophet of Yahweh, and yet felt saddled with His truth when he instead preferred the way of the flesh. And so he came to his end and condemnation, and is set up in the New Testament as a warning to us.

Jos 13:23 The border of the children of Reuben was the bank of the Jordan. This was the inheritance of the children of Reuben according to their families, the cities and its villages-
For "families", see on :15. According to Lev. 25:31, "cities" referred to any walled settlement, and "villages" to unwalled settlements.

Jos 13:24 Moses gave to the tribe of Gad, to the children of Gad, according to their families-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 13:25 Their border was Jazer and all the cities of Gilead, and half the land of the children of Ammon, to Aroer that is before Rabbah-
The cities of Gilead had belonged to the kingdom of Sihon and were given to Gad; the northern part of Gilead was given to the half tribe of Manasseh. So we can note that different difficulties and struggles are given to different members of God's people.

Jos 13:26 and from Heshbon to Ramath Mizpeh, and Betonim; and from Mahanaim to the border of Debir-
Ramath Mizpeh, where Jacob and Esau made their mound of stones, and Mahanaim (Gen. 32:2) are rich in association with the patriarchs. In our lives too, we are constantly pointed back to the patriarchs as our spiritual fathers, and in essence our lives, as those of Israel at this time, repeat their experience. A study of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is one of the most relevant Old Testament studies for a Christian today.

Jos 13:27 and in the valley, Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of

the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon, the Jordan's bank, to the uttermost part of the sea of Chinnereth beyond the Jordan eastward-
"The valley" refers to the Jordan river valley. The Sea of Chinnereth is the sea of Galilee. Succoth features in the account of Jacob; see on :26.

Jos 13:28 This is the inheritance of the children of Gad according to their families, the cities and villages-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 13:29 Moses gave an inheritance to the half-tribe of Manasseh. It was for the half-tribe of the children of Manasseh according to their families-
The words for "tribe" here are different. Some would see in this evidence that the Divinely inspired compiler was bringing together different existing records, giving us the Divinely inspired product of the synthesis.

Jos 13:30 Their border was from Mahanaim, all Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, and all the towns of Jair which are in Bashan, sixty cities-
These are the 60 cities of "Argob" (Dt. 3:4), which is "called the land of giants" (Dt. 3:13). The two and a half tribes saw good pasture land and wanted it there and then, as a king of short cut to the Kingdom of God. But there are no short cuts to the Kingdom. The conditions they were given demanded even more faith from them. Their men had to leave their flocks and families unprotected on the east of Jordan whilst they fought in the front line vanguard of Joshua's army to secure the territory on the west of Jordan. And the territory they were asked to possess was huge, far larger than the pasture lands they initially coveted, and inhabited by giants.

Jos 13:31 Half Gilead, Ashtaroth, and Edrei, the cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan, were for the children of Machir the son of Manasseh, even for the half of the children of Machir according to their families-
Machir was a very large clan of seven families within Manasseh (1 Chron. 5:24) and were given a large inheritance.

Jos 13:32 These are the inheritances which Moses distributed in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan at Jericho, eastward-

The land east of Jordan was far harder to possess and the two and a half tribes faced far more opposition there than those on the west of Jordan. We conclude that our inheritances in the Kingdom, and our paths there, are all tailored according to our personality types. But the half tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan initially prospered through all this. For when David was crowned at Hebron, western Manasseh sent 18,000 men, all Ephraim only 20,800, but the two and a half tribes east of Jordan sent 120,000.

Jos 13:33 But to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance. Yahweh, the God of Israel, was their inheritance, as He had told them-
See on :14.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 14

Jos 14:1 These are the inheritances which the children of Israel took in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed to them-
"Distributed" is s.w. "inheritance" or "inherit", and also "possessed". I have noted elsewhere the difference between Joshua slaying the kings, and Israel possessing or inheriting the land- which they generally failed to do. But here we read that Joshua also 'inherited' it to them. So much was done for them. We note too the king-priest association, again looking ahead to the work and dual office of the Lord Jesus.

Jos 14:2 by the lot of their inheritance, as Yahweh commanded by Moses, for the nine tribes, and for the half-tribe-
See on :5. Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

Jos 14:3 For Moses had given the inheritance of the two tribes and the half-tribe beyond the Jordan; but to the Levites he gave no inheritance among them-
The Levites had no material inheritance because "the sacrifices of Yahweh the God of Israel... are his inheritance... Yahweh God of Israel was their inheritance" (Josh. 13:14,33; Num. 18:20; Dt. 10:9; 18:2). Notice how "Yahweh" is put for what is sacrificed to Him. His very existence is an imperative to sacrifice to Him, despising all material advantage in doing so. Job comments that to make gold our hope and wealth our confidence is to deny "the God that is above" (Job 31:24,28). To trust in material wealth is effectively to proclaim ourselves atheists. We are described as the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5), so all that was true for the Levites becomes true for us. We are not to seek material inheritance. God will provide for us in ways other than our possessing land and

leaving an inheritance to our children. The wonder of serving Him is to more than compensate for this.

Jos 14:4 For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: and they gave no portion to the Levites in the land, except towns to dwell in, with their suburbs for their livestock and for their property-
The idea is that the number 12 was significant to God, and therefore to replace the tribe of Levi, the tribe of Joseph was split into two tribes.

Jos 14:5 The children of Israel did as Yahweh commanded Moses, and they divided the land-
The division by lot (:2) presumably meant that the tribal areas were defined and then distributed by lot. And then within those areas, each family was given a specific inheritance.

Jos 14:6 Then the children of Judah drew near to Joshua in Gilgal. Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, You know the thing that Yahweh spoke to Moses the man of God concerning me and concerning you in Kadesh Barnea-
Caleb was head of a household within the tribe of Judah. It could be argued that he was directly related to Judah through Hezron and Pharez (1 Chron. 2:5,18,25). But "Kenizzite" (also Num. 32:12) could refer to the Gentile tribe of Gen. 15:19; or to a man called Kenaz, memorialized by Caleb naming his son with that same name (1 Chron. 4:15). And Jud. 1:13 could mean that Caleb's father was called Kenaz. Caleb means "dog", and this is apparently alluded to when he is commended for faithfully following Yahweh, as a dog would follow its master (:8; Num. 14:24). The genealogies are constructed in such a way that they don't preclude Caleb having been a Gentile who was fully accepted into the tribe of Judah.

Jos 14:7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of Yahweh sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land. I brought him word again as it was in my heart-
We love Caleb for this. He as utterly persuaded, as he beheld the high walled cities, that it was absolutely possible for Israel to take the land- with God's help. LXX "I returned him an answer according to his mind" suggests that his mind / heart and that of Moses were united; they were both equally confident the land could be taken. But their heart / mind is contrasted with that of the people (:8). It was all a matter of the mind, and we see again the huge importance which the Bible attaches to the heart, spiritual mindedness.

Jos 14:8 Nevertheless, my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people

melt-
Yet the same phrase is used by Rahab of how the hearts of the Canaanites melted at this time. They were both scared silly about each other. The apparently insuperable obstacles to inheriting the Kingdom were shown to be nothing at all- if approached in faith.

But I wholly followed Yahweh my God-
See on :6. Joshua and Caleb were earlier characterized by the comment that they "wholly followed the Lord" when they went to spy out Canaan (Num. 14:24; 32:11,12; Dt. 1:36; Josh. 14:8,9,14), and urged Israel to go up and inherit it. This refers to the way that the Angel had gone ahead of them, and they faithfully followed where the Angel had gone, and believed that Israel could follow that Angel wherever it led. When Israel finally did go into the land, they were told that Joshua would 'go before' them, and they were to follow him and thereby inherit the land (Dt. 31:3). From this we see that circumstances repeat in our lives. As Joshua had been told to be strong and of good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others (Josh. 10:25). As God charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law, so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people (Josh. 1:7,8 cp. 23:6). Joshua had faithfully followed, and now he became the leader who was to be faithfully followed. Likewise, he led the Israelites in battle whilst Moses stood on the hill with arms uplifted in prayer for his success. And in capturing Ai, it was Joshua's turn to stand on a hill with arms uplifted [also in prayer?] whilst Israel fought. However, Joshua seems to have somehow gotten out of synch with the Angel when he meets Him in Josh. 5:14 and asks Him whether He is for or against Israel. We must walk in step with the Spirit / Angel in our lives; and yet no matter how much we've walked in step with Him, we can always allow pressure of circumstances to let us fall out of step with Him.

Jos 14:9 Moses swore on that day saying, 'Surely the land where you walked shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have wholly followed Yahweh my God'-
But "forever" was conditional. For Hebron was in due course to be captured by Gentile powers. Just as the promise of eternity for us is conditional.

Jos 14:10 Now, behold, Yahweh has kept me alive as He spoke these forty-five years, from the time that Yahweh spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. Now, behold, I am eighty-five years old today-
Comparing with :7, Joshua is saying that at this point, he has been subduing Canaan for a period of five to seven years [if we include parts of years as a year, as was the Hebrew style of reckoning, or if we consider the wilderness journeys to have been 38 and not 40 years]. This was the "long time" of Josh. 11:18.

Jos 14:11 As yet I am as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now for war, to go out and to come in-
Caleb is confident that he is still strong enough to fight the Canaanites living in Hebron and secure it. We might prefer however if he had spoken more of God's blessing than of taking the inheritance in his own strength. The first word for "strong" is different to that translated "strength". It seems to refer to mental strength and the determination of faith. And it was this which gave him his physical strength.

Joshua appears to have been only one of a group of Moses' "young men", who moved around the camp running his errands (Ex. 24:5; Num. 11:27,28); as a similar group did for Nehemiah and Paul years later. The young men of the New Testament were also characterized by their love of the word (1 Jn. 2:14). Moses would have had a special fondness for this generation who were to enter the land. A large part of the Law was concerned with Israel's behaviour after they had settled in the land; these would only have been relevant to that younger generation. It is fitting that both Moses and Caleb (and Joshua?) maintained their youthful vigour right up to their death (Dt. 34:7; Josh. 14:11).

Jos 14:12 Now therefore give me this hill country, of which Yahweh spoke in that day-
Although not recorded in Num. 14:24; Dt. 1:36, it appears Caleb was specifically promised Hebron at that time. Caleb had explored that area as a spy (Num. 13:22) and taken a special liking to it. We see therefore his spiritual ambition; 'this shall one day be mine'. And we can do the same, as we in this life spy out our future inheritance.

For you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and great and fortified cities-
Caleb seems to have wanted to make a point; that even the fortified mountain lair of the giants could be taken, even by an 85 year old. See on :15.

It will surely be that Yahweh will be with me and I shall drive them out, as Yahweh spoke-
"Drive them out" is s.w. "possess"; see on Josh. 13:1. Examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Josh. 14:12; 15:18); and this in turn inspired another woman to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (Josh. 17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord...hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness". To know God's righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seeking to attain it.

Caleb was a Gentile who became adopted into the tribe of Judah and became a leader of the tribe. Yet he was graciously given an inheritance in the land of Israel. By his

spiritual ambition, he was granted Hebron as his inheritance. He went up there and drove out the tribes with a faithful zeal unmatched in Israel. And yet, he gave away that city- for Hebron became a priestly city for the Levites to live in. He gave his place in the Kingdom to others (Josh. 14:12)- that was the level of love this great man reached.

Jos 14:13 Joshua blessed him; and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance-
On one level, we can quite rightly ask for material blessing, and the Father is pleased that we should. But there is a higher level we can live on, where requesting physical blessings doesn't figure so largely. We can be like Caleb, who conquered Hebron (his part in the Kingdom) for himself and then gave it to others (Josh. 14:12-14; 21:11). Many mature brethren realize that their prayers place decreasing emphasis on requesting physical blessing from God; be it safe-keeping, health etc.

Jos 14:14 Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day; because he wholly followed Yahweh the God of Israel-
He zealously followed the Angel which went before him, and therefore he obtained his inheritance which in prospect the Angel had prepared for him.

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 14:15 Now the name of Hebron before was Kiriath Arba, after the greatest man among the Anakim. The land had rest from war-
As noted on the force of "For..." in :12, Caleb seems to have wanted to make a point; that even the fortified mountain lair of the giants, even the greatest giant, could be taken- even by an 85 year old.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 15

Jos 15:1 The lot for the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families was to the border of Edom, even to the wilderness of Zin southward, at the uttermost part of the south-

The division by lot presumably meant that the tribal areas were defined and then distributed by lot. And then within those areas, each family was given a specific inheritance.

Jos 15:2 Their south border was from the uttermost part of the Salt Sea, from the bay that looks southward-

This implies detailed geographical knowledge of the southern part of the Dead Sea. It is doubtful anyone knew that area, and so we have here the direct transmission of fact from God to man through His word.

Jos 15:3 and it went out southward of the ascent of Akrabbim, and passed along to Zin, and went up by the south of Kadesh Barnea, and passed along by Hezron, went up to Addar, and turned about to Karka-

AV "Fetched a compass to Karka", literally "was deflected in the direction of Karka". This implies a birds eye perspective, looking at lines on a map. The perspective is clearly God's heavenly one.

Jos 15:4 and it passed along to Azmon, went out at the brook of Egypt; and the border ended at the sea. This shall be your south border-

It has been pointed out that there is no such surviving detailed geographical description of any contemporary nation. This reflects the extreme importance of the land of Israel to God. For it was and is to be His Kingdom, and has a special significance to Him.

Jos 15:5 The east border was the Salt Sea, even to the end of the Jordan. The border of the north quarter was from the bay of the sea at the end of the Jordan-

The idea is that the northern border of Judah started from the point where the river Jordan entered the Dead Sea.

Jos 15:6 The border went up to Beth Hoglah, and passed along by the north of Beth Arabah; and the border went up to the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben-

We note that the stone of a Reubenite was the boundary marker between Judah and Benjamin (Josh. 18:17). We have here a typical example of how despite the division of the tribes, with the intention that the people remained within their given family inheritances, people were dissatisfied with what God gave them; or for whatever reason

moved away from them, perhaps in search of something better. And yet the gift of the inheritances was clearly meant to be by God.

Jos 15:7 The border went up to Debir from the valley of Achor, and so northward, looking toward Gilgal, that is over against the ascent of Adummim, which is on the south side of the river. The border passed along to the waters of En Shemesh, and ended at En Rogel-
"Looking toward..." and similar language suggests the author was there looking at the various towns and geographical features. The whole perspective is God's bird's eye view of the land.

Jos 15:8 The border went up by the valley of the son of Hinnom to the side of the Jebusite southward (the same is Jerusalem); and the border went up to the top of the mountain that lies before the valley of Hinnom westward, which is at the farthest part of the valley of the Rephaim northward-
'Gehenna' is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew 'Ge-ben-Hinnon'. This was located near Jerusalem (Josh. 15:8), and at the time of Christ it was the city rubbish dump. Dead bodies of criminals were thrown onto the fires which were always burning there, so that Gehenna became symbolic of total destruction and rejection.

We note that the *Rephaim* or "giants" had children like other human beings (2 Sam. 21:16,18; Dt. 3:11), inhabiting an area known as the valley of Rephaim (Josh. 15:8). The "giants" of Gen. 6:2-4 were therefore humans and not celestial beings.

Jos 15:9 The border extended from the top of the mountain to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah, and went out to the cities of Mount Ephron; and the border extended to Baalah (the same is Kiriath Jearim)-
The old name included the name Baal, and was renamed by faithful men who wished to not hear the name Baal. There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land, although the change of name of Kiriath Baal to Kiriath Jearim (Josh. 15:60; 18:14) is evidence enough that there was some local attempt to stamp out the name of Baal in that case. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age. See on :15.

Jos 15:10 and the border turned about from Baalah westward to Mount Seir, and passed

along to the side of Mount Jearim on the north (the same is Chesalon), and went down to Beth Shemesh, and passed along by Timnah-
"Beth Shemesh", house of the sun, was a name rooted in idolatry which wasn't changed; see on :9.

Jos 15:11 and the border went out to the side of Ekron northward; and the border extended to Shikkeron, and passed along to Mount Baalah, and went out at Jabneel; and the goings out of the border were at the sea-
Ekron was a major Philistine city. "The side of Ekron" suggests God again recalculated the inheritance to save them from having to attack and possess this city; although it was God's initial intention that they take it. Such is His desire to give us the Kingdom that He graciously makes such concessions to inexcusable weakness. "Baalah" was a name rooted in idolatry which wasn't changed; see on :9.

Jos 15:12 The west border was to the shore of the great sea. This is the border of the children of Judah according to their families-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 15:13 To Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a portion among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of Yahweh to Joshua, even Kiriath Arba, named after the father of Anak (the same is Hebron)-
Joshua had taken Hebron (Josh. 10:36) but Israel had not followed up his victory, and the Philistines had returned; Caleb then took it (Josh. 15:13), but again, by Samson's time, the Philistines were back.

Jos 15:14 Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak-
"Drove out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus and Caleb; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take

possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

"Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak" are spoken of as having been present there 45 years previously when Caleb first spied out the land. Perhaps they were now elderly, or they refer to family divisions rather than individuals.

Jos 15:15 He went up against the inhabitants of Debir: now the name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher-
"Debir" is the word usually translated "oracle", referring to the sanctuary, which was centered around the word of God in the ark. The previous name also means something similar, 'Place of the scroll / books'. It's as if faithful Caleb renamed an idol shrine to a more Yahweh centered name. This confirms the suggestion made on Josh. 15:9,10 that the names associated with pagan worship were renamed by the faithful, but not renamed by the unfaithful.

Jos 15:16 Caleb said, He who strikes Kiriath Sepher and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife-
We wonder why Caleb himself didn't take Kiriath Sepher. Perhaps, at 85 years old, the strength he had boasted of was not quite as he had imagined, and he was exhausted or weak after the conquest of Hebron. Or maybe he wished to ensure his daughter married someone who had the same spiritual ambition and faith which he had. And such men were apparently in deficit, as Othniel his brother (Josh. 15:17) was the only one to come forward for the challenge. As Caleb was then 85, Othniel would unlikely have been a very young man, looking to marry a young woman.

Jos 15:17 Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it-
Caleb was head of a household within the tribe of Judah. It could be argued that he was directly related to Judah through Hezron and Pharez (1 Chron. 2:5,18,25). But "Kenizzite" (also Num. 32:12) could refer to the Gentile tribe of Gen. 15:19; or to a man called Kenaz, memorialized by Caleb naming his son with that same name (1 Chron. 4:15). And Jud. 1:13 could mean that Caleb's father was called Kenaz. Caleb means "dog", and this is apparently alluded to when he is commended for faithfully following Yahweh, as a dog would follow its master (Num. 14:24). The genealogies are constructed in such a

way that they don't preclude Caleb having been a Gentile who was fully accepted into the tribe of Judah. Perhaps the note at Jud. 1:16 about the descendants of the Kenites coming to live with Caleb's family is included to clarify the point that Caleb was a Kenite or Kenizzite.

And he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife-
As noted above, Caleb was then 85, so Othniel was not a young man at all; and Achsah was presumably a virgin. So valiant young, faithful men were apparently not to be found. For surely they were the kind of candidate Caleb was looking for.

Jos 15:18 It happened that she came to ask her father for a field. She got off her donkey, and Caleb said, What do you want?-
The Hebrew implies she got "him", her husband Othniel, to ask Caleb. And this is the sense given in Jud. 1:14. Examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Josh. 14:12; 15:18); and this in turn inspired another woman to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (Josh. 17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord...hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness". To know God's righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seeking to attain it.

Jos 15:19 She said, Give me a blessing. Because you have set me in the land of the South, give me also springs of water. He gave her the upper springs and the lower springs-
The idea of being given a blessing is of receiving an inheritance, as in Josh. 14:13 AV: "And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb... Hebron for an inheritance". "A south land" presumably refers to Debir, which was apparently without a good water supply. Debir is on a hill, and there is a valley at the foot of the hill with springs. The territory made presumably been conquered by Caleb and was his own- but he gave away what he had conquered.

Jos 15:20 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families-
For "families", see on :12.

Jos 15:21 The farthest cities of the tribe of the children of Judah toward the border of Edom in the South were Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur-
The towns are listed in four groups, corresponding to the division of Judah into the Negev / south country; "the valley" or "the plain", "the Shephelah"; "the mountains" and "the wilderness".

Jos 15:22 Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah-
Kinah could mean 'place of the Kenites'; see on :17. Perhaps this is the equivalent of the note at Jud. 1:16 about the descendants of the Kenites coming to live with Caleb's family is included to clarify the point that Caleb was a Kenite or Kenizzite.

Jos 15:23 Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan-
This Hazor is not the same as the one in northern Israel.

Jos 15:24 Ziph, Telem, Bealoth-
Bealoth means 'possessors', perhaps named by some who faithfully perceived the truths of :14.

Jos 15:25 Hazor Hadattah, Kerioth Hezron (the same is Hazor)-
There were two towns called Hazor, but they were distinguished by words added to them, Hadattah and Kerioth.

Jos 15:26 Amam, Shema, Moladah-
Moladah was given to Simeon (Josh. 19:2,3). Yet presumably that was not God's original intention, as here it is a town of Judah. We see how He is open to some recalculation of His purposes with us.

Jos 15:27 Hazar Gaddah, Heshmon, Beth Pelet-
None of these places has been very confidently identified. We have here an example of where the Biblical record is preserved, even though it had far more meaning for the immediate audience that it has ever had for the millennia of believers who have subsequently read these words. This in turn opens up the wider debate as to which parts of Biblical writings are preserved as historical record, for our general learning; and which are specifically commandments to us. As examples, I would argue that baptism was not just a command for the first century but for us too- because of the context and reasoning behind the command. Whereas the commandments about head covering in Corinth would appear from the context to be a historical account of a specific situation in that church at that time.

Jos 15:28 Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah-
Beersheba became effectively the southern border of Judah, hence the common phrase "from Dan [in the north] to Beersheba [in the south]". But this was not at all the southern border promised to Abraham, which was the "river of Egypt". God effectively

recalculated the boundaries for Israel, as He came to realize that they simply didn't have the spiritual ambition to go and possess the full extent of the land promised to Abraham. Thus "the river" on the eastern boundary effectively was recalculated as the Jordan and not the Euphrates; and likewise the southern border shifted northwards from the brook of Egypt to Beersheba. God has a similar flexibility with us too.

Jos 15:29 Baalah, Iim, Ezem-
For the retention of "Baal" in place names, see on :60.

Jos 15:30 Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah-
These were all given to Simeon (Josh. 19:4). Yet presumably that was not God's original intention, as here it is a town of Judah. We see how He is open to some recalculation of His purposes with us. .

Jos 15:31 Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah-
Ziklag had been passed from Judah to Simeon (Josh. 15:31; 19:5) and then passed to the Philistines (1 Sam. 27:6)- because if we don't want the kingdom, it will be lost to us.

Jos 15:32 Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon. All the cities are twenty-nine, with their villages-
The total comes to 36. The difference may be because of the definition of a "city", and some were listed but not counted as a city. And it seems that in some cases, the same city was called by two names.

Jos 15:33 In the lowland, Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah-
Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and too over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that thou hast done *unto us*?" (Jud. 15:11). "They had become reconciled to the dominion of sin since it did not appear to do much harm. They could still grow their crops etc."

Jos 15:34 Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam-
*"*Zanoah" is the word for being 'cast off' or rejected, and all 20 occurrences of it in the Bible are translated that way. 'Place of rejection' sounds a strange name for a city- unless it was to celebrate the rejection of idolatry there.

Jos 15:35 Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah-
We have to observe that the majority of these place names merely reflect the topography or geographical features of the area. They may have been no more than landmarks. We also note that the name of God or spiritual things was not introduced into them. When there is a regime change, it is typical that names of towns and streets are renamed, but there is little evidence that Israel generally did this.

Jos 15:36 Shaaraim, Adithaim and Gederah (or Gederothaim); fourteen cities with their villages-
Many versions give 15 cities by this point, but LXX omits Gederothaim.

Jos 15:37 Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal Gad-
"Gad" was the god of fortune, and the tower ["Migdal"] of Gad was surely a reference to idolatry. But the name was apparently not changed; see on :60.

Jos 15:38 Dilean, Mizpeh, Joktheel-
Mizpeh means a watchtower, but as noted on :37, it typically is associated with something else- the tower or watchtower *of* some idol, typically. It could be that this is a commendable example of where the name of an idol or god dropped out of a place name; see on :60.

Jos 15:39 Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon-
"Eglon" is literally 'the place of the calf', and the same word is used of Jeroboam's golden calves (1 Kings 12:28). Clearly he was mixing Yahweh worship with that of the local paganism which had never been totally eradicated. And this is the abiding temptation for God's people. To worship their own idols in the name of worshipping Yahweh, to mix the flesh and the spirit, to mix paganism with true worship.

Jos 15:40 Cabbon, Lahmam, Chitlish-
"Cabbon", a heap of stones, was a reference to early altars. See on :43,60.

Jos 15:41 Gederoth, Beth Dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah; sixteen cities with their villages-
Beth Dagon means 'house of Dagon', and is another example of local preexisting paganism continuing in the nomenclature of the land; see on :43,60.

Jos 15:42 Libnah, Ether, Ashan-

"Libnah", place of poplar trees, has definite paganic associations; the same word is found in Hos. 4:13; Gen. 30:37. See on :43,60.

Jos 15:43 Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib-
We lament that the place names reflect local idolatry or purely secular points of topographical interest, and there was little renaming of cities from a spiritual viewpoint. When the Soviets established their power in the republics of the USSR, they renamed towns, cities and streets in the name of Marxist-Leninist leaders and philosophies. "Leninogorsk", "Karl Marx Prospekt" and the like replaced names which reflected local history and culture. We would expect to have seen Israel doing this when they took Canaan, but they generally didn't.

Jos 15:44 Keilah, Achzib, and Mareshah; nine cities with their villages-
Mareshah was where the prophet lived who criticized Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:37), and it seems it is the Moresheth Gath of Mic. 1:14,15. Two prophets came from the same small settlement. We reflect that local groups do tend to hold on to the things of God's truth, often more effectively and for longer periods than larger communities, such as that based around the Jerusalem temple.

Jos 15:45 Ekron, with its towns and its villages-
I noted on :11 that the border is there stated to be "the side of Ekron", suggesting God again recalculated the inheritance to save them from having to attack and possess this city; although it was God's initial intention that they take it. Such is His desire to give us the Kingdom that He graciously makes such concessions to inexcusable weakness.

Jos 15:46 from Ekron even to the sea, all that were by the side of Ashdod, with their villages-
The Philistine areas now listed were never really permanently taken by the Israelites. We note again the curious phrase "by the side of Ashdod"; see on :45.

Jos 15:47 Ashdod, its towns and its villages; Gaza, its towns and its villages; to the brook of Egypt, and the great sea with its coastline-
Judah would have heard or read these descriptions and thought "no, too hard, not for me". And we must be challenged by their wrong attitude, as we too survey the Kingdom that is so very possible for us.

Jos 15:48 In the hill country, Shamir, Jattir, Socoh-
Jattir was given to the priests (Josh. 21:14). Although the choice of priestly cities was

supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory such as this Philistine territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 15:49 Dannah, Kiriath Sannah (which is Debir)-
"Debir" is the word usually translated "oracle", referring to the sanctuary, which was centered around the word of God in the ark. The previous name also means something similar, 'Place of the scroll / books'. It's as if faithful Caleb renamed an idol shrine to a more Yahweh centered name. This confirms the suggestion made on Josh. 15:9,10 that the names associated with pagan worship were renamed by the faithful, but not renamed by the unfaithful.

Jos 15:50 Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim-
Eshtemoa was a priestly city; it would seem the priests were largely supportive of David when on the run from Saul, perhaps due to Samuel's influence (1 Sam. 30:28; Josh. 15:50; 21:14).

Jos 15:51 Goshen, Holon, and Giloh; eleven cities with their villages-
Holon was given to the priests (Josh. 21:15). Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory such as this Philistine territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 15:52 Arab, Dumah, Eshan-
"Arab" is the usual word for "ambush", and may be one of the few name changes which reflects how Israel captured it in the first place. See on :43.

Jos 15:53 Janim, Beth Tappuah, Aphekah-
The walls of an Egyptian temple at Medinet Habu have a list of cities that Rameses II (1304-1238) considered to be enemy cities. They are depicted as shields, within which are the names of the towns; and these include Janim and Aphekah as well as Hebron (:54).

Jos 15:54 Humtah, Kiriath Arba (the same is Hebron) and Zior; nine cities with their villages-

"Kiriath Arba" is literally 'the city of the four [giants]', which was taken by Caleb and renamed Hebron; see on :43.

Jos 15:55 Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Jutah-
Maon was a mile north of Carmel, and they are mentioned together in 1 Sam. 25:1. The complete geographical and historical agreement of the books of the Bible, clearly written at different times, is such that there must have been a higher, singular hand behind them all. And that hand was that of God, through His inspiration of the entire volume.

Jos 15:56 Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah-
Not to be confused with the Jezreel in the plain of Esdraelon.

Jos 15:57 Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah; ten cities with their villages-
Timnah is the place of Gen. 38:12. The parable of Lk. 19:10 describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities. This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

Jos 15:58 Halhul, Beth Zur, Gedor-
At this point LXX adds: "Theca, and Ephratha, (that is, Bethlehem), and Phagor, and Etan, and Kulon, and Tatam, and Thebes, and Karam, and Galam, and Thether, and Manocho".

Jos 15:59 Maarath, Beth Anoth, and Eltekon; six cities with their villages-
Beth Anoth, house of answers / witness, has religious overtones. If they reflect Yahweh worship, then His Name would likely have been included. So we conclude that this is likely yet another pagan name which was left unchanged; see on :60.

Jos 15:60 Kiriath Baal (the same is Kiriath Jearim), and Rabbah; two cities with their villages-

There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land, although the change of name of Kiriath Baal (Josh. 15:60; 18:14) is evidence enough that there was some local attempt to stamp out the name of Baal in that case. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age.

Jos 15:61 In the wilderness, Beth Arabah, Middin, Secacah-

Beth Arabah was a small settlement right out in the desert (Josh. 15:61; 18:22), therefore also called Arabah (Josh. 18:18). From such a poor and obscure place there arose a man who was attracted to David's cause (2 Sam. 23:31), just as the Lord calls all manner of unusual people to Himself today.

Jos 15:62 Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En Gedi; six cities with their villages-

"The city of salt" was in the area of Sodom (Gen. 19:25) and may be another name for Zoar where Lot initially fled to.

Jos 15:63 As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah couldn't drive them out; but the Jebusites live with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day-

"Drive out" is s.w. "possess"; see on :14. I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 16

Jos 16:1 The lot came out for the children of Joseph from the Jordan at Jericho, at the waters of Jericho on the east, even the wilderness, going up from Jericho through the hill country to Bethel-

Significantly, the road to Jericho which features in the parable of the good Samaritan was the very dividing line between Judah and Ephraim (Josh. 16:1). The significance of this may be in the implication within the parable that Israel fell among thieves, needing the Messianic grace and rescue, as a result of their division into two kingdoms. And so many other spiritual lives have been shipwrecked over the rocks of division. Indeed, the Greek words for "division" and "stumbling block" are related; divisions are a stumblingblock to so many, even if they externally remain within their faith communities.

Jos 16:2 It went out from Bethel to Luz, and passed along to the border of the Archites to Ataroth-

Although Luz was called Bethel (Gen. 35:6; Jud. 1:23), Josh. 16:2 implies a difference between them. Perhaps Luz was the city, and "Bethel" refers specifically to the altar of Jacob there. But Keil suggests Bethel refers to the "southern range of mountains belonging to Bethel, from which the boundary ran out to the town of Luz, so that this town, which stood upon the border, was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:22)".

Jos 16:3 and it went down westward to the border of the Japhletites, to the border of Beth Horon the lower as far as Gezer; and ended at the sea-

The sea is the Mediterranean.

Jos 16:4 The children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance-

There was a difference between Joshua capturing land by defeating local kings, and the people actually taking it for inheritance, or possessing it. Here it is stated by grace and imputed righteousness that Manasseh and Ephraim took their inheritance, they did actually possess the inheritance; although we learn from Judges that there were areas where they failed to. And see on :10.

Jos 16:5 This was the border of the children of Ephraim according to their families. The border of their inheritance eastward was from Ataroth Addar to Beth Horon the upper-

The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each

family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 16:6 The border went out westward at Michmethath on the north. The border turned about eastward to Taanath Shiloh, and passed along it on the east of Janoah-
Is. 60:2 speaks of the sun rising upon Zion- as if Zion was the whole earth to God. Ps. 89:12 shows how God reckons the points of the compass with reference to Jerusalem: "The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice". Likewise "the sea" is often used to show that the west is intended, the Mediterranean being to the west of Jerusalem (Num. 2:18; Josh. 16:5,6; Ez. 42:19). "The east" is put for Persia, Media and the lands east of Jerusalem (Ez. 25:4; Mt. 2:1); "the south" for Egypt, south of Canaan (Jer. 13:19; Dan. 11:5), or for the Negev, the hill country south of Jerusalem (Gen. 12:9; 13:1,3; Ez. 20:46,47). God reveals Himself as being centered in His orientation around His people.

Jos 16:7 It went down from Janoah to Ataroth, to Naarah, reached to Jericho, and went out at the Jordan-
Their border “went down” due to how it descended down the slopes towards the Jordan valley. This is another example of how these divisions of land were clearly written from God's bird's eye perspective, and could not have been written by man at that time, lacking satellite imagery.

Jos 16:8 From Tappuah the border went along westward to the brook of Kanah and ended at the sea. This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Ephraim according to their families-
This describes the western half of the northern border, which ended at the sea between Joppa and Caesarea.

Jos 16:9 together with the cities which were set apart for the children of Ephraim in the midst of the inheritance of the children of Manasseh, all the cities with their villages-
This is another example of where the inheritances were recalculated. This could have been for many reasons. The lack of living room perceived by some of the tribes was unnecessary- had they driven out the Canaanites and cleared the land (:10). But God makes concessions to human weakness, and allowed them to inherit in other areas. He is similarly flexible with His people today.

Jos 16:10 They didn’t drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwell in the midst of Ephraim to this day, and became servants to do forced labour-

"Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

The whole of Solomon's kingdom was built on the backs of slave labour- firstly, of the Gentiles in the land (2 Chron. 8:8 RV), and then later of God's own people. The Gentiles should either have been put to death, or welcomed into the brotherhood of Israel- but to put them to slave labour was only repeating a classic mistake and sin of his forefathers (Josh. 16:10 RV). There was something rotten about all his achievements from the very beginning.

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 17

Jos 17:1 This was the lot for the tribe of Manasseh, for he was the firstborn of Joseph. As for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, because he was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan-
The giving of land by "lot" was clearly overruled. Because it is here noted that Gilead and Bashan, wild territory inhabited by wild people, was given to a warlike man to inherit. The nature of our calling to service in this life, and the nature of our eternal inheritance in the Kingdom, is personally tailored to suit our unique personality. We shall be given a name written which nobody knows apart from our Lord and ourselves (Rev. 2:17).

Jos 17:2 So this was for the rest of the children of Manasseh according to their families: for the children of Abiezer, for the children of Helek, for the children of Asriel, for the children of Shechem, for the children of Hepher, and for the children of Shemida: these were the male children of Manasseh the son of Joseph according to their families-
The children of Manasseh through Machir inherited east of Jordan (:1), and the rest of his clans listed here inherited west of Jordan.

Jos 17:3 But Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons, but daughters: and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah-
The fact God allows His children to live His truth on different levels needs to be grasped firmly by us, lest we become discouraged that others live on an apparently lower level than we do in some aspects of life. Being surrounded by 'lower levels' ought to inspire us to the higher levels. Zelophehad had only daughters; usually, in his context, a man would have taken concubines in order to produce sons. The record of his only having daughters is presented in the context of genealogies which show that many Israelite men had more than one wife (1 Chron. 7:15). But Zelophehad wasn't dragged down by this; God inspired him to maintain the higher level which he had chosen to live by. He didn't use the principle of Jephthah's vow. And his daughters likewise refused to be limited by their status as females, but obtained an inheritance amongst their brethren (Num. 27:1-7)

Jos 17:4 They came near before Eleazar the priest and before Joshua the son of Nun and before the princes, saying, Yahweh commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers-
Examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Josh. 14:12; 15:18); and this in turn inspired the daughters of Zelophehad to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (Josh. 17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord… hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness". To know God's righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seeking to attain it.

Therefore according to the commandment of Yahweh he gave them an inheritance among the brothers of their father- Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his

faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

Jos 17:5 Ten parts fell to Manasseh, besides the land of Gilead and Bashan, which is beyond the Jordan-
These ten parts may refer to specific inheritances defined for each family within the tribes. They are the reference of the frequent comment that the tribes received an inheritance "according to their families". The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 17:6 because the daughters of Manasseh had an inheritance among his sons. The land of Gilead belonged to the rest of the sons of Manasseh-
Manasseh's inheritance was split into ten parts (:5); five for the five sons of Gilead (Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem and Shemida); and five for the five daughters of Zelophehad.

Jos 17:7 The border of Manasseh was from Asher to Michmethath, which is before Shechem. The border went along to the right hand, to the inhabitants of En Tappuah-
Asher doesn't refer to the tribe of Asher but to a town east of Shechem.

Jos 17:8 The land of Tappuah belonged to Manasseh; but Tappuah on the border of Manasseh belonged to the children of Ephraim-
The latter "Tappuah" must refer to the town of that name.

Jos 17:9 The border went down to the brook of Kanah, southward of the brook. These cities belonged to Ephraim among the cities of Manasseh. The border of Manasseh was on the north side of the brook, and ended at the sea-
This is another example of where the inheritances were recalculated. This could have been for many reasons. The lack of living room perceived by some of the tribes was unnecessary- had they driven out the Canaanites and cleared the land. But God makes concessions to human weakness, and allowed them to inherit in other areas. He is similarly flexible with His people today.

Jos 17:10 Southward it was Ephraim's, and northward it was Manasseh's, and the

sea was his border. They reached to Asher on the north, and to Issachar on the east-
"The sea" is the Mediterranean.

Jos 17:11 Within the territories of Issachar and Asher, Manasseh possessed Beth Shan and Ibleam, along with their surrounding towns, as well as Dor (the one on the coast), Endor, Taanach, Megiddo, and their surrounding towns-
Dor was in Asher (Josh. 11:1,2; 12:23; 17:11; Jud. 1:27,28). Taanach was within either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But these towns were also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

Jos 17:12 Yet the children of Manasseh couldn't drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites continued to dwell in that land-
"Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jos 17:13 It happened that when the children of Israel had grown strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labour, and didn't utterly drive them out-
One reason why Israel failed to drive out the tribes, and thereby lost the Kingdom, was simply because they wanted to take tribute from them (Josh. 17:13). Ez. 7:19 defines "silver and gold" as Israel's stumblingblock- moreso than idols. They just so loved wealth. The men of Bethshemesh looked into the ark to see if there were any more jewels left in it (1 Sam. 6:19 cp. 6,15); they trampled upon the supreme holiness of God in their crazed fascination with wealth.

Jos 17:14 The children of Joseph spoke to Joshua saying, Why have you given me just one lot and one part for an inheritance, since I am a great people, because Yahweh has blessed me so far?-
Ephraim and Manasseh demanded more land at the time of Josh. 17:14, but their argument was weak because they had been given ample land, but they refused to drive out the Canaanites or clear the forests (Josh 17:15). Their combined population was about that of the single tribe of Judah according to the census of Num. 26. The amount of land they had per head of population was roughly that of the other tribes,

and much of it was exceptionally fertile. They claimed they deserved it because they had been "blessed". By saying this they were twisting scriptures which speak of their blessing (Gen. 48:20; 49:25,26; Dt. 33:13), and therefore demanding more territory which was easier to live in. But the promised "blessing" didn't require they be given more land, and the other tribes were also "blessed". This is typical of how people take one verse here or there to justify their own secular claims.

Jos 17:15 Joshua said to them, If you are a great people, go up to the forest, and clear land for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the Rephaim; since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you-

Joshua himself was from Ephraim, so he was careful not to show any bias towards them. "If you are a great people" could sound sarcastic, as if he didn't rate the spirituality of his own tribe. As explained on :14, he could have answered them with statistics, proving their claim wrong. But as so often in the Bible, men are answered out of their own mouths (Lk. 19:22). The wrong ideas and claims of men are for a moment accepted as true, and then turned against them.

When "the children of Joseph" complained that they didn't have enough territory, Joshua could've told them to go and drive out Canaanites and take their territory- this was clearly God's ideal intention. Instead, Joshua said they could go to some virgin forest and cut down trees to provide more territory for themselves. This was itself a concession to human weakness.

Jos 17:16 The children of Joseph said, The hill country is not enough for us. All the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both those who are in Beth Shean and its towns, and those who are in the valley of Jezreel-

They are presented as typical of so many who complain they need more, when arrogance, lack of faith and laziness are their real problem. They had not tried clearing the hill country, but they complain it was in any case not enough for them. And they have evaluated at great length the obstacles, the nature of the chariots, and where the Canaanites were located.

Jos 17:17 Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh saying, You are a great people, and have great power. You shall not have one lot only-

This appears almost sarcastic, in response to their insistence that they are such a great people. "The hill country" was not an additional lot; they had already been given it. They are being told to make it "yours" (:18) in practice by cutting down the trees there. Again we see the difference between actual possession, and merely being assigned territory.

Jos 17:18 but the hill country shall be yours. Although it is a forest, you shall cut it down, and it shall be yours from one end to the other; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong-

The closer one looks, the more conditional prophecies and Divine statements there are. “You *shall* drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they are strong” was in fact conditional on their effort and faith- although it doesn’t sound like that in the positive way it is spoken. Daniel understood that after 70 years Jerusalem must be restored; but he earnestly prayed for their forgiveness *so that* this would happen (Dan. 9:2 cp. 19). Perhaps he opened his window and prayed towards Jerusalem exactly because he wanted to fulfil 2 Chron. 6:37,38: “If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn, and pray unto thee…

toward their land… and toward the city which thou hast chosen". He knew that repentance was a precondition for the promised restoration to occur.

The "iron chariots" could be burned with fire (Josh. 11:6) because they were wooden but with iron wheels or perhaps scythes fitted to the wheels. If they cleared the wooded area of the hill country, they could live there without fear of chariots, as chariots could only operate in flat areas.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 18

Jos 18:1 The whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled themselves together at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there. The land was subdued before them-

The later context here is the setting up of the tabernacle at Shiloh, and "the land" in view could be the area around Shiloh.

The command to subject the animals in Eden [the land promised to Abraham?] corresponds to later commands to subject the tribes living in the land (Gen. 1:28 = Num. 32:22,29; Josh. 18:1). The "fear and dread" of humans which fell on the animals after the flood is clearly linkable with the "fear and dread" which was to come upon the inhabitants of Canaan due to the Israelites (Gen. 9:2 = Dt. 1:21; 3:8; 11:25). This all suggests that Eden is to be understood as the land promised to Abraham; for that is the focus of the Biblical record, right from early Genesis.

But the Hebrew for "subdued" specifically means to be put under tribute. One reason why Israel failed to drive out the tribes, and thereby lost the Kingdom, was simply because they wanted to take tribute from them (Josh. 17:13). Ez. 7:19 defines "silver and gold" as Israel's stumblingblock- moreso than idols. They just so loved wealth. The men of Bethshemesh looked into the ark to see if there were any more jewels left in it (1 Sam. 6:19 cp. 6,15); they trampled upon the supreme holiness of God in their crazed fascination with wealth.

Jos 18:2 Seven tribes remained among the children of Israel, which had not yet been assigned their inheritance-

Those tribes had settled down where they found good land and were lazy to go any further in possessing the Kingdom. Perhaps the reference here is not to be read as meaning that their actual territory wasn't defined, but rather that the individual families within their tribes hadn't been assigned their inheritances- because the tribes just hadn't taken or even moved into their territory.

Jos 18:3 Joshua said to the children of Israel, How long will you delay possession of the land, which Yahweh the God of your fathers has given you?-

Ecc. 9:20 teaches the sober fact that in the grave there is nothing, nothing at all, no work, no thought; and so now is the day in which to labour with all our heart in the thing we put our hands to. We may apprehend all this intellectually, and yet there is an inherent, clinging laziness which lurks within our nature. One simple reason why Israel failed to inherit the Kingdom in the time of Joshua / Judges was that they were simply "slack" (AV), lazy, to drive out the tribes (Josh. 18:3; the same word is used in Ex. 5:8 regarding how the Egyptians perceived them to be lazy; and also s.w. Prov. 18:9). See on :25. They were happy to receive tribute from them (see on :1), and to enjoy what blessings they received. They were satisficers, not men of principle or mission; not real bond slaves. And for this, God rejected them and they never really inherited the Kingdom prepared for them.

"Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jos 18:4 Appoint for yourselves three men from each tribe. I will send them, and they shall go through the land, and describe it according to their inheritance; and they shall come to me-

This could be read as a lack of faith in the promise that the Angel had brought Israel "forth out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them" (Ez. 20:6). Or perhaps this sending out of spies was another concession to human weakness, in God's eagerness that they should by all means come to possess the Kingdom.

Jos 18:5 They shall divide it into seven portions. Judah shall live in his borders on the south, and the house of Joseph shall live in their borders on the north-

The points of the compass were relative to where they then were at Shiloh.

Jos 18:6 You shall survey the land into seven parts, and bring the description here to me; and I will cast lots for you here before Yahweh our God-

Here again we see God recalculating the inheritance He had originally planned for them, because they lacked the faith or interest to take what had been made potentially possible for them. But God makes concessions to human weakness, and allowed them to inherit in other areas. He is similarly flexible with His people today.

"Before Yahweh" may refer to the tabernacle which had been set up at Shiloh.

Jos 18:7 For the Levites have no portion among you; for the priesthood of Yahweh is their inheritance. Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan eastward, which Moses the servant of Yahweh gave them-

The Levites had no material inheritance because "the sacrifices of Yahweh the God of Israel... are his inheritance... Yahweh God of Israel was their inheritance" (Josh. 13:14,33; Num. 18:20; Dt. 10:9; 18:2). Notice how "Yahweh" is put for what is sacrificed to Him. His very existence is an imperative to sacrifice to Him, despising all material advantage in doing so. Job comments that to make gold our hope and wealth our confidence is to deny “the God that is above” (Job 31:24,28). To trust in material wealth is effectively to proclaim ourselves atheists. We are described as the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5), so all that was true for the Levites becomes true for us. We are not to seek material inheritance. God will provide for us in ways other than

our possessing land and leaving an inheritance to our children. The wonder of serving Him is to more than compensate for this.

Jos 18:8 The men arose and went. Joshua commanded those who went to survey the land saying, Go walk through the land, survey it, and come again to me. I will cast lots for you here before Yahweh in Shiloh-
When Joshua told the spies "Go and walk through the land…" (Josh. 18:8), they ought to have perceived that he was asking them to walk in the faith of Abraham- to believe that this land truly had been promised to them, as his seed.

Jos 18:9 The men passed through the land, and recorded it by cities into seven portions in a book. They came to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh-
See on Ex. 32:32. To be blotted out of the book God had written may have been understood by Moses as asking for him to be excluded from an inheritance in the promised land; for later, a 'book' was written describing the various portions (Josh. 18:9). The connection is made explicit in Ez. 13:9: "…neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel". To be blotted out of the book meant to not enter the land (surely Ezekiel is alluding to Moses' experience). If Israel were to be blotted out there and then in the wilderness, then Moses wanted to share this experience.

Jos 18:10 Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before Yahweh. There Joshua divided the land to the children of Israel according to their divisions-
We wonder however whether this idea actually worked. For he was seeking to encourage them to possess the Kingdom on the basis of encouraging descriptions of the land. But detailed knowledge will not of itself motivate. A love of God and desire to manifest Him is what will motivate us to enter the Kingdom, and not merely detailed knowledge about it.

"Shiloh" means "rest", and we therefore see here how Joshua attempted to give Israel "rest". But Hebrews is clear that he didn't succeed in giving them "rest" as intended, and the potentials were all transferred and reapplied to the Lord Jesus (Heb. 4:8).

Jos 18:11 The lot of the tribe of the children of Benjamin came up according to their families. The border of their lot went out between the children of Judah and the children of Joseph-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

It has been suggested that "there were probably two urns, one of which contained the names of the seven tribes, and the other that of the seven portions".

Jos 18:12 Their border on the north quarter was from the Jordan. The border went up to the side of Jericho on the north, and went up through the hill country westward and ended at the wilderness of Beth Aven-
Beth Aven, house of iniquity, is the same as Bethel, which became Beth Aven in prophetic thought after Jeroboam had set up the calf there. The use of this name

therefore suggests the book of Joshua was edited, under Divine inspiration, at some far later point- probably during the captivity (see on Josh. 1:1).

Jos 18:13 The border passed along from there to Luz, to the side of Luz (the same is Bethel) southward. The border went down to Ataroth Addar, by the mountain that lies on the south of Beth Horon the lower-
Although Luz was called Bethel (Gen. 35:6; Jud. 1:23), Josh. 16:2 implies a difference between them. Perhaps Luz was the city, and "Bethel" refers specifically to the altar of Jacob there. But Keil suggests Bethel refers to the "southern range of mountains belonging to Bethel, from which the boundary ran out to the town of Luz, so that this town, which stood upon the border, was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:22)".

Jos 18:14 The border extended, and turned around on the west quarter southward, from the mountain that lies before Beth Horon southward; and ended at Kiriath Baal (the same is Kiriath Jearim), a city of the children of Judah. This was the west quarter-
There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land, although the change of name of Kiriath Baal (Josh. 15:60; 18:14) is evidence enough that there was some local attempt to stamp out the name of Baal in that case. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age.

Jos 18:15 The southern side began at the outskirts of Kiriath Jearim. The border went out westward, and went out to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah-
The description here matches that of the northern border of Judah (Josh. 15:5-9). The boundaries of the seven tribal cantons now being discussed may have been slightly recalculated, but the basic definitions were as God had originally intended.

Jos 18:16 The border went down to the farthest part of the mountain that lies before the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is in the valley of the Rephaim northward. It went down to the valley of Hinnom, to the side of the Jebusite southward, and went down to En Rogel-
'Gehenna' is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew 'Ge-ben-Hinnon'. This was located near Jerusalem (Josh. 15:8), and at the time of Christ it was the city rubbish dump. Dead bodies of criminals were thrown onto the fires which were always burning there, so that Gehenna became symbolic of total destruction and rejection.

We note that the *Rephaim* or "giants" had children like other human beings (2 Sam. 21:16,18; Dt. 3:11), inhabiting an area known as the valley of Rephaim (Josh. 15:8). The "giants" of Gen. 6:2-4 were therefore humans and not celestial beings.

Jos 18:17 It extended northward, went out at En Shemesh, and went out to Geliloth, which is over against the ascent of Adummim. It went down to the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben-
We note that the stone of a Reubenite was the boundary marker between Judah and Benjamin (Josh. 15:6). We have here a typical example of how despite the division of

the tribes, with the intention that the people remained within their given family inheritances, people were dissatisfied with what God gave them; or for whatever reason moved away from them, perhaps in search of something better. And yet the gift of the inheritances was clearly meant to be by God.

Jos 18:18 It passed along to the side over against the Arabah northward and went down to the Arabah-
The boundary of Benjamin is that of the northern border of Judah described in Josh. 15:5-9. But the description there moves from east to west, but here from west to east.

Jos 18:19 The border passed along to the side of Beth Hoglah northward; and the border ended at the north bay of the Salt Sea, at the south end of the Jordan. This was the south border-
"Bay" is 'tongue', and the Dead Sea is described as having such a tongue at each end of it, thus forming bays. It has been pointed out that there is no such surviving detailed geographical description of any contemporary nation. This reflects the extreme importance of the land of Israel to God. For it was and is to be His Kingdom, and has a special significance to Him.

Jos 18:20 The Jordan was its border on the east quarter. This was the inheritance of the children of Benjamin, boundary by boundary all around, according to their families-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 18:21 Now the cities of the tribe of the children of Benjamin according to their families were Jericho, Beth Hoglah, Emek Keziz-
The cities are described in two groups; 12 to the east, 14 to the west.

Jos 18:22 Beth Arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel-
Beth Arabah was a small settlement right out in the desert (Josh. 15:61; 18:22), therefore also called Arabah (Josh. 18:18). From such a poor and obscure place there arose a man who was attracted to David's cause (2 Sam. 23:31), just as the Lord calls all manner of unusual people to Himself today. Zemaraim was in the territory assigned to Benjamin (Josh. 18:22), but is located "in the hill country of Ephraim" in 2 Chron. 13:4.

Jos 18:23 Avvim, Parah, Ophrah-
Avvim may be Ai, called Aiath (Is. 10:28) and Aija (Neh. 11:31). Ophrah is not that associated with Gideon, This was not the Ophrah of Gideon, but the Ophrah which fell into Philistine hands of 1 Sam. 13:17. The history of so many of these places reflects how the huge potential possession was not realized by Israel, and wasted spiritual potential is one of the most tragic features of the entire Divine-human encounter.

Jos 18:24 Chephar Ammoni, Ophni, and Geba; twelve cities with their villages-
Geba is not the Gibeah of Saul as some suggest because this one is one the east (:21). Meaning "height", Geba was a common name.

Jos 18:25 Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth-
Beeroth was one of the Gibeonite towns which made peace with Israel, but here Benjamin is encouraged to possess it. The Gibeonites had agreed to be servants to the Israelites, and by all accounts they kept that agreement. But they remained living in their towns, such was the laziness of Israel to possess what had been given to them. See on :3.

Jos 18:26 Mizpeh, Chephirah, Mozah-
Mizpeh was to become a significant holy place and point of gathering for Israel (Jud. 20:1-3; 1 Sam. 7:5,6; 10:17; Jer. 40:6).

Jos 18:27 Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah-
These places are at best obscure or unknown to us today. We wonder why we have these records. None of these places has been very confidently identified. We have here an example of where the Biblical record is preserved, even though it had far more meaning for the immediate audience that it has ever had for the millennia of believers who have subsequently read these words. This in turn opens up the wider debate as to which parts of Biblical writings are preserved as historical record, for our general learning; and which are specifically commandments to us. As examples, I would argue that baptism was not just a command for the first century but for us too- because of the context and reasoning behind the command. Whereas the commandments about head covering in Corinth would appear from the context to be a historical account of a specific situation in that church at that time.

Jos 18:28 Zelah, Eleph, the Jebusite (the same is Jerusalem), Gibeath, and Kiriath; fourteen cities with their villages. This is the inheritance of the children of Benjamin according to their families-
Benjamin's inheritance was roughly 26 miles in length by 12 in breadth. But the small size was because of the huge fertility of the land and its strong topographical nature. And likewise there is in all God's gifts, in this life and eternally, a kind of compensation and equality.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 19

Jos 19:1 The second lot came out for Simeon, even for the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families. Their inheritance was in the midst of the inheritance of the children of Judah-
The boundaries of the promised land and indeed the individual possessions of the tribes were changed by God in accordance with the weakness of Israel to actually drive out the tribes and take the inheritance (consider how the inheritance of Simeon and Judah was merged because of this inability to expel the Canaanites, Josh. 19:1). He “changed the portion of my people” (Mic. 2:4). Yet God worked with them in this progressive lowering of levels.

Jos 19:2 They had for their inheritance Beersheba (or Sheba), Moladah-
Beersheba became effectively the southern border of Judah, hence the common phrase "from Dan [in the north] to Beersheba [in the south]". But this was not at all the southern border promised to Abraham, which was the "river of Egypt". God effectively recalculated the boundaries for Israel, as He came to realize that they simply didn't have the spiritual ambition to go and possess the full extent of the land promised to Abraham. Thus "the river" on the eastern boundary effectively was

recalculated as the Jordan and not the Euphrates; and likewise the southern border shifted northwards from the brook of Egypt to Beersheba. God has a similar flexibility with us too.

Jos 19:3 Hazar Shual, Balah, Ezem-
Balah is a form of Baal. There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land, although the change of name of Kiriath Baal (Josh. 15:60; 18:14) is evidence enough that there was some local attempt to stamp out the name of Baal in that case. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age.

Jos 19:4 Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah-
Presumably this was not God's original intention, as in Josh. 15:30 they are towns of Judah. We see how He is open to some recalculation of His purposes with us. "Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag" (1 Chron. 4:30) were towns were all associated with David, and he sent presents of the Amalekite spoil to them (1 Sam. 30:26-31). It seems he wanted them under the control of Judah not Simeon. .

Jos 19:5 Ziklag, Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susah-
Ziklag had been passed from Judah to Simeon (Josh. 15:31; 19:5) and then passed to the Philistines (1 Sam. 27:6)- because if we don't want the kingdom, it will be lost to us.

Jos 19:6 Beth Lebaoth, and Sharuhen; thirteen cities with their villages-
Beth Lebaoth is Beth Biri in 1 Chron. 4:31.

Jos 19:7 Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan; four cities with their villages-
These are listed in 1 Chron. 4 as belonging to Judah. The implication could be that David tended towards a policy of 'Judah for the men of Judah', and the agreement that Simeonites could live in Judah was then not honoured. This was to come to full term in the tragic division of the kingdom in the next generation.

Jos 19:8 and all the villages that were around these cities to Baalath Beer, Ramah of the South. This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 19:9 Out of the part of the children of Judah was the inheritance of the children of Simeon; for the portion of the children of Judah was too much for them. Therefore the

children of Simeon had inheritance in the midst of their inheritance-
"The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. See on :47. Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience (Jud. 3:2 NIV). His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them.

Jos 19:10 The third lot came up for the children of Zebulun according to their families. The border of their inheritance was to Sarid-
For "according to their families", see on :8.

Jos 19:11 Their border went up westward, even to Maralah, and reached to Dabbesheth. It reached to the brook that is before Jokneam-
The brook is probably the Kishon.

Jos 19:12 It turned from Sarid eastward toward the sunrise to the border of Chisloth Tabor. It went out to Daberath, and went up to Japhia-
Daberath was to be given to the Levites (Josh. 21:28; 1 Chron. 6:72), but Zebulun had not even taken this town, let alone given it to the Levites. Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory such as this Philistine territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 19:13 From there it passed along eastward to Gath Hepher, to Ethkazin; and going on to Rimmon it bent toward Neah-
"Bent toward" is AVmg. “which is drawn”; see on :14. Gath Hepher was the birthplace of the prophet Jonah (2 Kings 14:25).

Jos 19:14 The border turned around on the north to Hannathon; and it ended at the valley of Iphtah El-
Literally “and the border went round it (Neah) northward to Hannathon", thought to be Cana. We are reading here a bird's eye description, as if someone is writing this with a detailed map. Clearly the perspective is God's, as given the lack of maps and overall topographical knowledge, no single man could have written these descriptions.

Jos 19:15 It included Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem: twelve cities with their villages-
Only five names are given, but that is no contradiction; seven were not listed. The Bethlehem mentioned here is not the same as Beth-lehem Ephratah in Judah.

Jos 19:16 This is the inheritance of the children of Zebulun according to their families, these cities with their villages-
For "according to their families", see on :8.

Jos 19:17 The fourth lot came out for Issachar, even for the children of Issachar according to their families-
For "according to their families", see on :8. Although the inheritances for the location

of the tribal cantons were drawn by lot, it is clear the hand of God was in it. For the inheritances were appropriate to the people given them. Issachar's lot for possession of the land was next to Judah and Zebulun (Josh. 19:17), with whom Issachar had lived and journeyed side by side during the wilderness years (Num. 2:5; 10:15). This opens up the question as to whether we should also draw lots in this age. For God worked through them clearly enough in Joshua's time.

Jos 19:18 Their border was to Jezreel, Chesulloth, Shunem-
Issachar's borders begin to be described, but are not continued. We are just given names of towns which were to be theirs. We have here another indication that the extent of inheritance in the Kingdom, both then and now, is to some degree open to recalculation. Those like Caleb who wanted specific things were given them. This flexibility of God is hard for the legalistic mind to understand. But He is so open to relationship with us, and is willing to recalculate His intentions for us according to our own vision and desires for His Kingdom.

Jos 19:19 Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath-
The king of Hapharaim had been slain by Joshua (Josh. 12:17); but Issachar did not possess his territory. In the type, the Lord Jesus has overcome all obstacles to our inheritance of the Kingdom; but we are often slow to do our part in making this good by possessing it.

Jos 19:20 Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez-
These places are at best obscure or unknown to us today. We wonder why we have these records. None of these places has been very confidently identified. We have here an example of where the Biblical record is preserved, even though it had far more meaning for the immediate audience that it has ever had for the millennia of believers who have subsequently read these words. This in turn opens up the wider debate as to which parts of Biblical writings are preserved as historical record, for our general learning; and which are specifically commandments to us. As examples, I would argue that baptism was not just a command for the first century but for us too- because of the context and reasoning behind the command. Whereas the commandments about head covering in Corinth would appear from the context to be a historical account of a specific situation in that church at that time.

Jos 19:21 Remeth, Engannim, En Haddah, and Beth Pazzez-
Ramoth in 1 Chron. 6:73 is called Jarmuth in Josh. 21:28,29, and perhaps Remeth in Josh. 19:21. Anem of 1 Chron. 6:73 is En-gannim in Josh. 19:21; 21:29.

Jos 19:22 The border reached to Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth Shemesh. Their border ended at the Jordan: sixteen cities with their villages-
Tabor here is not the mountain, but a town which was supposed to be given to the Levites (1 Chron. 6:77). See on :12. So many of the Levitical cities were in mountains or less desirable areas- so that we wonder whether really the "lot" used to distribute them was fair, because it seems many of them were cities which the tribes didn't want or own anyway.

Jos 19:23 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Issachar according to their families, the cities with their villages-

For "according to their families", see on :8. It is tragic that they were so lazy to inherit their portion, because Gen. 49:14,15 had prophesied that “seeing that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant, bowed his shoulder to bear...". But they didn't. This was a conditional prophecy. The land was good, as the spies had said when they first viewed Canaan, just as the Kingdom is "good"; but it failed to motivate those who were satisfied with what was immediately before their eyes at this moment. And this is just why people today fail to respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Jos 19:24 The fifth lot came out for the tribe of the children of Asher according to their families-
Asher bordered Naphtali, and they also marched side by side with them through the wilderness. Although the inheritances for the location of the tribal cantons were drawn by lot, it is clear the hand of God was in it. For the inheritances were appropriate to the people given them. This opens up the question as to whether we should also draw lots in this age. For God worked through them clearly enough in Joshua's time. See on :17,32.

Jos 19:25 Their border was Helkath, Hali, Beten, Achshaph-
Helkath was to be given to the Levites (Josh. 21:31). Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory which was unattractive to the tribes, such as in the mountains, or on the very edge of their tribal canton, or in territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 19:26 Allammelech, Amad, Mishal. It reached to Carmel westward, and to Shihorlibnath-
Mishal was to be given to the Levites (Josh. 21:30). But it was not possessed by Asher, and was on the mountainous edge of their territory; see on :25.

Jos 19:27 It turned toward the sunrise to Beth Dagon, and reached to Zebulun, and to the valley of Iphtah El northward to Beth Emek and Neiel. It went out to Cabul on the left hand-
We note the retention of the old pagan name, 'house of Dagon'. There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land, although the change of name of Kiriath Baal (Josh. 15:60; 18:14) is evidence enough that there was some local attempt to stamp out the name of Baal in that case. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age.

Jos 19:28 and Ebron, Rehob, Hammon, and Kanah, even to great Sidon-
"Ebron" is Abdon in some manuscripts. This again was a town they were intended to give to the Levites (Josh. 21:30). We get the impression that most of Asher's border towns were supposedly taken by lot to be given to the Levites, but we wonder whether that lot wasn't interfered with; for it was towns on the very edge of their inheritance,

as yet untaken from the local people, which Asher dedicated to the Levites. See on :25.

Jos 19:29 The border turned to Ramah, to the fortified city of Tyre; and the border turned to Hosah. It ended at the sea by the region of Achzib-
Asher never made any effort to take these major Phoenician cities (Jud. 1:31). They would have heard of their possible inheritance in the Kingdom, and shrugged it off as too difficult; and got on with farming what bit of land they then had. So much potential was and is wasted.

Jos 19:30 Ummah also, and Aphek, and Rehob: twenty-two cities with their villages-
There are not 22 cities listed, but that is no contradiction. Some are listed, some aren't.

Jos 19:31 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Asher according to their families, these cities with their villages-
For "according to their families", see on :8. "The Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites" (Jud. 1:32), they made no real effort to inherit the Kingdom. They were one of the largest tribes at the census of Num. 1 at Sinai; but were given a small area, and they became so small they are not listed amongst the tribal rulers in 1 Chron. 27:16-22. Yet out of such spiritual indifference came the faithful Anna (Lk 2:36), just as we can rise up far above our unspiritual environment and background.

Jos 19:32 The sixth lot came out for the children of Naphtali, even for the children of Naphtali according to their families-
For "according to their families", see on :8. Naphtali marched in the wilderness side by side with Dan and Asher (Num. 2:25-31), and now they are chosen "by lot" to again be near them. See on :24.

Jos 19:33 Their border was from Heleph, from the oak in Zaanannim, Adaminekeb, and Jabneel, to Lakkum. It ended at the Jordan-
The northern border is unclear. Because according to the promise to Abraham, the territory of Israel could have extended far to the north, to the sources of the Euphrates. We are just given names of towns which were to be theirs. We have here another indication that the extent of inheritance in the Kingdom, both then and now, is to some degree open to recalculation. Those like Caleb who wanted specific things were given them. This flexibility of God is hard for the legalistic mind to understand. But He is so open to relationship with us, and is willing to recalculate His intentions for us according to our own vision and desires for His Kingdom. See on :18.

Jos 19:34 The border turned westward to Aznoth Tabor, and went out from there to Hukkok. It reached to Zebulun on the south, and reached to Asher on the west, and to Judah at the Jordan toward the sunrise-
"Judah" is used because the sixty cities of Havoth-jair (Num. 32:41) were counted as belonging to Judah. God effectively recalculated the boundaries for the tribes, as He came to accept that they simply didn't have the spiritual ambition to go and possess the full extent of the land promised to Abraham. Thus "the river" on the eastern boundary effectively was recalculated as the Jordan and not the Euphrates; and likewise the southern border shifted northwards from the brook of Egypt to Beersheba. God has a similar flexibility with us too.

Jos 19:35 The fortified cities were Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Chinnereth-
Hammath was a "fortified city" (Josh. 19:35), fortified by the local population and considered too strong for Naphtali to take. But it was given by them to the Levites (Josh. 21:32). As noted elsewhere, the tribes "gave" to the Levites the cities which were on the very edges of their cantons, or held by the enemy, or in mountainous, remote areas. I therefore suggest that the process of distributing the priestly cities by "lot" was interfered with. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 19:36 Adamah, Ramah, Hazor-
The mighty king of Hazor had been destroyed by Joshua (Josh. 11:1). It is so tragic that that amazing victory had not been followed up by the Israelites, just as the victory of the Lord Jesus is likewise not personalized by so many.

Jos 19:37 Kedesh, Edrei, En Hazor-
"Kedesh" is 'the holy place', and is another example of the spirituall disappointing retention of paganic names; see on :3.

Jos 19:38 Iron, Migdal El, Horem, Beth Anath, and Beth Shemesh; nineteen cities with their villages-
Migdal El is the Magdala of Mt. 15:39.

Jos 19:39 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Naphtali according to their families, the cities with their villages-
For "according to their families", see on :8. Asher bordered Naphtali, and they also marched side by side with them through the wilderness. Although the inheritances for the location of the tribal cantons were drawn by lot, it is clear the hand of God was in it. For the inheritances were appropriate to the people given them. This opens up the question as to whether we should also draw lots in this age. For God worked through them clearly enough in Joshua's time. See on :17,32.

Jos 19:40 The seventh lot came out for the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families-
For "according to their families", see on :8. Naphtali marched in the wilderness side by side with Dan and Asher (Num. 2:25-31), and now they are chosen "by lot" to again be near them. See on :24.

Jos 19:41 The border of their inheritance was Zorah, Eshtaol, Irshemesh-
Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and too over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that thou hast done *unto us*?" (Jud. 15:11). "They had become reconciled to the dominion of sin since it did not appear to do much harm. They could still grow their crops etc."

Jos 19:42 Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah-
Shaalabbin, “the place of foxes", may have been named in memory of Jud. 15:4, which incident occurred in this area.

Jos 19:43 Elon, Timnah, Ekron-
The aim of Samson's marriage was to dispossess the Philistines and take their possession for Israel. It seems no accident that he chose Timnath, 'a portion assigned'- to Israel. This was part of the land promised to Dan, but which they had allowed the Philistines to overrun (Josh. 19:43,47). And Samson would have seen himself as 'Samson-of-Zorah', the hornet- symbol of the Egyptian tribes which drove out the Canaanites in preparation for Israel's later victories (Dt. 7:20; Josh. 24:12).

Jos 19:44 Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath-
"Baalath" is another example of the spiritually disappointing retention of paganic names; see on :3.

Jos 19:45 Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon-
Gath Rimmon was given to the Levites (Josh. 21:24). Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory which was unattractive to the tribes, such as in the mountains, or on the very edge of their tribal canton, or in territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing. See on :47.

Jos 19:46 Me-Jarkon and Rakkon, with the border over against Joppa-
We wonder why Joppa itself isn't recorded as being Dan's, although the suburbs around it were. Perhaps here again we have an example of there being great fluidity in the assignment of areas, with some tribes taking areas which the other tribes didn't want, often from fear of the local inhabitants.

Jos 19:47 The border of the children of Dan went out beyond them; for the children of Dan went up and fought against Leshem and took it, and struck it with the edge of the sword and possessed it and lived therein, and called it Leshem Dan after the name of Dan their father-
2 Chron. 2:14 says "Hiram" was "son of a woman of the daughters of Dan", whereas 1 King 7:14 says he was "the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali". Dan may refer to the town called Dan or Laish which was in the territory of Naphtali, but inhabited by Danites (Josh. 18:27; 19:47; Jud. 18:7). Here we see how an apparent discrepancy on a surface level reveals a deep evidence of the way the records do not contradict but dovetail perfectly, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired writing. But this is only apparent to those who respectfully search the entire scriptures, rather than bandying around a surface level contradiction with an eagerness which speaks more of their own fears the Bible is inspired than of deep factual persuasion.

God here speaks so positively about spiritually weak Dan. See on :9. "The coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

LXX adds: "The children of Dan did not drive out the Amorite who afflicted them in the mountain; and the Amorite would not suffer them to come down into the valley, but they forcibly took from them the border of their portion". If Dan didn't have in their possession their border towns, and yet these were supposedly given by them to the Levites, then this 'gift' was meaningless. See on :45.

Jos 19:48 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families, these cities with their villages-
For "according to their families", see on :8. LXX adds: "The Amorite continued to dwell in Edom and in Salamin: and the hand of Ephraim prevailed against them, and they became tribute to them". This shows the weakness of Dan in even deeper emphasis; for Ephraim subdued those in their area whom they wouldn't.

Jos 19:49 So they made an end of distributing the land for inheritance by its borders. The children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun in their midst-
The inheritance was ultimately given by God. So Israel 'gave' it to Joshua in that what would otherwise have been their inheritance because theirs. I have suggested on :8 that each family was given a specific inheritance which they were to build up; and Joshua set the parade example to his people in doing this (:50).

Jos 19:50 According to the commandment of Yahweh, they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnathserah in the hill country of Ephraim; and he built the city, and lived there-
This was an example of spiritual ambition. Perhaps like Caleb he had noticed this city whilst spying out the land 40 years before, and was given his request. There is an element to which our experiences in this life lead us to desire or request things which we shall receive in the Kingdom.

Jos 19:51 These are the inheritances, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed for inheritance by lot in Shiloh before Yahweh, at the door of the Tent of Meeting. So they made an end of dividing the land-
LXX "and they went to take possession of the land". Again we note that being "before Yahweh" doesn't mean being in Heaven itself; for His representatives are spoken of as Him, and therefore coming before Him meant coming before them. It could be that the Angel of Yahweh dwelt over the mercy seat of the ark, in the shekinah glory between the cherubim; and this therefore made coming before the tabernacle a coming before Yahweh.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 20

Jos 20:1 Yahweh spoke to Joshua saying-
Having given the people their inheritances, they are now asked to set some aside as cities of refuge. But as noted several times in Josh. 19, some of these cities they had not even taken from enemy hands.

Jos 20:2 Speak to the children of Israel saying, 'Assign the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you by Moses-

"Assign" is the usual word for "give". The tribes were to give these cities. But several of them they had not even bothered to take from the local inhabitants.

Jos 20:3 that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there. They shall be to you for a refuge from the avenger of blood-
We are all in the position of the man who unintentionally committed manslaughter and must therefore die. We are under sentence of death by reason of being human, as well as for our actual sins. The avenger of blood could be seen as God, for it is He alone who has the right to execute judgment for sin. And we must note that the word *ga'al* translated "avenger" is also that translated "redeemer" or 'ransomer'. The cities of refuge are therefore understood in Heb. 6:18 as looking ahead to refuge in the Lord Jesus: "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us". The allusion is to how the person who found they had committed a sin worthy of death, yet without as it were wishing to have done so, could flee to a city of refuge and be saved there by the death of the high priest. The curse upon Levi was that the members of this tribe were to be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7). However, this resulted in the cities of the Levites being scattered throughout the land, thus providing accessible cities of refuge to all who wished to escape the consequences of sin. Those cities were evidently symbolic of the refuge we have in Christ. Again and again, the curses and consequences of human sin are used by the Father to mediate blessing. It is the sure hope before us which is our refuge. "Hope", *elpis*, is a confident knowledge of a future reality, rather than a hoping for the best. We should be confident in our salvation. The 'guilty' person was made free totally through the death of the High Priest, clearly looking forward to the significance of the death of the Lord Jesus.

LXX adds: "until he have stood before the congregation for judgment". In this case we note that the person was to be assumed innocent until proven guilty- a principle to always live by.

Jos 20:4 He shall flee to one of those cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city. They shall take him into the city with them and give him a place, that he may live among them-
The cities of refuge represented salvation in the Lord Jesus (Heb. 6:18). But most of them were situation in remote or mountainous areas, Hebron being an exception. The idea was that those wishing for salvation from sin they had unintentionally committed must make quite some conscious effort and choice to get there, as is true today. And more such cities were promised, but Israel didn't take up that offer. This would have made salvation more easily accessible, as it were, had they done so.

Jos 20:5 If the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver up the

manslayer into his hand; because he struck his neighbour unintentionally, and didn't hate him beforehand-
This is assuming that the elders find the man's case consistent and genuine. They were to judge that according to whether he 'hated him in time past' (Dt. 19:6). We note that hatred of a neighbour was to be the reason for death. John appears to have this in mind when he reasons that hatred of our brother is effectively a living death sentence (1 Jn. 2:11; 4:20). It was to be that "whoever hates his brother is a murderer", not a manslaughterer (1 Jn. 3:15). And that hatred can be in someone's heart, even if they have not killed the object of their hatred. This is the principle which is taught here.

Jos 20:6 He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days. Then the manslayer shall return, and come to his own city, and to his own house, to the city he fled from'-
The death of the High Priest was paralleled with a man standing before the judgment for his crime in Josh. 20:6 RV. This surely prefigured how Christ's death was and is effectively our judgment. Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events.

Jos 20:7 They set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba (the same is Hebron) in the hill country of Judah-
But Kedesh was listed in Josh. 19 as a city not yet taken by Naphtali; yet it was commanded to be given by them to the Levites as a city of refuge (Josh. 20:7). So their refusal or 'being slack' to take the city meant they had no wider vision, of providing a place of refuge for the needy within Israel as a whole. And there is no real evidence that this wonderful system of salvation and justice ever really worked in practice.

Jos 20:8 Beyond the Jordan at Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness in the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh-
But Ramoth Gilead passed in and out of Israelite possession; and it is doubtful whether Manasseh ever bothered securing Golan from the local inhabitants. The cities were generally in the wilderness or mountainous areas; perhaps the idea was that they should not be used casually, but the person had to make quite some effort to get there.

Jos 20:9 These were the appointed cities for all the children of Israel, and for the alien

who lives among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stands before the congregation-
Again we note that the person was to be assumed innocent until proven guilty- a principle to always live by. The cities were "appointed", this gracious system of salvation was carefully worked out in practice for the people. But the cities were not all "given" by the people, so the system didn't work in practice.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 21

Jos 21:1 Then the heads of fathers' houses of the Levites came near to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun and to the heads of fathers' houses of the tribes of the children of Israel-
They would have listened to all the descriptions of the cantons of the other tribes, and would have been deeply aware that they had not been provided for by their brethren.

Jos 21:2 They spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan saying, Yahweh commanded Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for our livestock-
This implies that the Levites had livestock with them when they entered the land, and we assume that they also had animals with them on the wilderness journey. Hence we are told that Achan had his own flocks of animals at the time when they first crossed the Jordan and entered the land. The manna was clearly supplemented by their own food products taken from the animals they had with them. They did this to satisfy their craving for meat in addition to manna, which had nearly led to their destruction. We wonder whether the Levites ought to have had such livestock in the desert, or whether they ought to have been satisfied with the manna.

Jos 21:3 The children of Israel gave to the Levites out of their inheritance, according to the commandment of Yahweh, these cities with their suburbs-
I pointed out throughout Josh. 19, and later here in this chapter, that many of the Levitical cities were 'given' to them by the tribes, when they had not driven out the tribes. Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory which was unattractive to the tribes, such as in the mountains, or on the very edge of their tribal canton, or in territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. So this 'giving to the Levites' was giving in word but not in deed.

Jos 21:4 The lot came out for the families of the Kohathites. The children of Aaron the priest, who were of the Levites, had thirteen cities by lot out of the tribe of Judah, out of the tribe of the Simeonites, and out of the tribe of Benjamin-

I will suggest later in this chapter, as on :3, that the tribes tended to give the Levites the cities which they didn't really possess or which were unimportant to them. It could mean that the "lot" was therefore interfered with. However, it could be that the tribes decided which towns they were going to "give", and the lot was not to decide which towns were given, but to which of the three families of the Levites the towns were to be given, i.e. the Gershonites, Kohathites and Merarites.

Jos 21:5 The rest of the children of Kohath had ten cities by lot out of the families of the tribe of Ephraim, out of the tribe of Dan, and out of the half-tribe of Manasseh-
The parable of Lk. 19:10 describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities. This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

Jos 21:6 The children of Gershon had thirteen cities by lot out of the families of the tribe of Issachar, out of the tribe of Asher, out of the tribe of Naphtali, and out of the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan-
As explained on :3,4, the Levites were 'given' these cities only in theory. They did not at that time 'have' them, as several of them were not even in Israelite hands.

Jos 21:7 The children of Merari according to their families had twelve cities out of the tribe of Reuben, out of the tribe of Gad, and out of the tribe of Zebulun-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 21:8 The children of Israel gave these cities with their suburbs by lot to the Levites,

as Yahweh commanded by Moses-
In other words, Joshua ensured that there was a strictly legal granting of these cities to the Levites. But as explained on :3, the spirit of all this was rather lacking seeing that several of the cities were not even possessed by the Israelites at this time. Joshua was very good at obedience to clear commandments (Josh. 4:10,17; 8:27; 10:40). But when he had to articulate his faith in God in unexpected situations, e.g. when the ambassadors from Gibeon arrived, or when the first attack on Ai failed, he seems to have performed poorly. Legalistic obedience is no use in those cases when principles need to be applied. Josh. 5:13,14 can be read as a rebuke of Joshua, wanting to boil everything down to black and white, wanting to see God as either personally for him or against him; when the essence is to seek to discern and do God's will. He very strictly adhered to God's commandments with legalistic obedience, e.g., about how to approach and deal with Jericho, or how to cross the flooded Jordan and build an altar; and time and again, we read in Joshua of how he strictly relayed and obeyed the Divine commandments given by Moses (Josh. 8:31,33,35; 11:12,15,20; 14:2,5; 17:4; 21:2,8). Yet as with any literalistic or legally minded person, it was hard for Joshua to apply the principles behind the laws to situations which weren't specifically addressed by Divine revelation, where legalistic obedience wasn't what was required.

Jos 21:9 They gave out of the tribe of the children of Judah, and out of the tribe of the children of Simeon, these cities which are mentioned by name-
"Mentioned" is literally to call out, as if the names of the cities were read out, along with the result of the lots, i.e. to which clan of the three sons of Levi they should be given.

Jos 21:10 They were for the children of Aaron, of the families of the Kohathites, who were of the children of Levi; for theirs was the first lot-
The Kohathites had their cities in Judah and Ephraim, which were not neighbouring tribes. This fulfilled the promise that Levi was to be scattered in Israel, although this curse was intended to turn out as a blessing, in that the knowledge of God would be further spread amongst the people.

Jos 21:11 They gave them Kiriath Arba, named after the father of Anak (the same is Hebron), in the hill country of Judah, with its suburbs around it-
Joshua had taken Hebron (Josh. 10:36) but Israel had not followed up his victory, and the Philistines had returned; Caleb then took it (Josh. 15:13), but again, by Samson's time, the Philistines were back. A study of these place names reveals the tragic weakness of God's people.

Jos 21:12 But they gave the fields of the city and its villages to Caleb the son of

Jephunneh for his possession-
Perhaps rather speculatively, Kiel concludes from this “that the Levites only received as many houses in the cities assigned them, as their numerical strength required, and that it was these which remained in their hands as an inalienable possession”.

Jos 21:13 To the children of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron with its suburbs, the city of refuge for the manslayer, Libnah with its suburbs-
We are all in the position of the man who unintentionally committed manslaughter and must therefore die. We are under sentence of death by reason of being human, as well as for our actual sins. The avenger of blood could be seen as God, for it is He alone who has the right to execute judgment for sin. And we must note that the word *ga'al* translated "avenger" is also that translated "redeemer" or 'ransomer'. The cities of refuge are therefore understood in Heb. 6:18 as looking ahead to refuge in the Lord Jesus: "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us". The allusion is to how the person who found they had committed a sin worthy of death, yet without as it were wishing to have done so, could flee to a city of refuge and be saved there by the death of the high priest. The curse upon Levi was that the members of this tribe were to be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7). However, this resulted in the cities of the Levites being scattered throughout the land, thus providing accessible cities of refuge to all who wished to escape the consequences of sin. Those cities were evidently symbolic of the refuge we have in Christ. Again and again, the curses and consequences of human sin are used by the Father to mediate blessing. It is the sure hope before us which is our refuge. "Hope", *elpis*, is a confident knowledge of a future reality, rather than a hoping for the best. We should be confident in our salvation. The 'guilty' person was made free totally through the death of the High Priest, clearly looking forward to the significance of the death of the Lord Jesus.

Jos 21:14 Jattir with its suburbs-
Jattir was given to the priests but was in Philistine territory (Josh. 15:48 and context). Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory such as this Philistine territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Eshtemoa with its suburbs-
Eshtemoa was a priestly city; it would seem the priests were largely supportive of David when on the run from Saul, perhaps due to Samuel's influence (1 Sam. 30:28; Josh. 15:50; 21:14).

Jos 21:15 Holon with its suburbs, Debir with its suburbs-

"Now the name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher" (Josh. 15:15). "Debir" is the word usually translated "oracle", referring to the sanctuary, which was centered around the word of God in the ark. The previous name also means something similar, 'Place of the scroll / books'. It's as if faithful Caleb renamed an idol shrine to a more Yahweh centered name. This confirms the suggestion made on Josh. 15:9,10 that the names associated with pagan worship were renamed by the faithful, but not renamed by the unfaithful.

Jos 21:16 Ain with its suburbs, Juttah with its suburbs, and Beth Shemesh with its suburbs; nine cities out of those two tribes-
In the Hebrew text of 1 Chron. 6:55-60 we have eleven names of priestly towns, but thirteen towns are stated as having been 'given' in 1 Chron. 6:60. Juttah and Gibeon were promised (Josh. 21:16,17), but were not possessed. But as also experienced in 1 Chron. 6:81, and as often happens with God's people, they do not take all the blessing that God promised and intended for them.

Jos 21:17 Out of the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with its suburbs, Geba with its suburbs-
The Gibeonites had made peace with Joshua and by all accounts remained faithful to Yahweh for generations, as the Nethinim. It was appropriate that Gibeon be made a priestly city. But see on :16.

Jos 21:18 Anathoth with its suburbs, and Almon with its suburbs; four cities-
Anathoth was the birthplace of Jeremiah, and means 'place of answers', perhaps because the prophetic word was given there. Almon was only one mile from Anathoth, so we get the impression the tribes were just trying to make two priestly cities out of one; which fits with the theme of them giving the Levites marginal towns or those they didn't possess.

Jos 21:19 All the cities of the children of Aaron, the priests, were thirteen cities with their suburbs-
This sounds a large number of towns for this group, given their population at the time. But many of the "cities" were tiny settlements like Almon (see on :18).

Jos 21:20 The families of the children of Kohath, the Levites, even the rest of the children of Kohath, had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim-
The children of Kohath (i.e. here those apart from those of the priestly order), were give four cities in Ephraim, four in Dan and two in Western Manasseh. This fulfilled the promise that Levi was to be scattered in Israel, although this curse was intended to turn out as a blessing, in that the knowledge of God would be further spread amongst the people.

Jos 21:21 They gave them Shechem with its suburbs in the hill country of Ephraim, the city of refuge for the manslayer, and Gezer with its suburbs-
The cities of refuge were generally in the wilderness or mountainous areas; perhaps the idea was that they should not be used casually, but the person had to make quite some effort to get there. See on :13.

Jos 21:22 Kibzaim with its suburbs, and Beth Horon with its suburbs; four cities-
Kibzaim is Jokmeam in 1 Chron. 6:68. Any student of the Hebrew text will soon perceive that proper nouns can be expressed in various ways, and that people and towns often had more than one name. It is nothing but intellectual desperation which would try to forge from this a claim that the record contradicts itself. Such differences surely reflect the fact that these records were written by different people at different times, and yet don't contradict because the records are all inspired by the same Spirit of God.

Jos 21:23 Out of the tribe of Dan, Elteke with its suburbs, Gibbethon with its suburbs-
These cities were in Dan (Josh. 21:23,24), but were given by Ephraim to the Levites (1 Chron. 6:66,69). This continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24.

Jos 21:24 Aijalon with its suburbs, Gath Rimmon with its suburbs; four cities-
Gath Rimmon was one of the towns which Dan didn't take (Josh. 19:45). Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory which was unattractive to the tribes, such as in the mountains, or on the very edge of their tribal canton, or in territory which was never really subjugated by Israel. See on :23.

Jos 21:25 Out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Taanach with its suburbs, and Gath Rimmon with its suburbs; two cities-
In the list of cities given to the Levites, this is called "Bileam". "Bileam" means 'not of the people', called Ibleam, Jud. 1:27; 2 Kings 9:27, and in Josh. 21:25, Gath-rimmon. Perhaps it is called "Bileam" in 1 Chron. 6:70 because it continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24.

Jos 21:26 All the cities of the families of the rest of the children of Kohath were ten with

their suburbs-
For "ten cities", see on :5.

Jos 21:27 They gave to the children of Gershon, of the families of the Levites, out of the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan with its suburbs, the city of refuge for the manslayer, and Beeshterah with its suburbs; two cities-
Golan was one of the cities of refuge on the east of Jordan. Those cities of refuge could have been increased in number (Dt. 19:9), thereby making salvation that much 'easier' or accessible; but there is no evidence Israel availed themselves of this.

Beeshterah is Ashtaroth in 1 Chron. 6:71, a shortened for of 'house of Ashtaroth'. We note the retention of the old pagan name. There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land, although the change of name of Kiriath Baal (Josh. 15:60; 18:14) is evidence enough that there was some local attempt to stamp out the name of Baal in that case. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age.

Jos 21:28 Out of the tribe of Issachar, Kishion with its suburbs, Daberath with its suburbs-
This is called Kedesh in Josh. 13:22.

Jos 21:29 Jarmuth with its suburbs, En Gannim with its suburbs; four cities-
Ramoth in 1 Chron. 6:73 is called Jarmuth in Josh. 21:28,29, and perhaps Remeth in Josh. 19:21. Anem of 1 Chron. 6:73 is En-gannim in Josh. 19:21; 21:29.

Jos 21:30 Out of the tribe of Asher, Mishal with its suburbs, Abdon with its suburbs-
Mishal was in the mountains on the very edge of Asher's inheritance, which they had not possessed (Josh. 19:25). See on :31; and for Abdon, on Josh. 19:28.

Jos 21:31 Helkath with its suburbs, and Rehob with its suburbs; four cities-
Helkath was in the mountains on the very edge of Asher's inheritance (Josh. 19:25). Although the choice of priestly cities was supposedly taken by lot, it is significant that many of them were in territory which was unattractive to the tribes, such as in the mountains, or on the very edge of their tribal canton, or in territory which was never

really subjugated by Israel. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 21:32 Out of the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with its suburbs, the city of refuge for the manslayer, Hammothdor with its suburbs, and Kartan with its suburbs; three cities-
Hammath was a "fortified city" (Josh. 19:35), fortified by the local population and considered too strong for Naphtali to take. But it was given by them to the Levites (Josh. 21:32). As noted elsewhere, the tribes "gave" to the Levites the cities which were on the very edges of their cantons, or held by the enemy, or in mountainous, remote areas. I therefore suggest that the process of distributing the priestly cities by "lot" was interfered with. They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 21:33 All the cities of the Gershonites according to their families were thirteen cities with their suburbs-
The children of Gershon had thirteen cities, two in Eastern Manasseh, four in Issachar, four in Asher and three in Naphtali. This fulfilled the promise that Levi was to be scattered in Israel, although this curse was intended to turn out as a blessing, in that the knowledge of God would be further spread amongst the people.

Jos 21:34 To the families of the children of Merari, the rest of the Levites, out of the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with its suburbs, Kartah with its suburbs-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 21:35 Dimnah with its suburbs and Nahalal with its suburbs; four cities-
Rimmono and Tabor in 1 Chron. 6:77 are in Josh. 21:35 as Dimnah and Nahalai.

Jos 21:36 Out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with its suburbs, Jahaz with its suburbs-
Jahaz, like Heshbon, Jazer and Mephaath, was taken by the Moabites and was in their long term possession (Is. 15:1-9; 16:1-14; Jer. 48:21,34). This continues the impression that the cities given to the Levites were often in marginal areas which were liable to attack and loss to Gentile powers. See on :37.

Jos 21:37 Kedemoth with its suburbs and Mephaath with its suburbs; four cities-
Kedemoth was given to the Levites (Josh. 21:37) but was in fact a town which had not been captured from the local population (Josh. 13:18). They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Jos 21:38 Out of the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with its suburbs, the city of refuge for the manslayer, and Mahanaim with its suburbs-
But Ramoth Gilead passed in and out of Israelite possession. The cities of refuge were generally in the wilderness or mountainous areas; perhaps the idea was that they should not be used casually, but the person had to make quite some effort to get there.

Jos 21:39 Heshbon with its suburbs, Jazer with its suburbs; four cities in all-
See on :36.

Jos 21:40 All these were the cities of the children of Merari according to their families, even the rest of the families of the Levites. Their lot was twelve cities-
The children of Merari has twelve cities, four in Zebulun, four in Reuben, four in Gad. This fulfilled the promise that Levi was to be scattered in Israel, although this curse was intended to turn out as a blessing, in that the knowledge of God would be further spread amongst the people.

Jos 21:41 All the cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the children of Israel were forty-eight cities with their suburbs-
The idea was that the Levites would live "in the midst" of the people, teaching them God's way. But Israel's apostacy is often blamed upon the failure of the priesthood; and yet that in turn was partly due to Israel not providing for the Levites.

Jos 21:42 Each of these cities included their suburbs around them. It was this way with all these cities-
"Suburbs" is translated by some as "cattle drives".

Jos 21:43 So Yahweh gave to Israel all the land which He swore to give to their fathers. They possessed it, and lived in it-
The Lord gave them the land, i.e. potentially, but they failed to possess it; the language here is that of potential achievement by Joshua, rather than by Israel in practice. "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and

their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

But Joshua's achievements are presented as a primary fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. In a sense, the promises that the seed *would* inherit the land, and that God *would be* their God were fulfilled straight after God said them. He became Isaac's God (Gen. 31:42,53 refer to this), the God of Abraham's son. Time and again God reminds Israel that He *is* their God. And that land in a sense *was* given to the Jewish fathers (Gen. 15:18; Dt. 28:63; 30:5 NIV; Josh. 1:2-9; 21:43; 1 Kings 4:20,21). David could praise God simply because He was "my God" (Ps. 118:28)- an allusion back to the Abrahamic promise. Of course, the *main* fulfillment of this promise will be in the Kingdom; but in principle, the promise has *already* been fulfilled to Abraham's seed- i.e., us!

Jos 21:44 Yahweh gave them rest all around, according to all that He swore to their fathers-
Heb. 3:8 is clear that Joshua did not give them "rest" as intended, and so his work was reapplied and rescheduled to his namesake the Lord Jesus. So the language here is that of potential achievement by Joshua, rather than by Israel in practice.

Not a man of all their enemies stood before them. Yahweh delivered all their enemies into their hand-
But their enemies did stand before them, they didn't possess all the land. Yet God puts it over so positively, as if it's a story with a happy ending- when actually it's a tragedy. Even when rebuking them, God sees Israel as in some ways " perfect" (Is. 42:18-20). Israel were like Sodom, and yet they weren't treated like Sodom (Is. 1:9,10). They were Jeshurun, the upright one, but they kicked at God (Dt. 32:15). See on Josh. 19:9.

Jos 21:45 Nothing failed of any good thing which Yahweh had spoken to the house of Israel; all came to pass-

Literally, 'a word from all the good word'. Every word of promise concerning every town, field, cattle drive and suburb didn't fail. God's prophecies do not fail of themselves; it is human weakness which fails to realize the prophetic potential. Indeed as concluded in Josh. 24:18 "Yahweh drove out from before us all the peoples". But Israel failed to make good on that, for they didn't drive out all the peoples. This all speaks of the tragic wasted potential which there is in all that the Lord Jesus achieved. He won the victories over every aspect of sin, every obstacle between us and possessing the Kingdom. But we are slow and lazy to believe and act upon that. See on Josh. 24:15.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 22

Jos 22:1 Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh-
Clearly Joshua called the representatives of those tribes. This is a major theme in the Bible- that the representative of a person or entity is spoken of as being that person. Understanding this helps us easily understand the verses wrested to support the mistaken doctrine of the Trinity.

Jos 22:2 and said to them, You have kept all that Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded you, and have listened to my voice in all that I commanded you-
Moses had told the Reubenites and Gadites that they could return to their possessions when "the Lord have given rest unto your brethren, and they also possess the land" (Dt. 3:20). But Joshua tells them to go to their possessions simply because their brethren were now at "rest" (Josh. 22:4). He significantly omits the proviso that their brethren must also possess the land- because much of the land wasn't possessed. Was this Joshua getting slack, thinking that the main thing was that people were living in peace, even though they weren't possessing the Kingdom? Or is it a loving concession to human weakness? Indeed, the conditions of Dt. 3:20 were in their turn an easier form, a concession to, the terms of the initial agreement in Num. 32:20-32.
Joshua didn't give the people rest (Heb. 4:8); although he potentially enabled it (Josh. 22:4; 23:1). He failed to fulfil the potential of Josh. 1:13-15- that *he* would lead the people to "rest". The Messianic Kingdom could, perhaps, have come through Joshua-Jesus; but Israel would not. And so his work was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who does give "rest" to the true people of God (Heb. 4:8). See on Josh. 21:43,44; 23:4; 24:14,23. Or is all this rooted in his love for them, not seeing iniquity in Jacob?

Jos 22:3 You have not left your brothers these many days to this day, but have performed the duty commanded by Yahweh your God-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 22:4 Now Yahweh your God has given rest to your brothers, as He spoke to them. Therefore now return and go to your tents, to the land of your possession, which Moses

the servant of Yahweh gave you beyond the Jordan-
This is a timeless principle- that our own inheritance of the Kingdom requires our efforts to help our brethren inherit it also. For in a sense, salvation is collective; the body of Christ receive His resurrection life, the Israel of God inherit Canaan. Whilst relationship with God is ultimately personal, the essence of that relationship is love. And love in its ultimate term is the desire to eternally save others.

Jos 22:5 Only take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded you, to love Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul-
If we love the Lord Jesus Christ, we will keep His words (Jn. 14:15,21; 15:10). This is evidently alluding to the many Old Testament passages which say that Israel's love for God would be shown through their keeping of His commands (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,13,22; 30:16; Josh. 22:5). Israel were also told that God's commands were *all* related to showing love (Dt. 11:13; 19:9). So there is a logical circuit here: We love God by keeping His commands, therefore His commands are fundamentally about love. Thus love is the fulfilling of the law of God; both under the Old and New covenants (Rom. 13:10). It is all to easy to see our relationship with God and Christ as a question of obedience to their words, as if this is somehow a test of our spirituality. This is to humanize God too far, to see God as if He were a fallible man; for if we were God, we would institute some kind of written test for our creatures: 'Do this, and if you don't, then I know you don't love me'. The God of glory is beyond this kind of thing. He is His word. If we love Him, we will be eager to know His words, we will dwell upon them, we will live them out in our daily experience as far as we can.

Yahweh was to be loved with all the heart, soul and mind (Dt. 6:5). This is understood by Joshua as meaning that those who loved Yahweh would not "mix with" and intermarry with the nations and accept their gods (Josh. 23:11,12,16). "Love" for God was not therefore a feeling; Joshua said that they must "take good heed therefore to yourselves, that you love Yahweh" (Josh. 23:11). This is the love of conscious direction of the mind, the love which is a choice rather than an emotion.

Jos 22:6 So Joshua blessed them and sent them away; and they went to their tents-
The agreement in Josh. 1:14 had been that "Your wives, your little ones and your livestock shall live in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan; but all your mighty men of valour shall pass over before your brothers, armed, and shall help them". This was no small sacrifice, because it left their much beloved flocks, as well as their women and children, without protection. That is the significance of the agreement that "all" their soldiers were to pass over Jordan. And they were to be in the front line, "before

your brothers", forming the vanguard. Further, their inheritances east of Jordan were huge, and included areas inhabited by giants and strong enemies. So the agreement required them to live by faith in God's protection far more than did the other tribes. Their attempted short cut to the Kingdom didn't work, it ended up with far greater challenge to their faith. And that is true to this day.

Jos 22:7 Now to the one half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given inheritance in Bashan; but to the other half gave Joshua among their brothers beyond the Jordan westward. Moreover when Joshua sent them away to their tents he blessed them-
Division between brethren is not God's ideal intention. We wonder whether this arrangement was God's curse, if that is not too strong a word, upon Manasseh's desire for the immediate inheritance east of Jordan. We note that Dan also, a tribe associated with much spiritual failure, was likewise given two areas of inheritance, one in the south and one in the north.

Jos 22:8 and spoke to them saying, Return with much wealth to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, gold, brass, iron and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers-
The enemies of Israel west of Jordan were still their enemies, and they were to divide the spoil they had taken there with their brothers east of Jordan. Although God arranged their disunity in response to their wish (see on :7), He also worked to minimize it.

Jos 22:9 The children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh which is in the land of Canaan to go to the land of Gilead, to the land of their possession which they owned, according to the commandment of Yahweh by Moses-
"Which they owned" is a reminder that God accepted the situation, as discussed on :6,7. He had given them their inheritance as they requested, even if it was not His idea intention. But He didn't wish for that to be revisited and caviled against by the other tribes. This was legitimately their inheritance. After less than ideal behaviour from others, we need to move on, the lines remain drawn where they have been- but we must move on with our brethren and not seek to endlessly revisit the issue.

Jos 22:10 When they came to the region about the Jordan, that is in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, a great altar to look at-
This altar was right on the edge of their territory, and was not therefore intended as a central place of worship. It was perhaps built opposite the altar that been built when Israel first crossed the Jordan. See on :11. Their desire to settle east of Jordan meant they would be separated from the sanctuary by the river Jordan. The law required that

three times / year their men were to appear at the sanctuary. We recall from Josh. 3:15 that the Jordan was very hard to cross at the time of Passover. So their decision was going to make spiritual devotions and obedience to the law far harder to keep. But God went along with their request, as did the Father of the prodigal son. And as He did with Israel's request for a human king and a temple- even though those things made devotion to Him that much harder to achieve.

Jos 22:11 The children of Israel heard a report that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar in the forefront of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that pertains to the children of Israel-

Or "at the passage of the children of Israel". This would confirm the suggestion on :10, that it was built opposite the altar that been built when Israel first crossed the Jordan. And this too would be the sense of "the forefront of the land of Canaan". For Israel had first entered Canaan at this point, in the plains opposite Jericho, and they considered that area to be the 'forefront' of Canaan.

Jos 22:12 When the children of Israel confirmed this, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up against them to war-

We have the impression that they did the right thing on hearing a report (:11); they confirmed it to be true by investigation. But then they fail completely in going to war against their brethren who only recently had been fighting for them in the vanguard of the Israelite army, in order to secure their inheritance west of Jordan. There were clearly underlying jealousy and personality issues. They were twisting the Mosaic commandment of Dt. 13:12-16 about investigating whether or not idolatry was being committed in a city, and if it was, then attacking and destroying the city. As often happens in these kinds of controversies, there is a semblance of obedience to Divine commands [they confirmed that an altar had been built], but not in fact. For no idolatry was being committed upon the altar which had been built. They found no evidence of that but still wanted to attack and destroy their brethren. The scenario has repeated countless times within the body of Christ. And the western tribes could hardly consistently claim such a scrupulous level of obedience to Divine law, when they had not driven out the Canaanite tribes and were starting to worship their gods. They were transferring their own guilt onto others. This is why brethren guilty of a certain sin will zealously accuse others [even falsely] of that very sin, and seek to punish them for it. This is not simply a case of hypocrisy. It is psychological transference of their own sin onto others, and seeking to punish them with the judgment they themselves deserve.

Jos 22:13 The children of Israel sent to the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead. They sent Phinehas the

son of Eleazar the priest-
Phinehas had become well known for saving Israel by murdering the apostates (Num. 25:7). But as explained on :12, here he was going too far. He was assuming the existence of idolatry, when in fact there was none. He was of the personality type which was judgmental, and had made his name, as it were, from this. But on this occasion he was allowing the natural human desire to be judgmental to consume him, when he ought to have controlled it. There are so many people like him in the body of Christ today. See on :17.

Jos 22:14 and with him ten princes, one prince of a fathers' house for each of the tribes of Israel; and they were each one of them head of their fathers' houses among the thousands of Israel-
This would have included a prince for the other half of the tribe of Manasseh which was west of Jordan. We wonder how enthusiastic he really was, or like many a member of committees of brethren who are directed to attack other brethren... he maybe secretly disliked this direction, but succumbed to group pressure. Or perhaps the western half tribe were jealous of the apparently better possession which the eastern half apparently had.

Jos 22:15 They came to the children of Reuben and to the children of Gad and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them saying-
Gilead was the very area where Jacob and Laban had built a mound of rocks to symbolize their separation from each other, although with Yahweh watching between them (Gen. 31:23,25). It was also the area where Esau came to slay his brother Jacob, but was stopped in his tracks by God, and by Jacob's repentance. Perhaps something like that was going on here. The eastern tribes may well have had something to repent of; and the hypocritical western tribes were acting as Esau rather than Jacob. Perhaps the eastern tribes, despite fighting for their western brethren against the Canaanites, had fallen out with their brethren. And they had built this altar in the spirit in which Jacob and Laban had built their altar in the same area. But division between brethren is not the same as idolatry, in this context. The fact brethren are separated doesn't make one party idolatrous. Gilead had been specifically given to Machir son of Manasseh in Num. 32:40, so it was quite wrong for the eastern tribes to imply this land was unclean (:19), and that the eastern tribes ought to come and live with the western tribes- with such "unity" enforced at sword point! Terrible abuse has been performed by Christians in the name of "unity within Israel", and we see it all prefigured here.

Jos 22:16 Thus says the whole congregation of Yahweh, 'What trespass is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following Yahweh,

in that you have built yourselves an altar, to rebel this day against Yahweh?-
They considered themselves as those on the west of Jordan to be "the whole congregation of Yahweh". They considered geographical issues, and the unwise choices of seven years previously, to have cut off the eastern tribes from Yahweh's congregation. This is typical of the kind of wrong reasoning which goes on within the body of believers to this day; considering that they alone are the body of believers, and reasoning onwards further from that false assumption and perspective. We also note that half of the tribe of Manasseh were also west of Jordan. So by reasoning like this, they were pitting brother against brother. See on :18.

Jos 22:17 Is the iniquity of Peor of little consequence for us, from which we have not cleansed ourselves to this day, although there came a plague on the congregation of Yahweh-
Phinehas is alluding to how he had saved Israel from destruction at that time by destroying the apostates (see on :13). He implies that although he cleansed Israel at the time, they were still unclean from it in that idolatry was still ongoing. But his hypocrisy is in the way that he is ignoring that the idolatry was not simply in the eastern tribes; it was clearly amongst his own western tribes, as indicated by later commentary upon their spiritual state. Defending the fait against perceived possible idolatry can become obsessive- exactly because it appeals to the flesh. Otherwise fairly lax believers eagerly get caught up in a feeding frenzy of judgment against their own brethren, because it is all a transference onto others of their own weakness and liability to judgment.

Jos 22:18 that you must turn away this day from following Yahweh? It will be, since you rebel today against Yahweh, that tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel-
Their logic is wrong all the way through. They had just reasoned that they alone were the congregation of Israel (see on :16). But now they reason that if those in the congregation east of Jordan sin, then they on the west of Jordan will be punished for it, because all the congregation will suffer together. Yet they have just reasoned that those on the east were not in the congregation of Yahweh. This is the kind of serious error in logic found in nearly all division and aggression within the body of believers today. These ancient records speak so relevantly to our day, for God's word is in this sense a living word.

Jos 22:19 However, if the land of your possession is unclean, then pass over to the land of the possession of Yahweh, in which Yahweh's tabernacle dwells, and take possession among us; but don't rebel against Yahweh, nor rebel against us, in building an altar other than the altar of Yahweh our God-
Clearly the western tribes considered the land east of Jordan to be unclean. They were

ignoring the fact God had given the eastern tribes their inheritance there, calling it the "good land", and defining clearly their borders and cities, even asking for cities of refuge and priestly cities there. They were reasoning in a very parochial way. For the land right up to the Euphrates had been promised to them; indeed the majority of the land promised to Abraham was east of Jordan. God had made a concession to their weakness by recalculating "the river" as the Jordan rather than the Euphrates. They were psychologically transferring their perception [that the land east of Jordan was unclean] onto these people. Likewise they equate rebelling "against us" with rebellion "against Yahweh". They were playing God, assuming that anyone not with them was against them and thus against God. It was just this mentality amongst His followers which the Lord rebuked sternly in Lk. 9:50. See on :31.

As we will see on :29, this is very similar to the exaggerated challenge made by Joshua to the hypocritical western tribes in Josh. 24:15 "If it seems evil to you to serve Yahweh...". Joshua was speaking to the western tribes as they had spoken to the eastern tribes- and accusing them of idolatry, as they had [perhaps falsely, but hypocritically] accused the eastern tribes. The western tribes were being made to feel how they had made the eastern tribes feel; and were being reminded of their own idolatry. God likewise works with men today, often confronting those who confront their brethren, and trying to help them perceive their hypocrisy and repent.

Jos 22:20 Didn't Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the devoted thing, causing wrath to fall on all the congregation of Israel? That man didn't perish alone in his iniquity'-

Again, Biblical precedent is being used wrongly, in order to justify participation in a feeding frenzy of judgmentalism. In the same way as Daniel, Isaiah, Ezra, Israel at the time of Achan etc. were reckoned as guilty but were not personally responsible for the sins of others, so the Lord Jesus was reckoned as a sinner on the cross; He was made sin for us, who knew no sin personally (2 Cor. 5:21). He carried our sins by His association with us, prefigured by the way in which Israel's sins were transferred to the animal; but He personally was not a sinner because of His association with us.

This is no evidence for guilt by association. The situation here has been misinterpreted by some to mean that we therefore cannot associate with sinners of the Achan category, lest we become defiled by association with them. But the point is that all the community of believers are in a sense considered at fault because of the failings of some of them. So if there is guilt by association, then it cannot be avoided by not associating with sinful people within the community. For the people of God, the community, is indivisible. We are in it and cannot quit it, if we wish to remain God's people. And in fact the Lord Jesus time and again turned all this around to the opposite- by willingly seeking association with sinners, eating with them, touching the leper etc.

He was not thereby condemned, but rather sought to highlight His association with unclean people of God. It was through that willing association that we are saved.

Jos 22:21 Then the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered and spoke to the heads of the thousands of Israel-
The style of the record is very slow and deliberate, to focus our attention upon the words spoken, and to perceive for ourselves where truth really lay in this matter.

Jos 22:22 The Mighty One, God, Yahweh, the Mighty One, God, Yahweh, He knows; and Israel shall know if it was in rebellion, or in trespass against Yahweh (don't save us this day)-
The repeated usage of the covenant Name is to show that they were faithful to Yahweh and had not at all turned away to idols; and therefore the harnessing of Dt. 13:12-16 to slay them was quite inappropriate. Their argument in :22,23 seems appropriate to those who are genuinely taken aback by a false accusation of idolatry. They seem to be saying that God knows, and He will judge- and these incensed brethren ought to leave it to Him, and not act for Him. And that is really all we can say to people who are utterly obsessed with finding fault with us and condemning us.

Jos 22:23 He knows whether we have built us an altar to turn away from following Yahweh; or to offer burnt offering or meal offering, or sacrifices of peace offerings-
As discussed on :33, the altar they had built was symbolic and not for actual usage in worship.

Let Yahweh Himself decide-
"Decide" is the word for searching of requiring. The judgment will be the time when God 'requires' of us our behaviour. And yet the Hebrew word is used about our enquiring / searching to God in prayer now (Gen. 25:22; Ex. 18:15; Dt. 4:29; 12:5; 1 Kings 22:5), as well as His 'requiring' / searching of us at the last day (Dt. 18:19; 23:21; Josh. 22:23; 1 Sam. 20:16; 2 Chron. 24:22; Ez. 3:20; 33:6,8). There is a mutuality between a man and his God. We must keep and *seek* for His commandments and He will *seek / search* our hearts in response (1 Chron. 28:8,9- the same original words are used). The wicked don't *seek* for God because they don't think He will *require* their deeds of them; but because He will *require* them, we should *enquire / seek* for Him (Ps. 10:4,13,15- the same word occurs three times). We enquire of Him and He enquires of us, both now and in the last day. This entering into 'enquiry' with our God is what goes on in prayer. In it we have a foretaste of judgment to come.

Jos 22:24 if we have not out of concern done this, and for a reason, saying, 'In time to

come your children might speak to our children saying, What have you to do with Yahweh, the God of Israel?-
The eastern tribes had already effectively started to say this, by implying that the eastern tribes were living in an unclean land and were not part of the congregation of Yahweh; see on :16,19.

Jos 22:25 For Yahweh has made the Jordan a border between us and you, you children of Reuben and children of Gad. You have no portion in Yahweh'. So your children might make our children cease from fearing Yahweh-
Yahweh had indeed established the Jordan as a border between the tribes of Reuben and Gad. Eastern Manasseh didn't have the Jordan as a border. We note the absolute internal consistency of the records. "No portion" is the term often used of how the Levites had "no portion", no tribal canton allotted to them. The eastern tribes foresaw that the western tribes were reasoning toward a position whereby everything east of the Jordan was not the inheritance of Yahweh; see on :19. By so doing, they were totally overlooking the Abrahamic covenant promise of all the land east of Jordan up to the Euphrates. The western tribes were only harnessing a few scriptures out of context, and were overlooking the overall tenor of scriptural teaching.

Jos 22:26 Therefore we said, 'Let's now prepare to build ourselves an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice-
They stress that like the altar built opposite on the other side of Jordan to commemorate the crossing of Jordan, and like the altar built by Jacob in this place, they intended just a memorial and not an active functioning altar. See on :27.

Jos 22:27 but it will be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us-
This continues the allusion to the altar made by Jacob and Laban in the same area, as a "witness" of their positions (Gen. 31:48), just as the altar built on the western side of Jordan was likewise intended as a teaching tool and witness (Josh. 4:6,7).

That we may perform the service of Yahweh before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings;' that your children may not tell our children in time to come, 'You have no portion in Yahweh'-
So they appear to mean in :26 that they did not then at that time intend to use it, but they would use it if later their descendants were banned from worshipping at the sanctuary to the west of Jordan. The idea would be that the altar was a witness of their intentions, and this is another example of the language of inanimate objects speaking and witnessing. This is not literally true, just as demons don't exist, yet the New Testament uses the language of demons as then understood.

Jos 22:28 Therefore we said, 'It shall be, when they tell us or our generations this in time to come, that we shall say, Behold the pattern of the altar of Yahweh, which our fathers made, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice-
We note their calm response to monstrous false accusation- that they were already using the altar for idol worship and therefore must be violently destroyed by their brethren. In fact the altar's meaning [at least, as they explained it] was the very opposite of what the ten tribes had willfully misinterpreted it to mean. LXX "Behold the likeness of the altar of the Lord" suggests they intentionally copied the altar before the tabernacle, because they wanted this altar to be used for sacrifice if they were denied access to that in the sanctuary west of Jordan.

But it is a witness between us and you'-
See on :27.

Jos 22:29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against Yahweh, thus turning away this day from following Yahweh to build an altar for burnt offering, for meal offering, or for sacrifice, in competition with the altar of Yahweh our God that is before His tabernacle!-
The accusation was that they had rebelled against Yahweh (:16,18,19). The western tribes claimed they had evidence for this, and they use the words of Joshua himself found in Num. 14:9 "Only don't rebel against Yahweh". But that verse continues: "Neither fear the people of the land; for they are bread for us. Their defence is removed from over them, and Yahweh is with us. Don't fear them". But the western tribes did fear the Canaanites, and did not drive them out of their territories. So again we see how they justified their jealousy of the eastern tribes by grabbing half of a Bible verse out of context. The rest of that verse shows that it was they who were the rebels against Yahweh. Indeed all Israel were rebellious against Yahweh from the day He knew them (Dt. 9:24), and Nehemiah 9:26 specifically states that after entering the land, they "were disobedient and rebelled against You". Josh. 24:23 is specific that there was idolatry going on amongst the western tribes at this time, so their attempt to exterminate the eastern tribes for unproven accusations of idolatry is to be seen as hypocritical.

These are pretty much the words of the western tribes in Josh. 24:16. The western tribes were hypocritical in implying that they were so totally devoted to Yahweh alone that they had to slay their eastern brethren because of their possible idolatry. In Josh. 24, they are effectively accused of idolatry by Joshua in the same way as they accused the eastern tribes of it. And they are answering in the same way- even though they were guilty of idolatry themselves, and needed to "put away" their idols (Josh. 24:14). Phinehas (:30) is revealed here as somewhat hypocritical, for surely he was aware of the situation in Israel. For Joshua himself clearly knew that idolatry was widespread amongst them, as his speech in Josh. 24 makes clear.

Jos 22:30 When Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation, even the heads of the thousands of Israel that were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them well-

What "pleased" or 'was good in the eyes of' the elders was likewise 'good in the eyes of' the peoples of the western tribes (s.w. :33). Major decisions about the fate of many people, going to war or not, were based upon what seemed good in the eyes of 11 men. I suggest on :32 that there must have been other issues going on here beneath the surface.

Jos 22:31 Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh, Today we know that Yahweh is in the midst of us, because you have not committed this trespass against Yahweh. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of Yahweh-

Yahweh's hand was not against the tribes east of Jordan. The hand that was against them was the hand of the western tribes, motivated by personal dislike and jealousy. Again they make the mistake of playing God, assuming that their positions are God's; see on :19. And Phinehas offers no apology for his wrong assumption that the altar was idolatrous; he seeks to save face by implying they had in fact repented, and thereby saved the rest of Israel from being punished by Yahweh. Again we note the contradiction in logic. The western tribes had just reasoned that they alone were the congregation of Israel (see on :16). But now they reason that if those in the congregation east of Jordan sin, then they on the west of Jordan will be punished for it, because all the congregation will suffer together. Yet they have just claimed that those on the east were not in the congregation of Yahweh.

Jos 22:32 Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the princes, returned from the children of Reuben, and from the children of Gad, out of the land of Gilead, to the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought them word again-

We see here the fickleness of people. One moment they were intent on destroying their brethren, claiming to have researched the matter and found them guilt of idolatry. And now they are all "pleased" with the words of the men of the eastern tribes. Given the massive problem with idolatry throughout Israel at this time, one suspects that some unrecorded deal was cut between the two sides, and that there were ulterior motives for wanting to fight against the eastern tribes.

Jos 22:33 The thing pleased the children of Israel; and the children of Israel blessed God, and spoke no more of going up to destroy in warfare the land in which the children of Reuben and the children of Gad lived-

Israelites from the western tribes were later to be persecuted for their faithlessness and crossed the Jordan into the territory of Gad (1 Sam. 13:7). This is fair commentary upon the situation in Josh. 22:19,25, where the Israelites accused Gad of falling away from Yahweh worship, and the people of Gad explained that they feared that the other Israelites would make the Jordan a boundary which they would use to exclude them from Yahweh worship. All these fears and speculations about the future are here shown to be inappropriate. Actually the very opposite worked out. And this is the problem with so many divisions between brethren; they are based upon fears of possible futures, and the passage of time often shows the opposite working out.

Jos 22:34 The children of Reuben and the children of Gad named the altar 'A Witness Between Us that Yahweh is God'-

The implication of course was that "We will serve Yahweh alone". If Yahweh is God, which the Bible states on about every page of the Old Testament in the phrase "Yahweh God", then it is axiomatic that we are to serve Him with unique loyalty.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 23

Jos 23:1 It happened after many days, when Yahweh had given rest to Israel from their enemies all around and Joshua was old and well advanced in years-
Joshua didn't give the people rest (Heb. 4:8); although he potentially enabled it (Josh. 22:4). He failed to fulfil the potential of Josh. 1:13-15- that *he* would lead the people to "rest". The Messianic Kingdom could, perhaps, have come through Joshua-Jesus; but Israel would not. And so his work was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who does give "rest" to the true people of God (Heb. 4:8). See on Josh. 21:43,44; 23:4; 24:14,23.

Jos 23:2 that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, their heads, their judges and for their officers and said to them, I am old and well advanced in years-
He invited "all Israel", but it seems from :4 that only those west of Jordan came. Already the unwisdom of settlement to the east of Jordan was apparent. They put secular advantage before spiritual fellowship, and suffered for it.

Jos 23:3 You have seen all that Yahweh your God has done to all these nations because of you; for it is Yahweh your God who has fought for you-
Nehemiah 9:26 specifically states that after entering the land, they "were disobedient and rebelled against You". Given the very quick descent into idolatry we read of in Judges, it is clear that Yahweh fought for Israel because of Joshua's faith and His loving grace towards them- and not because of their spirituality.

Jos 23:4 Behold, I have allotted to you these nations that remain to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even to the great sea toward the going down of the sun-
The Lord Jesus may allude here in saying that He has appointed unto us a Kingdom (LK. 22:29). Joshua enabled the Kingdom, overcame all obstacles to it, and appointed it to Israel. But he couldn't drag them in to possess it and experience it, and neither will the Lord Jesus do. Joshua seems here to be addressing the western tribes- for he speaks of inheritance from the Jordan to the Mediterranean. See on :2.

Jos 23:5 Yahweh your God will thrust them out from before you, and drive them from out of your sight. You shall possess their land, as Yahweh your God spoke to you-
"Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an

inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jos 23:6 Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that you not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left-
See on Josh. 1:7,8. Because God gave them the land of Canaan, a land for which they did not labour, didn't do any 'work' to receive, but were given because "You did a favour unto them" (Ps. 44:3)- *therefore* they were to keep the law (Dt. 26:15,16; 29:8,9; Josh. 23:5,6). David said that he loved keeping the law *because* God's testimony to him was so miraculous (Ps. 119:129 Heb.). There is an awesomeness to God's grace in all this. Hence the paradox of Ex. 20:20: "Fear not... that the fear of God may be before your faces". We are not to fear Him, for such perfect love casts out fear... yet it is exactly because of the wonder of all this that we live life in some fear / awe of misusing and abusing that grace.

As Joshua had been told to be strong and of good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others (Josh. 10:25). As God charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law, so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people (Josh. 1:7,8 cp. 23:6). Joshua had faithfully followed, and now he became the leader who was to be faithfully followed.

Jos 23:7 that you not mingle with these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow down yourselves to them-
Yahweh repeatedly forbad His people to mention the name of other gods. In the Ancient Near East, all conflict between peoples and nations was seen as conflict between gods. The role of prophets or priests on either side was to bring curses upon the other gods. And so they repeated the names of the other gods in incantations supposed to bring curses upon those gods. This however is forbidden to God's people. They instead were to focus upon the Name of their God Yahweh. And we see in this a pattern for ourselves; to focus upon the ultimate truth and truths of the one true God, and not be caught up in wishing cursing upon those who believe otherwise. To focus upon the positive, which is

the source of all victory, rather than going on the defensive against other views by cursing them.

'Don't even make mention of their gods' is alluded to in Eph. 5:3; Paul understands idolatry in our age as referring to the perversions and pleasures of the world around us.

Josh. 23:7 made a concession regarding the nations left in the land. The ideal standard was to destroy them. But the concession was made that they should not socialize with them or worship their gods. But inevitably they did mix with those nations and learned their religions. Likewise the early Jewish Christians were allowed to keep the Mosaic law (in concessions to human weakness like that of Acts 15), but this really implied a lack of faith in Christ's sacrifice, with the result that many of them seem to have drifted back to Judaism. Concessions to human weakness [we think of God allowing them to have a human king and a temple, which were not His will, and His permission for the eastern tribes to settle far from His sanctuary] are made because God wants by all means to continue relationship with us; but they actually make the path to relationship with Him more difficult.

Jos 23:8 but hold fast to Yahweh your God, as you have done to this day-
We wonder whether this was really true. "Hold fast" is the word for "cleave" used of marriage (Gen. 2:24). Israel's faithfulness to God's covenant is likened to marital faithfulness. Their associations with other gods were therefore adultery. It rather seems that Joshua's faith had led to blessing for the people. For they very soon turned after the gods of the land. I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jos 23:9 For Yahweh has driven great and strong nations out from before you. But as for you, no man has stood before you to this day-
And yet even at this time, Israel felt the nations to be too strong for them (Jud. 1:1); despite every evidence that they would win if they tried to fight them. Likewise the Lord Jesus, the greater Joshua, has won every victory, and therefore anything that appears an obstacle between us and possession of the Kingdom is going to soon crumble. If we fight it. But like Israel, we tend to not even seriously try.

Jos 23:10 One man of you shall chase a thousand; for it is Yahweh your God who fights for you, as He spoke to you-
Joshua is recalling the reversal at Ai, when Israel had been chased by their enemies for disobedience to the covenant. And likewise he recalls how it was God who had fought for Israel during the multiple victories against the Canaanites.

Samson is to be read as a symbol of Israel: "Be therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses... that you come not among these nations, these that remain among you (true in Samson's time)...but cleave unto the Lord your God... no man has been able to stand before you (this was Samson)... one man of you shall chase a thousand (cp. Jud. 15:16): for the Lord your God, He it is that fights for you (this was exactly true of Samson in Jud. 15:18)... take good heed unto yourselves... else if you do at all go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and make marriages with them (as Samson did), and go in unto them, and they to you (cp. Jud. 15:1; 16:, where Samson went in to the Philistine women): know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you (cp. 16:20); but they shall be snares and traps unto you (Delilah!)... and thorns in your eyes, until you perish" (Josh. 23:6-13). This passage would associate Samson's God-given strength and victory over the Philistines with his obedience to God's word.

Jos 23:11 Take good heed therefore to yourselves, that you love Yahweh your God-
Yahweh was to be loved with all the heart, soul and mind (Dt. 6:5). This is understood by Joshua as meaning that those who loved Yahweh would not "mix with" and intermarry with the nations and accept their gods (Josh. 23:11,12,16). "Love" for God was not therefore a feeling; Joshua said that they must "take good heed therefore to yourselves, that you love Yahweh" (Josh. 23:11). This is the love of conscious direction of the mind, the love which is a choice rather than an emotion.

Jos 23:12 But if you do at all mix with and hold fast to the remnant of these nations, even these who remain among you, and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you-
In this context of marriage out of the Faith, we read that God will destroy "him that hates Him" (Dt. 7:2-11), and repay him to his face. On the other hand, not marrying Gentiles was part of *loving* God (Josh. 23:11,12). Joshua's warning that those who married the surrounding tribes would find them "a snare and a trap for you... thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:12,13 RSV) was fulfilled in Samson being tied up and blinded by Delilah; and yet it also had an element of fulfillment with his first wife. The similarity is such as to suggest that Samson's marriage out of the Truth was definitely wrong because it was a

fulfillment of the words of Josh. 23. But God worked through it, so eager is He to work with less than ideal choices of His children.

Jos 23:13 know for a certainty that Yahweh your God will no longer drive these nations from out of your sight; but they shall be a snare and a trap to you, a scourge in your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which Yahweh your God has given you-
This is explicit that it was because of marriage out of the faith that Israel lost their inheritance in the Kingdom, and the Gentile nations there remained a thorn in their eyes. Because of the seriousness of it, the prohibitions against intermarriage are often accompanied with an unmistakable threat of judgment: "The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this" (Mal. 2:11); "destroy them... (the Lord) will not be slack...he will repay him to his face" (Dt. 7:2,10); "know for a certainty... that God will expel you from the land" if you intermarry (Josh. 23:12,13); "him shall God destroy" (2 Co. 6:14-16 cp. 1 Cor. 3:13). If we deny our covenant with God by marrying into the world, we have effectively cut ourselves off from Him.

We are to be renewed in knowledge, finding full assurance of our salvation in *understanding* (Col. 2:2; 3:10). The Hebrew word for “understanding” is also that for “certainty”- e.g. Josh. 23:13 “Know for a *certainty*...” [s.w. “understanding”]. To understand is to be sure, in God’s language. Understanding, "being filled with the knowledge of his will", *does* have a place in determining our daily walk in Christ. What and how we understand, and thereby what we believe, *does* therefore matter.

Jos 23:14 Behold, today I am going the way of all the earth. You know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which Yahweh your God spoke concerning you. All have happened to you, not one thing has failed of it-
Literally, 'not a word from all the good word'. Every word of promise concerning every town, field, cattle drive and suburb didn't fail. God's prophecies do not fail of themselves; it is human weakness which fails to realize the prophetic potential. Indeed as concluded in Josh. 24:18 "Yahweh drove out from before us all the peoples". But Israel failed to make good on that, for they didn't drive out all the peoples. This all speaks of the tragic wasted potential which there is in all that the Lord Jesus achieved. He won the victories over every aspect of sin, every obstacle between us and possessing the Kingdom. But we are slow and lazy to believe and act upon that. See on Josh. 24:15.

Jos 23:15 It shall happen that as all the good things have come on you of which Yahweh your God spoke to you, so Yahweh will bring on you all the evil things until He has destroyed you from off this good land which Yahweh your God has given you-

Joshua alludes to how they had read the blessings and cursings at mount Ebal. As it happened, Israel did worship other gods consistently. And yet it took centuries before God removed them from the land. His patient grace was wonderful. Likewise the experience of "good things" was by God's grace, giving the rewards for obedience to those who were disobedient. Much of it was achieved by Joshua, and this, it seems, was counted to the people.

Jos 23:16 if you disobey the covenant of Yahweh your God which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down yourselves to them. Then the anger of Yahweh will be kindled against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given to you-

Joshua is making the same point time and again. He obviously sensed the tendency towards idolatry, which makes the apparent zeal of the western tribes to destroy the eastern tribes in Josh. 22 so deeply hypocritical.

JOSHUA CHAPTER 24

Jos 24:1 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God-

"Before God" means before Joshua or before the tabernacle. This is a major theme in the Bible- that the representative of a person or entity is spoken of as being that person. Understanding this helps us easily understand the verses wrested to support the mistaken doctrine of the Trinity.

Jos 24:2 Joshua said to all the people, Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, 'Your fathers lived of old time beyond the River, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods-

The meanings of Abraham's immediate ancestors all have associations with idolatry, confirming the note here that Abram and his ancestors were idolaters. Out of that background, God chose a man who had the potential to be different. Another reading of "Terah" is that it means "One who tarries / remains", which would fit with his remaining in Haran and not going further towards Canaan.

Jos 24:3 I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac-

Note that God took Abram, when Abram had been asked to leave of his own volition. He didn't do this, and so God as it were muscled in and dragged him out. God made him obedient to the call. Gen. 20:13 LXX has "when God brought me forth out of the house of my father"; we see the emphasis upon God bringing him out to separation from his relatives, rather than his obedience to the call to do so. By saying this, he would be growing closer to appreciating grace; that God caused him to be obedient when he of himself was not. This is the same work of the Spirit which continues in our days. The Gentile believers are in this sense 'made obedient' by the Spirit's work (Rom. 15:18; 1 Pet. 1:2). Truly our salvation is not of works of obedience, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:9).

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

Jos 24:4 I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau. I gave to Esau Mount Seir, to possess it. Jacob and his children went down into Egypt-

We note the stress is on how Isaac was given children, the seed; whereas Esau was

given possessions. This is a difference between the believer and the world. Esau as the direct grandson of Abraham could have had the promises of inheritance of the eretz relevant to him; but he chose to go out of that land. Mount Seir was just outside the promised land (Josh. 15:10). And so God accepted that and gave him an inheritance in Seir, although without the promises of eternal inheritance and of the saviour seed. He wanted a possession immediately in this life, and God gave Esau what he really wanted. And this is part of a big theme, both in the Bible and in life- that we get what we truly want. And so what is so critical is a spiritual mind that wants the things of the Kingdom above all.

Jos 24:5 I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt according to that which I did in its midst: and afterward I brought you out-
The idea is that this was all done by God with a view to bringing His people into Canaan, and their serving Him exclusively, with no worship of other gods. The plaguing of Egypt is mentioned in this context; for the plagues were each one targeting a specific idol (Ex. 12:12). And it seems from Josh. 24:14 that Israel had taken those gods with them, and were worshipping the very idols which Yahweh had plagued. This points up the hypocrisy of the western tribes in appearing so hyper zealous to destroy the eastern tribes because of their suspected, although unproven, idolatry.

Jos 24:6 I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and you came to the sea. The Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and with horsemen to the Red Sea-
They were brought out of Egypt just as Abraham was "taken" from Ur (see on :3). This was all by grace. Although the pursuit of Israel by the Egyptians was a historical act at a specific time, caused by God's direct action upon the hearts of the Egyptians (Ex. 14:8), the pursuit and their destruction is described as ongoing "to this day" (Dt. 11:4). God's word and His actions according to that word are somehow alive to this day. This is the unique nature of Biblical history. All the incidents within it speak to us of later generations. And so in Josh. 24;6 and often, Israel are bidden understand their history as speaking directly to them, to perceive God's grace to them in history, and respond now. Ps. 114:5,6 RV describes the Red Sea as even now fleeing before God's people. And thus because of the records of God's past activities, we should be motivated in our decisions now. Josh. 24:13,14 reminds Israel of the record of their past history with God, and then on this basis exhorts them: "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him..." .

This Divine speech relayed by Joshua is clearly repeating the argument and some phrases from Dt. 11:2-9, which climaxes in the appeal to not serve idols but obey Yahweh exclusively. This was to be the power of history in human life. Yet human nature has a tendency to declare history as bunk, reflecting our preference to live for the immediate present and disregard the past.

Jos 24:7 When they cried out to Yahweh, He put darkness between you and the

Egyptians and brought the sea on them, and covered them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt; and you lived in the wilderness many days-
Darkness was believed to be somehow demonic and under the control of the gods. But those gods didn't exist, and therefore they should not worship them. For the darkness was controlled by God. "Your eyes saw..." could suggest that Joshua was particularly addressing the generation who were under 20 when they had left Egypt. But still they were worshipping the idols of Egypt (:14), and at least one of them was the god of darkness, whom Yahweh had targetted in the plague of darkness, and shown His supremacy over at the Red Sea crossing.

Jos 24:8 I brought you into the land of the Amorites that lived beyond the Jordan; and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand. You possessed their land; and I destroyed them from before you-
This conflict had been intended as a foretaste of their far larger scale victories against the Canaanites, and possession of Canaan. God gently leads us through one experience to prepare us for the next, larger one. AV "That you might possess their land". "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jos 24:9 Then Balak the son of Zippor king of Moab arose and fought against Israel. He sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you-
This conflict with Balak, and their salvation from him and Balaam by grace, had been intended as a foretaste of their far larger scale victories against the Canaanites, and possession of Canaan. God gently leads us through one experience to prepare us for the next, larger one.

Jos 24:10 but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you still. So I delivered

you out of his hand-
Balaam, in his heart, didn't want to bless Israel; he wanted to curse them so he could get his hands on the riches Balak promised him if he did so. Balaam knew if God had told him to bless Israel, there was no way of changing things. But God says that He refused to hear Balaam's prayer to curse Israel. It seems that Yahweh read Balaam's latent, unexpressed desires as prayer to Him. It is our dominant desire which is read as prayer. For otherwise the efficacy of prayer would be related to how good we are at verbalizing things, and not everyone is good at that. Our innermost desires are read as prayer; hence Elijah was understood as praying *against* Israel in his heart, and God refused to hear that too (Rom. 11:2). There is another example of this kind of thing in :11.

Jos 24:11 You went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. The men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Girgashite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite; and I delivered them into your hand-
There is no record of the men of Jericho fighting against Israel; perhaps their intention to do so was read by God as if they had done it. Shutting the gates against Israel and not submitting to the call to repentance which was implicit in the jubilee trumpet blasts was perhaps read as actively resisting Israel. For passivity can also be a form of 'fighting against' in aggression. This continues the theme discussed on :10, that internal attitudes are read by God as far more than that.

We note there are typically seven nations listed as dwelling in the land, as here. This sets up the basis for understanding the 'kings of the earth / land' in later Biblical prophecy as referring to leaders within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

Jos 24:12 I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites-
The fear amongst the Canaanites prior to Israel's approach and the weakness of those nations was due to "the hornet" being sent before Israel (Dt. 7:20; Josh. 24:12); it would seem that this is a reference to the Angels softening up the Canaanite tribes, perhaps through inciting the Egyptians to raid them and ruin the economy. And specifically, the two kings of the Amorites attacking the other Canaanites. "The hornet" could also refer to the Phoenician raiders, who had hornets as totems; they too weakened Canaan before the Israelites arrived, and would have been manipulated to do so by an Angel. In Ex. 23:27 God says He will "send My fear before you, and will destroy all the people to whom you shall come". Jacob likens his guardian Angel to "the God before whom my fathers walked" (Gen. 48:16), who is called "the fear of Isaac" (Gen. 31:42,53) when Jacob describes the personal presence of God in his life. So the "fear of God" is associated with an Angel; God sent His fear, an Angel, before Israel into Canaan, as

promised explicitly in Ex. 23. "The hornet" could have referred to literal hornets, used by God to destroy the nations of Canaan. For they were indeed a problem in the land; "Zorah" in Judah means "place of hornets". But I prefer the idea that the Angel manipulated Gentile nations to soften up the Canaanites before Israel's arrival. The same figure is found in Is. 7:18, where God whistled for the "fly that is in Egypt and the bee that is in Assyria". We note that this was all built in to God's wider plan; for had Israel entered Canaan 40 years before they did, they would've found the Canaanites that much stronger than they were after "the hornet" had weakened them for 40 years. It's as if God recalculated the program according to the great weakness of Israel. They didn't enter when they could have done, and so He used the period of their wilderness wanderings to make their entrance to the land that much easier than it would otherwise have been.

Not with your sword, nor with your bow-
"Bow" and "sword" often occur together as almost an idiom for human strength (Gen.48:22; Josh. 24:12; 2 Kings 6:22; 1 Ch. 5:18; Hos. 1:7). Right at the very end of Jacob's life, he lets slip a comment which would seem more appropriate to his earlier life: "Shechem... which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with *my* sword and with *my* bow" (Gen. 48:22). The wrongness of this attitude seems to be alluded to in Josh. 24:12, which says that God drove out the tribes "but not with your sword, neither with your bow". And Ps. 44:3,6 also: "They got not the land in possession by their own sword... I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me". So Jacob, right at the end of his life, still hadn't completely overcome that besetting weakness of self-reliance. This is, of course, a dangerous road to go down. In no way can we be complacent about our urgent need for spiritual growth. But on the other hand, we will never reach the stature of Christ without righteousness being imputed to us.

Jos 24:13 I gave you a land whereon you had not laboured-
The spies' comment that not all the people needed to "toil" or "labour" to capture Ai betrays a wrong idea that victory was through their labour, rather than God's grace (Josh. 7:3). And so Josh. 24:13 uses the word in saying that Israel were given a land for which they did not "labour" (s.w.). They were taught through Achan's sin that they were not defeating the Canaanites by their strength, but by God's undeserved grace. Their inheritance of the Kingdom was not according to works.

And cities which you didn't build, and you live in them. You eat of vineyards and olive groves which you didn't plant-
This continues the repeated reminder that they had been shown grace and a place in the Kingdom not according to works. This emphasis upon grace now leads up to the appeal to quit any other gods (:14)- because Yahweh alone is the God of grace. The

other gods had no concept of this; it was unique to Yahweh. And true grace is likewise the unique feature of true Christianity.

Jonah 2:8 reflects Jonah's understanding of this: "Those who regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy". This is a profound truth; true grace ["mercy" is *hesed*] and salvation is only found in Yahweh the God of Israel. To forsake Him is to forsake our own access to mercy and grace. Jonah was surely reflecting upon how the sailors had begged their idols and gods for salvation, and not found it. Only Yahweh had provided such saving grace, both to them and to Jonah. This reflection was surely to motivate Jonah to now go and try to persuade the Ninevites of Yahweh's grace. Jonah is constantly quoting from the Psalms, and here he may have in mind Ps. 31:6: "I have hated them that regard lying vanities". But now Jonah doesn't hate the idolaters personally, but rather perceives the tragedy of the fact that they are rejecting their own access to Yahweh's grace. Yahweh is all about mercy, or grace; again, Ps. 59:17 "the God of my mercy" is in mind. But we preclude His grace if we trust in the lying vanities of this world.

Jos 24:14 Now therefore fear Yahweh, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth-
God's living word places us in their position; for the appeal to serve Him in "sincerity and in truth" applies to us (1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 1:12; 2:17).

Put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh-
See on :13. Compare Joshua's earlier over positive statements. Now it seems he came to a final sense of realism about sin, obedience and Israel's failure. They had taken the idols of Egypt with them (Ez. 20:6-8 also mentions this), even though God had judged those idols (:5). They worshipped that which had afflicted them, and they were to continue worshipping the idols of their enemies. Acts 7:43 speaks of them carrying another tabernacle with them through the wilderness, and the star of Remphan along with the standards of the tribes. This is the idiocy of idol worship; but when it comes to spiritual matters, we act without attention to even basic logic.

Jos 24:15 If it seems evil to you to serve Yahweh-
As we will see on :16, this is very similar to the exaggerated challenge made by the hypocritical western tribes to the eastern tribes in Josh. 22:19 "However, if the land of your possession is unclean, then pass over to the land of the possession of Yahweh". Joshua was speaking to the western tribes as they had spoken to the eastern tribes- and accusing them of idolatry, as they had [perhaps falsely, but hypocritically] accused the eastern tribes. The western tribes were being made to feel how they had made the eastern tribes feel; and were being reminded of their own idolatry. God likewise works

with men today, often confronting those who confront their brethren, and trying to help them perceive their hypocrisy and repent.

Choose this day whom you will serve-
Elijah uses the same logic in 1 Kings 18:21, offering Israel an 'all or nothing' choice between total devotion to Yahweh, and idolatry.

Whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell-
Joshua asks them to make two choices. Firstly, to decide whether they want to serve Yahweh exclusively, and any other choice apart from that would be "evil". And then, if they did choose other gods, they were to decide which of them they preferred, and serve them exclusively- either the gods of Abraham's family, or those of the land of Canaan. This second choice was surely sarcastic, but it was inviting them to see the seriousness of the situation. Israel however were to be characterized by serving many gods of many nations, whereas as the prophets point out, a nation usually only served one set of gods and didn't change their gods unless they were forced to by domination by other nations. But Israel were, as Hosea says, like a sexually addicted woman, ever seeking new religious experiences. See on :19.

As for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh-
Joshua perhaps feels that he and his family alone have chosen to exclusively serve Yahweh. In the context of his argument in this verse, any other choice apart from total devotion to Yahweh is "evil". This is the logic of total commitment to the things of Yahweh. Joshua appears to be alluding to Gen. 18:19, as if raising a family devoted to Yahweh is the sign of being a true seed of Abraham. I will note on :19 that as in :15, Joshua almost encourages Israel not to try serving Yahweh whilst worshipping idols; and is perhaps implying that God's purpose with His people can continue through him and his family, as God had once offered to do with Moses.

Jos 24:16 The people answered, Far be it from us that we should forsake Yahweh to serve other gods-
These are pretty much the words of the eastern tribes in Josh. 22:29 (see on :15). The western tribes were hypocritical in implying that they were so totally devoted to Yahweh alone that they had to slay their eastern brethren because of their possible idolatry. They are effectively accused of idolatry by Joshua in the same way as they accused the eastern tribes of it. And they are answering in the same way- even though they were guilty of idolatry themselves, and needed to "put away" their idols (Josh. 24:14).

Jos 24:17 for it is Yahweh our God who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way in which we went, and among all the peoples through the

midst of whom we passed-
The people repeat the words of Joshua, as if they assent to all he has said, and recognize Yahweh's grace and care toward them. And yet there is no evidence that they actually quit their idols, as demanded in :14. We expect and hope to read that they offered up their idols to Joshua and he destroyed them. But nothing like that happens; there is just an intellectual assent to being Yahweh worshippers, and an acceptance of His power in history. But they failed to translate that into present reality. And so it can easily be, as week by week God's people sing words and assent to such statements; and yet keep their idols.

Jos 24:18 Yahweh drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve Yahweh; for He is our God-
See on :18. They insist that Yahweh "is our God"; not "will be". They are arguing that Yahweh has always been their God and still is, and by implication, they have not wickedly departed from him, and are all set to continue with Him. They seem to be saying that they believe in His existence and in His historical actions for His people, but we expect to read a heartfelt repentance in response to the demand in :14 that they quit their idols. But that is not forthcoming. They refuse to engage with Joshua's accusation against them. What they say is disappointing for what it doesn't say. Their words therefore become nothing but a cultural and historical acceptance of "Yahweh", whilst refusing to engage with His demands upon His people. It was mere religion, and not spirituality.

Jos 24:19 Joshua said to the people, You can't serve Yahweh-
The Lord Jesus alludes to this in Mt. 5:24, warning His followers that they "cannot serve" God and mammon. He thereby interprets idols as "mammon", wealth and the good life. We will read in :31 that they did "serve Yahweh", but Joshua here says that they could not do so acceptably, unless they ditched their idols. Which they didn't. The people understood serving Yahweh as doing the rituals of His religion, whereas Joshua understood it as serving Him exclusively with no place in their hearts for any idolatry.

For He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your disobedience nor your sins-
As in :15, Joshua almost seems to be encouraging them to devote themselves to their idols, and to stop claiming to be Yahweh's servants. This presumably was because he understood the principle that knowledge brings responsibility. They would be terribly punished if they continued to claim to serve Him and yet served idols; it were better for them in the long term to accept how they were, and to leave Him. Joshua seems to imply in :15 that God's purpose with His people can continue through him and his family, as God had once offered to do with Moses.

Joshua alludes to the words of warning to Israel in Ex. 23:21. The jealousy of God is a natural result of the depth of His love and unique commitment to His people, as the prophets often state. Israel's adultery was going to provoke His jealousy and anger with them. And yet although the things stated here about God are absolutely true on one level, the passages which speak of God as the betrayed lover (Jer. 2, Ez. 16,23 and all Hosea) reveal that *despite this*, He so loves Israel that He wants to save them and love them all the same. This is the inexplicable paradox of God's love for His people.

Jos 24:20 If you forsake Yahweh and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you evil and consume you, after He has done you good-
As discussed on :19, this was true, and yet God's love was such that He ever sought their return, and in wrath He remembered amazing mercy. Joshua also states things in rather too simple terms here, as if they would be consumed if they were to serve other gods. The reality was that they were serving foreign gods then at that time, just as they had in Egypt and throughout the wilderness journeys (:14). And still God had given them the Kingdom, and amazing victories against their enemies. He did eventually turn and consume them (Is. 63:10). "After He has done you good" was a reminder that no matter how much blessing they had received at that point, it is never a case of 'once saved always saved'. Despite all that, He could still destroy them.

Jos 24:21 The people said to Joshua, No, but we will serve Yahweh-
We expect to read a heartfelt repentance in response to the demand in :14 that they quit their idols. But that is not forthcoming; there is no word of repentance or regret, no admission of wrongdoing. They refuse to engage with Joshua's accusation against them. What they say is disappointing for what it doesn't say. Their words therefore become nothing but a cultural and historical acceptance of "Yahweh", whilst refusing to engage with His demands upon His people. It was mere religion, and not spirituality.

Jos 24:22 Joshua said to the people, You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen Yahweh, to serve Him. They said, We are witnesses-
"You have chosen Yahweh" in the context means that out of the range of gods in their possession, they had chosen Yahweh. This is why Joshua goes on :23 to beg them therefore to put away their idols. "Witnesses against yourselves" suggests Joshua was confident, perhaps by Divine revelation, that they would not be uniquely loyal to Yahweh, and would suffer for it. There would be a future day of judgment, and they would be the witnesses called up to testify against them.

Jos 24:23 Now therefore put away the foreign gods which are among you-
See on :22. This is specific that there was idolatry going on amongst the western tribes

at this time, so their attempt to exterminate the eastern tribes for unproven accusations of idolatry is to be seen as hypocritical (Josh. 22).

And incline your heart to Yahweh, the God of Israel-
This shows that the essence of idolatry, as well as service of God, is the heart. They were asked to make a conscious mental effort to incline their hearts to God, but Solomon prays that God will do this to His people (1 Kings 8:58 s.w.). God is capable of working directly on the human heart and we can ask for His Holy Spirit to effect this; to give us a heart for Him, to incline our hearts to Him. And yet the same phrase is used of how Solomon's wives inclined his heart to idols (1 Kings 11:2,4,9). Although God will work upon our hearts and deepest psychology, He will not force us, and will allow us to allow others to also incline our hearts away from Him.

Jos 24:24 The people said to Joshua, We will serve Yahweh our God, and we will listen to His voice-
Again, we are disappointed by their lack of engagement with the call to put away their gods (:14,23). We expect to read their words of repentance, and pulling out their idols and burning them. But they instead just state that they will serve Yahweh and respect His word. This can be what His people say today, in the words of songs sung, liturgies recited, and loyalty to the church proclaimed. Whilst we are totally refusing to engage with the call to quit our idolatry.

Jos 24:25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem-
The covenant on Sinai (Ex. 19:20) was reaffirmed in the plains of Moab (Dt. 29:1) and on Joshua's death (Josh. 24:25), and was to be reaffirmed every seven years (Dt. 31:9-11,25,26). It is this reaffirmation of covenant relationship which we make in the breaking of bread service.

Jos 24:26 Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a great stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of Yahweh-
The oak in Shechem (:1) was that of Gen. 35:4, at which the sons of Jacob / Israel had reaffirmed their covenant with God and had buried their idols. We eagerly hope to read that Israel likewise buried their idols there. But there is no word of that. They reaffirm the covenant, but don't ditch their idols. And this has poignant warning for we who regularly reaffirm the covenant through the breaking of bread service. The question is, have we buried our idols, or are we just reaffirming a covenant in words only?

Jos 24:27 Joshua said to all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us;

for it has heard all the words of Yahweh which He spoke to us. It shall be therefore a witness against you, lest you deny your God-
Some of the Bible's language refers to pagan superstitions which are evidently untrue; thus stones listen (Josh. 24:27), trees talk (Jud. 9:8-15), corpses speak (Is. 14:9-11). These ideas are clearly nonsense. And yet they are picked up and used by the Spirit in order to express God's word to people in contemporary terms. The language of demons is used likewise in the New Testament.

Jos 24:28 So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance-
The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's Kingdom, possibly based around spiritual family units.

Jos 24:29 It happened that, after these things, Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Yahweh, died, being one hundred and ten years old-
Numbers and ages in Hebrew literature are not necessarily to be taken literally. This was the age at which Joseph is recorded as reaching (Gen. 50:26), and we will read in :32 of the burial of Joseph's bones at Shechem, at the same time as Joshua is buried. We are clearly invited to see a connection between the two men, both of them maintaining spirituality and hope in the Kingdom whilst surrounded by unspirituality and terrible failure by God's people to realize their potential.

Jos 24:30 They buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathserah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash-
"In the border" may mean that they believed even then that one day he would be resurrected, and then immediately enter into his eternal inheritance. LXX adds: "There they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel in Galgala, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord appointed them; and there they are to this day".

Jos 24:31 Israel served Yahweh all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work of Yahweh that He had worked for Israel-
This serving of Yahweh is not to say that they served Him exclusively. The idea may be that they did His "service" as required by the law of Moses in the sanctuary. Joshua in :19 had said that they could not 'serve Yahweh' acceptably, unless they ditched their idols. Which they didn't. The people understood serving Yahweh as doing the rituals of

His religion, whereas Joshua understood it as serving Him exclusively with no place in their hearts for any idolatry.

Jos 24:32 They buried the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, in Shechem, in the parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money. They became the inheritance of the children of Joseph-

See on :29. Like Jacob, Joseph's heart was in the land of promise. Joseph's bones were 'carried up' with them when Israel left Egypt. The New Testament emphasizes the paradox: that the patriarchs bought land in the land which was their eternal inheritance. They couldn't bury their dead nor pitch their tent without having to realize that the land wasn't theirs. The same paradox was taught in Jacob having to call Esau his "lord", the younger serving the elder; but in faith that things would not eternally be that way. Joseph's bones were buried here later (Josh. 24:32), which suggests that Jacob bought it with a view of it becoming a burial place and Israelite sanctuary. Yet Acts 7:16 says that Abraham bought this land as a burial place; perhaps the paradox deepens in that they were deceived out of their "own" land and had to pay for it twice, even though it was eternally theirs.

We note that Joseph's bones were finally buried in Shechem (Josh. 24:32), the specific inheritance given to him by Jacob. Yet it was from Shechem that the 17 year old Joseph had gone to "seek" his brothers. And finally he returns there. It's as if his amazing work in seeking and saving his brothers was finally fulfilled; for their names will be written on the new Jerusalem, and we can assume that his work in seeking and saving them, through so much hurt, grace, wisdom, patience and forgiveness, was finally done and achieved.

Jos 24:33 Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in the hill of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim-

LXX adds: "In that day the children of Israel took the ark of God, and carried it about among them; and Phinees exercised the priest's office in the room of Eleazar his father till he died, and he was buried in his own place Gabaar: but the children of Israel departed every one to their place, and to their own city: and the children of Israel worshipped Astarte, and Astaroth, and the gods of the nations round about them; and the Lord delivered them into the hands of Eglom king of Moab and he ruled over them eighteen years".

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: JUDGES

JUDGES

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

JUDGES CHAPTER 1

Jdg 1:1 After the death of Joshua the children of Israel asked Yahweh, Who should go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them?-
Biblical history is unlike any other national history of a people in that it seems to emphasize the spiritual weakness of Israel. The heroes are nearly all flawed rather than

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

After the leadership of Moses, there came that of Joshua. See on Josh. 23:9. When he died, Israel expected that another such leader would be raised up: “After the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first?”. They expected a man to be named. But instead, they were told that the whole tribe of Judah must go up. The reality would have sunk home- no more charismatic leaders, now the ordinary people must take responsibility.

When faced with the prospect of driving out the tribes, they procrastinated by asking "Who shall go up for us?". They wanted someone else to do the job, just as all religious [rather than spiritual] people want a leader to do their spiritual work for them. God could have responded: 'I have already gone before you, all of you have a duty to go up and possess the land, and to help your brethren. The question of who goes first is totally faithless and irrelevant!'. But He didn't say this. He told Judah to go up first (1:3).

Multiple times we read in Joshua that he "fought against" the Canaanites and also many times that Yahweh would fight against them. All Israel and Judah seem to have forgotten all that. Just like the Israelites of Gilead wanted someone to go and lead them in fighting "for us" against the Ammonites (Jud. 10:18). It's likewise hard for us to believe that with no visible leader, victory is assured. Joshua/ Jesus has already fought and won. Joshua didn't however defeat all the Canaanites. Perhaps this looks ahead to how the Lord Jesus has achieved complete victory, against all issues and factors that appear to preclude us possessing the Kingdom of God.

Jdg 1:2 Yahweh said, Judah shall go up. Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand-

Clearly there were various scenarios possible for Israel to take the land, as there are for our inheritance of the Kingdom. The tribes could have directly followed up on Joshua's victories. They could each individually have gone to take their inheritance. Or Judah was given the potential to take the whole land, and they could have followed up on those victories. Joshua 10 describes Joshua's massive victory against the five southern

Canaanite kings, of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. He went on to conquer further: "Joshua struck all the land, the hill country, the South, the lowland, the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but he utterly destroyed all that breathed... Joshua struck them from Kadesh Barnea even to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even to Gibeon. Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because Yahweh, the God of Israel, fought for Israel" (Josh. 10:40-42). Joshua 11 then describes his subjugation of the north: "So Joshua captured all that land, the hill country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, the Arabah, the hill country of Israel, and the lowland of the same... even to Baal Gad in the valley of Lebanon under Mount Hermon. He took all their kings, struck them and put them to death... There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took all in battle... and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel: Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. There were none of the Anakim left in the land of the children of Israel. Only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did some remain. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that Yahweh spoke to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel" (Josh. 11:16-23).

The land was effectively subdued before Israel at that point, and all the individual tribes had to do was to go ahead and possess the land. The fact we read in Judges 1 and 2 of them failing to do so shows that even after that, the people were just satisfied with a bit of land where they were, and failed to see the glorious potential they had of more actively possessing the entire land. All this looks forward to the failure of God's people to make good on the vast victories of the Lord Jesus.

The fact we fail to realize our potentials doesn't mean God quits working with us. Reflect how Judah was given the potential to possess the whole land, and yet they selfishly only focused upon their own inheritance (Jud. 1:2,3). And yet God still worked with them, giving them victory in what battles they did fight (Jud. 1:4). Yet even then, Judah didn't follow through with the help God was so eager to give them. They took Jerusalem, but later we read that the Jebusites were soon back living there (Jud. 1:8,21). But see on :22.

Gen. 49:8 had prophesied that Judah would defeat their enemies. But this was yet another example of conditional prophecy. For Judah didn't take the whole land, although potentially it was "delivered... into his hand". God had worked through Joshua to subdue all the land, but they had failed to follow up on this. The soldiers of the eastern tribes had been intended to subdue the land for their brethren; but that had not worked out. Now God tries another path; the tribe of Judah were given potential power to subdue the land for the other tribes. But again they failed. The whole Divine-human relationship has been one of tragically missed potentials, and God by all means trying different methods to achieve His purpose- of giving His people the Kingdom.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Jdg 1:3 Judah said to Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my designated portion so that we can fight against the Canaanites, and I likewise will go with you into yours. So Simeon went with him-

Judah refused to believe the promise of :2 that the whole land had been given to him. Instead, Judah chose to willfully misunderstand this as meaning that just their tribal canton had been given into their power. And even then, they thought they needed the human help of Simeon, as Simeon thought too about their inheritance.

Jdg 1:4 Judah went up and Yahweh delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hand. They killed ten thousand men in Bezek-

"Thousand" when used of conflicts often refers not to a literal 1,000 but to a military subdivision. Bezek, 'place of lightning', could mean that God used natural causes, lightning, to destroy these people. For such seems His preferred style in defeating His enemies at the hands of His people, lest they be tempted to think it was their power which had won the victories. He is so sensitive to our temptations, and ever seeks to keep us from pride.

Jdg 1:5 They found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they killed the Canaanites and the Perizzites-

"They found" implies he had hidden. This verse summarizes the preceding and following verses. Bezek has not been located as a town; that of 1 Sam. 11:8 is too far north to be the same place. But they buried Adonibezek in Jerusalem (:7), and Adonizedek king of

Jerusalem (Josh. 10:1,3) is called Adonibezek in the LXX. It could refer to the same individual.

Jdg 1:6 But Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him, caught him and cut off his thumbs and his great toes-
This kind of humiliation of a vanquished foe was common at the time, but seems inappropriate for God's people acting in faith that any victory was by His grace. This treatment was typically given to those who would later become the servants of the conquerors (Jud. 16:21; 1 Sam. 11:2; 2 Kings 25:7). But Judah's intention was thwarted by the man dying (:7). God did not intend His people to humiliate others, not even their enemies.

Jdg 1:7 Adoni-Bezek said, Seventy kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, scavenged under my table. As I have done, so God has requited me. They brought him to Jerusalem and he died there-
See on :6. He had supposedly vanquished 70 tribal chiefs, probably only rulers of very small areas. He treated them like dogs (cp. Mt. 15:27). We wonder whether this king came to repentance at the very end of his life, and accepted the God of Israel.

Jdg 1:8 The men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it, putting it to the sword, and set the city on fire-
Insofar as Israel followed their Angel, they had success. We repeatedly read that the cities they conquered were 'sent up in flames' (Jud. 1:8; Josh. 6:24; 8:8; 11:11), surely because they were following the Angel who was himself as a devouring pillar of fire (Dt. 9:3). Yet quite naturally we balk at the height of our calling, to follow the Angel. Their victory however was like those of Joshua- not followed up on. For soon the Jebusites were entrenched in Jerusalem (Jud. 1:21). They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom. The burning with fire was to show that the city was *herem*, totally dedicated to Yahweh as a burnt offering. But this burning with fire was not at all complete, because in :21 we find the Jebusites living there again and they remained in control until David's time. Here we see the danger of merely symbolic dedication to Yahweh.

Jdg 1:9 Afterwards the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the South and in the lowland-
These three areas are how the area of Judah was divided up topographically. Judah had been given the power and potential victory throughout the land, but instead they

focused only upon their own place in the Kingdom rather than seeking it for their brethren too (see on :2).

Jdg 1:10 Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (the name of Hebron before was Kiriath Arba), and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai-
We must compare this and :11 with the record of what actually happened in Josh. 15:13-15: "And unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he [Joshua] gave Hebron. And Caleb drove out thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak. And he went up thence against the inhabitants of Debir". It was Caleb who took Hebron and went against Debir. But the record here speaks as if the "he" was the tribe of Judah. We would expect to read "they went..." in :11, but the "he" clearly alludes to how it was Caleb who did this. We can conclude therefore that Caleb's victory was assumed by Judah as theirs, in their attempt to show that they had won victories against the local inhabitants within their tribal canton. This attempt to personally claim the spiritual conquests of others is not unknown amongst God's people today. It must have been somewhat irksome for Caleb to have Judah 'give' Hebron to him (:20), when he had himself conquered it. Or we can read all this as meaning that Caleb took Hebron, but it was repossessed after his time and Judah had to attack it again, giving it to him posthumously, in his memory (:20). This would then also be the situation with Debir in the next verses. However, the actual towns of Hebron and Debir were to be given to the Levites and Caleb only inherited the countryside nearby to it (Josh. 21:10-15). So taking a city and then giving it away to others was commendable; but our suspicion is that they didn't in fact do this.

Jdg 1:11 From there he went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher-
See on :10. "Now the name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher" (Josh. 15:15). "Debir" is the word usually translated "oracle", referring to the sanctuary, which was centered around the word of God in the ark. The previous name also means something similar, 'Place of the scroll / books'. It's as if faithful Caleb renamed an idol shrine to a more Yahweh centered name. This confirms the suggestion made on Josh. 15:9,10 that the names associated with pagan worship were renamed by the faithful, but not renamed by the unfaithful.

Jdg 1:12 Caleb said, He who strikes Kiriath Sepher and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife-
We wonder why Caleb himself didn't take Kiriath Sepher. Perhaps, at 85 years old, the strength he had boasted of was not quite as he had imagined, and he was exhausted or weak after the conquest of Hebron. Or maybe he wished to ensure his daughter married

someone who had the same spiritual ambition and faith which he had. And such men were apparently in deficit, as Othniel his brother (Josh. 15:17) was the only one to come forward for the challenge. As Caleb was then 85, Othniel would unlikely have been a very young man, looking to marry a young woman.

Jdg 1:13 Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife-
As noted above, Caleb was then 85, so Othniel was not a young man at all; and Achsah was presumably a virgin. So valiant young, faithful men were apparently not to be found. For surely they were the kind of candidate Caleb was looking for.

Caleb was head of a household within the tribe of Judah. It could be argued that he was directly related to Judah through Hezron and Pharez (1 Chron. 2:5,18,25). But "Kenizzite" (also Num. 32:12) could refer to the Gentile tribe of Gen. 15:19; or to a man called Kenaz, memorialized by Caleb naming his son with that same name (1 Chron. 4:15). And Jud. 1:13 could mean that Caleb's father was called Kenaz. Caleb means "dog", and this is apparently alluded to when he is commended for faithfully following Yahweh, as a dog would follow its master (Num. 14:24). The genealogies are constructed in such a way that they don't preclude Caleb having been a Gentile who was fully accepted into the tribe of Judah. Perhaps the note at :16 about the descendants of the Kenites coming to live with Caleb's family is included to clarify the point that Caleb was a Kenite or Kenizzite.

Jdg 1:14 When she came, she got him to ask her father for a field, and she alighted from off her donkey and Caleb said to her, What would you like?-
Examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Josh. 14:12; 15:18); and this in turn inspired another woman to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (Josh. 17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord... hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness". To know God's righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seeking to attain it.

"When she came" is literally 'when she came to him' and could refer to the wedding day. Hence GNB, similar to LXX, "On the wedding day Othniel urged her to ask her father for a field. She got down from her donkey, and Caleb asked her what she wanted".

Jdg 1:15 She said to him, Give me a blessing, for that you have set me in the land of the South; give me also springs of water. Then Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs-

The idea of being given a blessing is of receiving an inheritance, as in Josh. 14:13 AV: “And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb... Hebron for an inheritance”. "A south land" presumably refers to Debir, which was apparently without a good water supply. Debir is on a hill, and there is a valley at the foot of the hill with springs. The territory had presumably been conquered by Caleb and was his own- but he gave away what he had conquered.

Inheritance was passed to the sons, not daughters. We see this from how the case of Zelophehad was considered (Num. 27:1-11); and we note how Abraham gave some inheritance to his less favoured sons, Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. Caleb had 15 sons: three sons by his first wife Azubah (1 Chron. 2:18), one by his wife Ephrath (1 Chron. 2:18), one by Achsah's mother, seven more by his concubines Ephah and Maacah (1 Chron. 2:49), and three more by an unnamed wife (1 Chron. 4:15). And yet some of the inheritance they were due was asked for by their sister Achsah, and Caleb agreed and gave it to her. It seems that Othniel's capture of Kiriath Sepher was accepted as the bride-price; the field in the Negev was the dowry [see other translations]; but the springs were a simple gift from Caleb to his daughter. Yet perhaps we can infer that the 'gift' of fertile springs meant that Othniel had to drive out whoever was living there. We enquire why we have this incident of Caleb, Othniel and Achsah at this point. Especially as it is a repeat of what we read earlier in Josh. 15:15-19. Caleb was a Kenizzite (Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6,14), and :13 stresses "Othniel the son of Kenaz"; they were only adopted into the tribe of Judah. The bravery, ambition and zeal of his family to possess Canaanite territory is perhaps inserted as a contrast to how the rest of the chapter states or implies that the pure blooded Israelites were fearful, nervous and ineffective in possessing the land. We could perhaps read :11 as meaning that Judah 'went against' Kiriath Sepher but didn't conquer it- it was Caleb's family who did ["Judah... went against the inhabitants of... Kiriath Sepher. Caleb said, He who strikes Kiriath Sepher and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife"]. LXX says that Caleb "gave her according to her heart". With all her heart she wanted that land, despite the fact she had 15 brothers who had claim to it theoretically- but she received it.

Jdg 1:16 The descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the men of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad, and they went and lived with those people-

This note may be inserted at this point to support the idea that Caleb was also a Kenite / Kenizzite. See on :13. "These people" may refer to the people of Caleb, which would make sense if Caleb was ethnically related to them. LXX "with the people of Amalek" would corroborate with the connection between the Amalekites and Kenizzites made in 1 Sam. 15:6; Num. 24:20-22.

Jdg 1:17 Judah went with Simeon his brother and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed the town. The name of the town was Hormah-
Hormah ["devoted"] was the Canaanite Zephath ["watchtower"]. The strength of the Canaanites was devoted to Yahweh, and they were supportive of David when on the run from Saul (1 Sam. 30:30). What was taken from the world was devoted to Yahweh by the faithful Israelites involved in this area. And that is an abiding principle.

Jdg 1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with its border and Ashkelon with its border and Ekron with its border-
LXX says the opposite, "and Judah did not dispossess...". But that is perhaps an attempt to reconcile this statement with the reality that these Philistine areas remained in Philistine hands (Jud. 3:3; Josh. 13:2,3). But Jud. 1:18 says that "Judah took Gaza with its border and Ashkelon with its border and Ekron with its border". I suggest the answer is that their victory was like those of Joshua- not followed up on. And like the victory over Jerusalem recorded in Jud. 1:8, soon after which the Jebusites were soon again entrenched in Jerusalem (Jud. 1:21). They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom.

Jdg 1:19 Yahweh was with Judah and drove out the inhabitants of the hill country, for he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron-

"The valley" likely refers not to 'valleys' but to the flat coastland area where the Philistines settled. This is confirmed by Josh. 13:2 listing "All the regions of the Philistines" as still remaining to be possessed. The wording is very gracious, suggesting Yahweh was with Judah in their campaigns in the hill country, but not in the "valley". He was of course equally with them in "the valley" and it was only their lack of faith that stopped their conquest. He was not in reality "with Judah" there because although He was potentially, they chose not to realize that in practice. Likewise Emmanuel, "God with us", all men... but most choose not to experience this, and so God is disallowed by them from being "with" them.

The inhabitants of the valley had been defeated by Joshua. But Judah would not 'drive them out'. "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of

Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jdg 1:20 They gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised, and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak-

As discussed on :10, it was Caleb who had taken Hebron. But then Judah made out that they were so righteously granting it to him, as if they had won the victory. It was in any case given to Caleb by God through Moses and Joshua, not by them. And Hebron was a priestly city, so Caleb gave it away anyway.

Jdg 1:21 The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day-

Josh. 15:63 says that "As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah couldn't drive them out; but the Jebusites live with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day". We noted on :2 that Judah was given the potential to drive out the inhabitants of the entire land, including Jerusalem. They failed to do this and so Benjamin also failed to. Although "did not drive out" doesn't sound as if they failed in battle; they simply didn't attempt it, because they were satisficers, content with what they had and not seeing their much greater call and potential. Joshua had earlier defeated "Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem" (Josh. 10:1), but this victory wasn't followed up permanently; for Judah did take Jerusalem in :8 but lost it soon afterwards. Just as the Lord Jesus has taken Jerusalem for us...

It seems that as Jerusalem was on the border between Judah and Benjamin, they both had the opportunity to possess Jerusalem, but both chose not to. See on :19. As explained on :8, Judah defeated the king of Jerusalem. But they failed to possess his territory. They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom.

Jdg 1:22 The house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and Yahweh was with them-

Bethel is about 2 km. away from the site of Ai, which had been totally destroyed by Joshua. There is archaeological evidence that Bethel was built up soon after the entry of Israel to Canaan under Joshua. Clearly the great victories of Joshua weren't followed up on, and some community of Canaanites associated with Ai had established or re-established themselves down the road at Ai. Yet Yahweh was eager to still support them at this later stage in trying to follow up on the Ai victory, for "Yahweh was with them" in attacking Bethel. This is the persistent theme- that Joshua's victories were not followed up on. For in any conquest, even a won battle must be followed up on. All this points to our failure to follow up on the Lord's total victory against sin in every form.

This term "house of Joseph" presumably refers to Ephraim and eastern Manasseh, but the term is used to describe a Benjamite in 2 Sam. 19:16,20. God's intention was that each family within each tribe had a specific inheritance, from which they drove out the local inhabitants and lived there with His blessing. But it seems that contrary to this intention, they often moved to other tribes, ever seeking for a better deal some place other than that which God intended for them.

"Yahweh was with them" is LXX "And Judah was with them", reflecting the one Hebrew letter difference between the two words Yahweh and Judah in the original. In this case, we would have some evidence that some in Judah saw the potential of :2, that all the land, for all the tribes, had been given into the possibility of Judah to conquer for them.

Jdg 1:23 The house of Joseph sent to spy out Bethel. The name of the city before was Luz-

Although Luz was called Bethel (Gen. 35:6; Jud. 1:23), Josh. 16:2 implies a difference between them. Perhaps Luz was the city, and "Bethel" refers specifically to the altar of Jacob there. But Keil suggests Bethel refers to the "southern range of mountains belonging to Bethel, from which the boundary ran out to the town of Luz, so that this town, which stood upon the border, was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:22)".

Jdg 1:24 The spies saw a man come out of the city and they said to him, Please show us the entrance into the city and we will deal kindly with you-

They were perhaps seeking to emulate Joshua's victory over Jericho, and the preservation of Rahab (Josh. 6:23). The word translated “keep” in Ex. 23:20 is that translated “spies” here. The spies were the keepers in the way of Israel, to bring them in to the land. And yet the Angel at the exodus was their ‘keeper’ to bring them into the land. The spies were working in harmony with their Angels; and thus they succeeded. Israel’s guardian Angel was to “keep” them in the way (Ex. 23:20), clearly echoing how the Angels kept the way to the tree of life in Eden. The same Hebrew word for “keep” occurs very often in Exodus in the context of Israel being told to keep God’s commands; but their freewill effort was to be confirmed by the Angel keeping them in the way of

obedience. They were to “keep” themselves in the way (Dt. 4:9 and many others; s.w. “take heed”, “observe” etc.), but the Angel would keep them in it. This mutuality is developed in Ex. 23:21, where having said the Angel will keep them, Israel are told “Beware of him, and obey his voice”. “Beware” translates the same Hebrew word as “keep”. The Angel would keep them., but they were to keep to the Angel. This is an example of how we are intended to have a mutual relationship with our guardian Angel, leading to Him strengthening us in the one way.

Jdg 1:25 He showed them the entrance into the city and they put the city to the sword, but they let the man go and all his family-
The conquests of Joshua were nearly all as a result of the local inhabitants coming against him. Even the men of Jericho are described as proactively fighting against Israel (Josh. 24:11). These later conflicts are a result of not having possessed the land as God intended, and so they seem to feature Israel now attacking the local peoples. This was it seems not God's ideal intention; His intention was that those peoples came against Israel and were therefore defeated.

Jdg 1:26 The man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 1:27 Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements; the Canaanites continued to dwell in that land-
In the list of cities given to the Levites, "Bileam" meaning 'not of the people', is called Ibleam, Jud. 1:27; 2 Kings 9:27, and in Josh. 21:25, Gath-rimmon. Perhaps it is called "Bileam" in 1 Chron. 6:70 because it continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24.

Dor was in Asher (Josh. 11:1,2; 12:23; 17:11; Jud. 1:27,28). Taanach was within either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But these towns were also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

Jdg 1:28 When Israel had grown strong they put the Canaanites to forced labour and did not utterly drive them out-
For "forced labour", see on :30. For "drive out", see on :19. To 'grow strong' can be a technical term for having military superiority (s.w. 1 Kings 20:22; 2 Chron. 17:1; 21:4).

Jdg 1:29 Ephraim didn't drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, but the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them-
Living together meant that there was a reconciliation of cultures between them. If the Israelites had been truly devoted to Yahweh's ways in practice, such reconciliation would not have been practicable; or we would be reading that the Canaanites accepted Yahweh. But the opposite happened. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas and vice versa, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh.

Jdg 1:30 Zebulun didn't drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or Nahalol, but the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labour-
One reason why Israel failed to drive out the tribes, and thereby lost the Kingdom, was simply because they wanted to take tribute from them (Josh. 17:13). Ez. 7:19 defines "silver and gold" as Israel's stumblingblock- moreso than idols. They just so loved wealth. The men of Bethshemesh looked into the ark to see if there were any more jewels left in it (1 Sam. 6:19 cp. 6,15); they trampled upon the supreme holiness of God in their crazed fascination with wealth.

Jdg 1:31 Asher didn't drive out the inhabitants of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob-
According to the definition of Asher's territory in Josh. 19:24-31, these were their border towns. Perhaps they settled down to inherit the territory in the midst of their canton, and just couldn't be bothered to subjugate the peripheral towns. For "drive out", see on :19. Many of the towns which weren't subjugated by the tribes were on the very edges of their tribal cantons. They were therefore literally thorns in their sides (Jud. 2:3).

Jdg 1:32 but the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out-
Living among the Canaanites would imply that Asher were a minority amongst a majority. The extent of disobedience to the commands to slay the inhabitants of the land is quite astounding. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh.

Jdg 1:33 Naphtali didn't drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath, but he lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land who became subject to forced labour-
Living among the Canaanites would imply that Naphtali were a minority amongst a majority. For "forced labour", *see* on :30. For "drive out", see on :19. The two towns mentioned here were idol sanctuaries, 'house of the sun god' and 'house of Anath', another Canaanite idol. These ought to have been destroyed, and not doing so was tantamount to breaking covenant with Yahweh (Jud. 2:2).

Jdg 1:34 The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the hill country, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley-
Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience (Jud. 3:2 NIV). His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them. Yet elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. Likewise "the border of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

Jdg 1:35 but the Amorites continued to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim. Yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became subject to forced labour-

For "forced labour", see on :30. Mount Heres is 'mount of the sun,' probably the same as Ir-shemesh, 'city of the sun', in Josh. 19:41. As noted on :33, these pagan sanctuaries ought to have been destroyed.

Jdg 1:36 The border of the Amorites was from the ascent of Akrabbim, from the rock and upward-

"The rock" may be that at Kadesh of Num. 20:8, or Petra / Sela ["the rock", Obadiah 3]. The point is that the local population drew a boundary line in the area which was supposed to be Israel's, and defended and enforced it. This was how weak Israel were from the beginning.

JUDGES CHAPTER 2

Jdg 2:1 The angel of Yahweh came up from Gilgal to Bochim. He said, I brought you up out of Egypt-

Angels are usually recorded as just appearing. This Angel apparently travels from Gilgal to Bochim. Gilgal was Joshua's base camp for his conquest of the land (Josh. 9:6; 10:6; 10:15; 10:43; 14:6), and where the [same?] Angel had first appeared to him encouraging him in his conquest. This surely is the Angel that was promised to Israel in Ex. 23 who would lead them into the promised land and subdue their enemies. It was likely through the mouth of that Angel that Israel had been warned against intermarriage and idolatry in Canaan. Israel were circumcised at Gilgal (Josh. 5:2-9) and stones had been set up there so that "When your children ask their parents in time to come, "What do these stones mean?" then you shall let your children know, "Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground." For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that you may fear the LORD your God forever'" (Josh. 4:20-24 NRSV). But the Angel removes from there and travels some way- perhaps observed doing so by the Israelites. The message was that Yahweh had departed from them and come to a place of weeping, 'Bochim'. But a fair case can be made that Bochim was in fact Bethel. Bethel is connected with weeping: "And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried below Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called the Oak of Weeping" (Gen. 35:8; also in Jud. 20:26). The LXX is clear: "The angel came to the Weeping Place, even to Bethel, even to the house of Israel". And we have just read of Bethel in Jud. 1:22-26. The terrible reality is that God wept because of how Israel had

wasted their potential to inherit the Kingdom, which Joshua-Jesus had made possible for them. And surely He weeps today. But Israel wept too (:4)- they shared God's perspective on their failures, and thus came to know His Spirit. This is, therefore, the model repentance- to come to see things as God does, to feel about our sins as He does.

The Hebrew is "I made you to go up out of the land of Egypt". This was God's grace to Israel, through the Angel. For the people didn't actually want to leave; they liked the idea of it, as men like the idea of quitting the world today, but preferred to stay: "Is not this the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14:12). Stephen in Acts 7 argues that Israel were always resistant to the saving work of Moses, just as they were to that of the Lord. They constantly murmured against him and rejected his leadership. And yet God brought them up from Egypt, literally, made them go up out of Egypt (stressed in Lev. 11:45; Dt. 20:1; Josh. 24:17; Jud. 6:8 and so often). Just as Abraham was taken out of Ur, and we too were taken out of the world. We are called, but He certainly assists our response to that call. Just as in the Lord's parable, those invited to the wedding feast are sent servants to actually bring them to it. And they resisted even that.

The salvation from the Egyptians was at the Red Sea, long ago (Ex. 14:30). The Israelites were repeatedly reminded of this (Jud. 2:1; 6:8; 10:11). But they failed to perceive that God's actions in history were in fact their personal salvation, an act of grace shown to them also. David grasped that point, and his Psalms often thank God for the exodus, as if it had happened to him personally. But the problem is that Israel like all people tended to only see what was before their face at that moment. They had no sense of God's historical salvation of them, and the guarantee that He would likewise come through for them, if they remained faithful to Him.

And have brought you to the land which I swore to your fathers, and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you-

The promises made to Abraham were made by an Angel. This is implied in the Genesis account and repeated later- e.g. Judges 2:1 describes the Angel which led the people of Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan reminding them of "the covenant which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you". Thus when we read passages talking of the covenant God made with them and with Abraham, let us watch out for further allusions to Angelic work. When we read of God breaking His covenant, are we to understand that the Angels can speak like this, but God Himself doesn't and can't? Or that God has such passion and emotion that He can say 'contradictory' things like this?

Consider the following examples of God 'repenting'. For each, try to explain it in terms of *God Himself* changing His mind, and then think how an understanding of Angels could do better: Ex. 4:24; Num. 14:34 AVmg.; Ex. 32:11 mg.; Hos. 12:4; Jud. 2:1 cp. Zech. 11:10,11. If you like this line of approach, consider the following examples, of where 'God' says He won't do something; and then does: Ex. 33:3 cp. 34:9; Dt. 4:31; 31:6,8 cp. 31:17. See on Zech. 11:10,11.

Although the idea of Angels changing their minds has some attraction, my own conviction is that God as it were limits His omniscience and omnipotence in order to enter into real relationship with His people. He has emotions, and speaks in the fire of His wrath, as we do, who are made in His image. And so He utters judgments which by grace He didn't totally follow through on. Perhaps the repentance or intercession of a minority ameliorated His judgments; or perhaps the pole of grace and love is stronger within Him than that of judgment. For mercy rejoices against judgment, even within His personality.

God promised that even if Israel sinned, He would never break His covenant with them (Lev. 26:44; Jud. 2:1). But He did (Zech. 11:10 cp. Jer. 14:21 "don't break Your covenant with us"), as witnessed by the termination of the Law of Moses, which was the basis of His covenant with Israel. His love creates yet another Bible paradox. Israel broke the covenant by their disobedience (Lev. 26:15; Dt. 31:16 and many others). God therefore broke His part of the covenant. Yet God made His promises concerning the unbreakable covenant because He chose to speak in words which did not reflect His foreknowledge that Israel would sin. The apparent contradiction is resolvable by realizing that God did not set His mind upon Israel's future apostasy when He made the 'unbreakable' covenant with them. And yet the paradox still ultimately stands; that He broke His covenant with them when they sinned. He worked through this punishment in order to establish an even more gracious new covenant.

It was Israel who "broke the everlasting covenant" (Is. 24:5; Jer. 11:10); "they broke My covenant through all your abominations" (Ez. 44:7). But from God's side, He remained faithful to them, like the faithful partner in a marriage. As Paul put it, if we deny Him, He abides faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). The covenant was broken by Israel but not by God.

Jdg 2:2 and you must make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; break down their altars'. But you have not listened to My voice; why have you done this?-
As discussed on :1, their covenant with the inhabitants of the land was an undoing and abrogation of the exclusive covenant with Yahweh which they had signed up to. And yet He still remained in covenant. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh (:1). The existence of pagan place names throughout the record of the

conquest, e.g. Bath Dagon, house of Dagon, Beth Shemesh, house of the sun god, all demonstrates that they didn't break down the altars.

Jdg 2:3 Therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out from before you, but they shall be thorns in your sides-
I noted on Jud. 1 that many of the towns which weren't subjugated by the tribes were on the very edges of their tribal cantons. They were therefore literally thorns in their sides (Jud. 2:3).

And their gods will be a snare to you-
Twice in 1 Timothy, Paul speaks about a snare; the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7), and the snare of wanting wealth (6:9). The desire for wealth in whatever form is the very epitome of the devil, our inherent sin which we must struggle against. The idea of a snare is that it results in a sudden and *unexpected* destruction. The unexpectedness of the destruction should set us thinking: surely the implication is that those who are materialistic don't realize that in fact this is their besetting sin, and therefore their rejection in the end because of it will be so tragically unexpected. It's rather like pride; if you're proud and you don't know it, then you really are proud. And if we're materialistic and don't know it, we likewise really have a problem. The idea of riches being a snare connects with copious OT references to idols as Israel's perpetual snare (Ex. 23:33; Dt. 7:16; Jud. 2:3; 8:27; Ps. 106:36; Hos. 5:1). Paul's point is surely that the desire of wealth is the equivalent of OT idolatry.

Jdg 2:4 When the angel of Yahweh spoke these words to all the children of Israel, the people lifted up their voice and wept-
As in their response to Joshua's speech challenging their idolatry, we rather wait with expectant hope to read that like Jacob's sons, they bring out their idols and bury or burn them. If only we could achieve a second naivety in reading the records, we would at this point be on the edge of our seats, waiting for them to now ditch their idols. But we read only of their tears, the emotion of a religious moment, rather than any lasting response to the blunt warning they had been given. Yet still God graciously responds to their tears.

Jdg 2:5 They called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to Yahweh-
We notice that they had the opportunity to rename or name places in Israel. But they retained so many place names which have clear associations with Baal and Dagon. As noted on :4, they went through the motions of religious worship and repentance- but there is no record of them actually ditching their idols.

Jdg 2:6 Now when Joshua had sent the people away, the children of Israel went every man to his inheritance to possess the land-

Joshua / Jesus "let the people go" / dismissed them to live in their possessions which he had liberated for them. He dismissed them to go and live in their specific inheritance which it seems each family were given, although unrecorded this is implied by the laws about inheritance. We think of Daniel standing in his lot at the last day. The phrase is so often used of Israel being let go from Egypt. Now they were let go into the Kingdom. But they balked at it, wanted a hand to hold, a man to follow. And no man was raised up to replace Joshua after his death. The Lord's death and finished work are likewise all we need. It is for us to now go and inherit the Kingdom, although the Lord uses this language about how we shall do so after the judgment seat.

They were to quit their idolatry and then possess the land in God's strength. They went forward to possess the land, but with no record of having ditched their idols. "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jdg 2:7 The people served Yahweh all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of Yahweh that He had worked for Israel-

Serving a god meant doing sacrifice to it as they did to the Baals (:11). As discussed on Josh. 24, I suggest that the 'service of Yahweh' in view here refers to the operation of the tabernacle rituals. For 'serving Yahweh' can be a technical term which refers to this and nothing else. This is not to say that they were faithful nor exclusively committed to Him. Joshua in Josh. 24:19 had said that they could not 'serve Yahweh' acceptably, unless they ditched their idols. Which they didn't. The people understood serving Yahweh as doing the rituals of His religion, whereas Joshua understood it as serving Him exclusively with no place in their hearts for any idolatry.

Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience (Jud. 3:2 NIV). His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them. Yet elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. Likewise "the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

Jdg 2:8 Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Yahweh, died, being one hundred and ten years old-

Numbers and ages in Hebrew literature are not necessarily to be taken literally. This was the age at which Joseph is recorded as reaching (Gen. 50:26), and we will read in Josh. 24:32 of the burial of Joseph's bones at Shechem, at the same time as Joshua is buried. We are clearly invited to see a connection between the two men, both of them maintaining spirituality and hope in the Kingdom whilst surrounded by unspirituality and terrible failure by God's people to realize their potential.

Jdg 2:9 They buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnah Heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash-

"In the border" may mean that they believed even then that one day he would be resurrected, and then immediately enter into his eternal inheritance. LXX adds: "There they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel in Galgala, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord appointed them; and there they are to this day".

Josh. 24:30 says Joshua was buried in Timnath Serah. "Heres" means the sun, and may well have a paganic reference. Perhaps the name was changed back to its original "Heres" because the Israelites worshipped the gods of the Canaanites.

Jdg 2:10 Also all that generation were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another

generation after them who didn't know Yahweh, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel-
The "fathers" served other gods (Josh. 24:2), but the Bible describes death as a gathering to the fathers. Clearly the differentiation between good and bad men is not made at death. Death is unconsciousness, and the ultimate division and reward will be at the return of the Lord Jesus and the judgment seat He will then set up.

Note the parallel between knowing Yahweh and seeing / experiencing all His works for His people (:7). This experience is what it is to know Yahweh, rather than purely academic theoretical knowledge.

Jdg 2:11 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and served the Baals-

Serving Yahweh was to be exclusive. Any worship of Baals was to break that exclusive covenant they had made with Yahweh and therefore to forsake Yahweh (:12,13). But 'forsaking Yahweh' is how He saw it. They themselves never became atheists or formally abrogated their relationship with Yahweh. They believed that they could worship Yahweh through worshipping Baal, and that they were doing nothing wrong to Him by this infidelity. Hence Yahweh warns in Hos. 2:16, "You shall no longer call Me Baal".

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

Jdg 2:12 They forsook Yahweh the God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed themselves down to them-
See on :11.

And they provoked Yahweh to anger-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

Jdg 2:13 They forsook Yahweh and served Baal and the Ashtaroth-
As explained on :11, this was how Yahweh felt. They themselves didn't think they had forsaken Him. The Bible at times speaks from God's viewpoint, at others from the perspective of the people whose actions are being described. To forsake Yahweh was to

break covenant with Him (Dt. 31:16,17). Israel did forsake Yahweh (Jud. 2:13), but still He remained faithful to them, as Hosea remained faithful to Gomer despite her infidelity to their marriage covenant. Instead of forsaking them as He threatened, He instead by grace sent them saviours, judges, looking forward to His grace in sending the Lord Jesus, Yah's salvation.

The punishment for forsaking Yahweh was that "Yahweh will send on you cursing, confusion and rebuke in all that you put your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the evil of your doings by which you have forsaken Him. Yahweh will make the pestilence cleave to you until He has consumed you from off the land into which you now go in to possess it" (Dt. 28:20,21). We expect these things to therefore happen at this time; but we note God's amazing patience and gentleness in not bringing these things immediately, and instead raising up judges as saviours for this wayward people.

'Baal' literally means an owner, hence a lord or husband. One of David's mighty men was called Baal-Yah (1 Chron. 12:5 AV "Bealiah", owned by Yah). What was wrong with Baal worship was that it made Baal your owner or possessor. Accepting God as our owner has huge practical import. Man's need for belonging is ultimately met. We belong to God. We are His servants. Ashtaroth is the fertility god also known as Astarte, or Ishtar by the Assyrians and Babylonians, Aphrodite to the Greeks.

Jdg 2:14 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He delivered them into the hands of raiders who plundered them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around so that they could no longer stand before their enemies-
As noted on :13, this was a very restrained response from Yahweh, and not actually according to the judgments threatened for forsaking Him in Dt. 28:20,21. The judgments of Dt. 29:23-27 were likewise the prophesied outcome of Israel forsaking Yahweh; and this too didn't happen at this time, by grace alone: "The whole land is sulphur, salt and burning, that it is not sown nor giving produce and no grass grows therein, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which Yahweh overthrew in His anger and in his wrath. They and all the nations shall say, Why has Yahweh done thus to this land? What does the heat of this great anger mean? Then men shall say, Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshipped them, gods that they didn't know and that He had not given to them. Therefore the anger of Yahweh was kindled against this land, to bring on it all the curse that is written in this book". But instead we are to read that although God punished them, He raised up saviours to save them from the judgments; and this looks forward to His grace in the Lord Jesus, 'Yah's salvation'.

Jdg 2:15 Wherever they went the hand of Yahweh was against them for evil, as Yahweh had spoken and as Yahweh had sworn to them; and they were very distressed-
See on :18. But as noted above, He did not bring upon them all the things which He had spoken, in wrath He remembered mercy. This "distress" is the word used of the distress of the historical Jacob / Israel (Gen. 32:7), when like Israel he was confronted with his sins and led to cast himself upon God's grace.

Jdg 2:16 Yahweh raised up judges who saved them from those who plundered them-
The judgments for forsaking Yahweh were of total destruction- see on :13,14. We expect these things to therefore happen at this time; but we note God's amazing patience and gentleness in not bringing these things immediately, and instead raising up judges as saviours for this wayward people. And those saviours look forward to the Lord Jesus.

Jdg 2:17 Yet they didn't listen to their judges; for they played the prostitute after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly out of the way in which their fathers walked, who had obeyed the commandments of Yahweh. They didn't do so-
Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 62:4,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity to God is spoken of as adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for us (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for us is so exclusive. He expects us to be totally *His*.

Jdg 2:18 When Yahweh raised up judges for them-
God Himself 'arose and saved' Israel from Egypt (Ps. 76:9, s.w. "raised up a saviour"), and the phrase is also used of Moses in Ex. 2:17. But the people didn't want this radical deliverance from their enemies, because like the generation saved from Egypt, they were with their enemies in their hearts, and worshipped their gods as Israel had taken the idols of their Egyptian enemies with them, through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:17). So the potential possible in these raised up saviours / judges was never totally realized.

Yahweh was with the judge and saved them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge, for it grieved Yahweh because of their distress because of the oppression-
The hand of their enemies was effectively Yahweh's hand (:15). Yet God's grace worked as it were against His own judgment. We see here the tension between mercy and judgment deep within the personality of God; and the pole of grace wins out over that of necessary judgment. And this God is our God. "Grieved" is the word for "repent" (as AV);

He changed His mind, because He was grieved for them. And so we read in Hos. 11:8 of how His repentings were kindled together deep within Him.

Jdg 2:19 But when the judge was dead they turned back and behaved more corruptly than their fathers in following other gods to serve them and to bow down to them. They didn't cease from their evil practices or from their stubborn ways-
The book of Judges reflects this grace of God- showing, incidentally, that grace isn't only a New Testament theme. We are so wrong if we imagine that Judges is all about a cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, raising up a judge-saviour, salvation and restoration to God. For one thing, the cycles are never the same- for God is in passionate relationship with His people, and passionate love doesn't work to the 'same ole same ole' plan every time. Time and again we find that Israel sin, do not repent (Jud. 2:19)- and yet all the same God sends them a Saviour. They are saved without repentance, simply because God pities them (Jud. 2:15,16). They do the very things which God predicted in Deuteronomy would result in Him breaking the covenant with them (see on :13,14)- and yet He does *not* break His side of the covenant (Jud. 3:1). In all this we see an altogether profound grace, arising out of God's passionate love for His people. We simply don't 'get' how passionate is God's love for us!

After each judge they did "more corruptly" than the previous generation. We get the same impression in the record of the kings. It all gives the impression of an ever downward slide into the final apostacy which elicited the captivities in Assyria and Babylon. These are therefore presented as only happening after an amazing display of patient grace over many generations.

"Stubborn" is literally hard or difficult. The way of the flesh is difficult, just as Paul says that men crucify themselves / pierce themselves through with many sorrows through loving money (1 Tim. 6:10).

Jdg 2:20 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He said, Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to Me-
To keep covenant was thus paralleled with listening / being obedient to God. The covenant was broken, because they had broken it rather than God. And yet for generations (see on :19), He still kept His side of it. Josh. 23:16 had said that when Israel "transgressed [My] covenant", then they would "perish quickly from off the good land". But as noted on :19, this didn't happen "quickly". God's grace waited many generations before exiling them from their land. He changed His mind, or 'repented', because of His grace; see on :18.

GNB suggests the sense is that God regularly said that He would no longer drive out the nations, every time a judge died and the people turned away: "Then the LORD would become furious with Israel and say, "This nation has broken the covenant that I commanded their ancestors to keep. Because they have not obeyed me, I will no longer drive out any of the nations"".

Jdg 2:21 I also will no longer drive out from before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died-
Israel were told to work with God to drive out the nations who lived in Canaan, because if those people remained there, they would be a spiritual temptation for Israel. But Israel sinned, they willfully followed the idols of Canaan rather than the God of Israel. And therefore God said that He would not help Israel in driving out the nations any more (Jud. 2:20,21). It was as if He was confirming them in their desire to succumb to the temptations of the surrounding nations. He as it were 'led them into temptation', and we are to pray in the words of the Lord's prayer that we are not led as they were.

Jdg 2:22 So by them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk therein as their fathers did, or not-
As discussed on :21, the test of Israel was really leading them further down the downward spiral which they themselves wanted. We note Yahweh graciously considered that "their fathers" had "kept the way of Yahweh", clearly alluding to Abraham and the patriarchs (Gen. 18:19). But this too was an imputation of righteousness by grace, for the patriarchs often strayed from that covenant, Jacob especially.

Jdg 2:23 So Yahweh left those nations without driving them out quickly and didn't deliver them into the hand of Joshua-
Josh. 23:16 had said that when Israel "transgressed [My] covenant", then they would "perish quickly from off the good land". But as noted on :19, this didn't happen "quickly" when they now transgressed the covenant. God's grace waited many generations before exiling them from their land. Instead, God puts it so positively by saying that He didn't drive out the nations "quickly". The positive nature of His grace is seen all through this sad record of human failure.

The implications that we should respond 'quickly' to the Gospel surely mean that we should not have any element of indifference in our response to the call of God, and yet the foundations of a true spiritual life cannot be laid hastily. The Father drove out the tribes from Canaan slowly, not immediately- or at least, He potentially enabled this to happen (Jud. 2:23). But Israel were to destroy those tribes "quickly" (Dt. 9:3). Here perhaps we see what is meant- progress is slow but steady in the spiritual life, but there

must be a quickness in response to the call of God for action in practice. Compare this with how on one hand, God does not become quickly angry (Ps. 103:8), and yet on the other hand He *does* get angry quickly in the sense that He immediately feels and responds to sin (Ps. 2:12); His anger 'flares up in His face'.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

JUDGES CHAPTER 3

Jdg 3:1 Now these are the nations which Yahweh left to test Israel, those who had not known all the wars of Canaan-

Israel do the very things which God predicted in Deuteronomy would result in Him breaking the covenant with them- and yet He does *not* break His side of the covenant. In all this we see an altogether profound grace, arising out of God's passionate love for His people. We simply don't 'get' how passionate is God's love for us! See on Jud. 2:19. Jud. 2:23 says that "Yahweh left those nations without driving them out quickly and didn't deliver them into the hand of Joshua". Josh. 23:16 had said that when Israel "transgressed [My] covenant", then they would "perish quickly from off the good land". But as noted on Jud. 2:19, this didn't happen "quickly" when they now transgressed the covenant. God's grace waited many generations before exiling them from their land. Instead, God puts it so positively by saying that He didn't drive out the nations "quickly". The positive nature of His grace is seen all through this sad record of human failure.

Yahweh left or 'gave rest' to Israel's enemies, using the very word used of how He would give rest to Israel so that they didn't experience war nor opposition from enemies. But this was reversed. They need not have had any war, if they had been loyal to the covenant. So God "left' nations in the land to teach Israel war, hoping still to lead them to a position where they would conquer those enemies in obedience to the covenant. But we note "He did this only in order to teach each generation of Israelites about war, especially those who had never been in battle before" (:2 GNB). The implication is that living at peace and safety was now never envisioned by God as being possible for Israel. Even if some future generation had never experienced war [the contemporary generation most definitely had], they likely would need to fight in future. Because they seemed bent on sin, God now foresees they would never get to a point where they would be without war. Because war, the threat from enemies, was the result of unfaithfulness to the covenant. As happened after the flood, God comes to a more realistic view of His people's weakness. Through understanding what's going on here, we can better appreciate the Kingdom prophecies which speak of Israel finally dwelling at peace and without threat from their enemies. Because they shall sin no more, and the result of righteousness shall be peace from their enemies all around them.

Jdg 3:2 so that the later generations of the children of Israel might learn battle experience, those who before knew nothing of it-

As discussed on :1, this is putting it so positively. For the reason He didn't drive out the nations was because they had broken covenant with Him (Jud. 2:19-23). Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience. His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them. Yet

elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. Likewise "the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

God didn't drive the nations out as a punishment and also as a test of Israel's faithfulness, which they failed by marrying into those nations and therefore worshipping their gods (Jud. 2:20-23). But here God speaks more positively of how He sought to use those nations as a training for Israel. To train their faith in Him. We marvel at God's incessant desire to save, and to use even abject human failure to somehow by all means save some.

"Learn battle experience" is literally, 'learn war'. The ideal was that God would have driven out the nations and Israel lived at peace, none making then afraid. The Kingdom age will feature "they shall learn war no more". But God now adopts a suboptimal policy. He wants to teach Israel to fight, to learn war, and so He intended to work through the nations remaining in the land. To strengthen Israel's faith. Towards the end that they would drive out all the nations and live in peace. He acts similarly if e.g. someone marries out of the Faith. He doesn't abandon them but continues working with them, even though they have made their spiritual path more difficult for themselves and less likely of success.

Jdg 3:3 the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites, the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath-

But Jud. 1:18 says that "Judah took Gaza with its border and Ashkelon with its border and Ekron with its border". I suggest the answer is that their victory was like those of Joshua- not followed up on. And like the victory over Jerusalem recorded in Jud. 1:8, soon after which the Jebusites were soon again entrenched in Jerusalem (Jud. 1:21). They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as

having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom.

Jdg 3:4 They were left to test Israel, to know whether they would listen to the commandments of Yahweh which He commanded their fathers by Moses-
Israel were told to work with God to drive out the nations who lived in Canaan, because if those people remained there, they would be a spiritual temptation for Israel. But Israel sinned, they willfully followed the idols of Canaan rather than the God of Israel. And therefore God said that He would not help Israel in driving out the nations any more (Jud. 2:20,21). It was as if He was confirming them in their desire to succumb to the temptations of the surrounding nations. He as it were 'led them into temptation', and we are to pray in the words of the Lord's prayer that we are not led as they were.

Jdg 3:5 The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites-
Living together meant that there was a reconciliation of cultures between them. If the Israelites had been truly devoted to Yahweh's ways in practice, such reconciliation would not have been practicable; or we would be reading that the Canaanites accepted Yahweh. But the opposite happened. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas and vice versa, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh.

Jdg 3:6 and they took their daughters to be their wives and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods-
Many passages make the connection between marriage out of the covenant, and adopting idolatry: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; Jud. 3:6,7; 1 Kings 11:2,3; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14. Dt. 7:4 RV dogmatically predicts that a Gentile man will definitely turn away the heart of his Hebrew son-in-law... So certain is it that marriage to Gentiles leads to accepting their idols that Ezra 9:1,2 reasons that Israel hadn't separated from idols because they had married Gentiles. Time and again, those who marry out of the covenant claim that they feel strong enough to cope with it, that marriage is only a human thing, and that their spiritual relationship with God is between them and God, and unaffected by their worldly partner. Yet this is exactly the opposite of what God's word says. It's not true that you can marry into the world and be unaffected in your own spirituality. Solomon thought he could handle it; and apparently, he did- for the first 20 years or so. But his Gentile wives were his spiritual ruin at the end.

Jdg 3:7 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and forgot Yahweh their God, and served the Baals and the Asherahs-
Serving Yahweh was to be exclusive. Any worship of Baals was to break that exclusive

covenant they had made with Yahweh and therefore to forsake or forget Yahweh (Jud. 2:12,13). But 'forsaking / forgetting Yahweh' is how He saw it. They themselves never became atheists or formally abrogated their relationship with Yahweh. They believed that they could worship Yahweh through worshipping Baal, and that they were doing nothing wrong to Him by this infidelity.

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

Jdg 3:8 Therefore the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He sold them into the hand of Cushan Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. The Israelites served Cushan Rishathaim for eight years.
The pattern of 'serving' their Canaanite conquerors and then 'crying unto the Lord' (Jud. 3:8,9,14,15) recalls their servitude to the Egyptians, resulting in Israel 'crying to the Lord' (Ex. 2:23), and being answered by the Passover deliverance - which looked forward to the events of the Lord's second coming. Their deliverances by the judges therefore also typify this. "Saviours (judges) shall come up upon mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau (so that) the Kingdom shall be the Lord's" (Obad. 21). "Saviours / judges" may be an intensive plural referring to the one true saviour / judge, Jesus.

The phrase "the Lord sold them into the hand of..." , which occurs here in Jud. 3:8, runs as a refrain throughout the record of Israel's punishment at the hand of her enemies. The force of what this will mean in practice is brought out in Dt. 32:30: "How should one chase a thousand (Jews), and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock (protecting Angel) had sold them...?". Given the huge numerical superiority of Israel's Islamist enemies, this shows a total military collapse by the Israelites in the face of this aggression. This is a far cry from the arrogance, confidence, bravery and 'fight to the death' attitude of modern Israelis.

Jdg 3:9 When the Israelites cried to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a saviour for them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother-
God Himself 'arose and saved' Israel from Egypt (Ps. 76:9, s.w. "raised up a saviour"), and the phrase is also used of Moses in Ex. 2:17. But the people didn't want this radical deliverance from their enemies, because like the generation saved from Egypt, they were with their enemies in their hearts, and worshipped their gods as Israel had taken the idols of their Egyptian enemies with them, through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:17). So the potential possible in these raised up saviours / judges was never totally realized.

Jdg 3:10 The Spirit of Yahweh came on him and he judged Israel. He went out to war and Yahweh delivered Cushan Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Cushan Rishathaim-

We can too easily skim read these verses and fail to appreciate how huge was the victory. "Mesopotamia" was the vast region between the Euphrates and Tigris; the Hebrew is Aram-naharaim 'Syria of the two rivers,' usually held to designate the country between the Euphrates and the Tabor (2 Kings 17:6). This king was mighty and ruled a large territory. He was perhaps seeking to get access to the sea, hence he attacked Israel. But this great king and his army were slain by the small clan of Othniel in the South of Judah.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

This king of Cush (also featured in Ez. 38:5, N.I.V.) has the epithet 'Rishathaim', meaning 'double wickedness'. These things point forward to the conflicts of the latter days between the Lord Jesus, Israel's ultimate judge / saviour, and the latter day enemies of Israel within the land promised to Abraham. This serves to emphasize how the latter day invasion will be headed up by an individual who is unashamedly a 'man of sin', a true anti-Christ. He was "king of Mesopotamia" (Jud. 3:8), literally meaning 'Aram (Syria) of the two rivers", i.e. Tigris and Euphrates. This would point to a geographical location in modern Iran / Iraq.

Jdg 3:11 The land had rest forty years. Othniel the son of Kenaz died-
The forty years rest of Jud. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28 may not be a literal period. I have elsewhere noted that the forty year reigns of Saul, David and Solomon create chronological problems if read literally. The idea may be that forty years was a time of testing, as it was

for Israel in the wilderness. We think of the Lord's 40 days of testing too. In this case, they were tested by peace. And they consistently failed, as God's people often do.

Jdg 3:12 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh. Yahweh strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of Yahweh-
This hints, perhaps, at a relatively sudden revival / strengthening of Israel's enemies, allowed by God in order to punish His people. They dominate Israel, they repent, and then cry to Yahweh for a saviour- and the Lord Jesus will be sent. It could be argued that this has indeed occurred since the discovery of oil in the Arab states; alternatively it could refer to a sudden revival after a dramatic defeat by Israel and/or her Western allies. Jer. 48:47 NIV clearly speaks of a revival of Moab's fortunes in the last days.

The repeated mention of Edom, Moab and Ammon in the prophets is hard to interpret specifically, seeing that these nations covered relatively small geographical areas which are now in Jordan and Syria. It may be that it is from these nations that the latter day onslaught is launched. We can, perhaps, therefore look to those countries becoming increasingly radicalized against Israel.

Jdg 3:13 He gathered to him the Ammonites and Amalek and he went and struck Israel; and they took possession of the city of palm trees-
Amalek was a tribe fated to destruction by God (Ex. 17:14), so we immediately suspect that this domination of Israel will come to destruction.

This should be seen against the background of many Scriptural indications that the latter-day entity dominating Israel in their land will comprise a confederacy of surrounding nations, united by the single desire of attacking Israel. Psalm 83 is a notable example of this. We note these attackers came from the east, over Jordan, and took Jericho (Dt. 34:3), perhaps making it their headquarters on the west bank of the Jordan. However, "the city of palm trees" could also have been En-gaddi, since Jericho had been destroyed by Joshua and wasn't rebuilt until the time of Ahab (1 Kings 16:34).

Jdg 3:14 The Israelites served Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years-
"Eglon" means 'calf', the same word used of the calves later worshipped by Israel. He was named after his idol, and yet Yahweh strengthened him (:12) in order to punish His people. God may use people, but that usage doesn't mean that He therefore approves of them. We too may be used by God, but this is no evidence of our acceptability with Him. He is described as "fat" and is slain with a knife- as if this was the slaying of the fatted calf. In the prodigal parable, the Lord interprets this as a celebration for repentance. Possibly Israel had sinned and repented, and Ehud was raised up in

response to that. Or more likely, God counted Israel as having repented when they hadn't.

Jdg 3:15 But when the Israelites cried to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a saviour for them, Ehud the son of Gera the Benjamite, a left-handed man. The children of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab-
It seems from 1 Chron. 8:6 that Ehud's family were carried captive to Mahanath, a place in Moab. And this would explain his motivation in fighting to free Israel from Moabite domination. The Ehud of 1 Chron. 8:6 was also a Benjamite [from Geba] who was related to Gera; see note there. Left handed people were considered strange and often relegated to the periphery of society in primitive societies; we see again how almost all the judges had something which made them despised and rejected. And yet it was exactly that group which God delighted to use to save His people (Jud. 3:15). We notice how God used left handed people to give David victory (1 Chron. 12:2), and to punish their hypocritical brethren (Jud. 20:16), and also the left handed Jael (Jud. 5:26 LXX). He seems to rejoice in using those whom man despises. See on :21. It's also possible that Ehud was right handed but had lost use of his right hand, thus making him effectively left handed. The Hebrew for Left-handed" here is literally 'a shut up right hand'. It isn't the same as in :21 where we are told of his left hand. That again would support the theme- that human strength is taken away so that God may be glorified through human weakness. And although he was of Benjamin, the son of the right hand, that was somehow shut up or disabled. This explains why there's something odd in the grammar of the phrase "the Benjamite". Literally it reads "a son of the right hand". Perhaps the idea is that the son of the right hand has his right hand somehow disabled, so that he is left handed. His natural ability has been removed. Ehud couldn't be the man he was intended to be. And all this was part of God's psychological background work in 'raising up' Ehud to save Israel.

I discuss on Jud. 20:16 how Benjamin were noted by the other tribes for having a regiment of left handed men. Benjamin means 'son of the right hand', the firstborn-something Judah and the other tribes bitterly resented. It's as if they were known as 'left handers', famed or mocked by the other Israelites for their left handed slinging regiment-as a dig against their role as being sons of the right hand. And this tension was behind the way the Israelites were later eager for an excuse to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. Left handedness is associated with sexual deviance, homosexuality and femininity in some African cultures, and it quite likely was in the time of Judges. "Sinister" literally means 'left handed'. "Men shook hands with their right hands since it was this hand that carried any weapon and if a weapon was being carried shaking hands could not take place". Indeed losing the right hand was seen as a punishment for sexual deviance. Ehud would have felt misunderstood and misjudged, perhaps contributing to his initial desire to make a suicide mission to assassinate Eglon. Probably his personal

desperation was stronger than any courage that came from faith. In their culture at the time, being 'normal' was all important. And it was not normal to be left handed. And so many of us fall into that category, of those not considered 'normal'. But God uses those very abnormalities. The point is that the man who was of the right handed tribe was in fact left handed; he fitted the image of a man who didn't live up to his name, and was perhaps mocked because of it. But it was that despised left hand which God was to use. And so continues a great theme in Judges, that God uses the marginalized and disdained as His great warriors. Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah... the left handed, female, youngest son, illegitimate son of a prostitute. Just as Ehud uses a home made dagger with his left hand, others use an ox goad, a tent peg, water pitchers instead of swords, a millstone thrown over a wall, the jawbone of a donkey... the weak, everyday things of life. This is still how God's Spirit works.

If Ehud's right hand was deformed, and he had no sword on his left thigh, Eglon would not have suspected that Ehud had any nefarious purpose in wanting to come close to him. God worked through the left-ness of Ehud. The man who had lost use of his right hand was not fit for military service; but he became the great warrior deliverer of Israel. The right hand is associated with good things (Is. 48:13; Ex. 15:6; Ps. 89:25; 110:1), morality (Ps. 137:5), approval (Gen. 48:13-20; Ps. 80:17; Is. 41:13) and purity (Ex. 29:20; Lev. 8:23; 14:14,17). But the left hand is associated with the opposites of these things. The rejected go to the left hand; and Ecc. 10:2 sums it up: “A wise man’s mind is at his right, and the fool’s mind at his left”. But through this weakness, God works.

Ehud was "raised up" by God, but clearly worked on his own initiative. His plan involved making himself a dagger (:16), carefully working out an assassination plot based on his knowledge of Eglon's palace after having been there many times taking tribute; and a cunning plan to pretend to have received a message from the idols at Gilgal for Eglon. This was all a result of ideas forming in his own mind, and having the single minded courage to develop them. Yet all this was under God's control, 'raising him up' for the moment.

Jdg 3:16 Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length; and he wore it under his clothing on his right thigh-
"Made himself" is literally 'made him', and could as well mean that he made the sword as a gift for Eglon- but in presenting it to him, plunged it into Eglon to murder him. There is irony throughout. Eglon, the fatted 'calf' [as Eglon means] was sacrificially offered. For the dagger recalled the priestly knives. Whereas Ehud had been bringing sacrifices to Eglon. We ponder whether all this irony and mockery was in fact of the Spirit. Yet still God worked through it all. Ehud was a man of a disabled right arm; he did whatever he did with his left hand. To fashion a sharp knife with only his left hand would not have

been easy. And the record stresses that he "made [it] himself". We are left to imagine him struggling one handed with the hot metal, making some kind of vice to hold the knife as he sharpened it... And so the one handed man made a two edged sword / dagger / knife, with its own hilt. The way he makes it himself, and returns from the idols to Eglon alone, all suggests he had planned the assassination carefully- and without the involvement of anyone else. Because, I suggest, he thought of it as a suicide mission. God worked through the hand of this disabled, suicidal, left handed loner... For men who think up suicide missions do so for many reasons. Not just bravery or a desire to achieve a greater good for their own side at the cost of their life. The desire to end their own lives can also play a large part, and this was likely the case with Ehud. But as with Samson, God worked through it. We note that the Spirit only came upon Ehud after his assassination of Eglon. The assassination itself was apparently his own plan, although part of his being 'raised up' for the job of delivering Israel from Moab.

This is presumably measuring by the "short cubit," i.e. the length from the elbow to the knuckles, about 13 inches or 33 cm. The idea of a saviour with a two edged sword looks ahead to the Lord Jesus and His latter day deliverance of His people from the same neighbouring peoples (Rev. 1:16).

Jdg 3:17 He offered the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man-
There is a strange emphasis on Eglon's physical form. "Eglon was a very fat man" is supported by the detailed and gory record of his death by stabbing: "Ehud... thrust it (the dagger) into his belly: and the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly" (Jud. 3:17,21,22).The men of Moab are likewise described as "lusty" (Jud. 3:29), the Hebrew word meaning literally 'oily, greasy', and implying fatness. All this emphasis - and it is that - must be for a reason. Surely it suggests that the Moabites had indulged themselves in the good life, eating and drinking to excess - doubtless at the expense of the Israelites whom they were then dominating. This would indicate that the latter day enemies of Israel will be enjoying great material prosperity, yet most standard-of-living indicators show that Israel's neighbours generally are far from having this. A massive redistribution of wealth brought about by revolutions, coupled with holding the West to ransom with oil prices and pillaging the wealth of Israel, would easily bring about this situation.
However, LXX gives "handsome", and the word translated "fat" is used also of flourishing animals and plants (Gen. 41:2,5; 1 Kings 5:3). It is the word used for Daniel and his friends appearing so healthy and strong (Dan. 1:13, as Ps. 73:4). But generally the word is used of animals, perhaps inviting us to see Ehud as a priest sacrificing Eglon, whose name means 'bull'. "Present" is mentioned three times and the word *mincha* can mean 'sacrifice'. But Ehud sacrifices the fattened calf Eglon with a priestly knife.

Jdg 3:18 When he had finished offering the tribute he sent away the people who carried the tribute-
This could have happened at Eglon's palace in Moab, or at his field headquarters in the "city of Palm trees" (:13), which I suggested was En-gaddi or Jericho (see on :28). It seems Ehud wanted to operate totally alone; possibly because there was nobody of exactly the same mind in the group of Israelites accompanying him. This would be a sad reflection on how willing they were to be subjugated; and also a parade example in serving God alone, even if our brethren are weak; see on :19.

Jdg 3:19 but he himself turned back from the idols that were by Gilgal and said, I have a secret errand to you, king. The king said, Keep silence! All his attendants left him-
This language could suggest that "he himself" turned away from idolatry, but his brethren were happy to remain with the idols. The assassination had to be carried out by himself alone because he had nobody of a similar mind to support him. See on :26. *"Turned back" carries the idea of repentance. Perhaps only at this point did Ehud repent of idolatry; hence the significance of him passing beyond the idols on his return.* "Gilgal" means a circle, so perhaps the "hewn images" were arranged in a circle. We are left guessing what happened to the other Israelites. Ehud alone "turned back from the idols" so we are left to guess that the others stayed there worshipping them. Ehud acted alone, spiritually and in every way. He never shared his mission with anyone else, for likely the mindset of the Israelites was as in Samson's time- accepting that the Gentiles ruled over them, and not seeking to overthrow them in any realistic way. They simply complained of their burdens, just as many today. The way God worked through Ehud to save them was therefore grace itself to the undeserving. "Errand" is literally a 'word', which is why the king asks his servants to be silent and to leave- so that the prophetic word could be heard by him.

"Secret message" is literally 'a hidden thing'. Ehud has in view his hidden dagger. He is constantly being sarcastic and ironic- not an altogether spiritual characteristic. The sarcasm and irony continues, in that it was the king himself who commanded his servants to leave him alone with Ehud. Ehud could not have contrived this, nor could he have asked them to leave. This was God's hand confirming him in his brave mission- which may well have been planned by him as a suicide mission, hence him going alone. For had be murdered Eglon, the servants would soon have murdered him. The long delay of the servants in unlocking the door and finding Eglon dead, a delay just long enough to allow Ehud to escape with his life, was likewise surely the hand of Divine providence which Ehud could not have himself orchestrated. We also reflect how Eglon didn't scream when stabbed or in his death throes [possibly any groaning from him was thought to be the sound of the obese man having another stomach upset]- again, Ehud could not have orchestrated this. Had Eglon screamed, his servants surely would have

heard and come to arrest Ehud. Likewise the servants didn't check or frisk Ehud's right thigh where his dagger was hidden. They saw his right hand was deformed and there was no sword on his left thigh, as would be normal for a right handed man; and so presumably they let him go in to Eglon. All these things lead us to suspect again that he himself had planned it all as a suicide mission; but God saved him from death at that point, so that he could rally Israel by his example.

Jdg 3:20 Ehud came to him as he was sitting alone in the cool upper room. Ehud said, I have a message from God to you. He arose out of his seat-
The cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed close in here upon the two men. We are told that the room is an upper room, and cool; we see Eglon arising out of his seat, perhaps with some difficulty if he were obese. "God" is *elohim*, and Ehud is pretending that he has been to the idols near Gilgal, the elohim, and has been sent back by them to Eglon with a personal message for him. Balak, another king of Moab, likewise "rose up" to hear the oracle from Balaam. And we think of Samuel taking Saul aside alone to give him a word from the Lord (1 Sam. 9:27). Oracles were sometimes given to kings by priests or local rulers as a sign that they accepted the king's sovereignty over them. And Ehud is surely doing this. Ehud's deceit is of a very high level. Although his personal bravery isn't in question, and was surely an outcome of his faith, a higher level would surely have been to simply trust in Yahweh and in Yahweh's Name attack the Moabites and liberate territory from them. But Ehud's bravery and huge risk is of such an extraordinary level that we naturally hesitate before suggesting he could have done even better. But it seems to me that he could have done even better... by not pretending he actually was an idol worshipper.

Jdg 3:21 Ehud put forth his left hand and took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his body-
Again there is the stress on the fact that Ehud used his left hand; see on :15. He presumably was grasping the king, about to whisper in his ear a message from God. And perhaps he did indeed have a message from God which he whispered as he stabbed him.

Jdg 3:22 The handle also went in after the blade and the fat closed on the blade, for he didn't draw the sword out of his body, and it came out behind-
It would seem that AV "and the dirt came out" may be correct. Ehud knew he only had one chance, to kill the man immediately without him screaming in agony to attract attention. So he would have struck him with full force. But the idea may also be that the man was as it were pierced right through; the image of total victory used several times of God's piercing through of His latter day enemies. Or we could render the phrase to the intent that he immediately went out into the *parshedon*, or inner chamber, and thence to the next chamber (:23). This would continue the very fine attention to detail

noted on :20.

ESV "and the dung came out". This turned Eglon's throne into a toilet chair or seat. The irony and sarcasm of the record surely reflects Ehud's thinking; and such an attitude seems suboptimal in spiritual terms.

Jdg 3:23 Then Ehud went out into the porch and shut the doors of the upper room on him and locked them-
As noted on :20, we have a very close attention to detail here. He managed to make the door lock after he closed it. Ehud clearly planned the assassination carefully. He would have been familiar with the layout of the palace because he had presumably been there several times before, offering tribute during the 18 years of Moabite domination of Israel (:14). Yet bringing the tribute to Eglon could be seen as a sign of weakness. But through that, God worked. For it gave Ehud knowledge of the palace layout.

Jdg 3:24 Now when he had gone out, the servants came and saw that the doors of the upper room were locked, and they said, Surely he is covering his feet in the upper room-
Covering the feet is an idiom for sleeping (1 Sam. 24:3), but it could be that it also means 'to go to the toilet'. His obesity may have been such that he had frequent bowel problems, of which he was embarrassed, and they assumed he had locked the doors for the sake of his own privacy.

There is a bitter sarcasm in the record. Eglon was indeed going to the toilet, in that his excrement flowed out from his wound and he was lying in it. This sarcasm reflects how Ehud had planned things. And we again question whether such bitter sarcasm was right when doing God's work. So much could have gone wrong for Ehud, but nowhere does he hint at praise of God's grace to him. Rather does the record reflect his perspective, of shaming an enemy and making him and his people a laughingstock. But that surely isn't God's approach to His enemies. The AV brings out better the triple usage of "Behold". We are given as it were a slow motion description of the servants' actions and confusion. We aren't given such slow motion description of Ehud's escape and flight. The record seems to reflect Ehud's intention- to mock and poke fun at the Moabites, as their inaction is contrasted with his dashing heroism as he successfully exits the palace and flees: "They saw that, *behold*, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber. And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, *behold*, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, *behold*, their lord was fallen down dead". We note the similarities between Ehud's left handed, deceptive murder of Eglon, claiming to have a quiet word for his victim; and the deception used by Joab to assassinate Abner and Amasa, again using his left hand in an unexpected left handed thrust and shedding out the bowels of the victim (2 Sam. 3:27; 20:8-10). Joab's assassinations were wrong, as

the record makes clear (1 Kings 2:5,6,31,32). But we wonder whether he was inspired by Ehud; and that raises the question as to whether Ehud used the right methods to assassinate Eglon. Even though God worked through them. Just as He did through Samson's very deceptive and morally wrong ways of murdering Philistines.

Jdg 3:25 They waited until they were ashamed; but still he didn't open the doors of the upper room, therefore they took the key and opened them and behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth-
"Still he didn't open the doors of the upper room" is written from the perspective of the servants. For we know, as the readers, that their king is lying there dead. But the Bible chops and changes in whose perspective it adopts, and this is helpful to remember when assessing the language of demons in the New Testament.

Jdg 3:26 Ehud escaped while they waited and passed beyond the idols and escaped to Seirah-
This was a daring, single handed assassination that reflected a deep faith within Ehud. I suggested on :19 that the assassination had to be carried out by himself alone because he had nobody of a similar mind to support him. His brethren were happy to remain with the idols (:19), but Ehud passed beyond them- to true relationship with Yahweh. "Seirah" has not been defined as a town, and may be the name for the forests of the hill country of Ephraim (:27). The record continually mocks at the enemy, calling Eglon a fat cow sacrificed by Ehud, who cleverly duped the dumb courtiers. And here, Ehud "escaped" whilst none of the Moabites "escaped" Israel (:29 s.w.). The *pesilim* ["idols"] may refer to carved paganic stones which the Moabites had set up as boundary markers on the territory they had taken over from the Israelites. They probably had an image of Eglon and his gods upon them, like other boundary markers which have been unearthed, which is why Ehud claims he has received a revelation from those gods to give to Eglon.

Jdg 3:27 When he had arrived, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, and he went before them-
I suggested on :19 and :26 that Ehud was pretty much alone in his high level of devotion to Yahweh. But although the other Israelites were spiritually weak, they still had some potential strength; and Ehud's example inspired them to come forward for the Lord. If [like Elijah] he had despised them for their unspirituality, then they would not have rallied to him.

There is no record of Ehud telling the Israelites that he had slain Eglon. He urges them to follow him- "he went before them"- to attack the Moabites. Clearly his single handed act of faith inspired him to further faith, and somehow his confidence in victory inspired Israel.

Jdg 3:28 He said to them Follow me, for Yahweh has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. They followed him and took the fords of the Jordan opposite the Moabites and didn't allow any man to pass over-
I suggest that Eglon was based at "the city of palms" which he had made his headquarters on the western side of Jordan. Now he had been slain, the Moabites wanted to flee back over the Jordan to Moab. Ehud guessed this would happen, and so took the fords of Jordan. "Opposite the Moabites" would then mean "before the Moabites arrived".

Ehud was a man whose right hand was closed or restricted. But he had assassinated Eglon with his left hand. And so he urges Israel that their "hand" too can prevail, and :30 confirms this by saying that Moab was subdued under the hand of Israel. If the deformed hand of Ehud could do what he did, so could the weak hand of Israel. And we are also to be inspired by the victories of those who one way or another are limited in their right hand. We love watching handicapped people achieving great things... and should be inspired that we too can arise above our own handicaps. Ehud's victory was intended to be the inspiration for Israel's. Thus the fatness of Eglon is repeated in :29, where the 10,000 Moabites slain were all 'fat' or strong (Heb.). Above all, the Lord's victory as a man of our nature is to inspire us to likewise overcome.

Jdg 3:29 They struck down about ten thousand Moabite men at that time, every strong man and every man of valour, and none escaped-
See on :17. The word for "thousand", especially when used in a military context, doesn't necessarily refer to a literal 1,000. Rather can it mean some kind of military subdivision.

Jdg 3:30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. The land had rest for eighty years-
The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

Jdg 3:31 After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred Philistine men with an ox goad, and he also saved Israel-
Anath is clearly a reference to Anat, the god of warriors. He was named according to a belief that he as a warrior would have Anat supporting him. But again we see, as with Jael and Gideon, how being surrounded by a background and culture of spiritual error and weakness didn't preclude people from rising above it. And so it is today.

Some pointings of the Hebrew in Jud. 3:31 have Shamgar killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad or "mattock" [as LXX]- using whatever came to hand in workaday life. Likewise Samson killing 1000 men with the jawbone of an ass (Jud. 15:14,15). Likewise Jael with her [wooden] tent peg and mallet.

The Hebrew phrase "attack... and save" is used in 1 Sam. 23:2 when David is uncertain about whether to attack the Philistines. David is being pointed back by this allusion to the zeal of Shamgar the son of Anath, 'the answer'. The answer to David's question was in Shamgar. David was spiritually and mentally exhausted at this time, and God's way forward for him at this time was to get up and be proactive for others. That is not always the right answer for us in our low moments, but when it is, we will be directed to it by God, perhaps through allusion to Biblical characters.

Samson's victory at Lehi may have inspired Shammah to slay the Philistines at the same place, years later (2 Sam. 23:11; AV "into a troop" is Heb. "Lehi"). And yet Samson's victory with a donkey jawbone would have been inspired by Shamgar's victory with an ox goad (Jud. 3:31). This is how the body of Christ should function; one spiritual victory inspiring another.

JUDGES CHAPTER 4

Jdg 4:1 The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, when Ehud was dead-

This is the intentionally repeated cycle of all the historical records, both of the judges and kings. Israel's apparent loyalty to Yahweh was only seen at the time of strong individual reformist leaders. Immediately the leader died, they returned to unashamed idolatry. Clearly the message is that no matter what strong leadership there may be amongst God's people, or what truly spiritual ethos and culture is inculcated by them- the hearts of individuals can still be untouched by it. And so without that culture, if the church closes or the individual moves away geographically or cannot attend due to health issues, or the leader dies... the commitment of the individual will be shown to have been meaningless. We must ask ourselves how our faith would really be, if we were taken away from the Godly influences and cultures in our lives. If individual believers were forcibly removed from their churches and spiritual networks- would their faith stand? This is why we must continue our appeal for personal Bible reading, indeed Bible study, and serious personal prayer and witnessing.

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24). But another refrain in Judges is that every man did what was right in his own eyes- but what is right in our own eyes, following our own heart, is usually not what is

right in God's eyes.

Jdg 4:2 Yahweh sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor-

Josh. 11 speaks of Joshua totally destroying Hazor so that no Canaanite remained there. But clearly the site had been re-taken and populated again. Just as happens with the victories of Joshua-Jesus against everything that might be a barrier to our inheritance of the Kingdom. Joshua's destruction of "Jabin" is understandable once we perceive that "Jabin" was not a personal name but a title, like 'Pharaoh'.

Yahweh sold them, but the record often says that they sold or prostituted themselves to the idols of the nations. He will confirm men in the path they wish to go.

The record of Deborah and Barak's victory over "Jabin king of Canaan" is shot through with connections with other passages which are clearly latter day prophecies, e.g. Ps. 83, Ez. 38. There is also a very deliberate series of allusions in their song of victory to Israel's exodus from Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh's army - which is also prophetic of Israel's future deliverance from her neighbouring oppressors by the Lord's return. Other expositors have shown the links between the song of Deborah and Barak and Ps. 68, which is clearly prophetic of Christ's work of deliverance both on the cross and in the final deliverance of Israel from the forces of evil.

"Jabin" meaning "man of great understanding" may suggest that he was the intellectual think-tank behind the confederacy, whose ideology was operationalized by a capable, well resourced, military leader (Sisera). The motivation for the coming attack on Israel must be ideological as well as just "to take a great spoil". However, the words of Sisera's mother imply that he (and she!) personally was motivated by a desire for the riches of the Israelites: "Have they not divided the prey... of divers colours of needlework... meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?" (Jud. 5:30). Such total confidence in victory is yet to be seen in a Middle East scarred with the memories of Israel's victories over the last decades.

The captain of whose army was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the Gentiles-
This presents an identical scenario to Sennacherib king of Assyria having Rabshakeh as his field commander during his attack on Jerusalem, which beyond doubt was a major type of Israel's latter day invasion outlined in passages like Ez. 38 and Ps. 83.

Jdg 4:3 The Israelites cried to Yahweh, for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and for twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel-
*"*Oppress" is the word used of how Israel were oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 3:9). But the intention, as with Israel's latter day oppression, is that it would lead them to cry out for Yahweh's salvation, 'Jesus': "For they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He

will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them" (Is. 19:20 s.w.). All the judges were therefore types of the ultimate deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus in the last days.

The fearful implications of "chariots of iron" [probably wooden chariots with iron scythes on the wheels] is hard for us to fully appreciate. "The children of Joseph said... the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron" (Josh. 17:16), as if that were a totally understandable reason for their unwillingness to even challenge the Canaanites; whilst some years later Saul and Jonathan were the only Israelites to have iron weapons, thanks to the Philistines' monopoly over it (1 Sam. 13:19-22). Possession of 900 "chariots of iron" was therefore like having some super-weapon into whose paradigm no other armaments could enter. This may have its latter day equivalent during the coming period of Israel's total domination by her neighbours. See on :15. The scythes on the wheels were specifically intended to destroy foot soldiers on flat ground. Yet Barak charged down Tabor onto the flat ground, his mean at his "feet", as foot soldiers, with no shield nor spear [according to Jud. 5], to engage with these chariots. This was in total faith. And his 'coming down' Tabor matches Yahweh's 'coming down' in victory.

Jdg 4:4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, judged Israel at that time- "Deborah" is usually interpreted as meaning 'bee', but clearly it is a form of the common Hebrew word for 'word' or 'saying', *debar*. The prophetess was a woman of the word, and as with many personal names, she was named after her life's work- just as Anglo Saxons carry the name carpenter, smith, buckler, joiner etc. She "judged Israel" perhaps in the sense of giving them judgments from God's word. A judge was a deliverer, and being a judge was being a deliverer (Jud. 2:16; 3:10). She is not recorded as having delivered Israel and so we assume her 'judging' Israel was in teaching them the law, and thereby resolving disputes. Doing what the Levites were intended to do, but clearly didn't do- as we see from the accounts of Levites in Jud. 17-21. Judges typically received a commission or were filled with the Spirit; but we don't read of that with Deborah. Most of the judges are described as having been raised up by Yahweh to save Israel (Jud. 3:9,15; 6:14; 10:14,15; 13:5); and they were empowered to do so by Yahweh's spirit (Jud. 3:10,28; 6:16,34; 7:22; 8:3; 11:29,32; 13:25; 14:19; 15:14; 16:20). The judges "save" Israel; but that term is never used about Deborah (cp. Jud. 2:16; 3:9,15,31; 6:14,15; 8:22; 10:1; 13:5). None of these things are ever stated of Deborah. This sets us up to be somewhat uneasy about her from the start; and we will see that she continually reflects pride. She is not later listed as a judge in 1 Sam. 12:9-11 LXX, but Barak is; and Barak is the one noted by name for his faith in Heb. 11:32.

Jdg 4:5 She lived under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill

country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for judgment-
Presumably this refers just to those Israelites who wanted to hear the judgments of God's word. She laments in Jud. 5:10 LXX that she was largely ignored, and she rebukes those who ignored her prophetic words and had been unwilling to assist in the battle: "Ye that sit on the judgment-seat, and walk by the roads of them that sit in judgment by the way". It was Deborah who sat by the roadside giving judgment from God's word, and who was largely ignored

Note the parallel between an Angel sitting under an oak and a prophetess sitting under an oak (Jud. 4:5; 6:11). In Jer. 23:18,22 we find prophets standing in the "council of the Lord" (RV) to receive His word; and yet this sounds very much like Angels standing in the court of Heaven to receive God's word of command. "The God of the spirits [Angels] of the prophets sent his Angel" to the prophet John (Rev. 22:6 RV); implying that as God had sent His Angel-Spirits to inspire the prophets, so now He did to John. Ps. 147:15,18 speak of the sending out of God's word to melt snow and send rain; this must surely refer to the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do these things. The way the "watcher and holy one" came down from Heaven is paralleled with the word of Divine command likewise coming down from Heaven (Dan. 4:23,31). The universe is not just ticking away on clockwork; the Angels are actively being sent out from Heaven to perform what may appear the most mundane and repetitious of things. Thus God sends out His Angels; He sends out His word; and He also sent out His prophets (Haggai- Hag. 1:12; Ezekiel- Ez. 3:5,6). God rose up and sent out His prophets (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 7:25 and many others). He is described as doing this because those prophets likewise identified with the word (as Deborah- see on :4) and became part of their own message.

The geography is significant. Deborah lived in the south, and apparently had little ability to motivate many of the people around her, according to her lament in Judges 5. She sends a message to a man in the far north of Israel, telling him to rally 10,000 men and go and fight a far superior enemy. That Barak responds to this message, and from a woman, sent from a distance, is commendable. It was a great act of faith, even if his faith wasn't as total as it might have been, and reveals his huge respect for Deborah, 'woman of the word / *debar*'.

Jdg 4:6 She sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh Naphtali and said to him-
'The holy place of Naphtali' is an example of the paganic place names still being used. Barak is being called to leave all that and go and work for Yahweh in His strength. "Barak", 'lightning', is the word used to describe Yahweh's miraculous manifestation through lightnings in the saving of His people (s.w. Dt. 32:41; 2 Sam. 22:15), and He will use them again in the last days when He repeats these ancient victories over Israel's enemies (s.w. Hab. 3:11; Zech. 9:14). But Barak was slow and nervous to live up to the

potential victory which was implicit in his name; and that was the tragedy of Israel's history at the conquest. And it is the abiding tragedy of so much spiritual history.

Hasn't Yahweh, the God of Israel, commanded-
This could imply he had received the prophetic word to go into battle, but had not responded. Jud. 5:2 LXX says that "A revelation was made in Israel when the people were made willing", referring to the specific prophetic word given to Deborah here in Jud. 4:6,7 that victory was possible- if the people were willing. Which Barak wasn't, completely.

'Go to Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and Zebulun?-
"Mount Tabor... the river Kishon (Jud. 4:6,7) is near the valley of Jezreel - Armageddon. Hence Jud. 5:19 speaks of "the waters of Megiddo", and "men of... Naphtali... and... of Zebulun" from those same areas (4:6) were used to win the victory. "Take with you", AV "draw toward", is s.w. :7 for how God would likewise draw the enemy toward them. The two sides were to be drawn together by God in conflict.

This records the call to arms as only for Naphtali and Zebulon. But the other tribes are criticized in Jud. 5 for not entering into the spirit of the event. The need is the call, and no legalistic arguments can stop that call. The calling of 10000 men of Naphtali and Zebulon to Mount Tabor by Barak and Deborah surely was some fulfilment of the otherwise enigmatic Dt. 33:19: "They shall call the peoples to the mountain. There they will offer sacrifices of righteousness, for they shall draw out the abundance of the seas". This prophecy has as context "the ten thousands of Ephraim; they are the thousands of Manasseh" (Dt. 33:17). The impression is given there that they would offer sacrifice there on "the mountain" and share the spoil of "the seas" [nations], and possibly this happened as Deborah sung the song of Jud. 5. The people of Ephraim and Manasseh are first in the list mentioned in Jud. 5 as those who supported the thousands of Zebulon and Naphtali, and who assembled to the mountain of Tabor. Asher and Dan are criticized in Jud. 5 for not assembling to Tabor because they were too concerned with their business in their ports on the coast. But Dt. 33:19 LXX promises blessing to Zebulon and Naphtali from the coast: "For the wealth of the sea shall suckle thee, and so shall the marts of them that dwell by the sea-coast".

Jdg 4:7 I will draw to you, to the river Kishon-
This 'drawing' points forward to Gog, the chief (military?) prince of Meshech and Tubal (parts of Assyria?), being drawn into Israel with hooks in his jaws (Ez. 38:4,8). The Kishon is little more than a muddy trench. But God uses the little things, and made it swell and

flash flood the plain so that the chariots and horses, Sisera's super weapon, became useless.

Sisera the captain of Jabin's army with his chariots and his multitude, and I will deliver him into your hand'-
The apparently insuperable strength of Sisera is recognized, but within that recognition there is the encouragement that God would deliver it all into the hand of Barak. He disbelieved this, and so the victory was given into the hand of a woman. Thus God set up a potential which a man didn't realize, and in this case, He transferred it into the hands of another (:9).

Jdg 4:8 Barak said to her, If you will go with me then I will go, but if you will not go with me I will not go-
If Yahweh had commanded him (:6), then Yahweh would be with him. But just as Israel wanted a human king rather than Yahweh, so Barak wanted a human manifestation of God to be with him. Just as Asa is recorded as serving God just as well as David, when actually this wasn't the case; but God counted him as righteous (1 Kings 15:11), so the incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). Sometimes the purges of idolatry by the kings is described in undoubtedly exaggerated language- such was God's joy that at least something was being done? Barak is listed in Heb. 11:32 as one of "those who through faith subdued kingdoms... from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens". As with Samson, we ponder whether the record presents his weak side. But God saw the faith that was also within him, and noted that for us all to see in Hebrews 11. But "I will not go..." could be read as a defiant refusal of the Divine call ["go to mount Tabor", :6; "Arise Barak and lead away captives", Jud. 5:12] unless Deborah 'goes' with him. Yahweh has gone out before him, but still he refuses to 'go' unless Deborah 'goes' with him. Many of the calling narratives feature this weakness of response to the call to "go". Moses objects "Who am I that I should *go*... they will *not* believe me" (Ex. 3:11; 4:1). Jeremiah and Ezekiel both protest their inadequacy to "go". Gideon opines that his clan is the smallest in Manasseh and he isn't the right man (Jud. 6:15); Saul likewise objects that he is from a poor family and the smallest tribe (1 Sam. 9:15). We too are called, for the language of calling is applied to us all in the New Testament. Not only to the Kingdom, but to "go" into all the world around us with the Gospel. And our responses likewise will be faltering. We as men balk at God's call. Clearly enough, from all these examples of Old Testament men doing so.

We can compare Barak's desire for Deborah the prophetess to "go with" him with Moses, Aaron and Hur praying for Israel on a hill, whilst Joshua down below was fighting the battle. Or the prophet Elisha being present during battles. Barak on one level believed God's word through Deborah, because he does muster 10000 men for an

apparently suicidal encounter with Sisera. But like so many of us, he still wanted the physical embodiment of that word to be with him visibly.

LXX adds: "For I know not the day on which the Lord prospers his messenger / Angel with me". We have here another allusion to Angelic involvement in the victory, which we have noted elsewhere and on Jud. 5:23. But at this point, Barak is unsure whether this will happen. And yet he is counted in Heb. 11:32 as a man of faith. This not knowing is then alluded to in :9 LXX "but know that thy honour shall not attend...". See on :14.

Jdg 4:9 She said, I will surely go with you; nevertheless the journey that you take will not be for your honour, for Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh-

The potential was that the enemy was to be sold into Barak's hands (:7). But Barak didn't fully believe that, and so the potential was applied to another. This is still how God works. This opens up the question of whether God automatically reassigns a task and possibility to another; or whether if we let the ball drop, His intention will not be realized. We think of Mordecai's comment to Esther in Esther 4:14 [see commentary there] that if she doesn't speak up for the Jews, deliverance will come from another quarter. And yet the original is unclear- it could equally be saying "And shall deliverance come from another quarter?". As if it might not. The lack of clarity is intentional. We are to appreciate the degree to which we matter. The Lord's parables speak of Him giving His wealth to His servants to trade with. How far His work prospers is over to them; for He has 'gone into a far country', He is far away in the sense that He has delegated to us authority to do His work on His behalf, and will review that work at His return. To have your life's mission done by a woman, to be shown to have been less brave than a woman, and to be presented as having been spiritually inferior to a woman... all this would have been shameful and humbling to Barak. But he is the one mentioned by name in Hebrews 11, and not Deborah nor Jael. His humiliation may well have developed his faith. Or perhaps the women were brave but without the faith that he had, for people can be very brave for reasons other than faith in God. And he was humbled whereas Deborah was proud. We note that Barak is listed as judge in 1 Sam. 12:11 rather than Deborah: "Yahweh sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies". I note on Jud. 5:7 ["The rulers ceased to rule in Israel. They ceased until I, Deborah, arose; until I arose, a mother in Israel"] that Deborah's victory song hints at excessive pride in herself; and perhaps that is why the apparently weaker Barak is seen by God as the greater hero than Deborah. Deborah's statement that Yahweh would "sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" may indeed have been a prophetic word of Jael's murder of Sisera. But we can also accept the possibility that the "woman" Deborah had in view was herself. And her prophetic word was fulfilled through another woman, not herself as she perhaps imagined.

"Deborah arose" is to be connected with how the Divine word was "Arise, Barak, and lead away your captives" (Jud. 5:12). Barak didn't make this response. Deborah did it for him. And yet he is counted as a man of faith (Heb. 11:32).

"I will surely go with you" sounds like Yahweh's assurance to a nervous Joshua (Josh. 1:9) and Israel (Dt. 1:30; 20:4). But Deborah rather arrogantly puts these words in her own mouth to the nervous Barak, facing the same essential enemies as Joshua.

Jdg 4:10 Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh and he went with ten thousand men following him; and Deborah went with him-
Heb. 11:32 seems to imply that Barak did this in faith, although not to the ideal level possible for him. Heb. "Ten thousand men at his feet", perhaps meaning 'Ten thousand footmen'. He had no chariots; his army was all composed of infantry, facing a vast multitude with 900 chariots of iron. We note the contrast in :13 between these foot soldiers, and the chariots of iron- whose iron scythes were specifically designed to kill foot soldiers: "Barak *summoned* Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up by foot with ten thousand men behind him" (4:10)... "Sisera *summoned* all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the troops who were with him" (4:13).

Jdg 4:11 Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the children of Hobab the brother-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent by the oak in Zaanannim which is by Kedesh-
Kedesh, 'holy place', was an example of the pagan names still being used by the Israelites. Likewise Zaanannim is LXX "the oak of the covetous ones", and we recall the association of oaks with idolatry. Again we are getting the impression of strength coming out of surrounding spiritual weakness. Heber's separation from the Kenites is here not presented in a very positive light. See on :17. Probably it was motivated by personal betterment; hence he chose to live by LXX "the oak of the covetous ones". Jael's faithfulness to Israel is the more remarkable; because her family were on the side of Sisera, and had fallen out with the Israelites. Previously, the Kenites had been part of Israel: "the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad, and they went and settled with the people" (Jud. 1:16). But Heber at least had now fallen out with Israel, seeing he was in alliance with Jabin; yet clearly his wife had retained her personal faith in Yahweh despite the family politics around her. She was in any case distantly related not to Moses directly, but to Moses' Gentile wife. But clearly she had faith in Israel's God, or else she wouldn't have done the hugely counter cultural thing that she did, reversing the hospitality code and going against her husband and clan to slay their ally Sisera. She acted totally alone to do so, and showed thereby her faith and personal relationship with Yahweh.

The “Oak in Zaanannim” next to Kedesh, 'the holy place', is surely a sign of idolatry, and stands in contrast to Yahweh's woman Deborah prophesying His word beneath “the palm tree of Deborah” (:5). Heber had gone away from Yahweh; yet within his camp, his wife was strongly faithful to Yahweh. "Kenite" is literally, one from Cain; and is the word for "spear" (s.w. 2 Sam. 21:16). Israel won their victory without sword or spear, as Deborah will later sing. Even from the family like Cain, there was at least one faithful woman. Here we see the power of a new creation, of how our background and surrounding environment need not railroad us into unspirituality.

Jdg 4:12 They told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor-
The battle plans seemed all the wrong strategy in human terms. The dreaded chariots were at full advantage on the flat land around the Kishon. Barak took his men up into the mountain, which was logical, as chariots couldn't be used there. But then they are told by God to come down from mount Tabor and fight with the chariots (:14). As with the capture of Jericho, God's strategy is seen as unwise humanly. But this is the 'foolishness of the thing preached' which Paul says confounds the might of this world.

Jdg 4:13 Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles to the river Kishon-
This 'gathering together' is spoken of in latter-day passages - Zech. 14:2 and Rev. 16:14. These previous invasions which typify those of the future, also mention this 'gathering together': Sisera's forces did this (Jud. 4:13), as did those of Ammon (Jud. 10:19; 1 Chron. 19:7), the Amorites (Jud. 11:20), the local powers with Assyria in Hezekiah's time (Mic. 4:11), Gog's forces (Ez. 38:7), the Arab-Canaanite tribes (Gen. 34:30) and especially the Philistines (Jud. 16:33; 1 Sam. 13:5,11; 17:1; 25:1; 28:1; 29:1; 2 Sam. 23:11). This is quite some emphasis. Thus while we can expect to see greater potential Arab unity developing around the Israel issue and perhaps a common allegiance to charismatic 'Nebuchadnezzar' figure for a brief period, their complete meeting of minds will not be until the final push against Jerusalem.

Jdg 4:14 Deborah said to Barak, Go, for this is the day in which Yahweh has delivered Sisera into your hand-

"This is the day" would connect with Barak's complaint in :9 LXX: "I know not the Day in which God will send his angel to give me prosperity: come with we that you may direct me in this respect”. She did come with him, and now tells him the precise time in which he was to make the attack: "*This* is the day".

But as explained on :7,9, Yahweh's plan was indeed that ideally Sisera would be delivered into Barak's hand. But his faith wasn't up to it, so the enemy was to be

delivered into a woman's hand. But it seems Deborah, as a prophet, knew that it was still potentially possible for Barak to have the victory through the enemy being delivered into his hands.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Hasn't Yahweh gone out before you? So Barak went down from Mount Tabor and ten thousand men after him-
See on :12. To come down from mount Tabor to where the chariots could be used was the very opposite of good strategy. Deborah in Jud. 4:14 quotes the words of Dt. 9:3 concerning the Angel going before Israel to drive out the nations to Barak, to inspire him with courage in fighting them: "Yahweh your God is He who goes over before you as a devouring fire. He will destroy them and He will bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly". She recognized that the work the Angels did when they went out many years ago to do all the groundwork necessary for Israel to destroy all the tribes of Canaan was done for all time. It was not too late to make use of that work by making a human endeavour in faith. So with us, the smaller objectives in our lives as well as our main goal of reaching the Kingdom have all been made possible through the work of Christ and the Angels in the past. Deborah's recognition of this is shown in her song- Jud. 5:20: "They (the Angels) fought from Heaven; the stars (Biblical imagery for Angels) in their courses fought against Sisera". In passing, note that the Hebrew for 'courses' is almost identical with that for 'ladder' in the account of Jacob's vision of a ladder of Angels. Strong specifically defines it as meaning 'staircase'. See on Ex. 14:24.

Other implications that a repentant Israel will be used to win this great victory, are to be found in the mention of "the river Kishon" and "Harosheth", which was near Mount Carmel. These places feature in the record of Elijah's great appeal to Israel; the

apostate element among them were slain at the Kishon (1 Kings 18:40), as the faithless in Israel will be in the last days. The typical inference here in Judges that the invader will be destroyed at this same place would suggest that they will share in the judgments that come upon God's enemies, and therefore perish in the same geographical location. Yet it was also in this same place that Israel repented, finally responding to Elijah's ministry. The work of the Elijah prophet of the last days will likewise culminate in a spiritually revived Israel defeating their enemies.

Jdg 4:15 Yahweh routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the sword before Barak, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot-
This stress on chariots, both in the record of the attack and of God's defeat of them, takes the mind back to the Egyptian chariots which pursued Israel and were destroyed in the Red Sea. "The Lord routed Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host" (Jud. 4:15) recalls how God "troubled (same Hebrew word translated "routed" / "discomfited") the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels... so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee... and the Egyptians fled" (on foot, Ex. 14:24-27), just as Sisera "lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet" (Jud. 4:15), due to the mud produced by the hail (Ps. 83:9).

Deborah will later exalt that Israel had no shield nor spear (Jud. 5:8). The "sword" here may therefore refer to Yahweh doing this rout with *His* sword.

Jdg 4:16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth of the Gentiles, and all the army of Sisera fell by the sword; there was not a man left-
"There was not a man left" matches the comment concerning the Egyptians, that "there remained not so much as one of them" (Ex. 14:28). We find the essence of the Red Sea deliverance repeated in life after life, situation after situation, in Israel's history. This happens to the extent that some of the Psalms can speak as if we were there present; and Paul stresses how that passage through water remains a type of the baptism of every believer to this day (1 Cor. 10:1). Just as Yahweh confounded Israel's enemies at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:24,25), so He did in Deborah's victory over Sisera (Jud. 4:15); and likewise "not one was left".

"Not a man left" may allude to how Canaanites were to be totally destroyed as *herem* to Yahweh, devoted as a burnt offering in totality. One of many examples in Dt. 7:2: “When the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them". See too Dt. 7:16,17,24; 9:1,3; 11:23; 33:27 etc.

Jdg 4:17 However Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite-
The wives of Bedouin chiefs have their own tent.

For there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite-
Jabin / Hazor is listed in Joshua 11 as one of the kings overcome by Joshua earlier, and now Heber has made peace with Hazor. LXX adds "...the Kenite his friend", pointing up Jael's bravery in murdering the friend of her husband under the guise of friendly hospitality. For a wife was expected to uphold the political alliances of her husband. This would suggest Heber had moved away from the things of God and was now in league with Jabin, rather than maintaining the connection between the Kenites and Israel. We recall that Moses' wife was a Kenite. See on :11. Again we are getting the impression of strength coming out of surrounding spiritual weakness.

Jdg 4:18 Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; don't be afraid. He came in to her into the tent and she covered him with a rug-
LXX "Hid him behind the curtain". Here again, as with Rahab, Ehud and the Gibeonites, we have deception used as an expression of faith. "The curtain" would have been the curtain which separated her sleeping space from the rest of the tent. To invite another man into her tent and invite him into her personal sleeping space was unheard of. She was very brave to do this, and was desperately thinking outside the box of her surrounding culture and all the expectations upon her as Heber's wife. Because she wanted to rise to the moment and *carpe diem* for the Lord's work. Sisera was surely heading towards the tent of the male head of the family, Heber. But Jael goes out to meet him and urges him to turn in to her tent. Men never entered the tent of another man's wife; even Amnon had to ask his father's permission for his half sister to come into his bedroom. So quite possibly he perceived that Barak was hot on his heels chasing him, and there was not a moment to be lost. Hence he tells her to stand at the tent door and inform any man looking for him that there is no man in her tent. And this would explain the violation of custom in entering the personal tent of the wife of a married man. Sisera is expecting pursuit and expecting tents to be entered in search of him. All the examples of the hospitality culture include footwashing (Gen. 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; Jud. 19:21). She doesn't do this because time is of the essence- Barak is hot on the heels of Sisera. All this highlights Jael's bravery and quick thinking. Women lived in separate tents to their husbands, often because the husband had more than one wife. We recall Laban searching the tents of Jacob and also the tents of his wives (Gen. 31:33).

"Turn in, my lord, turn in to me" is the language of the hospitality culture. It repeats the words of Lot to the Angels in Gen. 19:2: "My lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house". And yet she bravely subverts and goes against that hospitality culture; instead

of protecting her guest with her life, she kills him. And thus stands as an example of rejecting our surrounding culture and even subverting it, for the sake of the Lord's work. And so it is used in Prov. 9:15,16; 7:5-23). Indeed, for a married woman to invite a male in to her tent and cover him with a blanket / invite him beyond the curtain into her sleeping space... was most definitely seen as a very forward thing to do. Whilst I fail to see solid evidence that they had a sexual encounter, it does seem to me that she was giving him the come on... and that helped him to make that split second decision to go into her tent for refuge. When her plan was to kill him. We note too that the invitation from a woman to turn in to her personally [Lot invites his guests to turn in to his house] could be read as having a hint of sexual invitation. Hospitality culture always involved the male head of family making the offer to the visitor. But Heber was a friend of Sisera; and he was not consulted. Jael invites the guest- and that was unheard of in their hospitality culture.

Jdg 4:19 He said to her, Please give me a little water to drink for I am thirsty. She opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him-
The cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed close in here upon the two people in the tent. She gives him more than he asks, not water but milk, and butter (Jud. 5:25), perhaps thinking that dairy products would make him more sleepy. She did what she did on the spur of the moment, for she was surely not expecting Sisera to come stumbling in to her tent. Although she had her own tent, there is no evidence that the other people in the encampment, including her husband, agreed with her actions. Like Ehud, she acted completely alone, quite against the expectations of her surrounding family and environment. And for all time we have an example of a woman far from the battle front, "a woman of the tents" (Jud. 5), in an unspiritual environment, surrounded by children and domestic issues, suddenly given a chance to do a major thing for God. And she rises to the call magnificently, grabbing what she had to hand [a tent peg] and using it. The comment has been made that "Now as then the work of pitching tents fell to women among the Bedouin". The tools of her workaday life were transformed into God's instruments in her hand. Just as a delivery driver or hairdresser on a British council estate rises up to lead woman after woman to the saving Truth of Jesus Christ.

As we see from Lot and the old man in Jud. 19 being willing to sacrifice their daughters for the sake of hospitality culture, the woman was bound by that culture of hospitality to have defended his life, even at the risk of her own. So what Jael did was powerfully and radically counter cultural. She thought well beyond the narrow confines of her social situation.

Deborah responds to a request for something to drink, gives milk and covers Sisera with a blanket. Possibly in her own bed. This is very much the image of a mother. I suggest this quietly subverts Deborah's proud claim to be a "mother in Israel", and Deborah's

implication that the glory for killing Sisera would go to her as a true "mother in Israel". The glory goes to Jael, also presented as a mother figure, who was not in fact an Israelite.

Jdg 4:20 He said to her, Stand at the door of the tent and when any man comes and asks you 'Is there any man here?' say 'No'-
The theme of gender continues. She surely had children and other women in her tent. She was to speak of Sisera as if he were not even a man, but a woman. The whole story is a deconstruction of the male glorifying narrative of those times. And this was not purely for the sake of it, rather is it part of a wider theme that God works through the despised in order to achieve His greatest victories.

Jdg 4:21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a tent peg and a hammer in her hand and went quietly to him and hammered the peg into his temples, and it pierced through into the ground-

"Heber's wife" is noted because what she was doing was so countercultural, against the will of her husband who was in league with Sisera. And the inspired record takes note of that. "Jael" can mean 'wild deer', and we note that "Naphtali [source of most of Barak's soldiers] is a hind [*yaelah*] let loose" (Gen. 49:21)- suggesting she was on the side of her husband's enemies. A sleeper cell, even perhaps of just one woman, within the tents of Israel's enemies. Just as so many of the Lord's people today.

We too easily assume that a nail was made of iron or some metal, as we are used to. But all archaeological evidence is that tent pegs were wooden. And so were hammers. Metal was at a premium. To kill a man with a wooden peg was an act of faith by Jael. The way he apparently rose up against her three times is thereby more understandable if the peg was only wooden. Ez. 15:3 is specific that a pin or nail (s.w.) was made out of wood. The word for nail is also rendered "stake" in Is. 33:20; 54:2. We note that some pointings of the Hebrew in Jud. 3:31 have Shamgar killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad or "mattock" [as LXX]- again, using whatever came to hand in workaday life. Likewise Samson killing 1000 men with the jawbone of an ass (Jud. 15:14,15).

"In her hand" is added, whilst obvious, to show the fulfilment of the prophecy that Sisera would be given into "the hand" of a woman (Jud. 4:9; 5:25,26). He ran to the encampment and was enticed by Jael's hospitality; but through that, Yahweh was putting him into Jael's hand. But if Jael had remained within the very narrow horizons of her tent life, if she had remained just a woman of her time and station... then the potential gift 'into her hand' wouldn't have happened.

This is clearly intended to be understood as the seed of the woman smiting the seed of the serpent in the head. Jael smiting off Sisera's head may be the basis of Ps. 110:7:

"therefore shall he lift up the head". It also connects with David cutting off Goliath's head in an encounter full of echoes of the latter-day conflict between Christ and Israel's enemies. In the same way as Israel then had to follow up David's token victory, so they had to do the donkey- work in the wake of Sisera's death, and so they will also engage in a process of subduing the nations after Christ's initial dramatic victory at Armageddon - the landing of the stone upon the feet, the killing of Goliath, the nailing of Sisera's head. "The hand of the children of Israel prospered ('going, went and was hard', A.V. mg.), and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin" (Jud. 4:24) definitely speaks of a subsequent process of subjugation.

For he was in a deep sleep; so he died-
LXX "darkness fell upon him and he died". But the idea seems to be that he swooned, and then died. She didn't kill him outright, according to Deborah's song of praise for Jael, he rose up and then fell down dead at her feet (Jud. 5:27). This makes Jael's bravery all the more commendable, especially in that her husband was in league with Jabin. Indeed Jud. 5:26,27 could suggest he sank down three times: "She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead". She hammered the peg through his skull and into the ground [NIV “She drove the peg through his temple into the ground”], implying his head was on the ground. If she had first struck him while he was lying down asleep, covered with a blanket, then there would have been some cushion or mattress between his head and the ground. So it makes sense to understand she had a struggle with him, he fell to the ground [as in Jud. 5], and she at that point nailed his head into the ground [Jud. 4:21]. We can read with LXX "darkness fell upon him and he died" rather than that he was asleep. Or "he was in a deep sleep" [NEV] may mean he was stunned and unconscious when he fell the last time.

Jdg 4:22 As Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, Come and I will show you the man whom you seek. He came to her and there lay Sisera, dead; and the tent peg was in his temples-
In Jud. 5:15 LXX, Deborah comes over as in command in the field, sending Barak on foot to find Sisera: "And princes in Issachar were with Deborah and Barak, thus she sent Barak on his feet in the valleys into the portions of Reuben". We wonder whether Barak pursuing Sisera personally was because Barak wanted the glory of killing him. He would thereby have been disregarding Deborah's prophecy that "Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (:9). Despite constantly being presented as not being of the highest spiritual caliber, Barak is the one listed in Hebrews 11 as the man of faith. We aren't told how Barak felt as he saw Sisera's body in Jael's tent and realized the brave act she had performed. He would have been filled with deep respect for her. But also a deep

sense, surely, of how foolish he had been to pursue the glory of killing Sisera himself. Naturally he would have remembered Deborah's words to him, and realized that he had wasted his effort in running after Sisera seeking to kill him. Just as so much of our human endeavour we suddenly realize to have been so misplaced. If we had been more sensitive to God's word, we'd have saved ourselves so much exertion.

Jdg 4:23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the Israelites-
The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

Jdg 4:24 The hand of the Israelites prevailed more and more against Jabin the king of Canaan until they had destroyed him-
All this is but one of several hints that after Christ's latter day destruction of the military arm (cp. Sisera) of the enemies in the land of Israel, the campaign is then taken to the civil headquarters (represented by 'Babylon' in the Apocalypse?), typified here by Jabin.

JUDGES CHAPTER 5

Jdg 5:1 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang this song-
It is clearly Deborah's song, and it is very critical of those in Israel who didn't respond to her prophetic call to arms. And Barak would have ben humbled by the fact that women like Deborah and Jael had gotten the glory rather than himself. So the way he sings along with it is a sign of his humility, which meshed with his faith [although incomplete] which Paul notes in Hebrews 11.

Jdg 5:2 Because the leaders took the lead in Israel, because the people offered themselves willingly, blessed be Yahweh!
But the song will go on to lament that the leaders of Israel didn't take the lead (:7 especially), and neither did Barak. But Deborah, a woman, took the lead and was the true leader. Elders can shut up, or open, the Kingdom to men. They watch “in behalf of” the souls of the ecclesia (Heb. 13:7 RV). Their very examples can influence the flock positively or negatively- for “like priest like people” is a Biblical idea. When the leaders “offered themselves willingly”, so did the people (Jud. 5:2,9). LXX "A revelation was made in Israel when the people were made willing" would refer to the specific prophetic

word given to Deborah in Jud. 4:6,7 that victory was possible- if the people were willing. Which Barak wasn't, completely.

"The people offered themselves willingly" to Deborah perhaps forms the basis for the description of Christ's people in the last days, being "willing in the day of your power" (Ps. 110:2).

Deborah praises God for the freewill of His warriors, as in :9; as if it was a gift from Him. The fact she praises God and not them reflects how God still works in human freewill decisions. And therefore those who didn't come to Yahweh's "help", even though not invited, are condemned by Deborah.

Jdg 5:3 Hear, you kings! Give ear, you princes! I, even I, will sing to Yahweh. I will sing praise to Yahweh the God of Israel-
LXX "I will sing, it is I who will sing to the Lord, it is I, I will sing a psalm" emphasizes "I"; perhaps the song was sung specifically by Deborah, as she glorifies that she, a woman and despised prophetess who had to teach under a palm tree as she had no premises to do so, had had her prophetic word justified. Barak would then show his humility by singing along with her. "Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes" sounds like the appeal to the nations that goes out after Christ's victory (cp. Ps. 2:10). But the kings and princes could simply refer to the leaders of Israel, whom effectively Deborah is rebuking later in the song (:7).

Jdg 5:4 Yahweh, when You went forth out of Seir, when You marched out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens poured. Yes, the clouds poured down water-
LXX "the heaven dropped dews". There was apparently a downpour of water from Heaven which led to the Kishon swelling and carrying away some of the enemy (:21). This is the language of Hab. 3, Ps. 68 and other prophecies of the last days. Deborah is feeling she has become, by default, another Moses; for the victorious march of Israel is like theirs from Sinai (:5), which she calls "Seir", alluding to Dt. 33:2. She feels a similar theophany has occurred, along with the rainfall then experienced (Ps. 68:8,9).

The language of storm and melting mountains (:5) clearly riffs on Baal, the storm god of Canaan. Yahweh is shown as superior to Baal- the god of the Canaanites, and the god adopted by His own people. It was the storm which gave Israel victory; and so Yahweh and not Baal is presented as the storm God.

Jdg 5:5 The mountains melted at the presence of Yahweh, even Sinai at the presence of Yahweh the God of Israel-

The mountains melted means that from the mountains flowed down streams.

Literally, "this is Sinai", as if Deborah was nodding towards mount Tabor as she sung. We might say, 'Sinai all over again'. Heb., as AV, "this Sinai", as if Deborah felt herself back there standing before Sinai witnessing the great theophany there, in that she has seen it before her eyes, as it were, in what God has now done in giving her victory against Sisera. This is the power of Biblical history. There is a living word which continues to speak to us; the historical victories of God are replicated, in essence, in our own experiences.

Jdg 5:6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, the travellers walked through byways-
The idea is that the situation in Jael's time is as it was in the days when Shamgar delivered Israel (Jud. 3:31). Whilst this describes the broken down infrastructure of the land, with people using byways because they feared being attacked on the main roads, there is the implication in LXX of spiritual weakness: "they deserted the ways... they went in crooked paths". And this may speak of the latter day Israel in a state of devastation and collapse, with highways unoccupied (cp. motorways wrecked by bombing). It's also possible they avoided the highways so as to avoid paying taxes to the Canaanites. Yahweh by contrast (:4) marched straight ahead and powerfully, and so did Barak and those marching in step with Him. Deborah's point seems to be that Shamgar's deliverance didn't change the fact that Israelites still feared to walk along the highways. But Deborah's deliverance had achieved that. She is comparing herself favourably to Shamgar, as if she is an even greater judge / deliverer. And yet later references to the judges mention Barak as a judge and not Deborah. Such comparisons again smack of pride.

Jdg 5:7 The rulers ceased to rule in Israel. They ceased until I, Deborah, arose; until I arose, a mother in Israel-
Rulers is LXX "the mighty men ceased". Deborah's song is really a lament at the failure of Israel's leadership, and Barak, who had also failed to provide this leadership when empowered to do so, was very humble to have sung this song with her (:1). She was a "mother in Israel", providing leadership in a family bereft of male headship- because none of the men provided it. "Ceased" can be rendered 'deserted'. Deborah is very critical of others in Israel, to point up her own exalted opinion of herself. Perhaps she alludes to how her namesake Deborah who was Jacob's nurse and was buried beneath an oak tree (Gen. 35:8). Quite possibly the palm tree under which she sat was that same tree. She was the mother of Jacob / Israel. Perhaps she calls herself a mother in Israel to compare herself with Sisera's mother (:28). We wonder if there isn't some pride here; which may explain our observation on Jud. 4:9 that it is the apparently weaker Barak who is seen by God as the greater hero than Deborah. Certainly :3 LXX has too many personal pronouns, as if it's all about her: "I will sing, it is I who will sing to the Lord, it is

I, I will sing a psalm". And here again: "I Deborah arose, until I arose". Other examples of her pride are noted on :13,21,28. The imagery of "mother" suggests protection of children unto death. Deborah is presenting herself as the saviour of the children of Israel; but it was really Barak's faith [although it was imperfect] and huge bravery, coupled with that of Jael- rather than Deborah. She isn't recorded as doing much at all in the battle.

Jdg 5:8 They chose new gods, therefore war came to the gates-
Gentile nations didn't change their gods; but God's people did, ever seeking a little extra material benefit from some new religion; see on Jer. 2:8,11. Israel are therefore likened in Hosea to a sexually addicted woman, ever seeking new partners. In this sense Israel were worse than the other nations, who only changed their gods when forced to by the military dominance of neighbours.

Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?-
"Thousand" when used in a military context usually means some military subdivision rather than a literal 1,000. The idea may be that although they had shields and spears, none of the 40,000 in view got their weapons out in response to Deborah's prophetic call. The reference to 40000 unarmed men may be to Josh. 4:13, where Joshua had 40000 soldiers who went to fight against Jericho- and defeated Jericho without fighting, because God gave the victory. Deborah is perceiving the similarity. The allusion must surely be to Joshua's conquest of Jericho because Barak's force was of 10000 not 40000 (Jud. 4:6,10).

Jdg 5:9 My heart is with the governors of Israel, who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless Yahweh!-
"Offered" can be translated 'responded'. LXX "You that are willing among the people, bless the Lord". Deborah now praises the few leaders who did respond to her prophetic call to arms. The Hebrew for "governors" can mean a law-giver or teacher, literally "an engraver of laws"; she may have in mind the faithful scribes, who supported her prophetic call to arms. Perhaps in the latter day context this speaks of a minority of faithful amongst latter day Israel, with God's law engraved in their hearts as it was on stone previously (Jer. 31:33). Remember that Elijah will be calling for a revival of true interest in the Mosaic law during his ministry, which may well coincide with Israel's period of downtreading (Mal. 4:4-6).

Jdg 5:10 Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way-

This seems a criticism of those in Israel who were not "willing" to assist in the battle. LXX "Ye that mount a she-ass at noon-day, ye that sit on the judgment-seat, and walk by the roads of them that sit in judgment by the way". It was Deborah who sat by the roadside giving judgment from God's word, and who was largely ignored (Jud. 4:5). Or we can read this as saying that the wealthy and the poor, who walked rather than rode expensive donkeys, would unite in praising Yahweh.

Jdg 5:11 Far from the noise of archers, in the watering places, there they will recite the righteous acts of Yahweh, the righteous acts of His rule in Israel. Then the people of Yahweh went down to the gates-

The idea may be that those who didn't respond to God's command to fight Sisera would in the future, far from the noise of war, recite at the wells the great acts which Yahweh had wrought through women. And those who recited things at the watering places were largely women. We recall how women were found at wells in the lives of Abraham's servant, Jacob and Moses. In the latter day context, Ez. 39:3 stresses how Gog will rely on his archery to terrorize Israel in the last days: "I will smite your bow out of your left hand, and will cause your arrows to fall out of your right hand". Assyrian bas-reliefs frequently show them posing with their bows. The importance of archery in warfare can easily be overlooked by us, who tend to lump bows, arrows, swords and shields etc. together as obsolete weaponry. Yet the ability to strike from a distance without personal combat was a vital innovation. The highlighting of the fact that the enemies of Jud. 4 and Gog of Ez. 38 both used archery suggests that this may have a latter day equivalent - which must surely be in the use of missile power? The vials of Revelation being poured out from the air onto the earth (land - of Israel) may also indicate that latter day judgments literally descend from the air.

AV "even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel". God saved Israel at this time by grace alone, and yet Deborah prefers to see that salvation as just or righteous. Perhaps she failed to grasp grace. Or possibly we are to perceive as does Paul in Romans, that God's saving by grace is still 'just' and fair in His morality. The women assembled at wells to chat and gossip, just as folks do today in online groups and coffee shops. But their talk was not to be the usual stuff of chit chat. It was to be of Yahweh's great salvation through the weak instruments He used. And so our social talk should be likewise focused.

Jdg 5:12 'Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead away your captives, you son of Abinoam'-

This seems to be a quotation from the prophetic word which came to Deborah. "Awake" is 'arise'. But Deborah says that she "arose" a mother in Israel, rather glorifying her own obedience to the call. Perhaps the first sentence in this verse was sung by Barak (see on

:1), and the second by Deborah, in a kind of part singing. Ps. 68:18 quotes this verse with reference to the latter day work of the Lord Jesus. Taking captivity captive (Heb.) means 'take prisoner those who took you prisoner'. This is the language of the latter day victory over Babylon (Is. 14:2).

Jdg 5:13 Then a remnant of the nobles and the people came down. Yahweh came down to me against the mighty-
She laments that only a remnant had responded to her call to arms. LXX "Then went down the remnant to the strong". But this again is a theme of God's workings with men. The left handed, the women, the minorities, those whom man despises, are used by Him to work His great victories.

'The remnant' presumably means that only a minority of God's people got involved in the battle. And so it has ever been.

We perhaps have another hint of Deborah's self focus when she exults [in the Hebrew] that "the people of the Lord came down for me against the mighty". "For me" leaves us wondering about her level of humility; see on :7. Dominion over the mighty was achieved by Jael, but Deborah likes to see herself as the victor. This confirms our hunch that her earlier comment that a woman would get the glory, and not Barak, had herself in view.

Jdg 5:14 Those whose root is in Amalek came out of Ephraim after you, Benjamin, among your peoples. Governors came down out of Machir-
LXX "Ephraim rooted them out in Amalek, behind thee was Benjamin among thy people: the inhabitants of Machir came down with me searching out the enemy". Machir may recall the daughters of Zelophehad, who joined Deborah in personally fighting the enemy. Being rooted in Amalek means they had taken over Amalekite territory.
Machir and Gilead refers to the two halves of Manasseh, one on each side of the Jordan.

Those who handle the writer's quill came out of Zebulun-
The idea is that instead of drawing their quills from their pouches, they drew swords.

God asked goldsmiths to do the manual work of building the wall of Jerusalem, bruising their sensitive fingers against lumps of rock (Neh. 3:8,31); and Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers (Jud. 5:14), not military men. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when we'd have thought that naturally speaking, they would have been far more comfortable in the reverse roles. Judas was put in charge of the money amongst the twelve; when Matthew the tax collector would presumably have been the obvious man for the job. Naaman wanted to do some great act, but was asked to do the hardest thing for him- to dip in Jordan.

Verses 14-18 mention the tribes of Israel, and their responses to the battle. The tribes are listed in order according to their mothers: by Rachel, then by Leah, then by Bilhah and Zilpah. This is clearly intentional. The Rachel tribes are mentioned first in that Joseph was represented by Ephraim, then Benjamin, then Machir (a grandson of Joseph and grandfather of Gilead). It's as if all Jacob's sons are paraded before us and receive their judgment. Perhaps this feature is because Deborah has declared herself the "mother in Israel" and thereby feels able to judge Israel, as her sons. But again, we wonder whether Deborah is not rather over exalting herself. And it is she rather than God who declares herself the mother in Israel, a matriarch on a par with Jacob. We note that later scripture doesn't make any comment upon Deborah. Barak is mentioned later as judge at this time, rather than Deborah; and Barak not Deborah is mentioned in the roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 as having through faith turned to flight a huge army. Jael was really the woman who should have been glorified more than Deborah. Whilst Deborah does praise her, unlike Rahab or Ruth, she has no abiding record in Israel's history. And Deborah seems to have far more to say about herself than about Jael. And so we have in Jael one of many true heroines who never got much reward for their heroism- in this life.

Jdg 5:15 The princes of Issachar were with Deborah. As was Issachar, so was Barak. They rushed into the valley at his feet-
LXX "And princes in Issachar were with Deborah and Barak, thus she sent Barak on his feet in the valleys into the portions of Reuben". Deborah comes over as in command in the field, sending Barak on foot to find Sisera (Jud. 4:22). LXX “Barak also sent forth his footmen into the valley". To leave the heights of Tabor and charge into the flat valley, with no shield nor spear, where the 900 iron chariots could be used most effectively, was against all military sense. But Yahweh caused a flash flood of the Kishon (:21), swept many of them away, and made the land muddy so the chariots got stuck in the mud. But the charging down into the valley, following Barak, was an act of pure faith.

By the watercourses of Reuben there were great divisions of heart-
She rightly mocks how the men of Reuben claimed to struggle in their hearts as to whether or not to support her call to arms. So often we hear the phrase "It's difficult to decide" or talk about struggles of heart- when the call to rise up in obedience is obvious and clear. But God's unambiguous calls are often made difficult by our struggles of the heart against them. "The divisions of Reuben" could refer to how they were divided among themselves into factions, which prevented their co-operation with their brethren; or they were divided in their judgment within their own hearts.

Jdg 5:16 Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben there was much searching of heart-

As noted on :15, they were claiming that the decision to follow God's calling was 'so difficult' and required much internal agony of heart searching. In reality, it involved them sitting amongst their sheep, listening to the bleating of the flocks (LXX). She asks "Why...?". And the answer was, because they didn't have faith and devotion to God's clear prophetic word which had called them to arms. Or we can read as GNB "Yes, the tribe of Reuben was divided; they could not decide to come". They operated on the false basis that there had to be unanimity before they could agree; and because they were divided over the matter, even those willing to fight actually didn't. Because they put their own desire for unanimity or "unity" with their brethren above the need to be loyal to God's word personally.

Jdg 5:17 Gilead remained beyond the Jordan. Why did Dan remain in ships? Asher remained still at the haven of the sea, and lived by his creeks-
Asher "lived" or [LXX] 'remained in his tabernacles', perhaps implying devotion to false gods; see on :18. The Hebrew for Gilead 'remaining' can mean 'pottered about', and that's how it is for so many believers. Likewise LXX "Dan pottered about in ships". The call to rise above their limited horizons is refused because they are too busy pottering about, 'just needing' to do this or that, preoccupied with their own immediate concerns... until life and opportunity is frittered away. Jud. 4:6 records the call to arms as only for Naphtali and Zebulon. But the other tribes are criticised for not entering into the spirit of the event. The need is the call, and no legalistic arguments can stop that call. Gilead could be read as the tribe of Gad. Dan's territory included the port of Joppa (Josh. 19:46), from where they likely traded with the Phoenicians. And they didn't want to leave their lucrative business to fight the Lord's battles up north.

Jdg 5:18 Zebulun was a people that jeopardized their lives to the death; Naphtali also, on the high places of the field-
The reference to the paganic high places could be in contrast to the hint in :17 that Asher remained serving idols, whilst Naphtali won victories for Yahweh on the paganic high places.

Jdg 5:19 The kings came and fought, then the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo-
Taanach was in either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But this town was also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

The battle was fought "at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo". 'Taanach' meaning 'place of fasting' is another hint at *repentant* Israel taking part in the final defeat of their latter day enemies. Joel describes a call to fasting during the period when the land lies totally devastated during the initial period of enemy domination (Joel 2:15).

"Megiddo" and the descriptions of Sisera *gathering* his chariots and God *drawing* them into battle must link with the nations being *gathered* to Armageddon, the valley of Megiddo (Rev. 16:16). If this connection is valid, then "the kings of the earth (land - of Israel?) and of the whole world" which are gathered (Rev. 16:14) would primarily refer to the kings of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, those within the 'land' at its maximum promised extent between the Nile and Euphrates.

They took no plunder of silver-
If the "they" is the victorious Israelites, the idea may be that unlike Achan, they devoted the spoil to Yahweh. Or LXX "they took no gift of money" might imply they refused to be bought off by the Canaanites, but rather slew them. If the "they" is the Canaanites, then Deborah may be rejoicing that the faithful Israelites refused to pay tribute to them. Or perhaps the idea is that the Canaanites expected much booty from their victory but were disappointed. Or the idea is that the Israelite warriors didn't fight motivated by plunder.

Jdg 5:20 From Heaven the stars fought. From their courses they fought against Sisera-
Israel's fighting is paralleled with the Heavens and stars [=Angels] fighting for them. The Lord of Hosts of Angels was working in tandem with the hosts of Israel. And it's the same for the new Israel. Heb. 12:22 speaks of how we, the hosts of the church, are paralleled with hosts of Angels: "...to innumerable hosts, the general assembly of angels, and the church of the firstborn" (RVmg.). See on :22.

Deborah in Jud. 4:14 quotes the words of Dt. 9:3 concerning the Angel going before Israel to drive out the nations to Barak, to inspire him with courage in fighting them. She recognized that the work the Angels did when they went out many years ago to do all the groundwork necessary for Israel to destroy all the tribes of Canaan was done for all time. It was not too late to make use of that work by making a human endeavour in faith. So with us, the smaller objectives in our lives as well as our main goal of reaching the Kingdom have all been made possible through the work of Christ and the Angels in the past. Deborah's recognition of this is shown in her song- Jud. 5:20: "They (the Angels) fought from Heaven; the stars (Biblical imagery for Angels) in their courses fought against Sisera". In passing, note that the Hebrew for 'courses' is almost identical with that for 'ladder' in the account of Jacob's vision of a ladder of Angels. Strong specifically defines it as meaning 'staircase'. See on Ex. 14:24.

This verse is the only one that seems to mention God's part in the victory. The classic songs of praise for deliverance (Ex. 15; Ps. 18; Hab. 3 etc.) continually speak of Yahweh as having wrought a great deliverance. But Deborah's song has not a single reference to Yahweh as the deliverer, the One actually doing the work, although there is the oblique reference to "the stars", presumably the Angels, fighting alongside Israel. Instead, the song praises Yahweh for how wonderful His servants have been; it glorifies Deborah, and briefly mentions the roles of Barak and Jael. It's hard not to see it as Deborah's self glorification. And we note Barak's humility in singing along with it. When he is the one noted by God later as the man of faith in the whole saga.

Jdg 5:21 The river Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. My soul, march on with strength-

The NIV Study Bible locates the area of Gideon's victory in Jud. 7:1 as being just south of Mouth Tabor between the Jordan River and the end of the Kishon River. This is the very same area where God would later give Barak a dramatic victory. Barak was encouraged in his faith by the fact Gideon had been given a huge victory against far greater odds, in the very same area. Barak of course may not have perceived this, just as we may not perceive the hints God is giving us that we in essence are going through the same experiences as Biblical characters.

The flooding of the Kishon made the chariot wheels drive heavily and slowed the horses; and made flight on foot very difficult. Just as happened at the Red Sea. "The fate of Sisera's host finds a parallel in the battle of Mt Tabor between the army of Napoleon and the Turks, Apr. 16, 1799, when many of the latter were drowned when attempting to escape across a part of the plain inundated by the Kishon". The "ancient river" recalls the historical associations of Kishon with the repentance of Israel at Elijah's time. It seems some of the enemy were swept away trying to ford it. LXX "my mighty soul will trample him down" presents Deborah as a glorious warrior on horseback; although we wonder if she is not being a tad lifted up in pride in speaking like this (see on :28). There was apparently a downpour of water from Heaven which led to the Kishon swelling and carrying away some of the enemy (:4). Or "my soul march on with strength" may have been a kind of pause for her to regain her breath to sing the next stanzas.

Jdg 5:22 Then the horse hoofs stamped because of the prancing, the prancing of their strong ones-

The picture may be of the muddy conditions and flooding causing the horses to come unhitched from the chariots, and then galloping away. LXX "When the hoofs of the horse were entangled", recalling the horses of the Egyptians entangled in the mud of the Red Sea. The idea is that the horses and chariots of Sisera, like those of Pharaoh, were in conflict with those of the Angel cherubim.

The chariots of Egypt and Sisera will finally be seen as a poor match for the Angel-cherubim "chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof". "Then were the horsehoofs (of Sisera's chariots) broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones", i.e. the Angel-cherubim. If there was a manifestation of the Cherubim on that occasion, this would accord well with the gentle hint that there will be a Cherubim appearance associated with the second coming (Mt. 24:30), and this would also be the means of putting the latter day Arab 'chariots' out of business.

Jdg 5:23 'Curse Meroz', said the angel of Yahweh. 'Curse bitterly its inhabitants, because they didn't come to help Yahweh, to help Yahweh against the mighty'-

Meroz was a village on the borders of Issachar and Naphtali, on the route taken by the fleeing enemy soldiers, but the inhabitants refused to participate in attacking them. The bitter cursing, specifically by an Angel, shows how much God notes and hates sins of omission, of doing nothing when the need is clearly the call to arms. We note the other tribes who refused to help aren't cursed as Meroz is bitterly cursed. Meroz was perhaps a village which Sisera fled through, and Meroz didn't apprehend him. Unlike Jael. Likewise we will soon read how Succoth and Penuel refused to give Gideon assistance (Jud. 8:5-9). Such sins of omission are laboured in the Bible. They are our most likely kind of failure.

Deborah was a prophetess and may have been given her prophetic words directly by an Angel. In one sense God 'requires not help from man'. But in another sense, 'God is in need of man', as Avraham Heschel put it. He never forces His ways upon us, and always acts with respect to human freewill. In this sense He 'needs' our "help"; even if it is the "help" which a father asks from his young son in doing a job. Meroz may have been a village through which Sisera or his men had fled, and they feared to join in the fight. The same situation was to recur when Succoth and Penuel refused to help Gideon (Jud. 8:5-9). The history of Meroz and the Israelites who refused to help Deborah was a lesson not learnt by Succoth and Penuel.

Jdg 5:24 Jael shall be blessed above women, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed shall she be above women in the tent-

Deborah's words reflect some bitterness at the way that women were secluded "in the tent" with apparently no role in public life. But Jael had risen above that. When unexpectedly Sisera came stumbling into her tent, she paid no respect to the league her husband had made with him and his king Jabin. She deceived him and slew him. She rose above all the apparent constraints upon serving Yahweh which were upon her.

Jdg 5:25 He asked for water and she gave him milk. She brought him butter in a lordly

dish-
She did this in sarcasm, recognizing him for who he was, and treating him as a lord- until she slew him.

Jdg 5:26 She put her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's hammer. With the hammer she struck Sisera. She struck through his head. Yes, she pierced and struck through his temples-
LXX "She stretched forth her left hand to the nail" would be another example of left handed people, or ambidextrous, being used by God; or at best, the victory is ascribed to the use of the left hand. Left handed people were considered strange and often relegated to the periphery of society in primitive societies; we see again how almost all the judges had something which made them despised and rejected. And yet it was exactly that group which God delighted to use to save His people (Jud. 3:15). We notice how God used left handed people to give David victory (1 Chron. 12:2), and to punish their hypocritical brethren (Jud. 20:16). He seems to rejoice in using those whom man despises.

We note again how Jael uses the man's hammer. She does the work a man was supposed to do. This is clearly intended to be understood as the seed of the woman smiting the seed of the serpent in the head.

Jdg 5:27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay. At her feet he bowed, he fell. Where he bowed, there he fell down dead-
The idea of Jud. 4:21 seems to be that he swooned, and then died. She didn't kill him outright, he rose up and then fell down dead at her feet. This makes Jael's bravery all the more commendable, especially in that her husband was in league with Jabin.

Jdg 5:28 Through the window she looked out and cried; Sisera's mother looked through the lattice. 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why do the wheels of his chariots delay?'-
Whilst Deborah was full of faith and God's word, there is a discernible element of bitterness and arrogance in her, now she has won the victory; see on :21. And we must beware of this kind of thing. From a distance, she mocks Sisera's mother and rejoices in that woman's pain and bitter disappointment. The song concludes somewhat strangely with this mockery of Sisera's mother- by the Deborah who has self proclaimed herself "a mother in Israel". She is seeking to heighten the contrasts between herself and Sisera's mother.

Jdg 5:29 Her wise ladies answered her, yes she answered herself-

This again is a mocking at the supposed wisdom of the enemy. Their wise women were sure Sisera delayed because he was busy gathering the spoil. And their wisdom is derided as foolishness.

Jdg 5:30 'Have they not found, have they not divided the spoil? A girl, two girls for every man; to Sisera a spoil of dyed garments, a spoil of dyed garments embroidered, of dyed garments embroidered on both sides, on the necks of the spoil?'-
Deborah mocks this woman and her female friends, as women who would glorify the way Sisera was delaying because he was busy raping pretty girls and dragging them back with him. In the latter day context, "Prey... spoil" is Ez. 38 language: "To take a spoil and to take a prey... Are you come to take a spoil... a prey?" (Ez. 38:12,13). Thus the motivation for the average invader is quite clear- although this will most likely be wrapped up behind some pseudo-religious reasoning provided by a latter day 'Jabin' (see on Jud. 4:2). Such total confidence in victory is yet to be seen in a Middle East scarred with the memories of Israel's victories over the last decades. "Girl" is literally "womb". Sisera's mother exalts that her son is probably delaying because he is raping some virgins and getting them pregnant with her future grandchildren. She is presented by Deborah as a most unpleasant woman; maybe she was, but Deborah is totally fabricating what she likes to imagine was in the mind of this woman. And Deborah has presented herself as a mother, a mother in Israel- and she is relishing the contrast with Sisera's mother, to Deborah's own glorification.

Jdg 5:31 So let all Your enemies perish, Yahweh, but let those who love Him be as the sun when it rises forth in its strength-
This takes on an ultimate fullness of meaning when this battle is read as typical of Armageddon, when all God's enemies will perish once and for all. "But let them that love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might" is using the common figure of the dawn as being representative of Messiah's second coming (Mal. 4:2; 2 Sam. 23:4; Ps. 19:4,5). Those who truly love the appearing of that sunrise will themselves be a light to this dark world of flesh; they shall personally go forth as the rays of sunlight, in whatever way, just as the light of knowledge of the person of Jesus will do. These words are clearly applied to all the faithful in Mt. 13:43; Dan 12:3.

Then the land had rest forty years-
The forty years rest of Jud. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28 may not be a literal period. I have elsewhere noted that the forty year reigns of Saul, David and Solomon create chronological problems if read literally. The idea may be that forty years was a time of testing, as it was for Israel in the wilderness. We think of the Lord's 40 days of testing too. In this case, they were tested by peace. And they consistently failed, as God's people often do.

JUDGES CHAPTER 6

Jdg 6:1 The children of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and Yahweh delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years-

The events of these chapters are to be read as typical of Israel's latter-day conflict with her enemies. Psalm 83 is a well-known description of the final invasion of Israel to "cut them off from being a nation", concluding with the imprecation "Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb; yes, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna" (Ps. 83:11) - whom Gideon destroyed. Isaiah 9 is set in the context of the Assyrian invasions of the land, the last of which they were saved from by Hezekiah, the primary fulfilment of the "great light" which appeared to an Israel under Assyria's dominance. The destruction of the invaders was to be "as in the day of Midian" (Is. 9:4), i.e. it would be typified by Gideon's destruction of Midian previously. The context in Isa. 8:12, 19-22 speaks of Israel living in fear of an Arab confederacy, having thrown off their faith in God, stubbornly refusing to seek "to the law and to the testimony", and with the land full of "trouble and darkness" so that "they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry", due to the invaders destroying the crops. This language recalls the scenario portrayed in Jud. 5:6,7, where the Jews creep around their own land after a total collapse of infrastructure.

Is. 9 then speaks of how God "lightly afflicted the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali (in the first Assyrian invasion - 2 Kings 15:29) and afterward did more grievously afflict her" (Is. 9:1) in the second invasion. The suffering of Israel at this time is spoken of in terms of their abuse in Egypt, which is clearly typical of the last days: "You have multiplied the nation (as God did in Egypt - Ex. 1:7), and not increased the joy... You have broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder (the language of Israel in Egypt), the rod of his oppressor (s.w. "taskmaster" in Ex. 1:11) (Is. 9:3,4).

This was to be "as in the day of Midian" (Is. 9:4) when Israel's saviour was Gideon. Yet Is. 9:2 speaks of their saviour as "a great light" arising in the darkness, and this is quoted in Mt. 4:15,16 as referring to Jesus. Gideon therefore becomes a type of Christ's breaking of the yoke of sin, and also of His latter-day deliverance of Israel from sin's political manifestation. Similarly the account of David's victory over Goliath has reference to our Lord's victory over sin on the cross, and also over "the man of sin" who will oppress Israel in the last days.

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

It is possible that a 'time' may also refer to a year, so the fact that "the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years" (Jud. 6:1) may refer to this "seven times" punishment for sin, which was to come after their refusal to be reformed by their previous sufferings (Lev. 26:23,24). A seven-year duration of Israel's final holocaust is hard to square with hints elsewhere that this will last for three and a half years. But Dan. 9:25-27 implies that after 69 weeks ('sevens') there would be a final week of punishment for Israel's sins, which would be split into two halves of three and a half years each. The first three and a half years may apply to the AD 70 period, and the latter to the last days. See on :25.

Jdg 6:2 The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel, and because of Midian the Israelites made themselves dens in the mountains, the caves and the strongholds-
"Yahweh *delivered*" Israel "*into the hand of* Midian" (:1) uses the same Hebrew word as in Lev. 26:25, "I will punish you yet seven times...ye shall be *delivered into the hand of* the enemy". To fulfil this, "the hand of Midian became strong (Hebrew) against Israel". Such a revival of Israel's enemies coupled with increasing military success against Israel is a process which is already beginning, and which, despite short-term fluctuations, we should expect to continue.

Identical language of hiding in caves is found in 1 Sam. 13:6 concerning Israel's pining away when under attack by the Philistines. There can be no doubt that these incidents are the focus of Heb. 11:37,38, which describes nameless men of faith as being "slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins... being destitute, afflicted, tormented... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth". This therefore teaches us that there were definitely some in Israel at those times who had a remarkable degree of faith, and it surely follows that the final tribulation which these previous invasions typify will likewise lead to the existence of a minority of faithful in Israel.

The Hebrew word translated "caves" occurs again in Ez. 33:27 in a passage speaking of the final desolation of the Land which will lead to Israel's repentance. "They that be in the forts and in the *caves* shall die of the pestilence (cp. the plagues to come upon Israel in the last days , Lev. 26:25). For I will lay the land most desolate... none shall pass through (cp. "the highways were unoccupied", Jud. 5:6). Then shall they know that I am the Lord, when I have laid the land most desolate" (Ez. 33:27-29). All this suggests a desolation of the land physically and a state of total breakdown of infrastructure.

The Israelites who fled to the dens and caves are described as heroes of faith because of what they did (Heb. 11:38). And yet their domination by the Philistines was a result of

their idolatry. They were idolatrous, and yet some had faith; and it was this faith when surrounded by weakness which was perceived by God.

Jdg 6:3 So when Israel had sown their seed, the Midianites, the Amalekites and the people of the east came up against them-
This is exactly what one would expect from the allusion to Lev. 26:26, speaking of the curses to come for breaking the covenant: "If... you break my covenant I *also* will do this unto you (i.e. break My side of the covenant, in that) I will even appoint over you terror, consumption... and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it".

Jdg 6:4 and they encamped against them, and destroyed the crops as far as Gaza, and left no sustenance in Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey-
Note that the initial motive for the raids was to spoil the land and steal cattle. The Ezekiel 38 latter day invader has similar motivation, "To take a spoil... to take a prey... to take away cattle and goods" (Ez. 38:13). It should be noted, however, that such connections do not necessarily indicate that the invasion prefigured in Judges 6 is to be equated with that of Ezekiel 38. The point is that all the latter-day invasions of Israel have broadly similar motives, and all consistently involve the neighbours of Israel, rather than nations like Russia.

The descriptions of what the Midianites did to the land are all expressed in terms of being the very opposite of the blessings for obedience to the covenant. If Israel were obedient, they would eat bread until they were full, live in safety without fear (cp. :5), and the land would be free of conflict (Lev. 26:5,6). Israel were suffering the curses for disobedience. They cried to Yahweh for help, but there is no record of their repentance, even when they are told to quit idolatry (:10). The cycle so far in Judges has been of sin-suffering-repentance-deliverance-sin-suffering etc. But the repentance element is noticeably missing here. The subsequent account of Gideon's fairly typical family encampment at Ophrah and Abiezer shows that they continued their idolatry. But still God saved them through Gideon, an act of grace. And yet when Gideon cuts down the image of Baal in his village, there is a surprising willingness to go Yahweh's way, as shown by his father's sudden taking of Gideon's side, and the local people responding to Gideon's call. Perhaps there was some level of subconscious repentance in the people, although unexpressed and not resulting in any actual change. But God noticed even that, and raised up Gideon to be the catalyst for the outward expression of a faith and repentance that existed *sub rosa*. And He works in the same way today. So often converts realize that they had subconsciously been there with the Lord all along, repentant in their hearts, but God raises up a situation which triggers them to come out openly.

Jdg 6:5 For they came with their livestock and their tents; they came up as locusts for multitude; both they and their camels were without number, and they came into the land to destroy it-
They brought their animals with them in order to graze them, which would've left Israel bare afterwards. This 'scorched earth' policy of the invaders is the prototype for Joel's latter day prophecy of the locust / grasshopper invaders leaving the land physically empty before Israel are forced to their final repentance. We note how the destruction as if by locusts means that Israel were treated as Egypt, to where they returned in their hearts and whose gods they had taken with them. See on :7.

Jdg 6:6 Israel was brought very low because of Midian and the children of Israel cried to Yahweh-
"Very low" is the word used about Israel's latter day humiliation which leads to their final repentance (Is. 17:4). It's not that God willingly humiliates; it's that humility is necessary for relationship with Him, and pride leads to sin. And it is this humiliation which leads to our crying out to God. David uses the word of himself (Ps. 79:8; 116:6; 142:6), as if he saw in Israel at this time something of himself. As we can.

Jdg 6:7 When the Israelites cried to Yahweh because of Midian-
Their crying to Yahweh is twice emphasized (:6,7). The phrase is used of how Israel did so in Egypt (1 Sam. 12:8), and of how they will in the last days (Joel 1:14). We noted the allusion to Joel in :5.

Jdg 6:8 Yahweh sent a prophet to them, and he said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of slavery-
The response to their crying to Yahweh is not deliverance, but rather a prophet coming to them and attempting to convict them of their sin and failure to respond to God's wonderful deliverance of them from the Gentile world. Their repentance is therefore presented as utterly critical to their further deliverance. But there is no record of this repentance being forthcoming. Instead, a weak man who doubts his own faith is chosen and strengthened to deliver them. This was absolutely a case of salvation by grace.

The salvation from the Egyptians was at the Red Sea, long ago (Ex. 14:30). The Israelites were repeatedly reminded of this (Jud. 2:1; 6:8; 10:11). But they failed to perceive that God's actions in history were in fact their personal salvation, an act of grace shown to them also. David grasped that point, and his Psalms often thank God for the exodus, as if it had happened to him personally. But the problem is that Israel like all people tended to only see what was before their face at that moment. They had no sense of God's historical salvation of them, and the guarantee that He would likewise come through for them, if they remained faithful to Him.

In the latter day context, this must have a connection with the suggestion that Elijah will be "*sent*" to Israel during their suffering, "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This "dreadful day" must be that of the final destruction of Israel's invaders rather than simply the return of Christ. Joel similarly speaks of how during the time when the Jewish heavens and earth are turned into "blood and fire, and pillars of smoke", the Jews will possess the Spirit gifts "before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:28-31). This connection between Joel and Malachi would hint that the possession of these gifts is associated with the work of Elijah.

Jdg 6:9 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, drove them out from before you, and gave you their land-
*"*Oppress" is the word used of how Israel were oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 3:9). But the intention, as with Israel's latter day oppression, is that it would lead them to cry out for Yahweh's salvation, 'Jesus': "For they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them" (Is. 19:20 s.w.). All the judges were therefore types of the ultimate deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus in the last days.

Jdg 6:10 I said to you, I am Yahweh your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But you have not listened to My voice'.
And so the message ended. There is no record of this repentance being forthcoming. Instead, a weak man who doubts his own faith is chosen and strengthened to deliver them. This was absolutely a case of salvation by grace.

"Fear" is a major theme of Gideon's early life. The word "fear" is used so often of 'not fearing' the pagan gods. "Fear" can mean simply to worship or revere, but it is all the same the word for "fear". Gideon's fear and timidity (Jud. 6:23,27; 7:1,3,10) is therefore to be associated with his fear of the power of the pagan gods. And this is indeed the result of worshipping anything other than the one true God- fear and nervousness. Peace is only in whole hearted devotion to Him.

In the latter day context, the prophet reminding Israel of the covenant they made with God in Horeb (Jud. 6:10), is precisely the work of Elijah (Mal. 4:4).

Jdg 6:11 The angel of Yahweh came and sat under the oak which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite, and his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites-
As noted on :10, this further initiative to save Israel without their repentance is a Divine movement of absolute grace. We have a picture here of Israel's desperation and poverty, as well as the extent of the domination by the Midianites. They had to hide even their wheat and flour from the marauding bands. We deduce that the winepress is not in use-

for one of the curses for breaking the covenant was that the vintage would cease, and wine would be cut off from Israel.

Note the parallel between an Angel sitting under an oak and a prophetess sitting under an oak (Jud. 4:5; 6:11). In Jer. 23:18,22 we find prophets standing in the “council of the Lord” (RV) to receive His word; and yet this sounds very much like Angels standing in the court of Heaven to receive God’s word of command. “The God of the spirits [Angels] of the prophets sent his Angel” to the prophet John (Rev. 22:6 RV); implying that as God had sent His Angel-Spirits to inspire the prophets, so now He did to John. Ps. 147:15,18 speak of the sending out of God’s word to melt snow and send rain; this must surely refer to the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do these things. The way the “watcher and holy one” came down from Heaven is paralleled with the word of Divine command likewise coming down from Heaven (Dan. 4:23,31). The universe is not just ticking away on clockwork; the Angels are actively being sent out from Heaven to perform what may appear the most mundane and repetitious of things. Thus God sends out His Angels; He sends out His word; and He also sent out His prophets (Haggai- Hag. 1:12; Ezekiel- Ez. 3:5,6). God rose up and sent out His prophets (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 7:25 and many others). He is described as doing this because those prophets likewise identified with the word and became part of their own message.

Grain was usually threshed on a special floor, but the word used here means to beat with a stick. This was what poor gleaners did, as in Ruth 2:17. Just beating out a few ears for a small amount of flour. It is the picture of poverty and fear, of the weak cowed by the strong. And at just that point, Gideon was called. This is God's style, to call and use the small, timid, under performing and fearful.

Jdg 6:12 The angel of Yahweh appeared to him and said, Yahweh is with you, you mighty man of valour-

The Angel assured Gideon that "Yahweh is with *you* [singular]"; and yet Gideon seems to have intentionally misunderstood this by arguing back that if Yahweh is really with *us*, then why are they suffering so much (Jud. 6:12,13). He flinched at the personal call to action- just as we can, seeking instead to take refuge behind the community. Yet God Himself turns to Gideon and bids him "go in the strength of this one"- the Hebrew grammar referring to the Angel. Robert Boling comments: "The referent of "this one" is the Yahweh envoy [i.e. the Angel], presumably in his capacity as commander of Yahweh's army". And this is the same call to us- to go in the strength of the Angel which goes before us, and seek to replicate Him, Heaven's plan for us, on this earth. And God backed up this call to Gideon to follow the Angel by saying he should go out in faith, "because Ehyeh is with you" (Jud. 6:16)- a direct quotation from the Angelic manifestation to Moses in Ex. 3:12. It's an interesting exercise to follow the parallels between the Angelic commander of Yahweh's armies, and Joshua as the human

commander of them on earth. And one doesn't have to be a military leader in iron-age Israel to feel that same call to follow the Angel.

Jdg 6:13 Gideon said to him Oh, my lord, if Yahweh is with us why then has all this happened to us? Where are all His wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying 'Didn't Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?' But now Yahweh has forsaken us and delivered us into the hand of Midian-
See on :12. Gideon is focusing upon the statements that Yahweh had brought Israel out of Egypt- and ignoring the consequences of Israel's sin of returning to Gentile domination by worshipping Gentile gods. This is typical of human 'difficulties' with God. They focus upon one aspect of the equation, and refuse to factor in the consequence of human sin.

The reference to "Which our fathers told us of" make us wonder whether this was not Passover time. The prophet had just spoken of Egypt in :8,9. Just as at the breaking of bread we can wonder whether all this is really true for me, so Gideon doubted. Gideon is actually being called to be a new Moses to deliver Israel; when he felt so inadequate and was apparently unqualified. We must remember that Moses was seen as the pinnacle of Hebrew spirituality. And Gideon was being called to be like him. The call was introduced by the phrase "The Angel of Yahweh appeared to him" (:12); and that is just the phrase used of Moses' call at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). It is a theme of most of the 'Divine call' narratives that the called person resists and feels inadequate [Gideon's resistance on the grounds of being the smallest of the smallest clan is repeated by Saul when he was called, 1 Sam. 9:21]; and it is the same in every human life. Moses felt "Who am I that I should go and deliver Israel?" (Ex.3:11); and Gideon felt "How can I deliver Israel?" (:15). "Who am I to do this?" is in fact the qualification of every truly called servant of God. We think of Jeremiah and many others. "Go and save Israel from the hand of [their enemies" (:14) was the same calling as Moses had. And Gideon is reassured in :16 that Yahweh will 'surely be with' him; in exactly the same words as spoken to Moses in Ex. 3:12: "Surely I will be with you. This will be the token to you, that I have sent you". They are both given a "token" of this. Divine calls often come whilst engaged in daily work; Moses was keeping his father in law's sheep, Gideon was threshing his father's grain, Saul was searching for his father's donkeys, Peter was working in his father's fishing business when the Lord called him. Both Gideon and Moses had their call authenticated by fire- in the burning bush, and in consuming Gideon's offering. As Gideon feared because he had 'seen God' (:22), so did Moses (Ex. 3:6 Moses was afraid because he had looked upon God, Heb.). Israel were under abuse by Gentiles and needed deliverance.

We note that in relatively recent history, God had done great miracles for Israel through the judges. But Gideon ignores all them, suggesting that Yahweh has done no miracle for Israel since the Exodus. His attitude is not at all good. But God still works with him.

We need to realize that God deals with us as individuals. No matter how functional and holy, or dysfunctional and evil, is our church, we are still treated by the Father as His individual children. So many have struggled with this, tending to see themselves rather as inevitably part of a community, faceless cogs in a machine. And this is actually quite attractive to humanity- hence the popularity of Roman Catholicism. Reflect a while on how God told Gideon: “I will be with thee” [you singular], and yet Gideon responds: “Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with *us*...” (Jud. 6:12,13). Gideon had to be taught that God saw him as a separate, unique individual, and didn’t deal with him automatically merely as part of a community as a whole. But it was a slow process. When Gideon saw in a dream a man saying that God had delivered Midian into *his* [singular] hand, Gideon then tells Israel that God had delivered Midian into *their* hands (Jud. 7:14,15). He still found it so hard to believe that God treated *him* as so important to Him.

Gideon's questions go unanswered because to ask them was to perceive the answer: 'Because Israel sinned and turned to other gods'. The Divine silence to many 'Why...?' questions reveals the same answer. The Divine silence provokes us to realize the answer was known to us in our conscience all along.

Jdg 6:14 Yahweh looked at him and said, Go in the strength of this One and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Haven’t I sent you?-
I prefer the AV / ESV: "Go in this might of yours and save Israel". There is a purposeful juxtaposition between Gideon's whining weakness, and God's statement that this is his "might" and by this strength / might, Gideon is to deliver Israel. All within us cries out that Gideon is not strong in faith; indeed he goes straight on to express his lack of faith that he could save Israel (:15). And that is exactly the point. Gideon is a parade example of those [like ourselves] who out of weakness are made strong (Heb. 11:34). It continues the theme of God rejoicing to save Israel by the weak, the left handed, the women, those who consider their faith is weak.

Or "Go in the strength of this One" could be God speaking directly to Gideon whilst the Angel stood there; as if bidding him follow his Angel in the path to victory which had already been potentially enabled.

Gideon in Judges 6 and 7 presents as a child, desperately wanting God to hold His hand. Wanting reassurance after reassurance, even though God had given it him. As a child, you instinctively put your hand out for someone to hold it as you approached a road. You earnestly implored the adult steadying your bicycle as you learned to ride and balance "You won't let go, will you?". Or as you learned to swim without a board. Gideon comes over as this, time and again. And God used him. But just as we now have crossed thousands of roads alone, he grew old and brave, whipped Israelites who didn't support him, appeared as a mighty warrior, fearless and confident in pursuit of his enemies. But the key is to remain in contact with the little child within you, to stay small in your own eyes, to always have that need for God, that instinctive putting out of your hand to Him.

It is for this reason that we have the incident of Gideon telling his young son to murder the captured kings, when [LXX] he was too young to wield a sword. He wanted to brutalize his own son at an early age by getting him to commit murder. As Gideon looked at his little boy, shy and so unsure and pining away from the challenge... he should have seen his real self. It is the loss of that little child within which is so tragic in spiritual terms. And it happens in life, as observed by so many. "Now we're old and brave, Fernando". "When I was a child, I caught a fleeting glimpse, out of the corner of my eye. I turned to look but it was gone, I cannot put my finger on it now, the child has grown, the dream has gone. And I have become, comfortably numb". Remember yourself as a small child, so unsure and humble in the sense of not caring about others' opinion and desperately seeking a hand to hold. That must be, and can be, how we ever are. The Lord held up one such child as the hero of faith and spirituality; whereas men hold up mighty warriors like Gideon in their moments of prowess and triumph as the image to inspire and seek to attain. The Lord exemplified all this, by constantly addressing God as His *abba*, daddy, the term of childhood endearment and dependence. Even in Gethsemane and to the cross. His usage of the term is startling, especially in the context of Judaism at His time.

O Lord, thy sovereign aid impart
To save me from low thoughted care;
Chase this self will from all my heart,
From all its hidden mazes there;
Make me Thy duteous child that I
Ceaseless may “Abba, Father” cry.

"I am weak but Thou art mighty, hold me with Thy powerful hand...
When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside"

Jdg 6:15 He said to him, O Lord, how can I save Israel? My family is the poorest in Manasseh and I am the least in my father’s house-
LXX Be gracious to me. Gideon saw the connection between grace and salvation and confessed that such a salvation could only be by God's grace to the powerless. This is the more impressive when we consider that Gideon was physically the very image of a warrior king. But he is so aware of his frailty.

"Poorest" could be as LXX and Hebrew, "my thousand is weakened", or diminished. This is evidence enough that the Hebrew term "thousand" doesn't mean literally 1,000, but a group of some kind; for the 1,000 is here diminished, and yet still remains a "thousand". This helps explain the otherwise very high numbers which we find in some places in the Hebrew Bible. The family had been brought down very low. But this was so that God might use Gideon in his weakness, and through him manifest His saving strength. The

answer as to "How can I save...", is 'through Yahweh's saving', Yahoshua, 'Jesus'. So many questions are effectively posed by God in our lives through our experiences, which have the same answer: Yah's salvation, Jesus.

Gideon argued that his "thousand" in Manasseh was diminished or reduced. But he was to learn that this was the kind of "strength" which he was to go against the Midianites with. And when he does, he finds that his strength is greatly diminished again, twice; from 32,000 to 10,000, and then from 10,000 to 300. But this theme of diminishing his strength had begun when his "thousand" was diminished.

We note the consistent theme of initial resistance to the Divine call (Ex. 3:11; 4:10,13; 1 Sam. 10:21,22; Jer. 1:6; Am. 7:14,15; Lk 5:8). We can too easily excuse our lack of devotion by saying that we are unfit and unworthy. But this is a lack of faith in His forgiveness and grace.

Gideon was in fact continuing the theme of Judges- that deliverers were from the weak and unqualified for the job. Ehud, the left-handed man (Jud.3:15-30), Deborah, a woman (Jud. 4-5), Samson the sexaholic etc. And now it is Gideon the fearful (Jud. 6:27 destroying the altar at night as he feared to do it by dad; 8:23 etc.); even his son Jether is presented as fearful. But God knew his fear, and even offers him the chance of going near the Midianite camp in chapter 7 in order to get assurance that they are in fact fearful of him. Yet by chapter 8, Gideon's dialogue with the men of Succoth and Penuel reveals him as confident of success and not at all fearful, and he threatens to tear down their tower (Jud. 8:9). This is very different to the Gideon who had feared to tear down his father's Baal altar. His judgment of Israelites who didn't support him in Jud. 8:14-17 is a reflection of his changed character. And this leads him to the poor behaviour with which he ended his life; spiritually, it would've been far better had he remained timid and desperate for God to hold his hand, rather than to become old and brave and self confident. So many stumble once they have a taste of power and success. We are set up to hope for a tale of a man moving from fear to faith, but instead the path is from fear to self-assertion. Yet despite this failure, Heb. 11 still lists him as a Kingdom person.

Jdg 6:16 Yahweh said to him Surely I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man-

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

pattern, and respond that "No! This ain't me...". But there, in the record of Gideon and his success, lies our challenge to rise up to the spirit of Moses.

The huge numbers of the Midianites are spoken of "as one man". Gideon was perhaps confident to fight a single Midianite in one on one combat, for he appears to have been a physically strong warrior. And God is saying that fighting the Midianites will be no more difficult than that for Gideon.

Jdg 6:17 He said to Him, If now I have found grace in Your eyes, then show me a sign that it is really You Who talk with me-
Gideon perceives he is being led as Moses was (see on :16,22). And so he uses the phrase Moses used, "If now I have found grace in Your eyes". But he does so without attention to context, for Moses said that when being almost sarcastic to God in his effectively refusing the way God wished him to go in.

God eating with man was a sign of grace in Gen. 18:3, where Abraham asks the Angels to eat with him if had found grace in their eyes. And so it was here, Gideon saw he needed grace, as noted on :15. And he is encouraged that he had received it. We likewise find assurance of that grace by eating with the Lord at the breaking of bread.

Jdg 6:18 Please don’t go away until I come to you and bring out my present and lay it before you. He said, I will wait until you come back-
Circumstances repeat within our lives, and between our lives and those of other believers. This incident was to repeat in Jud. 13:15. Such connections are why we meet together, why we share our lives with others; and one of the reasons why we read the Bible, which is God's selected choice of various biographies which He knows will speak to each of us in a unique way.

Jdg 6:19 Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes of an ephah of meal. He put the meat in a basket and he put the broth in a pot and brought it out to him under the oak and presented it-
Oaks were typically associated with idolatry, and the altar of Baal was apparently standing on the property belonging to Gideon's father. It was as if the Angel is demanding that Gideon and his people no longer serve Baal, but Yahweh; and give to Yahweh what they had intended for Baal (see on :25).

Jdg 6:20 The angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened cakes and lay them on this rock and pour out the broth. He did so-
That there was a rock altar beneath an oak (:19) makes it clear enough that the family sacrificed to idols at this point. But as explained on :25, they were now to quit that and

sacrifice instead to Yahweh. Tragically it was probably upon the rock upon which Gideon first sacrificed to Yahweh (Jud. 6:20) that his seventy sons were to be slain by Abimelech, with the help of men who worshipped Baal Berith (Jud. 9:5).

Jdg 6:21 Then the angel of Yahweh stretched out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes, and fire went up out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes, and the angel of Yahweh departed out of his sight-
Gideon being told to "pour out the broth" upon his offering, making it wet so that the consumption by fire from heaven was clearly miraculous (Jud. 6:20,21 cp. 1 Kings 18:33,34), was encouraging Gideon to see himself as the prototype Elijah-prophet. This would provide the basis for Elijah dousing his sacrifice with water before it was accepted in an identical way. Gideon still doesn't learn, for he proceeds to ask for a repeat of this miracle concerning wetness; he asks that there should only be dew upon the ground (or perhaps even upon the whole land of Israel, see Hebrew text) according to his word of faithful prayer (Jud. 6:37-39). Elijah saying that "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1) is surely a conscious replica of this. It is quite possible that we, too, may be given certain prompts in life by reason of particular experiences repeating those of a Biblical character.

Jdg 6:22 Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, and Gideon said, Alas, Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!-
See on :16, where we saw how Gideon is being set up as Moses. His panic at having seen the face of an Angel is therefore due to failing to appreciate this. For Moses saw the Angel's face, and lived. And there was no reason why Gideon couldn't. We see in his panic a man struggling with the calling he was being given. And yet despite all his wriggling, he does finally accept it, and does act in faith, as Heb. 11 makes clear.

I suggest that Gideon is transferring his real guilt into a form of false guilt, as often happens within the human mind. He realized his family, Israel and probably himself were guilty of idolatry. But he can't quite bring himself to confess that to himself, and so instead he feels guilt stricken over something which wasn't a sin, i.e. seeing the face of an Angel. For Moses and others had done so, and it was no sin.

It was no random chance that Gideon was later led to victory at Penuel (Jud. 8:9). Penuel was so named to celebrate how Jacob had seen the face of God and lived (Gen. 32:30). Gideon had earlier thought he would be slain as he had been so unworthy to see the face of the Angel. As with our lives, God was leading him to perceive ever more His grace. See on :23.

Jdg 6:23 Yahweh said to him, Peace! Don't be afraid. You will not die-
"Peace" in the Bible usually refers to peace with God through forgiveness. The assurance that he will not die was because he had been forgiven. I explained on :22 that he did have a conscience of sin, but he couldn't quite bring himself to confess it, and transferred that true guilt into a false guilt. But this was enough for God; that movement of conscience within Gideon was accepted as repentance, and he is assured peace with God. And he perceives this and memorializes that peace in the name of the altar he will build.

I noted on :22 that Gideon was later reminded at Penuel of how he like weak Jacob had seen the face of God and lived. And he at that time tells the men of Penuel that he will "come again in peace" (Jud. 8:9). Coming "in peace" reflected how he had learned the lesson from seeing the face of the Angel; for he had built an altar called 'Yahweh is peace', and now he was confident that indeed he was at peace with God despite all his weaknesses.

Jdg 6:24 Then Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh and called it Yahweh is Peace-
As explained on :23, this was a celebration of peace with God; and it implies therefore his repentance and forgiveness. What was required in order to lift the Midianite oppression was repentance; and Gideon's very weak repentance was as it were used by God to enable Him to lift it.

This altar is likely that of :26. It is mentioned and then we are given the details as to how it was built. Gideon's motivation in building it was because he had experienced peace with God through grace. Just as Paul says we have too. There was no grace and no peace with God through Baal. As Jonah noted, those who observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. Grace and peace with God are concepts unique to the one true faith.

To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 6:25 The same night Yahweh said to him, Take your father's bull, the second bull seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that your father has and cut down the

Asherah that is by it-
The seven year old bull represented the seven years of Midianite domination of Israel (:1). "The second bull" may have been an animal which was being raised especially for sacrifice to Baal. It was only by ending this Baal worship that the seven years of domination would be ended. And the seven year old bull was therefore to be seen as a kind of atonement sacrifice for those seven years of apostacy.

'Gideon' means 'hacker' or 'cutter / thrower down'. The root is used in the Mosaic commands to cut down the pagan idols of Canaan (Dt. 7:5; 12:3). He was being asked to live up to his name, to realize that he had been set up in advance to do what seemed to him so impossibly difficult. We too have good works prepared for us to do from the foundation of the world. And we struggle to accept this, making excuses, looking for signs etc.

We note that Gideon's father had the Asherah grove by the altar (Jud. 16:25). This was studied disobedience to Dt. 16:21: "You must not plant for yourselves an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of Yahweh your God, which you shall make for yourselves". His repentance, apparently overnight, is therefore the more remarkable. We also see how Yahweh worship had become mixed with paganic worship. "The altar" in view was that of Yahweh, but it had become the altar of Baal because of the mixing of truth and error, of Yahweh and paganic worship. This worship of the flesh in the appearance of Yahweh worship is in fact our abiding temptation, as it was for Israel. They never abrogated Yahweh worship, but worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship. We, e.g., may gossip in the name of "truth" or "love"; purchase luxury items or property in the name of worshipping God or serving Him.

Dt. 16:21 was one of a whole series of apparently 'minor' commands which were designed to make obedience easier to the others already given. Thus he tells them in Deuteronomy not to plant a grove of trees near the altar of God - because he knew this would provoke the possibility of mixing Yahweh worship with that of the surrounding world (Dt. 16:21). There was to be no possibility of worshipping idols in the name of Yahweh worship; there was not even to be the possibility of some subliminal suggestion of it arising from having a grove of trees near an altar.

Jdg 6:26 build an altar to Yahweh your God on the top of this stronghold in the proper way, and take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you cut down-
"This stronghold" may refer to the heap of stones under the oak tree which they had used for worshipping idols. I suggested on :25 that the "second bull" [it could be translated just "the other bull"] was one being bred for sacrifice to Baal.

Jdg 6:27 Then Gideon took ten of his servants and did as Yahweh had spoken to him, and because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, he could not do it by day, so he did it by night-
Again we see his weakness, and yet his desire to respond, however weakly. And God eagerly used that. Clearly his family were idolaters and the altar was on his father's property, so it would be surprising if Gideon was not also an idolater.

Jdg 6:28 When the men of the city arose early in the morning, the altar of Baal was broken down and the Asherah was cut down that was by it and the second bull had been offered on the altar that was built-
The record presents Gideon's complete (if nervous) obedience through the eyes of the observers early that morning. Gideon knew they would soon find out that he had done it. But he doesn't flee the village. He did it at night because he feared the other people would forcibly stop him from doing it.

Jdg 6:29 They said one to another, Who has done this? When they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash has done this-
We note that Gideon doesn't call them out on their idolatry. Rather he lets them come to him. He was no fearless prophet, denouncing idolatry in God's Name.

Jdg 6:30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, Bring out your son that he may die, because he has broken down the altar of Baal and because he has cut down the Asherah that was by it-
They were twisting the Mosaic laws of apostacy to apply them to Gideon for desecrating Baal's altar. They were psychologically able to do this because they considered that Baal worship was a form of Yahweh worship. And it was this continual mixture of flesh and spirit, of truth and error, which was and is the abiding weakness of God's people.

"Bring out... that he may die" recalls the behaviour of the Sodomites (Gen. 19:5). And again there is a refusal to agree. I suggest that Gideon perceived the similarity; because in :39 he asks God for yet another sign, prefaced with "Do not be angry with me if I speak one last time". And he is quoting verbatim the words of Abraham when he had pleaded for Sodom in Gen. 18:32. This is how familiarity with the text of scripture works; we perceive a connection between our experience and that of God's people historically. And then, working it through, thinking about life and its connections with Biblical precedent, we are inspired to continue the spirit of the Biblical narrative in our own lives.

Jdg 6:31 Joash said to all who stood against him, Will you contend for Baal? Or will you

save him? He who will contend for him, let him be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has broken down his altar-
Joash had presumably been a committed Baal worshipper; for the altar was on his territory, and the village would have been quite small. He responds not at all as we, or probably Gideon, expected. We can be encouraged that there is a spiritual conscience within all people, and when they see someone like Gideon have the courage to stand up and be counted, they are relatively easily motivated to do the same. Thus the Gospel penetrates strongly Islamic or atheistic communities- because one person within them stands up and is counted for Christ.

Self-expression, or even self-manifestation, is one of God's features, and so He intends it to be in us who are made after His image. God manifestation doesn't in that sense mean the destruction or ignoring of the individual human person; rather, the very opposite, in that the real character, the new life, will be eternally developed and preserved. This is where Hinduism is so wrong, as wrong as any monolithic, apostate version of Christianity- the person disappears into the great Whole. Joash understood where 'God manifestation' can be taken too far; he told the Baal worshippers to let Baal plead for himself, rather than them pleading for him. This needs thinking through. He was saying that they were assuming that they had to 'play God' for Baal; they had to mindlessly, unthinkingly manifest the god they thought existed. Joash says that if Baal really exists, he himself will act for himself, openly. And this of course is where the One True God excels; He does act for Himself, and doesn't rely *solely* upon manifesting Himself through men in order to achieve anything. Note the intentional surprise for us in Is. 43:1: "Thus says the Lord that created you... I have redeemed you, I have called you by *your* name; you are Mine". We expect the creator, owner and redeemer of someone or something to name it with *His* name. But God dashes that expectation- He says instead that we are called by *our* name.

Jdg 6:32 Therefore on that day he named him Jerub-Baal, saying, Let Baal contend against him because he has broken down his altar-
We see here how names were given to people because of life experiences; this explains why the same person or place can have several names. Joash was struck by the power of the logic which had occurred to him; Baal ought to argue for himself if he were a real god. Baal's total dependence upon men for his actions was evidence enough that he had no real existence. And Joash was grateful to Gideon for pointing this out.

Perhaps the point is that Baal must be really so weak, because he was unable to 'contend' with someone as weak and doubting as Gideon, who had cut down his image and thrown down his altar.

Jdg 6:33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east

assembled themselves together and they crossed over and encamped in the valley of Jezreel-
People who had been yelling for Gideon's blood now go strangely silent. Joash was perhaps the elder of the village, and his logic was hard to argue back against. The eastern peoples then crossed over Jordan, all set to now wipe out the Israelites and take their land. This was indeed the punishment for breaking the covenant, and only the weak faith and shaky repentance of Gideon was going to stop it.

Jdg 6:34 But the Spirit of Yahweh came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered together after him-
This language is picked up in Is. 61:1,2: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me... to preach good tidings... liberty to the captives...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God". Primarily this refers to Isaiah preaching an inspired message of deliverance to an Israel threatened by the Assyrian invasion, whilst it is also quoted in the Gospels concerning the work of Christ. Both these applications have their basis in the Spirit of God coming upon the judges, showing that they typify both the work of Christ and of the Elijah prophet, of which Isaiah was an early manifestation.

Abiezer, his home village, gathered loyally around Gideon; when just recently they had demanded his death for apostacy against Baal. We see here how fickle people are; and yet more positively, how relatively easy it is for people to change. Because there is a spiritual conscience in everyone, and it often needs just one person within their family or community to step out for Christ, and they will too.

Jdg 6:35 He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh and they also were gathered together after him, and he sent messengers to Asher, to Zebulun and to Naphtali and they came up to meet them-
The idea may be that all Manasseh supported him, but the three other tribes came up to discuss with him, just "to meet them". Or it could be that they all responded, at least eventually (Jud. 7:23). We recall how Deborah's appeal for support from Asher and some of the leaders of these tribes had been refused. And after God gave the great victory, she taught everyone the song of Deborah in Jud. 5 which lamented their lack of response. So perhaps that had worked, and now they responded. We may fail a call the first time, but then it is repeated, and we accept it. Just as Gideon had motivated the village of Abiezer, so now Abiezer motivated "all Manasseh" and perhaps they in turn motivated Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali.

Jdg 6:36 Gideon said to God, If You will save Israel by my hand, as You have spoken-
Gideon's fragile faith is in fact a great encouragement to us. He nervously kept on in his

spiritual path, although ever wanting visible evidence of God's presence with him. Gideon comes over as repeatedly trying to avoid God's claims and call; and yet God kept on with him, and so it is with each of us. We need to enquire and clarify what our mission is in this world- for we each have a calling, and the lesson of Gideon is for us all, not just a few.

Jdg 6:37 I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will save Israel by my hand as You have said-
Quite possibly there was a drought and water was precious, hence Gideon took a bowl in order to fill it with the valuable water from the fleece. The giving or withholding of dew was a reflection of whether or not Israel were receiving the blessings or cursings of the covenant. One of the blessings of the true Israel was that of dew (Gen. 27:28,44). The signs of the dew demonstrated that God would save by grace- giving the blessings for obedience when there had been no obedience, giving and taking those blessings by His soversign power. The miracles addressed Gideon's unspoken question: 'We have been disobedient, so how will God bless us with the blessings of obedience, such as dew and victory over larger armies?'. They deserved no dew, for they had sinned. Elijah was to be inspired by Gideon's weak faith in later asking for dew and rain to be withheld (1 Kings 17:1). We too are to be motivated by the faith of others, no matter how weak. The threshing floor is also a symbol of judgment. If God gave His blessings, the dew, to Gideon's fleece but not to the ground / land of Israel generally, then Gideon would know that indeed God was uniquely with him, even if the rest of Israel deserved judgment and the withholding of the covenant blessings. "Ground" is *eretz*, the usual word for the land of Israel. If just the soil around the fleece were in view, a different word would have been used.

Baal was supposed to be the god of dew. So having destroyed Baal's altar, Gideon asks God to demonstrate at least just to himself, that He is indeed the controller of dew rather than Baal. “Can any of the false gods of the nations give rain? Can the skies of themselves give showers? Only you are He, O Yahweh our God! Therefore we will wait for you, for you made these things” (Jer. 14:22). We see how a man can publically profess faith in God, and do great things in His Name and in criticism of error. And yet himself be very frail in faith and desperate for confirmation. The fighting of apostacy and brave declaration of the error of the wicked, can so easily be done whilst our real spiritual man is so weak and frail and in such need of confirmation.

Jdg 6:38 That is what happened, for he got up early the next day and squeezed the fleece together and wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water-
There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the

morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

Jdg 6:39 Gideon said to God, Don't let Your anger be kindled against me and I will speak but this once-
Gideon is inspired by the words and spiritual ambition of Abraham (Gen. 18:32). Perhaps he feared it was just a coincidence, seeing that fleeces naturally attract dew.

Fleeces naturally attract and retain moisture, so Gideon may have felt on reflection that the first sign was not in fact that great, and so he asked for something harder in the second sign. Again he presents as so very weak and faltering in his faith. As Hebrews 11 says, Gideon is really the classic case of a man whose weakness was made strong.

Please let me make a trial just this once more with the fleece. Let it now be dry only on the fleece and on all the ground let there be dew-
I suggested on :37 that Gideon specifically understood the dew as covenant blessing from God, which the ground / land of Israel didn't deserve. He had asked God to show him that he, Gideon, was going to receive those blessings, even if the land didn't. But his faith still faltered. By asking for it to now be done the other way around, Gideon was effectively asking for all Israel to be blessed with dew- because of his lack of faith, and needing everything to be demonstrated to him again. Again we note that "ground" is *eretz*, the usual word for the land of Israel. If just the soil around the fleece were in view, a different word would have been used.

Jdg 6:40 God did so that night, for it was dry on the fleece only and there was dew on all the ground-
The Hebrew word for "fleece" is literally 'that which is cut down / cut off', and it can also effectively mean that which is destroyed (s.w. Nah. 1:12 "thus shall they be cut down"; "they are soon cut off", Ps. 90:10). Israel had indeed been cut down by the Midianites. Gideon had just cut down the symbols of Baal worship (same idea, although a different word is used- Jud. 6:26,28,30). I suspect he simply asked for the miracle to be done

again, in reverse order, because of his own weak faith and not because he saw any great symbology in the whole scene at the time. But later, he may have perceived that he had been asking God to place His blessing of dew upon that which was cut down, or retract it. And indeed God demonstrated that He could do this with ease- and do it at Gideon's word. The blessing or cursing of Israel was to depend upon Gideon and his faith. For generally Israel had not repented, and that was what was necessary for the Midianite domination to end. But Gideon's weak repentance was going to be accepted by God as it were for all Israel. This was how eager God was to save them from Midian, despite their idolatry. And it looks ahead to His eagerness to save us, through the work of the Lord Jesus and His far greater righteousness being imputed to us, who are more willing to receive it than were Israel. Arguments like this make us have every confidence that we shall indeed be saved, by His amazing grace.

The two miracles are reversible miracles- wet on the fleece, dry on the ground; then dry on the fleece, wet on the ground. A reversible miracle was done again to prove to a doubting Israel, and a doubting Moses, that God was truly going to save them by grace: Moses' rod was made a snake and then a rod again; Moses' hand was made leprous and then sound again. This kind of reversible miracle was common in the surrounding idol cults. In the *Enuma Elish*, Marduk is challenged by the other gods to destroy a garment and then recreate it- and he does, to prove his power. In Homer's Odyssey, in the 10th book, the goddess Circe changed the comrades of Odysseus into pigs and then restored them. We see here how influenced Israel were by surrounding paganism, yet God worked through that to still confirm them. We can compare how the waters of both the Red Sea and the Jordan were driven back, and then made to return as before. Reversible miracles were to confirm weak faith. And God went along with that, having told Gideon at the start that He considered him a mighty warrior who had the faith to do his mission.

JUDGES CHAPTER 7

Jdg 7:1 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon-
"Gideon" is the word used for the command to cut down the idols of the land (Dt. 7:5; 12:3). It seems Gideon was named this after he cut down the pagan grove on his family property, and his father then also called him "Jerubbaal", 'let Baal contend [for himself]'. We see here how men came to be called by various names which reflected their life experiences. This is why often people have a number of different names in the Hebrew Bible.

And all the people who were with him rose up early-
There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly

not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

And encamped beside the spring of Harod-
"Harod" means trembling, and may have been named after the trembling of Gideon and the people (:3). Constantly he is portrayed as weak in faith and fearful, and yet not giving up and going forward in the path given to him.

And the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh, in the valley-
Moreh was the name of a Canaanite, so the continuing place name reflects how it had not been conquered by the Israelites and renamed as it should have been. We have the persistent impression of strength despite an environment of such weakness, and this we respect about Gideon.

"Moreh" means "oracle". The vision given to the Midianites was that oracle.

The NIV Study Bible locates the area of Gideon's victory in Jud. 7:1 as being just south of Mouth Tabor between the Jordan River and the end of the Kishon River. This is the very same area where God would later give Barak a dramatic victory. Barak was encouraged in his faith by the fact Gideon had been given a huge victory against far greater odds, in the very same area. Barak of course may not have perceived this, just as we may not perceive the hints God is giving us that we in essence are going through the same experiences as Biblical characters.

Jdg 7:2 Yahweh said to Gideon, The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast against Me saying, 'My own hand has saved me'-
In all Israel's great military victories, there was some element of God's hand (e.g. hailstones, earthquake) to stop them thinking that their own strength alone had saved them. And this is major theme in God's working with us. Gideon had earlier argued that his "thousand" in Manasseh was diminished or reduced (see on Jud. 6:15 *My family is the poorest in Manasseh* = My thousand is the most diminished). But he was to learn

that this was the kind of "strength" which he was to go against the Midianites with. And when he does, he finds that his strength is greatly diminished again, twice; from 32,000 to 10,000, and then from 10,000 to 300. But this theme of diminishing his strength had begun when his "thousand" was diminished.

We should be unsurprised when our own strength is diminished; by financial or health crisis, by rejection until we are virtually alone. God was now developing his understanding that the diminishing was necessary for faith in Him. We too find our natural strength diminished, that we may learn that when we are weak humanly then we are strong in God. There is entropy in everything, and this is why- be it health, physical strength, relationships etc. Gideon likely would have carefully calculated his number of troops and compared it against his enemies. And he thought he had a fighting chance of success, in his own strength. But what God now does is to force him to *abandon all rational calculation* and trust totally in God. And He works likewise with us. The whole incident with drinking from cupped hand or lapping as a dog was perhaps to indicate that it was the hands of just 300 men who would be used by God's hand.

This passage is alluded to in 1 Cor. 1:26-29, where Paul explains that for this same reason God has chosen "not many" to bring about His way of salvation, through a small remnant of weak people bringing to nothing the mighty things. This would equate Gideon's 300 with the true believers of both natural and spiritual Israel.

Jdg 7:3 Now therefore announce to the people, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead'. Twenty-two thousand of the people returned and ten thousand remained-
In all, three and a half tribes had sent men to support Gideon- half Manasseh, Naphtali, Asher and Zebulon (Jud. 6:35). According to Num. 1, each tribe had around 30,000 fighters. So only a few of their warriors had come anyway. These were the supposedly brave who had come to Gideon. And even of them, most were fearful. As always, it's a case of a minority of a minority of a minority...

This was strictly according to the law of Moses, which required commanders to invite their fearful soldiers to leave before conflict (Dt. 20:8). "Thousand" may refer to a military unit; see on Jud. 6:15. 32,000 were reduced to 10,000, and 10,000 to 300. The proportion of reduction the second time was far greater than the first time; about two thirds of the men returned, i.e. about 30% remained. But then just 3% remained. And overall, only about 1 % of the force was required by God. There would have been thousands of troops moving away from the front, rather embarrassed to tell the villages they passed through that they had moved away from the front because they were fearful. To turn their backs before their enemies was one of Israel's curses for

disobedience to the covenant. So the whole thing was set up to show them that indeed they had been disobedient to the covenant, and God was gently punishing them for this. And condemnation, turning backs before enemies, is in fact ultimately self inflicted by the condemned.

"Mount Gilead" is hard to understand. There may have been a Mount Gilead on the western side of Jordan, but it is not mentioned anywhere else. "Gilead" and "Gilboa" differ by one letter in Hebrew. Perhaps Gideon was to undo Saul's defeat, and was encamped on Mount Gilboa. Or we could read *maher*, 'in haste', for *mehar*, "from the mount", giving the sense "let him return in haste to Gilead" i.e. go home.

Jdg 7:4 Yahweh said to Gideon, The people are still too many. Bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Those of whom I tell you, 'This one shall go with you' shall go, and those of whom I tell you, 'This one shall not go with you' shall remain-
"The water" was presumably the spring of Harod, meaning "trembling" (:2,3). Those who apparently weren't trembling were to be tested as to whether they were weak enough to be used for the great salvation God was to achieve. Only Gideon was aware, it seems, of this basis for reducing the people further. It was a very personal move from God to him, to yet further reduce his trust in human strength. In the eyes of all his commanders and men, Gideon's behaviour at this point was bizarre and bound to lose them the battle. It says a lot for him that he went ahead with the idea.

Jdg 7:5 So he brought down the people to the water and Yahweh said to Gideon, Each one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, set him by himself; likewise each one who bows down on his knees to drink-
"Laps" is *yalok*, the very sound a dog makes when drinking. Only Gideon at this point knew the basis upon which he was dividing his men. It would have taken him some time to pass by ten thousand men [although "thousand" may mean a military subdivision rather than 1,000] and pick out the 300 who lapped. At the time, he may have had no idea why this was being made so significant. Quite possibly it isn't significant, it was just a way of severing a majority of odd thinkers and awkward, counter instinctive non-logical behavers from amongst the majority. For this is a big theme of the story. Those who drunk in a more natural and normal manner are described as acting like dogs. Even though it has been well observed that "humans are in fact physically incapable of lapping water like dogs, in that the human tongue is not flexible enough to make the cupshaped form necessary to raise water into the mouth". So the likeness to a dog is pointed and is making a point, that they were acting in a crude way. By behaving 'normally'. Perhaps bowing on the knees recalled idol worship, and the more sensitive would not have done this. The word is used in 1 Kings 19:18 for those who bowed the knee to Baal. Those who lapped were acting like despised dogs. And it is by the dogs,

like 'Caleb' [= 'dog'] who followed Yahweh faithfully [as a dog does a man], that God would save His people. Those who acted like dogs were the ones used, lapping like a dog laps, rather than drinking from cupped hands as men usually do.

The difficulty is that a dog laps on all fours. The majority also knelt down but used their cupped hands to get the water. So it is problematic to assume that some refused to kneel down because of the association between kneeling and idolatry. Both categories used their hands; those who lapped still put their hands to their mouths (:6). “Lap with the tongue from the water as the dog laps” and “lap putting their hands to their mouth” appear contradictory. Dogs don't lap from their hands / paws.

One solution is to see two groups spoken of here. Those who cupped their hands and then lapped water out of their hands; and those who lapped direct from the water as a dog laps. Or it could be that the lappers lapped out of their cupped hands whilst crouching [as a dog does], but not kneeling.

The LXX offers: "Everyone who laps with his tongue from the water as the dog laps, set him apart and everyone who crouches on his knees to drink set him by himself. And it was: the total number of lappers with their tongue was 300 men and all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water". This removes the issue of “lap putting their hands to their mouth”.

We can translate "likewise" as 'even...' or 'that is to say' [same construction in Gen. 4:4; Ex. 24:12; 25:12; 1 Sam. 17:40; 28:3], so the group spoken of in :5 are one and the same- those who were not chosen. They lapped as a dog laps, bowing down on their knees to get the water into their hands but lapped the water from their hands. A two legged being has to bow down on his knees to drink. But the other group in :6, the 300 who were chosen, drunk not as a dog drinks. They drank with their hands to their mouths. Which is exactly not how a dog drinks. They did *not act as if* lapping like a dog. So we would translate: "Everyone who laps with his tongue from the water as the dog laps, set him apart, that is to say everyone who crouches on his knees to drink” [Those thus set apart were those rejected]. Now the number of the lappers with their hand to their mouth was 300 men, whereas all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water [as dogs lap]". So the difference was between those who used their hands as a cup, and those who used their tongues. Those who used their hands were the hands chosen to be God's hand (:7). So my suggestion is to replace NEV "likewise" with "that is to say". This is exactly how the same Hebrew is translated in Gen. 4:4; Ex. 24:12; 25:12 ["cast for it four rings of gold, *that is to say* two rings on the one side and two rings on the other side"]; 1 Sam. 17:40 ["he put them in the shepherds' container that he had, *that is to say* in the pouch"]; 28:3 ["All Israel had mourned for him and had buried him in Ramah, *that is to say* in his city"]. And this would continue an undoubted theme of Judges- that God uses the odd, the cack-handed, awkward, often the subject of the comment "some mothers do have them", the dyspraxic and the otherwise marginal for His purpose, the

dog-like in this case, who had a most unusual way of drinking water from hands, lapping rather than sucking it up. Those who lapped used their hands (:6)- and perhaps the idea was that it was to be *by the dysfunctional hands* of God's people that victory would be achieved. We could note that eating [or drinking, in this case] in an unusual way is typical of some forms of autism. The autistic think differently and act differently. And they are [wrongly] despised. But it was those whom God chose. I have spent my ministry working with people who are generally out of church Christians, spiritual but not religious. And so many of them were autistic, and great believers they were, the ones God used just like Gideon's 300. They met daily like issues in an out of the box, different way to the majority. Three hundred out of 10000 is 3 % which was likely roughly the percentage of the group who were autistic.

Jdg 7:6 The number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouth, was three hundred men, but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink-
Gideon's faith would have been fully stretched. Although the exact round number, 300, would have confirmed to him that this indeed was what God intended.

Jdg 7:7 Yahweh said to Gideon, By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, each to his own place-
They were not to be kept as some kind of reserve force, they were to be sent home. The demand for faith was total, and we are sometimes put in similar positions, where we have only faith in God and all possibility of human help has been removed.

135000 Midianites had faced Gideon's 300 men (Jud. 8:10). That works out at precisely 450 of the enemy for every one of Gideon's men. And it cannot be coincidence that Elijah describes himself as facing off as one man of God against 450 prophets of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:22). Despite his arrogance and spiritual weakness, Elijah learned the lesson from Gideon's courageous example. This is how the Bible becomes a living word, the history is not dead but alive, because it has been carefully selected by God to show us that man is not alone, God is with us, no circumstance we face is in essence unique; others have trodden this path before.

This is why we so need each other; and we need to get to know each other and to share our stories in detail. The parts of the body of Christ are made for each other.

Jdg 7:8 So the three hundred men took food and their trumpets, and he sent all the rest of them to their tents; and the camp of Midian was beneath him in the valley-

The NASB follows the Hebrew best in suggesting that the 300 took the food brought by the other fighters who had either left or been forced to go home. They had come bringing

their own food- but the 300 somehow took that food for themselvs: "And so they took the provisions of the people in their hand". Quite possibly the 300 had not brought their own food with them- maybe suggesting they were forgetful, not well organized, hardly elite troops, or without much background support at home. No women in the family lading them with food to take with them... and they were the ones God used.

We expect to read of warriors taking weapons in their hands. But instead they take food and trumpets. Again we see how God's strategy is totally different to human strategy. It would have been a fair test of their faith to continue with an apparently bizarre plan which had no human hope of success. The spiritually minded would have recalled the conquest of Jericho with trumpets. "Their trumpets" would have been those of the 300 trumpeters amongst the 10000 men. They handed over their trumpets, perhaps each platoon of around 33 men had a trumpeter amongst them. Originally, perhaps the 32,000 had 300 trumpeters amongst them. And he handed his trumpet to one of the 300.

AV: "And he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and *retained* those three hundred men", using the same word as in :11 for "strengthened". Perhaps Gideon strengthened their faith in the intention of God to use them to save Israel from such overwhelming odds.

Jdg 7:9 The same night Yahweh said to him, Arise, go down into the camp; for I have delivered it into your hand-
The Israelite troops were mustered on a hill with a commanding view, so that they would see the vast army of their enemies. And now Gideon was told to go down to them, clinging on to his faith in those words that "I have delivered it into your hand", maybe repeating them over and over.

Jdg 7:10 But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp-
God knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. He sets an ideal standard that He knows we can reach- in Gideon's case, to go down to the camp of the enemies. But He knew Gideon's weakness and so by grace delayed the plan for a day, to allow Gideon to get more support for his weak faith. Rather like He didn't send Israel on the direct route to Canaan, lest they see war and lose heart. We can therefore never complain that we are forced by overpowering circumstance into lack of faith. God knows our levels and will not test us beyond that which we can bear, but will make a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). This is a wonderful promise, and it removes any excuse of 'circumstantial ethics' for our lack of response to God's challenges to faith.

Jdg 7:11 and you will hear what they say. After that your hands will be strengthened to go

down into the camp. Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outskirts of the armed men who were in the camp-
See on :12. Purah, 'boast of Yah', would have been one of Gideon's servants who bravely helped him cut down the altar of Baal and the Ashtaroth on another night not so long ago. See on :10; the same phrase for strengthening hands is used of how God graciously strengthened the hands of Lot to leave Sodom (Gen. 19:16), when he like Gideon had some faith but not enough to rise up to the simple command to 'go out' as commanded by God.

Gideon had strengthened the 300 men (see on :8), but clearly his own faith needed strengthening. He would have strengthened them whilst himself doubting. This is absolutely true to real human experience. The record has every psychological and spiritual credibility.

Jdg 7:12 The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like locusts for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand which is on the seashore for multitude-
The same description is used of Saul's Philistine enemies in 1 Sam. 13:5. Gideon was Saul's hero-see on 1 Sam. 14:28,31. Saul tried to externally imitate Gideon when he prohibited the men to eat anything while they were pursuing the Philistines (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5).

The enemy were "as the sand by the sea side for multitude", using the words of the Abrahamic promises (Gen. 22:17,18). These people were therefore a pseudo-Israel, having the appearance of being Abraham's true seed. Hagar had been promised "I will multiply your seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude", after the pattern of the promises to Abraham (Gen.16:10). This is confirmed by their description as being "by ranks of five" (Jud. 7:11), using the identical Hebrew phrase as used in Ex. 13:18 and Josh. 4:12 concerning Israel's marching against *their* enemies. The aptness of this to Israel's present enemies is obvious- their local enemies claim *they* are the true seed of Abraham.

Jdg 7:13 When Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his fellow. He said, I had a dream: a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat-
Gideon is likened to a loaf of barley bread tumbling into Midian, overturning it - pointing forward to Jesus, the barley-bread loaf (Jn. 6:35 cp. :9), falling as the little stone on to the image (Jud. 7:13). Barley bread was despised as the most desperate kind of food a man could eat to stay alive. And this was how Gideon felt- he was God's most desperate plan. His faith was weak, his repentance for idolatry had been secret and nervous, and yet God was going to use him.

We note that Gideon had very little bread when the Angel first appeared to him and commissioned him; he was beating out a few grains of wheat for a little bit of flour. In Jud. 8:5, he and his men lack bread. But it was Gideon as the tiny humble loaf of barley bread, the bread of the poor, that overturned the tent of Midian in Jud. 7:13. Again and again, Gideon was being shown that it is through the diminished and weak that God will bring victory. And we think of the five barley loaves of the little boy used by the Lord to feed thousands of people.

"Tumbled" is used to describe the sword of the cherubim which "turned every way" (Gen.3:24); another hint that Gideon and his men were a replication of the cherubim on earth; see on :20.

"The tent" is the usual word for 'tabernacle'. They had carried the tabernacle of their god with them into battle, and Gideon overturned it. The victory was therefore to be against their gods, and thereby demonstrating the supremacy of Yahweh. Gideon and Purah had overturned the altar of Baal in Abiezer, and as with events in our lives, this was to prepare him for the far greater overturning of the pagan tabernacle of the Midianites. The same phrase is used for the tabernacle of David which "fell", s.w. "lay flat" (Am. 9:11).

The tent may refer specifically to a kingly tent, as if the ruling house of Midian was to be destroyed.

Jdg 7:14 His fellow answered, This is none other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel. God has delivered Midian into his hand with all the army-
But Gideon's men were not to use swords, only trumpets and earthenware... and to proclaim the sword of Yahweh. Gideon now understood that Yahweh's sword was his sword, Yahweh's sword was men who didn't use swords. It's rather like the nervous, doubting Gideon being told "Go in this your might... you mighty man of valour". God sees things which are not as though they are; He sees maturity before it has developed. And our eye of faith is to see likewise. If the Midianites believed that they were delivered into Gideon's hand, and God believed it, then Gideon had to believe it.

Jdg 7:15 When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped, and he returned into the camp of Israel. He said, Arise, for Yahweh has delivered the army of Midian into your hand!-
We need to realize that God deals with us as individuals. No matter how functional and holy, or dysfunctional and evil, is our church, we are still treated by the Father as His individual children. So many have struggled with this, tending to see themselves rather as inevitably part of a community, faceless cogs in a machine. And this is actually quite attractive to humanity- hence the popularity of Roman Catholicism. Reflect a while on how God told Gideon: “I will be with thee” [you singular], and yet Gideon responds: “Oh

my Lord, if the Lord be with *us*..." (Jud. 6:12,13). Gideon had to be taught that God saw him as a separate, unique individual, and didn't deal with him automatically merely as part of a community as a whole. But it was a slow process. When Gideon saw in a dream a man saying that God had delivered Midian into *his* [singular] hand, Gideon then tells Israel that God had delivered Midian into *their* hands (Jud. 7:14,15). He still found it so hard to believe that God treated *him* as so important to Him. Or we could argue that Gideon was not out for personal justification, but for the victory of Israel.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Jdg 7:16 He divided the three hundred men into three companies and he gave each of them a trumpet and an empty pitcher, with a torch inside the pitcher-
The pitchers would have been used for carrying water, for water supply was critical to the movement and sustenance of an army on the move. To have empty pitchers, they would have had to empty the water out of them. Now they had no water, they had to trust fully in Yahweh. They had to get down from the mountain, destroy the enemy, and then they would again be able to lap of the water. The earthenware pitchers represented men, made of clay, but with the torch of God's Spirit burning within them. And that potential was to be revealed by breaking the pitchers. "Empty" translates the common Hebrew word for vain or worthless. They had no strength of their own.

This is the whole message of the Gideon story, that men are made strong out of weakness, but it is their weakness and emptiness which is used; for truly we come to God with nothing in our hands.

Jdg 7:17 He said to them, Watch me, and do as I do when I come to the outermost part of the camp-

Gideon and Purah had been to the outermost part of the camp the night before. Gideon had been so fearful, but now he has been made strong out of that weakness. True leadership is only from those who were once weak and have thus been made strong. Israel would only be delivered from the Midianites if they repented, and Gideon's repentance was being treated as symbolic of the nation. And so the people with him had to act as if 'in him'. He was their representative, as the Lord Jesus is for us.

Jdg 7:18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow your trumpets too, on every side of the camp, and shout 'For Yahweh and for Gideon!'-
See on :17. AV "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon". He had learned the lesson from :14, that his sword was that of Yahweh. And yet they were not to use swords, but just to have torches and worthless [s.w. "empty"] pitchers in their hands. Yahweh's sword was not a visible one in the hands of His people. And that is an abiding lesson.

Jdg 7:19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch, when they had but newly set the watch. They blew the trumpets and broke in pieces the pitchers that were in their hands-
To break an earthenware pitcher was a symbol of death (Ecc. 12:6). Through their human frailty, for the pitchers were "empty" (s.w. vain, worthless), the torch fire of God's Spirit was to be revealed.

The blowing of trumpets by the 300 points forward to the resurrection. The breaking of the clay to reveal the burning lamps within the pitchers, is clearly at the root of 2 Cor. 4:6-8: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness (cp. the sudden appearance of those lights on that night)...we have this treasure in earthen vessels (cp. Jud. 7:19), that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us (cp. Jud. 7:2). We are troubled on every side" (cp. "on every side", :18 and Jud. 6:2-6). All this would suggest that the 300 men are to be connected with the resurrected of the new Israel, whose "earthen vessels" are broken (by means of resurrection and judgment) at the end of Israel's latter day downtreading and immediately prior to the great destruction of their enemies by them. To break an earthenware pitcher was a symbol of death (Ecc. 12:6).

Jdg 7:20 The three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers and held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands with which to blow, and they shouted, The sword of Yahweh and of Gideon!-
Literally, they strengthened the torches in their hands, the very phrase used in :8,11 of God strengthening their hands. But their strength was in gripping on to the torches, not their human weapons.

"The sword of Yahweh", instead of their swords [for they held pitchers and torches, not swords] has been interpreted as a reference to the cherubim; see on :13. The point has been made that this whole scenario of flashing fire and swords was a conscious imitation of the cherubim. In this case, we see that true faith is a trust that we are in fact manifesting God, He is manifesting Himself through us, and therefore we are not going in our own strength. From this we can infer that the cherubim will be associated with the latter-day deliverance of Israel- perhaps the enigmatic "sign of the son of man in heaven" (Mt. 24:30).

Jdg 7:21 They each stood in his place around the camp and all the army ran, and they shouted and put them to flight-
The shouting was as in the conquest of Jericho- the victory cry uttered before they had won the victory. This was done in faith, acting as if they had received already that which they had asked for (Mk. 11:24).

Jdg 7:22 They blew the three hundred trumpets, and Yahweh set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army, and the army fled as far as Beth Shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah by Tabbath-
This is a prototype for how the latter day invasion by Israel's neighbours will be overcome (also 2 Chron. 20:23). Ps. 83 perfectly describes the Islamist unity as they attack Jerusalem in the last days (Ps. 83:3-5, 12), but concludes with the Psalmist praying that God would destroy them as He did Oreb and Zeeb (Ps. 83:11) - who were defeated as a result of God making their troops turn on each other.

The invaders massacred each other, as in 2 Chron. 20:23. They were a confederacy, and there were likely preexisting tensions and suspicions. This is a theme in the latter-days passages: Zech. 14:13; Jud. 7:22; 1 Sam. 14:22. We see that division is in fact from God as a form of judgment. Those who create division are therefore creating and living out their own condemnation. And the same will happen in the last days. Whilst such confusion is easily possible given modern high-technology warfare, it would seem more likely that a few initial mistakes of this sort could open up old rivalries which are then fought out to the death. Indeed, we could sensibly look for even more rifts to occur between Israel's enemies, e.g. over oil.

Jdg 7:23 The men of Israel were gathered together out of Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian-
We recall how Deborah's appeal for support from Asher and some of the leaders of these tribes had been refused. And after God gave the great victory, she taught everyone the song of Deborah in Jud. 5 which lamented their lack of response. So perhaps that had worked, and now they responded. We may fail a call the first time, but then it is repeated, and we accept it. We note that these men of Israel from these areas were

probably those who had originally come with Gideon and then been sent back (Jud. 6:35). They would have reflected upon their own weakness of faith, and now would have been grateful to be called out to service again. God doesn't just dismiss people from His service because of their weak faith; He tries to use them again. Or we could conclude (see on :24) that Gideon's acceptance of them now as fellow soldiers was really a rejection of God's hand in sending those very soldiers home as unneeded in His plan.

Jdg 7:24 Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim saying, Come down against Midian and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah. So all the men of Ephraim were gathered together and took the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah-

This would have been near to where Israel first entered the land under Joshua. The spiritually minded would have seen the hand of God again at work in the same locality. This was where John the Baptist was to baptize repentant Israelites (Jn. 1:28). And the whole victory was because of repentance.

It could be argued that this appeal for more human help reflects a lack of faith. He has just sent home the majority of his soldiers, having been taught how God works through much diminished numbers. And now he appeals for more soldiers to come to him. This could be seen as the start of a downward spiral of faithless behaviour, as if he had reached his spiritual peak and was now declining, although Heb. 11:32 assures us he will be in God's Kingdom. The idea of smooth, incremental spiritual growth is mythical, and was only seen in the Lord. In Gideon's case, his spiritually grew an declined... although he still died a saved man. His appeal for Israelites to come and support him led him to the sin of whipping and punishing his own brethren who didn't come and support him. That would have been avoided if he and his few soldiers had just gone onwards in God's strength, and accepted that God was clearly with him.

Jdg 7:25 They took the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb-

Zeeb had presumably tried to hide in a winepress. But he was slain there. And we recall how it was in a winepress, disused because there was no vintage because Israel had broken the covenant, that Gideon was first called whilst threshing wheat in it. Thus we see the triumph of the small, cowering, little man.

They pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon beyond the Jordan-

The Philistines in 1 Sam. 29:4 recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. This appears another suggestion that although Gideon refused in so many words to be king, he acted as king and was

treated as one. Challenging us, as to how much of our devotion and principle is in name and word only...

Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

JUDGES CHAPTER 8

Jdg 8:1 The men of Ephraim said to him, Why have you treated us this way, that you didn't call us when you went to fight with Midian? They rebuked him sharply-
The Ephraimites came over as offended because they weren't invited to fight in a battle, even though they had shown no inclination; and they did this with both Gideon and Jephthah (Jud. 8:1; 12:1). Again we see absolutely credible characterization of people and families in the Biblical record. This is in sharp contrast to the mythical elements and exaggerated presentations in contemporary literature.

Here we have an example of a situation being stated, and then we have the explanation of how it came about. They made this complaint after the incident of :4, when they had captured the princes of Midian. So this is not strictly chronological.

Jdg 8:2 He said to them, What have I now done in comparison with you? Isn't the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?-
The Proverbs often comment upon historical situations in the Hebrew Bible, and "a soft answer turns away wrath" may well be based upon this incident (Prov. 15:1). We recall that Gideon was initially called by God whilst he was threshing wheat in the disused family winepress in Abiezer- disused because there was no vintage, as this was a curse for disobedience to the covenant. He is ever aware of how the victory began with the few men of Abiezer gathering around him, and only then did others come to his call to arms. He assumes Ephraim has a vintage, a wine harvest, which is incomparable to that of Abiezer. He treated even those apostates as more worthy of God's blessing than himself and his home village. We have a window here onto his deep and genuine humility, which is the more commendable as it seems he was a strong warrior in his own right (see on :18,21).

Gideon's idea is that they had had the honour of capturing the princes of Midian (:3), and this was far greater than his victory over the Midianite armies. Gideon's reply may appear a soft answer turning away wrath. But the better and more truthful answer would have been 'Because God saves by many or few and showed me that He doesn't need many men nor even swords in hands'. We sense Gideon slipping spiritually, more concerned with keeping in with people than challenging wrong positions. A far cry from the Gideon who cut down the pillar of Baal, willing to stand alone against his father, his family and the men of his town. Perhaps Gideon focused now upon personally capturing and slaying the two *kings* of Midian, Zeba and Zalmunah, motivated by the fact that he had lost the honour of slaying the two *princes*, Oreb and Zeeb. His apparently humble words were therefore only a cover for his hurt pride. And how much of our apparent humility is but a cover for hurt pride? We will later see that his apparently humble rejection of kingship was likewise not at all humble, and in reality he acted as a king.

Jdg 8:3 God has delivered into your hand the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb! What was I able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that-

God had delivered the enemy into Gideon's personal hand (Jud. 7:9), but Gideon speaks of the enemies having been given into Israel's hand (Jud. 7:15). Gideon was not out for personal justification, but for the victory of Israel. And so he has the humility to placate the Ephraimites by saying that they had the honour of having Oreb and Zeeb in their hands.

Jdg 8:4 Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over with the three hundred men, exhausted yet pursuing-

LXX "faint and hungry", hence their request for bread in :5. Saul tried to imitate this when he prohibited the men to eat anything while they were pursuing the Philistines (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5). But he was totally missing the point- he was trying to make a cardboard copy of another man's faith, following only the externalities, without Gideon's faith and humility.

The pursuit of the enemy east of Jordan repeats what Abraham did with his 318 servants, roughly the same number as Gideon had with him. He found himself, as we do, walking in the steps of his spiritual father Abraham; see on :32. David too was to pursue after his enemies exhausted, and so we see how circumstances repeat between the lives of God's people. This is how the Bible becomes a living word, the history is not dead but alive, because it has been carefully selected by God to show us that man is not alone, God is with us, no circumstance we face is in essence unique; others have trodden this path before.

Jdg 8:5 He said to the men of Succoth, Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian-

To turn down a request for bread from travellers was a deep insult, according to the hospitality culture of the times. And it still is, in many such areas today. Zebah and Zalmunna had fled upon camels, and so it seemed they would not be caught by Gideon and his men. And the men of Succoth clearly feared they would survive and return to punish them if they supported Gideon. They failed to learn the lesson of Deborah's song, which castigated those Israelites who had failed to respond to her call to arms.

We note that Gideon had very little bread when the Angel first appeared to him and commissioned him; he was beating out a few grains of wheat for a little bit of flour. In Jud. 8:5, he and his men lack bread. But it was Gideon as the tiny humble loaf of barley bread, the bread of the poor, that overturned the tent of Midian in Jud. 7:13. Again and again, Gideon was being shown that it is through the diminished and weak that God will bring victory. And we think of the five barley loaves of the little boy used by the Lord to feed thousands of people.

We wonder whether Gideon was in fact intended to pursue the Midianites beyond the Jordan. They had left Israelite territory. Their weakness and exhaustion is emphasized. Gideon turns to human help rather than Divine help, and gets furious when he doesn't get that human help. This seems in contrast to how they so easily destroyed the Midianite army within the territory of Israel. Perhaps Gideon was now motivated not by a desire to glorify God, but to glorify himself and get vengeance for the deaths of his family at Tabor. And yet God still worked through his weakness, and gave him and his exhausted 300 men an amazing victory. "The people who follow me" perhaps reflects a growing desire to be leader and have a personal following. And yet at the same time he retains his sense that Yahweh will give him victory and not his own strength (:7).

Jdg 8:6 The princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your possession, that we should give bread to your army?-

Meroz was cursed bitterly by God in Jud. 5:23. It was a village through which Sisera or his men had fled, and they feared to join in the fight. The same situation was to recur when Succoth and Penuel refused to help Gideon. The history of Meroz and the Israelites who refused to help Deborah was a lesson not learnt by Succoth and Penuel.

Jdg 8:7 Gideon said Because of that, when Yahweh has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers-

Gideon's faith is now so strong that he can be sure that he will catch those whom he was pursuing, even though they had camels. "Tear" is AVmg. "thresh", with all its

connotations of judgment. The area around Succoth is famed for its thorn bushes. This is a far cry from the humble, insecure Gideon so desperate for a Divine hand to hold. He threatens even his own people with being thrown down on a bed of thorns, trodden by him on it and whipped on it by him with briers. He was presumably justifying his natural anger as being exercised in judging / threshing the enemies of God. But judging for God isn't the same as just pouring out your native anger on other men who all the same were made in God's image. The idea of threshing appears to be of bashing out flour from ears of corn. A far cry from the timid Gideon who was threshing ears of grain in this way, cowering from the Midianites. Now he boasts he will do this to his own brethren.

We may enquire why Gideon wanted specifically to "scourge" those Israelites who were disloyal to him. In Jud. 7:25 the men of Ephraim killed Oreb and Zeeb the princes of Midian. Even though they were riding on the back of Gideon's faith and courage. We learn in Is. 10:26 that they were scourged before their death. For in the last days, Yahweh "will raise up a scourge according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb". So we have a psychological classic. Gideon felt he was the one who deserved to scourge his enemies. But other men had gotten that glory. So he felt the need to scourge someone. And he picked on his own brethren. This kind of transference goes on all the time in human being. And again we see how the Biblical record is so psychologically credible.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Jdg 8:8 He went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered-

Spiritual weakness is easily contagious. They replied just as the others had, assuming Gideon would not achieve his Divinely empowered mission.

It could be argued that this appeal for more human help at Jud. 7:24 reflects a lack of faith. He has just sent home the majority of his soldiers. And now he appeals for more soldiers to come to him. This could be seen as the start of a downward spiral of faithless behaviour, as if he had reached his spiritual peak and was now declining, although Heb. 11:32 assures us he will be in God's Kingdom. His appeal for Israelites to come and support him led him to the sin of whipping and punishing his own brethren who didn't come and support him. That would have been avoided if he and his few soldiers had just gone onwards in God's strength, and accepted that God was clearly with him.

Jdg 8:9 He said to the men of Penuel, When I come again in peace I will break down this tower-
Penuel was so named to celebrate how Jacob had seen the face of God and lived (Gen. 32:30). Gideon had earlier thought he would be slain as he had been so unworthy to see the face of the Angel (Jud. 6:22). As with our lives, God was leading him to perceive ever more His grace. Coming "in peace" reflected how he had learned the lesson from seeing the face of the Angel; for he had built an altar called 'Yahweh is peace', and now he was confident that indeed he was at peace with God despite all his weaknesses; see on Jud. 6:23,24.

Gideon is presented in Jud. 6,7 as timid, doubting and fearful, always needing God to hold his hand, and tightly. Yet by chapter 8, Gideon's dialogue with the men of Succoth and Penuel reveals him as confident of success and not at all fearful, and he threatens to tear down their tower (Jud. 8:9). This is very different to the Gideon who had feared to tear down his father's Baal altar. His judgment of Israelites who didn't support him in Jud. 8:14-17 is a reflection of his changed character. And this leads him to the poor behaviour with which he ended his life; spiritually, it would've been far better had he remained timid and desperate for God to hold his hand, rather than to become old and brave and self confident. So many stumble once they have a taste of power and success. We are set up to hope for a tale of a man moving from fear to faith, but instead the path is from fear to self-assertion. Yet despite this failure, Heb. 11 still lists him as a Kingdom person.

Jdg 8:10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the east; one hundred and twenty thousand fighting men having been killed-
This means that initially, 135000 were facing Gideon's 300. That works out at precisely

450 of the enemy for every one of Gideon's men. And it cannot be coincidence that Elijah describes himself as facing off as one man of God against 450 prophets of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:22). Despite his arrogance and spiritual weakness, Elijah learned the lesson from Gideon's courageous example. This is how the Bible becomes a living word, the history is not dead but alive, because it has been carefully selected by God to show us that man is not alone, God is with us, no circumstance we face is in essence unique; others have trodden this path before.

Jdg 8:11 Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, which was unsuspecting-
'The way of the tent-dwellers' means the Bedouin route, he took the rough short cut, because those he was pursuing had camels and he was presumably on foot. Hence he came upon them whilst they were "unsuspecting".

Jdg 8:12 Zebah and Zalmunna fled and he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed all the army-
"Zebah" is the word for sacrifice, and the execution of Zebah in :21 may therefore be understood as an offering of them to Yahweh. Perhaps this is what he was named after the event, seeing that personal names were often given in response to life experiences.

Jdg 8:13 Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle from the ascent of Heres-
"Heres", the sun, probably refers to some place of idolatry. The whole record of the victories is to show the supremacy of Yahweh over the gods of the peoples, whom Israel were worshipping.

Jdg 8:14 He caught a young man of Succoth and asked of him, and he described for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men-
This was presumably in the form of a list of names.

Jdg 8:15 He came to the men of Succoth and said, See Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your possession, that we should give bread to your men who are weary?'-
Gideon preserved the kings alive in order to teach the men of Succoth. But we wonder, as always with Gideon, whether there was not an element of arrogance now creeping in to an otherwise humble man (see on :2) For surely there was no absolute need to humiliate his enemies and also go to such lengths to demonstrate the wrongness of the men of Succoth. The loss of humility, humility morphing into pride, is one of the most tragic of spiritual declensions. We must constantly examine ourselves as to whether we are losing humility.

Jdg 8:16 He took the elders of the city and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth a lesson-
This kind of torture was perhaps not unto death. Perhaps it was all an unnecessary display of power and smacks of arrogance (see on :15). Or maybe he didn't slay them as he did the men of Penuel (:17) because he believed they could be "taught" from this. But "taught" is LXX "threshed"; see on :7.

Jdg 8:17 He broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city-
This is the language of Christ's return in judgment upon the people of Jerusalem, who are elsewhere likened to a tower in Zion (Mt. 22:7). In the latter day context, those Jews who survive the tribulation but still refuse to learn the lesson of total commitment to their Messiah / judge / saviour, will be destroyed at broadly the same time as their enemies.

We note that Gideon apparently "taught" the men of Succoth (:16), but slew those of Penuel. Perhaps they took refuge in their tower and refused to meet with Gideon nor repent, hence he slew them.

Jdg 8:18 Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor? They answered, They were like you. Each one resembled the children of a king-
This massacre is not previously recorded. But clearly there had been the deaths of Gideon's relatives at Tabor. We note that Gideon had the air of a leader to him, resembling a king. His humility noted on :2 is therefore the more commendable. But we note what is so true to human experience and observation, that those who may exude authority and confident leadership skills are often terribly insecure, clinging on to God with a childlike faith and ever seeking His reassurance. See on :30. We learn from this that Gideon's body language was as if he were a king. This gives the lie to his later pious refusal to be a king. He effectively acted as one and felt as one, so his denial of this and apparent piety and humility were all merely an appearance. By various means, he dodged around the spirit of God's requirements; like Levites owning land in Cyprus. Possibly his sense of kingship began when he told his men to charge at the Midiantes shouting 'For the LORD and for Gideon!' (Jud. 7:18). Because the idea of [for our god] and for [our king] has always been common from ancient times- "In the name of God and the King" was the catchcry of the British empire. The way Abimelech asks whether Israel want to be ruled by one man or by all his 70 sons (Jud. 9:2) is a tacit implication that Gideon had reigned as king, and now the question was about whether one of his sons rule them, or all 70.

Jdg 8:19 He said, They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As Yahweh lives, if you

had saved them alive, I would not kill you-
The implication of :18 is that those slain at Tabor were Gideon's own children. See on :20. But it seems his brothers were also slain. The Divine command was to slay the Canaanites, so Gideon's statement here that he was only going to kill them because they had slain his relatives is therefore somewhat spiritually lacking. As is his materialistic demand for the spoil and making an ephod. And yet he died in faith. Just as Samson did, despite so many weaknesses.

Jdg 8:20 He said to Jether his firstborn, Get up and kill them! But the youth didn't draw his sword for he was afraid, because he was still a youth-
Although Gideon's brothers were slain (:19), it seems from :18 that his children were also killed. This is why he asks his firstborn son, who was with him and had survived, to act as the avenger of blood and slay those who had killed his brothers. This however was somewhat of a twist of the law of blood revenge, which surely didn't apply to deaths in battle. Although the children may have been too young to fight. "Jether" means "excellency" and this was the meaning of Jacob's firstborn Reuben, who was the "excellency" of his power (Gen. 49:3 s.w.). In this we see Gideon being guided by Biblical precedent, despite his weaknesses.

Gideon in Judges 6 and 7 presents as a child, desperately wanting God to hold His hand. Wanting reassurance after reassurance, even though God had given it him. As a child, you instinctively put your hand out for someone to hold it as you approached a road. You earnestly implored the adult steadying your bicycle as you learned to ride and balance "You won't let go, will you?". Or as you learned to swim without a board. Gideon comes over as this, time and again. And God used him. But just as we now have crossed thousands of roads alone, he grew old and brave, whipped Israelites who didn't support him, appeared as a mighty warrior, fearless and confident in pursuit of his enemies. But the key is to remain in contact with the little child within you, to stay small in your own eyes, to always have that need for God, that instinctive putting out of your hand to Him. It is for this reason that we have the incident of Gideon telling his young son to murder the captured kings, when [LXX] he was too young to wield a sword. He wanted to brutalize his own son at an early age by getting him to commit murder. As Gideon looked at his little boy, shy and so unsure and pining away from the challenge... he should have seen his real self.

The reference to Gideon using a sword is another allusion to Gideon's earlier spiritual strength. But he and his 300 had won the victory by shouting The sword of Yahweh and of Gideon. Gideon's sword was that of Yahweh. And there had been no sword in his hand, just trumpet and empty / useless earthen vessels. But like David later wanting Goliath's sword, so Gideon reverts to human strength.

Jdg 8:21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Get up and do it yourself, for as the man is, so is his strength. Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna and took the crescents that were on their camels' necks-

The implication could be that Gideon was indeed built as a strong and mighty warrior. His deep humility (see on :2) is therefore the more commendable. The crescents which he took remain the symbols of Israel's neighbouring enemies. But they had religious significance, and Gideon would have been better to destroy them. See on :12.

Jdg 8:22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, both you and your son and your son's son also, for you have saved us out of the hand of Midian-

Gideon had the deportment of a king, and had acted like one (:18). But we see here Israel's lack of faith in Yahweh as their king, and their desperate desire for the immediate, the human and the visual rather than the invisible things of God's rulership and kingship over them. "You and your son's son" means hereditary kingship. But Dt. 17 had been clear, that they could only have any king over them whom Yahweh had chosen. That seems to outlaw the common idea of hereditary kingship. It could be that the apparent request of the people was actually a way of saying 'You want to establish yourself and your family as kings- and we now accept that, given the prowess you have demonstrated'. In Semitic thought, such 'requests' can be made in order to confirm acceptance of what has been demanded. Thus a subjected nation would formally request the conqueror to reign over them. It was a way of accepting what was being asked of them.

"You have saved us..." ought surely to have elicited from Gideon the response that he had not saved them- Yahweh had. Again, this is a far cry from the Gideon who began his ministry by saying "Oh Lord, how shall *I* save Israel?" (Jud. 6:23). He fails to give glory to God; and as discussed on :2, he fails through sin of omission rather than commission.

Jdg 8:23 Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. Yahweh shall rule over you-

Time and again, the Bible is full of warnings against doing what seems right before God, when our motives are far from Him. Take the way that Gideon was invited to be king over Israel, but he refused, citing the fact that Yahweh is Israel's King. All well and good... but the record goes on to record how he made an idolatrous ephod in his home town, to which all Israel came (Jud. 8:22-24). And he had a son, Abimelech- which means 'my father is king'! And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). The name Abimelech is stressed 37 times in Jud. 9, and we read multiple times there of how Abimelech 'reigned' [as king] (Jud. 9:6,8,10,12,14,16,18), when God was the 'reigner', the King of Israel. Abimelech's argument in Jud. 9:2 was that one leader was better than many, and he suggested himself as that one leader. He felt the man born to be king.

Jotham chooses to claim that the Israelites wanted to anoint Abimelech as their king (Jud. 9:8). But all this was a failure to which they had been set up by Gideon wanting his son to become king. The fact all Gideon's 70 sons are slain by Abimelech shows how Gideon's hopes and projections upon Abimelech and for the establishment of his family as kings... all came to a tragic end. His family was not blessed, but he himself will be saved.

Our behaviour smacks of this time and time again. We do what is externally right, but our inward motives are impure. There's an urgent need for self-examination at depth within each of us... and yet the busyness of our lives, our poor time management and lack of rigorous regime in spiritual life, so easily leads us not to seriously attempt this. And we end up doing things which are only externally right. See on Jud. 9:18.

And yet we could quite understandably read this as Gideon's commendable refusal to replace Yahweh as their king. He resisted the temptation to misinterpret Dt. 17:14,15 as meaning that indeed he was the man who would be desired as king by Israel.

The parable of Jud. 9:8-11 implies that Israel repeated this request, but Gideon's sons refused, following their father's example. Only the illegitimate Abimelech accepted it.

Jdg 8:24 Gideon said to them, I would make a request of you, that every man would give me the earrings of his spoil. They had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites-
Midianites were Ishmaelites (Gen. 37:25,28,36). It seems that having overcome the temptation to be king (:23), Gideon succumbed to another temptation- to become wealthy, to effectively act as king by demanding wealth from his followers. We catch ourselves doing this; just as the alcoholic quits alcohol and takes to drugs. See on :26.

Although Gideon refused to be king, he called his son Abimelech, 'my father is king'. And he in other ways effectively declared himself as king, whilst on the other hand strongly and piously denying he was king. His request for a portion of the plunder was exactly what a king required from his soldiers (Jud. 5:30; 1 Sam. 30:19,20; 2 Sam. 12:30; 1 Chron. 20:2). Likewise taking many wives and having many sons, especially 70, was typical of the behaviour of men seeking to establish themselves as king. We think of how David took more wives and had children once he was king. Ahab also established his kingship by having 70 sons, and "seventy sons" may be another way of saying 'the sons of the king' in 2 Kings 10:1-7, where Jehu ends Ahab's dynasty by slaying "the sons of the king, seventy men". So having 70 sons was a way of claiming to be king.

Jdg 8:25 They answered, We will willingly give them. They spread a garment and each man threw the earrings of his spoil into it-
When Gideon received the golden earrings of the Ishmaelites (Jud. 8:24-27), his mind should have flown back to how golden earrings were turned into the golden calf (Ex.

32:2). He was potentially given the strength to resist the temptation to turn them into an idol. But he must have blanked out that Biblical precedent in his heart; he ignored his spiritual potential. The word for "earrings" in :24,26 only occurs in the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:2,3). Clearly what Gideon did is being paralleled with Aaron's creation of the golden calf. Like Aaron, Gideon never specifically repents, and yet is saved in the end. We wonder whether with some people, God accepts them because of outstanding faith and loyalty to Him at an earlier point in their lives. So long as they don't totally reject Him, He accepts them in the end despite their spiritual decline in later years. Or we wonder whether Gideon repented at the very end and is therefore saved on that account. We are not told, in order to exercise our minds.

Jdg 8:26 The weight of the golden earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescents, the pendants and the purple clothing that was on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were about their camels' necks-

Purple clothing was the clothing of kings. As noted on :24, Gideon turned down being king- but he then as it were compensated for that by taking the clothing and wealth appropriate to a king. His victory over temptation in this area was therefore only external, and not from the heart. And we can do the same. We can contrast his being clothed with the purple clothing of Midian with the way he was clothed with God's Spirit in Jud. 6:34 (Heb.). We learn from Jer. 10:9 that purple clothes were associated with idolatry: "Their idols... are dressed in violet and purple cloth woven by skilled weavers" (GNB). The Midianite kings had purple clothing- because they were king-priests. When Gideon is asked to be king, he declines, but declares himself a priest- he had already made an altar to Yahweh at his home village, and now he places an ephod there. So by doing this he was effectively declaring himself also a king, given the understanding of king-priests.

1700 shekels of gold was a huge weight, about 43 pounds [20 kg.]. Demanding and receiving such huge wealth was behaviour appropriate to a king. It is noted in :18 that Gideon had the deportment of a King; his body language betrayed his self perception as a king. Gideon has moved far on from the man who was once young and so desperately unsure, describing himself as from the poorest family in the poorest tribe, as he beat out a few ears of grain in the disused family winepress.

Jdg 8:27 Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah, and all Israel prostituted themselves by worshipping it there; and it became a snare to Gideon and to his house-

Twice in 1 Timothy, Paul speaks about a snare; the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7), and the snare of wanting wealth (6:9). The desire for wealth in whatever form is the very epitome

of the devil, our inherent sin which we must struggle against. The idea of a snare is that it results in a sudden and *unexpected* destruction. The unexpectedness of the destruction should set us thinking: surely the implication is that those who are materialistic don't realize that in fact this is their besetting sin, and therefore their rejection in the end because of it will be so tragically unexpected. It's rather like pride; if you're proud and you don't know it, then you really are proud. And if we're materialistic and don't know it, we likewise really have a problem. The idea of riches being a snare connects with copious OT references to idols as Israel's perpetual snare (Ex. 23:33; Dt. 7:16; Jud. 2:3; 8:27; Ps. 106:36; Hos. 5:1). Paul's point is surely that the desire of wealth is the equivalent of OT idolatry.

The ephod was likely comprised of precious stones which had also been in the earrings of the Midianites and around the necks of their camels. He had built an altar to Yahweh in his home, and it seems this was an imitation high priestly breastplate. He was effectively setting himself up as a priest. Gideon had a weakness for wanting signs from God, and it seems that the urim and thummim in the High Priest's breastplate flashed out yes / no binary answers to questions. So perhaps he never quite got over that desire to have visible signs, and this weakness [like all unvanquished weaknesses] expanded into something grotesque- a golden ephod that became a spiritual snare.

The language of Israel prostituting themselves reminds us of the golden calf incident, where again golden earrings are taken from the people, and an idol is made (Ex. 32:2-6). Clearly what Gideon did was as wrong as what Aaron did. He failed to perceive that he had been called in terms of being another Moses for Israel, as discussed on chapter 7. But he fails to keep perceiving that, and behaves as faithless Aaron. We too are to perceive which Bible characters we are being led to emulate. The fact he put about 20 kg. of gold into the "ephod" surely of itself suggests that this was more of an idol than en ephod. Although Heb. 11 assures us that Gideon will be in the Kingdom, seeing he "died in faith", we have to observe that he effectively rebuilt a pagan shrine in Ophrah, after having cut it down in his youth. We see the same spiritual entropy in David and others who will all the same be in the Kingdom. Spiritual entropy is a tragic thing to behold and it is a frequent sight. But Jud. 8:35 concludes his story with the comment that he did good to Israel- even though actually his vanity led all Israel to prostitute themselves against Yahweh. So in the final judgment of God, although Gideon laid a stumbling block to them in the form of the ephod, it was Israel who were more guilty than he was. We cannot judge, but seeing an example like this of how carefully God balances His judgment, we can be assured that His final judgment will be just and factor in everything. Without the comment of Heb. 11 and Jud. 8:35, we would likely have written off Gideon as a spiritual failure, one like Saul who started well but went wrong. We are taught here, as we are with Samson, that God's judgment is different to ours; we are not to judge exactly because we cannot judge, we do not see all the inner nuances of human minds and lives. But God does.

It is the surrounding Canaanite people who are repeatedly described as a "snare" to Israel. Just as Midianite women had been at the time of the golden calf, which incident is clearly alluded to in Gideon's creation of the ephod from earrings. All Gideon's hard work in delivering Israel from the Midianites was therefore undone by him- because his ephod became a snare to Israel, just as the Canaanite tribes had been. He left no good legacy, and his tragic family history after his death reflects that. Again we reflect that even if a man's work for the Lord is undone by his own foolish pride, he himself may still be saved as Gideon was. As Paul puts it, all a man builds may be burnt up, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. Gideon means 'hacker down' and Jerubbaal means 'Baal fighter' or 'Let Baal plead'. Gideon ultimately failed to achieve his potential. He as it were built up idolatry. But still he will be saved. This is both comfort and challenge to us.

Jdg 8:28 So Midian was subdued before the Israelites, and they exalted their heads no more-
The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

The land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon-
The forty years rest of Jud. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28 may not be a literal period. I have elsewhere noted that the forty year reigns of Saul, David and Solomon create chronological problems if read literally. The idea may be that forty years was a time of testing, as it was for Israel in the wilderness. We think of the Lord's 40 days of testing too. In this case, they were tested by peace. And they consistently failed, as God's people often do.

Jdg 8:29 Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house-
He commendably didn't try to establish himself with a palace, as he had rejected the possibility of becoming king. But he turned that house into a quasi sanctuary, having built an altar to Yahweh there, and now having made a breastplate. We see how his apparent resistance of the temptation to be king was not from the heart, because he acted like a king in other ways. Indeed it could be argued that the statement that he "lived in his own house" is tautological, in that of course people live in their own homes. The suggestion seems to be that he established his home as a kind of capital and religious center for Israel. The note that Gideon was buried in his own city in the tomb of his fathers (:32) is the same rubric used about the deaths and burials of Israel's later kings.

The mention of his name, Baal judger, is placed in juxtaposition with the fact he effectively made an idol and Israel worshipped it. As if he retained his name as a believer but didn't live up to it. Possibly he created an ephod because from it, the urim and thummim flashed out assurance and answers to questions. And Gideon had always been in such need of this from God. So we see some spirituality mixed with carnality in him, which was the consistent problem with God's people as it is to this day.

Jdg 8:30 Gideon had seventy sons conceived from his body, for he had many wives-
I suggested on :18,20 that some of Gideon's sons had been killed at Tabor, and this is why he asked his firstborn to act as the avenger of blood in slaying their killers. It is psychologically understandable that he sought to build up his family again, but his "many wives" hardly speak of spirituality, and having 70 sons looked ahead to the ungodly behaviour of Ahab (2 Kings 10:1). Ahab having 70 sons suggests that having 70 sons meant he was establishing himself as a king. The surrounding legends often feature a god / king as having 70 sons. We note that the record records Gideon's denial of kingship; but the inspired record gives many details which appear to show God's take on that, revealing that in fact he did act as king, despite his words to the contrary. The description of him having many wives, amassing gold to himself and leading Israel astray is all presented in terms of how Dt. 17:17-20 said that this was *not* what the King of Israel should do. We are left to conclude that he was the king who was never crowned, but his kingship was not as God wished. But again we note- that despite all this, he is listed in Heb. 11 amongst those who will be saved. The victory over Midian, and his transformation from a doubter to a man of faith, was surely over no more than a few weeks of his life. We are left to enquire whether this was so very pleasing to God that He saved him anyway. Despite all the spiritual entropy we observe in Jud. 8. We must enquire in what areas we protest our spiritual innocence, and yet in reality, act in the very way we deny. Are we materialistic? Do we really care about people? Are we really loving and devoted to love as we say we are?

Jdg 8:31 His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son and he named him Abimelech-
Abimelech means 'my father is king'. And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). As discussed on :23, Gideon overcame the temptation to become king, but only on an external level. In reality his behaviour was as if was a king in all but name.

Jdg 8:32 Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father in Ophrah of the Abiezrites-
This is the same description used for the death of Abraham (Gen. 15:15*;* 25:8) in whose

faultering steps of faith Gideon had followed; see on :4. He is presented, for all his moral weakness and faultering faith, as a seed of Abraham. And he is listed amongst the faithful in Heb. 11. We are thereby comforted in our own self doubt, as we review the weak nature of our own faith and commitment.

Jdg 8:33 As soon as Gideon was dead, the people of Israel turned again and played the prostitute after the Baals, and made Baal Berith their god-
Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 62:4,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity to God is spoken of as adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for us (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for us is so exclusive. He expects us to be totally *His*.

Baal Berith is literally the Baal of the covenant. Israel went wrong because they reasoned that serving Baal was a form of worshipping Yahweh and keeping covenant relationship with Him.

Jdg 8:34 The Israelites didn't remember Yahweh their God Who had delivered them out of the hand of all their enemies on every side-
They never formally abrogated Yahweh nor their covenant with Him, and would never have considered themselves atheists. Just as many of us never would. But they didn't "remember" Him nor His great salvation of them by grace; this was not constantly in their minds. And so it can be with us. This is why the breaking of bread service plays an important role in helping us not to forget these things.

Jdg 8:35 neither did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, that is, Gideon, according to all the kindness which he had showed to Israel-
Gideon loved Israel. We recall how he showed kindness to them by not becoming their king but leaving Yahweh as their king. God had delivered the enemy into Gideon's personal hand (Jud. 7:9), but Gideon speaks of the enemies having been given into Israel's hand (Jud. 7:15; 8:3). Gideon was not out for personal justification, but for the victory of Israel. But ingratitude and failure to lastingly perceive such love toward us is sadly a feature of human nature.

JUDGES CHAPTER 9

Jdg 9:1 Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father saying-
Abimelech means 'my father is king'; it was the dynastic title of the Philistine kings as we see from Gen. 20,26, Ps. 34 title etc. Kings named their sons Abimelech to continue their reigning dynasty. And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). As discussed on :2, Gideon overcame the temptation to become king, but only on an external level. In reality his behaviour was as if was a king in all but name. His weakness in this matter was repeated to a stronger degree in his son. Just as our weaknesses will be repeated and magnified in our children, as David's were in Solomon's love for horses and women. The comment was made about Gideon that he looked like the son of a king (Jud. 8:18 "They were like you. Each one resembled the children of a king"). Gideon was invited to be Israel's king, but he declined, saying that God was their king. But he named his son Abimelech, my father is king, as if he was deeply impressed that he looked like a king. He felt he was the man born to be king, but resented having to turn it down for the sake of Yahweh. But he expressed his hankering for it by vicariously living it out through his son Abimelech, and thus he set his son up for spiritual failure. So much vicarious sin goes on in our age, through watching movies or playing games that enable us to vicariously do that which we ourselves would not do in real life. Although Gideon will still be finally saved, according to Hebrews 11. Abimelech absorbed all this. He was eager to be king, which his father externally declined although internally wanted it; and he tried to replicate his father Gideon by destroying the tower in Shechem (Jud. 9:49) just as Gideon had destroyed the tower of Penuel (Jud. 8:17). But Abimelech then tried to continue to replicate his father by seeking to destroy the tower in Thebez - and this cost him his life. He should have listened to Jotham's parable and let God be king in his life and in the collective life of Israel. His obsession with destroying the towers of Shechem and Thebez reflected how Gideon had burnt the tower of Peniel. But Gideon's murder of fellow Israelites at Peniel as punishment for not supporting him was surely wrong- and again, this set up Abimelech for failure. For he clearly thought there was nothing wrong in doing this.

Jdg 9:2 Please speak to all the men of Shechem and say, 'Is it better for you that all the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy persons, should rule over you, or that one rule over you?' Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh-
There is no evidence that the other sons were seeking to be king. Their father Gideon had been offered the kingship for himself and his sons, and he had refused it. Abimelech was likely responding to the fear that they might stop him from his plan, and so many crimes and sins are committed on the basis of eliminating possible opposition.

Time and again, the Bible is full of warnings against doing what seems right before God, when our motives are far from Him. Take the way that Gideon was invited to be king over

Israel, but he refused, citing the fact that Yahweh is Israel's King. All well and good... but the record goes on to record how he made an idolatrous ephod in his home town, to which all Israel came (Jud. 8:22-24). And he had a son, Abimelech- which means 'my father is king'!. And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). Our behaviour smacks of this time and time again. We do what is externally right, but our inward motives are impure. There's an urgent need for self-examination at depth within each of us... and yet the busyness of our lives, our poor time management and lack of rigorous regime in spiritual life, so easily leads us not to seriously attempt this. And we end up doing things which are only externally right.

Abimelech claimed that he was of the same bone and flesh of the men of Shechem. His mother was a "concubine" from Shechem (Jud. 8:31). We can ponder whether the men of Shechem were in fact Gentiles, and whether Abimelech's mother was a Gentile prostitute from Shechem. Jud. 9:28 certainly implies they were Gentiles: "Be loyal to your ancestor Hamor, who founded your clan!". He is certainly playing on his mother having been from Shechem- for he now says he is of the same flesh and bone as the men of Shechem. And we ponder whether therefore his attempt to become king would have to fall short of the standard in Dt. 17:15: "You shall in any wise set him king over you whom the Lord your God shall choose; one from among your brethren shall you set king over you; you cannot set a stranger over you who is not your brother". In this case, Gideon should never have set up Abimelech to be king by naming him as he did, 'My father is king'. But Abimelech plays on his Shechem connections to be made king by them. And they accept this- "he is our brother" (:3). But Abimelech didn't work out well as king. Perhaps this incident happened to show Israel that if they wanted a king, it must be a man chosen by God and not a half Gentile. For as Jotham's parable showed, they wanted a king.

Jdg 9:3 His mother's brothers told all the men of Shechem all these words, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, He is our brother-
Shechem was apparently in the hands of the Hivites, so these men may not have been true Israelites. The idea is that their hearts were inclined (by God) to follow him (the same Hebrew phrase is in 1 Kings 11:3; Ps. 119:36; 141:4). Just as God inclined the hearts of the men of Shechem to follow Abimelech (Jud. 9:3), so He put an evil spirit / attitude of mind between them and Abimelech (:23). Clearly God can work directly upon the human heart according to His will. This is the basis of the way that the evil spirit (from the Lord) and the holy spirit work upon the hearts of men. We can pray that God "incline our hearts unto Him... incline my heart unto Your words" (1 Kings 8:58; Ps. 119:36 s.w.).

Jdg 9:4 They gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baal Berith, with which

Abimelech hired reckless adventurers who followed him-
Abimelech was apparently an idolater. And yet Jud. 10:1 implies that he was also a judge who saved Israel. His work for Israel isn't much recorded, and therefore we sense that as with the record of Samson, we have here the down points in his life.

Jdg 9:5 He went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy persons, on one stone; but Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal escaped, for he hid himself-
Tragically it was probably upon the rock upon which Gideon first sacrificed to Yahweh (Jud. 6:20) that his seventy sons were to be slain by Abimelech, with the help of men who worshipped Baal Berith. Presumably the 70 silver pieces were payment for the death of the 70 people, a coin for each murder. The deaths upon one stone suggests it was done as a sacrifice- where Gideon had sacrificed to Yahweh. Abimelech possibly justified killing his brothers as being some kind of service to God. Just as many have done. It just shows that spirituality cannot be automatically passed on as if it is genetic, although it can be inculcated. Jotham being the youngest son may mean he was no more than a child or teenager, but his spiritual perception was very fine.

Jdg 9:6 All the men of Shechem assembled themselves together, and all the house of Millo, and went and made Abimelech king by the oak of the pillar that was in Shechem-
Oaks and pillars are associated with idolatry throughout the Old Testament. "The house of Millo" is likely also a reference to an idol temple. Yet Jud. 10:1 implies Abimelech was a saviour and defender of Israel. At some point he must have repented of all this and done work for God. His proclamation as king was however a rejection of Yahweh as king; the very thing his father Gideon had refused to do. Yet even such a spiritually weak man was used to save His people.

This oak near Shechem was where the fathers of Israel had jettisoned their idols (Gen. 35:4). But clearly this was just a surface level appeal to spirituality by Abimelech, for the people were clearly idolatrous. And this was the oak of Josh. 24:25,26: "Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a great stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of Yahweh".
Abimelech was having himself made king at Yahweh's sanctuary, as Saul would at Gilgal (1 Sam. 11:15). Abimelech was behaving in a totally fleshly way under the guise of alluding to spiritual principles. This kind of thing is frequently seen in religion gone wrong.

Jdg 9:7 When they told Jotham he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted to them, Listen to me, you men of Shechem, so that God will listen to you-

God listens to those who hear His word, there is a mutuality between God and man. We hear His word, He listens to us. This implies Jotham's words were Divinely inspired. Mount Gerizim was the scene of the reciting of the curses and blessings, and Jotham is surely reminding the people that they are breaking covenant with God and can only be cursed. Jotham taught that if Israel heard his parable then God would hear them; but He wouldn't if they rejected the parable. They rejected the parable, but by grace, God does hear their cry later in Jud. 10. He stands on Mount Gerizim which was from where the blessings were uttered [Dt. 11:29; 27:12; the curses were pronounced nearby from Mount Ebal "you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal"]; and yet his words became a curse on Israel (:57). They were perhaps pronounced from Gerizim because it was God's intention they should bring about repentance and thus bring blessing.

Jdg 9:8 The trees went out one day to anoint a king to be over them; they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us'-

The trees refer to the people who wanted a king, one of themselves, a tree like them, but with superior qualities. Gideon had remonstrated that God was their king, and so they should not seek a human leader, another tree like them, but accept Yahweh as king. Jotham perceives the desire for leadership, and that is a theme throughout Judges. In his parable, the trees ask other trees to reign over them, but this isn't directly recorded historically. They had asked Gideon to be king, but now it is Abimelech who goes to Shechem and asks them to let him be king. But the parable paints things as if the trees are desperate for a king over them; I believe this is the point, as otherwise the parable appears untrue to its interpretation. Jotham is perhaps seeking to reveal to the people that consciously or subconsciously, their desire was for a human king when God was their king. The men of Samson's time were content with the Philistines ruling over them rather than Samson, Micah pays the young Levite to be a father to him, "The people, the princes of Gilead, said one to another, Who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). Our sense of brave independence notwithstanding, we all have a desire to be led by another, to have a parental figure in our lives. And that desire is finally only met in the Father and Son.

Jdg 9:9 But the olive tree said to them 'Should I give up my oil with which they honour God and man to go and hold sway over the trees?'-

These trees refused the other trees' desire for their rulership. This perhaps refer to unrecorded times when the sons of Gideon had been approached and asked to be king; and they had each refused, in line with how their father refused to be king, and refused the invitation to his sons also (Jud. 8:23). It was the priests who were to offer oil in order to honour God (Lev. 2:1-16), and used it to anoint men for special purposes. Thus the olive who honoured both God and man with oil might possibly refer to a priest who was

asked to become king, but refused it. It was more important to honour God and people, then to "hold sway over" people. And this is the point which those who desire leadership so often forget. Jotham's point is that spiritually minded people had already been asked to be king, but had refused- for Yahweh was Israel's king. The 'trees' who had refused the invitation were more interested in being of service to God and man; and they perceived that being a king was not going to achieve that.

Jdg 9:10 The trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and reign over us'-
These continual requests to men to "reign over us" reflect the basic tendency within human nature, to want to be submissive; to desire a human leader. The fact Israel were specifically not given a king, because the invisible God was their king, was in fact right against human nature. We see the same tension, between personal spirituality and on the other hand, a desire to be within a denominational structure that provides human leadership.

Jdg 9:11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I give up my good, sweet fruit to go to hold sway over the trees?'-
A good fig tree bears good fruit. But this wouldn't be possible if the tree was "promoted" (AV) to sway around over the other trees. Leadership positions so often mean that a person cannot quite be the person they were intended to be; something of their real self is lost and compromised. And this is why we should never seek leadership over others, because God has a specific role for us; and we will only become true leaders as a result of His guiding hand, rather than our seeking it. This is why we must be leery of any who clearly set out to be leaders of God's people, as if it is their right or just their chosen career path.

Jdg 9:12 The trees said to the vine 'Come and reign over us'-
Olive, vine and fig tree are all trees representative of Israel. But they each refused the invitation to be king. The idea would be that the true Israel would not seek to be king over itself. For Yahweh was their true king. The vine here is perhaps a reference to Gideon, a descendant of Joseph, who was a fruitful vine (Gen. 49:22)- and who was invited to be Israel's king in these very words (Jud. 8:22,23).

Jdg 9:13 The vine said to them, 'Should I give up my new wine, which cheers God and man, to go to hold sway over the trees?'-
Wine was part of the offerings to God (Num. 15:7,10) which cheered God in that He was pleased with Israel's drink offerings.

Jdg 9:14 Then all the trees said to the thorn bush, 'Come and reign over us'-

This refers to Abimelech, the illegitimate son of Gideon; and we recall that thorns were part of the curse. The people were so desperate for human leadership, and so insistent that they didn't want God's invisible leadership, that they would have even a symbol of the curse to reign over them. We must remember that it was Abimelech who had offered to be the king of Shechem (:1-3), but in the parable, Jotham suggests they had asked him to reign over them. Jotham is right and wrong; for in Jud. 8:22 they had invited Gideon, his son and grandson to reign over them. Possibly the three better trees who rejected the invitation refer to unknown sons of Gideon; or to previous judges like Othniel, Deborah and Gideon. It could be that Abimelech made the offer he did to them because they had already made it clear that they were open to this. Quite likely Gideon had wanted his son Abimelech to be king, and the people responded to this.

We note the stress that *all* the trees wanted the thorn bush to reign over them. Possibly we are to infer that the olive, vine and fig were amongst them. In which case we are left to conclude that they were so focused upon themselves and their own immediate preoccupations that they were willing for an obviously bad leader to lead them. And that is indeed how bad men get into power. The idiom "each man dwelling under his own vine and fig tree" (Mic. 4:4 etc.) suggests a vine and fig were the personal possession of a man; there was no collective communal element in the vine and fig. For the parable speaks of them as individual trees and not a plantation of them like a vineyard. Perhaps the argument is that the three good trees ought to have accepted the invitation to be king, and because they didn't, the bramble became king and burnt them all up. Each tree refuses kingship with the excuse that they didn't want to "give up" their own fruit; and leadership of others does involve a personal 'giving up'. They didn't want to do that for the sake of the community. That would fit a theme of Judges, that men were so focused on their immediate local needs and issues that they didn't think of the needs of the wider community. Judges 5 condemns those who didn't come to help Barak, and Gideon condemns those who refused to come and help him in his pursuit of the enemy. Their desperation for someone to rule over them is shown by otherwise superior trees begging an inferior to reign over them. The parable reflects how strong is human desire to be ruled over. When this need is not met in God, men make foolish choices which are not sincere in that they are themselves skeptical of their own choices.

Jdg 9:15 The thorn bush said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade; if not, let fire come out of the thorn bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon'-

"If in truth..." suggests the thorn bush [Abimelech] was skeptical about the request for him to be king. Or it could be that the voice behind the parable, which is God's inspiration, is suggesting that the trees were not sincere in wanting the thorn bush to be king. They wanted a king, any king, and were so desperate for this that they would even

choose someone they were skeptical of. Fire did come from the thorn bush and devour other trees, at least in literally burning 1000 people of Shechem. This means that the trees did not "in truth" / sincerely anoint Abimelech. They did so because they were so desperate for absolutely any leader. And thus God through Jotham is trying to get them to realize the strength of their human desire for a human leader rather than God. In the end, anyone would do. Even if they considered him not the best.

"Take refuge" is AV "put your trust". The Hebrew for "trust" usually means to trust in God. Jotham's point is that they were trusting in a human king rather than in God. The higher our trust in human leadership and structure, the weaker will be our faith in God. And this is the problem with all human leadership and religious structures.

The idea of shade is used of the shade / protection offered by God (Ps. 91:1; 121:5; Hos. 14:8); Lam. 4:20 recalls how Judah used to refer to their king by saying that "in his shade we will live among the nations". They meant that their king would protect them from the Gentile nations. And the surrounding nations used the idea of the shade/shadow of a king to refer to his protection. This was the context- the tribes wanted a king to save / shade them from their enemies. The other trees / options are presented as focusing on producing their own fruit; whereas the thorn bush has no good fruit but claims to offer shade when it cannot. Possibly Jotham's point is that no human leader can provide this shade- only by turning to God can they find this shade. Indeed we could understand the Abimelech experience as a warning to Israel of what to expect if they had a king. But their later demand for a king shows they didn't learn from this history. Jotham being the youngest son (:5) may mean he was no more than a child or teenager, but his spiritual perception was very fine. Cedars, vines, figs etc. would get no shade from a thorn bush.

But the thorn bush offers no shade. The Kingdom of God is likened to a tree giving shade (Mk. 4:32), but the thorn bush cannot do this. Abimelech's pretension at being king is therefore presented as at best unhelpful. He demanded miserable submission to himself, and if he didn't get it, he would burn up the fine cedars of Lebanon- possibly a reference to Gideon's sons whom he slew. This is where bad leadership leads- the destruction of that which is beautiful. This very figure is used in Zech. 11:1, of how the house / temple of the cedars of Lebanon was to be "devoured" (Zech. 11:1)- as a result of Judah's corrupt, spiritually illegitimate leadership. Cedars of Lebanon were seen as the best trees- so the idea may be that Abimelech would destroy the best candidates for leadership. Fire coming out of a thorn bush alludes to how forest fires are spread by thorn bushes near the ground, resulting in great trees catching fire. This is alluded to in Is. 9:18,19: "For wickedness burns like a fire, it devours the briers and thorns; yes, it kindles in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke... the land is burnt up; and the people are the fuel for the fire. No one spares his brother". Abimelech had not spared his brothers; he was starting a forest fire that would destroy the whole land. However :20 interprets what was to be burnt up, the cedars, as "the

lords of Shechem and Beth-millo". The parable ends with a curse from Abimelech / the thorn bush and "on them came the curse of Jotham" (:57), but the parable is uttered from Mount Gerizim not Mount Ebal, the mount of blessing not curse. It's as if Jotham offers Israel a choice between a blessing and a curse, but Israel choose the curse of Jotham in that their choice of him was not sincere. For Jotham predicates the curse upon their insincerely choosing Abimelech. How were Israel insincere in choosing Abimelech as king? Their insincerity was in that they were so desperate for a human king, that they chose just anyone despite being sceptical of their own choice. And it is this manic desire for any human leadership rather than God's which is the nub of the parable- rather than simply being a case of punishment for slaying Gideon's sons.

Jdg 9:16 Now therefore, consider whether you have done what is true and right in making Abimelech king, and whether you have done justly to Jerubbaal and his house as he deserves-

This was an appeal for their repentance. Jotham however makes no mention of how they had thereby rejected Yahweh as their king. He doesn't repeat that argument of his father Gideon, and lacked Samuel's spiritual insight; for he saw that this was the worst implication of desiring any human king. Instead he argues that Gideon's family were worth more respect than to slay his sons at the whim of the worthless king whom they had chosen. Yet he calls Gideon "Jerubbaal", in allusion to how Gideon had put down the Baal worship which they indulged in (:4).

Jdg 9:17 (For my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you out of the hand of Midian-

Jotham makes no reference to God nor Yahweh in his parable. As noted on :16, Jotham lacks spiritual insight here. For Gideon himself clearly saw the deliverance as worked by Yahweh and not himself. It was Yahweh's sword which had been his sword. And instead of emphasizing his father's human bravery as the basis for the deliverance, surely he ought to have stressed Gideon's faith in Yahweh. Yet despite this, Jotham was clearly a spiritual person; although as always with God's people at this time, his spirituality was very compromised by his humanity.

"Fought for you and risked his life" is the phrase Jonathan uses about David (1 Sam. 19:5). Yet Jonathan seems to have seen Gideon as his hero [compare 1 Sam. 14:10-20 with Jud. 7:3,10,11,14,22. Jonathan's son was called Merib-baal (1 Chron. 9:40), meaning 'rebellion against Baal', an epithet for 'Gideon']. Yet in 1 Sam. 19:5 he says that "David put his life in his hand", exactly as Gideon did (Jud. 9:17). In other words, Jonathan saw David as the perfect fulfilment of all he spiritually wished to be, he felt that *David* lived up to the example of his hero Gideon, whereas he did not.

Jdg 9:18 yet you have risen up against my father's house this day and have slain his sons, seventy persons, on one stone, and have made Abimelech the son of his female servant king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother)-
So many times has this been repeated in the history of God's people, to this day. Petty nepotism, the support of a close relative within the church, leads to the destruction and exclusion of other far more spiritual families. However Jotham reasons as if Gideon had in fact been king, and therefore his successor ought not to have been his illegitimate son, but one of his legitimate sons. I noted on Jud. 8:23 that although Gideon turned down being king, he effectively set himself up as king in all but name. He took the wealth of Israel, clothed himself in kingly purple clothes and had a son called "My father is king", i.e. Abimelech. And Jotham appears to go along with this in how he reasons.

Jdg 9:19 If you have done what is true and right with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech and let him also rejoice in you-
As discussed on :18, Jotham implies that the right thing would have been to appoint one of Gideon's legitimate sons as king in his place. For he keeps on about how they should have treated his family / house far differently than they had. Doing what was "true and right" is a quotation from Josh. 24:14, where doing this involved quitting idolatry; which they evidently hadn't done (:4). So although Jotham reveals much human reasoning, his heart was very much with Yahweh rather than Baal worship.

Jdg 9:20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and the house of Millo, and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from the house of Millo and devour Abimelech-
The end result would be self destruction, of the kind which had characterized his father Gideon's great victory against the Midianites. Fire coming out of a thorn bush uses the very words of Ex. 22:6; and the one who did that was to make restitution and bear guilt. Jotham was aware of Bible verses and yet not all of his reasoning was completely spiritual.

Jdg 9:21 Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there, for fear of Abimelech his brother-
Beer may be Beeroth in Benjamin's highlands (Josh. 9:17). Often the Bible leaves us with limited information about a person, such as Jotham, and we are to imagine how his life in exile ended, and whether, given the evidence we have, he held on in faith or not. We hear no more of Jotham. He was in the right, others were in the wrong; he was badly treated as were his family. He bravely and cleverly made his appeal to avoid the destruction of God's people, but his appeal went unheard. God worked to prove him right in the long term, for the inspired historian concludes that Jotham's words were

fulfilled by God (:56,57). Yet he lived out his days in obscurity although, we can imagine, with the Lord. For his appeal was really to trust God as their king and not man. He is like so many, who live out their lives in obscurity having done the right thing, having held to God's way, were unappreciated and suffered for it. Awaiting a future reward.

Jdg 9:22 Abimelech was prince over Israel for three years-
It appears to have been in this period that he judged Israel and saved them from their enemies (Jud. 10:1), although he had not been a very spiritual person before that. The implication really is that he must have repented to some degree. All we read about is of his rise and fall, not his rulership "over Israel". Or it could be that the record here is written to reflect Abimelech's perspective. He imagined himself as king over all Israel when he only controlled Shechem and Ophrah. Ophrah, Arumah, Mount Zalmon, Beer and Thebez are all close together in the same region. We note he is called prince, not king. Unlike the other judges, Abimelech doesn't judge / save, he simply reigns and is made king (:6).

Jdg 9:23 God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech-
Although God created the division between Israel and Judah as a punishment for their apostasy (cp. how He gave Egypt and the Shechemites a spirit of disunity likewise, Is. 19:1,2,14; Jud. 9:23), God never essentially recognized that division; for there was one Israel, one body. But division is indeed a sign of Divine judgment upon a community. Their hearts had been inclined (by God) to follow him (:3; the same Hebrew phrase is in 1 Kings 11:3; Ps. 119:36; 141:4). But just as God inclined the hearts of the men of Shechem to follow Abimelech (Jud. 9:3), so now He put an evil spirit / attitude of mind between them and Abimelech. Clearly God can work directly upon the human heart according to His will. This is the basis of the way that the evil spirit (from the Lord) and the holy spirit work upon the hearts of men. However, the 'evil spirit' is 'sent' from God. Quite possibly here a specific Angel / spirit is referenced; just as in 1 Kings 22 an Angel is sent forth as a deceptive spirit, to seduce Ahab to go and die at Ramoth. Here too there is deception- Zebul tries to deceive Abimelech (:31), Zebul tricks Gaal... and the end result is judgment upon the men of Shechem and Abimelech.

Jdg 9:24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be avenged, and that their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother who killed them, and on the men of Shechem who helped him to kill his brothers-
God punished this massacre by putting a divided attitude in the hearts of those responsible, so that they killed each other. Just as He had destroyed the Midianites in the time of Gideon. Turning people against themselves is a common way God has

brought about destruction of those under judgment; so division is indeed a sign of Divine judgment upon a community.

Jdg 9:25 The men of Shechem set an ambush for him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who came along that way. This was reported to Abimelech-
They didn't catch Abimelech himself, but robbed others. The division and falling out between Abimelech and the men of Shechem was revealed in the way they took to highway robbery, apparently against Abimelech's wish, and refused his authority. The mountain top road would have been that between Shechem and Ophrah, Gideon's town, which Abimelech would have treated now as his own, seeing he had slain all Gideon's sons and Jotham was in exile. Again we marvel at the internal corroboration of the Biblical records.

Jdg 9:26 Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem, and the men of Shechem put their trust in him-
Gaal, "loathing", was son of a slave. He may well have been a local Canaanite. That the men of Shechem wanted such a man as their leader says much about them. We note that Jotham accuses Abimelech's mother of having also been a servant of Gideon.

Jdg 9:27 They went out into the field and harvested their vineyards, trod the grapes and held a festival, and went into the house of their god, ate and drank and cursed Abimelech-
We note how pagan worship was associated with eating and drinking wine, getting drunk. The church at Corinth mixed Christianity and paganism to the extent that the breaking of bread service was turned into a time of feasting and getting drunk.

Jdg 9:28 Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Isn't he the son of Jerubbaal and Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem, but why should we serve Abimelech?-

The idea may be, 'Who is Abimelech to rule over Shechem. We may as well serve Hamor the Gentile who was the first owner of Shechem (Gen. 34:2)'. Or we can take "Shechem" as a reference to Zebul. GNB suggests: "Gaal said, "What kind of men are we in Shechem? Why are we serving Abimelech? Who is he, anyway? The son of Gideon! And Zebul takes orders from him, but why should we serve him? Be loyal to your ancestor Hamor, who founded your clan!". In this case, Gaal is appealing to the men of Shechem to serve the descendants of the Gentile Hamor, rather than a foreigner like Abimelech. The implication would be that Gaal is a descendant of Hamor. Possibly Gaal is saying that Gideon and Zebul were servants to Hamor, the ancient father of the town of Shechem (Gen. 34), whereas it was about time that Shechem became independent.

They should no longer be under the thumb of Abimelech, through his servant Zebul whom he had appointed over the city (:30). Or he may mean 'Let us show our loyalty to ancient Hamor who founded this city, whom Jacob's sons wickedly destroyed- and I will be your leader, and let us shake off the yoke of the sons of Jacob'. This would make sense if indeed Gaal was a Canaanite and not an Israelite, and the population of Shechem was largely Canaanite.

Jdg 9:29 If only this people were under my hand! Then I would remove Abimelech. He said to Abimelech, Increase your army and come out!-
These things may all have been said whilst drunk (:27,28). Abimelech was apparently not in Shechem at the time, having left Zebul to govern Shechem (:30,31).

Jdg 9:30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled-
We wonder if Zebul was also in the idol temple, and heard these words himself there (:27,38). Abimelech and his men are not portrayed as exactly spiritual people.

Jdg 9:31 He sent messengers to Abimelech secretly saying, Look, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem and they are inciting the city against you-
"Secretly" could be “in Tormah”, the name of a place, perhaps another name for Arumah in :41. For Abimelech was clearly not living in Shechem.

Jdg 9:32 Now therefore, go up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field-
"Up by night" is the same words as found in the Divine command to his father Gideon, to "arise" by night and attack the Midianites (Jud. 7:9). But he was only imitating his father on a surface level; see on :34.

Jdg 9:33 In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you can rise early and rush on the city, and when he and the people who are with him come out against you, then may you do to them as you see fit-
The battle strategy of Abimelech, setting an ambush (Jud. 9:32), rising early and rushing upon the city of his one time brethren (Jud. 9:33), was replicated by the Israelites in Jud. 20:37. The same Hebrew words are used. But it was a case of copying an example just because it was recorded in Divine history, following precedents which were in fact not at all good. Hollow imitation of the behaviour of others is an abiding temptation for us today.

Jdg 9:34 Abimelech and all the people who were with him got up by night and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies-
We get the impression he was trying to imitate his father Gideon, who made an attack upon the Midianites in three companies at night, having been bidden arise or 'get up' by night (s.w. Jud. 7:9). And he certainly imitates Gideon in :48. But he was totally missing the point- he was trying to make a cardboard copy of another man's faith, following only the externalities, without Gideon's faith and humility. His failure to exactly follow his father is perhaps shown in the fact he had four companies whereas Gideon had three.

Jdg 9:35 Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and Abimelech and the people who were with him got up from the ambush-
The men of Shechem had earlier tried to ambush Abimelech, and now he ambushes them- continuing the theme of wicked men destroying themselves.

Jdg 9:36 When Gaal saw the people he said to Zebul, Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains. Zebul said to him, You are seeing the shadows of the mountains as if they were men-
This may be as if to say to Gaal 'you're drunk, you're not seeing straight'. Perhaps Zebul remained in a drunken stupor for some days after the massive drinking session of :27. Zebul was trying to lull Gaal into a false sense of security, by saying that the approaching soldiers he thinks he sees are in fact just mountain shadows. We enquire why we have this detail of the conversation. Possibly we are to connect it with Abimelech's claim to be a man in whose shadow others could dwell (:15). Shechem is located beneath the shadows of Abimelech's men. And it will mean only the fire of destruction for Shechem- just as Jotham had prophesied.

Jdg 9:37 Gaal spoke again and said, Look, people are coming down by the middle of the land, and one company is coming by the way of the oak of Meonenim-
Oaks are usually associated with idolatry in the Hebrew Bible. "Meonenim" is the word for magician, sorcerer etc. These pagan place names should have been removed and renamed. Even in secular history, a new entity which comes to power renames the previous cities and streets, to eradicate the memory of the philosophy, history and culture which they have replaced. The USSR did this when they took over the republics. But Israel just didn't do this in the land- because they themselves believed in the idols of those whom Yahweh had given them victory over. We see here the Baal worshippers divided against themselves. Abimelech approaches from a pagan point of worship, assuming he would have blessing for doing so. And the men of Shechem are worshippers of Baal Berith. This is the kind of mutual destruction foretold by Jotham.

Jdg 9:38 Then Zebul said to him, Now where is your boast when you said 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Isn't this the people that you have despised? Go out now and fight with them-
This again suggests Zebul had been in the idol temple when Gaal had made his drunken boast (:27). Abimelech and his men are not portrayed as exactly spiritual people.

Jdg 9:39 Gaal went out before the men of Shechem and fought with Abimelech-
Gaal going "before the men of Shechem" suggests he got his brief moment of power and leadership which he had so craved- but just for a morning.

Jdg 9:40 Abimelech chased him and he fled from him, and many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate-
The same phrase is in 1 Chron. 5:22: "For there fell many slain [wounded], because the war was of God". This was indeed "of God", but it doesn't make Abimelech thereby righteous. He was used to judge the Canaanites living in Shechem and their would be leader Gaal, and perhaps that is one of the ways in which Abimelech was a judge of Israel who saved them from their enemies (Jud. 10:1). In this sense we see a similarity with Samson, whose following of his own natural desires was used in order to save Israel from their enemies.

Jdg 9:41 Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they should not dwell in Shechem-
As often in the Hebrew Bible, this is a summary of the situation, and we will now read how this came about.

Jdg 9:42 Next day the people went out into the field and told Abimelech-
The men of Shechem who had succeeded in entering the gates of the city of Shechem (:40) now came out into the field, where they were attacked by Abimelech (:44). They truly hated him, and it was surely only Abimelech's pride which was leading him to punish them like this. See on :40. But it's hard to understand that the Shechemites came out of the city as if nothing had happened, when the day before they had suffered a severe defeat. And they are again defeated by a surprise attack just as had happened the day before. "Next day" is literally 'because of the tomorrow'. We could read this as a second account of Abimelech's attack on Shechem. Or we could read "the next day" as referring to the day after the treason of the Shechemites in :25. Or we could read "went out into the field" to mean that civilians returned to their daily work at harvest time- and Abimelech is thereby pictured as attacking and murdering civilians going about their daily work. This was the kind of destructive behaviour foretold in Jotham's parable.

Jdg 9:43 He took the people and divided them into three companies and laid wait in the field, and when he saw the people coming out of the city, he rose up against them and struck them-
This division of his men into three companies was exactly what his father Gideon had done, in his legendary victory against the Midianites. But as noted on :34,48, he was totally missing the point- he was trying to make a cardboard copy of another man's faith, following only the externalities, without Gideon's faith and humility.

Jdg 9:44 Abimelech and the companies that were with him rushed forward and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and the two companies rushed on all who were in the field and struck them-
LXX gives "the company that was with him", singular. This sandwiching of the enemy against their own city gate recalls the strategy used to take Ai. But Abimelech's spirituality and imitation of the righteous, as noted on :43, was apparently of a purely surface level nature.

Jdg 9:45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he took the city and killed the people who were in it, and he beat down the city and sowed it with salt-
This was an attempt to claim that he had executed Divine judgment against an apostate city (Dt. 29:23), although Abimelech and Zebul were far from righteous themselves. We note how attractive it is to men to condemn others. The spreading of salt was likely another surface level spiritual allusion, claiming he had devoted the city to utter destruction to Yahweh. For strewing salt meant dedication to Yahweh, as in Ez. 43:24.

Jdg 9:46 When all the men of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of Elberith-
Elberith was presumably a form of their god Baal Berith (:4). Their trust in their false god was to be their destruction. Although Abimelech was hardly spiritual, and Zebul was apparently present in the idol temple (:27), he seems to have rejoiced in the idea of punishing them for idolatry. And we see the same personality types amongst God's people today.

Jdg 9:47 It was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together-
These "men of the tower of Shechem" were perhaps the priests; it seems the tower was part of the pagan temple of Elberith (:46).

Jdg 9:48 Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him,

and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, took it up and laid it on his shoulder, and he said to the people who were with him, What you have seen me do, hurry and do the same!-
Abimelech here quotes the words of his father Gideon in Jud. 7:17; and the carrying of tree branches and then rushing down from a height upon the enemy recalls Gideon with his three companies of men holding pitchers. See on :34. The way Abimelech made his men "cut down branches from the trees" alludes to Jotham's parable of the trees. The trees were cut down and burnt by Abimelech stirring up the people to do so. Zalmon means shadow, and according to the parable, Abimelech had bidden the men of Shechem come beneath his shadow. But the end result would be Shechem's destruction and also Abimelech's. "Shoulder" is the word for 'Shechem'. Literally, Abimelech laid the branch of the damaged tree on 'his Shechem'. He destroyed his own Shechem, his own people, just as Jotham had predicted.

Jdg 9:49 All the people likewise each cut down his branch and followed Abimelech, and they put them at the base of the stronghold and set the stronghold on fire on them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about one thousand men and women-
"The people of the tower", as suggested on :47, were apparently those committed to idolatry. "The stronghold" of idolatry is equated with the tower (:46). This was the house of Millo which was to be destroyed by Abimelech's fire (:20). Their destruction by fire would have been designed by Abimelech as some kind of destruction of the apostate as required by the law of Moses, as if he were Joshua conquering Canaan and burning the cities of the Canaanites. But Abimelech's spirituality comes over as so compromised that it was merely a surface level imitation of the true.

Jdg 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and took it-
Abimelech had an apparent run of success, and it led him to think he was invincible. This is seen so often amongst men; from sports stars to evangelists to businessmen. The Biblical histories are all so absolutely psychologically credible, unlike the uninspired histories of the time. He presumably attacked Thebez to slightly increase his tiny empire of a few villages which he considered his 'reigning over Israel'.

Jdg 9:51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women of the city fled to it and shut themselves in, and went up to the roof of the tower-
Abimelech assumed that as he had destroyed the tower in Shechem so he could that in Thebez. See on :50. Maybe Thebez had also been subject to Abimelech but had likewise rebelled against his authority.

Jdg 9:52 Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of

the tower to burn it with fire-
I suggested on :49 that destruction by fire would have been designed by Abimelech as some kind of destruction of the apostate as required by the law of Moses, as if he were Joshua conquering Canaan and burning the cities of the Canaanites. But Abimelech's spirituality comes over as so compromised that it was merely a surface level imitation of the true. He felt that because he was punishing apostacy with fire, he was himself invincible; and therefore he was judged harshly. And we see such things amongst the children of God today.

Jdg 9:53 A woman cast an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and broke his skull-
This obviously was a fulfilment of the seed of the woman hitting the seed of the serpent upon the head (Gen. 3:15). And yet Abimelech had been about to burn her to death for supposed apostacy. We also note that a man who ended up judged like this was also used as a judge / saviour of Israel (Jud. 10:1). Milling was the work of women (Mt. 24:41), so like Jael, she grabbed whatever was handy and used it- although it's unclear whether she did this "for the Lord" as Thebez [possibly Tirzah 6 miles north of Shechem] may well have been in Gentile hands as was Shechem. Abimelech had broken down Shechem (:45), just as now his skull was 'broken'. Again, Jotham's words came true. What Abimelech did to Shechem was done to him.

Jdg 9:54 Then he called hastily to the young man who carried his armour and said to him, Draw your sword and kill me, so that men will not say of me, 'A woman killed him'. His young man thrust him through and he died-
Saul's armourbearer would not slay Saul because he was Yahweh's anointed king. Although Abimelech claimed to be king, and was accepted by some as king, he clearly was not recognized as king by God nor his own people. We note that the first, or possibly the next, king of Israel met his end likewise, asking his servant to kill him (2 Sam. 1:9). Saul is thus made to be a failed king of Israel just as Abimelech was. Abimelech is indeed remembered for having been slain by a woman, both in this record in Judges 9, and in 2 Sam. 11:18-21. What he greatly feared came upon him, as it will upon all whom God rejects. He who slew his brothers on a stone is killed by a stone.

Jdg 9:55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead they departed each man to his place-
The tower was not burnt with fire, because it was God's intention that Abimelech should do this to Shechem- not Thebez (:20). And so Thebez was not burnt as Abimelech had intended.

Jdg 9:56 Thus God rewarded the wickedness of Abimelech which he did to his father, in

killing his seventy brothers-
Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact, for Jotham escaped out of the 70. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”.

Jdg 9:57 and all the wickedness of the men of Shechem God repaid on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal-
As noted on :55, the tower of Thebez was therefore not burnt with fire, because it was God's intention that Abimelech should do this to Shechem- not Thebez (:20). And so Thebez was not burnt as Abimelech had intended.

JUDGES CHAPTER 10

Jdg 10:1 After Abimelech, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar arose to save Israel, and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim-
God Himself 'arose and saved' Israel from Egypt (Ps. 76:9, s.w. "raised up a saviour"), and the phrase is also used of Moses in Ex. 2:17. But the people didn't want this radical deliverance from their enemies, because like the generation saved from Egypt, they were with their enemies in their hearts, and worshipped their gods as Israel had taken the idols of their Egyptian enemies with them, through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:17). So the potential possible in these raised up saviours / judges was never totally realized.

This verse implies Abimelech was a saviour and defender of Israel. At some point he must have repented of all this and done work for God. His proclamation as king (Jud. 9:6) was however a rejection of Yahweh as king; the very thing his father Gideon had refused to do. Yet even such a spiritually weak man was used to save His people.

"Tola" means 'worm', continuing the theme that the judges all had something about them which made them despised of men. The left handed, the son of a whore or of a concubine, etc. And it is exactly this kind of person whom God uses.

Jdg 10:2 He judged Israel twenty-three years and died, and was buried in Shamir-

'Shamir' is the word for "brier" or "thorn", and is often used in Isaiah in a very negative place. This man called "worm", Tola, lived in a place of briers / thorns, wasteland, bearing God's curse. But from such a place arose a man used by God to save His people.

Jdg 10:3 After him arose Jair the Gileadite, and he judged Israel twenty-two years-
"Jair" means 'enlightener', or possibly 'light', which would fit with him being described as 'arising'. Like all the judges / saviours of Israel, he looked ahead to the rising of the light of Christ in Israel's darkness. There was another Jair who had liberated large tracts of land from the Canaanites during the conquest. Perhaps he was named after him. I have often noted the similarities between the lives of God's servants as recorded in the Bible; Jair judged for 22 years, and the previous judge for 23 years (:2), about the same period.

Jdg 10:4 He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkey colts,
To ride on a colt, an animal not yet broken in, was unusual. The idea surely is that they all rode on such colts at one time, perhaps the time when they received their thirty cities. It was as if they had to break in their city, as they were breaking in the colt, representing how they had to subdue the local inhabitants. And they look forward, as do all the judges, to the Lord Jesus; who also rode on a donkey colt as He entered the city of His inheritance, Jerusalem.

And they had thirty cities, which are called Havvoth Jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 10:5 Jair died and was buried in Kamon-
Kamon can mean simply the rising, referring to elevated land. But given the belief in the resurrection of the body, we wonder if there was not also the idea of burying a man from where he would finally rise from the dead. In the same way as Joshua was buried in the border of his inheritance, to rise again and enter it.

Jdg 10:6 The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and served

the Baals and Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines; they forsook Yahweh and didn't serve Him-
"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24). Israel generally never totally rejected Yahweh whilst they served other gods. But at this point it seems they did. We note the large number of gods they worshipped. Typically a people only worshipped one god. But Israel worshipped many, never satisfied with one, but like Gomer in her sexual addiction, always seeking other gods. For the way of the flesh never satisfies.

Jdg 10:7 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the people of Ammon-
Yahweh sold them, but the record often says that they sold or prostituted themselves to the idols of the nations. He will confirm men in the path they wish to go.

Jdg 10:8 They troubled and oppressed the Israelites that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites that were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead-
The first sentence of this verse is omitted by LXX and many versions, hence GNB "For eighteen years they oppressed and persecuted all the Israelites who lived in Amorite country east of the Jordan River in Gilead".

Jdg 10:9 The Ammonites passed over the Jordan to fight also against Judah and Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was very distressed-
This "distress" is the word used of the distress of the historical Jacob / Israel in this same area (Gen. 32:7), when like Israel he was confronted with his sins and led to cast himself upon God's grace.

Jdg 10:10 The Israelites cried to Yahweh saying, We have sinned against You because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals-
This was how Yahweh felt. They themselves didn't think they had forsaken Him. The Bible at times speaks from God's viewpoint, at others from the perspective of the people whose actions are being described. To forsake Yahweh was to break covenant with Him (Dt. 31:16,17). Israel did forsake Yahweh (Jud. 2:13), but still He remained faithful to them, as Hosea remained faithful to Gomer despite her infidelity to their marriage covenant. Instead of forsaking them as He threatened, He instead by grace

sent them saviours, judges, looking forward to His grace in sending the Lord Jesus, Yah's salvation.

The punishment for forsaking Yahweh was that "Yahweh will send on you cursing, confusion and rebuke in all that you put your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the evil of your doings by which you have forsaken Him. Yahweh will make the pestilence cleave to you until He has consumed you from off the land into which you now go in to possess it" (Dt. 28:20,21). We expect these things to therefore happen at this time; but we note God's amazing patience and gentleness in not bringing these things immediately, and instead raising up judges as saviours for this wayward people.

Jdg 10:11 Yahweh said to the Israelites, Didn't I save you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites, and from the Philistines?-
The salvation from the Egyptians was at the Red Sea, long ago (Ex. 14:30). The Israelites were repeatedly reminded of this (Jud. 2:1; 6:8; 10:11). But they failed to perceive that God's actions in history were in fact their personal salvation, an act of grace shown to them also. David grasped that point, and his Psalms often thank God for the exodus, as if it had happened to him personally. But the problem is that Israel like all people tended to only see what was before their face at that moment. They had no sense of God's historical salvation of them, and the guarantee that He would likewise come through for them, if they remained faithful to Him.

In the Hebrew there are seven salvations mentioned here (:11,12), in contrast to the seven gods they worshipped in :6. It was all God's grace.

Jdg 10:12 The Sidonians also and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried to Me, and I saved you out of their hand-
"Maonites" is the word for the Midianites, alluding to the great deliverance from them worked by God through Gideon. "Oppress" is the word used of how Israel were oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 3:9). But the intention, as with Israel's latter day oppression, is that it would lead them to cry out for Yahweh's salvation, 'Jesus': "For they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them" (Is. 19:20 s.w.). All the judges were therefore types of the ultimate deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus in the last days.

Jdg 10:13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more-
God told Israel straight "I will save you no more". But they begged Him, and He did. And likewise in Hosea, He said He would give them up completely, but just couldn't bring

Himself to do it. God changing His mind is a theme that runs through Hosea. This is not caprice nor instability, but rather a window into the way that the pole of God's saving grace works out stronger than that of His necessary judgment of an awful, sinful people.

Jdg 10:14 Go and cry to the gods which you have chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress!-
They had doubtless done this already, and were turning to Yahweh only as a last resort, rather than the first and only resort.

Jdg 10:15 The Israelites said to Yahweh, We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to You, only deliver us, please, this day-
This confession of sin before asking for deliverance was apparently from the heart, for God responded to it (:16).

Jdg 10:16 They put away the foreign gods from among them and served Yahweh; and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel-
God's soul, His very person, was grieved (Heb. cut down, reaped- as in harvest, s.w. "his soul was vexed unto death", Jud. 16:16) for the misery / grief of Israel (Jud. 10:15,16). The Hebrew word translated "misery" is also translated "grief". The soul of Almighty God *so* far away from us grieved for their grief. Their pain elicited in Him a response, no matter that their pain was totally their fault.

In the death of Jesus we see the rejection of the Son whom God had so dearly hoped His people would reverence- but they rejected Him. As something of each of us dies in the death of those we love, so "God was in Christ", sharing in His sufferings and death. It was not of course that God died. But He fully shared in the sufferings of His Son unto death. God was so hurt by Israel's sufferings that in sympathy with them, "His nephesh ["soul"] was shortened" or expended. The phrase is used in Num. 21:4 and Jud. 16:16 about death or the diminishment of life. God's pain was such that this was how He felt, because He so internalized the sufferings of His people. And how much more in the death of His Son? He even feels like that for the sufferings of Gentiles- in the same way as Moab would weep for their slain sons, so God says that His heart would cry out for Moab, "therefore I weep [along] with the weeping of Jazer... my soul moans like a lyre for Moab" (Is. 15:5; Is. 16:9,11). God "pitied" Nineveh- a Hebrew word meaning to pity with tears (Jonah 4:11). The mourning of the prophets over Tyre (Ez. 27:1) and Babylon (Is. 21:3,4) was an embodiment of God's grief even over those not in covenant with Him. And how much more does He weep and suffer with His people Israel in their sufferings (Jer. 12:12; 23:10; Hos. 4:2,3); "my heart yearns / moans for him" (Jer. 31:20).

God grieved over the carcasses of those wretched men whom He slew in the wilderness for their thankless rebellions against Him their saviour (Heb. 3:17). The apostle makes the point: "With *whom* was He grieved?". Answer: with the wicked whom He slew! A human God or a proud God would never grieve over His victory over His enemies. Even in the fickleness of Israel's repentance, knowing their future, knowing what they would subject His Son to, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel". He delays the second coming because He waits and hopes for repentance and spiritual growth from us. But He praises the faithful for patiently waiting for Him (Is. 30:18; Ps. 37:7). Here we see the humility of God's grace, and His ability to have absolute humanity.

Jdg 10:17 Then the Ammonites were gathered together and encamped in Gilead. The Israelites assembled themselves and encamped in Mizpah-
Effectively this begins a new chapter or theme; this summarizes the situation which came about after the events of Jud. 11:1-4. Israel had repented: "The children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seems good unto You; deliver us only... and His (God's) soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Jud. 10:15,16). Straight after this, "the children of Ammon were gathered together" to attack. The people were "sore distressed" after an extended period of devastation at the hands of these people (Jud. 10:8,9), as they will be in the last days before they come to repent. It would appear from this type that after their repentance they will be faced with a final onslaught, and then tested as to whether they will really put their faith in Jephthah - Jesus.

This 'gathering together' is spoken of in latter-day passages - Zech. 14:2 and Rev. 16:14. The previous Arab invasions which typify those of the future, also mention this 'gathering together': Sisera's forces did this (Jud. 4:13), as did those of Ammon (Jud. 10:17; 1 Chron. 19:7), the Amorites (Jud. 11:20), the Arab powers with Assyria in Hezekiah's time (Mic. 4:11), Gog's forces (Ez. 38:7), the Arab-Canaanite tribes (Gen. 34:30) and especially the Philistines (Jud. 16:33; 1 Sam. 13:5,11; 17:1; 25:1; 28:1; 29:1; 2 Sam. 23:11). This is quite some emphasis. Thus while we can expect to see greater potential unity amongst Israel's enemies, developing around the Israel issue and perhaps a common allegiance to a charismatic 'Nebuchadnezzar' figure for a brief period, their complete meeting of minds will not be until the final push against Jerusalem.

Jdg 10:18 The people, the princes of Gilead, said one to another, Who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead-
The end result of Israel's suffering at the hand of Ammon was that they realized their desperate need for a firm leader. Both the ordinary people, and what remains of their leadership in the last days, will be unanimous in this same conclusion: "The people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the

children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). The fact that they then asked Jephthah to be this "head" (Jud. 11:8) would suggest that secretly they knew all along who they should follow.

JUDGES CHAPTER 11

Jdg 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of a prostitute; and Gilead was the father of Jephthah-
He was a "man of valour" (Jud. 11:1), a word also translated "virtue", and coming from a root meaning 'to whirl around'. This may possibly suggest a connection with the cherubim, as if through their righteousness ("virtue"), Jephthah and Jesus were a manifestation of God. We see a purposeful juxtaposition between him being a man or valour / virtue, and being the son of a prostitute. Just as "Tola" means 'worm', we see continued the theme that the judges all had something about them which made them despised of men. The left handed, the son of a whore or of a concubine, etc. And it is exactly this kind of person whom God uses.

Jdg 11:2 Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when his wife's sons grew up they drove out Jephthah, and said to him, You shall not inherit in our father's house because you are the son of another woman-
He was despised as "the son of a strange woman" (Jud. 11:2) as Jesus was accused of being born out of wedlock (Jn. 8:41). All the judges / saviours look forward to Him. Inheritance passed through the male line, regardless of the mother. Which is why Abraham's less favoured sons by Hagar and his concubines also received an inheritance from him (Gen. 25:6; Dt. 21:15-17). His disinheritance was therefore due to personal dislike. The brothers of Jephthah are apparently the same as the "elders of Gilead" to whom he says "Didn't you hate me and drive me out of my father's house?" (:7). Their argument would have been that since his mother was a prostitute, there was no guarantee that Gilead was in fact his father. Presumably Gilead had accepted Jephthah as his son, but [after his death?] the other sons overturned this. Psychologically, this set up Jephthah to want to prove himself as a man. And when offered the chance to become the senior son of his brothers through achieving a military victory, he jumped at it. And I suggest that was behind his desperate offering of his daughter to Yahweh if Yahweh gave him that much coveted victory. It wasn't simply about a desire to vindicate Yahweh and liberate His people; it was about Jephthah's pride and need to prove himself. Yet still he is counted amongst the faithful who will finally be saved (Heb. 11:32). Despite all his wrong motivations.

Jdg 11:3 Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and a group of

adventurers gathered to Jephthah, and they went out with him-
Having been rejected by his brethren, Jephthah "dwelt in the land of Tob" (Jud. 11:3), a word which can mean 'heaven'. Our Lord's return from heaven in response to Israel's plea for help clearly echoes this.

Jdg 11:4 After a while the Ammonites made war against Israel-
The summary of the whole situation was given in Jud. 10:17, and Jud. 11:1-4 have explained how this came about.

Jdg 11:5 When the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah out of the land of Tob-
Rejected by his brethren, he had been forced to live the life of a brigand and outlaw, and his military exploits and bravery were perhaps well known to all. Should he have resorted to robbery in order to stay alive? Perhaps not, but the experience was used by God in order to prepare him to deliver His people. The elders of Gilead likely included his brothers who had rejected him. The whole incident looks forward to Israel's desperation leading them to repent of their rejection of the Lord Jesus; see on :7.

Jdg 11:6 and they said to Jephthah, Come and be our chief, so that we can fight the Ammonites-
We see developed further the theme that Israel, and people generally, need a visible leader. It came to a head in their rejection of Yahweh as their invisible king in Samuel's time. And we likewise see the tendency of all religions to provide a visible 'king'; for personal faith in the invisible kingship of Yahweh, recognizing ourselves thereby as part of His Kingdom or Kingly dominion, demands real faith. Note how "so that *we* can fight..." becomes "that *you* may fight..." (:8). They were desperate for a human leader; they had offered leadership over them to anyone willing to even try: "Who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). Only when that didn't produce anyone do they think of Jephthah. They were more than scraping the barrel.

Jdg 11:7 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, Didn't you hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?-

This was effectively a 'no' from Jephthah. He is sceptical of their offer, and so he goes on to get them to swear before Yahweh that he will not only lead them in battle, but be restored to the "house" or family and be their permanent leader.

The Lord Jesus was 'thrust out' from His native town (Lk. 4:29) as Jephthah was driven out from Gilead. It was "the elders" who were also responsible for the Lord's rejection. Jephthah's questions were rhetorical. The answer was 'Because we failed to have your

faith in Yahweh and are suffering for it, so we need you, as a believer in Yahweh whom we rejected, to lead us. You have what we don't have'.

Jdg 11:8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, Therefore we have turned again to you now-
This really was what they had done to God. And they saw Jephthah as manifesting God to them; they responded to his rhetorical questions of :7, as discussed there.

So that you may go with us and fight the Ammonites, and you shall be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead-
The end result of Israel's suffering at the hand of Ammon was that they realized their desperate need for a firm leader. Both the ordinary people, and what remains of their leadership in the last days, will be unanimous in this same conclusion: "The people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). The fact that they then asked Jephthah to be this "head" (Jud. 11:8) would suggest that secretly they knew all along who they should follow.

Hos. 1:10,11 alludes back to Israel's choosing of Jephthah as their head, implying that their choosing of Christ will be at the time of their national acceptance by God: "It shall be said unto them, You are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together (cp. "the children of Israel assembled themselves together" to choose a leader to fight Ammon, Jud. 10:17), and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land (Exodus language - as if their suffering in their own land will match what they experienced in Egypt): for great shall be the day of Jezreel" - where Gideon won his great victory over the Midianites, which prefigured that of the last days (Jud. 6:33). This confirms our view that the final Ammonite attack prefigures the very last threat to Israel, which will come immediately after their repentance.

Jdg 11:9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, If you bring me home again to fight the Ammonites and Yahweh delivers them to me, shall I be your head?-
Perhaps men like Jephthah (Jud. 11:9) and Samson (Jud. 14:4) were not wrong to seek to be the judges who delivered Israel from the Philistines. For we sense here that being the "head" was attractive to Jephthah. Paul seems to want to inculcate the spirit of ambition in preaching when he told Corinth that they should be ambitious to gain those Spirit gifts which would be most useful in public rather than private teaching of the word (1 Cor. 14:1,12). In similar vein Paul commends those who were ambitious (from the right motives) to be bishops (1 Tim. 3:1). Yahweh was acknowledged here by Jephthah as the source of victory. Yet we will see how he later offers his daughter to Yahweh if Yahweh

will give him victory. It seems Jephthah is suspicious that they want him to be head over them during the war, but not afterwards. And so he clarifies the agreement- if he is given victory, then he will be permanently the head of Gilead and his family. And so passionately did he want this, to be brought home or back into the family again, that he bargains with God for the victory, so that he can become head of his family. Here we detect pride... and it was the same pride which meant he didn't redeem his daughter from death. We observe too how Jephthah things in terms of an exchange mechanism and reward for works. He sets up a deal with the elders, that if he defeats Ammon, he will be their head. And then he goes to God to broker a deal in the same spirit- if God gives him victory over Ammon, he will give God his daughter. This transactional mentality is far from the path of grace and faith. Faith and grace go together. He should have trusted in the power of God through His Spirit, and accepted that any victory would be by God's grace. But Jephthah's attitude fits the character picture we have of Jephthah- a rough, violent but intelligent man with a spiritual side. And he will ultimately be saved.

The son of a prostitute (:1) couldn't enter the assembly of Yahweh, and that is stated at the same as the statement that neither could a Moabite or Ammonite: "An illegitimate person must not enter into the assembly of Yahweh... An Ammonite or a Moabite must not enter into the assembly of Yahweh" (Dt. 23:2,3). Jephthah asks for victory against the Ammonites so that he might be restored to the house / family and become a leader in Israel: "If you bring me home again to fight the Ammonites and Yahweh delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" (Jud. 11:9). Many rejected people can identify strongly with Jephthah at this point, wishing intensely to be accepted in a family, to be respected, and not rejected for issues that were beyond their control [in this case, being the son of a prostitute]. He clearly resented his exclusion from God's people. And sought to negotiate and bargain a way around it. God makes no comment on his vow, but God does give him the desired victory and headship within Israel. Perhaps the "faith" which is noted in Heb. 11:32,33 was his trust that even a man in his impossible situation of rejection could in fact have a way made for him to be accepted. I prefer to see his motivations this way rather than him being ambitious for power. Although surely there was an element of that in the way he reasons.

Jdg 11:10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, Yahweh shall be witness between us; certainly we will do as you say-
They swear by Yahweh, when previously they had been serving other gods; and also because they knew that Jephthah was devoted to Yahweh.

Jdg 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them, and Jephthah spoke all his words before Yahweh in Mizpah-
We note that the word "king" is not used. Perhaps they had learned the lesson from

Gideon's refusal of the offer to be king, and had learned too from the tragic demise of Abimelech, the man who wanted to be king.

Jdg 11:12 Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites saying, What have you against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?-
The land was God's, and those who fight against God's people, fight against Him. Jephthah is very aware that as a leader of God's people, he is manifesting Yahweh. This rhetorical question, as his question to his own people in :7, was intended to elicit their repentance. And this fulfilled the Mosaic command to ask enemies to surrender before fighting them.

As Jephthah briefly appealed to the surrounding enemies to see Biblical sense before destroying them, will the Lord Jesus Christ do likewise? He will "plead with them" in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2). A remnant of repentant Philistines will apparently repent (Zech. 9:5-7); other hints that some of the latter day enemies will repent are found in Is. 19:23-25 ("Assyria the work of My hands" implies they will be the subjects of a new spiritual creation); Is. 14:1,2 (those who took Israel captive will willingly be their slaves in the Kingdom age).

Jdg 11:13 The king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land when he came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore that territory again peaceably- Ammon justified their invasion by a quasi-Biblical argument, based on their claim that "Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt". Jephthah replied by saying that because God had dispossessed Ammon then, they should not keep raising this old land question (Jud. 11:23). Yet this issue of who really owns the land of Israel is as live now as it was then, and indicates once again how the final latter day invasion will use this sort of argument to justify it.

Jdg 11:14 Jephthah sent messengers back to the king of the Ammonites-
His answer is very Biblical and reflects a thorough acquaintance with the scriptures he had access to. This man who had to make a living as a highwayman and robber, the son of a whore who had been rejected by his father's sons, had turned to the scriptures because of his experiences. We cannot judge people. We simply don't know who deep down is searching for God, nor what thief or lowlife is secretly reading the Bible on their phone.

Jdg 11:15 and said to him, This is what Jephthah says: Israel didn't take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the Ammonites-
The lengthy argument which follows will come to its conclusion in :21- it was really

Yahweh and not Israel who had taken the land. To cavil at this was to effectively fight against Yahweh, and Jephthah doesn't wish even his enemies to do this.

Jdg 11:16 but when they came up from Egypt Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh-
Jephthah's knowledge of the scriptural record seems very impressive, and he quotes verbatim fragments from passages like Num. 13:26; 14:25. Against him, the Ammonites stood no chance of twisting scripture and history to justify themselves.

Jdg 11:17 Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom saying, 'Please let me pass through your land;' but the king of Edom didn't listen. In the same way he sent to the king of Moab, but he would not, and Israel stayed in Kadesh-
The lesson is that if we are unreasonable to God's people, there will be eternal consequences. The Ammonites considered that all this was mere history. And that is the trouble with human attitudes to God's word, much of which is history. We tend to focus on the immediate, the situation before us at this moment; and consider that the passage of time works a kind of pseudo atonement for our previous failings. It doesn't, and we need to therefore repent as soon as we perceive our sins. See on :28.

Jdg 11:18 Then they went through the wilderness and skirted around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and they encamped on the other side of the Arnon, but they didn't come within the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab-
This is all careful quotation from Num. 21:4,11-20; Dt. 2:1. See on :16.

Jdg 11:19 Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land to our place'-
This is all careful quotation from Num. 21:21-24; Dt. 2:24,26. See on :16.

Jdg 11:20 But Sihon didn't trust Israel to pass through his border, but Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped in Jahaz and fought against Israel-
Jephthah is hereby appealing for the Ammonites to learn a lesson from history; for they too had 'gathered together against' Israel. The whole narrative of the book of Judges is that the lessons from history are simply not learnt. And so man stumbles on in darkness, ever seeking to be the empirical learner until it is too late, without the guidance of Divine principles and the precedents set in His word. See on :29.

Jdg 11:21 Yahweh the God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they struck them; so Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country-
This was only true on one level. "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the

difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jdg 11:22 They captured all the border of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and from the wilderness to the Jordan-
The territory is described from south to north, and then from east to west. The Ammonites claimed Israel had occupied their land and that of Moab (:15); Jephthah is aware of the history and corrects them, saying that in fact Israel captured the land of the Amorites, not the Ammonites. And that was only because Sihon of the Amorites refused to let Israel pass through his land and came out to attack them, resulting in Sihon's defeat. The Ammonites were to suffer the same fate- they picked a fight with Israel and then Israel not only defeated them but took twenty other towns (:33). And he stresses that Israel skirted around Moab rather than taking their land (:18). His awareness of God's word makes us ponder why he seemed unaware that he could redeem his daughter from having to undergo what he had vowed.

Jdg 11:23 So now Yahweh, the God of Israel has driven out the Amorites from before His people Israel, and should you take it over?-
By asking the Ammonites to accept Yahweh's legitimate claim upon this territory, Jephthah was effectively asking them to accept Yahweh as their God. In all God's judgments, there is the desire for human repentance.

Jdg 11:24 Won't you inherit that which Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever Yahweh our God has given to us, that we will take-
The idea of a god giving his people territory to possess was not at all foreign to the peoples of the land. Chemosh was god of the Moabites (Num. 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7,33; Jer. 48:7,13,46). But Moab and Ammon were closely connected. And Chemosh had failed to protect 'his' land from the Amorites. Jephthah states the issue as being a

conflict between Yahweh and Chemosh, both apparently laying claim to the same land. So the only way out of the conflict was for Ammon to accept Yahweh as their God, instead of accepting Chemosh, the god of another nation (Moab) as their god. But we wonder whether Jephthah is not still reasoning from the false assumption that Yahweh was only the God of the land of Israel, rather than going further as David did, and perceiving Him as in fact king of all the planet, with a claim therefore on every human heart. And later we will suggest that Jephthah's view of Yahweh was that He was a God open to negotiation and responding to bargaining chips like the offer of his one and only child.

Jdg 11:25 Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor king of Moab? Did he ever strive successfully against Israel, or did he ever fight against them?-
This is a somewhat more human argument. Balak king of Moab ought to have contested this land issue historically, but he never did.

Jdg 11:26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its towns, in Aroer and its towns and in all the cities that are along by the side of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why didn't you recover them within that time?-
As noted on :25, this is now a more human argument, to the effect that if a territory had been taken in war and kept for 300 years by its conquerors, then it could not reasonably be demanded back. But this is a human argument, and Jephthah should have surely just kept with the spiritual argument- that the land was Yahweh's, and He had given it to His people. We often see the same tendency; human, secular or logical arguments are deployed to uphold or support a position which is simply true because God's word has declared it to be so. This is where so much of 'apologetics' fails to be ultimately relevant. We think particularly of attempts to use science to bolster the Biblical accounts of God's miracles, or creation itself.

Jdg 11:27 I therefore have not sinned against you, but you do me wrong to fight against me. Let Yahweh the Judge be judge this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon-
Jephthah speaks in the first person, as if this is a personal argument with him. But he does so because he realizes he is manifesting God. He also argues that Yahweh is the Judge between Yahweh and Chemosh in their conflicting claims to property. The argument means that it is foolish to enter into the judgment court, seeing this is the case. Paul uses the same kind of argument, in presenting the Lord Jesus as both our advocate for the defence as well as our judge. We cannot, therefore, be condemned; if we are truly "in" Him. Jephthah claims to trust that God will judge. But he then offers God a deal- he will sacrifice his daughter if God does indeed judge for Israel. Judges were not to be bribed (Dt. 16:19; 27:25) for Yahweh cannot be bribed (Dt. 10:17 "For Yahweh your God, He is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty and the

awesome, who doesn't respect persons nor take reward"). That perhaps was a warning against the kind of attempt to bribe the gods made by the child sacrificing cults. And Jephthah knew his Bible, as it were, from how he reasons with the Ammonites about Israel's history. But Jephthah seeks to do just this with the ultimate judge. We too can give lip service to the idea of resigning all to God's judgment, and then press ahead in our own strength to bring about His judgment, as if it all depended upon us and our victories.

Jdg 11:28 However the king of the Ammonites didn't listen to the words of Jephthah which he sent him-
Just as the king of Edom refused to listen to God's words (s.w. :17). For Jephthah is clearly speaking God's words here.

Jdg 11:29 Then the Spirit of Yahweh came on Jephthah and he crossed over Gilead, Manasseh and Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he crossed over to the Ammonites-
As he went, he asked the Israelites there to support him, but they didn't (Jud. 12:2). This repeats the theme of what happened at the time of Deborah, and also Gideon. And again we see the inability of people to learn from history. For the Spirit was clearly upon Jephthah as it was upon Gideon and Deborah. See on :20. We enquire whether Jephthah was aware of this gift of the Spirit. Presumably he was, because gifts of the Spirit usually have some external manifestation and evidence. And yet he still makes the deal with Yahweh- that if Yahweh gives victory, he will sacrifice whatever first comes out of his house to greet him [and he surely knew that would be his daughter]. Had he fully trusted in the work of the Spirit, he need not have cut that 'deal' with God.

We too have received the Spirit, but are inclined to still lack faith that things will work out unless we act towards God as the world around us does. The gift of the Spirit for us is a constant internal presence of the Lord Jesus. When we pray, we may come to a time when we are lost for words, the clock ticks, the seconds slip by, but we still feel "in" God's presence although we aren't saying nor articulating anything at all... until we end the prayer with something like "In Jesus' Name, Amen". But the reality is that how we feel in those silent, wordless moments "in" prayer is how we can feel all the time. This is a huge challenge to us. But that is what life in the Spirit looks and feels like. But like Jephthah, we fail to retain the intensity and still consider we need human strength.

Jdg 11:30 Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh and said, If You will indeed deliver the Ammonites into my hand-
This need not imply doubt, but rather faith (for which he was noted in Heb. 11). "If" in Hebrew doesn't have to imply that something is open to question, but can function as the word "when...". But if indeed the "if" here betrays a lack of full faith, then this was the

basis for his foolish vow. Perhaps a man of full faith would not therefore have needed to make this vow. He would have taken victory as an absolute given. So in this case, we see how taking the lower level of faith so often leads us into further problems.

And yet it is hard to avoid the impression that Jephthah is trying to broker a deal with God. He had faith, which God saw and commended in Heb. 11:32. But that faith was incomplete and he wanted to try to encourage God to come through for him by offering God his daughter. As God saw that incomplete faith and commended it, as He did with Abraham, so we are encouraged that our incomplete faith is still acceptable to God. And are led to patience with those whose faith is clearly incomplete. There seems something wrong with this offer of something to God "If You will indeed deliver..." enemies. It's a kind of bribing God, and is not unknown today. If God does this, I shall do this or that. The usual pattern so far in Judges has been Israel's sin, Gentile oppression, Israel's repentance- and then God empowers a judge to deliver Israel through His Spirit. But Jephthah doesn't focus on the promises of the covenant- to give victory in response to loyalty to Yahweh. Instead he tries to bribe God. And I therefore do not consider that it was out of his mind to sacrifice one of his family to God. For offering your children to your god in gratitude wasn't unknown in the surrounding tribes. The Moabites especially were famed for their child sacrifices.

Jdg 11:31 then whatever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites, it shall be Yahweh's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering-
I will engage with the question as to whether or not Jephthah offered his daughter as a burnt offering; but I wish to preface the presentation of evidence by observing that this is one of the many times that the Bible intentionally presents us with a question which is ambiguous and cannot be conclusively decided. For God wishes us to engage with Him, to reflect upon His word, and consider it carefully. And in the process of that consideration and careful engagement with God's word, we are led closer to Him. It is the process and not the product, the road rather than the destination, which is important in these cases. Whether we come down on the right or wrong side in our conclusion as to whether Jephthah really sacrificed his daughter... is not the intention of the record. This of course is hard of acceptance by those literalists and legalists who insist that every Bible verse must have a clear, black and white interpretation, with no ambiguity.

That said, at this point I would note that animals don't live in houses where people live. Nor do they come forth from the doors of a house to meet the master of the house. And to sacrifice one animal in gratitude for a victory would be a very small sacrifice. If he had in view an animal, then he makes no stipulation that it must be a clean animal. For unclean animals couldn't be sacrificed. So it seems he does indeed have his daughter

in view from the start. And we might wonder whether this isn't something similar to how Saul pronounced death on whoever had eaten in return for military victory, "even if it be Jonathan my son", knowing surely that Jonathan had eaten as he had not heard the command and curse upon those who ate. We note in the case of Saul's vow to slay Jonathan that he is not condemned by Yahweh for breaking the vow. Rather does he just lose face before his people. And surely Yahweh would not have condemned Jephthah for not keeping the vow. Further, the phrase "offer it up for a burnt offering" is never used figuratively. Sacrifice as a concept is, but he doesn't use the word sacrifice. And yet *contra* this is the clear Divine disgust at human offerings, and Yahweh's condemnation of the other tribes for offering up their children to their gods. And as noted on :14, Jephthah had an excellent knowledge of the scriptures. So I conclude that the whole question is left intentionally ambiguous, with evidence both ways- in order to exercise our minds.

He offers "whatever comes forth", the phrase used of a child coming out from a woman at birth to become part of the "house" of the father, surely knowing that something was going to come forth. And typically it would be a woman coming to congratulate him. Jephthah knew full well that it was customary for women to go out to meet returning victors with songs and dances; in 1 Sam. 18:6 the women do so to meet David returning from his victory over Goliath. There is ample evidence from surrounding cultures that the victorious warrior's own daughters would come dancing to their father's success. Surely Jephthah knew his daughter would do this. It would have been most unusual if she had not. There is no Old Testament example of virgins devoting themselves to the Lord's service and remaining unmarried, let alone being forced to do so by a third party. The law of Moses and Biblical history is silent about this. So the vow to offer someone as a burnt offering must surely be taken as literal. It has been observed that “The burnt offering (‘olah) involves death in all 286 O.T. occurrences". Even if we wish to go with this line of interpretation, there is still something ethically, morally and logically dodgy about a father telling his teenage daughter that she must remain a lifelong virgin serving Yahweh because her father has just won a victory. Even if we still accept that, then the essential lesson still remains: That for the sake of pride, a man destroyed his daughter's life. And he used his daughter as a kind of bargaining chip with Yahweh- even though Yahweh makes no recorded response to his offer. When he should have gone to war in faith, trusting in his empowerment by the Spirit. And only male animals could be sacrificed in this context, and at a designated altar with Levitical priests officiating. So Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter was still not according to God's will. If he did it, which I suspect he did, then this was still not true devotion to Yahweh according to His law.

We could however go with Adam Clarke's suggestion that we translate the Hebrew as meaning ""I will consecrate it to the Lord, or I will offer it for a burnt-offering"; that is, 'If it

be a thing fit for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to him'". However :34 clearly presents Jephthah as in a state of tragic shock when his daughter comes out of the house to greet him, and if Clarke's get out is valid, then this reads very strangely. See on Jud. 12:1,4. But we note that indeed it is legitimate to translate the "and" as "or", as in Ex. 25:15. In which case we can understand him to mean that he would dedicate it to Yahweh or offer it as a sacrifice. The Hebrew for "burnt offering" is always used just about a literal burnt offering; it's never used figuratively. Child sacrifice was so common in the surrounding world, and offered to the gods as a kind of deal in which the god would give a victory in return for it. Child sacrifice was of course abhorrent to Yahweh (Jer. 7:31; 19:5 ; Ez. 16:20; 23:39) and forbidden by the law (Dt. 12:31; 18:10, Lev.18:21; 20:2); but Jephthah may have been influenced by the surrounding conceptions of "God". His ultimate salvation (Heb. 11:32,33) surely involved some unrecorded repentance, as in the cases of Lot, Samson and so many whom the New Testament assures us will be saved. Our repeated surprise at who shall be saved is surely to teach us the lesson not to judge, and to accept that repentance may take place in a person without our being aware of it. This can be a helpful thought as we struggle with the apparent lack of repentance from those who have hurt us. Historical records mention people offering their most noble children after offering purchased or slave children failed to lift a siege. Eusebius, citing Philo of Byblos, says that the Phoenicians "offered up their dearest children" in order to get victory against their enemies. And there are Biblical examples. Hiel rebuilt Jericho apparently using his oldest and youngest sons as foundation offerings (1 Kings 16:34). In 2 Kings 3:4-27 Mesha, the king of Moab, sacrificed his oldest son atop the walls of his fortress in full view of besieging troops to vainly try to break their siege. Ahaz sacrificed his son during a siege of Jerusalem, so perhaps he was doing the same thing (2 Kings 16:3,5). To sacrifice your most treasured possession to your god was seen as quite normal. And a son was a man's most treasured possession. It could be argued that a king or leader was expected [in the surrounding cultures] to make such a sacrifice. Jephthah's offer of his only beloved child can be readily understood within this context. Human sacrifices, especially of children, were required by the Moloch cult (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35). They were required in association with vows; Moloch would do good or not do evil to the offerer if they offered him their child. But Moloch was the god of the Ammonites whom Jephthah was fighting. Clearly he was influenced by the very religious system he was fighting- as often seen later in Israel's history.

This kind of negotiation with God was common- if You do this, then I'll do that. We think of Jacob offering to pay Yahweh a tithe if he is returned home safely (Gen. 28:20-22), Hannah offering Samuel to Yahweh if she gets pregnant (1 Sam. 1:11), Absalom claiming he made a vow to Yahweh if He returned Absalom from exile (2 Sam. 15:7-9). The law of Moses was aware of this culture. Vows to Yahweh are to paid immediately (Dt. 23:21) at the place Yahweh chose (Dt. 12:11,17,18); but Lev. 27:1-8 allowed for

payment to be made instead of the promised devotion of a person. Other legislation about vows is found in Lev. 22:17-25; Num. 30:2-17. And the practice of making vows and giving them is alluded to often- Job 22:27; Ps. 50:14; 56:13; 66:13; 76:12; Prov. 7:14; Ecc. 5:3. We note Saul promising God in 1 Sam. 14 that his men would eat nothing for a day, basically in return for military victory. When his son Jonathan unknowingly breaks the vow, Saul says he has to die [although we note that he didn't carry that out and is not condemned for it]. Jephthah's vow was made in this context. He could have got out of it. But it was perhaps his pride that stopped him. Human pride is more powerful even that faithfulness to your family.

Jdg 11:32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them and Yahweh delivered them into his hand-

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1). See on Jud. 12:2.

Jdg 11:33 He struck them from Aroer to Minnith, twenty cities, and to Abelcheramim, with a very great slaughter. So the Ammonites were subdued before the children of Israel-

The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

Jdg 11:34 Jephthah came to Mizpah to his house and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter-

I often say that the closer you look at anything Divine, the greater is the beauty. When you place human stuff under the microscope, the beauty breaks up. The fact Jephthah had only one child is stated twice over ["She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter" Jud. 11:34], and this is also stressed when we perceive the order of the numbers in this part of Judges. They are in a pattern: 70 - 30/30/30 - 1 - 30/30/30 -70. The first "70" is the number of children Gideon had; the first "30/30/30" refers to the sons/donkeys/cities of Jair's children ("He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkey colts, and they had thirty cities" Jud. 10:4), the central "1" is Jephthah's single daughter, the second "30/30/30" is the sons/daughters/daughters-in-law of Ibzan (Jud. 12:9 "He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He sent his daughters away in marriage, and brought in thirty women for his sons"), and the final "70" refers to the sons, grandsons, and donkeys of Abdon (Jud. 12:14 "He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkey colts"). Don't tell me the Bible isn't Divinely inspired to have such detail in a chiasm like this.

Having no other children [and the text twice labours this] meant that his line would die out, and that was the greatest tragedy for Hebrew man, a fate worse than death. The judges that precede and follow the story (Jud. 10:1–5; 12:8–15) have many children, as if to highlight the tragedy and cost of his sacrifice. He made the vow in Mizpah and his house was in Mizpah- everyone knew the terms of the vow, and so we can conclude that his daughter came out of the house knowing what she was doing. This was unusual for a man of some distinction, and we wonder if Jephthah had become impotent. Or it could be that his wife had become barren, and he had refused to remarry or take other wives. He stands in stark contrast to other judges of Israel, who had 70 or 30 sons. We see this as a sign of his integrity. The whole narrative is set up for us to sense that the girl coming out of the house to meet Jephthah sent a chill of terror and tragedy down Jephthah's spine. The tragedy of the scene is emphasized by the record mentioning that she was his only child. I discussed on :31 the pros and cons for thinking that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, and concluded that the evidence seems carefully stacked on both sides. Therefore I conclude that the incident is consciously crafted to help us engage carefully with the text, and there is no definite conclusion possible. His apparent integrity in only having one child is carefully balanced against his rashness of having made an oath which he now thinks he must carry out.

Jdg 11:35 When he saw her he tore his clothes and said, Alas my daughter! You have made me very sad and troubled, for I have made a vow to Yahweh and I can't go back on it-

"I can't go back" is literally "I am not able". He was able, but his pride was greater than his very genuine love of his family. And so it has so often been. We think of Darius and Herod making rash oaths and harming devout men of God- against their better desire,

but because of their pride. His vow was unlawful, as it involved human sacrifice, so it was not binding before Yahweh. Jephthah was not a priest and so could not have lawfully offered his daughter as a burnt sacrifice. So he was wrong to present his action as an unavoidable part of his Yahweh worship. The truth is that he was treating Yahweh as Moloch was treated, and was worshipping Yahweh in the way Moloch was worshipped. We note that his attitude to his own brethren the Ephraimites resulted in the death of 42,000 of them (Jud. 12:6). Surely he could have avoided that outcome, but he presents as having little conscience about blood shedding. He had after all led a band of robbers for many years, robbing his fellow Israelites, and was famed for being a warrior because of that. We could argue that he could have redeemed his daughter from the vow he involved her with (Lev. 27:4). But he decided in his mind: "I can't go back". Actually he could have done; but he so firmly chose the higher level that it was as if there was no way back. Ps. 15:4, in evident allusion to Jephthah, describes those who will attain the Kingdom as fearing Yahweh, and swearing to their own hurt and changing not. Some may swear and change and attain the Kingdom; but we are invited to follow Jephthah to the highest level. The principle of Jephthah's vow is seen in many other Bible characters.

Or it could be that for all his fluent knowledge of the history of God's people, he had not paid due attention to the details of the Mosaic law in Lev. 27:4, and so was unaware of this. I discussed on :31 whether like Saul wanting to kill his son Jonathan, Jephthah just possibly might have wished to kill his daughter. For he knew she would come out of the house to greet him with tambourine if he won. And this would make his grief here either theatrical, or because he now realized the reality of what he had vowed.

AV "thou art one of them that trouble me" correctly reflects the Hebrew. She had become an Achan to him, she was as one of his enemies. This seems a very harsh response; and it is certainly full of concern about his own feelings rather than his daughter's fate at his hands. But it may reflect the depth of his grief as he realized what his vow now required him to do. This extreme grief on his part would show the love he had for her, and we think of the mourning of Darius the night when Daniel was in the den of lions because of his refusal to change his decree. Through perceiving Jephthah's great grief, we are given an insight into his pride in still going ahead with her sacrifice. Be that sacrifice literal or figurative.

Jdg 11:36 She said to him, My father, you have made a vow to Yahweh; do to me what you have vowed, because Yahweh has taken vengeance for you on your enemies the people of Ammon-

Her attitude is indeed commendable on one hand, but she sees her father's victory as being his personal vengeance upon his personal enemies. The idea of fighting for Yahweh against His enemies, and His vengeance, seems far from her. I suggest she was

fully aware of the vow, and went out of the house to greet her father knowing her fate. Jephthah doesn't tell her the content of the vow. The way he speaks and she responds ["you have made a vow..."] suggests they both knew what the vow meant and required. The content of the vow is not explained to her by Jephthah. Their conversation suggests they both knew the content of the vow and what it now entailed. The law allowed her to have disallowed the vow but she was of the same mindset. The house was in Mizpah and the vow was taken in Mizpah. Everyone knew the deal Jephthah had cut. There is a connection in the Hebrew which is easily missed in translation: "*Do* to me... because Yahweh has *done* vengeance for you". Because of what Yahweh did, so must be done to her. It's all the language of the deal. There is no cry of despair by her. She expresses no surprise nor attempt to get out of the vow. The fact she "returned to her father and he did to her his vow that he had vowed" (:39) shows her total acceptance. She could easily have run away and not returned to face the consequences of her father's vow.

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Jdg 11:37 She said to her father, Let this one thing be done for me: let me alone two months to go around on the mountains and bewail my virginity, I and my companions.

As discussed on :31, this could mean that she was resigned to death. Or the bewailing of her virginity could mean that she accepted that she was dedicated to Yahweh and therefore could never marry and have children. But there is no Mosaic concept of a woman being devoted to Yahweh by the oath of a third party, and therefore being unable to have children or marry. Even the oath of Naziriteship didn't preclude marriage. So again, as discussed on :31, we are left with evidence for and against the idea of her sacrifice. This, I suggest, is intentional.

For God wishes us to engage with Him, to reflect upon His word, and consider it carefully. And in the process of that consideration and careful engagement with God's word, we are led closer to Him. It is the process and not the product, the road rather than the destination, which is important in these cases. Whether we come down on the right or wrong side in our conclusion as to whether Jephthah really sacrificed his daughter... is not the intention of the record. This of course is hard of acceptance by those literalists and legalists who insist that every Bible verse must have a clear, black and white interpretation, with no ambiguity.

Whatever Jephthah's unwisdom, motives or murderous plans which may or may not have lurked in a very dark mind which wished to slay his daughter, this doesn't exclude him from being listed amongst the faithful in Hebrews 11. The lesson therefore is the same as that which we take from Samson. No matter how possibly tangled were a man's motives at some points in his life, no matter how strangely parts of a man's biography may read or appear when we meet them in live encounter, we are not to judge. For God at the end of all things may well accept him as faithful to Him. We are not

to judge simply because we cannot judge.

Jdg 11:38 He said, Go. He sent her away for two months, and she and her companions went and mourned her virginity on the mountains-
The vow surely implied that Jephthah would immediately offer up whatever came out of his house (:31). So by allowing two months to perform the vow, he was stretching the interpretation. Why not, then, annul it altogether? We note it was her virginity which was to be lamented, which would suggest it was a devotion to a virginal life that was in view, rather than death. But then to die childless was also seen as a tragedy worthy of bewailing.

Jdg 11:39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed, and she was a virgin. It was a custom in Israel-

Jephthah "did" the vow after the two months. If she was only mourning her virginity in that period, there's a logical problem. For she was a virgin at the start of the period and at the end of it. She didn't sleep with a man during the two months. And so Jephthah "did" the vow to her at the start of the two months, if the vow was simply that she was to remain a virgin. Logically the requirement seems to be that he ended her life at the end of the two months. And her great sadness was that she died without having been a mother. The record stresses that the tragedy was her virginity. Whether or not Jephthah killed her, the idea is that he lost his lineage. God was silent about agreeing to Jephthah's vow, and there is no Divine comment on his carrying it out. Perhaps because the judgment was intrinsic to what he did- he was left with no seed.

"And she was a virgin" is intentionally vague; for tenses in Biblical Hebrew aren't at all precise. It could mean that she died, being a virgin. Or that she now lived the rest of her life as a virgin. But if the vow came into effect only after two months, then that could be read as implying she then died. Because she was a virgin at the start and the end of the two months. We note that the record doesn't state what Jephthah did to her; just that he did what he had vowed, and as discussed on :31,37, that vow is intentionally ambiguous. And the incident ends with this same open ended position, beckoning us to engage with the text and wonder what actually happened.

Jdg 11:40 that the daughters of Israel went each year to celebrate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year-
We wonder what there was to celebrate about this girl. For she could surely have run away, and would have found plenty to support her, just as Jonathan did when his father tried to murder him according to some unwise oath. Was the celebration of her obedience to her father's unwise oath? Or we could read "celebrate" as "lament" (AV). In

which case this would be a lamentation of how a young woman had her life either ruined or ended because of the unwisdom of a male, and his pride in refusing to just take back his oath, in a mistakenly literalistic interpretation of Dt. 23:23. Again, as discussed on :31,37,39, the record is intentionally vague, in order to invite our thought and engagement with it. Whatever actually happened to Jephthah's daughter, Jephthah acted unwisely and wrongly. It was only his pride that stopped him using the Mosaic laws about changing a vow. The rest of the Jephthah record presents him as a sharp guy- an able negotiator, statesman, Biblically and spiritually articulate, and a saviour and true judge of God's people. And later Biblical comment upon Jephthah is likewise positive (1 Sam. 12:11; Heb. 11:32). Perhaps we are left with the stark contrast, to ponder- whatever happened to his daughter, we see how a man is accomplished as Jephthah can still fail when it comes to pride. No price is too high for some men to pay in order to preserve their pride- or try to. Even the destruction of the nearest and dearest to them. That would be one takeaway from the whole enigma. And yet he will still be saved; a prostitute's son who had led an armed gang of robbers, who was proud and influenced by pagan conceptions of God, who shed blood too freely... will still be saved.

JUDGES CHAPTER 12

Jdg 12:1 The men of Ephraim were gathered together and passed northward, and they said to Jephthah, Why did you go to fight against the Ammonites and didn't call us to go with you? We will burn your house around you with fire-

This continues a theme in Judges, of how God's people had no collective vision nor responsibility. The men of Ephraim were jealous and had a wounded sense of self-importance- rather than rejoicing that the Ammonite enemy of Israel had been destroyed. The Ephraimites came over as offended because they weren't invited to fight in a battle, even though they had shown no inclination; and they did this with both Gideon and Jephthah (Jud. 8:1; 12:1). We see how the Biblical record is consistent in its depiction of character and personality, over incidents which occurred far apart. This is yet another internal evidence for Divine inspiration.

The threat to burn his house with fire, from which his daughter had emerged, may be an allusion to what he had done to her; and they sought to punish him by burning him to death, the punishment for apostacy. I discussed on Jud. 11:31,37 how the whole question of 'Did Jephthah slay and offer his daughter?' is intentionally left ambiguous. And here again we have only a possible contribution towards the argument that he may have done this. But it is very tangential, purposefully so.

Jdg 12:2 Jephthah said to them, I and my people were at great strife with the Ammonites and when I called you, you didn't save me out of their hand-

We note the difference between this response to the Ephraimites, and that of Gideon in

Jud. 8:1-3. Gideon was far humbler, and his softer answer turned away wrath. Whereas Jephthah is not so wise, and it results in bloodshed. We recall his unwisdom in his vow of Jud. 11. Surely Jephthah ought to have learned from the history of how Gideon correctly responded in an identical situation- when again, the Ephraimites had not come forward to help him in routing Yahweh's enemies. We also note Jephthah speaks of how the men of Ephraim could have helped save him from the hand of the Ammonites. But it was Yahweh who delivered him out of the hand of the Ammonites, and placed the Ammonites into his hand (Jud. 11:32). In the flush of victory, Jephthah seems to have lost the humility which Gideon displayed as noted on Jud. 8:2.

Jdg 12:3 When I saw that you didn't save me, I put my life in my hand and went against the Ammonites, and Yahweh delivered them into my hand-
Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Why then have you come up to me this day, to fight against me?-
Again we sense an arrogance, in the flush of victory. As if to say, 'I just beat the Ammonites, why then try to fight me?'.

Jdg 12:4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim, and the men of Gilead struck Ephraim because they said, You Gileadites are renegades of Ephraim from Ephraim and Manasseh-
The motivation for the conflict is here given as being merely racial and historical prejudice, rather than anything spiritual. And yet despite this yet further unwisdom and arrogance, Jephthah is listed as being amongst the faithful in Heb. 11, assured of resurrection to eternal life. We note that Jephthah took the initiative in attacking his brethren, and he did so because their words stuck in his mind, he kept repeating them, and therefore did what God was surely against- attacking and slaying his own brothers.

This casual attitude to the death of others may, or may not, tie in to the discussion on Jud. 11:31 as to whether he also intended to slay his own daughter.

We see here the power of unkind words, although LXX offers "because they that were escaped of Ephraim said, Ye are of Galaad in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh". This would imply there had been a previous, unrecorded conflict between Gideon and the men of Ephraim. But 'You as Gileadites are really under our control' was the idea. GNB "The Ephraimites had said, "You Gileadites in Ephraim and Manasseh, you are deserters from Ephraim!"". And reflection upon those words made Jephthah so angry that he went and slew his brethren.

We could understand that the men of Ephraim wanted to attack Gilead. Which is what the Ammonites had effectively tried to do in Jud. 11, and had been defeated again by Jephthah. The men of Ephraim were acting just like the Gentile world... and met the same fate. And this is what happens in all conflicts between God's people.

Or again we can see the attack on Gilead as being the result of pride. They boast, depending how we translate the Hebrew, that they will reduce the Gileadites to a mere remnant.

Jdg 12:5 The Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites. When the fugitives of Ephraim said, Let me cross over, the men of Gilead said to him, Are you an Ephraimite? If he said No-

The men of Gilead were related closely to the Ephraimites, hence the claim of :4. There was just a slight difference in accent between them. So this really was brother slaying brother, and shows Jephthah and his men in a very bad light. And yet, he is counted amongst the faithful in Heb. 11, and we assume he must have repented for what he did here.

Jdg 12:6 then they said to him, Now say 'Shibboleth;' and he said Sibboleth, for he couldn't manage to pronounce it right, then they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan-

"Sibboleth" means both a stream- which is all the 'river' Jordan is at places in northern Israel- or a burden of abuse (Ex. 6:6); and 'shibboleth' is an ear of corn. There are many examples of this kind of thing in dialects today. Maybe the idea was that if they couldn't say "shibboleth" then they were asking to be placed under an abusive burden of death, 'sibboleth'. It has been observed: "The 'ear of wheat' was an ancient symbol of Ishtar, the goddess of heaven; and in later astronomy the Aramaic shebelta was the name of the Virgo Spicifera in the Zodiac: possibly, therefore, popular religious associations may have had something to do with the choice of the test word".

At that time, forty-two thousand of Ephraim fell-
This was nothing less than a bloodbath, a huge massacre. Although "thousand" when used of military conflict probably refers to a military division, rather than to a literal 1,000. Or we can read this as 'forty and two thousand', i.e. 40 + 2,000 = 2,040. The whole tribe numbered only 32,500 at the previous census (Num. 26:37), which was less than the first numbering (Num. 1:33). Only 1,000 from each tribe formed the army (Num. 31:4,6). Whatever the figure, Jephthah presents surely as conscience less in arranging for the slaying of so many of his fellow Israelites. This would be in the context of his willingness to slay his own daughter, and his having led a band of violent robbers for many years prior to that.

Jdg 12:7 Jephthah judged Israel for six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a city of Gilead-
Perhaps it was during these six years that he repented of his unspiritual behaviour and unwisdom, and had the faith which was the basis of his commendation in Heb. 11. We reflect that Jephthah was willing to sacrifice his only child for the sake of God giving him a victory which in turn would return him to his "house" or family, and make him their leader. But it probably didn't work out as family life happily for ever after. He would still have been spoken of as the son of a prostitute. And even if he did get the acceptance he so craved, it only lasted six years.

Jdg 12:8 After him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel-
All the judges / saviours look forward to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate judge / saviour of Israel. Ibzan, 'the splendid one' of Bethlehem, is a clear example.

Jdg 12:9 He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He sent his daughters away in marriage, and brought in thirty women for his sons. He judged Israel for seven years-
He clearly wished to spread his influence far and wide. Perhaps "brought in" could imply from other tribes or even nations (AV "from abroad)", both of which were against the Mosaic intentions of keeping the inheritances within the tribes. We note the contrast with Jephthah, who had only one child, presumably because he refused to take other wives and retained his one barren wife as his only wife.

Jdg 12:10 Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem-
See on :8; he was a type of Christ. However, the book of Judges rarely mentions Judah, so this may be the Bethlehem in Zebulun (Josh. 19:15), from where the next judge also came (:11).

Jdg 12:11 After him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel for ten years-

Elon's name means 'grove of oaks', clearly with reference to pagan practices. The fact he is not recorded as having renamed himself could suggest that he remained an idolater, although was used by God to deliver Israel. Being used by God doesn't mean we are therefore faithful to Him and assured of His acceptance.

Jdg 12:12 Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun-
Elon and Aijalon have the same Hebrew consonants, and may be as in LXX the same basic word. Elon was a clan of Zebulun (Gen. 46:14; Num. 26:26), so this may refer to a man from that clan. The lack of a personal name would therefore indicate he was as it were an anonymous person used by God to deliver His people at a certain time.

Jdg 12:13 After him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel-
"Abdon" means server, and "Hillel" means praise, usually of Yahweh. Although the Yahweh Name is absent from his name, we assume that he was a servant of Yahweh (s.w. Jud. 10:16). And yet as noted on :15, his personal commitment to Yahweh failed to ensure that the whole people were His servants.

Jdg 12:14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkey colts, and he judged Israel for eight years-
The very large numbers of children by several of the judges suggests they were polygamists, and we therefore get the impression of men who were not very spiritual but were used by God to deliver His people. They throw Jephthah into positive contrast, as he had only one child; presumably because he refused to take other wives and retained his one barren wife as his only wife. And he is one of the few judges listed in Heb. 11 as having had true faith. The stress on riding donkey colts may indicate prosperity; but it could equally suggest that they pretended to kingship. Because riding on a donkey's colt was connected with being proclaimed king.

Jdg 12:15 Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites-
The mention of the Amalekites is tacit admission that Abdon did not effect a major, lasting deliverance of Israel from their enemies. Or perhaps, as with Joshua, his victories were not followed up by the people. We see spiritual weakness at every turn in the Judges narrative.

JUDGES CHAPTER 13

Jdg 13:1 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and Yahweh delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years-
"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

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

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

But just imagine if only the negative incidents in our own lives, over a period of 20 (or 40?) years, were recorded. Anyone reading it would conclude that we were a complete hypocrite to claim to have any hope of salvation. In our self-examination, we sometimes see only this negative record; we fail to see that God has justified us, that in His record book, we are ranked among the faithful, as Samson was in Hebrews 11. Any character study of Samson needs to bear this in mind. Samson, over 40 years of service, courted a girl not in the faith and tried to marry her; once went to a prostitute in Gaza; and had an on-and-off relationship with a worthless woman in Sorek for a few months (?). And yet he seems to have lived the rest of his life full of faith and zeal- although I say this not in

any way minimizing the mistakes he made. This is hardly evidence that Samson was the renegade sex-maniac that he is sometimes made out to be.

Jud. 17-21 contain various pictures of and insights into the apostacy of the tribe of Dan, providing the backdrop for a character study of Samson. These chapters seem chronologically out of place; they belong before the Samson story- perhaps. Although I have made a case on Jud. 17 that in fact some of the people of Dan from Samson's village home migrated north exactly because he had not delivered them from the Philistines. And the mother of the apostate Micah was likely Delilah, with her 1100 pieces of silver. Jud. 18:30 speaks of Jonathan the grandson of Moses, and 20:28 of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (cp. Num. 25:11), which would place these events at the beginning of the period of the Judges, once Israel had first settled in the land. Dan's apostacy is suggested by the way in which he is omitted from the tribes of the new Israel in Rev. 7. Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and too over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that you have done *unto us*?" (15:11). "They had become reconciled to the dominion of sin since it did not appear to do much harm. They could still grow their crops etc.". It is even possible that his parents had elements of weakness in them; for his name doesn't include the 'Yah' prefix, and 'Samson' ('splendour of the sun') may be a reference to the nearby town of Beth Shemesh ('house of the sun-god'). It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (Jud. 12:9; 14:2; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage. All the Judges were preceded by a period of Israel prostituting themselves to the surrounding nations (Jud. 2:16-19); and this was evidently true of the period in which Samson grew up. From this apostate tribe and background came Samson. The way his own people angrily rebuked him that "Don't you know that the Philistines are lords over us?" (Jud. 15:11) was tacit recognition of the depth of their apostacy. They seemed to have no regret that they were fulfilling the many earlier prophecies that they would be dominated by their enemies if they were disobedient to Yahweh. The fact that Israel were dominated throughout Samson's life by the Philistines is proof enough that they were apostate at this time (Jud. 13:1; cp. Jud. 15:20; 16:31).

Jdg 13:2 There was a man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren and childless-
Judges typically gives a cycle of sin, suffering, repentance, prayer to God, judge sent to save, sin, suffering, repentance, prayer to God, judge etc. The case of Samson is

different. Israel suffer for their sins but they do not repent nor pray to God, yet Samson is still sent. Likewise, the barren woman stories in the Bible usually have the woman desperately praying for pregnancy, and then getting a Divine intervention through an Angel, with a message about the child's future mission. This pattern is followed here apart from the fact Manoah's wife isn't recorded as praying. But she apparently experiences God's intervention by grace, on His intervention, without her [recorded] prayers. Grace is to be a dominant theme of the Samson story. Throughout the Samson story, there are anomalies, not least that a Nazirite continually broke the conditions of Naziriteship but was still a "Nazirite unto the Lord", in His sight. These are all summed up in the comment that his marriage to the Philistine was "of the Lord". The introduction to Samson's birth mirrors the introduction we have to Abraham. He is mentioned first, by name, and then his wife, with the comment she was barren. We are set up to expect a significant child from this barren woman. And that is typical of God's work with Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elisabeth... from the barren is brought forth something meaningful and salvific in God's purpose. And yet what we see in the child born is not at all a spiritual hero, but a very weak and confused man who was used by God. Samson is rather an anticlimax, intentionally so. And yet God still worked out His salvation through him. Manoah is named 15 times, his wife never; she is simply called "the woman", reflecting how she was perceived. As rather a childless nobody. God has a penchant for working through anonymous nobodies. And so the Angel was focused upon her rather than Manoah, even the second time appearing again to her alone, and she is presented as more perceptive than Manoah. It has been observed that "the large number of details about Manoah—he is given location, tribe, name and marital status—contrasts with the anonymity of his wife".

We note too the similarities with the account of the birth of Samuel. 'There was a certain man [Elkanah] of the family of... whose name was... whose wife was barren' (1 Sam. 1:1). Samson is to be a Nazirite to God from birth, and Hannah promised that Samuel was to be given up to Yahweh's service (1 Sam. 1:11-18); indeed it could be argued that Samuel was also a Nazirite. The Qumran text of 1 Sam. 1:13 has Hannah saying that "I will give him as a Nazir for ever" [MT "no razor shall come on his head"]. Both Elkanah and Manoah make offerings to God. Hannah assures Eli that "I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink" (1 Sam. 1:15), just as Manoah's wife is commanded not to [the phrase "wine nor strong drink" recurs], and just as the Nazirite was not to. We also note the repetition of phrase "If it had pleased God to kill us..." (by Manoah's wife, Jud. 13:23) and then in 1 Sam 2:25, talking of Eli's sins, who were slain "for it pleased God to kill them". The records are so similar that we wonder if what Samson failed to achieve, despite the potential given him, God set up Samuel to achieve. Although if Samuel were a Nazirite, he was defiled by touching a dead body (when he slew Agag, 1 Sam. 15:33). The parallels could mean that Samuel was intended to do the work Samson didn't. God raised up deliverance from another place, as Mordecai reasoned to Esther. And in

seeking to understand our own lives and ministries, there must always be the consideration that perhaps we were raised up to do what others failed to do, perhaps even in previous generations. On Jud. 14:19 I note the parallels between Samson and Saul, and also David. God seems to work similarly today. One man [Samson] is raised up for a task, he fails or only partially does it; another [Samuel] is raised up and likewise doesn't complete it; and another likewise [Saul]. And then another [David] is raised up who does do it.

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

Jdg 13:3 The angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman and said to her, Look now, you are barren and childless but you will conceive and bear a son-
"You are barren... but you will conceive" is typical of how God seeks to bring us to real acceptance of how we are, before offering deliverance. We think of the Lord asking the blind man what he wanted the Lord to do for Him. It was in one sense obvious, but the Lord wanted to convict him of what he really wanted. We too pass through that process of conviction before God delivers.

God's Angelic appearance to barren or childless women and promising them a very significant child is quite a theme. We think of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:19; 18:10,14), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:17), Elizabeth (Lk. 1:13) and Mary (Lk. 1:31). These women were intended to have reflected upon the experience of those previous women, and to have taken strength and guidance from their response. This is the advantage of daily Bible reading and familiarity with the text and historical narrative of the scriptures. Even if we 'don't get anything out of it' at the point of reading, when events occur in our lives, we are able to see them in the context of Biblical history, and are comforted that we are not alone. Our experiences are not so totally unique. And it is the sense of walking alone in unchartered, unexperienced territory which is where much of our fear comes from. And yet because the hand of God works according to a historical pattern, we need not feel so alone; through patience and comfort of the scriptures we have hope (Rom. 15:4), as if these historical records speak to us in a personified form and comfort us. See on :3,24.

"You will conceive" can be understood as 'You have conceived'. If so, we note how the Angel pointed out the obvious [that she was barren / infertile] and juxtaposed it with God's action: "You are pregnant". But the future tense would suggest that Manoah still had to do his part by sleeping with his wife.

Jdg 13:4 Now therefore you must be careful and drink no wine nor strong drink, and don't eat any unclean thing-

As discussed on :4, Manoah's wife was here promised that her son would be a Nazirite from birth; and she was to become the pattern for later women who were told likewise (1 Sam. 1:11; Lk. 1:15). It could be argued that she is being told that she too must be a Nazirite. At least until Samson is born. Menstruation meant touching the unclean (Lev. 15:19); so female vows of Naziriteship could not have been for longer than a month for pre menopausal women. But she would not have been menstruating whilst pregnant. If she was not asked to be a Nazirite, we would have an example of fences being placed around the law- Samson was to be a Nazirite, so his mother was not to drink wine whilst he was in her womb. The command to not eat anything unclean suggests she was likely or accustomed to eating unclean food.

Jdg 13:5 You shall conceive and bear a son, and no razor must come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he will begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines-

It would be simplistic for a character study of Samson to see Samson as some kind of sex maniac of a believer. He was a man of faith who, amidst a weak and indifferent brotherhood, tried to rise up to the spirit of Messiah in delivering Israel from their spiritual enemies. In order to devote himself to this, it seems that he chose the single life. In common with others who trod that path of zeal (e.g. Timothy and possibly Hezekiah), he couldn't maintain it all the time. He stumbled, and his stumbling in this area resulted in him reasoning that the end (i.e. the work he was doing) justified the means, and that therefore he could do God's work in a way which in fact gratified his own flesh. He had to learn the spirit of the cross-carrying Christ; the lesson of the whole burnt offering: that the *whole* of a man's life must be affected by the cross- not just those parts which we are willing to surrender. We can't mix the service of God with the service of self. There is no third road. Because Samson failed to realize this (until the end), he was a man who in many ways never quite made it; he never quite lived up to the spiritual potential which he had.

Although he was to be the beginning of serious deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, the whole story of Samson is prefaced by the fact that during the 40 years of Samson's' ministry (15:20 + 16:31), "the Lord delivered (Israel) into the hand of the Philistines" (13:1). It is emphasized in Jud. 14:4 that "at that time the Philistines had dominion over

Israel" ; and the men of Judah chode with him: "Don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us?" (Jud. 15:11). The point is hammered home in Jud. 15:20: "He judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years". God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it, and only 'began' to do it (Jud. 13:5). They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. He made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith. It may be possible to understand that the breaking of his Nazariteship was yet another way in which he never lived up to his God-given potential. He was "a Nazirite unto God from the womb to the day of his death" (13:7). Yet he broke the Nazirite vow by touching dead bodies and having his hair shaven (Num. 6:6); and probably drinking alcohol at the wedding feast and every time when Delilah betrayed him. This may mean that he chose to break God's ideal intention for him, to take a lower and lower level of service to God until actually he had slipped away altogether. However, it may be that God counted *his desire* for the high standard of Nazariteship to him. He saw him as if this never happened, in the same way as He saw Abraham as if he had offered up Isaac, even though ultimately he didn't (Heb. 11:17; James 2:21). Intention, not the human strength of will to do the act, seems to be what God earnestly looks for.

"A nazirite *to God*" could mean that this is how God would see him. Just as we are *unto God* the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. His view of us is all important. Bible readers are being set up for the NT concept of imputed righteousness. Because it could be argued that Samson broke every condition of the Nazirite vow. He drunk alcohol (Jud. 14:5,10 cp. Num. 6:3, and surely he was drunk when tied up and then shaved when living with Delilah); touched the carcass of a dead animal (Jud. 14:8 and also the jawbone of the ass cp. Num. 6:6-8); and had his hair shaved (Jud. 16:15-22). But God saw him as a Nazirite. Although when his hair was shaved, it's as if God said 'enough'. Samson could not keep on his reductionism of God's principles, assuming all would be as before. Samson is purposefully enigmatic, and every man and his dog has a different interpretation of him- from “heroic fool, foolish hero, trickster, tragic wild man, comic bandit, tragicomic-trickster-terrorist, foolish-freedom-fighter-type-of-Israel, fool-for-love-Nazirite-judge, negative example and hero of the faith”. And that, I would argue, is intentional. We don't know what to make of him. But God does, and Heb. 11 tells us that somewhere, somehow, he had faith, and will be saved eternally. Despite all those possible interpretations of Samson, I have to say that he strikes me as a narcissist who wasted his potentials, and all he ever does is more for himself than for God. And yet through all that... he will be saved by grace. Possibly in no other OT character do we see saving grace more clearly operative.

"He will begin to save..." could mean that he would begin the salvation- and David would finish it. But that would imply there had been no Divine attempt to save Israel from the

Philistines before Samson. But Shamgar had already fought the Philistines in Jud. 3:31. Rather I suggest this is simply an overall statement of Samson's achievement. He would begin the deliverance from the Philistines... although potentially he could have delivered Israel completely. Or at least, his own tribe of Dan. See on :25. Samson potentially could have freed Israel from the Philistines. Instead we read of him doing a few heroic massacres clearly motivated by personal anger and revenge.

Jdg 13:6 Then the woman went and told her husband, A man of God came to me, and his face was like the face of the angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he was from, neither did he tell me his name-
LXX "I asked him whence he was, and his name, but he did not tell me". "I did not ask him His Name". Therefore the husband did ask His Name when He appeared again. She assumed this was a prophet, a "man of God", but she had the suspicion that it was in fact an Angel.

Jdg 13:7 but he said to me 'You will conceive and bear a son; drink no wine or strong drink, and eat no unclean thing, for the child shall be a Nazirite unto God from the womb to the day of his death'-
He was a Nazirite to God (i.e. in God's eyes?) all his life- although he broke his Nazariteship by contact with dead bodies (Jud. 14:19; 15:15 cp. Num. 6:6) and probably by drinking wine at his wedding (Jud. 14:10 "feast" = 'drinking', Heb.). This was not only imputed righteousness, but God counting the essential intentions of a weak willed man to him as if he had actually achieved what he fain would do.

Or it could be that we are to read this as meaning that it was God's intention that Samson should be a Nazirite to the day of his death- but he failed to live up to that Divine intention and potential. Which is a sad theme of the Judges record. Jud. 13:7 cp. Jud. 16:17 implies that Samson himself felt he had broken his Nazariteship. Likewise Zacharias was "blameless" in God's sight, even though in this very period of his life he was in some ways lacking faith that his prayers would be answered (Lk. 1:6). It is our holding fast that is our acceptable service (Heb. 12:28 mg.); not the occasional heroics of outstanding acts of obedience.

We know that we sadly oscillate between the flesh and the spirit. And yet Scripture abounds with examples of where God sees us as in a permanent state of either sin or righteousness. We are fountains that bring forth good water, and therefore by that very definition cannot occasionally bring forth bitter water; we are good fruit trees or bad ones. We aren't a little of both, in God's sight. This is surely because He sees us on the basis of the fact that we are in Christ, clothed with His righteousness, rather than as individuals who sometimes act righteously and sometimes not during the course of a

day. Thus God saw Samson as a lifelong Nazirite, although we know there were times when he broke the Nazirite vow by, e.g., touching dead bodies and having his hair cut. The challenging thing is to behold our brethren as having the “in Christ” status (for we can’t impute anything else to them, lest we condemn them), and not to see them from the point of view of people who sometimes act righteously and sometimes don’t.

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

The woman fails to repeat what was most important in the Divine plan- that "he will begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines". And she doesn't repeat the requirement about not cutting his hair. Possibly we have here the theme that will be repeated in the Samson story- of partial spirituality. She is thrilled that she will have a child. But she doesn't see much further than that. And her lack of focus upon the hair issue may have come to full term when Samson effectively allows his hair to be cut.

She adds the detail "to the day of his death". The Angel didn't say that. And we are left to ponder the intentional ambiguity. Was this prophetic, that he would be seen by God as a Nazirite "to the day of his death"? Or is this the mother assuming he would not break his Naziriteship all his life? In which case her hopes for her son were to be majorly disappointed. Naziriteship was a voluntary vow, but here we see the higher hand of God, making Samson a lifelong Nazirite on the Divine initiative; and likewise making Manoah's wife a Nazirite at least until she gave birth to Samson. It's like his marriage being "of the Lord" (Jud. 14:5). That higher hand of God's working over against our freewill is the Old Testament version of the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Jdg 13:8 Then Manoah entreated Yahweh and said, Oh Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we should do to the child who will be born-

The Angel had explained already; they were to raise him as a Nazirite. But as with Gideon, Manoah had a weak faith and wanted continual confirmation. And there was also the fact that he may well have doubted how a woman could speak to him God's words. He wanted to hear them for himself. And God made a concession to that weakness, as He does to many cultural mores which are a denial of deeper spiritual principle.

Manoah's prayer was answered in that the Angel did come again- to his wife. He obviously wanted personal reassurance that his wife's pregnancy was from him, and that indeed she was telling the truth. The essence of the prayer was answered- the Angel came to his wife. And stayed long enough for her to dash to Manoah and get him to come and meet the Angel. We likewise often receive answers to prayer that are not to the letter of what we asked, but fulfil the spirit of it. But it is surely significant that the Angel appeared to his wife whilst she was alone. Clearly God was focused upon her as His channel, although she remains nameless as "the woman", and Manoah is mentioned by name 15 times. We note that in :11 Manoah refers to his wife as "the woman" rather than 'my wife'.

Jdg 13:9 God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field, but Manoah her husband, wasn't with her-
I suggested on :8 that he may well have doubted how a woman could speak to him God's words. He wanted to hear them for himself. And God made a concession to that weakness. But He does so by all the same first appearing to the woman alone, and not directly to Manoah in the first instance.

Jdg 13:10 The woman quickly ran and told her husband, and said to him, The man has appeared to me, who came to me that day-
We note that the woman ran quickly, whereas Manoah arose and walked behind his wife (:11 Heb.). She consistently is presented as the more responsive and dynamic. Even though she is left anonymous. We note too that the Angel refuses Manoah's offer of hospitality and declines to give Manoah his name- actions which would have been seen as a slight to the hospitality culture. The focus is repeatedly upon the anonymous woman rather than Manoah. The record of Samson's birth frequently uses the phrases "the man" and "the woman" (:10,11), as if to send the mind back to Eden- with the implication that Samson was the seed of the woman, in type of Christ. "The woman" is a phrase nearly always associated in Scripture with the birth of someone who was to be a seed of the woman. "Of all that I said unto the woman, let her beware", coming from the mouth of an Angel (:13), surely confirms the Eden allusions.

Jdg 13:11 Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, Are you the man who spoke to the woman? He said, I am-
To hear the words of God directly, Manoah has to follow after his wife. I suggested on :8,9 that he may well have doubted how a woman could speak to him God's words. He wanted to hear them for himself. And God made a concession to that weakness. But He does so in such a way that still requires him to follow behind his more spiritual wife (see on :23), in order to hear those words.

Jdg 13:12 Manoah said, Now may your words come true. What should the child's way of life and mission be?-
There may be here the slight hint that he did not have total faith in the words of promise. For we could understand him as meaning 'Well I hope what you say is true. Should it be true, then how should we, in that case, raise the child; what is his mission going to be, so that we might raise him towards it?'. I note on :23 that his wife has more faith and perception than he does. And it is highly significant that the description of the "mission", to deliver Israel from the Philistines, is told only to the woman and not to Manoah.

Jdg 13:13 The angel of Yahweh said to Manoah, All that I said to the woman she must do-
Although God is making a concession to Manoah's weakness in appearing to him, He emphasizes that His primary word had been to the woman, not to Manoah. The concession to his chauvinistic weakness was therefore not total, but done in such a way that he was reminded that God had chosen his wife before him in revealing His word. See on :14.

Jdg 13:14 She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; all that I commanded her let her observe-
"Let her observe" may have been the command to Manoah, to not stand in the way of her obeying the call to also be a Nazirite. See on :13.

Jdg 13:15 Manoah said to the angel of Yahweh, Please, let us detain you so that we may make a young goat ready for you-
The record of Samson has a large number of examples of the repetitions in Biblical narrative. They are situations where he was connected into the experience of those who had gone before- e.g. Manoah's desire to detain the Angel recalls Jud. 6:18; Gen. 18:5. His desire to detain the Angel and offer sacrifice was exactly that of Gideon (6:18). His belief after he had seen the Angel ascend (Jud. 13:20 = Jud. 6:21), and his subsequent fear, were again expressed in the words of Gideon (Jud. 13:21,22 cp. Jud. 6:22). As Gideon was, perhaps subconsciously, the hero of Manoah, so Samson followed his father's spirituality in this, wanting likewise to copy Gideon. It seems he lived out parental expectation, and imbibed the spirituality of his father without making it his own. Born and raised believers, beware.

The whole scene is very similar to that of Gen. 18:7,8. Manoah responded as Abraham did, and later he would have perceived the similarities, and therefore grasped that this "man" was indeed an Angel.

Jdg 13:16 The angel of Yahweh said to Manoah, Though you detain me, I won't eat your food, and if you prepare a burnt offering, you must offer it to Yahweh. Manoah didn't know that he was the angel of Yahweh-

And yet as noted on :15, the whole scene was so very similar to that of Gen. 18:7,8 that we conclude that Manoah ought to have perceived ["know"] that this was an Angel. The fact he didn't is therefore an indication of lack of spiritual perception on his part. See on :23. The fact the Angel didn't eat of his food and meat, whereas the Angels who visited Abraham did so, could be read as a possible rebuke of Manoah for not perceiving this was an Angel. It could also be argued that in a similar scene, the visiting Angel accepted Gideon's food (Jud. 6:18). See on :17.

"Detain" is the word used for the Angelic restraining of the womb from bearing children (Gen. 20:18), and had been used specifically about Sarah (Gen. 16:2). And this whole incident was intended to help them see the similarities with Abraham and Sarah's Angelic visitation. The Angel may intend them to grasp the point- that they thought they were detaining / restraining Him, when He had been restraining them from having children until this point. Perhaps only later did they perceive this, if at all. There are many such Biblical allusions built in by God to our life experiences; and we may or may not ever perceive them in the course of our lives. Self examination of the path and details of our lives is clearly intended by God.

Jdg 13:17 Manoah said to the angel of Yahweh, What is your name, that when your words come true, we may honour you?-

The record says that Manoah said this "to the Angel", whilst clearly thinking this was a mere man. He acts and reasons as if this is a man, and he needs to know his name so that he can give him honour. When surely his mind should have been upon honouring God. "When" may also bear the implication of "if", as if he still didn't completely believe these words (see on :12). As noted on :16, his lack of perception that this was an Angel is criticized implicitly.

Jdg 13:18 The angel of Yahweh said to him, Why do you ask about my name, since it is beyond understanding-

Or, "wonderful", implying 'miraculous'. This again was urging Manoah to understand that this was not a human prophet, but an Angel with the power to do miracles. I have noted on :16,17 that Manoah is being implicitly criticized for not perceiving this was an Angel. And so the Angel replies with exactly the Angelic words to Jacob (Gen. 32:29). Their subsequent fear (Jud. 13:22) is that of Gen. 32:20. See on Jud. 14:12. Yet despite this, Manoah fails to make the connection, for only at the point :21 does he realize this was an Angel. The Angel's name was "wonderful" [NEV "beyond understanding"]. The Angel

doesn't give any one word answer, but instead "*did* a wonderful thing" (:19). For all time we see that the Name of God is not a lexical item, but rather manifest in what He *does*.

Jdg 13:19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to Yahweh. Then the angel did a wonderful thing as Manoah and his wife looked on-
Manoah had initially wanted to prepare food for the visitor, but He had declined it, and told him instead to offer it to Yahweh. And Manoah does so.

Jdg 13:20 When the flame went up toward the sky from the altar, the angel of Yahweh ascended in the flame of the altar, and Manoah and his wife looked on-
The fact they had an altar on their property indicates that they did serve Yahweh, although not in the ideal sense of offering at His sanctuary. But still God worked through that. "Ascended" is the word usually translated "offering". The idea is that the Angel was identified with the sacrifice, meaning that it had been accepted. Despite all Manoah's lack of spiritual perception throughout the encounter, as lamented on :16-18.

And they fell on their faces to the ground-
The phrase used of men doing this with a sense of unworthiness and conviction of sin (Gen. 44:14; Josh. 7:6; Ruth 2:10). Now that they had been humbled, God could work further with them. And that is an abiding principle.

Jdg 13:21 But the angel of Yahweh didn't appear to Manoah or to his wife any more. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of Yahweh-
See on :16,17,18. It was the very absence of God's direct appearance in his life that in the end persuaded Manoah that truly, he did have a fully valid relationship with Him. And the apparent silence of God is intended to teach us likewise.

Jdg 13:22 Manoah said to his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God-
He failed to learn the lesson from Gideon, who had likewise wrongly panicked (Jud. 6:22,28); and likewise of Jacob and others who saw the face of an Angel and lived (Gen. 16:14; 32:30). Isaiah too failed to learn this lesson from history (Is. 6:5). This is typical of man's tendency to think that God is "a hard man", indifferent to us as persons, distant, judgmental. Again Manoah is presented as far less spiritually perceptive than his anonymous nobody of a wife, who [as many such are today] was far more perceptive in spiritual things.

Jdg 13:23 But his wife said to him, If Yahweh wanted to kill us He wouldn't have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from us, neither would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these-

She reasoned that if God had accepted the sacrifice, and told them they would have a child, they would therefore not be slain at least before she gave birth. She presents as far more perceptive than Manoah, even though she remains unnamed. Here we have a repeat of the essence of the situation between Deborah and Barak, where again a woman's faith was greater than a man's fear; see on :12. Such interconnections within the Biblical record reveal an overall Divine mind behind the entire volume. And we see too how Biblical history is intended to serve as a precedent for us, teaching us that we are not alone, not on unmapped territory never passed before. But all is working out as God has worked previously.

Jdg 13:24 The woman bore a son, and named him Samson, and the child grew and Yahweh blessed him-

"The child grew, and Yahweh blessed him" is the language used of Samuel, John and the Lord Jesus- all likewise chosen from the womb, with births announced by Angels to childless women. See on :2,3. It is possible that his parents still had elements of weakness in them; for his name doesn't include the 'Yah' prefix, and 'Samson' ('splendour of the sun') may be a reference to the nearby town of Beth Shemesh ('house of the sun-god'). We note that it was the wife who named him Samson, and it was unusual for a woman to name the child. Zorah was only 3 km. from Beth Shemesh. Long hair was associated with the sun gods- the long hairs representing the rays of the sun. The sun gods are depicted as having long hair- Ra-Horakhtz, Attis, Surya and Lugh. Samson chose to wear his long hair as seven locks (Jud. 16:13), and this is exactly the kind of radiant crown seen on the sun gods. The crown of the Greek sun-god Helios was often depicted with seven spikes. This continues the theme- that Samson mixed Yahweh worship with paganism; and his hatred of the Philistines was not therefore purely a result of his love for Yahweh. He died with the request "that I may avenge myself the revenge of one of my two eyes" (Jud. 16:28). The sun was thought to be the 'eye' of Heaven. Samson's dying request that he be avenged for the loss of his eyes suggests he died still with a strong sense of association with the sun god.

It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (Jud. 12:9; 14:2; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out of the faith'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage.

Jdg 13:25 The Spirit of Yahweh began to trouble him in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol-

Samson was intended to "begin" delivering Israel from the Philistines (Jud. 13:5), and so the Spirit of God "Began" [s.w.] to move him to do so (Jud. 13:25). But he didn't let that process progress as intended, becoming caught up on anger and sexual lust issues. We have the sense that God began a work in and through Samson that wasn't completed as potentially possible- perhaps with the implication, that it should have been but wasn't. Not until David's time would Israel be free from the Philistines (2 Sam. 8:1). Yet despite only partially fulfilling his potential, Samson did make a beginning. And he will be saved, despite all that was unfinished and all the unrealized potential. On one hand, the fool begins and doesn't finish (Lk. 14:30 "This man began to build, and was not able to finish"). On the other hand, we are saved by grace even when we don't finish. Likewise the Lord has "begun a good work in us" and will complete it- if we let Him, for He will keep on trying to finish it ("Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will keep working at perfecting it, until the day of Jesus Christ" Phil. 1:6). The Galatians 'began in the Spirit' but left that path and tried to complete the work without the Spirit, "by the flesh", and failed (Gal. 3:3). The Lord 'began' doing and teaching in His ministry (Acts 1:1; 10:37 "that word began from Galilee") and continues. So many times the Lord's words are prefaced with the statement that He "began to say..." (Mt. 4:17; 11:7,20; Mk. 4:1; 6:2,34; 8:31; 10:32; 12:1; 13:5; Lk. 4:21; 7:24; 11:29; 12:1; 20:9; 24:27). This is all quite some theme. His words were intended to commence something in the hearers, although usually that intended process wasn't and isn't allowed to go forward to its intended end. When a man today hears the Lord's words, that process likewise begins; but men truncate it.

I suggested on Jud. 17:1 that the story line continues directly from the death of Samson to Delilah and her son making an idol. We note that the camp of Dan, Zorah and Eshtaol are mentioned in Jud. 18:2,8,11,12, just as they are in Jud. 13. The Spirit of God had moved Samson to deliver his tribe Dan from the Philistines in that very area (Jud. 13:25 and see on Jud. 14:19), but he hadn't lived up to that potential. In Samson's time, the tribe of Dan had not possessed the land given to them (Josh. 19:47,48). In Jud. 18 we read of how they gave up, and went up north to drive the people of Laish out of their territory, rather than dealing with the Philistines and having their intended tribal allotment. Samson was their potential means for inheriting the land they were supposed to. The Spirit moved him to be sensitive to this. Yet as we see in Jud. 15, they were prepared to live with the Philistines reigning over them. Samson perceived the potential and wanted to realize it; but his people didn't. And he himself failed to realize his own personal potential. Had he liberated Dan from the Philistines as God potentially enabled, the whole miserable story of Jud. 17-21 need never have happened. But instead Samson was caught up with personal skirmishes arising from his own anger issues and refusal to get over the anger and sense of revenge arising from his failed marriage. Yet he still will be saved, according to Hebrews 11.

Zorah was where Samson was born and he was buried in just the same location between Zorah and Eshtaol (Jud. 16:31). In his youth, the Spirit moved him in between those places, setting him up for his life's work, or at least for the potential of it. The implication of being buried in the exact same place may mean that he didn't actually progress very far, in fact nowhere. Yet still he will be saved. The presence of the Philistines there, and perhaps their abuse of the Danites, provoked his spirit... and the Holy Spirit confirmed him in that. We know from his walk alone in the vineyards in Jud. 14 that Samson was not unknown to go walking alone. And so the LXX here in Jud. 13:25 is significant: "The Spirit of the Lord began to go out / walk with him". As he walked around the local area alone, angry at the evidence of Philistine domination, the Spirit went with him and confirmed him in his desire to break the bondage. Or we can interpret "the camp of Dan" as a military term for the soldiers of Dan in Zorah-Eshtaol, of whom there were 600 at the time of Jud. 18 in just that place; and he was one of them. The difference was that God's Spirit began to impel him personally. We see how the movement of the Spirit is partly a result of Divine sovereign choice, similar to making a man a Nazirite when Nazirite vows were to be taken as freewill decisions. Am. 2:11 speaks of God raising up Nazirites. On the other hand, God's Spirit confirms the human spirit. And yet the various translations all give the range of God's initiative with Samson here: “to stir” (NIV, NRSV), “to move [him] at times” (KJV), “to drive [him] hard", “to arouse”, “to direct”. Only LXX gives "to accompany / walk with". These translations all help us see how the Spirit works internally on a man's heart, and with us too today.

As we will note elsewhere, he failed to realize the potential- of giving his tribe Dan their inheritance free from the Philistines. He got caught up in anger issues over the failure of his first marriage. He turned to prostitutes, and was endlessly set on revenge for it. So that what he achieved was minimal compared to the potential enabled by the Spirit. Yet still he will be finally saved.

Samson was possessed of a finely tuned conscience. The first instance of this is when we read how the Spirit of Yahweh troubled him (Heb.) from time to time in the camp of Dan, in the very places where his people had earlier failed to follow up the victories of Joshua-Jesus by their spiritual laziness. He was troubled, deeply, by the Philistine dominance and Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh (s.w. Gen. 41:8). God works directly on the human spirit by His Spirit. And so He provoked Samson to have these concerns in his spirit, and God's Spirit confirmed Samson's positive response to these proddings, which were initially of God's working directly on his heart. This is how the Holy Spirit likewise works today.

The context of Samson's marriage does seem to suggest that Samson himself sought occasion against the Philistines; for the Spirit of the Lord had been troubling his conscience as to why the people of Dan had not followed up Joshua's victories, and had allowed themselves to be overrun by the uncircumcised (13:25 Heb.). The only other

references to "troubled" are in Gen. 41:8; Ps. 77:4; Dan. 2:1,3. The Spirit of God worked with Samson's spirit, so that it was troubled as he went for his solitary walks of meditation. It was no accident that he was buried in the very place where his conscience was first awakened (Jud. 16:31); he maybe asked for this burial place, to show he had at last returned to his innocent spiritual beginnings.

JUDGES CHAPTER 14

Jdg 14:1 Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines-

"Went down" reflects his spiritual fall; the theme is stressed in :1,5,7,10. This is a great anticlimax to all we have been set up to expect and hope for in Samson from the previous chapter. Born by Divine intervention, a Nazirite who has been Divinely stirred and set up to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And he now goes down and falls in love with one of their women, and intends to break the covenant by marrying her. And his weak father reluctantly goes along with it. It's all an intentional anticlimax to what we were set up to hope for. It reflects how God must so often feel- that potentials are wasted or at best only lived up to in a very partial way. Like Samson, God's potential heroes get caught up on their anger issues, personal revenge, sex and other dramas.

Samson's 'seeing' was wrong. The Hebrew is literally 'A woman he saw', and his first words are 'A woman I saw... get her for me'. This introduces us to his narcissism. He saw this woman, and then dismisses his father's objection that the woman is a Philistine by saying that she is 'right in his eyes', in his sight. His loss of eyes at the end is obviously an appropriate judgment upon a man who sinned with his eyes. But Samson is all Israel; for at this time, when there was no king, Israel like Samson did what was 'right in their eyes' (Jud. 21:25).

"Timnah" means 'a portion assigned', alluding to how this small area had been assigned to God's people- not the Philistines. Samson's potential mission was to dispossess the Philistines from there, and the entire small region between Zorah and Eshtaol. He failed in this, although he will be saved finally, according to Hebrews 11.

Judah also did wrong in Timnath with a woman, and was deceived and shamed by her (Jud. 15:1 = Gen. 38:17). Earlier Scripture, which it seems Samson well knew and appreciated, was crying out to Samson to take heed. But he was blind to the real import of it all. It is emphasized that Samson "went *down*" to her (Jud. 14:1,5,7,10), as if his literal descent to her in the valley was also a retrograde step spiritually. Samson's marriage was wrong. And so it was. And yet his hero Gideon (see on Jud. 13:15) had likewise 'gone down', the record emphasizes, to liberate Israel from their enemies (Jud. 7:9,10,11,24). In view of the other examples of Samson consciously imitating Gideon, it

is likely that he was seeking an opportunity to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And yet he mixed his motivations. He loved the girl, he wanted to gratify his flesh with the forbidden fruit. He loved the world, and thereby became in some sense an enemy of God (James 4:4). But then he loved Gideon, he loved the holiness of Yahweh, he hated the world and the Philistines, he loved Israel, weak as they were, and wanted to deliver them from their spiritual bondage. And instead of casting him off as a man of such divided heart that he was not worthy of God's covenant love, God worked with him. And by using a purposeful ambiguity, He has recorded this for us in such a way as unites God's desire for Israel's deliverance with that of Samson.

It may be that as Gideon "went down" to destroy God's enemies (Jud. 7:9), so Samson justified his 'going down' to the Philistines to take their women, as well as to destroy their warriors (Jud. 14:1,5,7,10). As Gideon was somehow 'separate from his brethren' in his zeal, so was Samson. And yet Samson seems to have copied just the externalities of Gideon; not the real spirit. And therefore as Gideon foolishly multiplied women to himself in the spiritual weakness of his middle age, so perhaps Samson saw justification for his attitude. 'If heroic Gideon could indulge the flesh in this area, I surely can'. He fell into our common trap: to compare ourselves amongst ourselves, to measure ourselves against human standards as we find them among the contemporary brotherhood (2 Cor. 10:12). Saul should have realized that Samson, like him, idolized Gideon, but only on a surface level- and should have taken the lesson. But he didn't see the points we've made in this paragraph. He could have done, but he didn't bother. And so with us. The word supplies us the potential power to overcome. It can often happen that the daily readings are almost purpose-designed for our present situation. Yet if we neglect to read them- that help lies untapped.

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

Jdg 14:2 He came up and told his father and mother, I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore get her for me as my wife-
This marriage with an unbeliever was clearly wrong. It could be argued that because the

father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (Jud. 12:9; 14:2; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out of the faith'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage. And Manoah is presented in Jud. 13 as consistently lacking in spiritual perception.

Jdg 14:3 Then his father and mother said to him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of your brothers, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? Samson said to his father, Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes-

The disappointment of Samson's parents is that of Esau's (Gen. 26:35; 27:46; 28:1). For all Manoah's slowness to respond and perceive in Jud. 13, he clearly was amongst the faithful minority. Samson's action was quite contrary to the spirit of the Law: marriage with the local tribes was categorically prohibited (Ex. 34:16; Dt. 7:3,4; 1 Kings 11:2). Joshua's warning that those who married the surrounding tribes would find them "a snare and a trap for you... thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:12,13 RSV) was fulfilled in Samson being tied up and blinded by Delilah; and yet it also had an element of fulfillment with his wife. The similarity is such as to suggest that Samson's marriage out of the Truth was definitely wrong because it was a fulfillment of the words of Josh. 23. "Is there *never* a woman among the daughters of your brothers... that you go to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" implies that she wasn't the first one; he had often got involved with Philistine girls down in the valley, despite his conscience for Yahweh troubling him as he walked alone on the heights (Jud. 13:25 Heb.). Samson gave no good answer to his parents: simply "Get her for me; for she is right in my eyes" (14:3, repeated in 14:7 for emphasis- he really did fall for the lust of the eyes). This insistence rather than explanation would suggest a bad conscience in Samson. Likewise the crowd only shouted out the more when asked why and for what crime they wished to crucify Jesus (Mt. 27:23). The Biblical record is consistently psychologically credible, and true to observed human experience in this area. Unlike the contemporary, uninspired histories and legends of the other nations around Israel. See on :10,11.

She was 'right in his eyes' (14:3 AVmg.) not for beauty but in the sense that 'she suits my purpose' (Heb.). The same Hebrew is used not concerning beauty but rather utility in 1 Sam. 18:20; 2 Sam. 17:4; 1 Kings 9:12. The way in which Samson set up the riddle, almost expecting that they might tease it out of him through his wife, the way in which he agreed that if they did this, he would give them the clothes of 30 Philistines... it all suggests that Samson set the whole thing up to seek an opportunity against the Philistines. On the other hand, there seems a connection with how Israel at this time did what was 'right in their own eyes'. Samson becomes representative of them all.

In their culture, it was unheard of for a man to disobey his father when it came to marriage. If the father said no, that was it. Samson presents as domineering and obsessive, possibly autistic. "Get her for me" is literally "This one, get her for me". That one, that Philistine... Manoah presents as weak in going along with his son's wrong request. For the command against intermarriage specifically stated that a man should not give his children in marriage to the surrounding tribes (Dt. 7:3,4). "Get her for me" specifically refers to paying the dowry and gifts to her family members. We perceive here the 'spoilt kid' in Samson, and the weakness of his parents.

Jdg 14:4 But his father and mother didn't know that it was from Yahweh, for He sought an occasion against the Philistines, for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel- The "He" can be read as both God and Samson; they both had the same desire, and God worked with mixed up Samson to this end. LXX "it was of the Lord, that he sought to be revenged on the Philistines". Samson's obsession with revenge was wrong on many counts. For he should never have so loved the Philistine woman that he wanted revenge when the marriage didn't work out. But God worked through that, for He also sought revenge on the Philistines for what they had done to His weak people. But strictly, "from the Philistines", a provocation originating on their side. Again we wonder whether this was God seeking to provoke the Philistines to provoke Samson so that he attacked them; or whether this is Samson consciously working out a way to make the Philistines provoke him so he has an excuse to attack them in a kind of revenge killing that would be more acceptable than an outright attack on them. And the ambiguity as to whether Samson or God are referred to is intentional; because it reflects how God works through human weakness, failure and anger. Working all this out from the evidence presented in the record is hard work. The fact a man does something "of the Lord" doesn't mean that he is guiltless. In the same context of God's deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, men who did things "of the Lord" were punished for what they did (Dt. 2:30; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Chron. 22:7; 25:20). But the whole question of Samson's marriage is overshadowed by this fact that "It was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines". He used this incident to begin to raise up Samson as a Judge of Israel (Jud. 2:16,18; 1 Chron. 17:10). This is surely one of Scripture's purposeful ambiguities, designed to provoke us to meditation: it is unclear whether "he" refers to Samson or Yahweh. There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. And yet this would require that God almost made Samson have a desire for that woman. For God's Spirit works directly upon the human spirit, and yet confirms our spirit in where we really want to go. This may not be impossible- it may be that Paul's

God-given "thorn in the flesh" was a similar forbidden passion. It would be an example of God leading into temptation (Mt. 6:13). However, it is more likely that God worked through Samson's wrong desires, through his human weakness, to bring about God's purpose and glory.

It is often maintained that "judge not" refers to not judging motives. If we are not to judge motives, but we are to 'judge' in some sense, this would mean that we must judge the outward works of men. And yet Biblical and human analysis reveals that outward behaviour is often not a reflection of inner motive (e.g. Samson's marriage). To judge outward behaviour without considering motives is almost pointless. There are countless cases of where the same action may be right or wrong depending on motive. Thus both David and Uzziah acted as the High Priest, but only Uzziah was condemned for it; David refused to choose his punishment as God asked him, preferring to leave it to God, whereas when Ahaz did something similar, he was condemned for it; Rahab's lie is commended as an act of faith, whilst other lies are sins; Samuel and Eli both had the same experience of their children being apostate and them being criticized for it, but only Eli is condemned for this.

God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it, and only 'began' to do it (Jud. 13:5). They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. He made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith.

Jdg 14:5 Then Samson went down with his father and mother, to Timnah and came to the vineyards of Timnah, and suddenly a young lion roared against him-
"Came to..." strictly translates as 'before coming to...'. These vineyards, I suggest, were in the valley of Sorek where Delilah was. For sorek is the Hebrew word translated "vine" in Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21. Again the idea is that the events in Samson's life were all in a very small area of not many square miles. His mission was to dispossess the Philistines from it; but he failed in that. For the people of that area in Jud. 18 emigrated to the far north of Israel because of the Philistines.

Lions roar when they are hungry, when they go onto the attack or begin to eat their prey (Ps. 104:21; Am. 3:4,8). Samson had provoked the lion by going into the vineyards, and yet the lion provoked Samson to kill it. This is related to how he sought to provoke a provocation "from the Philistines" through his marriage plan. It has also been suggested that "a young lion" would unlikely be alone in a vineyard- unless it were a nomadic lion attempting to claim a territory. This is yet another element of unreality, or anomaly, in the Samson story, reflecting how such things [like his marriage to the Philistine] were "of the Lord". Just as he was a Nazirite but flouted the vow, and as bees nesting in a lion

cadaver is unusual, so is a singular young lion going on the attack in a vineyard, apparently separate from the pride of lions. Attempting to claim a territory is another reason why lions roar and tend to be more aggressive [This matter is firmly established in Brent A. Strawn, "*kepir arayot* in Judges 14:5", *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009) pp. 150-158]. In this case, we see the lion representing the Philistines. And again, the issue is related to Samson's call to stop the territorial expansion of the Philistines into his area.

We get the picture of Samson and his parents walking the four miles down into the valley, and Samson goes off for a wander in the vineyards. The vineyard was a symbol of Israel (Ps. 80:15; Is. 1:8; 5:7; 27:2; Jer. 12:10; Mt. 21:41). This may have been already evident to Samson from Gen. 49:11; although most likely the symbol of Israel as God's vineyard was already established by his time. Conscious that Timnath was the 'portion assigned' to Dan and yet they had failed to take it, Samson meditates there in the vineyards, a symbol of Israel, the people who should have been there. Inheriting Philistine vineyards was one of the blessings promised (Dt. 6:11) and initially obtained by Joshua-Jesus (Josh. 24:13). And yet those vineyards were now back in Philistine control. A lion suddenly appeared and roared against him, just as the Philistines later would (Jud. 15:14). The lion was a common symbol of Israel's enemies. The Spirit came upon Samson and he overcame it, in evident symbol to him that he really could deliver Israel from the Philistines. There is every reason to think that Samson appreciated all this symbology.

And yet did Samson ultimately slay the lion of the Philistines and bring the promised blessings of honey to Israel (cp. Ex. 3:8; Dt. 8:8 etc.)? No, not really. He achieved some tokenistic success against their warriors; but Israel remained enslaved (Jud. 15:20). He didn't live up to that potential which God had enabled him to achieve. And yet although it may seem that his life was wasted, in that he didn't really bring much deliverance for anyone- the whole process of it saved him personally. Those whose families and converts have turned away from the Faith will identify with this comfort. But whilst the above case for Samson's spiritual commitment can be made, there is evidence galore that his motives were mixed in this matter of Samson's marriage. Consider: why did he as a Nazirite go for a walk in vineyards, among the forbidden fruit (cp. Christians putting themselves into compromising situations)? This was typical of him: a great zeal and understanding, mixed with a desire to walk as close to the edge as possible, and to ultimately have a little of both. He had a fascination with vineyards, which the record brings out. Like an ex-alcoholic staring at the bottles in the shop ‘just out if interest’, so Samson fooled about with what was forbidden- just as we all tend to.

Not only do circumstances repeat between the lives of God's children, but also within our lives. We may pass through a very similar experience more than once. The human chances of this ever happening again were remote. But the similarity and repetition may

be so that we learn the lesson we failed to learn; or it could even be a punishment for not learning the lessons we should have learned. Again, Samson's life demonstrates this. The lion roared against him as the Philistines did (Jud. 14:5 s.w. Jud. 15:14); and not least in the uncanny similarities between the way his first wife enticed him and wrung his secrets from him, and the way 40 years later another worthless woman did the same to him (Jud. 14:15-17 = Jud. 16:5,15,16). He just didn't see the similarities, or if he did, he didn't learn any lessons. Admittedly, it's far easier for us, presented with the records as they are, spanning 40 years within a few pages. And yet without doubt the lion's attack on Samson was a warning to him- not to sail as close to the edge as he could, wandering in vineyards as a Nazirite.

Jdg 14:6 The Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on him and he tore it as he would have torn a young goat, having nothing in his hand, but he didn't tell his father or his mother what he had done-

It was only after it roared against him that the Spirit came upon him and enabled him to kill it. He had to take the first nervous steps towards that lion in faith, and then the Spirit came upon him and confirmed his actions. The fact he didn't tell his parents what he had done may not only indicate his humility, but also suggests he was not naturally a strong man. To say he had just killed a lion would seem ridiculous.

The stress is on the way in which the Spirit came upon Samson (Jud. 14:6,19; 15:14), as it did on other judges (Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29). "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zech. 4:6) may be referring to these incidents; demonstrating that when God's spirit acts on a man, it is not human muscle at all that operates. He is even listed amongst those who out of weakness were made strong (Heb. 11:34). The three references to the Spirit coming upon Samson all use the same Hebrew word; it is usually translated 'to prosper'. And the point is clearly made that Yahweh will not prosper / come mightily upon the wicked, but He will prosper the righteous and obedient. Yahweh prospered Samson despite his disobedience, anger issues and unspirituality. Here we have another Old Testament example of imputed righteousness. Samson broke the Nazirite conditions, but was still counted as a "Nazirite to God", in God's eyes. This isn't the same as God turning a blind eye to His favourites. He counts us as righteous, especially now "in Christ".

Samson killed a lion, escaped fire and killed many Philistines by his faith (Heb. 11:32-34)- so the Spirit tells us. Yet these things were all done by him at times when he had at best a partial faith. He had a worldly Philistine girlfriend, a sure grief of mind to his Godly parents, and on his way to the wedding he met and killed a lion- through faith, Heb. 11 tells us (Jud. 14:1-7). The Philistines threatened to burn him with fire, unless his capricious paramour of a wife extracted from him the meaning of his riddle. He told her, due, it seems, to his hopeless sexual weakness. He then killed 30 Philistines to provide

the clothes he owed the Philistines on account of them answering the riddle (Jud. 14:15-19). It is evident that Samson was weak in many ways at this time; the Proverbs make many allusions to him, the strong man ruined by the evil Gentile woman, the one who could take a city but not rule his spirit etc. And yet underneath all these weaknesses, serious as they were, there was a deep faith within Samson which Heb. 11 highlights.

The latter day invader is likened to a beast devouring Israel (Joel 1:6), having the Assyrian invader as its prototype. But the Philistines are here likened to a lion ravaging God's people, the vineyard of God. Thus the period of invasions by Israel's smaller neighbours is a prelude to the final invasion by Assyria/Babylon. These larger powers are also symbolized by the lion (Jer. 50:17).

If the prohibition against Nazirites touching a carcass applied to animals, then this would've ended his Naziriteship. We get the impression God overlooked this. Probably this was why he didn't tell his parents how he got the honey. He scooped the honey with his hands and ate it from his hands, we are told. The same hands had just recently been empowered by the Spirit to slay the lion. His hands were again used to slay the Philistines with a bone, to tie the tails of foxes, to remove the gates of a town and then to push over the pillars of the temple. His unclean hands were still used by God.

We enquire why he didn't tell his parents; nor did he tell them where he got the honey from (:9.16). Likewise he tells his wife that he hadn't told his parents the answer to his riddle. On one level we deduce his loneliness, possibly arising from being an only child. On another, we get the impression that he realized that God was somehow in his life, and he was being called as an individual to deliver Israel from the Philistines. But this strand in his thinking was too heavily involved with his narcissism to be ultimately fruitful. For he failed to deliver his tribe from the Philistines, and his 'ministry' was merely personal skirmishes and vendettas against the Philistines. "She's the right one for me" (Jud. 14:3) can be read as a reflection of his sense that through this woman he could achieve his agenda- of attacking the Philistines. But the failure of that marriage led him to personal bitterness and anger, rather than perceiving that although life hadn't gone the way he expected it to, God was still in it.

Jdg 14:7 He went down and talked with the woman, and she pleased Samson well-
This again indicates that he didn't simply and totally use her as a tool towards his purpose of killing Philistines. He did really love her, and was wrong in this. But it was extremely unusual for a man to talk with a woman directly. There were usually intermediaries. The idea is that he specifically wanted her and saw the possibilities of using her in his carefully planned plot, to provoke the Philistines to provoke him so he could slay some of them in apparently legitimate revenge. We might note that so far he has only 'seen' her and decided to marry her; only now does he talk with her personally. On one hand, this was just a classic case of lust of the eyes. But it may be she looked

somewhat 'loose' and he imagined her being unfaithful during the drinking party, which would then provide the provocation "from the Philistines" (:4) that he was trying to create.

Jdg 14:8 After a while he returned to take her-
Samson is described as wanting to "take" a wife; this Hebrew word is 51 times translated 'take away', 31 times 'fetch'. He evidently didn't intend to live there with her; he wanted her to come and live with him in the Israelite encampment, four miles up in the hills from the valley where she lived. There was usually a significant period, up to a year, between engagement and marriage. Ample time for the bees to make honey in the carcass.

And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. In it there was a swarm of bees, in the body of the lion, and honey-
God sent the lion against Samson. He did this in order to go along with Samson's symbolic thoughts, and this may afford some justification for Samson's marriage. He was there, wandering in those vineyards, meditating how they were representative of the blessings which belonged to Israel, and yet they were now in the hands of God's enemies. And then, God furthers the parable: He sends a lion, symbolic of the Philistines, and Samson is given power to overcome him. And further, when Samson returned to the carcass to meditate deeper on 'the fallen one' (14:8 doesn't use the usual word for 'carcass'- s.w. " fall" Prov. 29:16; Ez. 26:15; 27:27; 31:13), "behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion" (14:8). The Hebrew for "swarm" is normally used (124 times) about a congregation of people, often God's people Israel. And the Hebrew for 'Bee' is 'Deborah', a celebrated earlier judge. God was surely teaching him that through his victory over the Philistine lion, God's people could be inspired to be faithful, and would therefore be able to enjoy the promised blessing of honey, taken out of the Philistines. Samson saw all this; for he "took" (Heb. is usually used in the sense of 'to take dominion over') the honey, partook himself, and shared it with others. In all this there is a detailed type of the Lord's representative sacrifice on the cross. On the cross, He won the victory over the lion of the devil (1 Pet. 5:8 cp. Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8 may allude to Samson's victory). This enabled us to be empowered to partake the Kingdom blessings. As Samson walked away from the carcass some days after killing it (14:8 Heb. "a time" = 'days'- three days?), with the honey in his hands, eating it and offering it to others, so the Lord left the empty tomb. See on :9.

Samson discovered a congregation (Heb. *'edat*) of bees- *deborim* , in Hebrew. The judge Deborah would've been fairly recent history for Samson; she would have been the heroine of anyone like Samson, who also arose to save Israel from their enemies at that

time. Surely he was being gently led to reflect that there were a whole congregation of Deborahs ['bees'] around, and he should eat of them. And yet Samson went his loner road, and suffered the consequences of it- rather like Elijah, who was in denial of the fact there were actually at least another 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Or perhaps Samson was simply being asked to execute his deliverance of Israel after the pattern of Deborah, to 'eat' of her, to fellowship her example and spirit. But he chose not to 'get it'; as we so often do in the countless nudges and prods which God gives us in daily life. We note the use of 'edat, meaning “community”, rather than the Hebrew 'seres', the common word for “swarm". The idea is that a new, liberated community of people would arisen over the dead carcass of the lion, representing the Philistines whom Samson would slay. But this potential never happened. For by the end of Samson's days, the Philistines were still in control of that small Danite community, between Zorah and Eshtaol, whom Samson had been intended to deliver. The presence of the honey in a lion carcass was miraculous, just as Samson's creation of a new community would have been. Some claim that the intense heat would have meant that the body of the lion decomposed dry, but that makes little sense. It has been observed: "The carcass would have to have dehydrated in an inconceivably short time, since bees do not live in such moist places as cadavers undergoing decomposition. Even if wind and heat in a Palestinian summer are judged sufficient to prevent decomposition, it is clear that the story does not represent Samson’s discovery as an every-day occurrence".

Jdg 14:9 which he took it into his hands and went on, eating as he went. He came to his father and mother and gave some to them and they ate, but he didn’t tell them that he had taken the honey out of the body of the lion-

See on :8. The way he ate and gave to his parents and *they also ate* without him telling them where he got it from is a clear reversal of what happened in Eden (Gen. 3:6; doubtless Eve didn't tell Adam either where the fruit came from): but here the fruits of spiritual victory rather than failure were enjoyed and shared. The promised blessings of honey were conditional upon Israel's obedience (Dt. 32:13 cp. Ps. 81:16), although granted in prospect (Dt. 32:13). Israel at Samson's time were disobedient and therefore didn't have the Kingdom blessings. And yet the whole acted parable taught that through the supreme zeal of one lonely man, into whose struggle not even his parents could enter (14:6,16), the blessings of obedience could be brought to the disobedient multitude of God's people. And here we have the essence of the Gospel.

"The body of the lion" in :8,9 is LXX "the mouth of the lion". The idea is that he was empowered to take something out of the mouth of a lion, as David would. And as with David, the message was that he could save Israel from the mouth of the Philistines.

Jdg 14:10 His father went down to the woman, and Samson made a drinking feast as was the custom for the young men-
The process of marriage involved Samson in participating in the traditions of the surrounding tribes (this is emphasized: Jud. 14:10,11; 15:20). The "feasting" was strictly 'drinking' (Heb.)- and Samson the Nazirite attended this. Even if he didn't partake, he was placing himself directly in temptations' way to break his Naziriteship. Just like walking alone in the vineyards.

Jdg 14:11 When they saw him they brought thirty companions to be with him-
The problem with marriage out of the faith is that you don't marry just a person, but a family. And so he now has 30 "friends", all of them unbelievers. But we suspect Samson had evil intent in all this, for his marriage was because he sought opportunity against the Philistines. The groom ought to have brought 30 friends with him, but he didn't. And so the bride's family provided them. LXX says they did this "because they feared him". They sensed he had evil intent toward them. This confirms the impression we have that his whole marriage plan was because that woman was "right in his eyes" for some plan he had to kill Philistines. In the same way as his marriage out of the Faith was "of the Lord". The Philistines were suspicious that something was going on like this.

Jdg 14:12 Samson said to them, Let me tell you a riddle now. If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing-
Thirty changes of clothing was a huge amount of wealth. We ponder why both sides were willing to gamble for such very high stakes. I suggest the men who agreed the bet with Samson were drunk at the time. It was not a rational, normal thing to do. We wonder whether somehow, Samson knew he was going to tell his wife and she would tell the others, thereby creating the need for 30 garments, which he would obtain by murder. Perhaps he knew this only on a deeply subconscious level. But clearly he was using their deceit in suddenly expecting him to come up with 30 changes of clothes for his "friends" as an excuse to murder 30 Philistines. For the entire marriage was because he sought an opportunity to fight the Philistines. We are left wondering to what degree Samson was overtaken by circumstances [his wife revealing his secret], and to what degree he planned all that happened. If it was all so carefully premeditated, we ponder why he returned to his parents' home so angry, rather than with joy that his mission against the Philistines had started to be fulfilled. The 'unclear' element which the narrative presents is in fact a way of giving us insight into the working of the Spirit. There are elements of both Divine and human volition.

They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They plowed behind his wife as

a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (Jud. 14:18).

Jdg 14:13 But if you can't give me the answer, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. They said to him, Tell us your riddle, that we may hear it-
It was Samson's duty as the groom to provide 30 changes of clothing (a huge expense), or at least, this was what they perhaps unexpectedly told him at the wedding. But perhaps he knew this full well ahead of time, and was using it as an excuse to kill 30 Philistines. How that exactly would work out, he perhaps didn't know. He clearly did love his bride, and she did indeed betray his love and trust. It is impossible to totally decode where he really stood in all this in psychological terms- for his motives were mixed and his plans and intentions were therefore perhaps not clearly defined in his own mind. I suggest that he knew full well that he had the obligation to provide 30 changes of clothing; this was part of the bride price. But he intentionally doesn't bring them, and says he will only give them if the Philistines guess his riddle.

Jdg 14:14 He said to them, Out of the eater came forth food. Out of the strong came forth sweetness. They couldn't give the answer in three days-
"The eater" (Heb. 'the devourer') and "the strong" not only referred to the lion, but more essentially to Samson himself. The same basic word for 'eater' is used as a verb to describe how Samson 'ate' / 'devoured' the honey from the lion (Jud. 14:9). And years later the Philistines realized how Samson's riddle described himself: for they rejoiced that "the destroyer (devourer) of our country" was now overcome (Jud. 16:24). Samson saw that through his God-given strength he could bring forth the honey of blessing to Israel. They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They plowed behind his wife as a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (Jud. 14:18). A riddle was supposed to have a reasonable answer. But the answer to Samson's riddle was "Bees hived in a lion's carcass and produce honey", but bees do not make hives in carcasses. The Philistines were being asked to accept something miraculous had happened, the hand of God, and that was beyond their conception. But that was the point that Samson wanted to make. Without accepting that point, the riddle was insoluble.

Jdg 14:15 On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, Entice your husband to tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you called us here to mock us?-
Thirty changes of clothes was a major expense. "To mock us" can be rendered "to make

us poor". Or the idea may be that they would have to strip themselves naked and give their clothes to Samson. LXX "did you invite us to do us violence?" could suggest that Samson had implied that he would obtain the 30 changes of clothes by murdering the wedding guests, the 30 companions of :11. Indeed the Hebrew for "mock us" can mean 'to dispossess'. That was indeed his intention and calling- to dispossess the Philistines from the small area between Eshtaol and Zorah. In this case, the wedding to the girl had been planned by Samson as a means through which to inflict damage upon the Philistines. The girl in question was "right in his eyes" for his plan. And yet his motives were mixed with his own carnal lust. For if he was merely using the wedding as a cover for an attack upon the Philistines, he wouldn't have afterwards been so furiously angry and jealous at the marriage not working out.

Jdg 14:16 Samson's wife wept before him and said, You must hate me, and don't love me. You have given a riddle to my people but you haven't told it me. He said to her, I haven't even told it to my father or my mother; why should I tell you-
He speaks to his wife as if she should expect that he was closer to his Hebrew parents than to her: "'I haven't even explained it (the riddle) to my father or mother', he replied, 'So why should I explain it to you?'" (14:16 NIV). Gen. 2:24 taught that a man must leave his parents and cleave to his wife in marriage; she must be closer to him than them. It could be that by saying this, Samson was reminding her that he didn't see their relationship as full marriage; he was only using her (cp. how he 'used' a Philistine as his best man, 14:20). Yet he did what only days before had been unthinkable: he told her his finest and most personal secret, which he wouldn't even tell his dear parents. Such is the fickleness of our nature. And yet there seems reason to think that somehow Samson foresaw his possible failure, and arranged to use the situation to forward God's work. It could even be that the girl was party to Samson's plan; she may have appeared to have a genuine interest in Samson's spiritual aims. The Philistines themselves realized this when they chode with Samson's wife that they had been called to the wedding 'to have our possession taken away' (14:15 Heb.). They saw the aim of Samson's marriage: to dispossess them and take their possession for Israel. It seems no accident that he chose Timnath, 'a portion assigned'- to Israel. This was part of the land promised to Dan, but which they had allowed the Philistines to overrun (Josh. 19:43,47). And Samson would have seen himself as 'Samson-of-Zorah', the hornet- symbol of the Egyptian tribes which drove out the Canaanites in preparation for Israel's later victories (Dt. 7:20; Josh. 24:12).

The parallels between the woman of Timnah and Delilah are clear. The words of the Philistines to the woman are identical: 'Coax your husband' (Jud. 14:15); 'Coax him' (Jud. 16:5). Both women use the same language to persuade Samson to reveal his secret: 'You really hate me, you don't love me' (Jud. 14:16); 'How can you say you love me' (Jud. 16:15). Both women are described as nagging him and wearing him down (Jud. 14:17;

16:16). The point is that Samson didn't learn from his mistakes, refusing to perceive how circumstance was repeating in his life.

Jdg 14:17 She wept before him for seven days, while their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him severely. Then she told the riddle to her people. On the seventh day before the sun went down-
As "she cried the whole seven days of the feast" (14:17 NIV), she daily "pressed him". This is the very same Hebrew word used in many passages to describe how an apostate, Gentile-loving Israel would be pressed / oppressed by their enemies (Dt. 28:53,57; Jer. 19:9; Is. 51:13). Samson was in some sense apostate at this time, yet he had faith and was strongly motivated; and for this he was blessed by God with strength to defeat the Philistines. The daughters of the Philistines *hate* God's people (2 Sam. 1:20; Ez. 16:27,57). The Ezekiel passages stress the paradox: that Israel (whom Samson represented) loved the women who hated them.

Samson really loved that girl (Jud. 14:3,17; 15:1,7,11), even though he also hated her (Jud. 15:2; he must have gone through this process again with Delilah in the time that led up to her final betrayal). This true love for her makes Samson's marriage look more questionable.

Jdg 14:18 the men of the city said to him, What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion? He said to them, If you hadn’t ploughed with my heifer you wouldn’t have found out my riddle-
LXX "before he went into the chamber", the same word as in Jud. 15:1.

They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They plowed behind his wife as a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (Jud. 14:18).

There is reason to think that to some degree, Samson may have realized that his life was pointing ahead to the great Messianic deliverer yet to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. Samson may have recognized the strength of the future Saviour when he gave his riddle to the Philistines. He meditated upon that dead lion with the sweet honey in it, and formulated his comment: "What is sweeter than honey? What (or, Who?) is stronger than a lion (Heb. 'the strong one'- this is one of Samson's many word plays)?". 'Who is stronger than the strong one?' was an idea picked up by the Lord Jesus in, I suggest, conscious allusion (Mt. 12:29); although it is masked in the English text. He was the strong one who was stronger than the strong man of sin. Through His victory, the roaring lion of the devil lays dead. And in his skull is sweet honey; did Samson see in this the

same meaning as David did in Ps. 119:103? Did he so understand the nature and method of the Lord's work that he appreciated that the Lord's victory over all His people's enemies would be through the power of God's word, lying there in the place of the mind of the beast He overcame? Yet Samson killed the lion himself; surely he felt that to some degree *he* was the strong man who had overcome the beast, through his application to God's word. His frequent references and allusions to God's past revelation, both in his words and actions, would indicate that he was a man of the word.

Samson's reference to his wife as his "heifer" could be seen as disparaging, just as his father Manoah had referred to his wife as "the woman" rather than "my wife". 'You ploughed with / behind my cow' would be a fair enough rendering. But to plough with another man's heifer, implying to plough in another man's ground, is an expression used in Greek and Latin, as well as extra-Biblical Hebrew, for committing adultery with another man's wife. It was a drinking party with young men known to the bride. It's quite likely Samson is accusing them of having slept with her; and indeed she ends up marrying one of them. They ploughed behind her would suggest anal sex whereby she technically remained a virgin. Such practices are known in parts of Africa. In this case, we have here something that Samson couldn't have planned ahead of time; although on the other hand she may have been 'right in his eyes' in that he saw her as a loose woman who would likely fall for his plan, and justify his anger and desire to create a provocation from the Philistines. In this case we see his penchant for sleeping with loose women; we think of the prostitute in Gaza and Delilah who also did things for money. His anger served as motivator for his continued anger with the Philistines in the area. And this was used by God; even though "What should Samson have done?" would surely have been to count himself blessed God had saved him from a marriage to an unbeliever. And humbly sought to think differently.

We are maybe too quick to assume that "the eater… the strong" meant simply the lion. It was Samson who was without doubt "the strong", and had demonstrated himself stronger than a lion by killing one; and it was he who ate the honey- he was "the eater". "Samson's vomit" could have been the answer to Samson's riddle: Food came from the eater [you vomit if you eat too much honey]; sweet things came out from the strong person.

But we could argue that their answer to the riddle, or the answer he gave his wife, knowing she would share it, was not really complete. The answer was not just 'Honey out of a lion'. Their answer was "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?". But this only answers the second part of the riddle: "Out of the strong came forth sweetness". They correctly define "the strong" and "sweetness". But they make no comment on the first part of the riddle: "Out of the eater came forth food". How exactly did honey come "out of" the lion? The answer was: "Because bees miraculously hived in its carcass after it had been killed". They don't explain that bit. Samson could have

argued that they had not in fact fully explained the riddle. They were warm, but not right there. Again we wonder whether the entire thing was a set up by him. He asked them to agree the wager when they were drunk, guessing that his wife would be pressured by them because the wager was so large, guessing she would give in- and planning this as an excuse to legitimately get angry with them and kill them. For his marriage was because he sought a provocation "from the Philistines". But he was playing with fire, and the fact he returns to sleep with his wife and is angry she has married another man rather suggests that he let that fire burn him. Likewise he later sleeps with a prostitute as a pretext for carrying off the gates of the city. He clearly thinks he can have a little of both. They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (Jud. 14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They apparently didn't fulfil this condition. Likewise on :14 I suggested that they were to perceive that the answer was also "Samson"- the strong who would bring the blessings of honey to Israel. But Samson thought their answer good enough to go and kill 30 men to provide the garments.

Jdg 14:19 The Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck thirty men of them and took their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle-

"Came mightily upon" has the idea of God penetrating / thrusting Himself upon Samson. And yet He was working through Samson's own spirit and desire to slay Philistines. We see how the movement of the Spirit is partly a result of Divine sovereign choice, similar to making a man a Nazirite when Nazirite vows were to be taken as freewill decisions. On the other hand, God's Spirit confirms the human spirit. And yet the impression is surely given that the Divine sovereignty side of the equation is stronger. We see the same happening when the Spirit came upon Saul (1 Sam. 10:6,10; 11:6). I discussed on Jud. 13:2 how Samson only 'began' to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but his birth has many similarities with that of Samson. As if God raised up Samuel to do the work Samson began but didn't finish. But even Samuel didn't do it; and so we can also note the many similarities between Samson and Saul, who was also raised up to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Like Samson, Saul also failed, and so David was raised up to do it (2 Sam. 8:1). The very same Hebrew phrase for the Spirit coming upon them is used of both men (Jud. 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6,10; 11:6). Both committed suicide, and were mocked by the Philistines in the house of their idols (Jud. 16:25; 1 Sam. 31:4,9,10). David likewise has some similarities with Samson in that he too killed a lion with his hands, as a sign he could defeat the Philistine. He killed the Philistine "without a sword in his hand" (1 Sam. 17:50) just as Samson killed the lion with his bare hands (:5). And the Spirit given to Saul passed to him (1 Sam. 16:13). God seems to work similarly today. One man [Samson] is raised up for a task, he fails or only

partially does it; another [Samuel] is raised up and likewise doesn't complete it; and another likewise [Saul]. And then another [David] is raised up who does do it.

Lev. 26:3-8 had promised dramatic success against their enemies *on the basis of* obedience to the Law. The fact Samson had this power was therefore proof that he really was reckoned by God as zealously obedient to the Law; and yet he was like this in the midst of a sadly apostate Israel. I take this view of his strength. This is in itself no mean achievement: to rise to a level of spirituality much higher than that achieved by the surrounding brotherhood.

Significantly, he went down to the valley of Ashkelon, the very place that Joshua had conquered but Judah had been unable to drive out the Philistines from (1:18,19), and slew 30 warriors. But I would prefer to go with a different identification of "Ashkelon" as Khirbet Askalun, about four miles South of modern Tibneh (Timnah), rather than the well-known Ashkelon. Because it seems to me that Samson's mission was to free the area between Zorah and Eshtaol from the Philistines- see on Jud. 13:25. This was where he was first moved by the Spirit to deliver from the Philistines, and it was where he was buried. It was from exactly this relatively small location that the people of Dan emigrated northwards after Samson's death, unable to endure the Philistine domination.

To kill the men and then strip their clothes from their dead, bloodied bodies would have infringed Samson's Nazirite vow; as did touching the carcass of the lion. And probably he participated at the drinking feast, which would have done the same. Yet he reminded a Nazirite to God. But he kept assuming that Divine law and principle didn't apply to him personally, that God somehow understood... and this led to him finally letting his hair be cut [for surely he knew Delilah would betray his secret], and that was reductionism to a point that God would not accept it. A powerful lesson to us, that the fact God may let man 'get away with it' doesn't mean there are no moral boundaries.

His anger was burning, and he went up to his father's house-He seems angry that he had let himself fall too deeply for that Philistine girl (14:19), and "utterly hated her" (15:2). And yet this human anger may also have been mixed with a more righteous anger, in that to give his wife to another was adultery, and it happened that they carried out (perhaps unconsciously?) the punishment for adultery which the law required (Lev 20:14; 21;9). He realized that the Philistines had led him into sin, and he just wanted to destroy the source of his temptation. When he slew the thirty men at Ashkelon, as he seemed to have planned right at the start in his seeking occasion against the Philistines, he was "burning with anger". His motive was partly bitterness and the revenge of a man humiliated and deceived by a woman; but his slaughter of the Philistines was also done in faith (Heb. 11:32-34), with God given strength to confirm his faith.

Jdg 14:20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had considered a friend-

AV "used". We get the impression that he 'used' his wife as he 'used' this best man, because his motive was to use the situation in order to dispossess and murder Philistines. But he also genuinely loved the girl. His motives were terribly mixed. Here we have some more evidence on the side of 'the hand / Spirit of God' leading Samson rather than purely his own plans. The fact his bride was cruelly married off to his best man so quickly [despite his parents having paid the bride price for her] would have provoked his anger and been seen by everyone as unacceptable; and wrong as this anger may have been, in the sense that the planned marriage was disobedience, God worked through this. His failed marriage and the betrayal led him to hate the Philistines yet more. It stimulated deep anger issues within him that lasted the rest of his life. The subsequent events all relate to his anger with the Philistines and his desire for revenge, indeed it was all more of a personal vendetta than seeking to deliver Israel from the Philistines. It was his failed marriage that led him to use a prostitute and consort with Delilah who was likely not much less than a prostitute, willing to do anything for money. And yet through these failures God's purpose was worked out- of 'beginning' to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

JUDGES CHAPTER 15

Jdg 15:1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat. He said, I will go in to my wife into the room. But her father wouldn't allow him to go in-

This is another anticlimax, as in Jud. 14:1. We expect and hope that Samson has learnt his lesson and will keep well away from Philistine women. But we are disappointed; he returns to have sex with her and finds she is perhaps literally in the bedroom with her new husband, the best man at his wedding to her. His father had offered a young goat to Yahweh (Jud. 13:18), but Samson brings one as a gift to his Philistine father in law. But again, his failure is used to enable him to fight the Philistines with some kind of excuse. He speaks of being "blameless" by taking revenge, perhaps because this element to his behaviour would shield his people from being attacked by the Philistines. Because what he did would have been seen as vaguely legitimate within the revenge culture of the times.

Here we have another anomaly in the Samson story. His wife betrayed him and marries his best man. But despite his anger, still he loves her and comes back to her, for sex. He will do the same with Delilah despite all her betrayals. He never learns his lessons from his failures. But the anomaly is in that he wants to return to her for sex, rather than

keeping an angry distance from her. He had slain 30 Philistine men to provide the 30 garments. Those men were from Askelun, a local village. Again we see the "of the Lord" element in all this. His sexual passions are clear, as is his naivety, born of allowing his passions to be overriding. But God works through this- in order to bring about further judgment upon the Philistines, and to coax Samson towards his intended potential of delivering that area from the Philistines.

We get the impression that the woman's father blocked the door of the bedroom where the woman was. She was newly married- although marriages usually took time to arrange. We get the impression she was within the bedroom having sex with Samson's one time best man. The whole situation, caused by Samson arriving at the very worst moment, was of God. Because it fuelled Samson's anger. Even though that anger was in many ways wrong. And yet God worked through that anger, empowering Samson to catch 300 foxes and tie their tails together.

As the Spirit came upon Gideon (Jud. 6:34), so it is described as coming upon Samson (Jud. 14:6). It seems that the incident in chapter 15, where Samson visits his wife with a kid and uses this as an excuse to kill many Philistines, was planned by him to reflect Gideon's zeal. The way Gideon brought a kid to Yahweh (Jud. 6:19) may reflect how Samson came with a kid (Jud. 15:1). See on :4.

Jdg 15:2 Her father said, I was certain that you utterly hated her, therefore I gave her to your companion. Isn't her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead-

Samson really loved that girl (Jud. 14:3,17; 15:1,7,11), even though he also utterly hated her (he must have gone through this process again with Delilah in the time that led up to her final betrayal). This true love for her makes Samson's marriages look more questionable. The turning of love to hatred is what happened when Amnon raped Tamar. The Biblical record is consistently psychologically credible, and true to observed human experience in this area. Unlike the contemporary, uninspired histories and legends of the other nations around Israel.

He seems angry that he had let himself fall too deeply for that Philistine girl (Jud. 14:19), and "utterly hated her". And yet this human anger may also have been mixed with a more righteous anger, in that to give his wife to another was adultery, and it happened that they carried out (perhaps unconsciously?) the punishment for adultery which the law required (Lev 20:14; 21;9). He realized that the Philistines had led him into sin, and he just wanted to destroy the source of his temptation.

Jdg 15:3 Samson said to them, This time I will be blameless of harm to the Philistines-

He burnt those vineyards in a desire to be "blameless from the Philistines" (15:3 AVmg.). The same word is translated unpunished, guiltless, innocent, clean, acquitted; as if he knew he had sinned, but believed that by further fighting of Philistines he could gain his forgiveness. He had to be brought to the shame of Gaza Prison to learn that forgiveness was by absolute faith, not works and hatred of this present world.

Samson insisted that he would be "blameless" if he now destroyed the Philistines' economy by arson (3). But on a secular level, his causing of famine and pain to so many was not an appropriate response to his betrayal by his bride's family. This is all similar to Samson claiming that the Philistine girl was "right in my eyes", using the word for just or righteous. He felt his using her to provoke a fight with the Philistines was somehow 'right' and righteous. But he now wants sex with her... his ethics are definitely mixed. Yet God worked through it, even though Samson was on one level unethical and wrong to reason like this. Just as God worked through his anger problem.

Jdg 15:4 Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, tied them tail to tail in pairs and put a firebrand between each pair of tails-
I noted on :1 how Samson was seeking to imitate Gideon, who apparently was his hero. He takes 300 foxes and puts firebrands in their tails. Why 300? Surely this was in conscious imitation of how Gideon took 300 men and put firebrands in their hands, and with them destroyed God's enemies (Jud. 7:16). The connection between the faithful 300 and the foxes could suggest that in Samson's eyes, he didn't even have one faithful Israelite to support him; he had to use animals instead. He is consistently portrayed as a man acting alone, not leading Israel, which was perhaps the Divine intention for him as a judge. Throughout the Samson account, there are things which show God's power overriding nature. Bees hiving in a carcass is an obvious one. Another example is how foxes, who are solitary creatures, are put into pairs and take fire in a specific direction. Some have argued that jackals must be in view, because they are pack animals. The lesson of the foxes cooperating was perhaps to show Samson that his solitary personal war against the Philistines was not God's way. We recall how he didn't share his secrets with neither his wife nor his parents; how he twice went for a wander in the vineyards alone; and never told his parents about slaying the lion nor the source of the honey he later found in it. Solitary endeavour was not God's intention for Samson. Had he engaged with this weakness of his, he might indeed have fulfilled his mission potential of liberating at least the Zorah-Eshtaol area from the Philistines. To confirm Samson in learning this lesson, the incident with the foxes now takes his conflict with the Philistines away from a personal argument with his wife's family and neighbours, and towards a total engagement with the Philistines. He slew 1000 of them, so we can imagine they mobilized a few thousand warrior against him. His slaying of the 30 men after his betrayal at the wedding apparently went without reprisal from the Philistines. It was perhaps seen as within the limits of an eye for an eye in their *lex talonis* culture,

seeing that Samson had been so badly treated and shamed at the wedding. But his action with the foxes would have brought hunger and economic ruin to the Philistines, and elevated their conflict with Samson to an altogether different level.

Jdg 15:5 When he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing grain of the Philistines and burnt up both the shocks and the standing grain, and also the olive groves-

Samson used the whole situation as an opportunity to burn up the corn and vineyards of the Philistines, in conscious allusion to how the law stipulated that a man who did this to his Israelite neighbour must make retribution (Ex. 22:5). He was emphasizing that these people were *not* his neighbours, they were not in covenant relationship, and he openly showed that he treated them accordingly. Likewise he took vengeance on the Philistines (Jud. 15:5; 16:28), when the Law taught that Israel were not to take vengeance (same word) *on each other* (Lev. 19:18), but could do so on their enemies (Num. 31:2; Dt. 32:43 cp. Josh. 10:13). Note, in passing, how he set those foxes up as cherubim, again imitating Gideon's flaming torches- a ball of whirling fire coming in judgment upon the Philistines. The fox was a symbol of apostate Israel in later Scripture (Ez. 13:4); perhaps Samson made the same connection, and wanted to symbolize how through his faith and insight, weak Israel could be turned into the cherubim of God in bringing judgment on the Philistines and deliverance for themselves. The way he used their tails to bring such destruction may have been a reference to Dt. 28:13,44, where apostate Israel, suffering for their sins as they were in Samson's time, are described with the same word: they would be the tail of the nations. He saw that he was the one who could bring salvation and blessing to Israel.

He later teased Delilah to tie him with seven “withs”, the Hebrew word implying made from a vine. He just would mess with the forbidden. The way he burnt up those vineyards in 15:5 may have been as a result of realizing that the answer lay in total devotion and rooting out of temptation, rather than wandering around in them as he did in Jud. 14; cutting out the eye that offends. See on :3. His hatred of the vineyards was perhaps a reflection of his alcoholism. Surely he only slept and let Delilah's men cut his hair or bind him because he was drunk.

Destruction of fruit trees in war was forbidden (Dt. 20:19) and the contemporary culture considered that whilst theft of your enemy's harvest was acceptable, destroying their fruit trees was excessively cruel. But Samson does this, intentionally.

Jdg 15:6 Then the Philistines said, Who has done this? They said, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because his wife was given to his companion. The Philistines came up and burnt her and her father with fire-

The seven day marriage feast, associated with a deceitful father in law offering the sister

of the desired bride in marriage- this is all the same as Jacob experienced (Gen. 29:27), right down to the fact that the younger sister was fairer (Jud. 15:2 cp. Gen. 29:16,17). Samson should have learnt from the evident similarities with Jacob; but like Jacob, he still trusted his own strength. See on Jud. 13:18.

Jdg 15:7 Samson said to them, If you behave like this, surely I will be avenged on you- Saul followed Samson's weak side when at this same time he demanded to be avenged of his enemies (1 Sam. 14:24); yet this wasn't Samson at his best (Jud. 15:7; 16:28). On one hand, Samson uses this murder of his wife and father in law as a pretext for killing more Philistines. But yet we also sense that he had loved the girl, and wanted vengeance as any Hebrew man would have wanted for the murder of his wife. It was all about him, "I will be avenged", and he fails to learn the lesson even in his last words, demanding vengeance for his eyes. Likewise he boasts that "I" have slain a thousand men just with a jawbone. Yet still he will be saved. His motives were hopelessly mixed, flesh and spirit confused together. Whereas the life of simple, total devotion to the Spirit is the only way to peace and real spiritual achievement.

He felt he had done to the Philistines as they had done to him, and he felt his behaviour to them was somehow in terms of an eye for an eye, the lex talonis: "If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7). "As they have done to me, so I have done to them" (Jud. 15:11). He kills 30 men because his wife betrayed him. He burnt up the corn harvest because the wife he had abandoned had remarried. His expectation that he has the right to sex with her after her remarriage is unreasonable and betrays a sense of over entitlement. He kills many people because his ex-wife had been executed by the Philistines. He kills a thousand men with a jawbone because the Philistine authorities tried to arrest him. He wrecks a city gate because he was angry with himself for sleeping with a whore. Then at the end he wants to kill 3000 people because he has lost his sight. Again, his revenge is disproportionate. The revenge he took was always far more than an eye for an eye, even though he sees it all as justified, legitimate revenge within the terms of lex talonis ["If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7)]. The Mosaic examples of an eye for an eye are always careful to insist that any such punishment must never exceed the harm initially done. Samson seems to have had a sense of over entitlement and a genuinely warped sense of equality / measure for measure. Possibly an overbearing mother and distant, weak and ineffective father contributed to this narcissism. We note of course that the Lord's teaching was that "an eye for an eye" was not anyway the ideal standard of spirituality. And yet God worked through this, to begin the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines.

Jdg 15:8 He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them, then he went and

lived in the cave in the rock of Etam-
He smote the Philistines "hip and thigh" (AV) with a great slaughter, alluding to the sacrifices (s.w. "shoulder" Ex. 29:22; Lev. 9:21; 1 Sam. 9:24; Ez. 24:4- nearly all usages of this word in Samson's Bible referred to the "shoulder" of the sacrifices), as if he was offering them as a sacrifice to Yahweh. "Hip on thigh" is apparently a better rendering, implying hand to hand combat. This would serve to emphasize his contact with the dead bodies, as he hurled them to the ground one by one. And yet the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him to enable this- a breach of the letter of the Nazarite law.

But then he "went *down* (again- see on Jud. 14:1) and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam. You don't go down if you are going up to the top of a rock. But perhaps spiritually he 'went down', to dwell in isolation from the people he was supposed to be judging / leading, in the rocks. Dwelling in the rocks is associated with a bad conscience in Is. 2:21 and 57:5. Yet for all this, God counted him as having judged Israel 20 years at this stage (15:20); even though there was this evident break when he simply ran away from his people.

We enquire why Samson took refuge in Judah. I suggest he wanted to protect his own people of Dan, or at least the small area he was called upon to liberate, between Eshtaol and Zorah.

Jdg 15:9 Then the Philistines went up, and encamped in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi-
Samson's victory at Lehi may have inspired Shammah to slay the Philistines at the same place, years later (2 Sam. 23:11; AV "into a troop" is Heb. "Lehi"). And yet Samson's victory with a donkey jawbone would have been inspired by Shamgar's victory with an ox goad (Jud. 3:31). This is how the body of Christ should function; one spiritual victory inspiring another.

Jdg 15:10 The men of Judah said, Why have you come up against us? They said, We have come up to take Samson prisoner, to do to him as he has done to us-
He says that he had killed Philistines because "I merely did to them what they did to me" (Jud. 15:11 NIV). There was no mention of the fact that he was seeking occasion against God's enemies (even though he was speaking to Hebrews). He passed off his actions as pure revenge- which on one level, was all they were. The Philistines had earlier said that they wanted to take Samson "to do to him as he did to us" (Jud. 15:10). And Samson replies in the same primitive way: that he only did to them what they did to him. It seems that Samson spoke to them on their level. And yet when the Philistines came upon Samson, roaring against him like the lion in Jud. 14:5, God's Spirit once again came upon him in confirmation of his faith. And yet his motives were hopelessly mixed. He was partly the angry young man, the jilted lover, wishing to express his native anger- and

yet doing so by claiming that he was serving God. And indeed he was- but with mixed motives. We see this kind of thing in ourselves, and in many who claim to serve God.

Jdg 15:11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, Don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us?-
This was tacit recognition of the depth of their apostacy. They seemed to have no regret that they were fulfilling the many earlier prophecies that they would be dominated by their enemies if they were disobedient to Yahweh. The fact that Israel were dominated throughout Samson's life by the Philistines is proof enough that they were apostate at this time (Jud. 13:1 cp. Jud. 15:20; 16:31). Israel, as so often, refused the saviour / deliverer raised up for them, and preferred to remain in bondage. Just as so many today. We note that the men of Judah numbered three thousand warriors. Potentially, this was a force large enough to fight the Philistines. But this continues the theme of men not living up to their potential. The ideas are juxtaposed- they had 3000 warriors, but accepted the Philistines ruled over them. They had the potential to break free, but accepted their servitude. And are only recorded as using their potential strength to fight against their own deliverer.

What is this that you have done to us?-
Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and too over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that you have done *unto us*?".

He said to them, As they did to me, so have I done to them-
See on Jud. 13:5. If we ask 'What exactly did they do to him? What did they kill and burn of his?', the answer must be 'His wife'. He perhaps felt that she was worth hundreds of them, and the burning of their livelihood, leaving famine in it's wake, was what they had done to him emotionally. Yet it is curious how he loved the Philistines and yet hated them. Samson's answer however reveals that his main motive was personal revenge. He gives no hint that he sees his actions as part of a Divine deliverance of His people from the Philistines. Yet that was his potential and His intended purpose, as the Angel explained to his mother. The Philistines have just used the same phrase- they want to do to Samson as he did to them (:10), and now he says he wants to do the same to them, as they did to him. This is a classic case of "an eye for an eye", with each stage of the 'hitting back' being of greater magnitude than what was done. It is clearly out of step with the spirit of the Lord Jesus, who taught specifically not to think and act like this. We are again left with the impression that Samson was all about personal vengeance, shame, pride and anger issues rather than wanting to deliver Israel from the Philistines to Yahweh's glory.

Jdg 15:12 They said to him, We have come down to tie you up so that we can deliver you into the hand of the Philistines. Samson said to them, Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves-

He had to beg his own people not to try to kill him themselves (even whilst he had long hair), because he knew that the strength he had was only for certain specific purposes- i.e., to deliver God's people from the Philistines (15:12). The way they came to bind Samson has suggestions of Legion (Lk. 8:29); perhaps they considered him to be mentally ill, and attributed his strength to fits? Or worse, did they consider the work of the Spirit of God to deliver them to be that of demons? If so, Samson was typifying the Lord's later experience (Mt. 12:24-27). The way Jesus spoke of himself in this context as the stronger than the strong man (cp. Samson) encourages this view. And yet the strong man who was bound, i.e. the devil, can also be seen as a reference to Samson. Again, we are left with a difficult question: Was Samson telling them the truth when he said that his motive at Lehi was purely personal revenge? Or were they so unspiritual that he spoke to them on their level, even though at other times he pleaded with them to quit their idolatry (Jud. 2:16-19)? Or were his motives simply hopelessly mixed? Within him was a burning desire to do God's work; he was the one faithful Israelite who could chase 1,000; and yet in the company of his unspiritual brethren, he let his human side come out, and wrapped up his zeal for the Lord in human terms- even though there was some truth in how he expressed it. This kind of thing can so easily happen in our Christian experience; we bring out the worst in each other.

Jdg 15:13 They said, No, we will tie you up and deliver you into their hand, but we will not kill you. They bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock-

The way they tie him up and he begs them not to kill him (15:12,13) hardly sounds like Samson judging Israel (:20). And yet this was his desire, and this is what God imputed to him, in the same way as he was a Nazarite to God (i.e. in God's eyes?) all his life (Jud. 13:7)- although he broke his Nazariteship by contact with dead bodies (Jud. 14:19; 15:15 cp. Num. 6:6) and probably by drinking wine at his wedding (Jud. 14:10 "feast" = 'drinking', Heb.). This was not only imputed righteousness, but God counting the essential intentions of a weak willed man to him as if he had actually achieved what he fain would do.

Jdg 15:14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him, and the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on him. The ropes that were on his arms became as charred flax, and his ropes dropped off his hands-

The Spirit likewise came upon him to kill the Philistines in Lehi (15:14). It wasn't a permanent strength. This is in harmony with the way in which the Spirit was used in the New Testament. The Spirit came upon the apostles and they were filled up with it, as it

were, and then drained of it once the work was done; and had to be filled with it again when the next eventuality arose. The shouting of the Philistines recalled the roaring of the lion against Samson (Jud. 14:5). As in our lives, one experience prepares us for the next one, which occurs on a far greater scale than the first one.

Jdg 15:15 He found a fresh jawbone of an ass and struck down a thousand men with it- The record emphasizes it was a "fresh" jawbone. This meant Samson would be touching something unclean, and thus ending his Naziriteship. Yet still God empowered him to slay the Philistines in his unclean state. And we have to ask whether it was not, surely, of God that this fresh jawbone was there. God could have arranged an iron weapon to have come into his hand, or a jagged millstone or sharp flintstone. But the providential arrangement was for something unclean. This, then, is something slightly more than God tolerating Samson's breaking the letter of the Nazirite vow. This is God, having set Samson up as a Nazirite from birth, actually putting something unclean in his hand. And He then makes water flow for Samson to drink from the unclean carcass (see on :19). The message was that God accepted Samson was not very pure... but didn't want Samson to think that He wouldn't work through him because of that. Tragically Samson ended up sinning that grace may abound in that he came to assume that even his hair could be shaved, and still he would receive the Spirit.

Samson slaying Philistines with a jawbone suggests Shamgar slaying Philistines with an ox goad (15:15 cp. 3:31).
15:15 Samson grabbed a jaw-bone and exalted that with *that* he had slain a thousand men at Lehi. The word for "jawbone", Lehi, means literally 'that which is soft'. God was teaching him that His strength was only perfected in weakness. His words are a conscious allusion to Josh. 23:10 (and Lev. 26:8): "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, He it is that fights for you". It could be that he counted the bodies, or counted each man he slew, consciously trying to get up to 1,000 in order to fulfill the prophecy. Although "a thousand" may refer to a military unit rather than a literal number. Samson doesn't say that he alone killed the thousand men; he did it with the jaw-bone (coming from a Hebrew root meaning 'soft', 'weak'). This jaw bone is one of the seven weak things which are mentioned in Judges as being the tools of God's salvation: left handed man (Jud. 3:21); an ox goad (Jud. 3:31); a woman (Jud. 4:4); a nail (Jud. 4:21); a piece of a millstone (Jud. 9:53); a pitcher and trumpet (Jud. 7:20). God's people are likened to an ass frequently (Gen. 49:11,14; Is. 1:3; Jer. 2:24; Hos. 8:9; Lk. 13:15; 14:5). The first two references would have been known to Samson at Lehi; and he may have reflected that the fact the firstborn of an ass must be redeemed by a lamb was prophetic of how Messiah would save all His otherwise condemned people (Ex. 13:13; 34:20). Could it not be that despite their cruel betrayal of him and utter faithlessness, dear Samson felt he was living out a kind of acted parable of what was possible for Israel: that through his zeal, and in his hands, the weak people of God could

achieve the great victory over thousands which Moses and Joshua had earlier foretold? In this he was a superb type of the Lord.

Jdg 15:16 Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps on heaps; with the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men-
Samson sees all this as a personal triumph rather than seeing it in the context of God's plan to liberate Dan from the Philistines. Samson's victory song at Lehi smacks of personal vengeance, showing how mixed were his motives. There is little suggestion of the humble servant merely doing God's will:
"With a donkey's jaw-bone
I have made donkeys of them.
With a donkey's jaw-bone
I have killed a thousand men"
(15:16 NIV).

Lev. 26:3-8 had promised dramatic success against their enemies *on the basis of* obedience to the Law. The fact Samson had this power was therefore proof that he really was reckoned by God as zealously obedient to the Law; and yet he was like this in the midst of a sadly apostate Israel. This character study of Samson takes this view of his strength. This is in itself no mean achievement: to rise to a level of spirituality much higher than that achieved by the surrounding brotherhood.

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

God counted Samson's heart and partial obedience as enough obedience to work through him, and treat him as if he were obedient. Just as he was a "Nazirite *to God*".

Jdg 15:17 When he had finished speaking he threw away the jawbone, and that place was called Ramath Lehi-
And yet it was out of that jawbone which he discarded that water came to save his life (:19). He had used and then as it were cast away his first wife and best man, considering that the end [defeating the Philistines] justified the means. He is perhaps being shown that his attitude was wrong. The value and meaning of the human person, even if they are Philistines, is such that nobody should ever just be used and discarded.

Jdg 15:18 He was very thirsty and called on Yahweh and said, You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; now shall I die for thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised-
Samson had broken the Nazirite vow by touching the lion's carcass and eating the unclean honey from it. He had apparently drunk alcohol at the drinking party. He had touched the wet, fresh jawbone of a dead animal. He had touched dead bodies. Right after that, he faces death from thirst. He only survives by praying to Yahweh and then receiving miraculous water. God was teaching him that all his breaking of the Nazirite conditions was not unnoticed by Him, nor was Samson granted some kind of automatic exemption from God's law. He realizes this, and prays strongly to God for salvation. God was putting the brake on him. Or trying to. Because in the final incident with Delilah and his hair, he is brought up to reality with a harsh jolt. He effectively allowed Delilah to have his hair shorn [for surely he knew she would do this], and thus ended his Naziriteship. He on some level assumed this infringement of God's requirements would also be acceptable with God, and "as at other times" he could shake himself, receive power and murder the Philistines. But we cannot practice reductionism until there is no moral basis left in our relationship with God. See on Jud. 16:20.

His request for water in that dry place was abundantly answered- in the same way as Yahweh had responded to exactly the same request from a faithless Israel in the desert (Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13). And the way he names the well after the miraculous provision of water, and the way presumably the opened well remained (15:19), has links with pseudo-Israelite Hagar (Gen. 16:19 21:19). And yet even in these similarities, it must be noted that there was a certain spiritual culture in Samson's prayer. He didn't make a direct, crude demand for water. He placed his situation before God, and left it to Him to respond as He knew best. This is a feature of many spiritual prayers: not to crudely, directly ask for the obvious; but to simply inform the Almighty of the situation, in faith.

Samson at Lehi saw them as unclean asses; and yet he loved their women. And yet in the midst of this almost arrogance, he cries: "I thirst", and so exhibits something of the spirit of Christ in His final hour of agony and ultimate conquest on the cross (Jn. 19:28). Samson despised the uncircumcised Philistines, as he had been brought up to (Jud. 14:3). He knew they hated him and yet he loved them and yet he hated them- all this shows the complexity of human nature, and describes our attitude to the world and the things of the flesh. And yet the only real answer is to *cut off* the flesh; to gouge out the eye that offends; not to comfortably go along with the fact that we have such a love: hate relationship with the flesh. For we cannot serve two masters; we can only ultimately love one. The Lord we serve is in many ways a demanding Lord.
Samson dying of thirst crying desperately for water recalls Hagar's experience (15:19 cp. Gen. 21:19).

Jdg 15:19 But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi and water came out of it-
This is the language of God's provision for Israel in the wilderness. The word translated "Lehi" is that for jaw bone (AV "God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout"), as if the water came out of the discarded jaw bone. “God split open the hollow place which was near [or “in”] the jawbone". As discussed on :15, here we have an example of God yet again taking the initiative in showing that He would work through the unclean. For He could have made the water appear from some other source. Likewise He worked through the bees and honey miraculously appearing in the cadaver of the lion.

When he had drunk, his spirit came again and he revived, therefore its name was called En Hakkore-
We note how place names were altered or given to commemorate what had happened. The way that so many paganic place names survived in ancient Israel is a reflection therefore of how little effort they made to eradicate pagan influence- for they were mostly idolaters themselves. We have here another miraculous anomaly in the story- a spring remained on the top of a hill, Ramath Lehi (:15), 'jawbone hill'. Springs are generally in valleys, not on the top of hills; and so this one was called the fountain of the one who called [on God].

Which is in Lehi to this day-
I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9;

Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 15:20 He judged Israel in the days of the Philistines for twenty years-
God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it, and only 'began' to do it (Jud. 13:5). They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. And he was hardly accepted as Israel's judge / saviour, for they tied him up and handed him over to the Philistines. He made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith. On the other hand, we must factor in 1 Sam. 12:11, a comment about Samson that commentators have generally not given due weight to: "Yahweh sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety". The context is Samuel arguing that Israel didn't need a king to deliver them from their enemies, because they had had judges like Samson who delivered them. This certainly suggests that Samson did achieve something more than a few personal scraps with the Philistines, motivated by his personal anger issues. But it's not recorded. The Philistines themselves described him as "our enemy, the destroyer of our country who has slain many of us" (Jud. 16:24). Which encourages us to think that in God's wisdom, He has intentionally chosen to just record Samson at his worst, the low points of his life. To demonstrate that a believer [as Hebrews 11 treats Samson] may have very low moments, poor motivations etc. and yet still be a believer. It's no bad exercise to mentally write a spiritual autobiography of yourself, recording only you at your lowest moments. And yet by grace through faith, you too will be saved eternally.

JUDGES CHAPTER 16

Jdg 16:1 Samson went to Gaza and saw there a prostitute, and went in to her-
We noted earlier on Jud. 14:1 and 15:1 that the record presents us with strong anticlimaxes. We expect Samson to be spiritually strong, but he collapses in both 14:1 and 15:1. But by the end of Jud. 15 we are left with Samson strong in faith and humility, and having judged Israel 20 years. We are left hopeful that he is on the way up, spiritually. And now we read he goes to a Philistine city and sleeps with a prostitute. Again, our spiritual expectations are dashed. Yet despite all these failures to live up to potential, he will still be saved because of his faith.

This incident repeats how he went somewhere and saw a woman in Jud. 14. He presents as absolutely failing to examine himself, totally not self critical, blind to the consequences of his sins and therefore never learning from his mistakes. We think likewise of how a femme fatale teased his secret from him in Jud. 14 and then again in Jud. 16.

The way this passage starts with "Then" (see Heb., AV) is one of several classic conjunctions which occur in the Biblical record. The "But" of Acts 5:1 is another. After the spiritual and personal glory of the fight at Lehi, "Then..." Samson goes to Gaza and sees a whore. It may not have happened immediately afterwards (Jud. 15:20), but it seems purposefully placed where it is in the record. A similar example occurs in Jud. 14:19,20 cp. Jud. 15:1: after repenting of his marriage with the Philistine girl and using his failure as an opportunity to seek occasion against God's enemies, Samson then relents and lets his human love for the girl take him over, and he goes to visit and sleep with her. And again in Jud. 16:3, we see Samson repentant as he lies there at midnight, and he rises up and in the spirit of the Lord's cross, carries away the gate of his enemies. And then, "it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman..." (Jud. 16:4). He simply couldn't keep up the level of spiritual intensity which he fain would have. And again, we know much about this problem .

And yet Samson went to Gaza conscious that his people had failed to drive out the tribes there (Josh. 11:22). Judah had captured it in Joshua's strength (Jud. 1:18), but had let the Philistines return. So Samson chose Gaza from spiritual motives; and yet he schemed out his plan to enable him to gratify his flesh. But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he "got up and took hold of the doors..." (Jud. 16:1,3 NIV). If he went in to spend the night there, he presumably entered the house at around 7 or 8. He had what he wanted, and then lay there thinking, the record seems to suggest, and decided to not lay there all night as he planned, but get up and do God's work. Whilst it is unrecorded, surely there were prayers of deep and fervent repentance as he lay there? His conscience likewise seems to have struck him after he attempted to marry the Philistine girl, and also when he burnt up the vineyards. And so again here. He may have justified his behaviour by reference back (in his deep subconscious, maybe) to how the spies sought to destroy Jericho by entering the city and lodging with a whore- who also lived near the city gate.

When Samson decided to attack Gaza by going into a harlot's house, he may have been consciously imitating the way the spies played their part in Jericho's destruction (16:1). And yet it was once again only a surface imitation. He fell for the 'little of both' syndrome, justifying it under the guise of Scriptural examples.

Jdg 16:2 The Gazites were told, Samson is here! They surrounded him and laid wait for

him all night in the gate of the city, staying quiet all night and saying, Wait until dawn, then we will kill him-
"They laid wait for him all night" is describing what they intended to do; for he arose at midnight. They were apparently "in the gate of the city", where the whorehouse was just as Rahab's was. They waited outside her house, in the gate of the city, probably in the many guard chambers there were around the gate complex of a city. Yet they "surrounded him"; so he was in a room within the gate complex, used as a brothel, just as Rahab's brothel was on the city gate. Just as the Philistines would do later around Delilah's house [because he failed to see the similarities]. But Samson picks up the gate of the city- presumably killing the Philistines or making them flee. For the city gate complex was always heavily guarded in any city. Taking the gate of the city with its bar would likely have wrecked the whorehouse. The bar was a horizontal rod at the backs of the two leaves of the gate.

See on Ps. 118:10-12. The purpose of this final tragic chapter in Samson's life was to bring Samson to a final realization that there was no third way in the service of Yahweh: it's all or nothing. The Lord worked through Samson's 'little of both' syndrome. The Lord Jesus read the Samson record this way: He recommended that we too tear our eyes out to stop us stumbling from the path of total devotion (Mk. 9:47). We all know how the story turns out. And it's one of those parts of Scripture which I for one don't reading. I don't want to go on from chapter 15 to chapter 16. I know what's coming, and I'd rather not be reminded of the whole tragic sequence. And yet it's there, absolutely for our learning. And *Samson should have already learnt*. As his first wife had vexed her with her words to tease his secret from him, so Delilah did. As the Philistines laid wait for Samson as he lay with the whore in Gaza (16:2), so they laid wait in Delilah's bedroom (16:9). He had already repented of using God's service as an excuse for satisfying his own flesh in the incident with the Gaza prostitute. He had bitterly walked away from his first Philistine wife. He burnt down the vineyards, recalling how he had foolishly strolled in them as a Nazarite. He must have looked back and seen how he had played with fire. And now, he goes and does it all again. He goes to the valley of Sorek, 'choice vines', and Samson falls for Delilah, 'the vine'. He went down to the vineyards again; the Nazarite tried to take fire into his bosom again.

Jdg 16:3 Samson lay until midnight, then arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts, picked them up, along with the bar, put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain that faces Hebron-
"Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight" (16:3 AV) gives a different picture: of Samson 'laying' with her as a man lays with a woman, and then getting up and going out to do God's work. The interplay between sexuality and spirituality was never stronger.

The incident in Gaza is evidently typical of the Lord's work. There was Samson, "the splendour of the sun" , 'compassed in' by his enemies (as Christ on the cross, Ps. 118:5,10-12) in Gaza ('fortified stronghold', cp. death). Then he arose in the darkness, rendered powerless the gates of death and carried them up 30 miles to a high altitude (cp. Heaven), to Hebron, 'the city of fellowship', where the tomb of Abraham was (Gen. 23:19), and where Gentile giants had once lived (Num. 13:22), conquered by faithful Israelites. Joshua had taken Hebron (Josh. 10:36) but Israel had not followed up his victory, and the Philistines had returned; Caleb then took it (Josh. 15:13), but again, by Samson's time, the Philistines were back. And Samson, although a type of Christ, was intensely aware of all this failure (cp. how he chose Gaza and Timnath, areas with a similar history, for his other exploits). It would seem that Samson killed the men at the gates, the leaders of the city, and then took the gates with him (16:3 cp. 2). The Hebrew used for Samson 'taking away' the gates is that translated 'possess' in the Genesis promises. Thus he possessed the gates of his enemies and slew their figureheads, as the Lord did through the cross. Samson obviously saw some specific meaning in taking the gates to Hebron and the tomb of Abraham. He surely saw that he was prefiguring Messiah's work of taking the gate of his enemies, as promised to Abraham. Or perhaps he saw himself as 'in' the Messiah, and sharing in what He would do in the future. Archaeologists have found tablets that refer to the power of Baal to possess the gates of all who oppose him; and Samson evidently wanted to show the superiority of Yahweh over Baal. The fellowship ('Hebron') which was enabled by the Lord's victory should never be undone by us; He died that He might gather together in one all God's people, to reconcile us all in one body both to each other and to God. To break apart the body is therefore to deny the essential intention of the cross. There are other points of contact with the Lord's passion. The men of Gaza laid wait in the gates of the city; they were therefore the rulers? But they decided to only kill him in the morning. The rulers of the Jews decided likewise.

It is hard to decide whether Samson was an ordinary man "out of weakness made strong" by the Spirit; or whether he was a giant, extra empowered at times by the Spirit. To carry the gates and the bar that ran across them would require not only strength, but a very large person. The bar was a horizontal rod at the backs of the two leaves of the gate. Likewise his ability to touch both the pillars on which Dagon's temple rested would have required very long arms. A person's arm span is related to their height, and various Dagon temples have been uncovered. For his hands to be on each pillar, he would have been abnormally tall. This consideration could support the idea that he was a giant, and that in turn would perhaps explain his apparent lack of intelligence, his mother's previous barrenness due to genetic issues, inability to settle down with a woman, hot blooded compulsive behaviour, inability to charismatically lead Israel in battle and the fear the Philistines had of him when he first appeared on the scene at his wedding party [in the LXX]. In this case, he was the Israelite version of Goliath the Philistine giant.

Samson's strength isn't taken away despite his sin. He assumes that he can touch the unclean and morally do as he wishes, and God will remain with him. The fact God by grace appears to let man 'get away with it' leads men to the same tragic decline as we will now read of. It is a powerful warning. We note Hebron was 30 miles away and at an elevation of 3300 feet. It was on the frontier of Israelite and Philistine territory, and the gates placed there on a mountain there would have been visible to the entire Shephelah. If this mountain is the modern El Montar, it towered as a landmark familiar to all travellers along the caravan route from Syria to Egypt. Samson was seeking to make a point and to inspire Israel that they too could possess the gates of their enemies. Yet he does this right after spending an evening with a whore in Gaza. How do men feel after visiting a whore? Angry with themselves and wanting to prove themselves in some other way, since they have failed to find or keep a wife as the love of their life. Samson's physical feat right afterwards was surely motivated by anger, with himself and with the Philistines and their whore. But God empowered that anger with a gift of His Spirit, and worked through Samson. And finally will save Samson eternally. We gasp at His grace.

Jdg 16:4 Afterward, he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah-

Samson had a mixed conscience when he slew the lion. He was in the vineyards, the very place where he shouldn't have been as a Nazarite, although he justified it by spiritual and even Biblical reasoning. He then burns up those vineyards in order to have a blameless conscience. He then loses that good conscience and cowers in the rocks. And then later he goes to the valley of Sorek (Heb. 'the vine') and forges a relationship with another worthless woman. Samson's marriage looks less acceptable in this context. So he returned to his old desire to walk near the forbidden fruit of the vine. His purges of conscience were temporary, and he returned to the old haunts and ways.

Jdg 16:5 The lords of the Philistines came to her and said, Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and how we might prevail against him to tie him up and subdue him. Then we will each one of us give you eleven hundred pieces of silver-

"Delilah" is a distinctly Hebrew name, and Sorek was on the border of Hebrew and Philistine territory. I will suggest on Jud. 17:1 that she is in fact the Hebrew woman who uses her wealth to sponsor her son to make an idol.

Prov. 6:26,27; 7:1 make clear allusion to Samson and Delilah, and they suggest that Delilah was a "whorish woman". In this case, her motivation for betraying Samson was fundamentally financial, apart from other lesser factors which there probably were. The bribe she was offered has been estimated in modern terms as around US$ 2 million (2025). And Judas likewise went to the chief priests and asked how much they would

give him for betraying the Lord. Again, Samson was a type of Christ. This all indicates the unbelievable materialism which is in our natures: to betray a good man, even the Son of God, ultimately for pieces of metal. We must have all asked: 'Why, oh why, did Samson go on trusting her, when it was so obvious she was going to betray him?'. It may have been because she was an Israelitess (even if a renegade). The way she says "The Philistines are upon you!" (16:20) and the way the lords of the Philistines came up to her (16:5) may suggest this. Their offer of money to her was exactly after the pattern of the Jews' approach to Judas. The way "pieces of silver" feature in both records leads us to wonder whether the correspondence was so exact that she also betrayed the helpless Samson with a kiss, as Judas did. See on Jud. 14:5.

We note that the same sum of 1100 pieces of silver will occur in the next chapter; see on Jud. 17:2.

The parallels between the woman of Timnah and Delilah are clear. The words of the Philistines to the woman are identical: ‘Coax your husband’ (Jud. 14:15); ‘Coax him’ (Jud. 16:5). Both women use the same language to persuade Samson to reveal his secret: ‘You really hate me, you don’t love me’ (Jud. 14:16); ‘How can you say you love me’ (Jud. 16:15). Both women are described as nagging him and wearing him down (Jud. 14:17; 16:16). The point is that Samson didn't learn from his mistakes, refusing to perceive how circumstance was repeating in his life.

Jdg 16:6 Delilah said to Samson, Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be tied up and subdued-
As his first wife had vexed him with her words to tease his secret from him, so Delilah did. But Samson didn't learn from his life, and this is the tragedy of so much spiritual failure- people don't learn from history, both their own and others. LXX "and humbled". It was crystal clear what Delilah intended to do with the information.

Jdg 16:7 Samson said to her, If I am tied with seven fresh cords that were never dried, then shall I become weak like other men-
"If I am tied..." is literally "If they tie me". Samson knew, on one hand, that Delilah was going to betray him and get the Philistines to tie him. But the way he continues in the relationship is psychologically credible. His hair was braided in seven locks (:19), and so his reference to seven cords was in fact reflective of how he had his hair in mind. If Delilah were a better psychologist, and a more educated guesser, she might have figured the answer even at this point.

He teased Delilah to tie him with seven “cords” or AV "withs", the Hebrew word implying made from a vine. He just would mess with the forbidden. Samson tells Delilah that if he is bound, he will be weak "like one man" (16:7 AVmg.). This is surely an allusion to

passages like Lev. 26:8 and Josh. 23:10- that one man would chase many. Samson implies that he fights like he is many men; he appropriated those blessings to himself. He came to assume he had faith. Lifetime Christians have the same tendency, with the joy and vigour of first faith now far back in time. Samson had been bound before and had burst those bonds (Jud. 15:13); he seems to have assumed that one past deliverance was an automatic guarantee of future ones. His great zeal for the Lord's work seems to have lead him to chose the single life; and yet he evidently was in the habit of occasional affairs (Jud. 14:3 "is there never..."), using prostitutes and having on and off relationships with women like Delilah. Samson thought his devotion and the appalling apostacy of his brethren somehow justified it. Note how Timothy and Hezekiah seem to likewise have stumbled in their commitment to the single life.

Jdg 16:8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought to her seven fresh cords which had not been dried, and she tied him with them-
As this all happened in the bedroom (:9 NEV "inner room"), it seems to me that she used them in some kind of sexual bondage game. "Delilah" means 'weak', and Samson was the archetypical strong man. The mind will follow... as to how this played out in their sex life. And yet the strong was dominated by the weak, and eyeless in Gaza he was made to do women's work. Yet as noted on :9, even at such a low spiritual point in his life, God's Spirit remained with him.

Jdg 16:9 Now she had an ambush waiting in the inner room-
The idea is, "the bedroom". See on :8. The Philistines are described as "abiding" in Delilah's house (16:9 AV)- a word normally used in the sense of 'permanently living'. It would seem that Samson didn't permanently live with her, but occasionally visited her, until at the end he was happy to live with her (she pressed him "daily"), co-habiting with her other Philistine lovers. With his hair shaven, he 'went out, as at other times'- deciding bitterly that he had really had enough, and once again he would walk out on her, this time for good, and would 'shake himself' and take a hold on himself. But this time it was too late.

She said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! He broke the cords, as a string of tow is broken when it touches the fire. So his strength was not known-
The thongs burst from him as when string comes close to a flame. This is similar to the scene in Jud. 15:14, where because the Spirit was upon him, Samson became like a burning fire which snapped his bonds. See on :12.

Jdg 16:10 Delilah said to Samson, You have made a fool of me and told me lies! Now please tell me how you can be tied-

We are left to imagine all the crocodile tears and lies told by Delilah regarding how she set him up to be ambushed and slain by Philistines, whilst claiming she loved him.

Jdg 16:11 He said to her, If I am tied with new ropes with which no work has been done, then I shall become weak like other men-
Samson ends up bound (s.w. "tied") in fetters of brass. He was truly an Israelite in bondage to the Philistines, the very thing he had so despised and given his life to fighting against. But in these bondage games with Delilah, he liked being tied up in bondage to a Philistine [or quite possibly, a Hebrew woman involved with the Philistines]. We have a deep insight here into how he actually both loved and hated Philistine bondage. Just as he loved vineyards and yet burnt them up. This inability to wholly dedicate himself to Yahweh's ways and people was to be his undoing.

Samson was reasoning that as the ropes of Jud. 15:11 had been overcome by the Spirit, so any attempt to tie him up would trigger the same outpouring of Spirit power.

Jdg 16:12 So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! The ambush was waiting in the inner room. He broke them off his arms like a thread-
In the next two occasions when Samson broke his bands (Jud. 16:12,14), the language of breaking them as if there was fire within him (as in :9, see note there) doesn't occur. It may be that although the fire of the Spirit was within him, Samson came to feel that he, of his *own* ability, was doing the miracles: "*he* snapped the ropes off his arms...". There is even a sense of unjustified, egoistic sarcasm in the way he gets the Philistines to tie him with flimsy pieces of grass and then breaks them off and kills them. Samson had broken the ropes which the men of Judah had bound him with; he was living in the assumption that God would act as He had done before, empowering him to get out of his problems by grace. He was slipping into continuing in sin that grace might abound, presuming upon grace, seeing grace as a right and entitlement. And yet as with the power of the Spirit right after sleeping with a prostitute in :2,3, so again despite such weakness, God's Spirit power still came upon him. But there had to be a limit to his reductionism.

Jdg 16:13 Delilah said to Samson, Until now you have fooled me and told me lies. Tell me how you can be tied. He said to her, If you weave the seven braids of my hair into the fabric on the loom, I will become as weak as other men-

Samson had been named after the sun god, and was raised near the sun god shrine at Beth Shemesh. Long hair was associated with the sun gods- the long hairs representing the rays of the sun. The sun gods are depicted as having long hair- Ra-Horakhtz, Attis,

Surya, and Lugh. Samson chose to wear his long hair as seven locks (Jud. 16:13), and this is exactly the kind of radiant crown seen on the sun gods. The crown of the Greek sun-god Helios was often depicted with seven spikes. This continues the theme- that Samson mixed Yahweh worship with paganism; and his hatred of the Philistines was not therefore purely a result of his love for Yahweh.

See on Ps. 118:10-12. He initially says: "If *they* bind me..." (16:7), but changes this to "If y*ou*..."; he knew beforehand that she would betray him, although couldn't admit it to himself. And so we see the complexity of Samson's situation. It was not that his telling of the secret to Delilah was necessarily a sin in itself. He trusted her and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a part of human nature. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson : Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. David likewise must have known Absalom's deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love's sake. "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]... but I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:12,13). Paul surely knew how Corinth despised him, how little they knew and believed, and as he himself said, the more he loved them, the less they loved him. And yet in all honesty he could say: "As you abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence *and in your love to* us" (2 Cor. 8:7). Yet the more abundantly he loved them, the less they loved him- not the more abundantly. Yet he saw them as loving him abundantly. One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the telltale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand... against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature; the contradictions evident in the Jesus : Judas relationship and the Samson : Delilah relationship are only explicable for me by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor. If you love someone, you like them and see them as different and better to how they are. You see them as more than they are, as more than they can be. And so it is with God's love, resulting in what Paul would call Him imputing righteousness to us, justifying us, counting us right.

And this Lord is our Lord, the same yesterday and today. Our self-knowledge will be deepened by realizing that we too have this spiritual schizophrenia: it's not that we are spiritual one day and unspiritual the next. We are both flesh and spirit at the very same moment. Appreciation of this will help us cope with the more evident failures of our brethren. It doesn't necessarily mean that they must be written off as totally unspiritual

and insincere because of acts and attitudes of evident unspirituality. The Spirit is still there, at the very same moment. Think of how Samson slept with a whore until midnight, and then in faith rose up and was granted the Spirit to perform a great act of Christ-like, cross-like victory over the enemies of God's people.

Jdg 16:14 She wove his hair into the fabric and fastened it with the pin, and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! He awoke and pulled away the pin from the loom and the fabric-

The way Samson asked Delilah to fasten the hair of his head with a nail and then try to have mastery over him is a parody of what would have been a well known incident: Deborah's mastery over Barak (Jud. 4:21). This would indicate that Scripture was never far from his mind. In Samson's relationship with Delilah, he got closer and closer to the edge. Samson tells Delilah to bind him, then he gets closer to showing his hand: he asks her to do something to his hair. And then, he falls to the final folly. It could even be that after the previous teasings he left her completely (16:14 AV "he went away")- after the pattern of his previous twinges of conscience concerning his first wife, his love of vineyards, his lying with the whore in Gaza... But he evidently returned to her.

Jdg 16:15 She said to him, How can you say, 'I love you', when your heart is not with me? You have fooled me three times and have not told me where your great strength lies-

Even at his weakest, Delilah had observed that his heart wasn't with her: it was somewhere else, i.e. with the God of Israel. She repeats the very words of Samson's first wife. And he failed to discern the patterns in life, to learn from his mistakes. Because he wasn't deeply impressed by his sin, because his anger and pride were so dominant in his personality.

Jdg 16:16 When she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, he became tired to death-

Samson's marriage reflects a spiritual brinkmanship which was his spiritual undoing, however. For the same word is used concerning how Delilah later vexed him unto death with her words, and then Samson rose up and slew the Philistines with God's help. The same word is used concerning how the Gentile enemies of an apostate Israel would afflict them (Dt. 28:53,55,57). Yet at this very same time, Samson had faith. But there came a time- there had to come a time, for the sake of Samson's eternal salvation- when this having a little of both had to be ended.

His becoming tired to death could mean that he now decides upon a path to death. His later suicide was just the outworking of his decision to die at this point; see on :28.

Jdg 16:17 So he told her everything, and said to her, No razor has ever come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will go from me and I will become weak like any other man-
Samson's zeal to deliver Israel was confirmed by God, in that he was given gifts of Holy Spirit in order to enable him to deliver Israel. However, this doesn't mean that he himself was a man rippling with muscle. The Philistines wanted to find out the *secret* of his strength; it wasn't that he had such evidently bulging muscles that the answer was self-evident. He told Delilah that if his head were shaved, he would be like any other man. He was therefore just an ordinary man, made strong by the Father after the pattern of the Saviour he typified. It wasn't a permanent strength. This is in harmony with the way in which the Spirit was used in the New Testament. The Spirit came upon the apostles and they were filled up with is, as it were, and then drained of it once the work was done; and had to be filled with it again when the next eventuality arose. Indeed, the word *baptizo* strictly means 'to fill and thereby submerge'; hence the use of the term in classical Greek concerning the sinking of ships or the filling of a bottle. Therefore the idea of baptism with Holy Spirit could simply be describing a temporary filling of the Apostles with power in order to achieve certain specific aims.

If this is indeed how Samson experienced his fillings with the Spirit, it throws new light on the way he allowed Delilah to apparently suck information out of him. She asked for the secret of his strength; he knew she would betray him; he told her; she betrayed him, which meant a group of Philistine warriors came and hid themselves in the house (full known to Samson); and he then rose up and killed them, using the gift of God's Spirit. He was so sure that God would use him in this way, that he thought he could do anything in order to entice Philistine warriors into his presence- even if it involved gratifying his own flesh. The way he threw away the jawbone after killing 1000 Philistines at Lehi may suggest that he felt that now he had done the job, the instrument was useless; and he begged the Lord to give him drink. He knew that now he was an ordinary man again.

Jdg 16:18 When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent for the lords of the Philistines saying, Come up once more, for he has told me everything. Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money with them-
It has been suggested from the way the Philistine lords are described as coming up to her, and the way in which she speaks of "the Philistines" (16:18-20), that she was in fact an apostate Israelitess. And thus he justified himself. We are left to ponder how Delilah lived after she had received all the money she clearly coveted. Was she happy? Did what she did buy her happiness? Clearly not.

Jdg 16:19 She made him sleep on her knees, and then she called for a man who shaved off the seven braids of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him-

See on 2 Chron. 33:12,13; Neh. 13:22. It should be noted that his strength was not somehow magically associated with his hair; his strength went from him because Yahweh departed from him (16:19,20). We have seen earlier that Samson was well into spiritual brinkmanship. It had characterized his life, according to the selection of incidents the record presents us with. The sequence of events is worth listing:
Delilah asked Samson to tell her his closest secret,
then Delilah bound Samson as he asked;
Samson awakes from a deep sleep with Delilah;
Delilah playfully afflicts Samson while he is bound and Samson overcomes Delilah (16:19 implies this happened each time);
Then Samson realizes Delilah has betrayed him;
and the Philistine warriors were there waiting in the bedroom.
Then Samson goes out of the bedroom, shakes himself and kills them.
Then Delilah says Samson doesn't really love her
- and they repeat the experience.

This is the classic material for love : hate relationships. At first sight, Samson appears an incomprehensible fool. But more extended meditation reveals the human likelihood of it all. She would've convincingly repented and asked for one last chance- time and again. It is hard not to interpret his sleeping exhausted with her and then the bondage session as some kind of sex game, followed by drinking alcohol so that he fell fast asleep [thus mocking his Nazirite vow]. And yet Samson thought he was strong enough to cope with it, as did Solomon years later. He may even have had some kind of desire to simply mock the Philistines when he suggested they should tie him up with seven pieces of grass. He seems to somehow have known that his first wife would wangle his secret from him and betray him, and thus he would have the opportunity to kill Philistines- even though he didn't intend to open his heart to her (Jud. 14:16). And now the same happened. He seems to have known that she would betray him, although he evidently thought better of her; for he was deeply in love with her.

The shame of the final fight is graciously unrecorded. The events of 16:19-21 seem a little out of sequence. It would seem that Delilah awoke Samson, and he thought he would go outside, shake himself and kill the Philistines whom he was sure were in wait. But she started to tease him as before in their games of bondage; but this time, "she began to subdue him, and he began to weaken" (16:19 LXX; one meaning of 'Delilah' is 'the one who weakens'). "Began" is a strange translation; it is often translated to profane / humble. She spiritually abused him. And then she called the Philistines. He was

powerless, physically, beneath that woman, and was therefore no match for them. The fact she was physically stronger than him when the Spirit of the Lord left him is proof enough that he was not a physically strong man in his own right. The way the apostate woman subdued him physically, in the name of a love / sex game, would have remained in his memory. He, the strong man of Israel, had been conquered by a worthless woman. His humiliation was to be typical of Israel's: "children are their oppressors (cp. the young lad at the feast?), women rule over them" (Is. 3:12). It is quite possible that Peter had Samson in mind, when he wrote of how "they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness... they themselves are the servants of corruption: *for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage*. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world... they are again *entangled* therein, and overcome..." (2 Pet. 2:18-20). Samson had been spiritually overcome, and therefore physically he was overcome and brought in bondage. Thus Peter understood that Samson is everyman.

"Torment" is 'humiliate', and is twice used of rape in Jud. 19:24; 20:5. It is quite possible that she sexually humiliates him in some form as he is tied up. Clearly the love he had for her was blind to the fact she had a seething hatred of him.

We note that "she called for a man" is not found in all texts; some say that she cut Samson's hair. Jack Sasson suggests: "Bringing him to sleep on her lap, she called to the man [Samson], then began to cut the seven braids on his hair".

Jdg 16:20 She said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! He awoke out of sleep and said, I will go out as before and shake myself to be free of them. But he didn't know that Yahweh had departed from him-

See on Jud. 15:16. The way Samson was so deeply sleeping on Delilah's knees that he didn't feel them shave him, and then he went out and shook himself (this seems a fair translation)- all this could suggest he was drunk. There is no concrete evidence for this, but his love of vineyards would suggest he had a yearning for the forbidden fruit. And Sorek means the vine, and "Delilah" can be understood as 'vine woman'. He had broken the Nazarite vow by touching dead bodies, he obviously thought that having unshaven hair was only tokenistic and irrelevant to the real spirit of Nazariteship, and therefore he may have reasoned that alcohol was also another tokenism. Thus his reductionism destroyed him (almost). Perhaps it was brought about by a willful misunderstanding of God's waiving of the Nazarite ban on touching dead bodies; for after all, God had made Samson a Nazarite, and then empowered him to go and kill Philistines in personal combat, thereby touching dead bodies. So God waived one principle for a more important one; and yet Samson abused this, taking the principle far further than God intended, to the point that he ended up justifying sin as righteousness.

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

We have here a sober warning. Samson had broken the Nazirite conditions multiple times, and there is no mention of his cleansing nor rededication. He came to assume that letters of the law were irrelevant. And in the end, he thought that even his hair could be shorn. We see for all time that there is a limit to God's patience, and the spirit of His laws overriding the letters. We cannot practice reductionism to the end, whereby nothing remains. We cannot assume that we have a right to God's acceptance of us; we are in fact entitled to nothing but death. I explained on Jud. 15:18 that God had previously sought to put the brake on Samson's downward slide in all this, by forcing him to pray for salvation rather than automatically providing it. But the lesson, as ever with Samson, went unheeded. Just as he failed to learn the lessons from his first wife enticing him to share his secret and then betraying him.

Jdg 16:21 The Philistines seized him and put out his eyes, and they brought him down to Gaza, bound him with fetters of brass, and made him work at grinding in the mill in the prison-

"Bound" is the word used for how Delilah had bound Samson with weak things like grass and hair, just as the Israelites had bound him before handing him over to the Philistines. The same word is used. He now found that he was unable to break what he was bound with. He was truly an Israelite in bondage to the Philistines, the very thing he had so despised and given his life to fighting against.

Samson, who boasted that he had made donkeys of the Philistines, is now made as a donkey. Dagon was the god of corn, so Samson's grinding corn was showing him to be a servant of Dagon and not of Yahweh. He who had lusted with his eyes now lost his eyes.

He was given women's work in prison, grinding at the mill, in order to rub the point in (Ex. 11:5; Mt. 24:41). 'Grinding' was some kind of figure of speech for the sex act: "May my wife grind for another, and over her let other men kneel" (Job 31:10). "Take a pair of millstones and grind flour. Uncover your veil, strip off your skirt, reveal your thigh… Your

nakedness shall be exposed, also your disgrace shall be revealed" (Is. 47:2,3). The "fetters of brass" with which he was bound would have recalled his games of bondage with Delilah, and the same word is translated "filthiness" in a sexual context (Ez. 16:36). The word used for 'prison' means literally 'house of binding'- an extension of Delilah's house, they would have joked. One can imagine how the story of how Delilah enticed him would have become the gossip of the nation.

The idea of binding the strong man must surely look back to Samson. The language can't just be accidentally similar (cp. Jud. 16:21). This means that the Lord saw Samson as the very epitome of Satan, even though ultimately he was a man of faith (Heb. 11:32). Thus the Spirit doesn't forget a man's weakness, even though ultimately he may be counted righteous.

Jdg 16:22 However the hair of his head began to grow again after he had been shaved- The record seems to suggest there was a link between the growth of his hair, and God giving him strength again. This doesn't mean that there was some metaphysical link between his strength and his hair. Rather does it show how God responded to his faith and *what was behind the growth of his hair*, and therefore gave him strength to destroy the Philistines. It would seem that Samson decided to keep the Nazarite vow again. He was in no position to offer the inaugatory sacrifice which the law required; and yet he threw himself upon God's grace, trusting that his zeal would be accepted by God; that he, the sinner and failure and shamer of Yahweh, could be allowed to make that special act of devotion in Nazariteship. And he was accepted in this, as witnessed by the great power of the death of Samson.
It must be emphasized that his strength was not tied up in his hair. He only ground in the prison a short time, until the great sacrifice was offered to Dagon in thanks for Samson's capture. In that time, his hair grew- but not very long, in such a short time (no more than months, Jud. 16:22,23). The growth of his hair is to be associated with his renewed determination to keep the Nazarite vow. He was reckoned by God as a lifelong Nazarite (Jud. 15:7); the time when his hair was cut was therefore overlooked by God. His zealous repentance and desire to respond to the gracious way in which God still recognized him as a lifelong Nazarite, although he wasn't one, inspired him to a real faith and repentance. It was this, not the fact he had some hair again, which lead to God empowering him to destroy the palace of Dagon.

The question arises: why did Samson tell Delilah that if his hair was cut, he would become weak? Surely he must have known within him that she would do it, in line with past experience? He went out as before to fight the Philistines, surely aware that he had been shaved, and yet assuming God would still be with him. He had come to realize that his long hair was not the real source of his strength, on some kind of metaphysical level. He saw that his strength was from the Spirit of God, not long hair or Nazariteship. He

went out knowing, presumably, that his hair had been shaven, and yet still assumed he would have God's strength. And even when his hair began to grow again, he still had to pray for strength (Jud. 16:28). He fell into the downward spiral of reductionism. He figured that if his hair was shaved, well it was no big deal. He was supposed to be a Nazarite all the days of his life, and yet perhaps he came to reason that because he had touched plenty of dead bodies, he therefore needed to be shaved anyway (Num. 6:9). He thought that therefore God would accept him in principle as a Nazarite even though he had broken the letter of Nazariteship, and therefore losing his hair was only a surface level indicator of spirituality. And yet there is also good reason to think that there was an association in Samson's mind between his hair and his God-given strength. For why did he "tell her all his heart" by saying that if he were shaved, he would lose his strength? And of course, when his hair was cut off, then his strength went. Samson saw a link between being a Nazarite and having strength (Jud. 16:17). When Samson went outside from Delilah and shook himself as he usually did, was he not shaking his hair free before attacking the Philistines, as if he saw in his hair the source of his strength? However, this must all be balanced against the evidence that Samson originally realized that his strength came from God, not his hair. Whilst he even had this realization, theoretically, when he gave Delilah the possibility of shaving him, he also at this time had the conception that his strength was associated with his hair length. I would suggest that this can be resolved by understanding that although his strength was not in his hair, this is how Samson came to see it. And therefore God went along with this view, and treated Samson *as if* his strength was in his hair. And therefore He departed from him when he allowed his hair to be shaved. If Samson had really told Delilah the truth about the source of his strength, he would have said: 'Faith, causing the Spirit of God to come upon me to do His work'. Samson knew this, and therefore he allowed her to shave him; and yet it was also true that in his heart of hearts, he also at the same time believed that his hair was the source of his strength. So he was the victim of reductionism, as well as tokenism. He came to see the mere possession of long hair as a sign of spirituality. And yet at the same time he reduced and reduced the real meaning of Nazariteship to nothing. Difficult as this analysis may be to grasp, I really believe that it has much to teach us; for the latter day brotherhood is afflicted with exactly these same problems.

Jdg 16:23 The lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, for they said, Our god has delivered Samson our enemy into our hand-

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

have been seen as a victory of Yahweh over Dagon. Now the Philistines were attempting to make Yahweh the loser against Dagon. Samson's desire to end his miserable life was nuanced against his desire to vindicate Yahweh. And Yahweh gave him the strength to do so.

Jdg 16:24 When the people saw him, they praised their god. They said, Our god has delivered our enemy, the destroyer of our country who has slain many of us, into our hand-
See on Jud. 14:14. Gentiles praising their gods, mocking Yahweh, and then suddenly being destroyed was a scene repeated in Dan. 5:4.

Jdg 16:25 When their hearts were merry they said, Call for Samson so that he can entertain us. They called Samson out of the prison, and he performed before them. They set him between the pillars-
Samson suddenly called up out of the prison house (16:25) recalls Joseph (Gen. 41:14) and John the Baptist (Mt. 14:9). The same Divine hand was at work in such different lives, leaving the same hallmarks behind in the record. And the more familiar and thoughtful we are about Biblical history, the more we too will perceive this. LXX "they smote him with the palms of their hands, and set him between the pillars". This has strange relevance to the Lord's experience, also smitten with the palms of His tormentors, and put to death between two poles / crosses.

"Entertain us" is literally 'make sport'. I discussed on :21 the sexual aspects to Samson's humiliation. The same word is used in a sexual context in Gen. 26:8, when Isaac is observed 'sporting' with Rebekah.

Jdg 16:26 and Samson said to the boy who held him by the hand, Allow me to feel the pillars on which the house rests so that I can lean on them-
A read through all the recorded words of Samson will reveal a growing humility and spirituality. "Suffer me that I may... that I may" (16:26 AV) reflects a courtesy and humility distinctly lacking in his previous recorded speech. His growth came to its intended climax in the repentance and final peak of spirituality which he achieved in his time of dying. Or it may be that the utter exhaustion of Samson from their afflictions (prodding with sticks?) is revealed when he asks the lad "Suffer me..." (Heb. 'allow me to rest / take a break'). This pointed forward to the Lord's physical exhaustion, driven to the limit of human endurance, must be imagined.

God patiently worked through the weakness of Samson to achieve not only a great final victory over the Philistines, but also Samson's own salvation. The way Samson asked

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

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

Jdg 16:27 Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women watching while Samson performed-
The destruction of them all would have left a huge hole in Philistine power. And yet still Israel failed to capitalize on this victory, for by Saul's time, Israel were effectively in bondage to them again.

Jdg 16:28 Samson called to Yahweh and said, Lord Yahweh, remember me please, and strengthen me please, just this once oh God, that I may with one blow be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes-
Heb. “that I may avenge myself the revenge of one of my two eyes”. His idea was that the death of all those Philistines would only avenge the loss of one of his eyes. The fact he had lost two of his eyes required, he implied, a revenge beyond revenge. He died very bitter. Or we can understand him to desire vengeance for one of his eyes, believing that the vengeance for the other eye would come at the last day. In this case he still fails, even right at the end, to appreciate his sinfulness with his eyes and the rightful judgment for this. And yet still he will be saved, along with many others who likewise refused to appreciate their own sinfulness and resented their sufferings resultant from that.

Samson's name was an allusion to the sun god. The sun was thought to be the 'eye' of Heaven. Samson's dying request that he be avenged for the loss of his eyes suggests he died still with a strong sense of association with the sun god. See on :13.

We think of other spiritual heroes who made a suicidal death wish: Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah and Job, along with Tobit and Sarah in the Apocrypha. But God only grants this

wish to Samson. Again we have an anomaly in the story. The Samson story ends as it began, with God working through human weakness to achieve His purpose. And the weakness of the person, in Samson's case, isn't a deal breaker for their final salvation. There is such huge encouragement in this. We are left to ponder the motives for Samson's suicide. Suicide is usually assumed to be a case of the victim concluding they have no better reason to continue living. And Samson's miserable state, grinding eyeless in Gaza under cruel abuse, would certainly fit that scenario. We can connect Samson's suicide with the way that he knowingly gives Delilah the secret to his strength. That was in a way suicidal, because he knew what was going to follow. From that point onwards, he considered his life not worth living- because her psychological bullying of him led him to suicide: "When she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, he became tired to death" (:16). Possibly at that point he decided his life wasn't worth living. The love of his life was pressing him to death. And he gives in, setting in process a path that he knew would lead to his death.

But in a case like Samson's, it has to be factored in that a man may end his life because he considers his objective at the time to be of greater value than his own life. A soldier may charge the enemy knowing he will lose his life but kill many of their soldiers by doing so. This too was clearly present in Samson's decision. So again we are left with mixed motives, right at the end. And yet he will still be saved. God sees the good.

Samson desired vengeance for the loss of his eyes, and as such hints at his earlier comments that he had done to the Philistines as they had done to him, and he felt his behaviour to them was somehow in terms of an eye for an eye, the lex talonis: "If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7). "As they have done to me, so I have done to them" (Jud. 15:11). He kills 30 men because his wife betrayed him. He burnt up the corn harvest because the wife he had abandoned had remarried. His expectation that he has the right to sex with her after her remarriage is unreasonable and betrays a sense of over entitlement. He kills many people because his ex-wife had been executed by the Philistines. He kills a thousand men with a jawbone because the Philistine authorities tried to arrest him. He wrecks a city gate because he was angry with himself for sleeping with a whore. Now he wants to kill 3000 people because he has lost his sight. The revenge he took was always far more than an eye for an eye, even though he sees it all as justified, legitimate revenge within the terms of lex talonis ["If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7)]. The Mosaic examples of an eye for an eye are always careful to insist that any such punishment must never exceed the harm initially done. Samson seems to have had a sense of over entitlement and a genuinely warped sense of equality / measure for measure. Possibly an overbearing mother and distant, weak and ineffective father contributed to this narcissism. We note of course that the Lord's teaching was that "an eye for an eye" was not anyway the ideal standard of spirituality. And yet God worked through this, to begin the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines.

Like Paul and the crucified thief, Samson by his death came to a deep realization of the reality of judgment to come: "Remember me" must be read in this context. It carries the connotation of 'remember me for good and therefore forgive me at the judgment' in Ps. 25:6,7; Lk. 23:46. It seems that Nehemiah was inspired by this at his end (Neh. 13:22,31; did he too come to a finer realization of his failures at the end?). "Remember me" was a cry only used prior to Samson by men in weakness: Gen. 15:8; Josh. 7:7; Jud. 6:22 (Gideon, Samson's hero, had used it). Yet now Samson appropriates it to himself in faith that he will be mercifully treated at the judgment. And his example in turn inspired Nehemiah. The intensity of Samson's repentance was quite something. It must have inspired Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:11), who like Samson was bound (16:21) and humbled (Jud. 16:5,16,19 AVmg.)- and then repented with a like intensity. And Zedekiah went through the same basic experience, of capture by his enemies, having his eyes put out, his capture attributed to false gods; and he likewise repented (2 Kings 25:7).
Samson is therefore listed amongst those who out of weakness were made strong (Heb. 11:34). A character study of Samson must remember this about him. This could suggest that he was even weaker than a normal man; or it could be a reference to the way in which out of his final spiritual weakness and degradation he was so wonderfully strengthened.

But Samson's death plea for vengeance against the Philistines for his two eyes sounds woefully human. Indeed, the RSV and RVmg. speak of him asking for vengeance "for one of my two eyes", as if he felt that even if God gave the destruction he asked for, this would only half avenge him. This would indicate a real bitterness, an unGodly hatred of both sinner and sin. In some ways, for all the intensity of weeping before God in repentance (16:28 LXX), Samson had not progressed much from his attitude in Jud. 15:7, over 20 years before- where he once again had admitted that his motive for 'seeking occasion against the Philistines' was partly just personal revenge. The spirit of not avenging oneself but leaving it to God to do was evidently something he never quite rose up to in his life (Rom. 12:19). "That I may be *at once* avenged of the Philistines *for my two eyes*" seems to be quite without any desire for the vindication of God's Name. Although it seems to me it was wrong, and betrayed some unspirituality, yet it is taken as the epitome of the desire of all the faithful for vindication through the coming of Christ (Rev. 6:10). Samson died therefore with some unconquered weakness, just as we will and as will our brethren. Yet we are assured in Heb. 11:34 that he will be saved in the end.

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

Job 30:1 mocked by youth = Judges 16:26

Job 30:6 The wicked dwell in the rocks = Judges 15:8

Job 30:9 "Now I am their song, yes, I am their byword" = Judges 16:25

Job 30:11 "He has loosed my cord and afflicted me" = In Judges 16:8 the same word is used of the cords with which Samson was bound, and which the Philistines loosed. Only a short time later God was afflicting him through Delilah (16:19)

Job 30:12 "Upon my right hand rise the youth; they push away my feet... they mar my path, they set forward my calamity". This indicates Job's poor eyesight and how the youth abused him. = This is exactly what happened to Samson. The lad made him dance, according to Jewish tradition, by poking Samson with sticks (16:25,26)

Job 30:17 "My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest". = Both Samson and Job came to fellowship something of the Lord's future cross: the unnatural darkness, the pierced bones, the constant ache of sinews: as Samson ground and danced, and as the Lord heaved Himself up and down on His sinews to breathe.

Job 30:19 "He has cast me into the mire (sometimes an idiom for prison), and I am become like dust and ashes" = As Samson in prison came to be like an ordinary man (dust and ashes; 16:11).

Job 30:20 "I cry unto You... I stand up" = Samson cried to Yahweh, standing up (16:28)

Job 30:24 "Howbeit he will not stretch out his hand to the grave" = Samson likewise would have come to the hope of personal resurrection.

According to Samson's appreciation of these links, so he would have reaped encouragement and hope. Job's last words were followed by a final humbling, and then the glorious justification of himself and the judgment of his enemies, to culminate in his future resurrection. One hopes that Samson saw the point and grasped hold of the hope offered. And this is not all. There were other words in Job which would have so comforted Samson at the end: "Behold, God is strong... He withdraws not His eyes from the righteous... and if they be bound in fetters, and be held in cords of affliction; then He shows them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He opens also their ear to discipline, and commands that they return from iniquity... but the hypocrites in heart... *cry not* (as Samson did) when He binds them" (Job 36:5-13).

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

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

Jdg 16:29 Samson took hold of the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and leaned on them, one with his right hand and the other with his left-
The way he chose to destroy the Philistines at the end by bringing down the posts of their temple (16:29,30) has some connection with the way he chose to take up the posts of Gaza. Perhaps he remembered his earlier failure and repentance in Gaza, and now he was back there (16:21), he repented again and wished to replicate his earlier repentance and victory for the Lord.

Jdg 16:30 Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines! He pushed with all his might and the house fell on the lords and on all the people who were there. So he killed more in his death than he killed in his life-
Perhaps here we have finally some repentance in Samson. The request to die with the Philistines may be a statement that he recognizes he had wrongly married and given his heart to Philistine women, and he deserved to die with them. Samson's desire to die with the Philistines could be read as suicidal. In this case, he had elements of weakness at the end, and yet he was accepted as dying in faith. Or it could be understood that he wanted to die because he believed that through his death, he would achieve God's plan for taking the gates of his enemies. In this case he would have had the spirit of Christ.

Samson's death was died in faith, and at his time of dying he had been made strong out of weakness, on account of his faith (Heb. 11:32-34). "Let me ('my soul', AVmg.) die with the Philistines" was surely a recognition that in his heart he had been a Philistine, for all his hatred of them and despising of them as uncircumcised, and thus outside the covenant (15:18). It could be that he was too hard on himself. Yet Samson wanted to receive the just desert for his life: to die with the Philistines. His mind may well have been on Scripture as he died, such as Josh. 23:10,11, which spoke of how one man would chase a thousand (he had earlier appropriated this to himself in Jud. 16:7)- *if* Israel took good heed to their *souls* (AVmg.). And perhaps Samson realized that he hadn't taken good heed to his soul, and therefore had ultimately been unable to chase a

thousand men. And yet he died in faith, even though with a deeply appreciated recognition of his sinfulness. As with Paul and Jacob, deep recognition of personal sinfulness was a feature of their spiritual maturity. And as with Jacob, Job and Moses, Samson seems to have reached a progressively higher appreciation of the Name of God. His calling on Yahweh Elohim at the end, weeping before Him, was the first and only time he ever used that title; and the first time we actually read the covenant Name on his lips (cp. Jud. 15:18).

Samson's recalls the words of Heb. 2:14,15 about the Lord Jesus: "through death he (destroyed) him that had the power of death". Through His own death, Christ destroyed the power of sin, epitomized in the dead Philistines. Heb. 2:15 goes on to say that the Lord delivered "them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage". Those words are packed with allusions to the time of the judges- Israel in hard bondage to their Philistine masters, living in fear, until judges or 'deliverers' like Samson delivered them from their oppressors. The same great relief which Israel felt after Samson's deliverances of them, can be experienced by us spiritually. The sins, the doubts, the fears which we all have as we analyze our spiritual standing, should melt away when we recall the great deliverance which we have received.

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

Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on his lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

Jdg 16:31 Then his brothers and all the household of his father came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burial site of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel for twenty years-

The way the body was taken up by brave Israelites after Samson's death recalls the action of Joseph and Nicodemus. It was no accident that he was buried in the very place where his conscience was first awakened (Jud. 13:25); he maybe asked for this burial place, to show he had at last returned to his innocent spiritual beginnings. And yet we reflect that it was that small area which he had been called to liberate from the Philistines. His ministry began there, and we read a few incidents of his lashing out at Philistines in that area. But he didn't fulfil his mission potential. He was intended to liberate that area, and this would be the beginning of deliverance of all Israel from the Philistines. But he failed, and died there. And in Jud. 18 the people of the area flee

northward from the Philistines. Yet despite not living up to the potential which he could, should and might have attained... he will still be saved.

Or we can reflect how the Philistines themselves described him as "our enemy, the destroyer of our country who has slain many of us" (Jud. 16:24). Which encourages us to think that in God's wisdom, He has intentionally chosen to just record Samson at his worst, the low points of his life. To demonstrate that a believer [as Hebrews 11 treats Samson] may have very low moments, poor motivations etc. and yet still be a believer. It's no bad exercise to mentally write a spiritual autobiography of yourself, recording only you at your lowest moments. And yet by grace through faith, you too will be saved eternally.

JUDGES CHAPTER 17

Jdg 17:1 There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah-
Jud. 17-21 contain various pictures of and insights into the apostacy of the tribe of Dan, providing the backdrop for a character study of Samson. These chapters seem chronologically out of place; they belong before the Samson story. Jud. 18:30 speaks of Jonathan the grandson of Moses, and Jud. 20:28 of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (cp. Num. 25:11), which would place these events at the beginning of the period of the Judges, once Israel had first settled in the land. Dan's apostacy is suggested by the way in which he is omitted from the tribes of the new Israel in Rev. 7. Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and too over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that you have done *unto us*?" (Jud. 15:11). See on Jud. 13:1.

However, my considered take is that although there was an earlier migration of Danites from their inheritance as mentioned earlier in Judges, we will now read in Jud. 17,18 of the migration northward of just those Danites who lived in Samson's home area of Eshtaol. This is tacit acceptance that Samson had failed to liberate his local area, although God had set him up potentially to achieve this. So the record continues directly in the context of the Samson history. We note that in Deborah's time, the tribe of Dan at that time still remained in ships (Jud. 5:17), suggesting the Danites generally at that time had not yet left the territory assigned it by the sea.

Jdg 17:2 He said to his mother, The eleven hundred pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which I heard you utter a curse - I took them. His mother said, Yahweh bless you my son-

One theme of the history of Dan is the mixture between flesh and spirit, and this was to come to full term in the life of Samson. His idolatrous mother blesses him by Yahweh, and she is an idolater. 1100 pieces of silver would imply that this woman was very wealthy, for 10 pieces of silver a year was a good salary (:10), and so the apostacy we are to read of would likely have been amongst the wealthy leadership class. She had cursed the thief, but when she found it was her son, she turns the curse into a blessing. We compare this with how Jephthah didn't feel he could change such an oath once uttered. 1100 pieces of silver was exactly the amount of money which each prince of the Philistines was to pay Delilah for Samson's betrayal (Jud. 16:5). We wonder whether this woman may have been Delilah, or connected with her; for I gave some reasons for believing she was perhaps an Israelitess. Women typically didn't have money of their own; but this woman does, and Jud. 16 explains just how this may have come about. Sorek was on the border between Israelite and Philistine territory; and Samson grew up in Zorah and Eshtaol, on the northern sides of that valley. She refers to "*the Philistines* be upon you, Samson" as if neither she nor Samson were Philistines. Jud. 16:5 says that the Philistine leaders “went up” to her. We note that the camp of Dan, Zorah and Eshtaol are mentioned in Jud. 18:2,8,11,12, just as they are in Jud. 13. This also suggests that the storyline continues after Samson's death. Both Micah and Samson were from the tribe of Dan. We note too that the Hebrew translated "that were taken from you" could as well be rendered "that were taken *by* you". This would be so appropriate to Delilah. Yet they had been apparently stolen- and Micah admits to being the thief. It is quite credible that he would have been revolted by his mother's behaviour and therefore stole one of the 1100 shekel payments.

If indeed the woman here was Delilah, it is also possible that Micah was the son of Samson and Delilah. It is psychologically credible that he resented what his mother had done to his father, and therefore stole the money paid to her. 'Delilah' uses the Yahweh Name, and Micah means 'Who is like Yah?'. The engraved and molten image[s] made with the money appear to be teraphim, and such family gods were usually made in memory of a dead father or ancestor; they were thought to be representations of their deceased spirits. Teraphim are associated with household worship in Gen. 31:19,34,35 (Rachel) and 1 Sam. 19:13,16 (Saul's daughter had teraphim in the form and size of a man, and placed it in a bed to double as her husband). It seems reasonable to guess that Micah's father had recently died... again inviting us to see the father as Samson, and the story of Jud. 17 following right on from the death of Samson in Jud. 16. The claim is often made that Jud. 17-21 come after Jud. 16, largely based on the account of Dan migrating northwards earlier in Judges. I suggest not all of them did, and the Danites around Samson did so only in Jud. 18. Higher critical theory is always seeking to argue for dislocation of Biblical texts, but careful reading usually shows this is all totally unnecessary. On the contrary, we see Jud. 17 and the rest of the story following on in perfect context from Jud. 16.

Micah stole money to make a molten image, but that image was in turn to be stolen from him by his Levite, one he trusted as his spiritual father and who was to him as a son (:11).

Jdg 17:3 He returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother and she said, I solemnly dedicate my silver to Yahweh for my son to make an engraved image and a molten image. Then I will give it back to you-
The grammar is ambiguous. It could be a past perfect, “I indeed had dedicated”, or a performative perfect “I hereby solemnly dedicate". She had cursed her own son, although inadvertently, not knowing he was the thief. And curses were held to be of absolute power and veracity. This would explain why she immediately wants to spend the money on Yahweh and also on a molten image- to somehow reverse her curse she had placed on her own beloved son. Her comment in :2 "May Yahweh bless you" was a way of saying that she wished Yahweh to reverse her curse she had placed on her son, and replace it with a blessing. And yet in the end she only gives 200 of the silver pieces to this project. There are many Greek and Roman stories of a thief being cursed, fearing the oath and returning the stolen property- a part of which is then dedicated to a god. This could explain the ambiguity of "I solemnly dedicate / I had solemnly dedicated" the silver to Yahweh. She had dedicated 1100 to Yahweh, but her son stole it, she cursed him, he returned it- and so she now gives part of the sum to idol worship. And presumably the other 900 to Yahweh. We see how mixed were her motives and loyalties. Which is exactly the theme of the Samson story and this last section of Judges [Jud. 17-21].

It seems the idol was made from melting down the 200 silver pieces. The idol was therefore made from stolen silver, immediately casting a cloud over whether it could ever be legitimate in any religious context.

The idea seems to be that she would dedicate the money but somehow retain it within her power. His repentance therefore cost him nothing, and neither really did her supposed sacrifice to Yahweh; whereas it is a principle of sacrifice that it must cost us something, we must be left in deficit after it, in real terms (2 Sam. 24:24). We see how deeply Israel had fallen into thinking that idolatry was justified, because it was a form of Yahweh worship. Their later placing of idols in the temple of Yahweh could only really have happened on that basis. And this has been the abiding temptation and tendency for God's people; to mix the flesh and the Spirit, to have a little of both, rather than making wholehearted commitment to Him. And it is seen too in the mixture of paganism with Biblical truths in the theology of standard Christianity.

Jdg 17:4 So he returned the money to his mother and she took two hundred pieces of it and gave them to the silversmith, who made it into an engraved image and a molten

image, and they were put into Micah's house-
And then the rest of the money she returned to Micah (see on :3). "Micah" means 'who is like Yah!'. His mother had named him like this and he probably would have agreed with his name, hence he kept it; but this was the mere externality of religious devotion. For clearly they were idolaters, wrongly claiming to serve Yahweh through serving idols. See on :3.

Or we can translate: "So he restored the money to his mother (and his mother took two hundred shekels), and she gave it to the founder". The 200 would be roughly one fifth of 1100, which means he may have given this to his mother in obedience to the Mosaic command of Lev. 6:5 for a thief to return the stolen goods with a one fifth restitution. In which case we see how confused they all were, keeping parts of God's law and having a genuine conscience towards God; whilst being idolaters and very ignorant of His ways.

Another reading is that the woman said she would give the 1100 shekels to make an image, but in reality she only gave two hundred shekels for this and kept the rest. There is a connection with how Achan keeps Babylonian idol paraphernalia and also 200 shekels of silver (Josh. 7:21).

The Hebrew word for "Micah" in :1 and :4 is *Micayahu*, who is like Yah. But after he has established his shrine / house of gods, he is called *Mica*, without the 'yah' suffix. His best efforts to apparently serve Yahweh meant that in fact Yahweh was removed from him. And that is the paradox of so much religiosity.

Jdg 17:5 This man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods and consecrated one of his sons to be his priest-
Micah was clearly a passionate religionist. The apostacy of such people was partly due to the failure of the priesthood. He therefore consecrated one of his sons to be a priest. Part of his apostacy, making his own holy place and ephod, was perhaps due to the fact that the sanctuary of Yahweh wasn't functioning properly. It was still in Shiloh (Jud. 18:31), but perhaps being abused as it was at the time of Eli, so that people didn't wish to attend it. Individual failure is always personally culpable, but this isn't to say that spiritual leaders aren't also to be held accountable by God for it.

"Had a shrine" could suggest Micah already had a place for his idols, and he added the ephod and teraphim constructed with the stolen money. "A shrine" is better as AV "an house of gods". But a *bait elohim* could as well mean "a house of God" as "an house of gods". The very same phrase is found in Jud. 18:31 "the house of God that was at Shiloh". This ambiguity continues that noted earlier on :3. He worships both Yahweh and many gods, in the same house. "And he made..." suggests that in addition to the 200 pieces of silver melted down to make an idol, he additionally made an ephod and teraphim. Quite possibly with his mum's money. Bethel and Shiloh were nearby, famed for their

sanctuaries, and Jud. 20:18-28 shows that the sanctuary at Bethel was in use at the time. But Micah wanted his own sanctuary and priest.

The record is clearly allusive to Dt. 27:14,15: "The Levites shall proclaim aloud to all the men of Israel, “Cursed is the man who makes a statue and molten image, an abomination to Yahweh, the work of an artificer’s hand, and places it in an occult place!”. All the people will respond and say, “Amen”". The Levite instead is blessing and participating in worship using a statue and molten image. Nah. 1:14 likewise refers to an idolatrous 'statue and molten image' within a 'house of god / elohim'. We recall that the Levites were chosen because they alone in Israel had killed Israelites who worshipped a molten image (Ex. 32:4,8). The Levite was a far cry from the intention for the Levites in Dt. 33.10: "They will teach Your decrees to Jacob and Your law to Israel, they place incense under Your nostrils, and a sacrifice on Your altar", at the place Yahweh chose- not the altar of an idol shrine.

Jdg 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes-
The contrast is with how they did evil in the eyes of Yahweh (Jud. 3:7). Their eyes were seeing the opposite of God's eyes. And that is exactly what we are reading here in this story of Micah. What they thought was right in their eyes was evil in God's eyes.

This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostacy. The lament may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.

Jdg 17:7 There was a young Levite who had been living in Bethlehem Judah-
Note the triple mention of the fact this Levite was from Bethlehem Judah, which wasn't a priestly city. Nor is he presented as living near any of the noted sanctuaries of Yahweh: Shechem, Shiloh, Gilgal, Mizpah, Bethel, Penuel or Hebron. We note the surprise of the Danites when they learn he is a Levite: "Who led you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?” (Jud. 18:3). They are surprised to find a Levite not in a

Levitical city nor at a sanctuary. He is repeatedly characterized in the record as not really being a Levite in practice. We could render "from the tribe of Judah". Yet he was also a Levite, a potential king-priest, seen as of great significance. And yet we will learn in Jud. 18:31 he was descended not from Aaron but from Moses, and therfore unqualified to act as a Levite.

I suggested on :3-5 that the apostacy of Micah and others like him was partly a result of the Levites to teach them a better way. And the absence of Levitical teachers, and the apparent non functioning of the sanctuary, would in turn have been a result of the people not paying tithes to the Levites so that they could do this teaching work. And so everything had spiraled downwards. Bethlehem was not a priestly city, and so this Levite had been living there but not working as a Levite. Presumably because his home city was a place where the tithes were not paid, this Levite had gone to live in Bethlehem looking for work.

Jdg 17:8 and he left the city to find a better place, and came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah-
A Levite leaving Bethlehem is exactly what we have in Jud. 19. The clear connection is perhaps to suggest that in fact nothing was learnt from these tragic events in Jud. 17,18, and the mistakes were repeated.

The Levites had no inheritance of land, and so life was extremely difficult for them when they were not paid tithes by the other Israelites. They became like this man, wandering labourers who went looking for any kind of work just to keep them alive. He perhaps went to the house of Micah because he was evidently wealthy; for his mother had 1100 pieces of silver to spend on religion, when a good salary was 10 pieces / year. That money was 110 years of good salary. The Levite likely went there in the hope of finding work in the house of a rich man.

Jdg 17:9 Micah said to him, Where have you come from? He said to him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem Judah, and I am looking for a place to live-
Not having their own land, the Levites were homeless when the tithes weren't paid, or if their priestly allotment was taken from them by the tribe where the priestly city was. I noted on the distribution of the priestly cities in Joshua that many were in areas not subdued by Israel, or in remote, peripheral regions. So the Levites became landless labourers, often homeless.

Quite possibly there is the intended contrast with the command for the Levite to travel to the place Yahweh would choose, and serve there: "If a Levite comes from any of your gates out of all Israel, where he lives as a foreigner, and comes with all the desire of his soul to the place which Yahweh shall choose, then he shall minister in the name of

Yahweh" (Dt. 18:6,7). This Levite is just wandering around looking for a job in any place. Time and again, this Levite is presented as doing and being the exact opposite of what a Levite was intended to do. The implication of the record is that he was looking for a paid position as a priest, whereas the Levites were to live from the tithes of the people.

The allusion is to how Eli's descendants would beg for a piece of silver in return for priestly work (1 Sam. 2:36). This man was not blessed. The priests were intended to live from their portion of the sacrifices, but clearly they wanted payment in cash not kind and so had departed from those commands.

Jdg 17:10 Micah said to him, Live with me and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver per year, a suit of clothing and your food. So the Levite agreed-

Micah asked the young Levite, who was “unto him as one of his sons”, to “be unto me a father and a priest” (Jud. 17:10,11- note the paradox), resulting in others likewise asking him to “be unto us a father and a priest” (Jud. 18:19). The point is, no matter how unqualified a person may be for the job, they may be pressed into being leaders because that’s what nominally religious people so desperately need. They need someone to call 'father'; and it seems Pharaoh treated Joseph in the same way (Gen. 45:8). It is very noticeable amongst those who are themselves senior or heads of some kind of group, be it domestically or in the workplace. The way the Lord forbad this (Mt. 23:9) was therefore tantamount to disallowing any merely 'religious' approach to God. He personally was to be understood as Father, and a personal relationship developed with Him.

The priests were to be from the line of Aaron, whereas this Levite was a descendant of Moses (Jud. 18:30). Not all Levites were priests. Again we see how the whole situation was only an appearance of obedience to Mosaic law when in fact they were all being totally disobedient. It's not hard to see the similarities with various forms of high church Christian religions. But we need to look at our own lives and possibilities of being the same. For this is the difference between religion and spirituality. The prophets condemn priests selling their services (Hos. 4:4-10, Mic. 3:5-8). But Micah's hiring of the Levite was seen by him as his generosity to Yahweh. Again and again we see this mixture of flesh and Spirit.

Jdg 17:11 The young Levite was content to dwell with the man and became unto him as one of his sons-

The paradox is that this young man was wanted by Micah as a father to him. Even though he was of an age and maturity to merely be Micah's son. It was as if Micah's religious impulse led him to by all means want someone to be his spiritual senior, no matter how

young or unqualified they were. And we see precisely this mentality in all cultures of our world today.

These words are an exact quotation of Ex. 2:21: “And it pleased Moses to dwell with the man”. The Levite was a descendant of Moses (Jud. 18:30). We are again given the impression of a man externally imitating a righteous man, but out of context- and in fact going against the spirit of that righteous man.

Jdg 17:12 Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, living in his house-
It was priests who were to consecrate Levites; but Micah is just taking bits and pieces from God's true religion and making them part of his own do it yourself religious system. And we see this going on all the time, both now and historically. Biblical verses and precedents are taken quite out of context, and mixed in with paganism and human ways. And every reference to consecration of priests so far in the Bible have referred to consecration of the descendants of Aaron (Ex. 28:41; 29:9,33,35; Lev. 8:33; 16:32; 21:10; Num. 3:3). But the Levite was descended from Moses not Aaron (Jud. 18:30). He was also of mixed stock, also being from Judah. He wasn't even a pure Levite. But he lived in Micah's house, probably meaning he was accepted as part of Micah's household. The record often speaks of Micah's "house", whereas worship was meant to be in God's house.

Jdg 17:13 Then Micah said, Now know I that Yahweh will do good to me, since I have a Levite as my priest-
We feel almost sorry for Micah. He had a basic conscience, feeling struck by guilt that he had stolen a huge sum from his mother, equivalent to 110 years of good salary. He wants Yahweh in his life and His blessings, but he thinks it can be attained by mere externalities, and through worshipping other gods. He was desperate for teaching; and the Levite failed him in this, perhaps because he too had not been taught God's ways and law. This relief that he is now blessed by God is as noted on :3- a relief that now his mother's curse on him as a thief has been cancelled out by Yahweh. Or so he thinks, because he predicates the removal of the curse upon Yahweh accepting his idol shrine now he has a Levite as a priest. The curse had no real power, and neither did his scheme to have it reversed. If he had believed solely in Yahweh, rather than in Yahweh plus evil powers and gods, he would have made less mistakes and had far greater peace. Just as for many today. But in this case, both the Levite and the molten image were removed from Micah- in God's higher purpose, to try to lead him to repentance before God, and trusting in Yahweh's directly mediated blessing. There is intentionally no comment as to whether this achieved the intended end. We are left to ponder that, because that is one of the intended lessons of the story.

JUDGES CHAPTER 18

Jdg 18:1 In those days there was no king in Israel-
This seems to repeat Jud. 17:6 "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes".
This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostacy. The lament may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.

And at that time the tribe of the Danites looked for a place to live in, because up until then they had not come into their inheritance among the tribes of Israel-
Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience (Jud. 3:2 NIV). His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them. Yet elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. Likewise "the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1). In similar vein, He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there.

I suggested on Jud. 17:1 that the story line continues directly from the death of Samson to Delilah and her son making an idol. We note that the camp of Dan, Zorah and Eshtaol are mentioned in Jud. 18:2,8,11,12, just as they are in Jud. 13. The Spirit of God had moved Samson to deliver his tribe Dan from the Philistines in that very area (Jud. 13:25), but he hadn't lived up to that potential. In Samson's time, the tribe of Dan had not possessed the land given to them (Josh. 19:47,48). In Jud. 18 we read of how they gave up, and went up north to drive the people of Laish out of their territory, rather than dealing with the Philistines and having their intended tribal allotment. Samson was their potential means for inheriting the land they were supposed to. The Spirit moved him to be sensitive to this. Yet as we see in Jud. 15, they were prepared to live with the Philistines reigning over them. Samson perceived the potential and wanted to realize it; but his people didn't. And he himself failed to realize his own personal potential. Had he liberated Dan from the Philistines as God potentially enabled, the whole miserable story of Jud. 17-21 need never have happened. Yet he still will be saved, according to Hebrews 11.

Jdg 18:2 The children of Dan sent five men of their family, men of valour, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it, and they said to them, Go, explore the land! They came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there-
Zorah was Samson's hometown, and I suggested on Jud. 17:1 that Jud. 17-21 is further background about Samson. We see then that Samson's people had not inherited the land intended because they had not driven out the local inhabitants as God intended, and as was therefore potentially possible. And therefore they were looking to get more living space by settling another area which was easier to take over, taking a short cut to the Kingdom. The invasion of Laish (:7) was because "The children of Dan did not drive out the Amorite who afflicted them in the mountain; and the Amorite would not suffer them to come down into the valley, but they forcibly took from them the border of their portion" (Josh. 19:47 LXX).

Jdg 18:3 When they were near the house of Micah they recognized the voice of the young Levite, so they went in there and said to him, Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?-
"Regarded the voice" may mean they noted that he had a different accent, and this corroborates with the way Ephraimites had a different accent to other Israelites (Jud. 12:6). Such internal harmony within the Biblical records is to me the clearest evidence of Divine inspiration.

We note the surprise of the Danites when they learn he is a Levite: "Who led you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" (Jud. 18:3). They are surprised to find a Levite not in a Levitical city nor at a sanctuary. See on Jud. 17:7.

Jdg 18:4 He said to them, This is what Micah has done with me, and he has hired me to be his priest-

This presumably implies that he showed them the ephod and other imitations of the tabernacle which Micah had made. The reference to the priest as a hireling is negative; for the Lord speaks of false shepherds as hirelings in Jn. 10. The way he quits Micah for the Danites presents him as a mercenary with no real care for his flock, and certainly not the spiritual 'father' that Micah hired him as. One cannot buy such relationships.

Jdg 18:5 They said to him, Please enquire of God to find out whether our journey will be successful-

We see again the deep religious conscience within these men of Dan, although it was so misplaced and mixed with idolatry.

Jdg 18:6 The priest said to them, Go in peace. Your way has the approval of Yahweh-

We get the impression that he just said this without making any semblance of looking at the mock ephod and urim and thummim which Micah had made. To claim to give Yahweh's approval in such an arbitrary way was really quite blasphemous. We think of how Nathan too quickly assumed God wanted to approve David's plan to build a temple; and how Micah initially told the king "Go up and prosper; and Yahweh will deliver it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:15) when in fact this was not God's word. We too can assume we know God's will when in fact we don't. "Your way is before *Yahweh*" could be read as the Levite saying that Yahweh and not the elohim / idol gods could know their way. He uses a Hebrew word which can mean "in front of" or “opposite”. He is hedging his bets and being purposefully ambiguous. He does not in fact have a prophetic word from God. Priests were consulted before warfare (1 Sam. 14:41; 23:9–13; 30:7,8; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19). They were intended to give inspired oracles from God, but using the urim and thummim: "Of Levi He said, Your Thummim and your Urim are with Your holy one" (Dt. 33:8). But here this Levite, who is not a priest, apparently gives God's word of blessing for warfare against their own brethren; and he does so without Urim and Thummim, the stones which were attached to the breastplate. Again we see how form has eclipsed content.

Jdg 18:7 Then the five men departed and came to Laish. They saw that the people there lived in security like the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, and they were prosperous, lacking nothing-

See on :2. 2 Chron. 2:14 says "Hiram" was "son of a woman of the daughters of Dan", whereas 1 King 7:14 says he was "the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali". Dan may refer to the town called Dan or Laish which was in the territory of Naphtali, but inhabited

by Danites (Josh. 18:27; 19:47; Jud. 18:7). Here we see how an apparent discrepancy on a surface level reveals a deep evidence of the way the records do not contradict but dovetail perfectly, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired writing. But this is only apparent to those who respectfully search the entire scriptures, rather than bandying around a surface level contradiction with an eagerness which speaks more of their own fears the Bible is inspired than of deep factual persuasion.

Also they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone else-
"With anyone else" could be "with Syria", reading 'Aram' instead of 'Adam' ['with no man']. They were on the very border of Syria. The idea would be that they were too far from Sidon to be helped by them, and had nothing to do with Syria over the border. This change to "Syria" requires only a 'daleph' and 'resh' to be confused in the Hebrew alphabet; and these letters have only a miniscule difference which in early printed form is often obscure. This would be an example of the Divinely inspired Bible being infallible apart from having some errors caused by copyists.

"Had no dealings with any man" could be rendered "There was a dearth of heirs", and therefore nobody to dispute the theft of their inheritance.

Jdg 18:8 The men returned to their brothers to Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brothers asked them, What did you find?-
The business of sending out spies, who return with a good report which is eagerly believed by their brethren, all has a kind of similarity to the spying out of the land of Canaan at the conquest. LXX "what did ye bring back?" recalls the fruit of the land being brought back to show the Israelites by Joshua and Caleb. And so is developed the theme of misplaced idealism. For they ought to have taken the land allotment which God gave them. But they didn't and sought an easier way, by attacking softer targets elsewhere. Samson himself had shown this mixture of spirituality and human thinking.

Jdg 18:9 They said, Come on, let us go up against them, because we have seen the land, and it is very good. Do you doubt? Don't hesitate; go in to take possession of the land-
As discussed on :2,8, they are mixing the flesh and the Spirit. They quote the words of Moses and Joshua about the land of Israel being a good land, and urge each other to take possess "of the land". But they had ignored that commandment and had not taken possession of "the land". Instead they were using those words to encourage themselves to massacre a group of unsuspecting people in a very limited "land".

Jdg 18:10 When you get there, you will find an unsuspecting people, and the land is large. God has given it to you, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth-

The men of Dan here quote the words of Dt. 8:9, but out of context. Those words were true of the entire land promised to Abraham. But the men of Dan didn't drive out the tribes from the land. Instead, they applied these words to a tiny, remote part of it in Laish, and encouraged themselves on the basis of these words to go and massacre a group of unsuspecting people and take their land- with the blessing of Micah's false gods. We note that the Danites are wrongly confident of God's blessing; just as Micah was, when he says he is sure Yahweh will bless him because he has a Levite as a priest for his shrine of idols (Jud. 17:13).

Jdg 18:11 Six hundred armed men of the family of the Danites set out from there, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol-

I have noted on previous verses that the Danites were liking to imagine that they were as Israel going up from Egypt to inherit the land of Canaan. In fact, they were leaving the area in the land they had been faithless to inherit, and were going to inherit just a tiny area where the people were weak. But they encourage themselves by alluding to the words of Joshua and Moses about inheriting the entire land. We therefore note that the 600 men "armed" or 'in ranks' may be seen as intended to imitate the six hundred thousand 'men in ranks' of Israel as they marched toward Canaan (Num. 11:21). However, a group of "six hundred men" is found so often in the records that we suspect that it may not be literal, but rather refer to a military unit or subdivision (Jud. 3:31; 18:11; 20:47; 1 Sam. 13:15; 14:2; 23:13; 27:2;30:9; 2 Sam. 15:18).

Jdg 18:12 They went up and encamped in Kiriath Jearim in Judah. That is why they called that place The Camp of Dan, to this day; it is behind Kiriath Jearim-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 18:13 They went from there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah-

For 600 men to visit Micah would suggest that he was a well known leader in the area. We noted earlier that his mother gave him 1100 shekels of silver at a time when a good salary was 10 shekels / year.

Jdg 18:14 Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish said to their brothers, Do you know that there is in these houses an ephod and household gods, an engraved image and a molten image? Now therefore consider what you have to do-
The five spies had come to Micah for blessing on their journey, and obviously thought that Micah's set up of false gods modelled around imitations of Yahweh's sanctuary, along with a Levite for a priest, was all pretty cool. And they coveted it all for themselves. As in :25, they speak of their criminal and violent intents in an indirect way.

Jdg 18:15 They turned in there and came to the house of the young Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him how he was-
They focus upon the Levite; he was clearly aware of their intentions, and was eventually not against them, as he saw he would get more income from being a spiritual father to a larger group. The landless Levite labourer who had come looking for work with Micah... became covetous and ended up with an excellent income.

Jdg 18:16 The six hundred armed men of Dan stood by the entrance of the gate-
They clearly so coveted Yahweh's supposed presence and help through the idols that they were willing to steal and kidnap to get it. They show the mixture of flesh and Spirit, of misplaced ideals, which were so typical of Samson their judge.

Jdg 18:17 The five men who had gone to spy out the land went in there and took the engraved image, the ephod, the household gods and the molten image; and the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred armed men-
The idol paraphernalia required five men to carry it. It was not therefore huge.

Jdg 18:18 When these men went into Micah’s house and fetched the engraved image, the ephod, the household gods and the molten image-
The ephod was an imitation of the high priestly breastplate. The Hebrew reads strangely, as if the engraved image was the ephod, or closely associated with it. We fear that they had actually made an idolatrous image of Yahweh, exactly what he had forbidden. And they were worshipping the Baals in the name of Yahweh worship.

The priest said to them, What are you doing?-
The Levite was initially shocked, but soon went along with their evil plans. Although effectively they kidnapped him (:19).

Jdg 18:19 They said to him, Keep quiet, put your hand on your mouth and go with us, and be unto us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel-

See on Jud. 17:11. Micah had asked the young Levite, who was “unto him as one of his sons”, to “be unto me a father and a priest” (Jud. 17:10,11- note the paradox), resulting in others likewise asking him to “be unto us a father and a priest” (Jud. 18:19). The point is, no matter how unqualified a person may be for the job, they may be pressed into being leaders because that’s what nominally religious people so desperately need. They need someone to call 'father'; and it seems Pharaoh treated Joseph in the same way (Gen. 45:8). It is very noticeable amongst those who are themselves senior or heads of some kind of group, be it domestically or in the workplace. The way the Lord forbad this (Mt. 23:9) was therefore tantamount to disallowing any merely 'religious' approach to God. He personally was to be understood as Father, and a personal relationship developed with Him.

Jdg 18:20 The priest’s heart was glad, and he took the ephod, the household gods and the engraved image, and went with the people-
Why was he glad? Probably his motives were mixed, for that is the theme of this history of the tribe of Dan at this time. He was glad he could 'serve' more people, in his mixed up way, even though he was an idolater; and also glad at the offer, presumably, of more money than he was previously earning.

The ephod was only worn by the High Priest and had the urim and thummim within it to give answers. The priest gave a supposed answer from Yahweh to the Danites, using an ephod without the urim and thummim. The hollowness of spirituality is apparent.

"With the people" is literally “went in the midst of the people” - perhaps for his personal security; but more probably in imitation of the place appointed for the priests and the ark, in the middle of the congregated tribes, on the marches through the wilderness. Again we see the theme of surface level spirituality and allusion to Biblical ideas, but out of context and in fact as a front for sinful behaviour.

Jdg 18:21 So they turned and departed, putting the little ones, the livestock and the goods in front of them-
Fearful that Micah would chase after them and attack them from the rear. Although Micah was outnumbered, he was so passionate about his idols and his priest that he was deemed capable of a very vicious attack upon them. Again we see the mixed motives of men at this time, burning down one side for Yahweh, and down the other for the flesh and idolatry.

Jdg 18:22 When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near to Micah’s house were gathered together and overtook the Danites-
Not only Micah but the folks in his village were passionately devoted to those idols. It

wasn't a case of just making some more, but rather were they very deeply devoted to them. Again we see the mixed motives in them all. Chasing after those who had stolen teraphim is an exact repeat of Laban's behaviour against Jacob. But whilst Micah was open to vague Biblical allusions to support his apostasy, he failed to see the more pointed personal parallels between himself and the unspiritual Laban. We note the positioning of the "little ones" and goods (:21), recalling Jacob's great "company", the word used in :23. Clearly Jacob and Laban are in view here, but Micah doesn't get it.

Jdg 18:23 They shouted after the Danites, who turned round and said to Micah, What is the matter with you that you come with such a company?-
Although they were just presumably a few houses, all the men must have armed themselves and charged out against this far superior force. As noted on :22, they were so passionate about their idols.

Jdg 18:24 He said, You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what else do I have? How then can you say to me, 'What is the matter with you?'-
Despite his wealth and position within society, Micah told the truth when he said that his own little religion, paganic and perverting of Yahweh worship as it was, was everything to him. "What else do I have?" he dolefully and truthfully lamented. And we see this attitude in so many people. Their religion is by far the most powerful passion in their lives. But this doesn't thereby justify them as true believers, for Micah was far away from true worship of Yahweh.

Jdg 18:25 The Danites said to him, Don't argue with us, or angry fellows might attack you, and you will lose your life, with the lives of your household-
As in :14, they speak of their criminal and violent intents in an indirect way. They speak as typical criminals. 'You might just get attacked by a bunch of angry yobbos around here, you know. Best to go home, or else such a gang might not only kill you, but go to your houses and then murder all your families'. And yet they made this threat because they were so desperate to have those idols, which they thought meant Yahweh's blessing upon them. Again, we see how hopelessly mixed were their motives.

Jdg 18:26 The Danites went on their way, and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house-
Micah was willing to fight for his idols, such was his passion. But he realized he was outnumbered. A true believer in Yahweh would have believed that one in covenant with Yahweh could chase a thousand; and Judges has several examples of small groups

defeating much larger armies. But Micah, for all his professed belief in Yahweh, was not a true believer, and assessed things in purely secular terms.

Jdg 18:27 They took what Micah had made and his priest and came to Laish, to a people unsuspecting and secure, and attacked them with the sword, and they burnt the city with fire-
Although Micah had paid for some of his idol paraphernalia to be made by others, he was ultimately the maker of it. The stress is that these things were what his hand had made. And there is an intended juxtaposition between their having the idols and the priest with them, and then slaying unsuspecting people without giving them the chance to first make peace and accept the God of Israel, as required in the law of Moses. They burnt the city with fire as if they were replicating Joshua's conquest of the land, again reflecting their terrible mixture of motives and desire to just take bits and pieces from Yahweh's ways and ignore the rest. Just as many do today. See on :28.

Jdg 18:28 There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone else-
See on :7, probably "with Syria", the neighbouring power just over the border.

It was in the valley that lies by Beth Rehob. They built the city and lived there-
If they intended to live there, we enquire why they first burnt the city and then rebuilt it- when they could have lived in the houses already standing. I suggest that they burnt it because they wanted to appear to be following the law about devoting a city to Yahweh, and copying Joshua's example of burning some of the cities he took. But as explained in :27, they were utterly oblivious to whole masses of basic Mosaic teaching. Like many today, they thought that just obeying a few out of context Biblical principles would justify them living like any other unbeliever.

Jdg 18:29 They called the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel, but the name of the city before was Laish-
Unlike how Israel very often did, they didn't allow the old names to remain, but renamed this after their ancestor Dan, meaning 'judgment'. Again we see an attempt to follow the culture of their Israelite religion on a surface level, when their hearts were far from it.

Jdg 18:30 The Danites set up for themselves the engraved image, and Jonathan the son of Gershom the son of Moses and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the time of the captivity of the land-
Jud. 17-21 contain various pictures of and insights into the apostacy of the tribe of Dan, providing the backdrop for a character study of Samson. These chapters seem chronologically out of place; they belong before the Samson story. Here, Jud. 18:30

speaks of Jonathan the grandson of Moses, and Jud. 20:28 of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (cp. Num. 25:11), which would place these events at the beginning of the period of the Judges, once Israel had first settled in the land. Dan's apostacy is suggested by the way in which he is omitted from the tribes of the new Israel in Rev. 7.

"The land" is "the ark" in some manuscripts. See on :31. But I see no reason why the Assyrian or Babylonian captivities are not in view; for Judges was rewritten or edited under Divine inspiration during the captivity. This would mean that the Danites in this peripheral location on the very borders of the land quietly continued their apostacy all through the various reforms of the kings, as well as the time of David. And this is really what we understand from the many laments that Israel had persistently and consistently worshipped idols throughout their generations.

Jdg 18:31 So they set up for themselves Micah's engraved image which he had made, using it all the time that God's house was in Shiloh-
Here and :30 emphasize the "engraved image", and I suggested on :18 that this could have been an image of Yahweh- exactly what was prohibited so strongly. Clearly they didn't bother going to the sanctuary because they considered that they had their own absolutely legitimate sanctuary to Yahweh, replete with a direct descendant of Moses as priest. Even though he would not therefore have been a Levite. And they worshipped an image for Yahweh.

It is tempting to think that "until the captivity" in :30 is effectively parallel with 'the time God's house was in Shiloh'. I noted on :30 that the captivity in view may have been of the ark, and not of the people to Babylon or Assyria. The house or sanctuary of God was in Shiloh only until the time of Saul. When the ark went into captivity with the Philistines, and the sanctuary moved to Nob and then to Gibeon in the time of David, the time period in view may have finished. However I suggest that out of the three recorded places where the sanctuary was located (Shiloh, Nob and Gibeon), Shiloh was the nearest of them to Dan. The idea may therefore be that even when the sanctuary was relatively near them, they didn't go to it. They had their own sanctuary right in their own town. We note again the description of the sanctuary as "the house", even though no temple was then built- another reminder that these records were rewritten after the temple had been built, probably during the exile.

We must recall that Shiloh was nearby. The point is that despite having God's house close by, Micah seeks to build his own idolatrous house of God, and considers that he is worshipping Yahweh by so doing. The warning is to all who have a form of Godliness but deny the power / Spirit thereof (2 Tim. 3:5).

JUDGES CHAPTER 19

Jdg 19:1 In those days, when there was no king in Israel-
This seems to repeat Jud. 17:6 "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes".
This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostacy. The lament may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.

There was a Levite living on the farther side of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine out of Bethlehem Judah-
Not having their own land, the Levites were homeless when the tithes weren't paid, or if their priestly allotment was taken from them by the tribe where the priestly city was. I noted on the distribution of the priestly cities in Joshua that many were in areas not subdued by Israel, or in remote, peripheral regions. So the Levites became landless labourers, often homeless. This Levite appears to have been somewhat better off, and had a relationship with a woman other than his wife from Judah, far from where he was living. He had presumably met her in his various travels as a landless man. But immediately we get the impression he is not going to be a spiritual man- for he had another woman apart from his wife.

This Levite is presented as very similar to that of Jud. 17,18. I suggest the following connections are too specific for this to be unintentional. Both are introduced with the comment that there was then no king in Israel. This Levite is a "wayfaring man", a traveller always on the move, who was living temporarily ["sojourning"] in mount Ephraim, and his concubine was from Bethlehem. The Levite of Jud. 17 is also presented as a traveller, a man of the road looking for a better deal. He too lived temporarily in mount Ephraim, at Micah's home. He too had lived in Bethlehem, which is where the Levite's concubine came from in Jud. 19. It's quite possible that the young Levite of Jud. 17 has now grown up, and his sons had become priests at Dan (Jud. 18:30). But he for whatever reason is now travelling again, possibly returning to live with Micah in mount Ephraim. We suggested earlier that Micah's parents were Samson and

Delilah. In this case we see how the semi-spirituality of Samson led to the tokenistic version of spirituality of Jud. 17 and 18; and now that theme continues in Jud. 19-21. Here again we will see God's people doing externally the right thing, with allusion to God's law- when they were in fact just following their own flesh. Although Samson will be saved, his bad behaviour as a judge / leader of Israel for 20 years sowed these bad seeds. For he too was a complex mixture of flesh and Spirit, although God judged the "Spirit" side to be finally dominant. But those who followed his bad examples didn't have that strand of sincere faith and spirituality- and we see in Jud. 19-21 where that leads.

Jdg 19:2 His concubine was unfaithful to him, and went away from him to her father's house to Bethlehem Judah, and was there for four months-
Again the impression is reinforced that neither this Levite nor his woman on the side were very spiritual people. He was effectively unfaithful to his wife, and she was unfaithful to him. The fact she left him and returned to her family may have been because she feared he would physically abuse her- which he eventually does by cutting up her body into parts, showing himself no better than the men who raped her to death. And suggesting she indeed had reason to fear his abuse. Her unfaithfulness to him could have been punished by death. And yet the huge fuss made about her death therefore seems inappropriate to the fact that in God's book, she deserved death anyway.

"Unfaithful" is LXX "she scorned him". The record paints the Levite as someone the reader is also intended to scorn. The Hebrew can also be read as "she rejected him". It could be argued that the account sets up sympathy for the woman, although she has been unfaithful. People are unfaithful for a reason, and the reason is explained at length- the Levite was a sociopath and effective murderer, probably an alcoholic, a pig of a man despite his religiosity. Possibly the four months wait was to determine whether or not she was pregnant. It's possible that the trauma the woman went through was all the worse because she was pregnant. What appears to be the case on the surface is going to be revealed to be the very opposite- and that is a theme of Judges 13-21, that surface level spirituality conceals very raw flesh.

In the whole miserable story in Jud. 19-21, I personally have sympathy for none of the characters. They present as sinful and fully culpable for the consequences of their sins. But I do have sympathy for the concubine, and I suspect that's the intention of how the inspired narrative is written. She goes to her father for protection, but he hands her back to her husband. Her father presents as totally obsessed with socializing with the Levite rather than caring for his daughter. She is taken with the Levite probably against her will; for she has run away from him. She is presented as having no say in anything. She is grabbed [Heb.] by her husband and thrown out to a gang of rapists. She is used by them and then returns to her husband for protection. He doesn't even open the door. He is

'making merry' with the old man, the host; or possibly keeping a religious feast using bread and wine. She collapses on the doorstep. Her husband tells her to get up. But she is either dead or unconscious. She is taken by her husband and then cut into pieces to make a point. She is unloved, used and abused. And the men who were supposed to care for her actually abused her and failed her. But our first encounter with her is when we learn she has committed adultery and returned to her father. Adultery is of course wrong. But how many times has an adulterer been judged harshly and their partner praised as virtuous. When we know that the sins of the apparently innocent partner were very great, far greater than the adultery they provoked their partner to. And so it is here, I suggest. And so we go on through life, finding patience and comfort in these scriptures as we see basic human life repeat; there's nothing new under the sun. A misjudged woman 3000 years ago resonates with misjudged people in our age.

Jdg 19:3 Her husband went after her to persuade her to return. He had his servant with him and a couple of donkeys, and she brought him into her father's house. When her father saw him, he was pleased to meet him-

"To persuade her" is Heb. 'to speak to her heart'. The phrase is always used of sincere love or grace, given to one who didn't deserve it: God to unfaithful Israel (Is. 40:2; Hos. 2:14), Joseph to his brothers (Gen. 50:21), Boaz to Ruth (Ruth 2:13). Perhaps this is being described from his perspective; it was how the Levite wished to present himself as acting. Quite possibly he took this approach because he recognized that it was his behaviour which had driven her to her actions. We will soon read that he doesn't love her at all; and anyway, he spends his time drinking and feasting with her father rather than speaking to her. We are set up to see the Levite as insincere. I noted on :2 that the Levite hardly loved his concubine. And yet it seems that on another level he did. This is typical of the theme of mixed motives in Judges. We note too that girl's father seemed to like her married lover. We get the impression that this was a case of male drinking partners getting on well with each other, and not interested in the fact she had been unfaithful; they just wanted to get the family relationship back together. She may well have been pregnant by the Levite- hence his interest in having her back; he visits her after four months to see if she's pregnant, finds she is, and so he wants her back. For he couldn't have really loved her to cut up her body as he later does. The "couple" of donkeys were literally two donkeys (:2). As he was wealthy enough to have a concubine, a servant and donkeys, we wonder why he didn't bring a third donkey- for the concubine to ride on. The conclusion is surely that he didn't care for her; and his desire to get her back may well have been because she was pregnant with his child.

We note the similarities with the previous Levite just described in Jud. 17,18. He appears on the surface to do the right thing when he is hollow inside. So here, this Levite appears to do the right thing by ensuring he safely returns home his wife who had

cheated on him. But his heart is very far from that. His apparent spirituality and love is just a disguise; the way he seizes her and pushes her out to her rapists, the way he talks to her limp body on the doorstep, the way he cuts her up and never laments her... shows he had only hatred and not love for her. The joyful father in law and apparent happy fellowship between the Levite and his father in law... all belies his real feelings. The father of the concubine likewise presents as uncaring for his daughter. He may simply have been happy the marriage was going to be restored so he didn't have to return the bride price.

Jdg 19:4 His father-in-law, the girl's father, persuaded him to stay, and he stayed with him three days, eating and drinking and sleeping there-
Eating and drinking are associated with illicit sexual behaviour, so we wonder whether the "sleeping" was also in this area. Hence in :6 "enjoy yourself" comes after eating and drinking. We can assume that the drinking involved drinking alcohol to excess, and we note that the Levite mentions that he is carrying plenty of wine with him in :19. It all builds up the impression that this Levite is not a very spiritual person; and neither is his concubine nor her family.

"Persuaded" is literally to grasp or to force in some way. It is the same word used of how the Levite grasps / takes / forces the man's daughter and throws her out to the mercy of her rapists (:25) and how he grasps / takes her body and cuts it up. The same word is used of how Amnon seized / grasped Tamar to rape her (2 Sam. 13). The English translations blur these connections. The word definitely has the idea of forcing; Saul takes / grabs Samuel's robe until it tears (1 Sam. 15:27). We wonder if the father of the woman, possibly under the influence of alcohol, somehow forced the Levite, possibly in homosexual rape. For he forces the Levite to 'sleep the night'. The Levite's response to the man's daughter, his concubine, is therefore an understandable psychological response- although obviously so wrong. He would have gone his way so angry with the man, and with his daughter, his concubine. In this case, we can understand *why* someone commits a gross sin, we can discern the anger issues behind it, we can detect how he has transferred his anger onto the victim [in this case anger with the father was transferred to his daughter]... but perceiving the processes going on doesn't make the sin any less culpable. Be it theft, love of wealth, sexual perversion, unlove in any form...

However, we note the strong desire of the girl's father to entertain the Levite and restore the marriage. Quite possibly he was like Micah in the previous story- he thought that having a Levite in the family was sure to bring blessing. Again we see a case of form without content.

Jdg 19:5 On the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he got ready to depart-
LXX "he stood up to depart" could imply he had been drunk before that.

And the girl's father said to his son-in-law, Strengthen yourself with something to eat and then go on your way-
The man clearly likes the Levite and wants him to stay with him at all costs, recalling the apostate Micah of Jud. 17 by all means wanting the unspiritual Levite to stay with him.

Jdg 19:6 So they sat down, ate and drank together, and then the girl's father said to the man, Please stay another night and enjoy yourself-
"Enjoy yourself" clearly suggests these men were drinking to excess and possibly misbehaving sexually; see on :4. AV "let thine heart be merry", the phrase used of the apostate Levite in Jud. 18:20 whom we have suggested may have been the same Levite: "The priest's heart was glad".

Jdg 19:7 When the man got up to go, his father-in-law urged him to stay, so he stayed there again-
We get the impression that the Levite just couldn't resist the temptation to drink.

Jdg 19:8 On the fifth day he got up early to leave, and the girl's father said, Please refresh yourself and stay until the afternoon; and they ate together-
They ate but didn't drink together as planned. The girl's father managed to delay him until afternoon, when the logical time to start the journey was in the morning (:9). But the Levite can't make an early start because he is always so drunk the night before, and can't get up early. That is the clear implication. We get the impression of weak will and carnality in this man. The record focuses upon the two men; the girl, who may well have been pregnant which was why he wanted her back so as to claim the child, didn't feature in their behaviour. The Levite is presented as not caring for her- building up to the impression that what he will do with her body and the fuss he will make is all hypocritical.

Jdg 19:9 When the man, his concubine and his servant got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, Look now, it's nearly evening; please stay all night. Stay here and enjoy yourself, and tomorrow set off early and go home-
Afternoon was an unwise time to start the journey, as they would need to find somewhere to stay at night; and travel was dangerous and lonely after dark. The truth is, this Levite is so alcoholic that he was always drunk at night, and so early morning starts weren't what he was capable of.

Jdg 19:10 But the man wouldn't stay that night; he got up and departed, and went towards Jebus (that is Jerusalem) with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine-
We are left to wonder as discussed on :3 why a man wealthy enough to have a servant, a

concubine and donkeys didn't bring a third donkey for the (pregnant?) concubine to ride. We get the impression from "his two donkeys and his concubine" that the concubine had to walk whilst he and his male servant rode the donkeys. Continually the impression is built up that he didn't really care for the girl at all, and the outcry he was to make was hypocritical.

Jdg 19:11 When they were near Jebus, the light was almost gone, and the servant said to his master, Please come and let us go into this city of the Jebusites, and stay the night there-
The servant was clearly fearful of travelling at night, knowing the dangers from wild animals and robbers. He had no particular fear of the Jebusites, showing that Israel was reconciled with the local inhabitants- because they worshipped the same gods.

Jdg 19:12 His master said to him, We won't go into the city of a foreigner whose people are not Israelites; we will go on to Gibeah-
Again we see the theme of mixed hearts in Judges. The Levite is presented as very unspiritual; but he refuses association with non Israelites. He will not even sleep a night in a Gentile inn- although there was no Mosaic prohibition of coming into the home of a Gentile. We recall at the time of Peter that New Testament Judaism had made entering the home of a Gentile an unlawful thing. And it was the same hypocrisy behind this Levite here. The unspiritual Levite with his donkey is the image used by the Lord in His parable of the good Samaritan, and it also features an inn which the Levite refused to use to assist the injured man. The Lord therefore presents this Levite in a bad light.

We note the Levite left Bethlehem, David's home town, and encountered disaster at Gibeah, Saul's home town. Perhaps the idea is that departing from the house of David will lead to disaster.

Jdg 19:13 He said to his servant, Come and let us get to one of these places; we will spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah-
These were about two or three hours journey further on from Jerusalem where they were.

Jdg 19:14 So they went on and towards evening they were near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin-
This was to be the "Gibeah of Saul". We note Saul was from such an unspiritual place with such an awful spiritual history. But for all that bad background, the Spirit of God would have turned him right around- had he wished it. For bad background is no obstacle to the transforming work of the Spirit. Gibeah was intended to be one of the

Levitical cities and possibly one of the extra cities of refuge (Josh. 21:17 AV "Geba" is Gibeah). Josh. 24:33 ESV confirms this: "Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim". The Levite went there expecting support, but didn't find it. He experienced what his wife did from her father. Yet "the Levite" is listed along with the widow, alien and orphan for whom all Israel had a special duty of care (Dt. 12:12,18,19; 14:27-29; 16:11-14; 26:11-13). We see the dysfunction and failure of religion. And how we experience in essence what we do to others, not as karma, but so that we might ourselves learn and repent. In this sense, God was even trying with that miserable Levite, to lead him to repentance. The men that should have provided him with support actually want to rape him. They act just like the men of Sodom. We are left to conclude that the Levite would have been better off staying with the Gentiles in Jebus than with the Israelites of a priestly city.

Jdg 19:15 They stopped there to spend the night in Gibeah. They went in and sat down in the street, because no-one took them into his house for the night-
Again (see on :12), the Lord may have this incident in mind when He says that He will condemn those at the judgment who in this life did not take in strangers (Mt. 25:43). We are intended to reflect that he would have been better treated had he arrived in Jebus that night than he was amongst the Israelites in Gibeah. The fact nobody showed hospitality was a reflection of the unspirituality of Gibeah. "The street" is better 'the square'.

Jdg 19:16 In the evening there came an old man from his work in the field. He was from the hill country of Ephraim and he lived in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites-
He was therefore from the same area where the Levite was living (:1). This was surely Divine providence. Perhaps the men of Gibeah were so xenophobic that they also hated even this old man who was from another tribe. And the old man, being a stranger himself, was moved to show kindness to strangers. The more we perceive our own condition, the more natural it will be to reach out to others in that same condition. If we are convicted of our sin and God's grace towards us, we will more naturally and easily reach out with God's grace to other sinners.

Jdg 19:17 When he saw the traveller in the street the old man said, Where are you going? Where have you come from?-
These words are a direct quote of the Angel's words to Hagar, when she is fleeing from Sarah and has nowhere to go, and faces death and danger alone in the desert (Gen. 16:8). Clearly the old man was faithful to Yahweh and immediately thought in terms of

Biblical and spiritual precedent, and wished to act as the Angel had acted to Hagar when He 'found' her. We should be the same, always thinking in terms of Biblical precedent. But it is also the old man who offers the mob his daughter and the Levite's concubine; so concerned is he to follow the culture of hospitality and preserve his own pride of face.

Jdg 19:18 He said to him, We are on our way from Bethlehem Judah to the far side of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there and I have been in Bethlehem Judah. I am going to the house of Yahweh, and no-one has taken me into his house-
This was a lie; the man was returning home, and not going to Bethel or to the sanctuary of Yahweh. We note the term "house of Yahweh" again indicates the records here were edited [under Divine inspiration] during the exile, or at least after the temple had been built. The Levite may mean that he was a Levite who served in God's house, and therefore Israel ought to have taken him into their houses; but they were so apostate and even against Yahweh's sanctuary and the Levites that they did not. He may also be implying that it was because he served in Yahweh's house that these apostates wouldn't have him in their houses. Which may have been true, but was very hypocritical for a man who has been drunk the last five days. Maybe indeed the Benjamites despised the sanctuary of Yahweh, and the Levites; and this was the real reason why Yahweh allowed their destruction at the hands of the brethren.

Jdg 19:19 Yet we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine also for me and for the maidservant and for the young man who is with us. We don't need anything-
The fact the Levite mentions he has plenty of wine with him suggests he may well have been an alcoholic; for we recall him drinking wine to excess with his woman's father for some days before this journey. It all builds up the impression that this Levite with his donkey is not a very spiritual person, and the Lord's parable of the good Samaritan may well have this Levite in view- presenting him as an unspiritual man. Even worse, the bread and wine and ample provision could suggest that the Levite suggests that they enjoy spiritual fellowship and keep some kind of religious feast, presumably to Yahweh. They were interrupted in doing so by the mob, pushed their women out of the door to be gang raped... whilst they got on with their religion. Again we see how form had eclipsed content.

Jdg 19:20 The old man said, Peace to you! But I will provide for you; don't stay all night in the street-
The story is clearly a repeat of the actions of Lot toward the Angels he met on the streets of Sodom. Again we are asked to see that situations repeat within the lives of God's

servants. And we are to perceive this, being always comforted that we are not alone; the biographies we have in the Bible are to comfort us that we are not travelling unchartered territory, no experience is not completely unique to us. We begin thinking that the old man is going to be a kindly Godly figure. But again we are disappointed- for he offers his own daughter to the mob, and does nothing to help the abused concubine who collapses with her hands on his doorstep, begging for shelter in his house- and doesn't find it from her. Like the concubine's father, the old man is eager to provide hospitality to the Levite, but couldn't care for his concubine.

Jdg 19:21 So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank-
The old man comes over as spiritually minded (:17) and although an old man, like a true seed of Abraham, still entertaining strangers. But as discussed on :20, this was all just a surface appearance. Constantly in these accounts we find that first impressions aren't true.

Jdg 19:22 As they were enjoying themselves-
The same phrase is used about how the Levite got drunk repeatedly with his father in law. The Levite basically tells the old man that he has wine with him and they can have a nice time together with it, if he stays at his place (:19).

The wicked men of the city surrounded the house, beating on the door; they said to the owner of the house, the old man, Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may have sex with him!-
This is a repeat of the situation in Sodom, and "that righteous man" Lot is paralleled in the old man- weak, but spiritual and with God in his heart. The Hebrew stresses: "Some of the wicked men of the city". Not all the men of the city, nor all of the wicked men, just some of them. One lesson from the story is that the a whole community should not be punished for the sins of a minority. As a result of this surrounding of one house, Gibeah was to be surrounded and totally destroyed (Jud. 20:29).

The desire to rape the Levite was not merely a matter of sexual lust. If a man raped a man, the victim was seen as feminized, and the rapist had thereby shown his power over the victim. The desire to rape was therefore also related to xenophobia and hatred of the Levite. And yet Gibeah was supposed to be a priestly city, where the Levite should get a warm, supportive welcome. Just as his wife's father's home ought to have been a safe space for her.

Jdg 19:23 The owner of the house went out to them and said to them, No my brothers, please don't act so wickedly; since this man is my guest don't do this disgraceful thing-
The culture of protecting guests was very strong, and the care of the man was partly

from pride, and partly from genuine concern to protect a Levite. Again, as always in Judges 17-21, a case of mixed motives. The man says that to rape his visitor would be "wicked" and a "disgraceful thing". But he apparently thought that the mob raping his daughter and the visitor's wife would not be anything like so "wicked". Even though the term for "disgraceful thing" is used in God's word about rape and sexual immorality (Gen. 34:7; Dt. 22:20,21). Possibly he thought that the example of Lot ["that righteous man"] justified him. Lot offered two women to the mob, his two daughters. Maybe that's why the old man offers not only his daughter but another woman, the Levite's concubine. This would continue the theme of merely following Biblical precedent in a cardboard, lifeless way, whilst ignoring the Bible's deeper moral teaching- in this case, that rape of a woman and sexual immorality is a "disgraceful thing".

Jdg 19:24 Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. I will bring them out now and you can use them and do with them what seems good unto you, but don't do any such disgusting thing to this man-

The old man perceived, surely, the similarities with Lot in Sodom. For we saw on :17 how he knew the book of Genesis very well, and had already quoted from Genesis 17. And the events of Lot in Sodom were only a little later, in Gen. 19. So it may be that he made this desperate offer thinking that he was justified in it by Lot. He failed to perceive that the Biblical characters are not at all spotlessly righteous, and it is for us to perceive that and learn from their mistakes- rather than taking a simplistic approach which considers them all as pale faced, perfect saints. The wrath of Israel was upon Benjamin and Gibeah for what was done. But they were overlooking the fact that this man of Ephraim, with the full consent of the Levite, had in fact offered the Levite's concubine to these men. They had even invited them to do "whatever seems good unto you". And the men did so. And yet Israel's wrath ignores all this and focuses instead upon those they wish to focus their wrath upon. There is very much injustice and lack of consideration of all factors in their judgment of the situation. And one of the lessons from the errors all around in this narrative is that we are not to judge- simply because we cannot judge. We are incapable of factoring in everything.

The similarities with Gen. 19 are clear:
- Travellers arrive in the city in the evening.
- A man who is himself an alien notices them in the street / square
- The travellers plan to spend the night in the open
- At the insistence of the host, the travellers agree to spend the night in his house.
- The host washes the guests' feet (implied in Gen. 19:2,3)
- Host and guests share in a fellowship meal.
- Base men of the city surround the house.
- They demand that the host "bring out" [both times] his male guests ["them that have come to you" used both times] to them that they might commit homosexual gang rape.

- The host protests this display of wickedness.
- When the protests prove futile, the hosts hand over a substitute female, a "virgin" involved both times, inviting the mob to "do to them what is good in your eyes", but not to the guest[s]. Both Lot and the old host "went out to them". Both times, the offer doesn't satisfy the mob.

- Both men use hospitality culture as an excuse to do the wrong thing.

The clear similarities and points of contrast with the scene in Gen. 19 invite us to see an inversion of things. The visitors were not Angels, here they are a Levite and his wife. The old man offers his guest's wife and not just his daughter to gratify them (:24). Indeed in :24 he uses the word for "rape", which Lot doesn't do. On one hand, he seeks to show himself a wonderful host. But offering your guest's wife to rapists rather undermines that image. His apparent extreme hospitality culture is undercut by his failure to be even basically hospitable. And he is only externally, mechanically following the similarities with Lot. Lot was threatened personally, with the door shut behind him, talking to the mob. The old man isn't personally in such danger as Lot was.

The Hebrew is literally "do to them what is good in your eyes". This continues the theme of Judges, that without a king, Israel did what was good in their own eyes. And that "good" was shown here to be gang rape. Clearly and powerfully the point is made: If man is left to do whatever he finds good in his eyes, then this is where it leads. There has to be some moral restraint and submission beneath good moral leadership.

We note it was the old man who offered the Levite's concubine to the mob. Our first impression of a kindly, hospitable old man is again questioned. Presumably the Levite had presented his concubine to the old man as a woman he didn't love, who had been unfaithful to him and was worthless to him. And the Levite makes no attempt to persuade the host to solely offer his own virgin daughter to the mob. Again and again we see how surface level impressions are shown as a thin veneer. And we are thereby constantly bidden to self examination.

Jdg 19:25 But the men wouldn’t listen to him, so the man took his concubine and brought her out to them and they raped her and abused her all night until the morning, and when the day began to dawn they let her go-
This fact was not given its full weight. It was the Levite who had given his concubine to them. Instead of giving his life for his wife, he gave her to humiliation and death in order to save his own skin. Again we see that the Levite didn't love the woman. And if he had, he would not have cut her body up. Perhaps he justified himself by thinking of how Abraham and Isaac had [wrongly] given up their wives to save their own skin. Again, Biblical precedent was used wrongly. The men of Gibeah "wouldn't listen" and the same term is used of the whole tribe of Benjamin in Jud. 20:13. "Took" is literally "seized". The

Levite forced her to go out to them, possibly to her death. And yet he and all Israel were to demand that Benjamin "hand over" the men of Gibeah as if they had been her murderers (see on Jud. 20:13). See on :29. "Abused" is the word used in Jud. 20:45 of how the men of Benjamin were "abused" [NEV "killed", AV "gleaned"] to the end by the men of Israel. It seems so out of proportion- terrible as was the abuse of the woman, the abusing of almost every last man of Benjamin was a disproportionate response. But that is the end result of the mentality of "guilt by association" and letting "an eye for an eye" not remain at one eye for one eye. Responses never seem to remain at that; "an eye for an eye" was actually a call for restraint in response.

Jdg 19:26 Then the woman went back and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, and lay there until it was light-
"Her master" is a phrase suddenly used here and in :27. Perhaps the idea is that she belonged to the Levite. He was her master and should have been caring towards her as his property. He was not. And so the eager belief of the narrative that this poor man had cruelly lost his beloved wife... is suspect. It was created like that, and upon that was built in any case a huge over reaction. The implication is that she was alive when she got to the house; she was not murdered by the rapists. She died on the doorstep- because the Levite didn't open the door and pull her in.

Jdg 19:27 Her master got up in the morning and opened the door and went out to continue on his way, and there was his concubine fallen down at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold-
The idea may be that she had been trying to open the door, or at least knock upon it; hence GNB "with her hands reaching for the door". But the Levite, who surely didn't go to sleep that night, hadn't opened the door to pull her in and care for her. See on :26. The whole style of the narrative in :26-28 gives the impression that the Levite callously acted as if nothing had happened the night before. This is typical of how conscience less people act when they have committed major crimes, and again suggests that he in fact murdered her. For the record later says that she was murdered- but the rapists raped her and she was still alive when she returned home. The murderer was surely her husband. It could be argued that the murder isn't recorded but we are intended to infer that. Or perhaps his refusal to open the door and help his wife was in fact counted as murder, the classic sin of omission.

Jdg 19:28 He said to her, Get up, and let us be going! but there was no answer. Then he put her up on the donkey and set off for home-
This clearly reflects his despite of her. It was obvious that she was either dead, or severely wounded; likely she was covered with blood. But he gruffly tells her to get up

and be going. There is no attempt to enquire of her welfare or to assist her. It is absolutely clear now that the Levite doesn't at all love or care for her; indeed it was him who had given her to the rapists. He was wrong, they were wrong- but Israel were to make the mistake of so much human 'judgment', and seek to find one party guilty and the other totally innocent.

Jdg 19:29 When he had come into his house, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, and divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent them throughout all the regions of Israel-

Again as noted on :28, we have the final evidence that he didn't love her. For a man would never do this to a woman he loved. He was clearly offended that nobody had taken him in, and that he had been threatened with male rape. And he was seeking to wreak a terrible vengeance against the city and tribe- because of his own hurt pride. The twelve pieces going to the twelve tribes would have included Benjamin.

LXX "He took his sword, and laid hold of his concubine"; AV "he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine". "Laid hold" can be translated 'to seize'. The implication may be that she was still alive; hence he had to seize her. Just as in :25 he seized / took hold of her and forcibly pushed her out of the house towards her rapists. But he sends her body parts around Israel as if this is the anger of love, anger with the rapists and desiring justice against them. But in fact he has no love for his wife; his anger is with her and all this drama is an outcome of that.

We note that there is no confirmation of her death. Some manuscripts add in :28 "for she was dead" but many omit that. One moment he assumes she's alive, telling her to get up. The next we read that he takes her home and inside the house cuts her body up. He later claims that the attackers had raped her until they had killed her (Jud. 20:4-7), but he makes that claim at the same time as saying they had tried to kill him- which also isn't entirely true. And the comment of :25 is that "they let her go" at dawn; they didn't kill her. She managed to get herself to the door of the house, but the Levite was not looking to help her, and she died on the doorstep. Only after he had done drinking, possibly to excess, did he awake in the morning, open the door, and found her on the door step. Any reasonable man would surely have been looking to assist her once she knocked on the door. There is no mention that she was dead. This silence is significant, and invites us to conclude that he took her inside the house and killed her, or possibly took her to his home and there killed her with his "sword" (LXX, NEV "knife"). The record comments in Jud. 20:4 that the Levite was the husband "of the woman who was murdered". The record says she was murdered. But the rapists raped her and let her go; they didn't murder her, as she was alive afterwards. If she was murdered, then this could only have been by the Levite.

There are clear connections and parallels with the situation in 1 Sam. 11 when Israel are oppressed by the Ammonites. Saul's cutting up of an animal and sending parts throughout Israel leads to the deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead by Saul of Gibeah. The Levite's cutting up of his wife and sending the body parts leads to military action against Gibeah and Jabesh-Gilead; but now by Israel against Israel. But Saul saved Jabesh, whereas the results of the Levite's actions nearly destroy it (Jud. 21:10,11). So the mechanical imitation of Saul achieved the very opposite results. We note how Gibeah and Jabesh figure together in both passages. The old host in Judges 19 tells the mob that he will bring out the women, so that the mob can 'do to them what is good in your eyes' (Jud. 19:24). In 1 Sam. 11, the men of Jabesh-Gilead tell Nahash that "tomorrow we will come out (s.w.) to you and you will do to us all that is good in your eyes" (1 Sam. 11:10). Saul was seized by "the spirit of God" (1 Sam. 11:6). He takes a yoke of oxen (the Levite also had a yoke, Jud. 19:3 Heb.), cuts them into pieces and sends them throughout Israel. With a threat of consequence if Israel don't respond. Israel muster to him, just as Israel do in response to the cutting up of the concubine. Saul splits them into three groups [as Israel were in three groups in their final storming of Gibeah, see Jud. 20] and leads them to victory. It seems to me that the Levite was totally wrong in what he was doing, but typical of other situations in Jud. 14-18, he acts externally like a man [Saul] did upon whom the Spirit of God had come. He gives the impression, therefore, that he is acting according to the Spirit- when he is acting according to the flesh. And so often God's people do the same. Saul dismembered an animal and sent it throughout Israel, leading to Israel's salvation. But the Levite dismembered his wife and sent the parts throughout Israel, resulting in Israel's self destruction. Again we see the theme of surface level imitation of a spiritual event in the past, whereas the reality is totally unspiritual.

Likewise the way he as a priest cuts up her body into parts with his knife suggests he was offering her as a human sacrifice- clearly implying he is doing this to Yahweh. "Limb by limb" could mean "according to the bones" as if he cut up the body without breaking any bones, as if she were a Passover sacrifice. This would have created a huge outflow of blood. His allusion may have been to the way the body was thought to comprise 12 parts; but he ends up prefiguring his dismemberment of all Israel in her 12 tribes. All this fits in with the theme that began with Samson in Jud. 13- of flesh and Spirit hopelessly mixed, doing the things of the flesh under the guise of vague out of context Biblical allusion. "He took a knife..." is the phrase of Gen. 22:6,10, twice used of how Abraham "took the knife to kill his son". Clearly the Levite thinks this justified his action. But again, he is reading or recalling wilfully out of context, merely to justify his own anger against his unfaithful wife. There are a number of incidental connections with the scene of Abraham offering Isaac. None of them alone are significant, but put together they suggest that the inspired author of Judges 19 seems to "riff" on the Gen. 22 text. So Jud. 19:6 describes how the Levite and his father-in-law "ate, the two of them together", as

Abraham and Isaac "went, the two of them together" in Gen. 22:6,8. "He lifted his eyes and saw" occurs in both Gen. 22:13 and Jud. 19:17, as does "he arose early in the morning" (Gen. 22:3; Jud. 19:5). Both Abraham and the Levite travel with at least one saddled ass and a servant. Perhaps the impression is that the Levite perceived the similarities, but then out of context thought this would justify him too taking a knife and sacrificing his family member.

The idea of cutting up an animal and sending out the pieces was similar to cutting a covenant. Saul did the same in order to muster Israel to battle. But the idea was 'May you also be cut to pieces if you don't respond'. It was highly manipulative. The Levite was cleverly seeking to get all Israel to come against Gibeah, and they fell for his plot. The anger issues of one man were thereby allowed to cause a holocaust, as seen in Adolf Hitler. His break up with his woman was made the break up of all the community; as has been seen in church groups to this day. And the dismembered body spoke of the divided state of Israel, only united "as one man" in doing evil. We note in passing the double symbolism of a divided body. The Lord broke the bread, the symbol of His body, as the sign of His personal, individual giving of His body to each member of His spiritual body. But the divided body is also a symbol of a hopelessly divided body, the reality of which has caused so many to stumble from the Faith. But the Lord is identified even with His body in that. Likewise the cup of wine is a double symbol, of Divine judgment and also as "the cup of blessing".

Jdg 19:30 All who saw it said, Such a deed has never been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of Egypt until this day! Consider it! Decide what should be done-

The gruesome record of the Levite cutting up his wife's body and sending parts of the body throughout all Israel has much to teach us of the power of the memorial service. It was done so that all who received the parts of that broken body would "take advice and speak [their] minds" (Jud. 19:30). LXX "Take counsel with yourselves about her, and speak out". They were to examine themselves in the light of those body pieces, and give an opinion. It was designed to elicit the declaration of their hearts, and above all to provoke to concrete action. Splitting up a body and sharing it with all Israel was clearly a type of the breaking of bread, where in symbol, the same happens. Consider some background, all of which points forward to the Lord's sufferings:

- The person whose body was divided up was from Bethlehem, and of the tribe of Judah (Jud. 19:1)
- They were 'slain' by permission of a priest
- They were dragged to death by a wicked Jewish mob
- They were "brought forth" to the people just as the Lord was to the crowd (Jud. 19:25)
- "Do what seems good unto you" (Jud. 19:24) is very much Pilate language
- A man sought to dissuade the crowd from their purpose- again, as Pilate.

There should be a like effect upon us as we receive the emblems of the Lord's 'broken body'- the inner thoughts of our hearts are elicited, and we are provoked to action.

JUDGES CHAPTER 20

Jdg 20:1 Then all the Israelites went out, and the congregation assembled as one man- Religious people love to experience the unity which comes from having a common case of apostacy to fight against and judge. But this is not the unity of the Spirit. Recall how the Lord's enemies were united together by their common cause against Him. Such things recorded in the Bible reflect the absolute psychological and sociological credibility of the records. They assembled as one man [repeated in :11, and implied in :8 where not one man was to return home until Benjamin were punished], in apparent unity, in order to effectively dismember Israel by cutting off one of their own tribes. Their unity actually led to the worst civil war of their history so far. And thus is continued the theme of a guise of spirituality resulting in deeply fleshly behaviour.

From Dan to Beersheba and from the land of Gilead, to Yahweh at Mizpah- Beersheba became effectively the southern border of Judah (Josh. 15:28), hence the common phrase "from Dan [in the north] to Beersheba [in the south]". But this was not at all the southern border promised to Abraham, which was the "river of Egypt". God effectively recalculated the boundaries for Israel, as He came to realize that they simply didn't have the spiritual ambition to go and possess the full extent of the land promised to Abraham. Thus "the river" on the eastern boundary effectively was recalculated as the Jordan and not the Euphrates; and likewise the southern border shifted northwards from the brook of Egypt to Beersheba. God has a similar flexibility with us too.

The very extreme north of Israel's northern borders, in Dan or the former Laish, was inhabited by the apostates whom we have seen described in detail in Jud. 17,18. For them to go charging off in judgment upon Gibeah was grossly hypocritical, when they had slain a whole community of unsuspecting people in a primitive land grab, and installed a terribly apostate religious system there.

As in previous incidents in Jud. 17-19, what appears to be spiritual behaviour is hollow inside. Dan was idolatrous (Jud. 18:30,31). And the appearance of righteous unity "before Yahweh" to uphold His Truth was in fact nothing more than civil war fuelled by jealousy and hatred.

"And from the land of Gilead" is mentioned because at the time of Jephthah, Gilead had warred with Ephraim (Jud. 12:4,5). But as happened at the Lord's crucifixion, formerly opposed parties come together when they get caught up in a feeding frenzy to fight supposed apostacy and to dish out harsh judgment. We see the same in church politics

today.

Jdg 20:2 The leaders of the people from all the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand armed soldiers-
"Thousand" especially when used in a military context often doesn't mean a literal 1,000, but rather means a military subdivision. This gathering is described from the point of view of the tribes generally, for "all the tribes of Israel" presumably excluded Benjamin. The record reminds us that for all the huge dysfunction at this time, they were called still "the people of God". We need to remember this when we understandably shake our heads at the dysfunction of our brethren.

We could argue that they had already prepared for war before the judicial enquiry was made. Justice wasn't done and there was clearly a bias towards a conclusion at the outset. Yet to judge unjustly was something God's law expresses His especial hatred of. Sending body parts to all Israel was used by Saul as a call to arms in 1 Sam. 11, and the Mari texts have examples of similar things being done with human bodies at the time- as a call to arms. The assumption was therefore being made that crime had been committed, the perpetrators were identified, and now needed judgment. The gathering of such a huge number of soldiers suggests they already had the end result in view- a campaign against Benjamin. They came out as one man (:1) to consider the case, and then after the investigation they were again as one man (:8). The hint is that they had already decided this incident was to be their alibi for attacking Benjamin, and what they did after the judicial enquiry was what they had already decided to before it. We suspect that Judah and possibly Ephraim were after Benjamin's land for themselves, and were therefore eager for an excuse to subjugate or wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. They hadn't taken the land from the Canaanites, and were living in the uplands. Benjamin had some good lowland territory, and they coveted it. Instead of driving out the Philistines and others, they considered it easier to slay their own brethren and steal their land inheritance. Benjamin was one of the smallest tribes and had a very small inheritance- perhaps they assumed that it was easy to destroy such a small tribe. In the end, after the destruction of the 10 tribe kingdom, Benjamin was indeed effectively subsumed into Judah, and the two and a half tribe kingdom was known simply as "Judah".

Jdg 20:3 Now the Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah. The Israelites said, Tell us how this wicked thing happened-
The implication is that the Benjamites weren't represented at the Mizpah conference. The whole decision and chain of events was based solely on the word of the Levite, who we saw throughout Jud. 19 was hardly a man of integrity. The basis upon which they judged the case was unwise in the extreme. We learn from Jud. 21:5 that they had threatened death to anyone who didn't come to this gathering. So the Benjamites stood condemned to death just because they didn't attend a meeting. Just as some have been

disfellowshipped for "long continued absence" from a church. This is not at all Biblical, and the attitude of the Israelites here was not at all in accord with the Law of Moses. Nor did they take any advice from God about this; they simply promised death to any who didn't attend their gathering. Perhaps this was why they thought they were justified in slaying the Benjamites- because they had broken the Israelites' self declared law and commandment to come to Mizpah.

The "wicked thing" was presumably the death of the concubine. It's unclear whether the question is asked of Benjamin or the Levite. They ask this question of the accused before the accuser has even stated his version of events. The Levite then gives his version, and Benjamin say nothing. The question begs the assumption that a wicked thing has happened. But the nature of the wicked thing has not been defined. They are assuming and presuming the Levite's story as being true, even before he formally states it.

Jdg 20:4 The Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered, I came to Gibeah in Benjamin, I and my concubine, to stay the night-
See on :3. He begins absolutely factually, although not volunteering that his woman had run away from him, had been unfaithful to him, and he and her father had been drinking for five days solid before the incident.

We note the Levite is only called a Levite twice (Jud. 19:1; 20:4). He is repeatedly called "the man"; and we wonder whether he was a Levite. The "Levite" we met in Jud. 17,18 was in fact only a half Levite, being also from Judah. And he was descended from Moses, not Aaron, making him not a priestly Levite at all. We are surely invited to wonder whether this "Levite" was much of one at all.

"The woman who was murdered" is the Divine commentary. We are left to work out who murdered her, bearing in mind that the Hebrew for "murdered" usually refers to intentional, premeditated murder and not manslaughter (Ex. 20:13; Dt. 5:17). We noted on Jud. 19 how the same word is used for the Levite 'seizing' the concubine and forcing her out to the mob; and for how he 'seized' her and then used his knife to cut up her body. This is a strange word to use if in fact she was a dead body. In any case, he was surely her murdered as a sin of omission. For she came to the house he was staying at, knocking at the door, desperate for help. And he didn't open the door nor assist her.

Jdg 20:5 The men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me, and they raped my concubine and she is dead-
Now he begins to twist his story. There is no record that the men of Gibeah wanted to kill him. It was not all the men of Gibeah, but a group of yobbos who were probably drunk, who had demanded gay sex with him. And he doesn't volunteer the fact that he himself suggested they rape his concubine, and he gave her to them with no attempt to defend

her, but the opposite. He carefully avoids saying that they murdered her, just that "she is dead". For I suggested on Jud. 19:26,27 that she made her way back to the door of the house, but he refused to open the door and help her. He was in fact responsible for her death. Nor does he mention his crude comment to her corpse in Jud. 19:28. He calls the mob "the lords of Gibeah" (Heb.), when the record doesn't state this. He is trying to elevate the incident to a higher level and thereby vilify the whole town and its leaders. He leads the audience to believe that they raped her unto death. He doesn't say "they killed her" but leaves that implied. Notice all the personal pronouns in :4-6. It's all about him... I, me, my. We note all Israel respond positively to the Levite's words, and see nothing wrong in his dismembering his wife- they respond positively to it. There is no outrage at his callousness, nor any probing of his story. And that says a lot about them.

There was a requirement of two witnesses in the Mosaic law, especially for murder (Num. 35:30; Dt. 17:6, 19:15). This was because typically the accuser is a witness; but other witnesses are required rather than the word of one accuser. But the Levite alone testifies; the old host doesn't. The rape of his daughter isn't mentioned by the Levite, surely because he doesn't want to bring the old man as a witness. The law required that Israel's judges were to "make a thorough enquiry" (Dt. 17:4; 19:18) in such cases. They treat Gibeah as an idolatrous city (Dt. 13:13-18) but without the required careful investigation beforehand. And the rape of a woman by "some" of the men of the city isn't the same as a whole city turning to idolatry. There is no "thorough enquiry". The Levite's testimony is simply believed, even though we as readers know that he is being deceptive. Because what he says doesn't match fairly with what we know happened from Jud. 19. He speaks in the Hebrew of "the lords [Heb. *baal*] of Gibeah" when there is only mention of the "men" [Heb. *ish*] of Gibeah doing the crime in Jud. 19:5. He says that the men tried to kill him when in fact they wanted to rape him. He says they raped his concubine "and she is dead", using language in such a way as to lead the hearers to think they murdered her. But he is conflating murder with rape.

One simple take away from the Levite's recounting of events is that it's a human tendency to rewrite or re-state our narratives- to our own advantage. Omitting the real issues, focusing on a few facts, twisting and inventing a few things... until the narrative appears totally in our favour. And then to drag others into that narrative. Rather than humbly accepting that we are big time sinners who can be saved by grace. And another take away is to avoid the mentality of guilt by association. Most of Benjamin were destroyed because of the supposed sins of a minority. Saul of Gibeah of Benjamin later killed all the priests at Nob in a similar guilt by association killing (1 Sam. 22:19). We wonder whether he was subconsciously motivated in this by what Israel and the Levites had done to him and his town and tribe.

Jdg 20:6 I took my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the

country of the inheritance of Israel because they have committed this disgraceful and abominable act in Israel-
"The inheritance of Israel" is a claim to great spiritual discernment, claiming to rightly perceive that all the land was Israel's inheritance, and implying a lament that they had not inherited all of it. "Disgraceful act" is AV "lewdness", and we note in Lev. 19:29 that one cause of "lewdness" in the land would be prostituting a woman and causing her to be a whore. But this is what the Levite had done by suggesting the men sleep with her, and facilitating this. And finally all Judah were to go into captivity for "lewdness" (s.w. Jer. 13:27; Ez. 16:27; 23:29, especially the "lewdness" of the Levites, Hos 4:9). "Committed this... abominable act in Israel" is a direct quotation from the sons of Jacob wanting to destroy the entire town of Shechem for the apparent rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:7). But Simeon and Levi, ancestor of this Levite, were condemned for what they did to Shechem. Their response was considered by God disproportionate. But the Levite quotes a Bible verse and precedent, without attention to context- which would have revealed that in fact the situation with the rape of Dinah was not a precedent for going in and destroying the town where the rape had occurred. And finally all Israel were to be condemned for having "Committed... abominable acts in Israel" (s.w. Jer. 29:23). All the evidence therefore is that the course of judgment and action they were to now undertake was wrong and hypocritical.

Jdg 20:7 Now you Israelites, all of you, give your advice and counsel-
The fact they had gathered together in such numbers in response to the body parts being sent is evidence that their presence itself showed what they thought should be done. This request for advice was therefore a mere formalism and not at all sincere.

Jdg 20:8 All the people arose as one man saying, None of us will go to his tent, neither will any of us go home-
What we now read is a classic example of a groupthink overtaking an assembly. They were themselves deeply apostate and astray from God, lost in idolatry and apostacy. But the idea of punishing that which was obviously wrong was very attractive to them, and they experienced great unity amongst themselves in their desire to judge this matter harshly. They entered into a feeding frenzy against Gibeah and the Benjamites. The fact we are to leave judgment to God and believe that "vengenace is [alone] Mine, I will repay", is in fact an intended brake upon the human desire to judge and punish. But Israel ignore it here, as God's people have done so often.

Jdg 20:9 This is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot-
They seem confident they could destroy such a small town, which could only muster seven hundred fighters [perhaps "hundred" is also a term for a military subdivision].

Their over confidence was going to be judged by God. For they are reasoning here like the Israelites did before they attacked Ai and were defeated.

Jdg 20:10 and we will take ten men of every hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred out of every thousand and a thousand out of ten thousand, to get food for the army so that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin they can punish them for the disgusting thing they have done in Israel-
They decide the judgment and even the exact method of it without any request to God to guide them, and without hearing Gibeah's side. They decided the testimony of the Levite was true, purely on his say so.

Jdg 20:11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man-
We think of the unity of Herod and Pilate when they had the common cause of destroying the Lord Jesus, and the unity of otherwise disparate forces and entities against the Lord Jesus in the latter day prophecies.

Jdg 20:12 The tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin saying, What is this disgusting crime that has been committed among you?-
They quote the words of the Levite in :6, calling it a "disgusting crime". They don't enquire of God for wisdom as to how to proceed, or how to establish the facts of the case. They uncritically repeat his words and assume the crime has been committed, and judgment has been passed and the men of Gibeah must be slain. They are not open to any further discussion nor consideration of evidence. Not that any counter evidence had even been presented. The alcoholic Levite had to be right, because this was the path they wished to take.

Jdg 20:13 Now surrender the wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and put away evil from Israel. But Benjamin would not listen to their brothers the Israelites-
The tragedy of this situation between "brothers" is emphasized by the Divine record. The reasoning of the Israelites is that the men of Gibeah were provenly wicked and must be put to death. A kidnapper also had to be "put to death" (Ex. 21:16), and it could be argued that this is effectively what the Levite had done to his concubine. Why Benjamin refused to surrender the men of Gibeah is not recorded. But we imagine they disagreed with the way the judgment had been arrived at, and more than questioned the credibility of the sole witness, the Levite. That mixed up man was to have a lot of blood on his hands as a result of his hypocrisy, and desire to judge others for what in essence he himself was guilty of. And we see such people in the body of believers today. The punishment of being "put to death" was for murder (Lev. 24:17), and we see from :4 that

they were assuming that the men of Gibeah had murdered the woman. But they hadn't. She walked back to the house, and died due to the Levite's inattention; and quite possibly, the Levite murdered her. Homosexual sex was to result in being "put to death" (Lev. 20:13). But whilst the men at Gibeah had wanted this, they didn't do it.

The argument was that they had to put away evil from Israel. But Dt. 17:6,7 was clear that this should never be done on merely the testimony of one man. The Israelites were directly breaking this commandment, as the Levite was the only witness at Mizpah: "At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall he who is to die be put to death. At the mouth of one witness he must not be put to death. The hand of the witnesses must be first on him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from the midst of you". We can imagine Benjamin raising all these objections- and being ignored. They had surely heard from the authorities in Gibeah their side of the story, and yet saw that the other Israelites were not open to it at all. The Israelites however shrouded all this non-compliance with God's law beneath an appearance of doing what His law said. For "hand over..." is quoting from Dt. 19:12, where the murderer must be handed over to the elders for execution. The sad irony is that it can be argued that the men of Gibeah hadn't actually committed murder- that was done by the Levite, or so we are left to infer. But Dt. 19:12 speaks of the extradition of a murderer to the blood avenger by the elders. It's doubtful that any of those demanding the blood of the 'murderers' were 'avengers of blood'. And as discussed throughout Jud. 19, I suggest that it was the Levite not the rapists who committed the murder.

Jdg 20:14 The Benjamites gathered together out of their cities to Gibeah to go out to fight against the Israelites-

Again we note that they "gathered together", matching the earlier descriptions of them acting "as one man" in this matter. There was a groupthink mentality, a feeding frenzy which led to an obsession to judge and destroy, with no attention to facts nor to the Divine commands about how decisions should be arrived at in such cases. And this kind of thing goes on often enough within the body of believers today. Only a deeply secure and personal relationship with God will save us from being caught up in this kind of groupthink mentality.

Jdg 20:15 The Benjamites numbered twenty six thousand swordsmen out of the cities, besides the seven hundred chosen men of Gibeah-

Gibeah must have been relatively small if they had only 700 fighters, a small proportion of the Benjamites. Although we recall that terms like "thousand" and "hundred" are often not literal, but refer to military subdivisions. LXX gives 25,000, which would more or less fit with the numbers in :44-46.

Jdg 20:16 Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling stones at a hair's breadth and not miss-
Left handed people were considered strange and often relegated to the periphery of society in primitive societies; we see again how almost all the judges had something which made them despised and rejected. And yet it was exactly that group which God delighted to use to save His people (Jud. 3:15). We notice how God used left handed people to give David victory (1 Chron. 12:2 "they use both the right hand and the left in slinging stones and in shooting arrows from the bow. They were of Saul's brothers of Benjamin"), and to punish their hypocritical brethren (Jud. 20:16). He seems to rejoice in using those whom man despises.

We can assume that Benjamin were noted by the other tribes for having this regiment of left handed men. We are here reading the perception of others; for it is somewhat hard to believe there was in fact a regiment of slingers who were all left handed. But Benjamin means 'son of the right hand', the firstborn- something Judah and the other tribes bitterly resented. It's as if they were known as 'left handers', famed for their left handed slinging regiment- as a dig against their role as being sons of the right hand. And this tension was behind the way the Israelites were eager for an excuse to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. Left handedness is associated with sexual deviance, homosexuality and femininity in some African cultures, and it quite likely was in the time of Judges 20.

Jdg 20:17 The men of Israel apart from Benjamin were four hundred thousand swordsmen, all warriors-
Again we note that terms like "thousand" and "hundred" are often not literal, but refer to military subdivisions.

Jdg 20:18 The Israelites went up to Bethel and asked counsel of God. They said, Who shall go up for us first to battle against the children of Benjamin? Yahweh said, Judah first-
This comes over as very hypocritical and inappropriate. They had not asked counsel of God about how to judge the matter. They had all eagerly condemned Gibeah to destruction, without referring to God, and in studied disobedience to His word (see on Jud. 20:13). Yet having made their own judgment, they then made a great show of asking His advice as to which tribe should lead the assault, or, should attack Gibeah first (Jud. 20:18). Yet God responded to their request. He said Judah should go first. He wanted to use this incident to punish Israel, as well as Benjamin. And as so often, His judgments are in terms of brethren destroying each other, rather than Him doing it directly Himself. Jud. 21:15 notes that it was Yahweh who made a breach in Israel over this matter. He worked through it all. It was His way of judging His apostate, hypocritical people.

Division and conflict amongst God's children is therefore somehow of Him- but it is His judgment upon the community.

We could possibly infer that "the Israelites" meant the entire army. Their army has mustered (:17), and all is ready for the advance against Gibeah. But apparently they all then march off to Beth-el, 10 miles away, to consult Yahweh. And yet they were at Mizpah where there was some presence of Yahweh (Jud. 20:1). Such a change of position at such a moment is almost incredible, until we realize the huge power of mere religion. People are desperate to do their religious thing and feel they have God's blessing, even when they are set on going against His will.

This verse forms an inclusio with the beginning of Judges in Jud. 1:1,2: "The children of Israel asked Yahweh, Who should go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them? Yahweh said, Judah shall go up. Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand". We observe from this connection how that instead of focusing upon their common enemies and striving together to inherit and possess the Kingdom of God, God's people were now focused upon in-fighting. And God confirms them in that. That is very much the story of His people in our times. And there are other connections between the beginning and end of Judges. Both mention how Jerusalem is still in the hands of the Jebusites (Jud. 1:21; 19:11,12). There has been no progress towards real possession of the Kingdom. Israel collectively weep (Jud. 2:1-5 cp. 20:23,26; 21:2-4). We also reflect how the Israelites' asking 'Who should go up first?' is an attempt to recall their earlier history. But it is just mechanical imitation with no spirit in it. God responds almost sarcastically by saying: 'Judah'. But Judah were thereby going to their destruction and not to victory.

God was clearly confirming Israel in their own self division. He says Judah should go first- into a battle that will decimate Judah. But why did God choose Judah to go first and suffer the most? I suggest there was always tension between Judah and Benjamin. Judah was the demoted firstborn, and "Benjamin" was the beloved son of Jacob, called "the son of my right hand" because firstborn blessings were given with the right hand [as when Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph]. Benjamin was the only son born after Jacob's name was changed to Israel, the only son not involved in the betrayal of Joseph and deception of Jacob. Jacob's life was bound up with the life of Benjamin. He was the favourite son after Joseph left home and disappeared at 17; he was the son of Rachel, the favourite wife, and she died to as it were bring him to birth. God was confirming them in their hatred of each other. For He confirms men in the bad path in which they want to go.

Jdg 20:19 The next morning the Israelites got up and encamped against Gibeah-
Perhaps we are to understand that they ignored the command that Judah should go up first (:18); for it seems they all went up. The information we will now be given about the

battle is one of the most detailed battle reports in the Bible. Perhaps the idea is to highlight the awful tragedy of brother fighting brother.

Jdg 20:20 The men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin and took up battle positions against them at Gibeah-
As in :19, it is stressed that the Israelites went to fight against Benjamin, apparently ignoring the command that Judah should go up first (:18); for it seems they all went up. And this is twice stressed (:19,20). They were not really interested in following God's ways and word, as shown by the way they had misjudged the entire situation; see on :13.

Jdg 20:21 The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and destroyed twenty-two thousand Israelites on that day-
God had apparently sent the Israelites to their destruction by saying that Judah should go up first (:18). He was confirming His people in their misjudgments and lack of love toward each other; see on :18.

Jdg 20:22 The men of Israel encouraged one another and took up their positions again in the place where they had stationed themselves on the first day-
They make no new strategy. They encourage one another, as if they are doing God's work, fighting for the right cause. It was all such a case of misplaced ideals. They assumed their cause was just and that they were doing the right thing. The only thing they asked God about was which tribe should go up first. Assumptions that we are right are especially common amongst those who claim to "have the truth".

Jdg 20:23 They went up and wept before Yahweh until evening, and they asked Yahweh, Shall we go up to fight again against the Benjamites, our brothers? Yahweh said, Go up against them-
The request was really its own answer. Should they fight against "our brothers"? Obviously not. You do not fight and kill your brothers. The way they express the request like this surely suggests they were nagged in their conscience by the inappropriacy of fighting their brethren. See on Jud. 21:3. Their weeping before Yahweh recalls Joshua's after the defeat at Ai. They ought to have perceived the similarities; and realized that the defeat was because Israel had sinned. They were at fault. But they lacked the humility to realize this, and so Yahweh told them to go up again- to their destruction. As explained on :18, this was all God's judgment of His own people, but as often, He chose to work through people destroying themselves, rather than His direct destruction of sinners. We recall earlier in Judges how Israel had wept before Yahweh in order that the Gentile tribes might be driven out of the land (Jud. 2:4,5). They are treating their Benjamite

brethren like Gentiles. Yet they weep before Yahweh to destroy them. Likewise it seems their total destruction of Benjamin is done in order to fulfil the commands to totally destroy the Gentile inhabitants of the land. This is what happens once we fail to see our brethren as brethren- they then become as the Gentile world to us. The definition of who is within the body of Christ therefore becomes critical for us in our day. Again and again we see how mixed are their motives, and how surface level was their devotion to Yahweh and true spirituality.

Jdg 20:24 The Israelites went against the Benjamites the second day-
"Went against", AV "came near against", is not quite the phrase we would expect to describe men going up against others in battle. It is the term used about 'coming near' in [often illicit] sexual encounter (Gen. 20:4; Lev. 18:6,14,19; 20:16; Dt. 22:14; Prov. 5:8; Is. 8:3; Ez. 18:6). The idea is that the Israelites were effectively raping the Benjamites, doing to them what they had accused the Benjamites of doing to the Levite's wife. See on :45.

Hosea twice claims that the "sin of Gibeah" was the sin of all Israel: "These men are steeped in corruption as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins... Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel. There they stand. Shall not war overtake the guilty in Gibeah?" (Hos. 9:8,9; 10:9). Yet the sin of Gibeah historically was the sin of the men of Gibeah, defended from judgment by the tribe of Benjamin. But Hosea says that all Israel sinned as the men of Gibeah did. And that is what the Judges record brings out in Jud. 19-21. The tribes who judged Gibeah for their sin also suffered judgment- because in essence they were equally guilty.

Jdg 20:25 Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day, and destroyed another eighteen thousand Israelite men, all armed with swords-
"The second day" doesn't have to mean the day after the battle on the first day; for in the gap between, Israel had been to Bethel to get God's advice. It is the second day of the battle recorded. The Israelites fought so weakly because surely they had a deep sense that this was not a battle they should be fighting- against their brethren. See on :23.

Jdg 20:26 Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel and wept and sat there before Yahweh and fasted that day until evening. They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to Yahweh-
Peace offerings were offered in times of Israel's sadness and defeat (Jud. 20:26; 21:4) as well as in times of exaltation of spirit and joy. In our traumas of life, we need to remember that the only thing that matters is our peace with God, the joyful fact that we have nothing separating us. As Israel made their peace offerings at those times, so we too should consider the possibility of breaking bread, perhaps alone, as we meet the desperate traumas of our lives.

However the usual order is sin offering, burnt offering [speaking of subsequent dedication to God] and then the peace offering, celebrating the peace with God now enjoyed. But there is no mention of a sin offering. Israel still refused to accept how much they were in the wrong. For if they did, they would not have gone ahead with another battle against Benjamin. See on Jud. 21:4.

"All the people" is AV "and all the people", as if the massive losses meant that not only the soldiers but the common people were alarmed at the huge losses, and wanted to know whether they should continue.

Jdg 20:27 The Israelites asked Yahweh (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days-
Again as in :26 it is stressed that they asked Yahweh for guidance- when as a people they were generally very far from Him. Their desire for guidance indicates the problem of bad conscience they had, as well as the fact they had lost forty thousand in the previous two attempts to execute the judgment they had decreed without asking His guidance. Clearly any victory they may now win was going to pyrrhic [a victory at such cost it is hardly a victory].

"Those days" could refer to the days of this conflict; the ark had been brought from Shiloh to Bethel in order to seek God's blessing upon their judgment of their brethren. This was proof enough that the mere external symbols of religion did not at all imply God's blessings upon them.

Jdg 20:28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron ministered before it)-
Phinehas and the ark had come especially from Shiloh to Bethel for this situation, and was then returned to Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; 22:12; Ps. 78:60). But the mere external symbols of religion did not at all imply God's blessings upon them.

In this whole miserable episode of Jud. 19-21, Phinehas is the only person who is named. All other characters are anonymous. And we wonder whether that reflects how despite their surface level religiosity, they have no abiding place in God's purpose. Their religiosity left them as nobodies. Just as Benjamin very nearly lost his name.

Shall we yet again go out to fight against Benjamin our brother, or not? Yahweh said, Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver him into your hand-
See on Jud. 18:30. The sanctuary was presumably a day's journey away from Gibeah. Israel become the more desperate for Yahweh's guidance as their conscience niggled the more at them- for their request was really the answer. Fighting against their brother was wrong. As discussed on :18, this whole bloodbath was willed by God as a judgment upon all His people, at their own hands.

Jdg 20:29 *Israel set ambushes all around Gibeah-*
The strategy for taking Gibeah is very similar to that for taking Ai, and we wonder if the strategy was communicated to them by God in :28. They were to perceive the similarities. They had likewise been over confident of taking Gibeah, and they had so far failed because like Israel in the first battle of Ai, they were being punished because of their sins. This was mirroring how "some of the wicked men" of Gibeah had surrounded the house of the old man in Jud. 19:22.

Jdg 20:30 They went up against the Benjamites on the third day and set themselves in position against Gibeah as before-
*"*As before" invites us to imagine them clinging on in faith to God's words of :28 that "tomorrow I will deliver him into your hand". Through their unwisdom and wrong behaviour, they were being brought to faith in God's word.

Jdg 20:31 The Benjamites went out against them and were drawn away from the city. They began to fight the Israelites as before, on the highways on the way to Bethel and Gibeah, and in the field, killing about thirty men of Israel-
Josh. 8:13-16 describes the strategy to take Ai in just the same terms. Clearly the same lesson was being taught- that victory was to only be through turning their backs before their enemies, a sign they were under Divine curse. Through realizing that, victory would be given. There are so many deliberate connections with the battle against Ai- which Israel had initially failed to take because one of them had taken forbidden things from Jericho. There was an initial defeat; an ambush set west of the city (:33,36, as "behind the city" of Ai, Josh. 8:4). The attackers purposefully retreat so that the enemy think that as previously, the attackers are fleeing (Josh. 8:6 "as before" cp. Jud. 20:32,39). The men of Ai didn't realize an ambush had been set (Josh. 8: 14) as with Gibeah (Jud. 20:35). The men waiting in ambush both times rose up and charged quickly, setting the city on fire (Josh. 8:19 cp. Jud. 20:33,37). The soldiers of Ai and of Gibeah saw smoke rising from their city (Josh. 8:20; Jud. 20:40). A surrounding "desert" is mentioned both times (Josh. 8:24; Jud. 20:45). The men of Ai and Gibeah were killed on the roads and in the desert (Josh. 8:24; Jud. 20:46-48). All in both cities were put to the sword (Josh. 8:26,27; Jud. 20:48). All these similarities are intentional. On a surface level, Israel followed a Biblical precedent. But in fact they were treating their own brethren as if they were Gentiles of Ai.

Jdg 20:32 The Benjamites said, We are defeating them as before. But the Israelites said, Let's retreat and draw them away from the city to the highways-
Israel were punished for their over confidence, thinking it needed only a part of their

army to overcome Gibeah. And now the Benjamites are punished for their self confidence. Reliance in the arm of flesh is so displeasing to God.

Jdg 20:33 All the men of Israel arose up from their camp and set themselves in position at Baal Tamar, and the ambush charged from Maareh Geba-
We note the old paganic names were still used- another indication of the overall apostacy of all Israel. The Israelite army was split into three groups; the one at Baal-tamar, the one which formed the ambush behind Gibeah, and then the third which first directly approached Gibeah. This division into three companies echoes the strategy God used with Gideon.

Jdg 20:34 Ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel attacked Gibeah and the battle was severe, but the Benjamites didn't know that disaster was upon them-
The severity of the battle at this point implies that even more Israelites died at this time. God was punishing His people, as He often did the Gentiles, by turning their swords against themselves. And conflict within the church is likewise His judgment.

Jdg 20:35 Yahweh defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the Israelites destroyed twenty five thousand one hundred armed Benjamites that day-
This describes the deaths on that day, not counting any previous deaths in the other battles on the other days. We note that Yahweh gave the victory; as discussed on :18 this was all of Him, He gave victories to both sides, He was the one who made the gap in Israel (Jud. 21:15), because this was His way of punishing His sinful people; see on :34.

Jdg 20:36 Then the Benjamites saw that they were defeated, for the men of Israel had given way to Benjamin, trusting in the ambush which they had set against Gibeah-
We would rather read that they had trusted in Yahweh, but it seems they trusted more in their battle strategy.

Jdg 20:37 The men in the ambush rushed into Gibeah, spread out and put all the city to the sword-
The battle strategy of Abimelech, setting an ambush (Jud. 9:32), rising early and rushing upon the city of his one time brethren (Jud. 9:33), was replicated by the Israelites in Jud. 20:37. The same Hebrew words are used. But it was a case of copying an example just because it was recorded in Divine history, following precedents which were in fact not at all good. Hollow imitation of the behaviour of others is an abiding temptation for us today.

Jdg 20:38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the ambush was that

they should send up a great cloud of smoke out of the city-
This matches the signal of the sun glinting from Joshua's spear in the capture of Ai, and likewise the smoke signal from within the city. The similarities are so exact, because the point was that like Israel in the first battle of Ai, the 11 tribes had sinned and were being punished for it.

Jdg 20:39 Then the men of Israel would turn in the battle. Benjamin began to attack and killed about thirty of the men of Israel, for they said, Surely they are being defeated as before-
The whole account of the taking of Gibeah is repeated twice over, because we are really being urged to see the similarities with Ai; and take the implication that the Israelites had sinned as Israel had at that time and were being punished for it. It was they and not just the Benjamites who needed to eradicate evil from amongst them.

Jdg 20:40 But when the smoke began to go up out of the city, the Benjamites looked behind them and saw the whole city going up in smoke-
Exactly as in the capture of Ai (Josh. 8:20); see on :39. "The whole of the city" [also :48] is their allusion to Dt. 13:16 "And you shall burn the [whole] city with fire as a whole offering unto Yahweh". See on :48. They were again doing the wrong thing but liking to cover it with a veneer of spirituality. Anger, fear and partaking in a feeding frenzy of hatred and judgment cannot be done sincerely in the name of some vague Biblical allusion.

Jdg 20:41 Then the men of Israel turned on them and the men of Benjamin were terrified, seeing that disaster had come on them-
This is the fear of men facing condemnation. Why were they condemned? Not because of the reason that the other Israelites had given for their condemnation. For this was in any case a too heavy judgment for refusing to cooperate with the kangaroo court called by the Israelites. We recall how the Levite perhaps rightly claimed that he was given no hospitality because he was perceived as serving in the sanctuary at Bethel (Jud. 19:18). Maybe indeed the Benjamites despised the sanctuary of Yahweh, and the Levites; and this was the real reason why Yahweh allowed their destruction at the hands of the brethren.

"Disaster" is literally "evil"; the word used of the evil done to the concubine at Gibeah (Jud. 19:23; 20:12,13). It seems obvious that they realized evil was upon them in the sense of military defeat; and we wonder why this is mentioned. Therefore it makes more sense to understand this as meaning that they realized that the evil done to the concubine was now coming upon them. This implies they had previously refused to repent nor to recognize that "evil" had been done. They supported the xenophobic rape

of foreigners because they had some deep seated hatred of the other tribes and perhaps Levi specifically.

Jdg 20:42 So they fled before the men of Israel towards the wilderness, but they could not escape the battle, and the Israelites who came out of the cities destroyed them there-
There was a widespread hatred of the Benjamites amongst the general population.

Jdg 20:43 They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them and ran them down as far as Gibeah toward the east-
This appears to be another Gibeah which was on the way towards the rock of Rimmon where they were aiming for (:45).

Jdg 20:44 Eighteen thousand valiant men of Benjamin fell-
See on :46. Albert Barnes in his commentary discerns here and in the surrounding verses a poetical form of language, as if this was a victory song later sung. To gloat over such a massacre was wrong, and soon the Israelites were going to be repenting for it. Such gloating at the time reflects again an unspirituality in Israel; for God Himself doesn't rejoice over the death of the wicked.

Jdg 20:45 They turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and the Israelites killed five thousand of them along the way and chased them to Gidom, killing two thousand more-
AV "they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men". But "glean" is s.w. abused, mocked, defiled. We are again given the impression that they treated Israel just as the men of Gibeah had treated the Levite's concubine. They were no better. See on :24.

Jdg 20:46 So that day twenty-five thousand valiant fighters of Benjamin were killed-
A "thousand" often refers to a military unit or subdivision, rather than literal 1,000. See on :47. 18,000 fell in :44, and then another 7,000 in :45, and 600 escaped (:47). The LXX gives different figures, but if we take those figures as they are, we conclude that the victories they won on the first and second days were achieved without loss. This meant that the men of Israel were slain very easily- they fought weakly because their conscience told them they were fighting for a wrong cause. The Benjamite victories were therefore clearly of God, as was their defeat in the third battle (:35) - all part of His way of judging His totally sinful people at the point of each others' swords.

Jdg 20:47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and stayed there four months-
A group of "six hundred men" is found so often in the records that we suspect that it may not be literal, but rather refer to a military unit or subdivision (Jud. 3:31; 18:11; 20:47; 1 Sam. 13:15; 14:2; 23:13; 27:2;30:9; 2 Sam. 15:18).

Jdg 20:48 The men of Israel went back to Benjamin and put to the sword everything in the towns, including the livestock, and anything they found. All the towns which they found they set on fire-
This is exactly the language used of the destruction of Canaanite cities by Joshua. We note they didn't take the animals for themselves. All was as it were sacrificed to Yahweh. They were treating their brethren like Canaanites. And yet we note that the tribes of Israel had at this point not to zealously driven out the Canaanites and possessed their land. Their apparent zeal to obey Yahweh's commands about the Canaanites was misplaced, a twisting of His word to justify their own bloodlust and self justification. Truly we are to take the lesson that in conflict between brethren, there are never victors, only losers. Hosea twice (Hos. 9:9; 10:9) warns that all Israel will be punished "as in the day of Gibeah". His point surely is that all Israel sinned in essence as did Benjamin. They were no better. And continued to be no better. Even at the time, the losses on both sides [Israel and Benjamin] were so great that the lesson was even then taught- they were all as bad as each other. The body of Israel was divided and thereby destroyed or seriously damaged, just as was Benjamin.

"All the towns" and the language of complete destruction is allusion to how they saw them as 'devoted' to Yahweh; see on :40. They have in mind Dt. 2:34; 3:6, of devoting a city or people to destruction. The Israelites were determined to make the tribe of Benjamin a *herem* or total devotion to Yahweh, the equivalent of a whole burnt offering to Yahweh. The Levite likewise cut his wife up into parts as if she was a whole burnt offering. But they are confusing their own blood lust and hatred of their brethren with zeal for God. As happens so often.

JUDGES CHAPTER 21

Jdg 21:1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah: Not one of us will give his daughter to a Benjamite as wife-
Here we have another repetition of theme, that of unwise oaths. For Jephthah had done the same. And it resulted at very best in his daughter going unmarried. We think too of Joshua's over hasty oath to the Gibeonites. We are to discern the hand of God in all

these things and to learn from the repeated mistakes of His people as recorded in the Biblical record. We are surely intended to contrast this with how the Israelites had freely given their daughters to marry Gentiles. Their oath is therefore hypocritical. It is religious extremism, not spirituality. They treat their own brethren as if they are worse than Gentiles.

Jdg 21:2 The people came to Bethel where they sat until evening before God, raising their voices and weeping bitterly-

They had likewise sat before God, i.e. before His manifestation and presence in the ark and priesthood, when they had enquired why they had been defeated twice when fighting the Benjamites. It was tears all around, as they began to realize the extreme folly of what they had done. But it was grief they themselves had brought about. Their weeping before Yahweh recalls Joshua's after the defeat at Ai. The great victory they had just won was in reality a defeat for Israel. Because in conflict between brethren, there can only be losers. Any apparent victory is in fact a further loss.

Jdg 21:3 They said, Yahweh, the God of Israel, why has this happened to Israel, that there should be today one tribe missing from Israel?-

If Yahweh was indeed Israel's God, then to destroy a part of Israel was clearly to have sinned against Him. This is what we do whenever we separate or effectively cut off a part of the body of Christ. As noted on Jud. 20:23, the request was really its own answer. Should they fight against "our brothers"? Obviously not. You do not fight and kill your brothers. Why has this happened? Because they had done it. So often our prayers reveal their own answer. We see this in David's prayers as recorded in the Psalms. Some of them end up providing the answer to the opening question or struggle. This is one advantage of praying out loud, of verbalizing our questions to God. The answer sometimes becomes apparent just through the process of verbalizing our thoughts.

They ask the God of Israel why one tribe has almost perished from Israel. They imply that Israel's God should preserve Israel. Yet it was they who had dismembered Israel. This is a classic case of blaming God for what is clearly man's fault.

"Why did God let this happen?" is a common question today. But the answer is simply that man made it happen. The history here is a helpful window onto the question. There is no recorded answer of God to their question, as there isn't today. But the humble, reflective mind will immediately see the answer as soon as the question is framed. It's not a case of God letting things happen, but of man making bad things happen. In this case, Yahweh confirmed them in their course of action, by saying that Judah should go up first and be destroyed by Benjamin.

Jdg 21:4 Next day the people rose early and built an altar and offered burnt offerings and

peace offerings-
Peace offerings were offered in times of Israel's sadness and defeat (Jud. 20:26; 21:4), as well as in celebration. In our traumas of life, we need to remember that the only thing that matters is our peace with God, the joyful fact that we have nothing separating us. As Israel made their peace offerings at those times, so we too should consider the possibility of breaking bread, perhaps alone, as we meet the desperate traumas of our lives.

But as in Jud. 20:26, we note that the usual order is sin offering, burnt offering [speaking of subsequent dedication to God] and then the peace offering, celebrating the peace with God now enjoyed. But there is no mention of a sin offering. Israel still refused to accept how much they were in the wrong.

Jdg 21:5 They asked, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who didn't come up to the assembly before Yahweh? For they had taken a solemn oath that anyone who didn't come up to Yahweh to Mizpah should surely be put to death-
The implication of Jud. 20:3 ["The Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah"] is that the Benjamites weren't represented at the Mizpah conference. And Israel had threatened death to anyone who didn't come to this gathering. So the Benjamites stood condemned to death just because they didn't attend a meeting. Just as some have been disfellowshiped for "long continued absence" from a church. This is not at all Biblical, and the attitude of the Israelites here was not at all in accord with the Law of Moses. Nor did they take any advice from God about this; they simply promised death to any who didn't attend their gathering. Perhaps this was why they thought they were justified in slaying the Benjamites- because they had broken the Israelites' self declared law and commandment to come to Mizpah.

Jdg 21:6 The Israelites grieved for Benjamin their brother. There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day-
Their requests to God for guidance about attacking Benjamin had featured the phrase "our brother". They ought to have followed their conscience toward God, and their sense that any murder of a brother must be wrong. Instead the power of groupthink and transferring the guilt of their own sins onto Benjamin was stronger than that. And now they grieve for what they had done. Their exclusion and cutting off of their brother had in fact diminished all Israel. And this is what we do to the body of Christ by cutting off parts of it; it is as Paul puts it, as bizarre as cutting off our own limbs. The body will not function well without those limbs. I suggested on Jud. 20:2 that initially, the other Israelites wanted to destroy Benjamin in order to take their territory. But now they apparently genuinely repent. We see how even in the depths of unspirituality, there is still an element of conscience. And that is the theme of Judges 13-21, that flesh and

Spirit were hopelessly mixed in God's people at this time. So mixed that the mere presence of 'Spirit' element did not at all guarantee their salvation. We think of the rejected in the Lord's parables addressing him as "Lord, Lord"; and the foolish virgins eager to enter His Kingdom when it was all too late. And yet Jabesh Gilead was in Manasseh. By making Benjamites intermarry with another tribe, they were weakening Benjamin's claim to the land.

As noted on :3, God was silent in response to their enquiries. They don't get it- His silence was to elicit within them the awareness that it was their fault, not His, and their questioning of Him was inappropriate. They fail to get this, and so go ahead in yet more folly. Just as man does so often. Their efforts to save their brother will involve murder, kidnap and forced marriage- showing that their apparent 'love' and 'repentance' concerning Benjamin was fake. And Israel will do these things against Jabesh Gilead, probably the only city which had responded rightly to their demand to go and fight Benjamin.

Jdg 21:7 How shall we provide wives for those who remain, since we have sworn by Yahweh that we will not give them our daughters as wives?-
It seems the idea was that if the virgins were stolen and forced to marry, then the oath not to freely give daughters as wives was still kept. Even though it involved kidnapping, forced marriage, and the murder of many innocent people, including children. All these gross sins were done in order to keep a foolish and hasty oath. The appearance was that they were careful to avoid the sin of breaking an oath. But they commit far greater sins in order to avoid that sin. The real issue was that they didn't want Benjamites to marry their daughters. Again we see how badly things go when there is no personal devotion to Divine principle, and rather a desire to appear religiously correct in order to justify what man wants to do naturally. Another attraction of stealing the virgins was that there would then no issue about the husbands needing to pay the usual bride price.

Here we have one of several examples of men caught up in unwise oaths. We think of Darius promising to slay anyone who prayed to anyone apart from himself; of Herod vowing to do anything for the daughter of Herodias, including murdering John the Baptist. They could get out of their oaths by humility... but they didn't. In this case, the easiest option would have been to just repent of their oath and let the remaining Benjamites marry women from other tribes. But for all their apostacy, they had a legalistic mindset. And there was a pride factor in their society when it came to not following through on an oath. As many do today, they went to the most bizarre lengths to get around the oath they had made, and to save face. And yet their bizarre method of getting around it was all the same unethical, and involved the massacre of yet more of their brethren at Jabesh Gilead, and the kidnapping of girls from Shiloh. It would have been far better to humble themselves and retract their rash oath. We see this lesson

repeated in the rulers who swore too hastily, resulting in Daniel and John the Baptist suffering greatly- just because the rulers were too proud to take back their words.

Jdg 21:8 They asked, Which of the tribes of Israel didn't come up to Yahweh to Mizpah? They found that none from the camp from Jabesh Gilead came to the assembly-
We note that they had not attempted to murder these people because they had not come to the meeting at Mizpah. And yet they apparently used Benjamin's absence from that meeting [when it was clearly biased against them from the start] as justification for slaying Benjamin (:5). So clearly the whole miserable, quasi legal process was set up from the start in order to cut off Benjamin. And this is how church politics so often goes, when there is a predetermined desire to cut someone off.

Jdg 21:9 For when the people were counted, none of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead were there-
We wonder why Jabesh did not attend. Perhaps they like Benjamin had seen through the manic feeding frenzy of the groupthink, and had objected to the absolutely unBiblical judgment being taken- with so much depending on just one questionable witness, with Dt. 17:6,7 being so totally ignored. See on Jud. 20:13. And yet still Israel were impenitent for all that; and they were to go ahead and punish Jabesh with a massacre, killing even innocent children, because of it. The implication is that absolutely every town of Israel outside of Benjamin was represented in this great assembly, including the totally apostate people of Laish of Dan (Jud. 17,18). Only Jabesh didn't come. This is the extent to which the people were caught up in a shark tank feeding frenzy of judgmentalism, self congratulation and hatred against their brethren. These things happen today; brethren are demonized and hated on a mass scale on flimsy grounds by brethren who are only as weak as themselves. It is a basic psychological reaction, the unchecked movement of the flesh rather than of the Spirit.

Jdg 21:10 The congregation sent twelve thousand valiant fighting men and commanded them: Go and put the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead to the sword, including the women and children-
The idea was, a thousand from each tribe, following the principle of Num. 31:4. Yet they were following an isolated Biblical precedent in a very misplaced way- for they were going to massacre innocent people, all because they were too proud to accept they had made a foolish oath (see on :7). We see here a common human feature- of apparent obedience to the letter of the law, whilst breaking the obvious spirit of the law. We think of the Jews being scrupulous to be ritually clean for the Passover- at which they crucified God's Son. It's a case of having a plank in our own eye whilst noticing the splinter in the eye of another.

Jdg 21:11 This is what you are to do: kill every male and every woman who is not a virgin-
Whilst it is not recorded that this was done, this massacre of their own brethren was necessitated by their refusal to humble themselves and retract their oaths, as discussed on :7. They had not really learned the depth of their sin- for here they were advocating the cutting off of yet more of their brethren in a massacre, for the sake of undoing the damage done by cutting off their brethren from Benjamin. They had not learned the lesson.

More exactly, “You shall devote to utter destruction” or “cherem” (Lev. 27:28). They were also alluding to the uttermost destruction of the Midianites in Num. 31:7,17. But they failed to perceive that they are again treating their own brethren as Gentiles.

Jdg 21:12 They found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known man by lying with him, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in the land of Canaan-
This may imply they did not in fact destroy Jabesh as they had promised to Yahweh to do, and as the elders had told them to do. The town was still inhabited at the time of 1 Sam. 11:1. It seems they were very selective in their obedience, and yet claimed such utter and careful loyalty to Yahweh. The record continually demonstrates their hypocrisy and ignorance of true spirituality, whilst having a knowledge and apparent devotion to isolated parts of God's law. The same is seen amongst so many professing to be God's people today. Yet "saved alive" in :14 implies they did indeed massacre the town. The description of the conflict with Jabesh as a "war" in :22 suggests that there was indeed bloodshed, probably on both sides; and yet despite that, the required number of young female captives weren't taken. So all the bloodshed and "war" just didn't achieve the desired end anyway. The logical process in thought behind the decisions taken in all this appears very lacking in wisdom. Clearly they did not progress on God's advice, but only on their own.

The treatment of these women is not far from rape. The rape of two women by Benjamites leads to the effective rape of 400 women by the rest of Israel, and kidnapping and forcible marriage of another 200. This is how out of proportion was Israel's response.

Jdg 21:13 The whole congregation sent an offer of peace to the Benjamites who were in the rock of Rimmon-
They 'proclaimed peace', using the same phrase as in Dt. 20:10: "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, proclaim peace to it". But the Israelites did this to the few remaining Benjamites *after* they had massacred most of them (Jud 21:13). This was typical of how Israel at this time were taking fragments of God's law and applying them,

but absolutely out of context. Whilst they disregarded the majority of the Law, both in letter and spirit. And we see this in the wider Christian movement. Bits and pieces of Divine principle are used in a misplaced way, when the majority of God's revelation and will is ignored.

Jdg 21:14 So then Benjamin returned and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive from Jabesh Gilead, but they weren't enough for them-
"Saved alive" implies they did indeed massacre the town. They had clearly had a bad conscience about fighting against Benjamin their "brother". But they fail to really grasp why that was wrong. For in the flush of final victory against Benjamin, they now go and do exactly the same sin of murdering their brothers. And in this case, for no reason other than that Jabesh hadn't come up to some kangaroo court they had set up to judge Benjamin. They were acting absolutely against God's will and without any seeking of His guidance. And all because, as discussed on :7, they lacked the faith to let God resolve the issue of the remnant of Benjamin having no wives; and because they lacked the humility to take back their oath not to let their daughters marry Benjamites.

Jdg 21:15 The people grieved for Benjamin because Yahweh had made a gap in the tribes of Israel-
AV "repented them", they had a change of mind. But this is not necessarily the same as perceiving their own moral wrong. There is no reference to their seeking counsel from God as to whether or not to massacre yet more of their brethren in Jabesh, which was apparently of another tribe and east of the Jordan [presumably it was near the wadi Jabesh which is east of Jordan]. The people had not asked counsel of God about how to judge the matter. They had all eagerly condemned Gibeah to destruction, without referring to God, and in studied disobedience to His word (see on Jud. 20:13). Yet having made their own judgment, they then made a great show of asking His advice as to which tribe should lead the assault, or, should attack Gibeah first (Jud. 20:18). Yet God responded to their request. He said Judah should go first. He wanted to use this incident to punish Israel, as well as Benjamin. And as so often, His judgments are in terms of brethren destroying each other, rather than Him doing it directly Himself. See on Jud. 20:7. It was Yahweh who made a breach in Israel over this matter. He worked through it all. It was His way of judging His apostate, hypocritical people. The same word is used of His making a breach upon Uzzah, in judgment (2 Sam. 6:8). A breach from Yahweh is a judgment for sin (Is. 30:13; Ez. 22:30 s.w.). Division and conflict amongst God's children is therefore somehow of Him- but it is His judgment upon the community. Alternatively we can read this as the people still not facing up to the enormity of their sins. It was they who had made a breach in Israel, but they blame it on Yahweh. The ambiguity is intentional. They had made the breach, and blamed God for it

[see on :3]. And yet He had confirmed them in what they really wanted to do, which was to dismember Israel. Just as whether the Levite murdered his concubine is ambiguous.

Jdg 21:16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we provide wives for those who remain, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?-
A wife is "from the Lord", not from purely human device. Massacring a town to steal their virgin daughters, and then kidnapping girls from a Passover dance... is all the way of the flesh. We see how misguided were these people, partly concerned with the Divine concept of raising up seed for their brother, and yet with no basic moral backbone at all. They would have been better to have faith that God would provide, in His own wonderful way- rather than massacring Jabesh and kidnapping girls.

Jdg 21:17 They said, There must be an inheritance for the surviving Benjamites so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel-
They are arguing from the basis of the levirate law, that brothers must somehow ensure that seed is raised up to their brother in the case of death. But, as noted on :16, they are focusing upon just one aspect of Divine truth, and ignoring the wider moral teachings of the Mosaic law and indeed of basic ethics and morality. "There *must* be an inheritance..." again reflects their legalistic mind, driven by a devotion to quasi logic to do things which were plain wrong on every count. An inheritance is "of the Lord", just as a wife is (:16); their attempt to play God in all this just made things far worse. And we must ponder whether our own spirituality is no more, at times, than out of context obedience to a few Biblical commands, whilst our flesh runs rampant and we refuse to humble ourselves beneath the essence of a truly spiritual life.

Jdg 21:18 We can't give them wives from our daughters since the Israelites have taken this oath saying, 'Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin'-
I discussed on :7 how if they had humbled themselves and retracted their oaths, then they would not have needed to do the bizarre and sinful things which they did- massacre of Jabesh Gilead and kidnapping young girls. Their legalistic mindset is incredible; and yet they themselves were far astray from Yahweh themselves, and this was why they had been punished at the hands of the Benjamites, losing 40,000 men.

Jdg 21:19 They said, Look, there is an annual feast of Yahweh in Shiloh, which is on the north of Bethel, east of the highway from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah-
If the feast involved dancing (:21) then it was likely the feast of the Passover, with the girls replicating the dancing of Miriam and the women. The exact geographical description is given so that the Benjamites knew precisely where to go. But they ought to have been celebrating Yahweh's deliverance of His people by grace, rather than using it as an opportunity to kidnap wives for themselves. But again this is mixing the flesh and

the Spirit. The girls were to be kidnapped during a feast to Yahweh, without consequence. But the Canaanite tribes also allowed bride kidnapping during feasts. They were following a pagan practice. And it has been observed that "The Pokot people of East Africa permit kidnapping unmarried women during the summer solstice ceremonial cycle".

Jdg 21:20 They instructed the Benjamites: Go and lie in wait in the vineyards-
This bizarre idea of grabbing young unmarried females was all necessitated by the impenitence of the Israelites and their refusal to humble themselves and retract their oath, as discussed on :7.

Jdg 21:21 and watch. When the daughters of Shiloh come out to join in the dances, then rush out of the vineyards and each of you catch a wife from the girls of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin-
The language of lying in wait in ambush and then rushing forward upon the unsuspecting is the language of how the Benjamites had finally captured Gibeah, and how Israel had captured Ai. Again, we see the misplaced idea of appealing to past precedent in God's dealings with His people. They wished to follow some aspects of God's ways in the past, whilst ignoring the vast majority of His teaching, even on a most basic moral level. And we wonder whether the majority of those identifying as 'Christian' at this point in world history are not similar.

Jdg 21:22 When their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, 'Allow them to do this because we didn't get wives for them in the war-
The war is presumably the war against Jabesh of :12. The way it is called a "war" suggests the people of Jabesh fought back. There would have been yet more bloodshed, and it seems there were fewer virgin women captured than the Israelites had initially imagined. "Allow them" is literally 'show us grace'. Like many today, they spoke of grace with no idea of what it really means. They use the grace argument when the whole story shows that nobody knows anything about grace. Rather this is stilted legalism and yet further abuse of people. In response to the grabbing of one woman, the concubine, they are going to grab hundreds of women against their will. And to kidnap a person was a capital offence (Ex. 21:16).

You didn't give them to them, so you are not guilty'-
Perhaps they mean 'Not guilty of breaking the oath not to give your daughter in marriage to Benjamites'. But the way of humility would have been to simply ask God to forgive them for a rash oath, or to just leave it all to God to decide, with faith He would somehow work it out. But when there is no human answer visible, then we tend to abandon faith in God and go for these kinds of bizarre human ways of resolving things.

Or the idea may have been that to give a daughter in marriage to a man of another tribe was a sin. But as the daughters had been taken away forcibly, it wouldn't count as a sin. We note their extreme legalism. And yet as legalists often do, they seriously contradicted themselves. For in this case, it would have been a sin for Benjamites to be marrying women from another tribe. So their solution to the problem was only leading people into sin. There seems no direct statement in the law of Moses that intermarriage amongst the tribes was a sin, although the implication of the principles of inheritance amongst the tribes was that it was far from ideal.

Jdg 21:23 So that is what the Benjamites did. They took wives for each of them from the girls who danced, and carried them off. They returned to their inheritance, rebuilt the cities and lived in them-

See on :22. Carrying them off implies to captivity. They were treating these Israelite girls as prey, taken in some Divinely sanctioned war. But God had not been consulted, and was not in any of this.

Jdg 21:24 Then the Israelites departed each to his tribe and family-

This is perhaps stating the obvious but in order that we imagine them returning home, with only tales of woe and not glorious victory. For they had lost 40,000 of their own men, and slain a huge number of their brethren both from Jabesh and all Benjamin. And arranged the kidnap of innocent girls from their families. Not much to boast about to their families. And so the point is made, that in conflict between brethren, there are only shameful losers.

Jdg 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; each man did that which was right in his own eyes-

This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostacy. The lament may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: RUTH

RUTH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

RUTH CHAPTER 1

Ruth 1:1 In the days when the judges judged, there was a famine in the land. A man of Bethlehem Judah went with his wife and two sons to live in the country of Moab-
The famine was because of Israel's disobedience (Dt. 11:13-17). The idea of famine was to bring the people back to God, but Elimelech [like many people today] responded

poorly to it, and went away from God's people by moving to Moab. Indeed he left Bethlehem, the house of [true] bread, for Moab, [the fake] "seed of the father". The whole point of the story is that he would have been far better remaining in the land of God's bread than going to the world. In Moab he would be unable to come to the sanctuary, and his children ran the risk of marrying unbelievers; and seeing marriage required the father's approval, their marriage out of the faith reflects poorly on Elimelech as well as on his sons. So we see how sin results in Divine intervention [famine, in this case]; that intervention is punishment, but it is aimed at reformation. But it can be taken the wrong way, and people who respond poorly to it are then driven even further from God. This is the way the downward spiral works; but the *holy* Spirit likewise is the dynamic of the upward spiral. See on :13. Doubtless Elimelech reasoned that God had placed him in a situation so awful that he simply *must* go to Moab. But God has promised never to put us in situations which force us to sin (Ps. 125:3; 1 Cor. 10:13), although in the heat of difficulty this requires faith to believe and accept. Indeed the road to Moab would have been via Jericho and across the Jordan, as it were inverting the path to the Kingdom which their ancestors had taken.

Ruth 1:2 The name of the man was Elimelech-
'God is king', reflecting the belief at the time of the judges (:1) that Israel had no human king because Yahweh was their king. But he went to live in the land of Moloch, a form of the Hebrew *melech;* Moloch who was presented as the real king rather than Yahweh, and this family were happy to go along with that on a surface level.

His wife's, Naomi; his two sons', Mahlon and Chilion-
The names of the sons mean "sickly" and "wasting away". So we are given the impression of a "pleasant" woman ['Naomi'] with two sickly sons and a materialistic husband, ever seeking a better deal in life, which never worked out. To have just two sons was a very small family for those days; for we get the impression they had no other children. We can imagine the child deaths, miscarriages etc. which led her to feel that God was not completely with her. And yet it was through all this that she came to Him so strongly.

They were Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah. They came into the country of Moab, and stayed there-
As he now shifted to Moab for a better life, perhaps he had already made such a shift before; because he was a man of Ephraim who had moved to Bethlehem in Judah. We are presented with a family who always wanted a better life, but it never quite worked out. We have surely met this type in our lives. We note that many of the histories of apostacy in the book of Judges feature people from Ephraim, and it seems we are intended to read Elimelech's move to Moab as a continuation of that sad theme. The whole point of the story is that out of such weakness, at least one person [Naomi] holds

on, and through her, indirectly [through Ruth] a wonderful movement of God's Spirit is seen. And this too is a story we have all seen time and again.

Ruth 1:3 Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons-
See on :5. "Left" is usually translated "remained". The implication could be that she ought to have returned to Judah at this point, but she didn't. She is really the classic case of someone out of weakness being made strong; Esther is another example. She came to realize and experience that indeed Yahweh is a protector of orphans and widows (Ps 68:5). It may be significant that Naomi is Elimelech's wife in 1:1 but by 1:3 he is now called Naomi's husband; she has had to adopt the prominent role because of his illness and weakness.

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Ruth 1:4 The sons took wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other was Ruth. They lived there about ten years-
The very phrase "the women of Moab" recalls Israel's apostasy with the women of Moab in 1 Kings 11:1; indeed the Midianite women who led Israel astray in Num. 25:18 were connected with Moab (Num. 22:4). Moabites were not to come into the congregation of Yahweh (Dt. 23:3; Neh. 13:1). The fact the Moabite Ruth was accepted into that congregation in such a major way was therefore an example of God's great value of the human person as an individual, and He is willing as it were to break His own law to demonstrate the degree of that value He placed upon Ruth. With Elimelech dead, we can assume that Naomi was responsible for allowing these marriages to happen, because she refused to return to the land of Israel at that time (see on :3). In their culture, the mother had quite some role to play in the arrangement of marriages (see Song 8:2). Marriages with Moabites are interpretted as breaking the covenant (1 Kings 11:1,2 cp. Dt. 7:3,4). Likewise, departure from the land of Israel is Divine judgment of His people; but this family did just that of their own volition.

Ruth 1:5 Mahlon and Chilion both died, and the woman was bereaved of her two children and of her husband-
"Bereaved" is the word translated "left" in :3. We are given the impression of a woman who has the scaffolding around her life removed, bit by bit; for to lose all the men in her life was a major blow. And it brought her to passionate personal relationship with Yahweh. It seems she found Yahweh in Moab and not in Israel. And her commitment was so strong that it exuded from her, to the extent that Ruth was persuaded of Yahweh by her example. And this is the path so many must pass through; isolation and the removal of all human scaffolding leads us to personal relationship with our God.

Ruth 1:6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, to return from the country of Moab; for she had heard in the country of Moab how that Yahweh had visited His people-
"Visited His people" is an idiom for God's action and intervention. It's clearly not to be taken literally, and likewise the connected idiom of 'coming down' should not be read literally either. When God 'came down' in Christ, we are not to understand a literal descent of a pre-existent Christ to earth; but rather, the manifestation of God in His Son who was born on earth.

In giving them bread- The implication could be that there was a famine in Moab. Naomi's motives were not paramountly spiritual. Again, as noted on :2, she is moving around in search of a better life. We marvel at how God worked to get Ruth into Israel- the death of three men, the famine in Israel initially, the spiritual weakness of Elimelech, the punishment of the family (:21), the enduring faith of Naomi... all in order to bring Ruth into Israel. In the bringing of each person to Himself, there is likewise complex working with far-reaching effects upon unbelievers, for whom events have no personal meaning, and yet the events were for the sake of others. Thus large numbers of people suffered during the seven years famine in Egypt, with no personal meaning for themselves, because that famine was required to reunite the family of God.

Ruth 1:7 She left the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law went with her. They began the journey to the land of Judah-
It seems the idea had been to accompany Ruth from where she was living in Moab, at least to the border of Judah. "Left the place where she was" uses the same words about Lot and his daughters leaving the place where they were in Sodom (Gen. 19:12,14) to go to spiritual safety. And of course Moab was the fruit of Lot sleeping with his daughter when they did so. The allusion is therefore purposeful. The theme is as ever of spiritual weakness, and yet of people becoming strong for God out of that weakness.

The Hebrew is literally "To return to the land of Judah". I suggest the book of Ruth was written up or edited under inspiration in Babylon, as guidance and encouragement for those in captivity in Babylon to return to Judah. Despite having sinned and having endured judgment for that, and despite having lost many of their men folk, Judah were to follow Naomi's example and return, taking any faithful Gentiles with them, and would like Naomi find unexpected blessing in the land, and a part in the family of Messiah.

Ruth 1:8 Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to your mother's house, Yahweh deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me-
God blesses those who bless the seed of Abraham, even if the members of the seed are

spiritually weak (see on 1:1). Naomi shows her awareness of the Abrahamic promises by wishing this blessing upon her daughters in law, whom she considered had been 'kind' to her sons and husband and to herself too. Presumably this was said at the border of Moab and Israel. The women had accompanied Naomi there and the idea was that they should not return. Women travelling alone was unusual. We get the distinct impression of Naomi as being totally without male support in her life. This all drove her towards Yahweh as her Father, protector, provider and redeemer.

Ruth 1:9 Yahweh grant you that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice, and wept-
"Find rest in the house of her husband" is an idiom for having a stable family life with children; note how Ruth 3:1 uses the same idiom: "Shall I not seek rest for you?" effectively means 'I will try to set you up with marriage and a family'. The implication would therefore be that the women had not had children by Naomi's sons, and the sons had both died suddenly. Naomi interpreted this as God's judgment upon her (:20,21). Her bitterness with God was because she felt that her daughters in law had unjustly suffered [childlessness was seen as the greatest tragedy] only because of her and her family. Naomi is effectively telling these women that she considers that the God of Israel is responsible for their barrenness, and if they returned to their gods, and married one of their own people, they would likely have children and 'find rest' in family life. Ruth's strong commitment to Naomi personally and to the God of Israel was therefore all the more remarkable; she accepted she may never have children, that Yahweh's judgments upon His people sometimes affected Gentiles who happened to be involved... but she still so loved Him and wanted to devote herself to Him, despite His harder side. If there is really only one true God, then it is our duty to accept Him, even if we cannot attach meaning to events at the moment we experience them.

We note how Naomi openly and freely uses the word "Yahweh" (also in :8). Clearly she felt strong covenant relationship with Him.

Ruth 1:10 They said to her, No, but we will return with you to your people-
It was Naomi and not those Moabite girls who was returning. But they speak of *"we* will return" because they had come to so identify with Naomi. Or there may be the idea that they wanted to 'turn to' [another legitimate translation of *shub*, rendered here "return"] Naomi's people. Lot was the father of Moab, and the same words are used of how he was returned to his people by Abraham (Gen. 14:16). The hint may be that they wanted to have this same grace shown to them due to the Abrahamic covenant. See on :15.

Ruth 1:11 Naomi said, Go back, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?-

"Go back" is the word for "return" in :10. Naomi is encouraging them to return or turn to their own people, and not hers. And Orpah accepts her encouragement (:15). Naomi apparently had only produced two sickly sons who survived to adulthood, and they had both prematurely died; and she felt herself to be barren. There was no legal requirement for a widow to marry the younger brother of a deceased husband, but it could be argued that any future children of Naomi had a duty to marry their late brother's wife and have children by her in his name. But that would be a very strict reading of the Mosaic legislation in this case, if not simply a wrong interpretation of the Levirate law. For the simple intention of the Levirate law was that if a man died, his brother was to marry his widow and have children by her. And it only applied to "brothers dwelling together". But Naomi has clearly thought it through; for all her apparent weakness and even apostacy as noted so far, she was aware of God's laws. Despite having nobody to teach her there in Moab and no written scripture with her [she was surely illiterate anyway], she remembered the Mosaic law and thought through its implications. However her very strict interpretation of them in this case may suggest she is seeking every reason to discourage the young women to follow her back to Israel. And this makes Ruth's decision the more commendable.

Ruth 1:12 Go back, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, 'I have hope', if I should even have a husband tonight, and should also bear sons-

See on :11. She considered herself barren (:11), but even if she should be able to have children, and they were males, and they lived... it would mean the young women would have to wait to many years that they would likely then be infertile. So Naomi considers herself a woman without hope, in human terms. And it is for those who perceive their hopelessness that the hope of Israel means the most. She also considers the laws of levirate marriage as unable to provide a way out of her hopeless situation. This is perhaps why she doesn't even suggest that Ruth approach Boaz when they first arrive in Bethlehem. It was really a case of being surprised by grace when she finds that in the end, the levirate laws will in fact be used as the vehicle to effect for her such a great salvation for both her and Ruth.

Ruth 1:13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from having husbands? No, my daughters, for it grieves me much for your sakes, for the hand of Yahweh has gone out against me-

See on :11,12. "Grieves" is a form of the Hebrew word *Mara*. It would seem from :20 that Naomi, for all her awareness of God's word and faith in Him, was consumed by bitterness; and she publically acknowledged this. She was bitter because she felt God had unfairly punished her daughters in law for her sin and the apostasy of her family. This is so often a reason for bitterness with God- a sense that His judgments are unjust,

and that the innocent wrongly suffer. The book of Ruth concludes with a happy Naomi raising her grandson who is presented as being in the direct line of Messiah. But this was a woman consumed with bitterness earlier. One lesson is that God still works with and through bitter people, even those who are angry and cross at Him. Another lesson is that in the final end, God's utter grace and love is revealed through all His workings, even if at some points during the process, His actions seem totally unjust to us. But in the final, bigger picture, we realize that this was in fact the way of Divine love and grace, so far above any human plan.

She was grieved because she felt that the judgments upon her for her sin (see on :1) were of such a nature that they had seriously affected these two Gentile women, in that they had been left young widows without children. The fact the two sons and husband died apparently at the same time would lead to the impression that this was an act from God, which Naomi understood as judgment for sin. The fact she retains her love of God and wants to return to Israel is therefore commendable; she responded the right way to God's intervention and judgment, rather than going further away from Him as she had done previously when He intervened (see on :1).

Ruth 1:14 They lifted up their voices, and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell, but Ruth stayed with her-
AV "Clave unto her", the same Hebrew word used of the 'cleaving' in marriage of Gen. 2:24. And marriage has been the context of the discussion. Ruth is saying that she accepts childlessness and singleness, and in place of those things she wished to 'cleave' to Naomi, whom she saw as representative of Israel's God. She was rewarded for this in an appropriate way- she wanted to dwell under the wings of Israel's God (2:12), and He came to be manifested in Boaz, under the wings of whose garment she came (3:4,7,9).

Ruth 1:15 She said, Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people-
The word for "gone back" is that translated "return" in :10. The girls had originally intended to 'return' or 'turn to' Naomi's people, but now Orpah had decided to return to *her* people and not Naomi's people.

And to her god. Follow your sister-in-law-
Cp. AV "her gods". The contrast is between Orpah returning to *her* god [Chemosh?] and Ruth stating in the next verse that she wants to accept Naomi's God [Yahweh]. "Follow" would imply 'follow her back to follow her god'. And putting it like that, Ruth felt she had no choice but to cross the border of Moab / Israel, and totally commit to Yahweh.

Ruth 1:16 Ruth said, Don't entreat me to leave you, and to return from following after you-

She has a choice of following her sister in law to follow her gods, or to follow the apparently hopeless case Naomi, and follow her God Yahweh. It seems to me that it was Naomi's faith in her God despite her own personal weaknesses and Yahweh apparently failing to 'come through' for her in a short term sense... which actually attracted Ruth to Yahweh, through Naomi's example. The harder side of God is attractive in this sense. Because He is so evidently real and for real in human life. It is simply untrue that a God who appears to give immediate blessings is going to be the most attractive. The spiritually minded person will believe otherwise. See on Ruth 2:23.

For where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God-
Ruth's rejection of her national gods and her people was a huge thing to do. We note that the name "Ruth" means "to water"; which was exactly what Moab had refused to do for Israel in Num. 25:1-3. The hope of the restoration prophets was that a repentant Judah would return from the lands of the Gentiles, bringing with them Gentile converts. And I suggest the book of Ruth was rewritten in exile to support this, by demonstrating that it had happened before, historically. Not all Moabites were like Moab had been historically; a xenophobic Judah were to thereby remember that their own beloved king David was from Moabite stock, and any Gentile could come into the people of Israel. Evidence that the book has been rewritten is found in the impression that it was originally all in poetic form in very ancient Hebrew, but that appears to have been rewritten in a way which removes much of the poetic structure whilst adding later Hebrew words and Aramaisms (notably in Ruth 1:13; 4:7). Hence the need in Ruth 4:7 for the book to explain how things were done in "former times" in Israel.

The LXX of Ruth 1:16 is almost quoted by the Lord Jesus in an unusual way, at first blush. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day. He is the same yesterday [as He was in His ministry], today [in His mediation for us] and for ever, as He shall be at His return. Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His “brothers” straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It’s as if He didn’t want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God (Jn. 20:18). He alludes here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God”. This allusion would therefore be saying: ‘OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn’t essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God’.

Ruth 1:17 where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried. Yahweh do so to me, and more also-

Ruth had learnt the Yahweh Name and already accepted Him as her God. Only a person who was in covenant with Yahweh could swear by Him, for in those days you took an oath by your gods (1 Sam. 17:43). The location of death and burial was significant to those who believed that their gods were geographically limited; you wanted to be buried in the land of your god so he could look after you. It's quite possible that Ruth and Naomi still had a somewhat limited view of Yahweh, as did Jonah and many others, thinking that He was the God of the land of Israel, and therefore must be served there. Their return to the land was a return to Yahweh. But of course the wonder of their stories, as they looked back at them, was that they had both effectively found Yahweh outside the land of Israel, and in a situation of great moral weakness and disobedience to Him. This was exactly the intention for the exiles in Babylon, for whom this book was likely rewritten and republished.

If anything but death part you and me-

The idea is that not even death would not part them, because Naomi says they will be united in their death and burial.

We note how Ruth's devotion to Naomi in Ruth 1:17 is alluded to by the Gentile Ittai, when he refuses to "return" and swears to be loyal to David in life or death (2 Sam. 15:20,21). Ruth 4 labours the point that David was descended from Ruth, and it seems David publicized this connection and Ittai grasped it in its spirit of serving God for nothing in this life.

Ruth 1:18 When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she stopped speaking to her-

It was Israel who were to be "strong" (s.w. "steadfastly minded") in order to leave Moab and enter the land of Israel in faith that Yahweh would go with them, and give them an inheritance in that land (Dt. 31:6,7; Josh. 10:25). Again we see the relevance for the exiles in Babylon, who were urged to likewise be "strong" (s.w.) and leave Gentile lands and come back to Judah (Is. 35:3; 41:10).

Ruth 1:19 So those two travelled to Bethlehem-

AV "went until they came". This is the phrase repeatedly used of the travels of the patriarchs, who also left a Gentile land and came to inherit the land of Israel and enter relationship with Yahweh (Gen. 11:31; 13:3; 26:13; 28:15). Ruth is clearly presented as one who wished to act in faith as a true member of the seed of Abraham, and thereby to attain the "hope of Israel". We notice the intended contrast with Rachel, who died before she came to Bethlehem; the women likely passed by the spot where she died (Gen.

35:16,19). The idea is that this wayward Israelitess and Gentile Ruth had more faith than Rachel, one of the founding mothers of Israel.

When they had come to Bethlehem, it happened that all the city was agitated about them, and they asked, Is this Naomi?-
They counted Ruth as part of Naomi; so the grammar demands. They were "agitated about *them*", asking "Is *this* [not "are these"] Naomi?". Her identity with Naomi was somehow apparent.

Ruth 1:20 She said to them, Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me-
She uses the term "Almighty" rather than Yahweh, although she knows the Name Yahweh (:21), because *shaddai* means 'fruitful', from *shad,* the breast. But she had lost the fruit of her womb and apparently didn't even have any grandsons. She believed in Yahweh passionately, so much so that Ruth came to believe in Him because of her; but she has her deep struggles with His justice, and was bitter ["Mara"] because her character reflected how she felt He had dealt bitterly with her. We see how struggles with God's "justice" do not completely preclude relationship with and faith in Him. There are many Biblical examples of that (like Job, David and Jeremiah). And our character and personality likewise is a reflection of our perceived experience of God. The convinced atheist will have an "empty" aspect to their personality because God is missing. Those who have experienced His grace will likewise have grace and patience as part of their characters.

We note that the Divine record doesn't call her Mara but Naomi; whereas the record does recognize name changes such as Sarah, Abraham and Israel [Jacob]. Quite likely the change from Saul to Paul was of his own desire, and the record accepts it; but not this change from Naomi to Mara. The desire of a depressed woman was graciously overlooked by God.

Ruth's devotion to Naomi and the God of Naomi is really commendable. Because I suggest Naomi wasn't His best advertisment. But Ruth saw beyond that, she separated church from God, Yahweh from His people- and wasn't fazed by the channel of His revelation. She "clung" to Naomi (Ruth 1:14), using the word usually used for clinging to Israel's God. Her clinging to Naomi was because Naomi was representative of Yahweh for her. For Naomi herself was bitter, and I suggest, withdrawn into herself. She makes no comment upon Ruth's devotion to her (Ruth 1:18 "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she stopped speaking to her"), and encourages Ruth and Orpah to leave her to make the journey home alone; she tells them four times to "return!" and leave her alone (:8,11,12,16). She doesn't apparently tell Ruth that she has a wealthy relative in Bethlehem who might be able to assist them. Naomi proclaims to Bethlehem that she has returned "empty"; she doesn't mention the one thing she did

have, the blessing of a wonderfully devoted daughter in law. It could be argued that Naomi's silence at the end of the story is significant. There is no hymn of praise from her, no gratitude to Ruth, no recorded expression of joy at the wonderful outcome. We may well wonder whether the women's words of Ruth 4:15 are not a gentle chiding of her to join in the joy rather than remain depressed: "He shall be to you a restorer of life, and sustain you in your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him".

Ruth 1:21 I went out full, and Yahweh has brought me home again empty-
To be "full" was one of the blessings for obedience to the covenant, and the potential gift of God to Israel when they first entered Canaan (Dt. 6:11; Neh. 9:25 s.w.). But she had left Israel assuming that those blessings were not fulfilled. See on :2. Now she realized that she had seen the cup half empty instead of half full. To be empty was to be without blessing (Gen. 31:42; Ex. 3:21; Dt. 15:13). Boaz later tries to indirectly persuade her that this was not the case ultimately (s.w. Ruth 3:17). She returned to Israel and to Yahweh of her own initiative, and yet she says that Yahweh "brought me home", s.w. "returned" (:22 etc.). He worked, and still works, in confirming the desire of every person who seeks to turn or return to Him and the Hope of Israel. She felt that although she had not experienced blessing from Him, indeed she had lost the potential blessings and was without His blessings, yet still she wanted to return to Him. Contrary to Pentecostal reasoning, the experience of "blessing" was not what attracted her to Him. Rather she wanted to simply be in relationship with Him, like the prodigal son returning from Gentile lands not looking for any material blessing.

Why do you call me Naomi, since Yahweh has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?-
Judgment is now, in a sense. She felt that God had judged and as it were legally testified against her for her various weaknesses discussed earlier in this chapter; her seeking for a good life rather than putting God first, not returning to Israel when her husband died, allowing her sons to marry Gentiles etc. But what she was yet to realize was that the apparent affliction was but a prelude to her greater deliverance. Likewise God afflicted Israel in Egypt to the point that even Moses felt it was too much (Ex. 5:22,23), but only that He might bring them out to inherit the land of Israel (Gen. 15:13). The God who forbad the affliction of the fatherless and widow like Naomi and her sons (Ex. 22:22) would not ultimately willingly afflict His people, but only with their restoration in view (1 Kings 11:39; Job 37:23; Lam. 3:33).

But at this point, Naomi appears to not grasp this. And yet for all that, her faith in Yahweh was such that she persuaded Ruth to forsake all and follow Him; for all this mystery of His ways with men and apparent affliction of people with no game plan toward salvation yet in view. Indeed the word she uses for "afflicted" is that translated

"to do evil" or 'be wicked' with a moral dimension (s.w. Gen. 19:7; 38:10; Lev. 5:4; Ps. 64:2; 92:11; Is. 31:2 and often). She comes close to accusing God of being wicked in His treatment of her. This is how bitter she was. And yet this didn't preclude her desire to come to Him, and that desire and commitment to Him, the God whose ways she didn't understand, was so powerful that it converted Ruth to Him as well. We simply learn from this that solving all the problems of Divine justice is not actually required for a person to have relationship with Him. Indeed the very existence of those problems actually leads humble people to believe in Him. That is the paradox which is totally missed by those who seem to think that endless apologetics will pave the way for folks to therefore and thereby believe in God.

Ruth 1:22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned out of the country of Moab-

We notice the double stress upon how they "returned". As noted on :21, it was God who 'returned' them. She says that Yahweh "brought me home", s.w. "returned" (:22 etc.). He worked, and still works, in confirming the desire of every person who seeks to turn or return to Him and the Hope of Israel. There is another similarity here with Abraham, who felt God had made him leave his father's house and come to Canaan, even though this is what he had been commanded to do on his own initiative (see on Gen. 20:13). Ruth returned or turned to Israel "out of" Moab, suggesting she came out from her own people in order to come to Yahweh; just as Abraham.

And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest-

A reminder that there was indeed now bread in Israel. It would have been March or April, the time of Passover (Ex. 9:31), heightening the connection between these women and Israel. For Israel left Egypt after being "afflicted" there (see on :21), to enter the land of promise.

RUTH CHAPTER 2

Ruth 2:1 Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz-

"Kinsman" is literally 'one who knows'. Boaz ["strength", as in 1 Kings 7:21] is presented as a manifestation of Yahweh. He knew the situation exactly (:11), he was a *gibbor* ["mighty man"], with the wealth required to resolve the situation. 'Might' in those days was understood not just as monetary wealth, but in terms of wives and children. It is Sunday School Christianity to imagine him as a single man. And yet Naomi seems to have forgotten about him, or at least assumed her apostacy was such that he would be unable to assist. Again we see a similarity with the prodigal son, who returns to his father's relative wealth but with the assumption he might just be able to get a job as a day labourer with him but instead is welcomed into the family. Indeed the parable of the prodigal has so many similarities with the story of Ruth. The connections suggest that Naomi had indeed sinned and wasted her inheritance in

Moab. Boaz was a descendant of the prostitute Rahab and Salmon, a prince of Judah (Mt. 1:5; Lk. 3:32); and a case can be made that he was one of the spies who first spent the night at her brothel. So he had Gentile blood within him, and was aware that Gentile women, even questionable ones, could be accepted into the community of God's people.

The *goel* or redeemer role played by Boaz was representative of that played by Yahweh; the word is often used about His desire to be that redeemer figure for His people once they returned to the land. I suggested on Ruth 1:16 that the book was rewritten, under Divine inspiration, and applied to the exiles as an encouragement for them to return to the land, bringing Gentile converts with them.

Clearly Boaz is a type of the Lord Jesus. He was from Elimelech's family, who were original Ephrathites from Bethlehem (Ruth 1:1,2 cp. Gen. 35:19). And this relatively obscure town was to be the birthplace of the Lord: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days" (Mic. 5:2).

Ruth 2:2 Ruth the Moabitess-
This is emphasized six times (Ruth 1:22; 2:2,6,21; 4:5,10). The exiles who returned became very xenophobic against Gentiles, and one intention of the book of Ruth being reissued amongst them (see on :1) was to remind them that God deals with individuals, and there were faithful Gentiles as well as unfaithful Israelites. Her tatoos would've been noticeable and fascinating to untatooed Israelites, probably in honour of Moloch and Chemosh, she looked different, spoke Hebrew with a heavy accent and made grammatical mistakes, had a different body language.

Moabites were forbidden to enter Yahweh's congregation, i.e. they could never become part of His people, and that is why marriage with Moabites is specifically outlawed (Dt. 23:3-6). The Rabbis argue that this only applied to male Moabites and therefore Ruth was able to enter Israel. I prefer to see it that Ruth was faced with an impossible situation- she desperately wanted to follow Yahweh, but it seemed her nature and simple fact she was a Moabitess alienated her from God, as well as from Israel- because at the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1), Moab were enemies of Israel (Jud. 3:12,15 the conflict with Eglon king of Moab; and Jud. 11:17 implies Moabites were connected with Ammonites during their conflict with Jephthah). But there is no alienation by nature from a truly loving God. Boaz perceived that and therefore didn't allow God's law to become a chain. The whole story of Ruth is full of this theme- that the spirit and not the letter of laws was discerned and obeyed (e.g. about Levirate marriage, gleaning etc]. He married Ruth to redeem the inheritance of Elimelech- who it seems had broken all the principles of separation from Moab by going to live there, and his sons had married Moabite women. Elimelech went there, a distance of only 50 miles from Bethlehem, because he perceived there was rain and therefore food in Moab, but not in Israel. He ought to have perceived that this was a specific judgment of Israel by God. Because they were only 50 miles away.

Said to Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find grace-
If Naomi had Boaz in mind as a saviour, she surely would have suggested Ruth went and gleaned in his field. But she apparently doesn't suggest this, and is pleasantly surprised when she finds out Ruth happened to encounter Boaz. The encounter with grace is always a surprise to the recipient, for this is the nature of grace, and Naomi responds exactly as we would expect if she had indeed assumed Boaz would not help

her. Ruth casts herself completely upon grace. To glean for dropped grain was for the poorest of the poor (Dt. 24:19); and this is what they were.

We could however take the reference to Boaz in :1 as meaning that Ruth at least was aware of Boaz, and is describing him as the one in whose eyes she should find grace. It was Israel who were to find grace in Yahweh's sight (s.w. Ex. 33:16); so perhaps the spiritually minded Ruth was looking for a person who would reflect Yahweh's grace to her. And indeed Boaz has been set up in :1 as a manifestation of Yahweh's strength and power to save. Ruth was proactive in seeking for grace, however, as we will see when she takes the initiative in proposing to Boaz that he marry her. We could also note that Dt. 24:19 doesn't make allowing gleaning a binding law upon landowners. That's why Ruth says that she will have to find someone who shows her grace in allowing her to glean. The text simply states that "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless and for the widow". By allowing gleaners to come and pick up dropped grain, Boaz's grace was going far beyond the letter of the law. This would account for the hint in :22 that not every landowner allowed gleaning in their fields. Likewise he extrapolates from the law of Levirate marriage to marry Ruth; but as noted on Ruth 3:13, this showing far more grace than the law actually required, seeing that the Levirate law only affected "brothers dwelling together".

It could be argued [from Dt. 24:1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some unseemly thing in her, he shall write her a bill of divorce"; 1 Kings 11:19; Esther 5:8; Jer. 31:2 "The people who were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest... Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love" cp. Ruth 1:9 "Yahweh grant you that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband"] that to find grace in the eyes of a man meant that he would marry her. I suggest we are being told that subconsciously, this was Ruth's secret fantasy. Likewise Boaz's question "Whose is this woman?" betrays his subconscious fantasy of marrying her. It is a true romance, and looks ahead to our relationship with our redeemer, the Lord Jesus. Ruth perhaps entertained the hope or fantasy that she would find a wealthy landowner who would marry her. For this, humanly speaking, was the only way out of their desperate situation. It's rather like Joseph suggesting to Pharaoh that a man be appointed over Egypt's future harvests, and having the spiritual ambition to have himself in view for the appointment. Or Abigail asking David to "remember your handmaid" (1 Sam. 25:31), another possible idiom for marriage. And as with Ruth, that spiritual ambition paid off. What seemed impossible, that a Moabite Gentile beggar could marry a wealthy Israelite landowner and be welcomed into the community of Israel, actually came about. And I suggest Ruth had this spiritual ambition. Although when it began to come true, she was awed by the grace being shown to her.

She said to her, Go, my daughter-

Naomi was effectively a surrogate mother to Ruth. The idea of Ruth marrying Boaz had not initially even occurred to Naomi. She wishes her well in finding someone who would let her glean in their field, and that is all. It is only when Naomi tells her that a man called Boaz was kind to her, that the possibility appears to form in Naomi's mind. For levirate law didn't really envisage someone of such a distance from Ruth as Boaz marrying her to raise up seed. See on Ruth 3:9.

Ruth 2:3 She went, and came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers-

The barley was reaped by women, who tied the reaped grain into bundles, which were then gathered together into shocks for transport by the men to the threshing floor. See on :7.

And she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech-

They practiced strip farming, the strips being defined by landmarks. This situation arose because of the land being constantly split up in inheritances, and was one reason why the anonymous kinsman didn't want to mar his inheritance which he would leave by buying land which would revert to the son he was to have by Ruth, and would not remain in his name but in the name of that son. There was of course no "chance" to this ["she happened to.."]. One simple message of the book is that there is no chance. All was clearly meant to be, as God worked to respond to Ruth and Naomi's desire to come to Him. "She happened to come" is AV "Her hap was to light on...". The same phrase is used by Solomon in lamenting how such time and chance happens to all (Ecc. 2:14,15; 9:2,3). He failed to learn the lesson from his great ancestor; that in fact there is no such thing as chance happening in the lives of those who love God.

Ruth 2:4 Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, Yahweh be with you! They answered him, Yahweh bless you!-

We have here an insight into the spiritual mind of Boaz, openly using the Yahweh Name in the workplace. It is this kind of day by day spirituality which is the essence of the believing life. Yahweh's 'blessing' and 'being with' His people is however directly associated with generosity to those like Naomi and Boaz: "The foreigner living among you and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates, shall come and shall eat and be satisfied, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do" (Dt. 14:29). Perhaps the blessing called out upon Boaz by the people in his field was because they recognized that he was indeed blessing the foreigner, fatherless and widow. So his interest in helping Ruth and Naomi was genuinely spiritually motivated; the fact that Ruth was an eligible and perhaps attractive younger woman wasn't the primary motivation for his grace.

Ruth 2:5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was set over the reapers, Whose young woman is this?-

Boaz asking [in the Hebrew] *whose* is she, rather than *who* is she, might suggest it was love at first sight and he was immediately holding in mind the possibility of marrying her. It could be Ruth had the same feelings (see on Ruth 2:13; 3:2,10). The question 'Who is this?' as asked by Boaz of Ruth is to be understood as a statement of intended action and not read on face value. For he knew exactly who she was (:11). The same kind of question is asked by David about Bathsheba, even though he knew who she was because she lived next door to him and was the wife of his close friend (2 Sam. 11:3). Likewise when Saul enquires about who David is after his victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:56), it is not because he doesn't know him. For David had been already at the court of Saul. The question 'Who is this?' means that the questioner wants to do something for the person being enquired after.

"To whom does she belong?" are Boaz's first words. To which man, husband or slave owner- that was the question. And we can assume that he asks the question not just out of random interest, but because he was interested in changing that ownership and having her for himself. Ruth was unusual; her commitment to Israel's God had driven her to absolute poverty, homeless and hungry. But she was free- she belonged to nobody. Just to Yahweh. She was in that sense very attractive. She was vulnerable,

but this is what brought her to the shadow of Yahweh's wings. Her behaviour at the threshingfloor in chapter 3 appears out of character with her, but apart from that, she presents as a woman of intense spirituality and utterly devoted to Yahweh and serving Him for nothing. He says that after observing her at work. This can be read as anything from love at first sight, to the abusive grooming interest of a powerful man in a vulnerable weak woman. There is no reason to think Boaz was single. And at this point, he didn't know anything about Ruth and her background- he noticed a woman whom he found attractive, possibly from observing her bending down to glean sheaves, and began finding out how he could get her for himself. His attraction to her was on a human level. The language is that of David enquiring after Bathsheba, in order to have her for himself sexually. But he becomes her saviour / go'el, and typifies the apparently random interest of God in those whom He wishes to love and save.

Ruth 2:6 The servant who was set over the reapers answered, It is the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab-
This implies that she was already well known in the small town. Her Moabite nature is twice stressed. But :11 suggests that the servant / foreman told Boaz all the back story on Ruth. Because it would've been natural for him and the other workers to ask this foreigner what her story was.

Ruth 2:7 She said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves'. So she came, and has continued even from the morning until now, although she stayed a little in the house-

The foreman reports that Ruth had asked to gather among the sheaves. This could be understood as meaning that she had the ambition and initiative to ask to not just glean, but gather some sheaves; or at least to go to where the bundled sheaves had been lying before transportation, and glean what grain had fallen there from the sheaves as they awaited transportation. The law required landowners to leave the edge of fields unharvested and not to return to harvest stalks which had escaped harvest in the center of the field. The barley growing at the edge of the fields was mixed with weeds and of lower quality than that growing in the center of the field. But she asks for more than this. She made a special request, to glean after the reapers in the center of the field, and Boaz confirms his agreement to it in :15. Boaz asks that Ruth not be put to shame for her request. Presumably she was driven to this shameful special request by the desperation of hunger. Likewise her throwing of herself at Boaz in chapter 3 was motivated by desperation. It is depseration that leads us to Boaz, our redeemer, the Lord Jesus. She didn't cynically think that Bethlehem, the house of bread with plentiful harvests, was not in fact coming true for her. She continues her humble devotion to coming somehow into the land shadowed by God's cherubic wings. She is hereby presented as having no extended family and being really desperately hungry and poor. With no legal hope of marrying into Israel. We observe the same forwardness in her coming to Boaz in Ruth 3 and offering herself in marriage to him. The narrative bids us reflect and interpret- was she "forward" and self seeking, or, spiritual and modest, but simply driven by desperate hunger to this uncharacteristic boldness?

"The house" refers to a temporary booth where workers could take rest in the brutal heat. The law about gleaning didn't at all require that people should be allowed to glean right behind the reapers, "among the sheaves". It simply stated that if a sheaf was forgotten, the farmer should not return to collect it, but leave it in the field for the

poor. That Ruth's utter poverty lead her to beg to be allowed to pick up the grain "among the sheaves" was far beyond this. That Boaz and his servant allowed it indicates how he saw beyond the letter of the law to the spirit, and this is what will be seen again in the very generous and far reaching extension he makes to the law of levirate marriage. The whole story is in fact about moving beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of it, which is grace. Ruth could be interpreted as being forward, but it seems to me that really she was driven to such going beyond the letter of the law because of her desperate need.

"Although she stayed a little in the house" is understood by LXX as meaning that she worked all the time, and didn't even take a break in the rest booth. The foreman is commending her hard working nature. And this is indeed how she presents- hard working, taking the initiative, yet totally devoted to Israel's God. And God responds to that.

Ruth 2:8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, Listen, my daughter: Don't go to glean in another field, and don't go away from here, but stay here close to my maidens-

The girls in view are the reapers, for the reapers were usually women, and it was the men who gathered the sheaves into shocks and transported them to the threshing floor. We note how the Lord likens His Angels to reapers, when this was a typically female work.

Ruth 2:9 Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and go after them-

"Go after" the other women is to be connected with how Boaz later commends Ruth for not 'going after' men in the hope of marriage (Ruth 3:10). So we can conclude that he is directing her attention to the field before her; for already there was forming in his mind a plan to get a field for her of her very own. And by directing her eyes to the field he was surely hoping that the same possibilities would form in her mind too.

Haven't I commanded the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go to the vessels, and drink from that which the young men have drawn-

Boaz perhaps feared Ruth would go after the young men who were his harvesters. Again we have a picture of his subconscious attraction to her, and his fear that she would be snapped up by one of the young men. Although he and they greeted each other in spiritual terms, clearly that may have been a mere formality as they were likely to abuse a vulnerable single woman. He commends her later for not having gone after young men (Ruth 3:10). It would seem that Boaz fell in love at first sight, but the basis of his attraction was her spirituality and devotion to Israel's God (2:12,13).

Moabites were excluded from entering the congregation of Israel because they didn't give bread and water to Israel in the wilderness (Dt. 23:4-7). Boaz was a Godly man who makes allusion to the Torah in his words. So he was surely aware of this; and he is providing bread [grain] and water to a Moabitess. He understands grace and is reversing what Moab did to Israel, rather than simply legalistically obeying the law. Although he was in love with her, he also shows her the grace which is beyond the law. This going beyond the law in his attitude to her gleaning and to the Levirate marriage laws is a major theme of the book.

Ruth 2:10 Then she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found grace in your sight, that you should take knowledge of me, since I am a foreigner?-

Falling on the face, bowing and saying these very words is all what Moses did before

Yahweh in the context of entering the covenant and entering the land (Ex. 33:12,13). Abraham and Joshua did likewise (Gen. 17:3,17; 18:3; Josh. 5:14). All the way through, Ruth sees Boaz as representing Yahweh, and his acceptance of her and redemption of her represented that of Yahweh. For she had come to Israel primarily because of her commitment to Yahweh and the covenant.

Ruth's feelings at this point, probably perceiving that Boaz also was in love with her as well as being gracious to her, all point to our feelings when we grasp the grace and special interest of God in little me.

But to 'find grace in the sight' of a man also means to be accepted by him as a wife (Dt. 24:1). The words of both Ruth and Boaz always seem to have hints in them towards marriage; their feelings and hopes were clearly mutual, and this is the beauty of the story as romance. See on :13. Ruth is awed that he should give her grace in his eyes although she was a Gentile. She was aware of the prohibition upon Moabites entering Yahweh's congregation. But one of the themes of the book is that the spirit and not the letter of the law is to be followed. God cares for individuals and ultimately has relationship with persons rather than nations *en masse*. Ruth obviously lived in the hope that she could indeed enter the congregation of Yahweh and the letter of the law need not apply to her. She used the Yahweh Name and had specifically chosen to follow Naomi to Israel because of her commitment to Naomi's God, whom she had declared to be her God- whether or not God's people accepted her. She was therefore thrilled to see hints that Boaz likewise was thinking outside the box, beyond the constrictions of mere legalism. And in Boaz she sees the representation of Yahweh towards her.

Ruth 2:11 Boaz answered her, I have come to know all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth-

The reason for Boaz's kindness was not therefore that he simply was showing grace to some random stranger. He was aware of Ruth's story from his servant as discussed above. Or we may ask: From whom would he have known all Ruth had done for Naomi, unless he had spoken with Naomi? For they were relatives. This paves the way for my suggestion on Ruth 4:3,5 that Naomi, the seller of the land, had made a condition of buying the land that the purchaser also married Ruth. It could be that Naomi and Boaz had spoken and therefore he respects how she left her parents- implying they were still alive. But he would only have learned this from Naomi.

Again there is a *double entendre* in Boaz's words. For in Gen. 2:24, marriage is defined as leaving father and mother and being joined to our partner. He says that she has indeed left father and mother- to come to Israel. But his words are pregnant with the implication that now she had left father and mother, she was to marry. And his grace toward her in entering the marital covenant was to reflect Yahweh's covenant being extended to her. These ideas are developed in Ruth 3. planned the whole legal situation we encounter in Ruth 4.

"Left your father and mother" is an allusion to "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife" (Gen 2:24). Boaz is presented as clearly having marriage with Ruth on his mind at least subconsciously. He also is alluding to ""Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house unto the land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12:1); and he applies these words about Abraham to Ruth, as if he sees her as spiritually one of Abraham's seed. Although his reference to Gen. 2:24 suggests he was her as eligible for marrige, his allusion to scripture and his Godly way of greeting his workers suggest that he was a

Godly man, but one who fell deeply in love with Ruth at first sight and wanted her for himself. He uses the same Hebrew word for "cleave" in :8 "stay here close to my maidens". Subconsciously at least, he had Gen. 2:24 in mind and was thinking of marrying Ruth. Boaz was so distant as a relative that he was not at all obligated to marry Ruth. Any obligation for her could have come under the legislation of Lev. 25:23 about caring for your relative who has fallen upon hard times.

And have come to a people that you didn't know before-

She had of course "known" Israelites before. So Boaz is using the idea of 'knowing' in the Hebraic sense of having relationship with. She realized that relationship with Yahweh means a relationship also with His people. John's letters likewise point out how the vertical relationship with God must have a horizontal dimension also. Boaz realizes this and wants therefore to manifest Yahweh's acceptance of Naomi. Her coming to Israel was therefore seen as coming to know God.

Ruth 2:12 May Yahweh repay your work, and a full reward be given you-

We may query Boaz's idea that Ruth's devotion to Yahweh should be rewarded with 'full wages'- which he imagines is his marrying of Ruth and production of a child by her. The language appears very works-centered. Grace is nowhere implied. And Ruth clearly left Moab without expecting any such reward. She came to Israel expecting that in line with Dt. 23:3-6, she would be unable to marry in to Israel. She came expecting nothing material in response to her devotion to Yahweh- and neither should we. But by grace she was given it. Boaz however reasoned that she should get 'full wages' for her devotion to Yahweh, and thus appears as less spiritual than her. Naomi likewise had said that Ruth should receive "hesed" / grace from Yahweh because of the "hesed" / grace Ruth had shown to Naomi. She prays Ruth will be rewarded with marriage and family in Ruth 1:9 and then in Ruth 3:1 she uses the same word in seeking to find Naomi such "rest" by her own device and scheming. The story line bids us enquire whether this 'measure for measure' approach is in fact right; we continually encounter God's gracious hand of providence, such as Ruth 'happening' to glean in Boaz's strips of land. As if to show that God's grace is of a different nature to the 'measure for measure' expectation of Naomi and Boaz [representing the entire Protestant work ethic], that good words should be rewarded by God.

These are the very words of the new covenant offered to Judah in Gentile lands (Jer. 31:16). Again, as noted on Ruth 1:16, the book of Ruth was clearly rewritten with phrases and wordings designed to encourage the exiles to make the journey of Ruth and Naomi, and to accept Gentile converts and not oppress women, nor anyone, but to perceive the value of persons as Boaz had done. The fact Boaz says these words to her again shows him to be Yahweh manifest to her. He was to recompence her "labour" with practical care and the marriage covenant, and thereby was manifesting to her God's covenant acceptance of her.

John writes that it is our 'labour', in the sense of hard mental effort, to know Him and believe in Him, which will have a 'full reward' (2 Jn. 8). John here is alluding to the LXX of Ruth 2:12, where a 'full reward' is given to Ruth for working hard all day gleaning in the fields. It may be that this allusion was because "the elect lady" addressed by John was in fact a proselyte widow, like Ruth. John's allusion indicates that he understands Boaz as using "labour" to refer to her mental labour of coming to faith in Yahweh. But the point is, we have to *labour*, as much as one might work hard walking around a lake or gleaning in the field, in order to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

For He told those who walked around the lake that they should not do that labour for food, but for relationship with Him.

From Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge-

Again, he sees himself as manifesting that refuge which Yahweh was extending over Ruth. This was why he was preserving her life and her personal safety as she worked in his fields. See on Ruth 3:10. After "Yahweh, the God of Israel", the LXX adds “to whom you have come”, implying that Ruth’s motivation for coming to Israel was in order to come to the God of Israel and take her place under His wings. Ruth was smart and spiritually ambitious; she sees Boaz as representative of Yahweh in that she later literally takes refuge under the wings of Boaz's garments in 3:10.

Ruth 2:13 Then she said, Let me find grace in your sight, my lord-

As noted on :10, to 'find grace in the sight' of a man also means to be accepted by him as a wife (Dt. 24:1). The words of both Ruth and Boaz always seem to have hints in them towards marriage; their feelings and hopes were clearly mutual, and this is the beauty of the story as romance. She was here summoning the courage to indirectly suggest to Boaz that he could accept her as his wife. In the same way as she had the courage to throw herself upon Yahweh and claim covenant relationship with him, despite being a Moabitess.

Because you have comforted me, and because you have spoken to the heart of your handmaid-

This is very much the language of the restoration prophets in their message of encouragement to Judah in Gentile lands to return to the land (Is. 40;1; 66:13; Ez. 3:10). As explained on Ruth 1:16, the book of Ruth was rewritten under inspiration as encouragement to the exiles.

Although I am not as one of your handmaids-

This is one of a series of connections with the parable of the prodigal. As the son wanted to return to the Father as a servant although somewhat different from them, as he was a relative also, so Ruth felt. There’s an ambiguity in the last part of Ruth’s words here. It could be translated as “I don’t wish to merely be as one of your maidservants” (see NEB), with the implication, however vague, that she was thinking of marriage. This was then extended into the effective proposal she later makes to Boaz (see on Ruth 3:2,10).

Ruth 2:14 At meal time Boaz said to her, Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your morsel in the wine-

Bread and grape juice was indeed appropriate fare for workers in the oppressive heat of harvest. But the invitation from Boaz to Ruth to partake of "bread and wine" is framed as having religious overtones. For nearly all Biblical references to "bread and wine" together have a spiritual, covenantal dimension or context. He was again seeking to encourage her that she had indeed entered covenant with himself and with Yahweh whom he represented to her.

This is the direct equivalent of the office girl being invited out for lunch with the boss. The invitation to dip her bread in his bowl of wine was an invitation to close friendship; the Lord used the same to Judas as a desperate last minute appeal to him to accept His love. When you've only just started work. But Ruth didn't as it were work for the firm. It was as if some random homeless person who goes around checking the bins at a factory... gets noticed by the CEO and invited to lunch with him. And this is God's grace to us. The fact she even said "Yes" says something about her. She was

looking out for providential answers and ways forward, and was not just dumbly acceptive of her station and place. The random homeless person would likely decline such an invitation, at the very least because there is obviously some whiff of possible sexual expectation in it. But Ruth said yes. Here and in :15 we see Boaz not merely looking after the widow and foreigner, but showering her with attention and gifts. This can be read as nothing more than falling in love, or desiring her as his own. We need to perceive the absolute grace and wonder of having been invited to the Lord's table, to eat His bread and drink His wine; and never presume upon it, by getting offended that some human refuses to break bread with us. And never think to exclude others from that table and grace. For Ruth would hardly have turned around and told others to get away from Boaz's table.

She sat beside the reapers, and they reached her parched grain, and she ate, and was satisfied, and left some of it-

The legal requirement was that a poor person could pick grain and rub it in their hands to give a little food (Dt. 23:25). But this was taking that law way beyond what it said, in a spirit of grace. She was given no passing snack; she ate so much that she left some of what she was given. And we will see that this is what Boaz does with the levirate marriage law too. But the parched grain was extended to her by the reapers. They too had absorbed the spirit of grace shown by their master. And indeed, ways of grace are contagious. The superabundance of grace is shown by her having more than enough to eat, and taking back for Naomi what she had left over from the meal (:18).

Ruth 2:15 When she had risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and don't reproach her-

The women reaped, tying the reaped grain into bundles, which were then gathered together into shocks for transport by the men to the threshing floor. It was unsurprising that there should be some protest at this gleaner picking up as much grain as they themselves were going to take home. "Reproach" is the word used in the restoration prophecies of how a repentant, regathered Judah would not be reproached (Is. 45:17; 50:7; 54:4). Her boldness in asking to glean even among the sheaves was not forwardness; she was driven to it by hunger and poverty. And it was that same desperate but proactive seeking for grace which led her to as it were propose to Boaz. Ruth was childless and a widow, both of which were a reproach to a woman (Gen. 30:23; Is. 4:1; Lk. 1:25). Boaz again is hinting that he wished to take away her reproach amongst men- by marrying her. And it was Israel in exile who were a reproach (Ps. 44:13), which could be removed from them by God's plan of redemption. "Fear not the reproach of men" (Is. 51:4) was God's word of restoration to the exiles, but it was based upon Boaz's words to Ruth. They would forget the reproach of their widowhood and never be ashamed again (Is. 54:4; Jer. 31:19), after the pattern of Ruth.

Ruth 2:16 Also pull out some for her from the bundles, and leave it; let her glean-

Again, we see Boaz hugely expanding upon the letter of the law about gleaning. And it was this spirit which was to climax in his development of the levirate law of marriage to allow him to marry Ruth. But we note that he began with the law and extrapolated its spirit further; he didn't simply ignore it and act as he felt would be gracious according to his own native sense of justice and kindness. And there is a major lesson here. For so much that is claimed to be humanitarian aid is doing just that, and is not the same as the grace we see being developed, understood and practiced here. The law was a springboard toward grace, guiding the path and

trajectory toward it; as Paul puts it, the law was a schoolmaster to lead men unto Christ.

And don't rebuke her-

I noted on :16 that the restoration prophecy of Is. 54:4 comforted the exiles that they would not be reproached again; and the same word for "rebuke" here is used in Is. 54:9, assuring them that their restoration would mean that they would not again be rebuked. Those prophecies were clearly allusive to the story of Ruth; she and Naomi are being held up as parade examples to the exiles, to return to their land and to their God. They were not to fear that their situation had put them on the wrong side of the letter of the Mosaic law, but to accept grace and reflect it to others, especially in how they treated women and Gentiles.

Ruth 2:17 So she gleaned in the field until evening; and she beat out that which she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley-

The beating out and winnowing was done in the evening when there was generally a stronger wind. There were ten omers in one ephah, and one omer of manna could feed a man for a day (Ex. 16:16,36). So this was a huge amount of barley, enough to feed a man for ten days. The abundance of provision by Boaz is clear, but we note also the abundance of the harvest, when neighbouring Moab was perishing from famine. There is here confirmation that Yahweh was blessing Israel at this time.

Ruth 2:18 She carried it, and went into the city where her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. And she brought out and gave to her that which she had left after she herself had enough to eat-

I calculated on :17 that this was a huge amount of barley, enough to feed a man for ten days. She also took home for Naomi what was left over from the meal of :14. The impression is that Boaz has done what the Lord Jesus also did for the hungry [including Gentiles] who loved the God of Israel, providing them with superabundance of food so that there was much left over for people who were perishing with hunger. This was all consciously orchestrated by Boaz. He had gone way beyond the letter of the law and just wanted to articulate the lavishness of God's grace. And it is for us in our encounters with people to likewise lavish a reflection of the grace we have received.

Ruth 2:19 Her mother-in-law said to her, Where have you gleaned today? Where have you worked? Blessed be he who took notice of you!-

"Took notice" is s.w. "acknowledged" (Gen. 38:26; Dt. 21:17; 33:9). Boaz had acknowledged her as a Gentile who was in covenant with Yahweh, had acknowledged her desire to be in His family. Just as Yahweh had done. The exiles (see on Ruth 1:16) were likewise encouraged that they would be acknowledged and blessed (s.w. Is. 61:9). We too have been taken notice of, and like Ruth we go our way loaded down with Boaz's grace and special love, shown to us in the bread of the communion meal.

She showed her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz-

We may note that she speaks not of working for a man, nor of just being given gifts; but of working together "with" Boaz ["with" is stressed twice]. She answers the question as to "where" she worked by explaining *with whom* she had worked. We are increasingly getting the impression that Ruth and Boaz are unconsciously working

together towards the same end conclusion, as lovers do. But as those who truly love God also do.

Ruth 2:20 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of Yahweh, Who has not left off His grace to the living and to the dead-
Clearly Naomi recognizes that Yahweh's grace was being articulated through that of Boaz. The Bible is clear that death is unconsciousness. But Naomi perceives that through being gracious to her and Ruth, Yahweh was also being gracious to their dead husbands. Both of them had not been spiritually strong, as discussed on Ruth 1. But His grace is very deeply perceived by Naomi; she sees His grace to her and Ruth as also in a way being grace shown to their husbands, despite their bad decisions during their lifetimes. And when analyzed, Divine grace does indeed appear to have ever increasing facets and aspects the more we consider it; His grace is therefore "manifold" or multi-coloured, as a crystal refracting light (see on 1 Pet. 4:10). She may already have in mind now that if Boaz married Ruth and they had a child, this would be a grace to the dead Mahlon, as a seed would be raised up.

Naomi said to her, The man is a close relative to us, one of our near kinsmen-
Yahweh is clearly the *go'el* of His people; the near kinsman redeemer / *go'el* of Jacob (Gen. 48:16), of Israel from bondage (Ex. 6:6; 15:13); the term is used of Him so often (Ps. 19:15; 69:19; 74:2; 107:2 and throughout Isaiah). But then Israel were told that they were to redeem / be a *go'el* to their relatives who had fallen upon hard times (Lev. 25:25-30). Yahweh is that close to man, our kinsman redeemer. And we are to reflect that saving interest and grace to others. Boaz went a step further by also using the spirit of the Levirate marriage laws to marry Ruth. She and Naomi made it a condition to the other 'redeemer' that re-purchase of Elimelech's property was under the condition that the purchaser married Ruth and had children by her in Elimelech's name. Boaz is the only named human to whom *go'el* is applied. He clearly is to be seen as a type of the Lord Jesus. His falling in love with Ruth out of all the other women around therefore speaks of how the Lord, for some reason, fell in love with us, outside the legal scope of redemption; and we took the initiative in responding. The NT frequently uses the language of redeemer and redemption about the Lord Jesus, the greater man from Bethlehem (Rom. 3:24; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Yahweh was the *go'el* but was manifested through Boaz, just as His redemptive love and purpose was manifested in the Lord Jesus. This is the significance of Naomi saying "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead". The antecedent of "whose" could be Boaz or "the LORD". Ruth showed *hesed* / grace / covenant kindness to Naomi (Ruth 3:10), and that grace is returned to her by Boaz on God's behalf (Ruth 4:10,13). We too can be vehicles of the reflection of God's grace to others.

The idea of the returned exile being saved by a *go'el*, a redeemer, connects with the frequent descriptions of God as Judah's redeemer at the time of the restoration; the word occurs multiple times in this context in the latter chapters of Isaiah. The possibility of a *go'el* marrying Ruth had apparently not occurred to Naomi in Ruth 1:11-13, where she understands the *go'el* to only possibly marry herself, and then her resulting sons might then marry Ruth and Orpah. That the *go'el* could marry Ruth had not previously occurred to her. Perhaps because this wasn't what the Levirate law legally required, or perhaps because she considered that no true Israelite ought to marry a Moabitess like Ruth. Or because she considered Boaz too old and possibly

impotent. But now she sees beyond the letter of the law to the possibilities of grace. And this is indeed what affliction and providence lead us to.

Ruth 2:21 Ruth the Moabitess said, Yes, he said to me, 'You shall stay close to my young men, until they have ended all my harvest'-
The end of all the harvest meant both the barley and wheat harvest which followed it (:23). It is emphasized that Ruth "Stay close" to the young women (s.w. :8,23). Yet she reports this to Naomi here as saying that she had been told to "stay close" to the young *men*. Exactly why is unclear to me. It is the same word used of how Ruth "clave" to Naomi (Ruth 1:14). It is also the word of cleaving to a partner in marriage (Gen. 2:24), and cleaving to Yahweh in covenant relationship (Dt. 30:20; Josh. 22:5; 23:8). Boaz's servants were effectively him. The language is again to demonstrate that Ruth's cleaving to Boaz was an acted parable of her cleaving to Yahweh; and his usage of the word was surely to suggest that she might cleave to him in marriage. It was God's wish that His exiled people should cleave to Him (Jer. 13:11).

Ruth 2:22 Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maidens, and that they not meet you in any other field-
This could mean that not every landowner allowed gleaning in their fields. Dt. 24:19 doesn't make allowing gleaning a binding law upon landowners. The text simply states that "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless and for the widow". By allowing gleaners to come and pick up dropped grain, Boaz's grace was going far beyond the letter of the law. See on :2.

"Meet" is s.w. "entreat" in Ruth 1:16. Naomi could see that others might be impressed by Ruth and want her association with them, perhaps with a view to marriage. But although Boaz was old, she was sure that he had to be the right candidate for Ruth because he was the relative who could raise up seed for Mahlon. She thereby put spiritual principle first. The levirate law didn't strictly apply to Ruth and she was free to marry whom she wished.

Ruth 2:23 So she stayed close to the maidens of Boaz, to glean to the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest- For "stayed close", see on :21.

And she lived with her mother-in-law-
*T*his may be a reminder that despite their feelings for each other, Boaz and Ruth didn't live together before their marriage. It was the fulfilment of Ruth's promise in Ruth 1:16: "where you lodge, I will lodge". But it may also be an allusion to Gen 2:24, as there was in :11. Ruth lived with her mother, but she was to leave her and cleave to a husband. She had emigrated to Israel solely for the sake of relationship with Yahweh; she had begged Naomi not to entreat her to "leave" her (Ruth 1:16). She was resigned to a single life for the sake of her devotion to Him. But she was to be surprised by grace; she was in fact going to do just that [in terms of Gen. 2:24] when she married Boaz.

RUTH CHAPTER 3

Ruth 3:1 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?-
"Seek rest" is an idiom for finding a marriage partner. See on Ruth 1:9. Ruth had given up any hope of this in order to follow Yahweh, and Naomi had stressed that

returning to Israel with her would mean not finding rest in this sense. But now the possibilities of grace beyond the law occur to Naomi. The lights go on, as they have in the minds of all who start to perceive grace. It was a man who sought a wife, yet the record here stresses the initiative taken by Naomi and Ruth. Jer. 31:22, in a restoration context, speaks of how “a woman shall compass a man” (AV), i.e. a woman would take the initiative. And this surely alludes to the story of Ruth and Naomi. God’s people were to take the initiative with their redeemer, believing He would respond.

Naomi tried to "seek rest" for Ruth, i.e. to get her married, yet in Ruth 1:9 she has prayed that Yahweh would "find rest" for Ruth. So she is seeking to answer the prayer in her own strength. Seeing Boaz had taken an interest in marrying Ruth anyway, I suggest that Naomi goes too far in trying to get Ruth to sexually compromise Boaz and offer herself to him in marriage. And the otherwise highly commendable Ruth perhaps fails in going along with the suggestions. Had they done nothing, Boaz likely would have engaged the other possible redeemer and married Ruth anyway, without all this trying to force and work out answers to prayer in human strength and scheming. If this is the correct reading, then we have an exhortation to not act as if 'God helps those who help themselves'. That is the way of works, rather than trust / faith. The whole narrative in chapter 3 is intentionally left begging our reflection and interpretation- does Naomi suggest the right thing, and was Ruth right to obey her? Is she showing faith by what she suggests, or is she trying to force an answer to prayer in her own strength and by her own device? We note that the incident makes no mention of God; rather is it a night time intrigue, shrouded in secrecy. If this whole incident were omitted, would Boaz still have redeemed and married Ruth? Probably so. The lesson is that we can impatiently try to force things through in our own strength as Naomi did.

This incident is at the end of the barley and wheat harvest (Ruth 2:23); and Ruth and Boaz first set eyes on each other at the beginning of the barley harvest (Ruth 1:22). This means an interval of seven weeks. Perhaps Ruth and Naomi perceived that Boaz had a romantic interest, but was not moving forwards on it. And so Ruth takes this initiative. Why did Boaz delay, when he was clearly attracted to Ruth? Seven weeks is not a long period between first meeting and getting engaged. But it seemed that way to Ruth and Naomi. Perhaps one reason is revealed in his commendation of Ruth for not following after young men. He had earlier told her to keep away from the young men wolf whistling her as she gleaned. But he realized she would be better served in a human sense by marrying a young man rather than an old man like himself, who would likely leave her widowed a second time in life. So his delay was to test her. And in these thoughts we see another window onto the Lord's apparent delay with us, despite His undoubted love and desire to redeem us.

But the events of chapter 3 aren't Ruth, Naomi nor Boaz at their best. Boaz is drunk. Ruth is like us, aware of the redeemer's love, but wanting things to move faster. Had Ruth not done what she did, Boaz's love for her would've led her to marry and redeem her anyway. But she didn't feel that love and acted inappropriately., somewhat rushing things in her own strength. Just as we do in our relationship with our redeemer. The Sunday School Christianity view of things certainly breaks down in this chapter.

Ruth 3:2 Now isn’t Boaz our kinsman, with whose maidens you were? Behold, he winnows barley tonight in the threshing floor-

Threshing floor at harvest time was an immoral place, associated with prostitutes and

cheap women: "the harlots hire on every threshing floor of corn" (Hos. 9.1). A case could be made (but see on :3) that the plan was that Ruth would come to Boaz at night whilst he was drunk, dressed up appealingly, and sexually compromise him into marrying her. Ruth is to be commended for not doing as Naomi apparently intended her to; for she doesn't have sex with Boaz, or at least, he refuses this. Although, all dressed up to attract and with him somewhat drunk, she removes his bed sheet and sleeps next to him. This would've been so difficult for a woman like Ruth, who appears by all accounts an upright woman- more upright, if this were the case, than her Jewish mother-in-law who hatched the plan. The suggestion in :4 that Ruth lay down with him is indeed vague but could arguably suggest sexual contact; and "feet" there could be a euphemism as in Ez. 16:25, a passage which as we shall show was in Naomi's mind. Uncovering the skirt is also capable of sexual interpretation; see on :9. The whole story, of deceiving a man into marriage, coming to him by night, when he's likely slightly drunk... all recalls the situation of Jacob being tricked into marrying Leah [for surely Jacob couldn't have been quite sober if he really didn't know that the woman he was sleeping with wasn't in fact his beloved Rachel]. The motif of deception appears common to both histories. The connection is heightened by the villagers wishing Ruth fertility like Rachel and Leah (Ruth 4:11). They also wish her the fertility of Tamar (Ruth 4:12)- who also deceived a man using sexual compromise. See on Ruth 2:13. But Ruth was already known as a woman of integrity (:11), who wasn't chasing men (:10). This strongly weighs against the idea that she was practicing sexual manipulation.

But perhaps the simple reality was that "winnowing was generally done at night, in order to take advantage of the breeze". This meant that the grain remained there overnight, and Boaz perhaps Boaz slept by his corn because he feared it being stolen at night. Israel after all was emerging from a time of famine and the corn would have been valuable.

Ruth 3:3 Therefore wash yourself, anoint yourself, get dressed up, and go down to the threshing floor, but don't make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking-

There is a lot more to this than Springsteen's "Put your makeup on, fix your hair up pretty / And meet me tonight in Atlantic City". Likewise the advice to wait until he has finished eating and drinking is not simply secular wisdom, waiting until his heart was merry. She does these things and then asks for Boaz to spread his skirt over her (:9), which although not recorded here, was also what Naomi told her to do. What is "more" to all this is that Ezekiel describes Israel's coming into covenant with God in the wilderness as involving bathing, washing, anointing and the spreading of the skirt of the covenant, which the historical record states was accompanied by Israel's representatives eating and drinking before Yahweh (Ez. 16:8-12). And see on :5. Whilst Naomi's advice may all have been fair enough on the secular level, her language choice clearly indicates that she has the covenant at Sinai in mind. And Boaz is clearly represented as manifesting Yahweh to Ruth (see on Ruth 2:1). Naomi and Ruth were not simply sexual manipulators, there was without doubt a deeply spiritual element in all this. Whether that was the sole aspect of the carefully planned encounter is open to debate, but that spiritual dimension cannot be denied.

Ruth 3:4 It shall be, when he lies down, that you shall note the place where he shall lie, and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lay down; then he will tell you what you shall do-

Laying with a man and uncovering his feet could imply sexual contact; see on :2. "Feet" there could be a euphemism for the sexual organs as in Ex. 4:25 and Ez. 16:25, a passage which as noted on :3 was in Naomi's mind. But she was apparently to note the place where he was laying, and only return to it later that night. And it was quite likely that the threshing floor had other men sleeping on it as well, protecting their piles of corn (see on :2). Ruth generally presents as a very spiritual woman, and this incident I suggest is her low point. It was a case of out of character behaviour, less than her best, sub optimal spirituality, rather than sin. And we all have such cases in our lives. If the incident were removed from the story, it's clear Boaz would still have redeemed Elimelech's land and would have married Ruth, as he was in love with her. So the cunning plan of Naomi and Ruth was in fact unnecessary. God's love for us obviates the need for any human device and cunning to bring it about.

Ruth 3:5 She said to her, All that you say I will do-
I noted on :3 that both women have consciously in mind the covenant at Sinai, and this is word for word the agreement made between Israel and Yahweh in Ex. 19:8.

Ruth 3:6 She went down to the threshing floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law told her-
Her complete obedience to the idea of entering covenant is emphasized. See on :5.

Ruth 3:7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry-
The mention of this is an inconvenient truth for those who wish to portray Boaz and Ruth as parade examples of peerlessly spiritual believers who fell in love with each other. I have discussed on :2,4 whether Naomi and Ruth were being sexually manipulative in their plan. I overall decide against it. But it is simply so that human motivation is rarely pure, and faith is rarely total. The completed harvest was typically a time of sexual immorality and over eating and drinking. That Ruth should come to him precisely at this time, at night, and that he is described as having a merry heart from drinking... is all unfortunate for any argument for the peerless spirituality of Boaz and Ruth. The situation simply reminds us of their humanity. Ruth's, in that she apparently did capitalize upon Boaz's weakness, instead of inviting him to have a sober meeting with her to discuss things. Boaz's, in that every mention of a heart merry from drinking is in a very negative spiritual and moral context (1 Sam. 25:36; Jud. 19:6,22 cp. 18:20; 1 Kings 21:7). And yet it is through their weakness and humanity that their reality and spiritual greatness shines through. They, who were so weak and human, had such faith and spiritual insight.

He went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. She came softly, uncovered his feet, and laid herself down-
Ruth seems to me to be a wonderful example of a spiritually ambitious person. It was unheard of in those times for a woman to propose to a man; yet by coming to him, uncovering his feet and laying under his mantle, she was stating that she wished to see him as a manifestation of God to her (Ruth 3:7,9 = Ruth 2:12). She went after him, following him (Ruth 3:10); the poor, landless Gentile aspired to be a part of a wealthy Jewish family, in order to fulfil the spirit of the Law. And she attained this. As noted on :1, this was to be the inspiration for the exiles, when a woman was to compass a man.

Ruth 3:8 It happened at midnight, that the man was startled and turned himself; and

noticed a woman lay at his feet-
"Startled" is too mild a translation. The Hebrew is "trembled", and is used about trembling at the prospect of Divine judgment (Is. 32:11; Ez. 32:10 s.w.). Why would be tremble in this way if he awoke, sensing someone else near him, and find it to be the young woman whom he had his eye upon, and she was effectively proposing to him. Surely a different word would have been used, rather than one which expresses such fear and trembling in anticipation of judgment. He had got drunk (:7), and now he awakes, sober. He sees a woman near him, and he trembles at the thought that whilst drunk, he may have slept with one of the prostitutes who frequented harvest floors (Hos. 9:1). He had done wrong in getting drunk. But because he realized this and trembled because of his failure, what might have been the night of his shame became the most wonderful night of his life, humanly speaking. The young woman of his dreams proposes to him. And so again we see Divine grace; that in the very midst of human failure, and recognition of that failure... God acts to pour out His grace. We have likely all experienced this in our lives, and we see it so wonderfully at this point in Boaz's life.

Ruth 3:9 He said, Who are you? She answered, I am Ruth your handmaid. Therefore spread your skirt over your handmaid-
When Boaz asks Ruth "who are you?" he uses the same Hebrew term as Naomi does when Ruth returns: "Who are you?" (:16). The import is the same: Are you married? Boaz's extreme nervousness of :8 can be read as his extreme angst as to whether she had come to tell him that she had found someone else to marry.

But she had taken the initiative and spread his skirt over herself (:4,7). Boaz had earlier wished that Yahweh would bless her for wanting to be under the shadow of His wings (2:12), but Ruth takes the initiative herself in doing this. Just as Naomi asked Yahweh to give Ruth "rest" in the house of a husband (1:9) but seeks on her own initiative to arrange this (3:1). Spreading the skirt over a woman was understood as an invitation to marriage, alluding to how birds spread their wings ["skirt" is Heb. 'wing'] in mating. But she is alluding to his earlier comment that she had taken refuge under Yahweh's wings; she wants to marry him because she wants to be under Yahweh's wings. She was asking him to confirm the initiative which she had taken, and to manifest the God of Israel to her, under whose wings she had come from Moab to come under (Ruth 2:12 LXX). The same Hebrew words for ‘spread… skirt’ are those used to describe how the cherubim “spread their wings” (Ex. 25:20; 37:9 etc.). She saw God manifest in that man, her *go'el* / redeemer. To uncover the skirt of a person can mean to have sex with them (Dt. 22:30; 27:20 "Cursed is he who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s skirt... A man must not take his father’s wife, and shall not uncover his father’s skirt"). So Naomi's plan was clearly of sexual manipulation or compromise. But Ruth and Boaz refuse this, and commendably have a spiritual perspective throughout. But clearly she wants marriage, redemption and family life rather than just sex. But this could play along with the possibility of sexual manipulation discussed on :2. For you didn't sleep sharing the same blanket unless you were married. But she asks him to do this because he is "a near kinsman", and not for passing pleasure or money. LXX, following the targum: "Let thy name be called upon thine handmaid to take me for a wife". Ruth was already known as a woman of integrity (:11), who wasn't chasing men (:10). This strongly weighs against the idea that she was simply practicing sexual manipulation; although see on :7.

Ruth's actions were clearly inviting Boaz to marry her; and yet she saw in him a representation of Yahweh too. The connection is made clear in Ez. 16:8: “I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made a vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine”. Ruth clearly is taking the initiative in offering herself in marriage to Boaz. But we wonder whether she knew his level of feeling for her. We the readers are aware of this from Ruth 2, but she may not have been. And so we have the classic romance, that she finds herself in love with a man in love with her; and the apparently insuperable barriers between them, religious, ethnic, cultural and of class [social] are overcome. And this is exactly how it is between God and ourselves; "and going out to meet Him, I met Him coming towards me".

For you are a near kinsman-

This was an appeal to the spirit of the law and not the letter. Because legally, in terms of levirate law, Boaz wasn't the *go'el*. And he wasn't even the closest relative. The levirate law operated when "brothers dwell together". And that wasn't the case. Under Mosaic law, a Moabite woman was not to be married. At best it could be argued that a relative of Elimelech's could marry Naomi and raise up seed to him. But she was barren. It was a stretch of levirate law for Boaz to marry Ruth, let alone that she should take the initiative and proposition him to that effect. The idea of Ruth marrying Boaz had not initially even occurred to Naomi, so we can deduce from Ruth 2:2. I suggest that Ruth was not simply being a forward, manipulative woman. She and Naomi had thought through the levirate law, and were seeking to extend its implications according to the spirit of grace rather than law. See on :12.

Ruth 3:10 He said, Blessed are you by Yahweh, my daughter. You have shown more grace in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as you didn’t go after young men, whether poor or rich-

Heb. "You have made this last kindness greater than the first". His idea may be that she had not gone chasing men in Moab, because she wanted to follow Yahweh and not the gods of those men. That was her first grace. And now she had shown another grace or kindness, in that she wanted to marry Boaz because she perceived him to be a spiritual man and manifestation of Yahweh; and because she chose him specifically because of her respect in the principles, although not the letter, of the levirate laws of the covenant. He rightly perceives that his wealth was not an item of attraction. His usage of the word grace / kindness is slightly out of context, but we can understand it if he saw that out of it all, it was a kindness to him for a young, attractive widow to offer to marry him as an old man. Jewish tradition claims that he died soon after their marriage; perhaps his old age was one reason why the idea of Boaz marrying Ruth didn't initially occur to her. It can also be understood that her first kindness was to her late husband and his family. She wanted to raise a Godly seed for him, even though he was apparently weak in faith; and so her first kindness was that she had refused her Moabite suitors after his death. And now the second kindness was in being willing to marry an old Israelite man in order to continue her kindness to her first husband, by raising a Godly Israelite seed for him.

Boaz here recognizes that Ruth is ‘going after’ him. He feels she is showing him grace- reciprocating the grace he had shown her in the harvest fields. Just as he had invited her to see God’s skirt spread over her (Ruth 2:12), so she is asking him to spread his skirt over her. Her ambition in effectively proposing to Boaz, a Gentile nobody proposing herself to a man of the Jewish establishment, is indeed inspirational. See on 2:13. The GNB probably catches the idea: "You are showing

even greater family loyalty in what you are doing now than in what you did for your mother-in-law". This is looking very positively on Ruth- she was desperately poor, childless despite a previous marriage, and to throw herself on a rich distant relative in the hope of marriage and long term support was all absolutely human and natural. But Boaz, with the imputation of goodness which comes from being in love, saw her boldness and desperation in a very positive light. He liked to think of it as her showing grace to him, the old guy.

We note that grace is mutual. Boaz had shown grace [*hesed*] to Ruth (Ruth 2:20), and Ruth showed that grace to Boaz. And this is how God's grace works; we respond to it by showing it to others, and they in turn show it to us. Hence Peter talks of the "manifold grace of God", the refracted, multi coloured grace. Once you show Divine grace, or reflect it, then it is in turn reflected. This is why 2:20 is ambiguous- "Blessed be he of Yahweh, Who has not left off His grace [whose grace? Boaz's or Yahweh's?] to the living and to the dead". So do not think that showing grace to people is useless because it is not appreciated. Someone somewhere in some way will reflect it further.

Ruth 3:11 Now, my daughter, don't be afraid; I will do to you all that you say- Again, as noted on :5, this is the language of the covenant at Sinai. Ruth does all Naomi says, and Boaz does all Ruth says. The power of faithful, spiritually minded women is being emphasized, in a male dominated society. We note that both Boaz and Naomi call her "daughter". "I will do all that you say" needs some reflection, because there was an apparent legal obstacle to marrying Ruth on the basis of redeeming her. There was the closer relative. Boaz's promise "I will do..." therefore assumes that he is going to work through even that. Just as the Lord's pledge to us means the same. As the chapter concludes, He is not in rest until He has worked, tirelessly, to overcome absolutely all the seemingly insurmountable obstacles between us and Himself.

So much was against Ruth. Yet she had boldly stated that Naomi's people would be her people, and Yahweh, Naomi's God, would be "My God" (1:16), in allusion to the promise that Abraham's seed would have Yahweh as their God (Gen. 17:7; Ex. 6:7). Despite the fact that Moabites were not allowed to be Israel. Through Boaz and his love and ability to "make it work", she was empowered and enabled to overcome all the obstacles:

- She was poor, gleaning out of hunger. Whilst there was no caste system in Israel, marriage between rich and poor was unusual.
- She was a Moabite and Moab had recently during the time of the Judges abused Israel; and the record seven times calles her a Moabitess
- Moabites were not to be married nor allowed into the congregation of "My people"
- The women of Moab had led Israel astray in Num. 25:1 and were known as immoral
- She was not a virgin but a widow who had no male supporter as she had left her father and mother [Boaz says]. A woman with no male relative around had no legal status and was effectively not a person, certainly not a legal entity able to get properly married
- She had been married before but had produced no children during a ten year marriage (1:4), which was a significant "minus" in those days. The patriarchal society of the day would have blamed her as the woman for this. The fact her husband and father in law had died made her out to be some kind of "femme fatale" for Israelite men to marry.

- She likely was tattooed with the symbols of Moloch and Chemosh

- Boaz was not Elimelech's closest living relative; the other relative wanted the land but didn't want to marry Ruth.

Hence Ruth falls on her face before Boaz's grace: "Why have I found grace in your sight, that you should take notice of me, seeing I am a foreigner?" (Ruth 2:10). We too appear a hopeless case in seeking relationship with God Almighty. But His love and interest in us can overcome all the apparently insurmountable barriers between us. The book of Ruth is set during the time of the Judges, in Bethlehem. The only mention of Bethlehem in the book of Judges is in Jud. 12:8-10: "Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He sent his daughters away in marriage, and brought in thirty women for his sons. He judged Israel for seven years. Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem". We wonder if Jewish tradition is correct here, and Ibzan was Boaz. He is characterized by a desire to "bring in" women for his sons to marry; possibly implying he had a mission to bring Gentiles to the Hope of Israel. His salvation of Moabite Ruth could therefore be seen in this context.

For all my people in this city know that you are a worthy woman-

That Ruth was already known as a woman of integrity rather precludes the possibilities discussed on :2 that there was an element of sexual manipulation going on. Although human behaviour and motivation is rarely pure, and we cannot totally rule it out, as discussed on :7. "Worthy" is the same word translated "wealthy" in Ruth 2:1. Boaz was a worthy / wealthy *man*, and Ruth was a worthy *woman,* who was to be also wealthy when she married Boaz. They were perfectly suited for each other in moral and spiritual terms, and "all my people in this city", all the family [including the nearer kinsman], knew this. If this reading is correct, the idea of them getting married would not have come as a shock to the elders of the city in Ruth 4. It also confirms my suggestion later that Boaz and Naomi had agreed that the condition of buying her field was that the purchaser marry Ruth. They had had the two months or so of barley and wheat harvest (Ruth 2:23) to work things out and have some kind of courtship.

Ruth 3:12 Now it is true that I am a near kinsman; however there is a kinsman nearer than I-

But I explained on :9 that the levirate law didn't really define Boaz as any kind of *go'el*. He was only that through a seeking to extend its implications according to the spirit of grace rather than law. But he goes along with the idea. She appeals to grace, and he already understands that grace goes beyond the letter of the law. Dt. 24:19 doesn't make allowing gleaning a binding law upon landowners. The text simply states that "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless and for the widow". By allowing gleaners to come and pick up dropped grain, Boaz's grace was going far beyond the letter of the law. This would account for the hint in Ruth 2:22 that not every landowner allowed gleaning in their fields. And he was a descendant of the Canaanite prostitute Rahab, who had been allowed to marry into the princely line of Judah (Mt. 1:5).

Ruth 3:13 Stay this night-

This presumably was because it was dangerous for a woman to walk at night, or because he didn't want Ruth to be thought of as a threshing floor prostitute (Hos. 9:1) by being spotted walking near the threshing floor alone late at night. I suggested on :2

that Boaz slept by his corn to protect it from wandering thieves. But by saying this, he sets himself up already as her protector.

And it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform for you the part of a kinsman, so be it; let him do the kinsman's part-

Although as explained on :12 the whole idea of Boaz being the *go'el* was a long stretch of the law, he was willing to take the spirit of the law and extend it by grace. But this didn't mean that he therefore disregarded the original principle behind the grace he was willing to show. And he therefore is careful not to simply flout Divine law and principle in the expression of grace. And this is an important principle to grasp for all time. Seeing he was clearly in love with Ruth, this was no painless formality for him.

But if he will not do the part of a kinsman for you, then will I do the part of a kinsman for you, as Yahweh lives. Lie down until the morning-

The levirate laws stated only that the brother of the dead was to perform the duty of levirate marriage. And the duty only concerned "brothers dwelling together". Seeing Elimelech had left Israel, this hardly applied in this case. We get the sense throughout that Boaz wants to marry Ruth; and that he was showing far more grace than the law actually required. Just as he allowed gleaners in his fields, extrapolating from the letter of the law towards a far more gracious position; see on Ruth 2:2.

Ruth 3:14 She lay at his feet until the morning. She rose up in the dark; for he said, Let it not be known that a woman came to the threshing floor-

This could be what he said to himself, explaining his reasoning for sending her away before others had woken up. I suggested on :13 that he asked her to stay the night because it was dangerous or unseemly for a woman to walk alone at night. He was concerned that people didn't think he had slept with her. Perhaps the thinking of the Mishnah (Yeb. 2:8) was already current, whereby "a man suspected of having sexual relations with a gentile woman is excluded from performing the levirate with her".

Ruth 3:15 He said, Bring the mantle that is on you, and hold it. She held it; and he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her; and he went into the city-

By removing her "veil" [AV} in order to hold the barley, she was effectively removing the sign of her widowed status. Surely there were other means of transporting it, but Boaz is acting in faith that indeed he will marry her.

Kathleen Abraham has "published an interesting marriage contract. The contract is dated in the month of Adar in the fifth year of king Cyrus. The marriage is concluded between Nabuban-ai [a wealthy Babylonian], and Nanaya-Kanat, a fatherless woman". To make her his wife, "he will bind six minas of silver in the hem of her garment". I suggest that we have something similar here- six measures of barley, in her garment. Not admittedly "minas of silver", but there are strong outline similarities. This was another guarantee that despite the legal barriers, Boaz was going to overcome them and marry Ruth. Rather like we have been given the Holy Spirit as the deposit of guarantee against the day of our final redemption. The marriage contract is very similar in style to the situation in Ruth 4- the man at the gate of the town, making the contract before God and the elders, and receiving the blessing of the elders and a wish for many children. "Six measures" is a huge amount... she left loaded with blessing which promised and guaranteed yet more. It is as if Boaz was saying that although he had not given Ruth his semen, his seed, as Naomi wanted, he all the same was giving abundant seed to the family- and that's why he wanted Ruth to show the seed to Naomi.

Ruth 3:16 When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, How did it go, my daughter? She told her all that the man had done to her-

"Had *done*" rather than "had said" is perhaps significant. We could read her as meaning that he had promised to marry her. But again we cannot escape the thought that what he had "done" to her was to sleep with her or at least be sexually intimate with her, as discussed on :2. The huge amount of barley given her in :17 would then be some form of payment or at best concession that he had not acted completely correctly by her. Perhaps this whole question is indeed raised by the text, but left tantalizingly unanswered. It would be part of the story line which intrigues and holds attention, and leaves us with the caveat that for all their faith and spirituality, Ruth and Boaz were not sinless but still human.

Ruth 3:17 She said, He gave me these six measures of barley; for he said, 'Don't go empty to your mother-in-law'-

*"*Empty" here is s.w. Ruth 1:21, where Naomi laments that she is "empty": "I went out full, and Yahweh has brought me home again empty". To be "full" was one of the blessings for obedience to the covenant, and the potential gift of God to Israel when they first entered Canaan (Dt. 6:11; Neh. 9:25 s.w.). But she had left Israel assuming that those blessings were not fulfilled. See on Ruth 1:2. Now she realized that she had seen the cup half empty instead of half full. To be empty was to be without blessing (Gen. 31:42; Ex. 3:21; Dt. 15:13). And so here Boaz tries to indirectly persuade her that this was not the case ultimately; she was going to receive blessing such as she could never have imagined, even in this life. She felt that although she had not experienced blessing from Him, indeed she had lost the potential blessings and was without His blessings, yet still she wanted to return to Him. Contrary to Pentecostal reasoning, the experience of "blessing" was not what attracted her to Him. Rather she wanted to simply be in relationship with Him, like the prodigal son returning from Gentile lands not looking for any material blessing- and yet all the same finding it.

Naomi had lamented that she had left Judah full but returned empty (Ruth 1:21). Boaz uses the same word here, wanting to persuade Naomi that through his grace, she would not be empty. Naomi's return "empty" was really the consequence of her sin, just as we all experience. But Boaz the redeemer, the clear type of the Lord Jesus, was reversing the consequences of Divine judgment upon sin.

Ruth 3:18 Then she said, Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will end; for the man will not rest-

"The matter will end" uses the word usually translated "fail". The idea could be "Wait and see whether our plan has failed". "The matter" is the Hebrew translated elsewhere as "word" or "thing". Not one word failed of God's plan to bring Israel from Moab into the land and give them an inheritance there (s.w. Josh. 21:45; 23:14). And neither would this word for Ruth's redemption fail either.

Until he has finished the thing this day-

Literally, "fulfilled the word". And Boaz did do so, manifesting God to the exile Naomi and the Gentile Ruth. The very same phrase is used of God fulfilling His prophetic word of restoration through the decree of Cyrus to restore Judah from Gentile lands to Israel (Ezra 1:1). See on Ruth 1:16 for the relevance of Ruth to the restoration. Isaiah alludes to this by saying that God has no rest until He has restored and redeemed His people. God likewise is restlessly at work for our redemption.

Beyond the steely silence of the skies and the impression of a passive, inactive God who exists but rarely acts... there is in fact a restless activity working towards our redemption, through all the obstacles.

RUTH CHAPTER 4

Ruth 4:1 Now Boaz went up to the gate-

This fits exactly with Bethlehem being built on a ridge. The accuracy of fine details like this throughout the Biblical record confirm that indeed the Bible is not a fictional work of men but the inspired words of God.

Chapter 3 had left us with Ruth having taken the intiative in proposing to Boaz, and him promising her that he will indeed marry her, and asking her to remove her veil to receive a huge volume of his seed- a sign she was no longer a single woman. She was as it were assured of salvation and had been given a guarantee of it, just as we have been in the Holy Spirit.

And sat down there. When the near kinsman of whom Boaz spoke came by he said to him, Come over here, friend, and sit down! He turned aside, and sat down-

The near kinsman sits down, and in :2 the elders sit down. This all leads on from the information in Ruth 3:18 that Ruth too is sitting down, but at home, nervously and eagerly awaiting the result of the sitting down of the men. This is all part of the inspired story line and suspense. For we all want to know whether Ruth ends up having to marry a man who doesn't love her when she has already a lover. The narrative of loveless marriages, girls loving men whom they can't marry and marrying men they don't love and who don't love them... this has for ever been the stuff of Middle Eastern stories. And there is that intrigue inserted into this story, a kind of carrot to get human attention- in order to introduce us to some of the profoundest issues of Divine and human grace.

"Such a one" (AV) is right; NEV "friend". The idea is "So and so". His name is intentionally not mentioned- he who refused to preserve the name of his brother, will not have his name remembered. Our record with God is presented as directly related to our attitude to our brother. Just as Ruth "happened" to go to glean in Boaz's strips in the field, so it "happened" that the closer relative passed by. Again we see that higher hand of Providence working with human initiative, Divine sovereignty and human freedom perfectly meshing together.

Ruth 4:2 He took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit down here. They sat down-

Note the emphasis upon sitting down; see on :1. It's as if the cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed in close on the men in the scene; truly we can play Bible television with these verses.

The Hebrew Bible places the book of Ruth right after Proverbs 31, because Ruth is seen as the epitome of the virtuous woman of Prov. 31. "Her deeds will praise her in the gates" (Prov. 31:31) is the spirit of Ruth 3:13, where Ruth is well known as a virtuous woman. "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land" (Prov. 31:23) is exactly the position of Boaz in Ruth 4:2. So we could say that the genealogy at the end of Ruth 4 is significant in that it shows Ruth to be the ancestor of David and Solomon [it skips some generations to make this point], and they wish to show that their ancestor Ruth was the worthy virtuous woman.

Ruth 4:3 He said to the near kinsman: Naomi, who has come back out of the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's-

Just as Boaz had no legal necessity to allow gleaning in his fields, nor was he legally obligated to be the goel to Ruth (see previous discussions in Ruth 2,3), so he here appears to be somewhat stretching legal truths. For this is the first we hear of Naomi owning land. Mosaic law didn't allow inheritance by a widow (Num. 27:8-11); the property was to pass to the husband's family, not to his widow. Elimelech had long since left Israel and forsaken his inheritance, and we would assume that his parcel of land had passed already to someone else. And there appears no legal requirement for the kinsman to consider the land as jointly owned now by Ruth and Naomi, and to make purchase of the land contingent upon marrying Ruth and having children by her. The issue of property seems unrelated to the levirate law which Boaz was seeking to apply to himself. Surely he could have offered Ruth in marriage to the near kinsman, and married her if he refused.

We naturally enquire why he raises this issue of property. There are various options. It could simply be that there were Jewish laws in place at the time which we don't have access to, and Boaz is alluding to them. For in practice, the Mosaic laws would have required other practical laws added to them in order to enable to functioning of society in practice. Or perhaps the parcel of land in view had been inherited by Naomi from her father, in a situation akin to that of Zelophehad's daughters in Num. 27; or maybe Naomi was related to her husband Elimelech, which might explain their lack of children and poor health of the two who survived to adulthood. Or perhaps it belonged to Naomi in the sense that it should have passed to Mahlon and Chilion, but as they were dead, she was their legal representative and had the right to dispose of it as they were childless (:9). Or "The property was perhaps promised to Naomi as a marriage-gift or bequeathed to her at marriage to provide for her husband's predeceasing her without leaving a child".

It was absolutely possible for women to inherit property from their father (as in Job 42:13-15), and for a woman who had been a period in Gentile lands to return to Israel and have her inheritance restored (2 Kings 8:1-6). Because of her poverty, Naomi was selling the land which somehow she had legally inherited. But the need to marry Ruth if the land was purchased is not in accordance with any Mosaic legislation or even logic. Therefore it has been suggested that :5 should be translated "On the day you acquire the field from Naomi's hand, I am acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the deceased, to raise up the name of the deceased over his inheritance". And on reflection, the near kinsman pulls out of the property acquisition because he can see legal problems developing in the next generation if Ruth has children who would also claim it.

Maybe Boaz raises this whole issue of the property simply because he indeed did want to keep the land in the power of Ruth, and he wanted to make his advertising of his marriage to Ruth somehow incidental. He would then be using the property issue as a kind of blind, a distraction, to take attention away from his declaration of intent to marry Ruth. But we wonder why the night before he had told Ruth that he would like to be her *goel*, but there was a nearer kinsman who legally could do this.

My preferred answer is that Naomi, the seller, had made a condition of buying the land that the purchaser also married Ruth. Any children Ruth had would then inherit the land. And therefore Boaz had been unable to agree immediately to marry Ruth because he needed to get the near kinsmen with the first right of purchase to actually not purchase it.

I conclude, therefore, that between them, Boaz and Naomi are seeking to expand the spirit of the levirate law of Deuteronomy. The spirit of that law was that the widows should be protected and be given children. By various mechanisms and

schemes, they were expanding and keeping the spirit of the law but not the letter. Yet they didn't disregard the letter of the law, but sought to give the near kinsman the opportunity to buy the field and formally turn down the chance of marrying Ruth. This is in harmony with the way that Boaz had expanded the spirit of the law about not fetching home a forgotten sheaf to mean that he allowed women to glean in his field. And this is exactly the spirit of Yahweh's redemption of His people.

Ruth 4:4 I thought to disclose it to you saying, 'Buy it in the presence of those who sit here, and of the elders of my people'. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then let me know. You have first right to redeem it; and I am next in line. He said, I will redeem it-

See on :3 for the various options of interpretation. John the Baptist's comment that he came "after" Jesus, and that Jesus was the redeemer rather than he himself (Jn. 1:15) contain a strange allusion to the words of the redeemer-who-was-incapable-of-redeeming in Ruth 4:4. Boaz told him that "I am after thee" (AV, NEV "next in line"), but in the end the incapable-redeemer plucked off his shoe as a sign of unworthiness to redeem (Ruth 4:7). And John surely also had this in mind when he commented that he was unworthy to unloose Messiah's shoe (Jn. 1:27). The allusions are surely indicative of the way John felt like the unworthy / incapable redeemer, eclipsed before Boaz / Jesus.

Ruth 4:5 Then Boaz said, On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must buy it also from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance-

I concluded on :3 that Naomi, the seller, had made a condition of buying the land that the purchaser also married Ruth. The record doesn't state contact between Boaz and Naomi; although see on Ruth 2:11 for the suggestion that they worked out this plan together in the months of barley and wheat harvest. Naomi had told Ruth to just sit tight and wait and see what Boaz would arrange over the next 24 hours. We note too that Boaz didn't give the anonymous kinsman the full picture- he firstly mentioned the land for sale / redemption, and only then mentions that this would involve marrying Ruth and raising children by her in the name of Elimelech. The Levirate law only required brothers to raise up children to their dead brother. Elimelech had not died childless, so there was no legal requirement to raise up children in his name. Ruth's former husband had no living brothers. Therefore Boaz was operating according to the spirit of the law and not the letter of it; there was no legal requirement for the kinsman to marry Ruth and have children by her. But Boaz seems to be playing legal and psychological games to make the anonymous man turn down the offer of marrying Ruth- so that Boaz could then marry her on the basis that this was his legal necessity. The truth seems to be that he fell in love with her at first sight, and was going through all this appearance of legal necessity in order to somehow legitimize that fact. We likewise noted how he spoke of Ruth and Naomi's manipulation and desperate appeal to him for help to in fact be a display of Divine grace (see on Ruth 3:10).

If in some way the levirate law was being strictly followed, and I discussed possibilities for this line of thought on :3, then we reflect that the principle would have often required men to become polygamous. A man *"must* redeem" the property of a dead relative in some cases by marrying his wife; but this would have resulted in polygamy. Boaz himself may have been already married. There are times when the standards of God contradict each other, on a surface level.

It could be argued that the Levirate law was not applicable. This was not a case of "brethren dwelling together". So how could Boaz insist that buying the land meant that the relative "must" marry Ruth? It could be that he had arranged that Naomi and Ruth made this a condition. Or it could be that he is saying that the spirit of the law "must" be followed, which required also marrying Ruth. We have noted before with Boaz's attitude to gleaning rights that he considered the spirit of the law to effectively be the letter of it. The Levirate law, if it was even being applied, meant that the relative must redeem the land for *Elimelech*; but Boaz is adding the clause that seeing Naomi is too old to have children, then the spirit of the law would be to marry Ruth as the next of kin relative able to produce children. It seems from Dt. 21:15,16 that when a man died, his wife didn't automatically inherit his land [that is a Western, modern assumption], but his sons did: "If a man has two wives, the one beloved and the other hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the firstborn son be hers who was hated, then in the day that he causes his sons to inherit that which he has, he must not make the son of the beloved the firstborn before the son of the hated, who is the firstborn". Boaz may have been arguing that seeing Elimelech's sons were dead, the spirit of the law was that a relative should raise up a son for him so that the land could be passed to him. This is very much the spirit and not the letter of the law, but Boaz considers that this "must" be done. Because the spirit of the law is effectively the law. Although we must beware of creating hedges around laws. But the spirit of the law is the law, and that is a principle for us for all time. Just as we are saved by our Redeemer according to the spirit of the law, whereas by the letter of it we have no chance of redemption. We also have to accept the Lord Jesus as our near relative. In the same way as it seemed hard to understand that Boaz could stretch to be the near relative of Ruth, so it may seem hard to understand how the Lord Jesus can be our near relative / kinsman redeemer. But we are helped in this by understanding His humanity, nearer to us than we dare to believe, and able to become nearest and dearest to us. For Ruth is every one of us. The Lord clearly alludes to her when He speaks in Mt. 19:29 of “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life".

It should be noted that seven times, Ruth is called a Moabitess. Moabites were not to be married. Boaz however married her in line with the spirit of the many laws and implications that Gentiles could enter into Israel. It's rather like the law of sin and death condemning every sinner to the wages of their sin, which is death. And yet the spirit of the law enables salvation. We see Boaz, the redeemer, getting to that spirit in that he could legitimately marry a Moabite and she entered into the community of Israel.

Ruth 4:6 The near kinsman said, I can’t redeem it for myself, otherwise I will spoil my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption for yourself; for I can’t redeem it-
Land at that time was organized according to strips of land within a field, rather than owning a field. Even wealthy Boaz only owned part of the field (2:3). Strip farming was very inefficient; upon death, land was split up between the children, and then when they died, the land was split up even further. The anonymous man didn’t want to have any more children because it would mean that what he was leaving as an inheritance would be even more reduced and divided. But because of that, he remains anonymous. He was concerned about what would happen over the next generation or so. By contrast, Boaz wasn’t worried about splitting up yet further the inheritance

which he was leaving- and because of that, he left an inheritance which was recorded and stretched right down to the Lord Jesus.

It seems to me that the nameless relative in Ruth 4 was like so many people today. He was interested in getting a bit more land to add to his stack; but he didn't really care for the redemption of his brother, and pulled out of the whole thing once he learnt he would have to marry another wife and have more children. He said he couldn't do this because he would spoil [AV] or endanger [NIV] his inheritance. We know that at this time, strip farming was being practiced- whereby a field was split up into parts, each of which belonged to a different person (Ruth 2:3). By having more children, the man would have to split up his land into yet more parts so that each son had his strips. And the son he had by Ruth would be counted as Mahlon's son, in the spirit of the levirate marriage laws. And so his bit of land would then be separate from the land strips the man was intending to give to his existing children. Ultimately this could lead to the man's total inheritance becoming almost worthless if it was just split into tiny strips because he had too many children.

I like how the NIV has the man speaking of 'endangering' his inheritance. He was like so many people- he had say a 20 year horizon, genuinely concerned about what was best for his children in the short term, rather than thinking about his responsibility to his brother. He saw 'danger' in doing that. It could be argued that the 50 year Jubilee law meant that the land boundaries returned to how they originally were after 50 years... so perhaps [although it's hard to work out how the Jubilee law worked in practice] he was worrying about something which only had meaning for the next few decades [if that]. He wasn't a bad man; just one who was fearful and wouldn't look beyond the next 20 years or so. And I suggest the genealogy at the end of Ruth 4 comments upon this- that man is anonymous, his name never went down in history, whereas Boaz who loved his brother and didn't focus solely on his own immediate family went on to be the ancestor of both David and the Lord Jesus Himself.

Another possibility is that the man thought that marriage to Ruth was bound to spoil or destroy *his* inheritance or family, as she had that of Elimelech. He considered her a *femme fatale*. He may have seen this as just judgment for marrying a Moabitess. And he wasn't going to do the same. In this case we see how utterly wrong he was. He would be representative of the legalistic Jewish xenophobes of the postexilic period- who missed out on so much because of their attitudes.

Ruth 4:7 Now this was the custom in former time in Israel-

It can be noted that there are Aramaic terms in this verse. This confirms my suggestion on Ruth 1:16 that the book of Ruth was rewritten in exile, presenting Naomi and Ruth as examples to the exiles who were likewise intended to return to their land their God. This would explain why at this point, the author or editor sees the need to explain what the customs were "in former time in Israel", because the readership would not know this.

Concerning redeeming and concerning exchanging, to confirm all things: a man took off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour; and this was the way of affirmation in Israel-

This custom indicates that the law of Dt. 25:9 had been somewhat reduced in severity and altered. For there is no mention of spitting. We could read this as an indication of Israel's apostasy from God's law; or we could consider that even in Old Testament times, the essence of the Law was what was important rather than keeping the letter of it. However I have suggested on :3-5 that the levirate law did not at all require anyone

to marry Ruth. Perhaps that is why the spitting was not done, only the removal of the shoe as a sign that they had indeed made the agreement.

The fact that Ruth doesn't spit in the face of the relative could be read as further evidence that this was not a strict case of Levirate marriage; it was the spirit of it but not the letter. Because it was not a case of "brothers dwelling together". And the child Obed who was born is presented as the son of Boaz (:21) rather than the son of the deceased Mahlon, as we would expect if this were Levirate marriage. It was the spirit and not the letter of the law being used to redeem Ruth, just as in the case of the Lord's redemption of us who by the letter of the law should take the wages of sin, death.

Or it could be that the allusion is not to Dt. 25:9, but rather that treading on property with a shoe means you own that property. Moses was told to remove his shoes because the land was holy, sanctified to God. To give your shoe could simply mean 'I accept I do not own this'. To have your foot upon something meant you possessed it (Ps. 8:6; 36:11; Josh. 1:3; 10:24; 14:9). In some near Eastern cultures, placing shoes on the throne was part of the ritual of a new king possessing the kingdom. Hence giving up your shoe, the covering of your foot, meant relinquishing posession. Hence the connection between the Hebrew words *na'al* [sandal] and *nahal* [inheritance]. Perhaps this is the sense on Am. 2:6, that the needy were sold for a pair of shoes, i.e. their land was taken away from them.

Ruth 4:8 So the near kinsman said to Boaz, Buy it for yourself. He took off his shoe-
We notice that this was done "in the presence of the elders" (:2), just as was required by the law of Dt. 25:7-9 if the levirate law was not followed. But there was no spitting in the face, because actually the law did not require the kinsman to marry Ruth. That was an extension of the law being added by Boaz and Naomi. However :7 may imply that this whole things was nothing to do with levirate law in itself, and taking off the shoe was simply a token of confirmation of an agreement.

Ruth 4:9 Boaz said to the elders and to all the people, You are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi-
Presumably by this point, Naomi has appeared on the scene. Clearly there has been more collusion between her and Boaz than is recorded. The order Elimelech - Chilion - Mahlon may reflect the order in which they had died.

Ruth 4:10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, I have purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance, that the name of the dead not be cut off from among his brothers, and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses this day-
They were standing in the gate of his place, in the gate of Bethlehem (:1). Although Mahlon had been but a child when he left Bethlehem, he was still counted as being from there and somehow was rooted to the land of his inheritance. "To raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance" seems another attempt to connect the property issue to the marriage of Ruth (see on :3). This was not a connection strictly made by the levirate law. The seed did not have to be raised upon the geographical land inheritance of the deceased person. But that would indeed have been according to the spirit of the law; but it was not the letter. Naomi's selling of the land conditional upon the purchaser marrying Ruth was (see on :5) was therefore a reflection of how she [and Boaz] had worked out the spirit of the law. And indeed there is the nail-biting

moment when the nearer kinsman has the opportunity to marry Ruth. When she's in love with Boaz and he with her. This arose because of their genuine desire to be obedient to the law. So in terms of the narrative, this statement of Boaz that he is going to marry Ruth leaves us all with the same sense of relief and triumph which we imagine in his voice.

Ruth 4:11 All the people who were in the gate and the elders said, We are witnesses-
Passers by had crowded around the seated elders to witness what was happening. Marriage was to be publically testified. *There was not necessarily any documentary evidence, but marriage was publically acknowledged by the surrounding society in whatever form was then current. This can help us in defining marriage today.*

May Yahweh make the woman who has come into your house like Rachel and like Leah, who built the house of Israel; and treat you worthily in Ephrathah, and bring you fame in Bethlehem-
See on Ruth 3:2; 4:12. We recall that Elimelech was from Ephrath (Ruth 1:2), and perhaps Boaz was too, as he was a relative of Elimelech. The people perceived that Boaz wanted to build up the family of Elimelech, which had been wiped out by the death of his sons childless and his apparent failure to have any other children. This was grace indeed, to be so concerned about building up your brother's family, when Boaz surely had his own family. But it was as a result of this concern that his name is remembered; because we know nothing of his children, but we do know that his child by Ruth led to the Lord Jesus. "Worthily" is the word for "virtuous", used of Ruth in Ruth 3:11. They were seen as a match for each other, as they were both virtuous people.

Ruth 4:12 Let your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, of the seed which Yahweh shall give you of this young woman-
Tamar's fertility was legendary because despite being in middle age, one act of intercourse resulted in her having two children [twins]. The comparison with Rachel and Leah also seems forced, because they both had fertility problems; we have an example here of people using traditional terms of blessing, rather like singing hymns, without putting any meaning into the words. What unites all these three women is the fact that they were sexually manipulative, and this would support the impression we could possibly take from the record of Ruth's approach to Boaz that night at the threshing floor.

The references to Tamar and Rachel and Leah may well have been tongue in cheek. Although the idea might be that God's seed and purpose carried through, despite so much against it happening. In both cases, seed was obtained by some level of sexual compromise; and we wonder if they considered that Ruth and Boaz were similar. Otherwise, the reference to Tamar appears strange. In this case, the book ends with Boaz and Ruth being misunderstood and viewed askance, yet being the ancestors of the Davidic line which led to Messiah.

Ruth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and Yahweh gave her conception, and she bore a son-
The rubric for procreation usually found in the Bible is that a man goes in to a woman, she conceives and bares a child. But here there is added that "Yahweh gave her conception". We wonder if she had been barren before. Perhaps that is why she more easily resigned herself to coming to Israel to serve Yahweh and being Naomi's carer, resigning the hope of remarriage. She imagined that if she did remarry, it would

be a sad marriage [for those times] as she would be barren. However, her enthusiasm for Boaz, himself an old man, and the whole plan about him marrying her to raise up seed for Mahlon, was therefore all done even more in faith. So she, as so many, found that God does so exceeding abundant above all we ask or think. She had been in a childless marriage for 10 years, and committed herself to serving Yahweh for nothing, just happy to be with Him; now she is 'given conception' by God and her ancestor would be the Lord Jesus.

Ruth 4:14 The women said to Naomi, Blessed be Yahweh, who has not left you this day without a near kinsman; and let his name be famous in Israel-
The 'being a kinsman' to Naomi was felt to have only been achieved when a son was born. But grammatically, the near kinsman who would be famous and a restorer of life (:14) appears to refer to the baby boy. And this would then look forward to how this child's descendant would ultimately be the Lord Jesus, the ultimate restorer of life.

Ruth 4:15 He shall be to you a restorer of life, and sustain you in your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him-
Is. 56:3-8 seems to allude to Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. The "dry tree" who was a eunuch [Boaz? Naomi?] and the Gentile [Ruth] who had taken hold of the covenant would be given a destiny "better than of sons and daughters", a quotation from Ruth 4:15. Naomi has said she is barren (see on Ruth 1:11), and we can deduce from Ruth 4:13 that Ruth was also. And at his age perhaps Boaz was impotent. Perhaps this was why the idea of Ruth marrying him didn't initially occur to Naomi. Out of every human inadequacy and impossibility, God raised up a seed, through using two women and a man who had faith that "God is able". And that seed was to continue to the conception of the Lord Jesus by the faithful virgin Mary, also from Bethlehem.

I suggested on Ruth 1:20 that Naomi was depressive and her silence at the end of the story is significant. There is no hymn of praise from her, no gratitude to Ruth, no recorded expression of joy at the wonderful outcome. We may well wonder whether the women's words of Ruth 4:15 are not a gentle chiding of her to join in the joy rather than remain depressed.

Hezekiah apparently chose to be a eunuch for the Kingdom's sake. There is the implication in Is. 56:3-8 that his example inspired others in Israel to make the same commitment. They are comforted by Isaiah: "Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold (the same Hebrew word is used *five times* about Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 29:3,34; 31:4; 32:5,7) of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off". Hezekiah had lamented that he would die without a seed (Is. 38:12 Heb.; Is. 53), and so did those who had also become (in their minds?) eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom. There was that human desire for a seed, a "house" to perpetuate their name. But they are promised a name in God's house (family) in the Kingdom, better than of sons and daughters in this life. This alludes to Ruth 4:15, where Ruth is described as being better than sons to Naomi. In other words, Ruth's having a child was a living exemplification of the Kingdom now. How God acted with her is how He will with all His people, who put Him first and take hold of covenant with Him.

Ruth 4:16 Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse to it-

The barren Naomi (see on Ruth 1:11) is portrayed as becoming able to nurse the baby. That would have been a miracle, reflective of the new life God was giving to all involved. Or it could be that she symbolically held the child to her breast, rather like Bilhah giving birth upon Rachel's knees so that Rachel could claim the child as hers (Gen. 30:3).

Ruth 4:17 The neighbouring women gave him a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi! And they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David-
The naming of a child by women rather than the father is unusual (Lk. 1:62). Perhaps it was because Boaz died soon after the marriage, as Jewish tradition claims. But it fits in with the theme in the book of the meaning and power of women, in a male based society. "Obed" means 'servant' and this was not a great name for a child in those times, especially for the son of a wealthy man like Boaz. But the spirit of the family was such that they perceived the spirit of servant leadership.

Ruth 4:18 Now this is the history of the generations of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron-
The genealogy now given jumps many generations and so those who are mentioned must all have purpose. Beginning with Perez, son of Tamar who played the prostitute to Judah, we surely have Tamar [who was likely also a Gentile] being paralleled with Ruth. This could confirm the theme of sexual manipulation discussed on Ruth 3:2. But I think the similarity is more in that they had both worked out the spirit of the law, and then went out and in their own ways tried to practice it with the appropriate men in their lives.

Ruth 4:19 and Hezron became the father of Ram, and Ram became the father of Amminadab-
Comparing with 1 Chron. 2, some generations are skipped. But the point is that it included Amminadab, meaning "my kinsman, or paternal uncle (*ammi*) is generous". The idea is being presented that generosity and being a true kinsman redeemer *ran in the family*. Not only Boaz had been like this, but his ancestor too. The idea is that this would characterize the line of David, and would come to full term in the Messianic Son of David.

Ruth 4:20 and Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon became the father of Salmon-
Amminadab, the generous kinsman like Boaz (see on :19*),* had a descendant called Nahshon, meaning 'snake'. The abrupt juxtaposition is so that we understand that spirituality is not at all inherited genetically. It is a case of consciously choosing to follow good examples.

Ruth 4:21 and Salmon became the father of Boaz, and Boaz became the father of Obed-
Mt. 1:5 says that Salmon had Boaz by Rahab. Yet Rahab lived some time earlier. I therefore suggest that Salmon was the ancestor of Boaz [not the literal father], through the child he had from Rahab. This is mentioned to highlight the fact that Boaz was descended from Rahab, and therefore was generous to the strangers and saw nothing wrong with a Moabitess marrying into the congregation of Yahweh.

Ruth 4:22 and Obed became the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of

David-
The function of the narrative is to set up David as the intended outcome to a line which had arisen out of barren, Gentile women, domestic tragedy, servant leadership (see on :17), faith and perception of grace. And this is the line which the New Testament genealogies show continued to the Lord Jesus.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: 1 SAMUEL

1 SAMUEL

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 1

1Sa 1:1 Now there was a man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite-

We note that this continues on from Judges-Ruth, where people from Ephraim are generally apostate. So here we have an example of a family holding on to the covenant amidst general apostacy from it. Elkanah means "God obtains" and his father "Tohu" means "depression", and he was to be taught the meaning of his name through obtaining Samuel after the years of Hannah's depression. We too are set up by God with challenges and things we need to perceive, and are led by Him to that understanding- including through the experiences of our partners.

The variations in the genealogies reflect how fluid was the spelling of names, and how there were variations upon the same name: Elkanah, Jeroham, Elihu, Tohu, Zuph (1 Sam. 1:1); Elkanah, Jeroham, Eliab, Nahath, Zophai (1 Chron. 6:26,27); Elkanah, Jeroham, Eliel, Toah, Zuph (1 Chron. 6:34,35).

1Sa 1:2 He had two wives; the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; Peninnah had children but Hannah had no children-

"The one" could be translated "the first". Perhaps Hannah was his first wife, but being barren he had taken Peninnah. Hannah, the depressed, bitter, hopeless case, the barren first wife in a polygamous marriage, with a co-wife who has produced ten sons, is again the hopeless outsider chosen by God to further His saving purpose. For Peninnah to have produced many children and Hannah none, this situation must have gone on for at least 15 years. Throughout which God appeared apparently silent, years when live must've seemed just not worth living for Hannah.

Issues related to barrenness are so common in the lives of the Old Testament faithful. To not have children was seen as the ultimate poverty and sign of God's lack of blessing. The equivalent in modern society may be a sense that God has not come through for us in life as we think He ought or might have done; whether or not the issue is fertility. "Hannah" means Yah's gift or grace; and like Elkanah (see on :1), she had to be brought to understand God's intention for her, and to realize that children like all blessings don't come automatically but are God's gift by grace. "Peninnah" means rubies, and perhaps Prov. 31:10 has her in view when saying that the virtuous woman (cp. Hannah) is worth more than rubies / Peninnah.

1Sa 1:3 This man went up out of his city from year to year to worship and to sacrifice to Yahweh of Armies in Shiloh-

Elkanah is presented as faithful to the covenant. And yet the Mosaic commandment was that every male should appear before Yahweh three times / year (Ex. 23:17). But he

went up only once / year, and yet is presented as a righteous man. Clearly most of God's people didn't keep the law of Moses perfectly, and yet legitimate relationship with God was still possible. And yet the fact that was true, was therefore by His grace alone.

The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, priests to Yahweh, were there-
Phinehas means "mouth of a serpent", Hophni is less clear, possibly "one who punches / slaps with his hands". Strange names for men who were supposed to be priests, and a reflection on Eli. "Eli" could be a variation on El, but it seems more likely to mean high / proud one. And for all his apparent humility, that was indeed his problem in the end.

1Sa 1:4 When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he gave to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters portions-
The idea may be that they ate a peace offering together, presided over by Elkanah, and he shared out the portions of the sacrifice to the whole family to eat, including little children. They ate of the symbol of the covenant relationship which their parents had, and this may or may not be helpful in formulating an understanding of whether children should partake of the bread and wine in our dispensation.

1Sa 1:5 but to Hannah he gave a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but Yahweh had shut up her womb-
"But Yahweh had shut up..." may hint that Elkanah's high view of Hannah was not at that point shared by God. He gave her, literally, "the nose portion". This could be a metaphor for "double", or it could be read literally, as if the gift of this part of the animal was a symbolic sign of favouritism. We will note on 1 Sam. 2 that she says many things which seem to betray a very unspiritual and bitter heart, even though she was of a woman of faith. We note again the usage of contemporary medical understandings ["phenomenological language"], a point to bear in mind when we come to the language of demon possession used to describe mental illness in the New Testament. For infertility is not due to a literally closed womb. The dynamics of the situation are so true to life- Hannah had no children, but Peninah did; but Hannah was the favourite wife and was given the "double portion" to demonstrate that, and so Peninah responded by hitting at Hannah because of her barrenness.

1Sa 1:6 Her rival provoked her severely, to make her fret because Yahweh had shut up her womb-
We have the situation of Rachel and Leah repeated again, whereby the barren wife was loved more by the husband and was provoked by the other partner. It is commendable however that she didn't resort to trying to get her husband to sleep with another woman and bear a child symbolically for her. The way circumstances repeat in life and between persons, both contemporary with each other and historically, is typical of how God

works; we are intended to see the similarities with others and take lessons and encouragement. This is what makes the Bible a living word, because the characters selected for us to meet are all designed to speak directly to us in our lives, and to confirm our deep sense that man is not alone, and nothing we pass through is in fact totally unique to us. Peninnah made Hannah "fret" (1 Sam. 1:6), and yet when she has Samuel she asks God to "thunder", s.w. "fret", against her enemies, clearly having Peninnah in view (1 Sam. 2:10). Hannah imagines He will do this when His "anointed king" is reigning, and clearly she understood Samuel to be that. He didn't become that; and the fact he anointed David to be king rather than himself being anointed is pointed poof of the fact that her bitter expectations and hopes didn't come true as she intended. There seems no forgiveness, just a desire for judgment and to make Peninnah feel the same way as she had been made to feel; and a desire for the manifestation of the anointed King in order for her to see her enemy made to feel how she had felt, and worse.

"Fret" is literally, 'Anger after anger'. The picture is of continual provocation leading to continual anger episodes. But she will later reflect that Yahweh 'counts actions' (1 Sam. 2:3 Heb.). Every provocation and episode was counted. All the countless daily episodes like this in countless human relationships are likewise not unnoticed, and all will finally be judged when they concern the Lord's people.

1Sa 1:7 This went on year after year when she went up-
It is again emphasized that they made once yearly pilgrimages to the tabernacle. And yet the Mosaic commandment was that every male should appear before Yahweh three times / year (Ex. 23:17). But Elkanah went up only once / year, and yet is presented as a righteous man. See on :3. This is another indication that Hannah was not the peerlessly spiritual woman which she is sometimes made out to be.

To the house of Yahweh-
The temple of Yahweh wasn't then built, so this anachronism may reflect how these historical books were rewritten under Divine inspiration, after the exile. Or it could simply be that a more permanent structure had been built for the tabernacle.

She provoked her, therefore she wept and didn't eat-
The idea may be that she didn't eat of the peace offerings, because she didn't feel at peace neither with God nor with the rest of the family because of Peninnah being so horrible to her. Again this is all so psychologically credible; tension with another in the believing family leads to distance from God. Until like Hannah we get a grip and take initiative in our relationship with God personally.

1Sa 1:8 Elkanah her husband said to her, Hannah, why do you weep? Why don't you eat?

Why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?-
Perhaps this implied Peninah had borne him 10 sons; she is described as "she who has many children" (1 Sam. 2:5). We could infer that Hannah refused to eat the double portion Elkanah gave her; even his special love and favouritism couldn't compensate, in her mind, for her lack of children. We note that Elkanah isn't recorded as praying that his wife Hannah conceives, unlike Isaac for Rebekah. Perhaps because his own 'need' for children had been met through Peninah. And so it is Hannah who has to pray for herself directly to God. Only after she has done that does she agree to eat again- not because of Elkanah's pleas. Through ignorance, misintention, lack of sensitivity, dysfunction or whatever of others, we too are driven to personal engagement with God. Perhaps he alludes to the happy Naomi, for whom her daughter in law's love was better than seven sons. And he wonders why Hannah can't be like her. Weeping and not eating could be associated with fasting; but also it could be the psychological outcome of cruel teasing and provocation. Or perhaps there was a little of both. The loss of appetite associated with her depression turned into fasting before Yahweh for a child. Or as suggested on :8, it may mean she declined to partake in the eating of the peace offering.

1Sa 1:9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his seat by the doorpost of Yahweh's temple-
We have just read that she didn't eat (:7,8), which I suggested may mean she declined the meat and wine of the peace offering. But now she did, because her mood had changed because she had decided to make a vow (:11) and pray for a child with a prayer believed in so strongly that she believed and felt as if she had received the answer; for that is the true nature of faith in prayer (Mt. 21:22). Or perhaps Elkanah persuaded her to eat, and her participation in the meal of fellowship and peace with God [the portions were from the peace offering] inspired her to believe that this God she sat and ate with would indeed respond to her prayer. The memorial meeting should have the same inspiration for us.

We note how Eli sits but Hannah rises up. This is typical of the reversals we will read about in her prayer in 1 Sam. 2. Samuel was to rise and the house of Eli were to fall. So we have set up conflict between her house and that of Eli. Her prayer imprecating her adversaries can be read as referring to both Eli and Peninnah. Samuel was therefore born into conflict, and this enabled him to comfort David who was in the same situation with the house of Saul. Truly all our sufferings are in order to help others (2 Cor. 1:4).

1Sa 1:10 She was in bitterness of soul and prayed to Yahweh and wept bitterly-
I suggested on :9 that what we now read may be explaining how it came about that she was not eating and drinking the peace offering again, when previously she had not been. When we read in :18 that after her vow she ate, this would be linking back to :9. Who we

are as persons is effectively our prayer and plea to God. This conception of prayer explains why often weeping, crying, waiting, meditating etc. are spoken of as "prayer" , although there was no specific verbalizing of requests (Ps. 5:1,2; 6:8; 18:1,2,3,6; 40:1; 42:8; 64:1 Heb.; 65:1,2; 66:17-20; Zech. 8:22). The association between prayer and weeping is especially common: 1 Sam. 1:10; Ps. 39:12; 55:1,2; Jn. 11:41,42; Heb. 5:7, especially in the Lord's life and the Messianic Psalms. "The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer" (Ps. 6:8,9) crystallizes the point.

Hannah's personal spiritual ambition and initiative contrasts positively with the responses of other barren women. Rachel demanded that her husband resolve the situation; Rebekah kept silent about it and it was her husband who prayed to God about it (Gen 25:21); Sarah was willing to live with the situation but got her husband to sleep with her slave girl. Samson's mother was ordered to Nazirite her child, whereas Hannah takes the initiative in offering that to God.

1Sa 1:11 She vowed a vow and said, Yahweh of Armies-
Poor Hannah was driven through the sorrow of her life to coin the phrase "Yahweh of hosts" for the first time in Scripture, so strong became her sense of the strength and manifestation of Yahweh in His Angels. The close association between Angels [Yahweh's hosts] and answered prayer resulted in many of the early believers conceiving of God in terms of an Angel, as Jacob in particular did. Hannah is another example; she prayed to the Lord of Hosts (Angels) to "look on the affliction of Your handmaid"; and the Angels are God's eyes through which He looks on us. She came to pray "before the Lord" (:15)- i.e. before the Angel dwelling over the ark. Angels are associated with conception- the cases of Samson, John and Jesus quickly spring to mind. Her affliction drove her to a new paradigm in understanding God- hence she apparently coined the term "Yahweh of armies", used here as an address for the first time in Scripture. Our afflictions likewise drive us to closer and paradigm breaking understandings of the Father.

If You will indeed look on the affliction-
She was thinking of Leah, who considered the end of her barrenness to have been Yahweh looking on her affliction (Gen. 29:32 s.w.). She formed her faith from considering this Biblical precedent. But the same phrase is also used of Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 3:7; 4:31; Dt. 26:7 etc.). She reasoned that the God who had done that for His people could just as easily give her conception.

Of Your handmaid and remember me and not forget Your handmaid, but will give to Your handmaid a boy, then I will give him to Yahweh all the days of his life, and no razor shall come on his head-
She wanted not merely a child to remove her reproach amongst men, but specifically a male so she could present him as a Nazirite to God. Although they were not Levites, by

promising him as a Nazirite she was effectively asking for him to be counted as a Levite. Hannah's request in 1 Sam. 1:11 that God look upon her affliction and answer it was heard, and she became an inspiration to her descendant David; who often makes the same request, unashamed to be inspired by the example of a woman (s.w. 2 Sam. 16:12; Ps. 9:13; 25:18 and so often in the Psalms). See on :15. And yet why would Hannah so desperately want to give God just one more Nazirite? Surely her motives were mixed. She seems to have wanted above all to personally attain the status of motherhood, and for that she was willing to sacrifice retaining the child. Indeed it could be argued that abandonning Samuel after weaning him to be cared for far away from her by Eli and his immoral sons... showed no real care for Samuel. All she wanted, it could be argued, was the status of motherhood, and her offer of Samuel as a Nazirite was as it were a bargaining chip she offered God in return. But from this low point, she grew spiritually. And God worked through it to raise up Samuel and thence David as His servants.

It seems from :21 that they were in the habit of making a vow every year, hence Hannah decides to vow that if she has a son, she will give him to Yahweh's service.

1Sa 1:12 As she continued praying before Yahweh, Eli saw her mouth-
Col. 4:2 alludes to the LXX of this verse, bidding us all be like Hannah and continue in prayer; I noted on :11 that her example served as a template for David, as it should for us.

1Sa 1:13 Now Hannah spoke in her heart, only her lips moved but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk-
The tacit implication is that Eli had seen drunk people in the tabernacle before. The low level of spirituality in Israel is a continued theme of the Old Testament. We also have a reflection of how unspiritual and solely "religious" was Eli; the concept of praying silently rather than out loud was totally foreign to him. There is also the implication that Eli didn't hear her voice, but God did.

1Sa 1:14 Eli said to her, How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from you-
It's possible that most of the then existent Old Testament was rewritten under inspiration in the exile. Hannah becomes the template for the exiles; for they too were "afflicted" as she was (:11), and are described as drunk but not with wine who would be justified and their tormentors punished, surely an allusion to Hannah (Is. 51:21,23). See on :15. We recall how Peter was likewise falsely accused of being drunk when speaking in the Spirit. Circumstances repeat between Biblical characters, just as they do between the lives of contemporary believers. The same Divine hand is at work.

1Sa 1:15 Hannah answered, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit-
Israel in affliction in Egypt were of sorrowful spirit (s.w. Ex. 6:9). As noted on :11, she clearly had God's past salvation of His people from Egypt in mind. She felt that her domestic situation was as theirs, and likewise believed that God could miraculously save her from it. We note that this is the extent of depression and desperation that is inflicted by those who goad others over their supposed spiritual inferiority and God's supposed displeasure with them. We think of those disfellowshipped or tormented by others over their marital status, to the point they feel driven to suicide.

"Sorrowful" is the word for "hard". Her triumphant victory song of 1 Sam. 2 would indeed suggest her to be a hard woman, rejoicing over and requesting Peninnah's downfall. Verse 10 twice uses the word bitter about her- "in bitterness of soul... wept bitterly". Her language there is also relevant in parts to Eli and his sons, and came true of them. She commendably refused to be disillusioned with God because of the situation in the "church" of her time, but her bitterness with it is still discernible. The song seems all about her, and her self justification and vindication. Grace and forgiveness is not much on her agenda.

I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before Yahweh-
It was Judah in captivity whose soul was poured out (s.w. Lam. 2:12,19); see on :14. And David again took inspiration from his ancestor Hannah in speaking of himself likewise in Ps. 42:4; see on :11.

The peace offerings, of which Hannah was given a double portion, involved eating and also drinking wine. But although she has eaten (:9), she says she hasn't drunk wine. I take that as being because she believed before she prayed that she would conceive and Nazirite the child to Yahweh. She was surely influenced by the command to Samson's mother not to drink wine because even whilst Samson was *in utero* he was to be a Nazirite and not drink alcohol. So her prayer was preceded by faith that it would indeed be answered and she acted as if it had been answered. This is indeed faith in prayer, and it is why she exits the sanctuary and returns home with joy, believing and feeling as if the prayer has already been answered.

1Sa 1:16 Don't count your handmaid a wicked woman, for I have been speaking out of the abundance of my complaint and my provocation-
She meant, she had been speaking to God in her heart. "Wicked woman" is AV "daughter of Belial", the term used of Eli's sons. She may be implying that she was not in fact drunk as Eli's sons often were. In this case, Eli criticized her for doing what his sons did. It's a psychological classic, taking out on someone else what should be directed to ones own family.

1Sa 1:17 Then Eli answered, Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him-
Eli's unspirituality is again revealed, for he thinks that prayer is simply asking God for petitions. But in fact she had been pouring out her soul to God, telling Him all her feelings about the provocation of Peninnah (:16). Let us also not think that prayer is simply requests; read David's prayers in his Psalms, and see how few of his words are actually requests. Eli told her that her prayer would be granted even though he didn't know what it was for. In fact the answer to that prayer, Samuel, would mean the end of his priestly line and service. Hence she later tells Eli "For this boy did I pray, and the Lord granted me my request that I requested from him". Eli presents as the disinterested priest coming out with a standard form of verbal blessing with no personal interest in the worshipper. Perhaps she grasped that, and therefore didn't tell Eli her prayer- when it is usual in religious circles to want a priest to pray for you, to put your prayer to God. Again, the dysfunction of the situation led her to closer intimacy with God.

1Sa 1:18 She said, Let your handmaid find grace in your sight-
Corrupt and unspiritual as Eli was, she still saw him as Yahweh's representative. His acceptance of her therefore encouraged her that God likewise had accepted her. "Hannah" means 'grace'. She perhaps hints that to receive grace was 'her', it was how she had been set up by life's path of infertility, polygamous marriage experience etc.

So the woman went her way and ate, and her face wasn't sad any more-
She ate, of the peace offerings. I suggested on :9 that the mention of the fact that she again "ate" is then explained by :10-17. Her newfound joy was because she had the faith that feels and acts as if what we asked for has been granted, even though we don't yet have it (Mt. 21:22).

The LXX adds that they stayed in an inn. Hannah's song was clearly a major influence in the mind of Mary. But there are some background similarities as well as the verbal ones. The LXX of 1 Sam. 1:18 [not the Hebrew text] speaks of Elkanah and Hannah staying in a katalyma on their journey to Shiloh- the very word used of the "inn" in whose stable Mary had to stay. If we ask why Mary based her song so heavily on that of Hannah, we find a clue in considering how she was greeted by the Angel as "favoured" (Lk. 1:28). The Greek *kecharitomene* virtually translates the Hebrew name 'Hannah'. The record is written in Greek, but Mary was a Jewess and spoke Aramaic and Hebrew; and probably the Angel spoke to her in those languages. So the link would have been all the stronger- 'Hail, Hannah-like one'. And this set the mind of Mary thinking about Hannah, and in the days between hearing these words and meeting Elisabeth, Mary had perceived the similarities between her position and that of Hannah. She allowed the spirit of Hannah to genuinely become hers, in perceptive obedience to the Angel's bidding. She came to share God's perception of her as a woman like Hannah. 'Hannah' comes from the

Hebrew root *hnn* – favour. Mary is told that she has been favoured / 'Hannah-ed' by God (Lk. 1:30)- as if to lead her to see the similarities between her and Hannah. And she responds magnificently, by alluding to Hannah's song so closely. Tragically as we shall see, she later came to be more influenced by the world's perception of both herself and her Son. The theme of joy is very great in her song- again, because she was obedient to the greeting "Hail!", literally, 'rejoice!'.

The points of connection between the songs of Hannah and Mary's Magnificat are really quite detailed:
1 Sam. 1:3 = Lk. 1:7; 1 Sam. 1:18 = Lk. 1:38, 30; 1 Sam. 2:1 = Lk. 1:46; 1 Sam. 1:11 = Lk. 1:48; 1 Sam. 2:2 = Lk. 1:49; 1 Sam. 2:4 = Lk. 1:51; 1 Sam. 2:3 = Lk. 1:51; 1 Sam. 2:4 = Lk. 1:52; 1 Sam. 2:8 = Lk. 1:52; 1 Sam. 2:5 = Lk. 1:53; 1 Sam. 2:10 = Lk. 1:69; 1 Sam. 2:26 = Lk. 2:52.

Hannah's faith and initiative is impressive. There are several cases of Divinely induced pregnancies after infertility. But usually a prophet or Angel gives the news of the pregnancy, often there is a sign that it will indeed happen- whereas here Hannah takes it upon herself to pray for it, and with no confirmatory sign, totally believes it will happen and rejoices because of it.

1Sa 1:19 They rose up in the morning early and worshipped before Yahweh and returned home to Ramah, and Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and Yahweh remembered her-
The worship may imply thankfulness. As noted on :18, Hannah really believed the prayer would be heard, even though she had not yet tried to conceive again. "Remembered" doesn't mean God had forgotten. The word is often used of what man does to God, and is translated "burn [incense]" and other terms appropriate to prayer to God. There is a mutuality between God and man, which especially functions through prayer. We 'make mention' of things to God in prayer, and He respects that and in turn, in His own council of Heaven, mentions or makes a mark for us in response. This is why the Hebrew for "ask" is the same for "heard" regarding prayer and the answers to prayer. See on :20.

1Sa 1:20 When the time had come, Hannah conceived and bore a son-
The time coming is applied to both the conception and the birth of the child. With respect to the conception, the idea would be that God indeed had specified a time for this in His plan for Hannah from the beginning of the world. But all the same, without Hannah's intense prayer, this would not have been actualized. And it follows therefore that there are so many potentials which aren't actualized by intense prayer.

And she named him Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of Yahweh-
"Samuel" means both 'asked of God' and 'heard of God'. This exemplifies what was discussed on :19; that God and man are in mutual relationship. What we ask, He hears

in the sense of answering. Samuel's name memorialized how she had asked and had such faith in the answer coming.

1Sa 1:21 The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to Yahweh the yearly sacrifice and his vow-
It seems they were in the habit of making a vow every year, hence Hannah decides to vow that if she has a son, she will give him to Yahweh's service. LXX adds "and his tithes". It was surely clear that the tithes were being abused by Eli's family, but Elkanah still brought them. Their abuses led to men sinning against Yahweh by not bringing tithes and offerings (1 Sam. 2:23,24). But Elkanah is commended for not being amongst those made to stumble in this way. See on :25.

1Sa 1:22 But Hannah didn't go up, for she said to her husband, Not until the child is weaned, then I will bring him that he may appear before Yahweh and stay there forever-
The idea may be that she didn't go up because she had no vow to bring, whereas Elkanah did (:21); because her fulfilment of her vow would be when Samuel was old enough to be brought to the temple and left there, as a living sacrifice. We see here Hannah's individual, personal relationship with Yahweh; her vow was different to that of her husband's. This was at a time when religion was largely a male preserve, and the woman just followed along with the husband's religion. Elkanah encouraged her to do what was right to *her*.

1Sa 1:23 Elkanah her husband said to her, Do what seems good to you. Wait until you have weaned him, only may Yahweh establish His word. So the woman waited and nursed her son until she weaned him-
I noted on :22 that Elkanah encouraged her to do what was right to *her*. And this reflects how within a good, spiritual marriage, the devotions of the wife and husband may be quite different. Hence the significance of LXX "but may the Lord establish that which comes out of thy mouth". He saw Samuel as her project whilst he had his own projects for Yahweh, his vows he brought yearly; but Samuel was his wife's project. The Dead Sea Scrolls at this point has "Only may the Lord fulfill what your mouth has uttered".

1Sa 1:24 When she had weaned him she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of meal and a bottle of wine, and brought him to Yahweh's sanctuary in Shiloh-

"I am the woman" may suggest Eli had forgotten who Hannah was and she had to introduce herself to him again. She and her husband had been regular visitors over the years as well as her having had the encounter with him which is recorded here. Again he is presented as unthoughtful and mindless concerning his flock, which drove her to personal engagement with God. She clearly separated church from God, and didn't

allow inept religious leadership to discourage her from personal relationship with God. Rather did it drive her to this.

The age of the bull was perhaps to represent Samuel, who would have been weaned by three years old (see on 1 Sam. 2:11). If Samuel was only three years old when given to Eli, his later spiritual maturity and devotion is the more remarkable; for he grew up surrounded by bad examples, and only the annual visit of his parents to impart true spiritual guidance. The bread ["meal"] and wine were associated with the voluntary peace offerings. This formed the basis for the later institution of bread and wine in the breaking of bread. If we ask "And where is the animal that is devoted and eaten?" the answer would be that it represents the Lord Jesus and also ourselves, as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1) because we are "in Him".

The child was young-
Evidence enough that a child can still serve God.

1Sa 1:25 They killed the bull and brought the child to Eli-
The "they" is presumably Eli's sons, whom we learn usually abused the offering and took it all for themselves. But just as Elkanah still offered tithes despite the abuse of them by these men (see on :21), so Hannah offered the bull. She knew it was done to Yahweh despite the abuse of His representatives. She separated church from God, in a way which many fail to do today.

1Sa 1:26 She said, Oh my lord, as your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to Yahweh-
We note that she doesn't swear as Yahweh lives, as is commonly found in the Bible, but by Eli's own life. Perhaps she felt that Yahweh was no authority to Eli to make an oath by. We note that this way of swearing by the life of the person being spoken to [rather than by Yahweh] is used of men to Saul (1 Sam. 17:55), by Uriah to David when he knew David had slept with his wife (2 Sam. 11:11) and by Hannah to Eli (1 Sam. 1:26). In every case the implication is that the speaker didn't think that the person being addressed really feared Yahweh.

1Sa 1:27 For this child I prayed, and Yahweh has given me my petition which I asked of Him-
As Yahweh gave her, so she wanted to give to Yahweh (:28). This is the irresistible motivating power of grace, once it is perceived.

1Sa 1:28 Therefore I have given him to Yahweh-
AV "lent". It is rendered by many versions as "given" because she seems to have totally

and absolutely given Samuel to Yahweh for all his life, with no intention of getting him back. However, we can still read "lent" if she had a Kingdom perspective; she looked forward to receiving back the sacrificed relationships in the Kingdom, just as we can.

As long as he lives he is given to Yahweh. Eli worshipped Yahweh there-
This is an attempt to interpret "he worshipped Yahweh there". But I think the "he" refers to Elkanah, unless we apply it to Samuel, who was still so young. And then his worship becomes parallel with Hannah pouring out her heart to Yahweh in the next chapter, making this a repeat of the situation earlier, and continuing the theme of this lovely couple each independently pursuing their devotion to Yahweh in unique ways.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 2

1Sa 2:1 Hannah prayed, and said: My heart exults in Yahweh!-
Prayer is largely carried out in the mind – how we 'speak in the heart' is effectively read as our prayer to God. We find the phrase used about how Abraham's servant prayed, 'speaking in his heart' (Gen. 24:45). Thus our self-talk merges into prayer; Hannah's "prayer" appears to have been the same (1 Sam. 2:1). Solomon's prayer for wisdom is described by God as "in your heart" (2 Chron. 1:11). This close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: "Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them". Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfillment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit 'send' on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

My horn is exalted in Yahweh-
The allusion may be to the way women wore a protruding head dress which was lifted higher the more children they had. But it is righteousness which exalts the horn, and not the biological experience of childbearing; for the wicked also have horns (Ps. 75:10; Lam. 2:17). She may have had in view the idea that her child was to be the anointed Messianic seed (the term is used about Him in :10; Ps. 89:24). But her proud assurance of this was misplaced, for it was Samuel who was chosen not to be anointed, but to anoint David.

My mouth boasts over my enemies because I rejoice in Your salvation-
Hannah had remarkable faith, as noted throughout 1 Sam. 1. But like all of us, she had weaknesses, and those weaknesses were elicited by the situation she now suddenly found herself in. Instead of rejoicing in her blessings and new stage of life, she becomes boastful and distinctly vengeful in her attitude to Peninnah. There is no appeal to the other woman to repent, no forgiveness, only an eager desire for the direct judgments upon her, now that Hannah considered herself justified by God through her having had a child. "Enemies" may be an intensive plural for her one great enemy, Peninnah. Or it may be that she felt mocked for her infertility by a whole set of people, over whom she felt she could legitimately boast in the song she is now composing and singing.

Literally, my mouth is opened wide. 1 Sam. 1:7,8 describe her response to Peninnah's provocations as being weeping and silent depression. Now, with all psychological credibility, she opens her mouth and the pent up anger pours out. Yet within this unspirituality there is also faith and hope, and Mary's song of praise perceives the good and takes that and dwells upon it. Just as we should look at our brethren.

It has been observed that this prayer "begins with the first person, “I”: “My heart exults ... my horn is raised ... my mouth is wide ... for I rejoice.” Hannah is very full of herself and her own emotion at being
granted her petition. But quickly the prayer moves to focus on the source of Hannah’s joy: God. And, indeed, most of the prayer is about God and his act". This is the path for us all, from "me" to God. And in her case, she is led onwards to speak of the coming of "the anointed one", "David's seed", the Lord Jesus Christ.

1Sa 2:2 There is none as holy as Yahweh, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God-

David in his Psalms repeatedly alludes to the song of his ancestor Hannah. He effectively quotes this verse in 2 Sam. 22:32; although I argue throughout 1 Sam. 2 that Hannah's was apparently lifted up with pride and the vengeance of the underling who has overcome the oppressor. And there is reason to think that David had elements of this weakness too. He thought it was acceptable to be like this because Hannah had been. And that is the problem with setting bad examples. See on :5.

I explained on 1 Sam. 1:18 the detailed points of contact between Mary's magnificat, and Hannah's song of praise. But Mary was spiritually discerning enough to avoid the sense of pride and vengeance which fills Hannah's song in places. The points of connection between the songs of Hannah and Mary's Magnificat are really quite detailed:

1 Sam. 1:3 = Lk. 1:7; 1 Sam. 1:18 = Lk. 1:38, 30; 1 Sam. 2:1 = Lk. 1:46; 1 Sam. 1:11 = Lk. 1:48; 1 Sam. 2:2 = Lk. 1:49; 1 Sam. 2:4 = Lk. 1:51; 1 Sam. 2:3 = Lk. 1:51; 1 Sam. 2:4 = Lk. 1:52; 1 Sam. 2:8 = Lk. 1:52; 1 Sam. 2:5 = Lk. 1:53; 1 Sam. 2:10 = Lk. 1:69; 1 Sam. 2:26 = Lk. 2:52.

The evident allusions Mary makes back to Hannah’s song could be read as reflecting what had actually been wrought in Mary’s own person and experience by some kind of persecution in her childhood. And it drove her within herself. It seems that she had been deeply humbled in order for her to be highly exalted. One wonders if she had been sexually abused. If Joseph was indeed much older than her, then we can understand how it happened that this girl, mature as she was beyond her years, got attracted to an older and spiritual man. Her spirituality and intelligence [for her allusions to Scripture indicate a fine appreciation of so much] would have been enough to spark plenty of village jealousy.

1Sa 2:3 Talk no more so exceedingly proudly-

Hannah comes over as hypocritical as she has just announced that she will be speaking proudly and hardly against her "enemies" now that she has had a child.

Don’t let hardness come out of your mouth, for Yahweh is a God of knowledge, though actions be not weighed-

Hannah again presents as hypocritical because she has just admitted to Eli that she is a woman of a "hard" spirit. But she had reflected upon God’s omniscience; and on this basis she tells Peninnah not to be proud and not to use hard words against her, exactly because of this: “Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not hardness [AVmg.] come

out of your mouth: *for* the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" here and now, *because* He sees and knows all things (1 Sam. 2:3 AV); even though it appears that they are not being weighed, because His judgments aren't immediately apparent (so NEV, RVmg.). The word is used of how God weighs thoughts (Prov. 16:2; 21:2; 24:12), but here of actions. We could conclude that therefore the thought is the action, as the Lord Jesus taught; or that Hannah was over emphasizing the external rather than seeing that it is the thoughts of the heart which are the essential issue.

The Hebrew can be rendered "By Him actions are counted". In 1 Sam. 1:6 we read of how she had been made to "fret", literally, 'Anger after anger'. The picture is of continual provocation leading to continual anger episodes. But now she reflects that Yahweh 'counts actions' (1 Sam. 2:3 Heb.). Every provocation and episode was counted. All the countless daily episodes like this in countless human relationships are likewise not unnoticed, and all will finally be judged when they concern the Lord's people.

1Sa 2:4 The bows of the mighty men are broken-
Seeing children are as arrows (Ps. 127:4,5), the bow may refer to the womb, in Hannah's mind. And she is now wishing her barrenness upon her enemies who had once mocked her. This is hardly the right attitude, and she repeats it in :5. But as noted on :2, this is an idea alluded to by David in his victory song of 2 Sam. 22:35. She likely also has in mind the imagery of the mouth as a bow, and words as arrows: "Who whet their tongues like swords; they aim their arrows –cruel words – to shoot from hiding at the blameless man" (Ps. 64:3). She has in view how the words of Peninnah will be shattered. She is uttering curses she wished upon her enemies, which in Hebrew thought were seen as future prophecies.

Those who stumbled are armed with strength-
"Stumbled" is a word mostly used about spiritual stumbling. And yet Hannah is revealed as a woman of great faith in 1 Sam. 1. But she seems now to see that part of her life as stumbling, and her arrogant boasting as spiritual strength.

1Sa 2:5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread-
This is an idiom for prostitution. It's as if Hannah wishes Peninnah to be divorced by Elkanah and left on the street starving and needing to sell her body for food. The past tense may simply express Hannah's intention and desire for how things would be in the future, expressed in the past tense because of her confidence and strong desire that this would happen. Yet in line with the second half of the verse, hunger is understood as the hunger of the womb. So Hannah could be saying that she wishes Peninnah to now hunger, to become desperately barren, willing to prostitute herself to get conception. This is as Hannah also wished in :4.

We note that this is the judgment upon Eli and his family- begging for a morsel of bread in return for doing servile work in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2:36). The 'prophetic perfect' means this is a prophecy. Possibly Hannah is bitter at Eli's indifference and insincerity, and has him in mind as well as Peninah.

The Lord builds this into the experience of the prodigal son. He was more generous than Hannah. He held out hope even for the judged and rightly brought down.

Those who were hungry are satisfied. Yes, the barren has borne seven-
Again we see how past tenses are used in order to express intention and an assured future. Hannah was confident she would go on to have seven children. She didn't;

including Samuel she had six. She had only asked for a single child, but now she had Samuel she assumed she was going to be totally fertile. This was a presumption upon God's grace, and yet He still kindly gave her further conception. But not up to the "seven" she here confidently boasts of.

She who has many children languishes-

The languishing could be in the sense of being unable to have more children; see on :4,5. But it is also a word used of mourning the dead, which would then lead on to :6 if this is the context. It is as if Hannah wishes Peninnah's children to die, for Elkanah to divorce her and for her to become a prostitute selling her body for bread (:5). The bitterness is terrible, and sadly recalls Sarah's bitterness with Hagar. Without doubt, Sarah was wrong. And yet Hannah follows her example here, just as David will later follow Hannah's wrong example. See on :2. We can infer from 1 Sam. 1:8 that Peninah had borne 10 sons.

1Sa 2:6 Yahweh kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up-

Hannah feels that she has been dead [useless and non existent in society without children, cp. "the deadness of Sarah's womb", Rom. 4:19], and now made alive. But she seems to want the converse to happen; she wants Peninnah to now be made 'dead', perhaps in becoming barren as Hannah had been. . But she may literally have in view a desire for Peninnah and her children to die; for Sarah, whose wrong example she was unconsciously following, wanted Hagar and Ishmael dead and therefore cast them out into the desert to die.

1Sa 2:7 Yahweh makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and He also lifts up-

Instead of simply exalting that she had been lifted up (s.w. :1 "exalted"), she wishes to see Peninnah brought down. This is a classic psychological reaction of the downtrodden who are now exalted; but it is not the way of the Spirit. Hannah lacked grace. However we see in these statements that the negative side of life, the bringing down, the making poor, is attributed solely to Yahweh as in Is. 45:5-7. Clearly Hannah didn't believe the good comes from God and the evil from some cosmic Satan figure. See on :32.

1Sa 2:8 He raises up the poor out of the dust. He lifts up the needy from the dunghill-

Despite being apparently middle class, Hannah felt as a desperate beggar at the bottom of society. Perhaps she had Job in mind, for the story of Job would have been well known to her. But he was lifted up through recognizing his pride, and Hannah doesn't appear to have done that.

To make them sit with princes and inherit the throne of glory-

This and Hannah's song and experiences are alluded to in Ps. 113:7-9. She is presented there as representative of Israel, particularly the exiles in Babylon. Her hope was that Samuel, whose destiny she saw as tied up with herself, would be not only a priest [although he was not strictly a Levite] but also a prince / king reigning upon a throne of glory, a term which clearly has Messianic Kingdom overtones. This is all similar to the idea of Ps. 110:4, where the Messiah was to be a king-priest, not a Levite, but a priest "after the order of Melchizedek". "He settles the barren woman in her home, as a joyful mother of children" (Ps. 113:9) continues the allusion to Hannah continues; but she was representative to the "barren woman" of Israel in exile (Is. 54:1), who was to be blessed with many children (Is. 49:12,18,20; 54:2,3; 60:5; Gal. 4:27). But Samuel didn't do this; instead it was he who set up another man [David] and his family to do so.

For the pillars of the earth are Yahweh's; He has set the world upon them-
1 Sam. 2:8; 2 Sam. 22:8 speak as if Heaven / the sky rests on the mountains, from where earth seems to touch the heavens (Is. 13:5), with the stars stretched out in the north (Job 26:7). This reflected the geo-centric view held by people at the time. The point surely was that *however* people understood creation to have happened, God had done it, and in wisdom. Likewise the technically incorrect view of demons as causing mental illness is reflected in the language of the New Testament.

1Sa 2:9 He will keep the feet of His holy ones, but the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness; for no man shall prevail by strength-
The experience of Divine grace and answered prayer led her to over simplistically conclude that she was a "holy one" and Peninnah the wicked. She thinks that her pregnancy somehow empowered her to condemn Hannah to condemnation at the last day. What she says is true, but the way she expresses these Divine truths smacks of pride and inappropriate personal condemnation of others. And we who likewise hold Divine truth and experience His grace must take the lesson.

1Sa 2:10 Those who strive with Yahweh shall be broken to pieces. He will thunder against them in the sky-
Peninnah made Hannah "fret" (1 Sam. 1:6), and yet when she has Samuel she asks God to "thunder", s.w. "fret", against her enemies, clearly having Peninnah in view. Hannah imagines He will do this when His "anointed king" is reigning, and clearly she understood Samuel to be that. He didn't become that; and the fact he anointed David to be king rather than himself being anointed is pointed poof of the fact that her bitter expectations and hopes didn't come true as she intended. There seems no forgiveness, just a desire for judgment and to make Peninnah feel the same way as she had been made to feel; and a desire for the manifestation of the anointed King in order for her to see her enemy made to feel how she had felt, and worse.

Yahweh will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed-
She considers Samuel as becoming the anointed [the first occurrence of the word 'Messiah'] king. But her dogmatic statement here was not to come true. Samuel didn't want Israel to have a human king and Hannah appears not to appreciate this as she ought to have done. And it was his duty to anoint David to become king. Hannah's prayer began with her, in fact it was all about her- but develops to think about God Himself and now here we have her focus upon the Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah. This is almost the only time when a prophecy of the Lord Jesus comes from the lips of an ordinary Israelite. The classic Messianic prophecies were all from Angels or prophets speaking God's word. She came to the spirit of the Lord Jesus through her own reflections on her suffering; Job is perhaps the only other example, and he came to it likewise.

1Sa 2:11 Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the child served Yahweh before Eli the priest-
Again we note how a child can acceptably serve Yahweh. The mention of Elkanah returning leads us to wonder whether Hannah initially remained there with the three year old Samuel; see on 1 Sam. 1:24.

1Sa 2:12 Now the sons of Eli were men of Belial; they didn't know Yahweh-
Even in the Old Testament, sin was personified as 'Belial'. The personification of sin

was known throughout the Bible. And so it is in the New Testament, as the great enemy / satan of believers. It really has to be accepted that 'Devil' and 'Satan' are used to personify sin, because if we read these words as always meaning a literal being, then we have serious contradictions. We note that it's quite possible to do religious duties as did Eli's sons, without knowing / having relationship with Yahweh.

1Sa 2:13 The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand-
God was and still is intensely aware of every detail of what they did apparently in secret. He noticed that the fork had three prongs. The style of the record is as if there is a video camera trained upon the servant. And the recording is kept until today; see on :13.

The significance of "any man" is that this therefore included Elkanah. He and his sacrifices were therefore likewise abused. But still he offered them, because he separated church from God.

1Sa 2:14 He thrust it into the pan, kettle, cauldron or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there-
We notice the zoomed in focus of the camera, as it were. The fork was thrust in, and it brought up meat which the priest's took away for themselves rather than offered to Yahweh. See on :13.

1Sa 2:15 Moreover, before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came and said to the man who sacrificed, Give meat to roast for the priest, for he will not accept boiled meat from you, but raw-
The order given in Lev. 3:3-5; 7:29-34 was that the fat must be burnt to Yahweh first, before the breast and shoulder were waved or 'heaved' before Yahweh, symbolically given to Him, and only then could the priests take it. But Eli's sons were too impatient for this and just grabbed what they wanted as soon as they saw it, exactly the spirit of our age. There was no recognition that whatever they had was really God's, and given to them only as His representatives. The habit of thanking God for our meals ought to be strongly established amongst all true Christian believers.

The word for "servant" is the same translated "child" in :18, talking of how he ministered / served before Yahweh. So we are led to conclude that Samuel as a child or young person would've been expected to do what the priest's servant here does. So from a young person, he was up against conflict with his religious elders.

1Sa 2:16 If the man said to him, Let the fat be burned first, and then take as much as you want; he would say, No, give it to me now, and if you don't, I will take it by force-
Their sin was in how they saw the meat and wanted it immediately, as did Esau. They were unwilling to experience delayed gratification through firstly giving to God, however symbolically. The implication was that the fat was never burnt; and it was the fat which rose as a sweet odour to Yahweh. They looked greedily at it and took it for themselves, fattening themselves with the fat; see on :29.

1Sa 2:17 The sin of the young men was very great before Yahweh, for they despised the offering of Yahweh-
The word for "offering" here is *minchah,* that used specifically of the bloodless offerings of flour etc. The idea may be that when people saw the larger sacrifices

being abused, they didn't want to offer anything at all to God, no matter how tokenistic. They failed to perceive the difference between God and church. Disillusion with the visible people of God, especially their leadership, led to not serving God. Elkanah, as noted on 1 Sam. 1, overcame this- and he needs to be the example to many. "Despised" is the word for "blasphemed". We blaspheme God by not offering to Him, even if we blame the church. We note too that the greatest sin is to make others turn away from God.

1Sa 2:18 But Samuel ministered before Yahweh, being a child, clothed with a linen ephod-
The "but" places the child Samuel in contrast to the sons of Eli. The phrase "minister before Yahweh" is only used of the priests ministering in the holy place, where incense was offered (2 Chron. 29:11). We wonder how a child, who was not 30 years old, could do this, and wear a linen ephod whilst doing so. The remarkable truth seems to be that because Eli's family didn't do even the most basic work at the sanctuary, the young Samuel did it. The connection between the ephod and the robe made for him each year (:19) would suggest that his mother had the spiritual vision to realize this and try to make the appropriate priestly clothing for him. Truly this was a family who saw beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of it. See on :19.

1Sa 2:19 Moreover his mother made him a little robe and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice-
I suggested on :18 that the child Samuel, a non Levite, was doing the priestly work because Eli's family refused to do it, or perhaps just told him to do it. The Hebrew words for "robe" and "ephod" in :18 only occur together in the descriptions of the "robe of the ephod" worn by none other than the High Priest (Ex. 28:4,31; 29:5; 39:22). The young Samuel apparently did the work of the High Priest. His example and spiritual ambition inspired David, who he was to anoint, to likewise wear such a robe and ephod (1 Chron. 15:27).

1Sa 2:20 Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife and said, Yahweh give you children by this woman for the petition which was asked of Yahweh. They went to their own home-
Eli is somewhat male centred. He is really addressing Elkanah, and implying that he would be blessed with more children because "this woman", his wife, had prayed and dedicated the resulting child to Yahweh. Eli tacitly recognizes that he had been wrong in assuming Hannah had been drunk; he realizes now that she had indeed been praying with a paradigm of intensity unknown to him. Eli comes over so often as genuine enough; but it was his weakness in allowing his sons to blaspheme and cause others to stumble which led to his condemnation. The challenge to us is that major weakness in one area of life is not as it were compensated for, at least it wasn't in Eli's case, by an otherwise generally reasonable and spiritual service of God.

1Sa 2:21 Yahweh visited Hannah and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. The child Samuel grew before Yahweh-
This blessing- possibly implying quintuplets conceived at the same time- is directly connected to the blessing uttered by Eli in :20. Although Eli was condemned, Yahweh worked through him. The similarities with Sarah noted earlier in this chapter continued; for again Yahweh "visits" to grant conception. See on Gen. 18:10.

1Sa 2:22 Now Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons did to all Israel, how

they lay with the women who served at the door of the Tent of Meeting-
His great age is perhaps mentioned to imply that he had for decades heard of what his sons were doing, and had only rather lamely rebuked them rather than insisting that the abuses end. These women are the supporting women of Ex. 38:8 who looked ahead typically to those women who were to support the Lord Jesus, the true tabernacle which the Lord God pitched. Again, as in :17, the greatest dimension to sin is in making others stumble. "Served" is literally 'assembled in bands', as if their ministry was quite highly organized. See on 1 Sam. 3:11.

1Sa 2:23 He said to them, Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil deeds from all the people-
Being blind, he only "heard" of these things rather than saw them. Consistently, the Biblical record has the ring of internal consistency and credibility to it. People complained to him, but he is condemned for not disciplining his sons. So we can conclude that his words here were said as a formality and half heartedly. He would only have been condemned so strongly if it had indeed been within his power to change things. But we can also conclude that Eli ought to have noticed his sons' behaviour for himself. He only said something to them because people were gossiping about it. Image was clearly all important to him, and he himself colluded with his sons and is condemned for it.

Samuel was in his 50s or 60s at the time of 1 Sam. 8:1 when he made his corrupt sons judges over Israel. Eli had become judged of Israel at age 58 (1 Sam. 4:15,18). It seems that Samuel's later life had unfortunate parallels with that of Eli. Eli may well have had his sons Hophni and Phinehas in his 50s, because his daughter in law was pregnant at the time of his death at 98. It would seem that when Samuel was about the same age as Eli, he also had sons, who turned away from God just as had Eli's sons. And the people likewise complained (1 Sam. 8:4 = 1 Sam. 2:23). The fact Samuel made them judges despite their immorality would suggest he had gone the way of Eli in turning a blind eye to them. So although Eli's bad example to Samuel was apparently ignored by him and Samuel's spirituality was commendable, finally in later life it seems that example did rub off upon him.

1Sa 2:24 No my sons, it is no good report that I hear; you make Yahweh's people disobey-
We can make others sin (Ex. 23:33; 1 Sam. 2:24; 1 Kings 16:19). There is an urgent imperative here, to really watch our behaviour; e.g. to not drink alcohol in the presence of a brother whose conscience is weak. The making of others to stumble is the repeated reason given for God's wrath with this family.

Eli *did* rebuke his sons; but in God's eyes he didn't (1 Sam. 2:24 cp. 3:13). He said words for the sake of saying words, but in his heart he didn't frown upon them. Eli appeared to discipline his sons. But he couldn't have really done this from his heart, or he wouldn't have been condemned for not controlling them. He honoured his sons above God, to make himself "fat with the chiefest of all the offerings".

1 Sam. 1:21 LXX adds that Elkanah brought "his tithes". It was surely clear that the tithes were being abused by Eli's family, but Elkanah still brought them. Their abuses led to men sinning against Yahweh by not bringing tithes and offerings. But Elkanah is commended for not being amongst those made to stumble in this way.

1Sa 2:25 If one man sins against another, God will judge him; but if a man sins against Yahweh, who shall entreat for him?-

To sin against God's people is to sin against Yahweh, just as Saul's persecution of Christians was effectively done to the Lord Jesus. The Father and Son are so closely identified with their people, they feel all that is done to us as done to them. Man is not alone, even in the most painful sufferings at the hands of others.

We see here in this verse a hint towards the lack of the Lord's mediation available at that time. But sinners against Yahweh, such as Israel, had had a mediator- Moses. But these men had no such mediator. And yet the question is perhaps rhetorical; although Eli didn't quite understand that. The answer was: the child Samuel, who points ahead to the future mediator, the Lord Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). For Eli as the high priest ought to have been the mediator, but he was precluded from doing so by his own unspirituality.

However, they didn't listen to their father, because Yahweh intended to kill them-
And yet Eli was condemned for this. The situation was therefore of his making, but Yahweh confirmed that situation. He works in the same way today. There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. The fact a man does something "of the Lord" doesn't mean that he is guiltless. In the same context of God's deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, men who did things "of the Lord" were punished for what they did (Dt. 2:30; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Chron. 22:7; 25:20). God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

1Sa 2:26 The child Samuel grew and increased in favour with Yahweh and with men-
As noted on :25, Samuel is being set up as a type of the Lord Jesus, the mediator whom Eli should have been (Lk. 2:52 quotes this about the Lord).

1Sa 2:27 A man of God came to Eli and said to him-
The visit of the man of God to condemn Eli was the more remarkable because there "was no frequent vision" at that time (1 Sam. 3:1). God was making a special effort to appeal to Eli.

Thus says Yahweh, 'Did I not reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt, in bondage to Pharaoh's house?-
The reference is to the calling of the tribe of Levi "out of all the tribes of Israel" (:28). "Revealed" in 1 Sam. 3:7,21; 9:15 is the word used of how Yahweh had revealed Himself to the tribe of Levi and called them to be His priests (1 Sam. 2:27), and Eli as it were was in the loins of his father Levi, according to the principle of Heb. 7:10. But the line of Levi and Eli had potentially been rejected because of Eli's apostasy. The Divine intention was to replace them with Samuel as a prophet-priest and perhaps king (1 Sam. 2:10). But this potential was only partially fulfilled by Samuel, and despite possibilities in David and Solomon, it only came to full term in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. It seems that some unrecorded appearance of God to call the tribe of Levi is being referred to.

1Sa 2:28 Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before Me? Did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire?-

I have suggested that already, the non Levite child Samuel was doing these things. And he was wearing an ephod, which I suggested on :18 was one with religious significance. Eli and his sons had passed off the work of the high priesthood to the child Samuel. And their attitude was now being confirmed, in that this meant that the calling of them and their tribe was going to be abrogated. And this is indeed the nature of condemnation; it is a giving of a person what they themselves have wanted and according to their own desires.

1Sa 2:29 Why then do you despise My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded for My dwelling, and honour your sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?'-
"Despise" is as LXX 'to look greedily'. They saw the fat of the sacrifices which was intended for God and wanted it for themselves, fattening themselves with the fat.

The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'. When Eli and his sons kept part of God's sacrifices for themselves, he was condemned: "You trample upon My sacrifice and My offering" (1 Sam. 2:29 RVmg.). This is what we are doing by considering that anything that is God's is in fact ours- we are trampling upon that which is His. And this verse is alluded to in Heb. 10:29,30- we can indeed trample upon God's sacrifice today.

Eli honoured his sons above God, to make himself "fat with the chiefest of all the offerings". The description of Eli as being fat surely reflects his guilt (1 Sam. 2:29; 4:18). And yet he appeared on the surface to run his family life on a spiritual footing. His merely surface level rebuke of his sons is revealed as having a motivation in the fact he was himself benefitting from their misbehaviour.

Eli, although apparently righteous himself in many ways, was rejected specifically because "he frowned not" upon his sons' apostasy; he personally was counted as 'kicking' at God and profiteering from His sacrifices, even though he himself seems to have truly loved God (1 Sam. 2:29; 4:18). Because Eli wouldn't exercise discipline, he was somehow seen as committing those very things which he failed to rebuke. The man who wouldn't discipline his wayward ox was to be treated like as if he had committed the crime the ox did, and therefore must die if the ox killed a man (Ex. 21:29).

1Sa 2:30 Therefore Yahweh the God of Israel says, 'I said indeed that your house, and the house of your father, should walk before Me forever'. But now Yahweh says, 'Far be it from Me. Those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be despised-
The idea is, despised by God. To be despised by the God of all grace... is indeed a fearsome thing. "Despised" is the word used for the sin of presumption (Num. 15:31), and this is what Eli had committed. But having been told this, he could still repent; for Judah despised God's word until there was no remedy, the implication being that each time they were told what they were doing, they could have repented (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:16). And it is the word used by Nathan to David of what he had done (2 Sam. 12:9,10), and he repented in response to the prophetic word of rebuke. But Eli didn't. We see here how God can make an "eternal" statement, but it is in fact conditional upon preconditions which He may not at the time specifically express. He speaks His purpose, but He can change it according to human action (Jer. 18).

Because of His capacity to imagine, to see possible futures, we can better sense the poignancy behind His words in places like Is. 48:18: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments!", "Oh that they would have a mind such as this always" (Dt.

5:29), "O Israel, if you would but listen to me" (Ps. 81:8,13). It's as if He could see the potentially happy future which they could've had stretching out before Him. And so we can better understand the sadness with which God had to tell Hophni and Phinehas: "I thought this, that your house, and the house of your father, would eternally serve Me: But now, the Lord, says, Be it far from Me; for them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be despised" (1 Sam. 2:30). He as it were limited His omniscience in order to enter into real time relationship with Eli and his family. Note how God opened His heart to those who had so hurt Him, at the very time they had hurt Him- just as Paul did to Corinth. Such sharing of dashed hopes with those who have dashed them seems to be part of what condemnation is all about; and, given Paul's doing this to the Corinthians, it is perhaps even a useful tool for we who cannot condemn others, but may need to walk separately from them in this life.

1Sa 2:31 The days are coming when I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house so that there shall not be an old man in your house-
The father's house in view was that of Levi, who is the "father" referred to in :27,28. To cut off the arm was an idiom for removing from power. Eli was an old man and had therefore been High Priest a long time (see on :22). But this would not happen again. The implication seems to be that the cutting off of Eli and his sons (which happened at the same time) would be the point at which the house of Levi would be cut off from the priesthood. But this potential plan didn't happen, although it seems at the time that Samuel was intended to take over effectively as High Priest. But the Levitical High Priesthood did continue; it seems that Samuel didn't live up to his potential, although he does act as a priest as does David. The power of tradition trumped his potential calling, as happens so often with those called to new paradigms of service.

"Arm" is "strength", and the Hebrew word is very similar in sound to that for "descendants". Eli's descendants would be cut off, but Hannah had been promised a son and a dynasty of faithful priests.

1Sa 2:32 In distress you would look with envy upon the wealth which I would have given Israel, but there shall not be an old man in your house forever-
Eli was told of "all the wealth which God would have given Israel", which his behaviour had now disallowed. Knowing this, women like Hannah clearly hoped and prayed that their sons would be Messiah (1 Sam. 2:10 = Ps. 89:24); for they perceived that the outworking of God's purpose was open to change. The wealth of Israel is paralleled with there being an old man in the house / tribe of Levi; the blessing of the people would have been parallel with the blessing of Israel. But their apostasy was the poverty of Israel. And yet Hannah has spoken of the rich becoming poor and the poor rich, with her having in view how Samuel and herself were the poor who would be made rich (:7). Again we see that the priesthood of Eli could have been replaced by that of the non-Levite Samuel.

1Sa 2:33 Any man of yours whom I shall not cut off from My altar, will only blind your eyes with tears and grieve your heart; all the increase of your house shall die in the prime of life-
The original is unclear as to whether Eli's eyes would be blinded with tears, or whether any who were not cut off in violent death would be blinded. But there is also the possibility as in GNB: "Yet I will keep one of your descendants alive, and he will serve me as priest. But he will become blind and lose all hope, and all your other

descendants will die a violent death". Whichever option we take, it speaks of a future which was only a potential possibility. For Eli and his sons died at the same time. I suggest that all these potential pathways of cursing upon Eli didn't quite come about as was potentially possible, just as Samuel didn't become the anointed Messianic king-priest which he might have been (:10). The unclarity of the text is purposeful because it reflects the various possible paths of judgment; the very existence of them all reflects God's extreme sensitivity to human behaviour and the various outcomes He finds appropriate to them all.

1Sa 2:34 This will be the sign to you which will come on your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall both die-

The idea of a sign to Eli was surely that he was to take note of it and then repent. But it seems the day the sons died, he also died. It was as if he refused to respond to it, and therefore was slain the same day. And so the idea of the "sign" was that it was to be immediately responded to. Eli died at a great age; God had been so patient with him, giving him so many opportunities to repent, and then at the very end of his life , on the very last day of it, he was given the fulfilment of this sign to urge him personally towards repentance. And still he refused, being concerned merely about the loss of the ark as a religious symbol.

1Sa 2:35 I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall minister before My anointed one forever-

Again we see various potential fulfillments here. A faithful priest was to be raised up to minister before the anointed one, the Messianic king, who apparently was potentially Samuel (see on :10). But no such faithful priest was raised up in Samuel's time, nor did he become a king. These words were reapplied therefore to Saul and David whom Samuel would anoint, although neither of them had a specific priest ministering before them. And it is David who is presented as the man after God's own heart and mind (1 Sam. 13:14); yet he was the anointed one and not the priest. The promise of a "sure house" could have had fulfilment in Solomon (1 Kings 11:38), in contrast to God's destruction of Eli's household; and yet that also failed. So we see that none of the potential fulfillments fully came about, because of various human failures in living up to the potentials. And so these words are reapplied and reinterpreted towards fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. For all others, for whatever reason, had let the baton drop.

Samuel had been prophesied to be the next priest whilst the existing priest would be removed for apostasy. This was exactly the essential situation of David with Saul as regarded the kingship. Samuel's experience therefore ideally qualified him to relate to David. All our trials are likewise so that we can empathise with others.

1Sa 2:36 Each one who is left in your house shall come and bow down to him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread, and shall say, 'Please put me into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a morsel of bread'-

The Lord's parable of the prodigal seems to gave this in mind. The son asks to return to the family home not with the rights of a blood descendant, but just as a labourer and servant in order to eat bread. If indeed the Lord had this verse in mind, He would be hinting that even in this case, repentance was possible. This bowing down to the faithful priest of :35 never apparently happened, and so again [as noted throughout this section] we are left with the impression that there were various potential

pathways for fulfilment, different possible scenarios, which didn't all come strictly true to the letter.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 3

1Sa 3:1 The child Samuel ministered to Yahweh before Eli-
The phrase "minister before Yahweh" is only used of the priests ministering in the holy place, where incense was offered (2 Chron. 29:11). We wonder how a child, who was not of the tribe of Levi, could do this, and wear a linen ephod whilst doing so. The remarkable truth seems to be that because Eli's family didn't do even the most basic work at the sanctuary, the young Samuel did it. The connection between the ephod and the robe made for him each year would suggest that his mother had the spiritual vision to realize this and try to make the appropriate priestly clothing for him. Truly this was a family who saw beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of it. See on 1 Sam. 2:18,19.

The word of Yahweh was precious in those days; there was no frequent vision-
This would mean that the visit of the man of God to condemn Eli in 1 Sam. 2:27 was the more remarkable because there "was no frequent vision" at that time (1 Sam. 3:1). God was making a special effort to appeal to Eli. This also sets the scene for God appearing to the young Samuel in a vision. The lamps had gone out in the Holy Place, matched by Eli's declining sight, and yet we see Samuel's growth contrasted with the decline of Eli and his dynasty. A new light is set to dawn in Israel, through Samuel. Who was born and grew spiritually against all odds.

1Sa 3:2 At that time, when Eli was laid down in his place (now his eyes had begun to grow dim, so that he could not see)-
Blindness is repeatedly used in the Old Testament as a sign of Divine judgment. The impression is that his declining eyesight was connected with the waning of the lamp of God in the tabernacle that night (:3). We get the impression that the message he is about to receive is yet another appeal to him, as was the prophetic word of 1 Sam. 2:27.

Eli is presented always as either laying down or sitting down [by the tabernacle 1 Sam. 1:9, or by the road side at the entrance to Shiloh, 1 Sam. 4:13]. His passivity is highlighted. Samuel's father Elkanah likewise presents as passive, and so Samuel's zeal for God is the more commenable given this background and these role models.

1Sa 3:3 and the lamp of God hadn't yet gone out, and Samuel had laid down in Yahweh's sanctuary where the ark of God was-
The lamp was intended never to go out. We have here the impression of the oil lamps now waning and about to go out, connecting with the impression we have of Eli's declining light as his eyesight slowly failed in :2. God's presence in the tabernacle was in decline, but this was because Eli had not made the effort to keep that light burning, passing the job to young Samuel, who lit the lamps at evening and then went to sleep. We could reason that it was when the lamp had gone out that then the prophetic word of condemnation came to Samuel. The "lamp of God" going out was representative of the end of God's relationship with His people (2 Chron. 29:7), and is the term used of the faithful line having a lamp of God burning in Jerusalem (1 Kings 15:4). But in Eli's time, the lamp was allowed to burn out, because the priests couldn't be bothered

to keep it burning. And this therefore came to represent the extinguishing of the light of Eli's household.

1Sa 3:4 Yahweh called Samuel, and he said Here I am-
Notice the fascinating repetition within 1 Sam. 3:4-6,10,16: the Angel calls Samuel's name, and he replies "Here am I". Then Eli calls his name for the first time [:16 *Eli called Samuel and said, Samuel, my son! He said, Here I am*], and Samuel likewise responds "Here am I"- insisting that Eli has already been calling him, when in fact it had been the Angel. Clearly the Angel spoke to Samuel with the voice of Eli! Could this imply that that Angel was Eli's guardian? At very least it reflects how closely sensitive and understanding the Angels are to their charges on earth- they can imitate the exact intonation of their voices! By all means compare this with how the early believers were sure that what appeared to be Peter standing at the door was his Angel- they imagined that his guardian Angel looked exactly like him.

"Samuel" means 'the one who hears God', and he runs to Eli, 'my God'. He was being taught by these three episodes that hearing God was not the same as hearing Eli. Eli was not in fact 'Eli', 'my God', to Samuel. A child's perception of God is always taught by their father figure, and Eli was Samuel's father figure. But at this young age he was being taught otherwise, and to his credit he responded, not going the way of Eli and those around him.

1Sa 3:5 He ran to Eli, and said, Here I am, for you called me. He said, I didn't call; lie down again. He went and lay down-
We note Samuel's running in response to God's word, in line with the idiom of 'running' as meaning response to God's message (Dan. 12:4; Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Am. 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.).

1Sa 3:6 Yahweh called again, Samuel! Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, Here I am; for you called me. He answered, I didn't call my son; lie down again-
See on :4. "My son" reflects how in Elkanah's absence from maybe the age of three (1 Sam. 1:24), Eli was effectively Samuel's father. He is the more commendable for being spiritually strong for Yahweh when his adoptive family were so far from Him.

"Here am I" was the logical answer if the Divine voice came from between the cherubim, as it did in Num. 7:89. So Samuel was sleeping next to the ark. Yet when Uzzah touched the ark he was slain. Boundaries of holiness were so flexible. There seems little point in mentioning the ark unless to make the point that Samuel slept next to it: "Samuel had laid down in Yahweh's sanctuary where the ark of God was" (:3). The lamps that went out therefore refer to those in the candlestick in the Holy place. A child was maintaining the whole tabernacle and moving freely in and out of holy space. Eli's attitude to God's holiness was terrible.

1Sa 3:7 Now Samuel didn't yet know Yahweh, neither was the word of Yahweh yet revealed to him-
Despite this, he was still ministering to Yahweh, even though he had no personal relationship with Him and was aware of this in that he omitted using the term Yahweh (see on :10). For that is the usual sense of "knowing" in a Hebraic sense. This is mentioned to explain why Samuel was so slow in realizing that this was a Divine prophetic call and not Eli calling him. "Revealed" in 1 Sam. 3:7,21; 9:15 is the word used of how Yahweh had revealed Himself to the tribe of Levi and called them to be His priests (1 Sam. 2:27), and Eli as it were was in the loins of his father Levi,

according to the principle of Heb. 7:10. But the line of Levi and Eli had potentially been rejected because of Eli's apostasy. The Divine intention was to replace them with Samuel as a prophet-priest and perhaps king (1 Sam. 2:10). But this potential was only partially fulfilled by Samuel, and despite possibilities in David and Solomon, it only came to full term in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

1Sa 3:8 Yahweh called Samuel again the third time. He arose and went to Eli and said, Here I am; for you called me. Eli perceived that Yahweh had called the child-
This perception would have been mixed with a premonition that this child was his replacement, seeing he had earlier been warned that he was as it were not hearing his own calling as high priest (see on 1 Sam. 2:27). "Child" is the same word used in 1 Sam. 2:13 for how the priest's servant or "boy" defrauded worshippers of their sacrifices. Samuel even as a child was doing priestly service.

1Sa 3:9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, Go, lie down, and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, Yahweh, for Your servant hears'. So Samuel went and lay down in his place-
Eli is to be commended for being prepared to accept that Yahweh was having a relationship with Samuel because he had failed. Many jealous people, such as Saul, would have ten wanted to destroy Samuel. But Eli wasn't like that. He comes over as completely passive, although happy to get fat on the abuses performed by his sons. But the condemnation of him is severe. He is a parade example of the significance of sins of omission.

Eli's command to Samuel to "listen" may allude to the way in which his own sons "didn't listen to their father, because Yahweh intended to kill them" (1 Sam. 2:25). Eli presents as a man who knows what's right (he tells Samuel to say the right thing to God)- but is just too weak willed to do it personally. His condemnation, in such heavy terms, is a true warning and challenge to us all.

We naturally wonder why these three attempted callings of Samuel. The impression may simply be created that Eli was not spiritually perceptive; he ought to have perceived Samuel's calling at the first time. But Samuel was also being taught to perceive the difference between the voice of Eli, and that of God. Until this point he had conflated the two. Now he is being led further out of religion into personal spirituality and response to God's word direct to him.

1Sa 3:10 Yahweh came and stood and called as at other times, Samuel! Samuel! Then Samuel said, Speak; for Your servant hears-
This coming and standing of Yahweh was presumably in the form of an Angel. We note Samuel omits to use the term "Yahweh", contrary to how Eli had instructed him (:9 'Speak, Yahweh, for Your servant hears'). It is noted on :7 that Samuel didn't yet know Yahweh.

1Sa 3:11 Yahweh said to Samuel, Behold, I will do something in Israel which will make both the ears of everyone who hears it tingle-
Samuel as a child had to tell Eli of God's rejection of him, a message he also heard at night, and His replacement of him with someone else. This prepared Samuel for doing this very same thing years later, with Saul (1 Sam. 15:16); and to some extent, he too failed in ways similar to Eli, and was in a sense replaced. Whilst it's impossible to attach meaning to events at the time they happen, they potentially prepare us for later use by God if we are willing to be used.

Eli and his sons were surely unpopular, because the people complained to Eli about all the abuses going on (1 Sam. 2:22). The result was that they gave up offering sacrifices (1 Sam. 2:17). And yet Yahweh foresaw that the people would be shocked at the judgment to come upon the family. We see here how people need religion, to the point of accepting awful abuses and being deeply upset when the abusers are judged; even though they notice and complain about the abuses. This kind of thing, especially in the areas of sexual and financial abuse, is too often seen in religion gone wrong today.

1Sa 3:12 In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end-
And yet I noted in 1 Sam. 2 that there were various potential judgments upon Eli's house. But the essence of God's judgment was to be performed even if not the letter of it.

In the gap between beginning and ending, there would be no repentance. Because God can begin judgment and not complete it. But in their case, He would begin and take it through to the end. Possibly the beginning was in the death of Hophni and Phinehas, continuing in the death of Abimelech and the eighty five priests at Nob at the hands of Saul; and then came to "an end" when Solomon cast Abiathar from the priesthood.

1Sa 3:13 For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew-
The judgment was eternal not in the sense that they would experience eternal conscious punishment; but the consequences of rejection would be eternal in that they were missing out on eternity. And losing a potentially possible eternity is therefore in that sense an eternal judgment.

Because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he didn't rebuke them-
Eli *did* rebuke his sons; but in God's eyes he didn't (1 Sam. 2:24 cp. 3:13). He said words for the sake of saying words, but in his heart he didn't frown upon them. Eli appeared to discipline his sons. But he couldn't have really done this from his heart, or he wouldn't have been condemned for not controlling them. He honoured his sons above God, to make himself "fat with the chiefest of all the offerings". We too can go through the motions of spirituality without believing it. Even external acts of apparent righteousness can be sin.

Eli ought to have noticed his sons' behaviour for himself. He only said something to them because people were gossiping about it (1 Sam. 2:23). Image was clearly all important to him, and he himself colluded with his sons and is condemned for it.

We note again that all condemnation is self inflicted; they brought this curse upon themselves.

1Sa 3:14 Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli, that the guilt of Eli's house shall not be removed with sacrifice nor offering forever-
We compare this with the observation that the blood of bulls and goats could never remove sin or guilt of itself (Heb. 10:4). The guilt could only anyway be removed by faith in the future Messianic sacrifice, better than any animal offering. Again we see that the judgment upon persons was a reflection of what the position which the person themselves had arrived at. They had no desire for forgiveness nor any vision towards the future Messianic sacrifice; and so they were judged with the curse of sacrifice

never removing their guilt. David surely looked back to this when he confessed that sacrifice and offering could not remove his sin, only God's grace (Ps. 40:6).

We could infer from this statement that there was a hint that Eli even at this stage could find forgiveness- if he threw himself upon God's grace, as David likewise did when in a situation when sacrifice and offering couldn't save him. Indeed David may have been inspired by Eli's refusal of this offer to himself accept it. Possibly the situation with Eli is in mind in Hos. 6:6: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings". But instead Eli's response is passive, just accepting his judgment because of the clogging nature of religion and his lack of personal spirituality, reflected in how he failed to perceive Hannah was praying in her heart.

1Sa 3:15 Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of Yahweh. Samuel feared to show Eli the vision-
This is a common theme, of men fearing to tell others the prophetic vision. We think of Daniel dumb with fear before telling the vision to Nebuchadnezzar. It is our own narrative almost daily, as we fear to tell others God's word as it really is, fearing their rejection.

1Sa 3:16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, Samuel, my son! He said, Here I am-
"Here" translates *hinneh,* a word with the same consonants as the name of his mother Hannah. It was almost as if he were saying "I am Hannah". In that moment he felt unity with his mother, in obedience to God's word.

1Sa 3:17 He said, What was it that He said to you? Please don't hide it from me-
Surely Eli knew that this was another message of condemnation for him. But he wanted to know it, just as Zedekiah urged Jeremiah not to hide from him the message of his own damnation (s.w. Jer. 38:14).

May God deal with you severely if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you-
This was no mere threat from Eli. We are not to hide God's word from those for whom it was intended at our hands. One theme of the history here is the critical significance of sins of omission. Omitting to discipline sons, omitting to declare God's word... all merited severe judgment.

1Sa 3:18 Samuel told him everything-
Literally, "every word". Samuel is presented as a new Moses, for this phrase is used repeatedly about him and his mediation for Israel.

And hid nothing from him. He said, It is Yahweh-
By Eli commenting "It is the Lord", he meant 'It is the word of the Lord'; but he saw God as effectively His word. "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. Our attitude to God's word is our attitude to Him. "The word was God". David "despised the commandment (word) of the Lord... you despised me" (2 Sam. 12:9,10). David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is God. By *our* words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too 'are' our words.

Let Him do what seems good to Him-
This kind of fatalism isn't right. It seems a similarly faithfulness Hezekiah alludes to it

in Is. 39:8: "Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, Yahweh's word which you have spoken is good. He said moreover, For there will be peace and truth in my days".

1Sa 3:19 Samuel grew, and Yahweh was with him, and he let none of His words fall to the ground-
The words in view are presumably the intention to raise up the non-Levite Samuel as a replacement priest and mediator for Israel. But as noted on 1 Sam. 2, God's purposes and intentions for Samuel went as far as establishing him as a Messianic king, prophet and priest who would rebuke Yahweh's enemies (1 Sam. 2:10). But Samuel let the ball drop to some extent and this was not finally achieved in him. But from God's side, His words did not fail. Prophecy therefore doesn't fail or "fall to the ground" but the potential fulfillments may not come about.

1Sa 3:20 All Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of Yahweh-
Samuel was apparently required to speak forth his words of judgment upon Eli to all Israel, otherwise the ears of Israel could not have tingled at hearing the message (:11). This would have resulted in a difficult life for Samuel at Shiloh, with Eli and his sons aware of what he was saying about them. Perhaps the subsequent account of the death of the family in 1 Sam. 4 is now included to show how this verse came to be true. When the prophecy of Samuel about them was suddenly fulfilled, all Israel would have known that Samuel was indeed a prophet. For short term fulfillments were required in order to legitimize a prophet (Dt. 18:22).

1Sa 3:21 Yahweh appeared again in Shiloh, for Yahweh revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of Yahweh-
"Revealed" in 1 Sam. 3:7,21; 9:15 is the word used of how Yahweh had revealed Himself to the tribe of Levi and called them to be His priests (1 Sam. 2:27), and Eli as it were was in the loins of his father Levi, according to the principle of Heb. 7:10. But the line of Levi and Eli had potentially been rejected because of Eli's apostasy. The Divine intention was to replace them with Samuel as a prophet-priest and perhaps king (1 Sam. 2:10). But this potential was only partially fulfilled by Samuel, and despite possibilities in David and Solomon, it only came to full term in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 4

1Sa 4:1 Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle and encamped beside Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped in Aphek-
"Ebenezer" is "rock of help", but Yahweh was no longer the rock for Israel. Eli epitomized Israel; Jeshurun like Eli (:18) had "become fat" and despised Yahweh as their rock (Dt. 32:15), and so He was not a rock of defence for them (Dt. 32:30,37). Israel found no help from God there. The theme of religious hollowness continues, for mere tokenism cannot save.

1Sa 4:2 The Philistines put themselves in position against Israel; when they joined battle Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand Israelite soldiers-
The description of the drawing up of battle lines and camps recalls the description of

the conflict with the Philistines when David saved Israel by slaying Goliath. The contrast seems intentional. God's plan through Samuel and David was to salvation, whereas Eli and his sins led Israel to defeat and their own destruction.

1Sa 4:3 When the people had returned to the camp the elders of Israel said, Why has Yahweh struck us today before the Philistines?-
They realized that this was no mere bad luck, but that God was working through the Philistines. To be smitten by enemies was part of the curse for disobedience to the covenant. That was the answer, but rather look at themselves self critically and perceive their sins, the people blamed a lack of external religion- in that they blamed what had happened instead upon not having the ark with them. The ark was never presented as a talisman nor was there a command to take it with them into battle. This was purely their assumption.

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of Yahweh out of Shiloh that it may go with us and save us out of the hand of our enemies-
This is the language of Yahweh personally going with Israel and saving them out of the hand of their enemies. But as so many do today, Israel had replaced content with form, personal relationship with God with a hollow trust in wooden formalism and mere religion. For no gold box could save Israel. Instead of speaking of Yahweh going with and saving them, they speak of "that it [the ark] may go with us and save us". They were making God equal to a religious item. Just as so many do. They were misapplying Biblical precedent; “Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee” (Num. 10:35) was being taken to mean that enemies would flee before the physical ark, whereas this passage is nuanced by the blessings and cursings for faithfulness to the covenant; only a covenant compliant Israel would experience their enemies fleeing before them. They likely also recalled how the Ark had preceded them in the victory against Jericho (Josh. 6:6). The Biblical precedent for Israel was in Josh. 7:6-9 and Jud. 20:26-28 – where both times the people were humbled by their defeat before the ark and sought a word from their God. Both times their sins were revealed, the people repented and were then given victory. But here they just assume that the ark's physical presence would guarantee victory. There was no sense of personal sin nor relationship with their God. Instead they were treating the ark just as the Gentiles treated their gods, taking them into battle with them. Israel's victory against the Philistines in their next recorded battle, in 1 Sam. 7, was not because they had the ark with them- but because Samuel called them to repent and destroy their idols.

In 2 Sam. 5:21 we read of David destroying the images of the Philistines after defeating them in battle, so it's quite possible the Philistines had brought their idols with them to battle. And Israel wanted to do likewise by bringing the ark with them. But they were making the classic religious error of confusing symbol with actual Divine presence. This error is widespread; religious people think that God's presence is only in a building, or only mediated through relics or symbols. Presence and physical symbol are different, although mere religion conflates them. It is the same essential error of Holy Spirit-less Christianity, wherein the physical external forms and appearances of worship are relied upon rather than the actual presence of God through the Spirit. This is surely why the ark fades from view in Israel's history and nobody knows where it ended up. No ark features in the restored temple of Ezekiel. Likewise the temple was destroyed, as a judgment intended to actually help God's people relate to Him on a spiritual level rather than in terms of mere religion and externality. And this is surely why when the ark does literally return to Judah in 1

Sam. 6:19, the men of Beth Shemesh are judged rather than blessed by its presence. They likewise wrongly assumed that having the ark with them would guarantee them blessing; they repeated the same error of the people when they thought that having the ark with them would bring them victory.

David later brings the ark to Zion in 2 Sam. 6, but this was without any Divine command to do so and without consultation with Him; and there was the disaster with Uzzah the first time he attempted it. He clearly also veered towards seeing the ark as a talisman. It was almost as if he wanted to underwrite his own enthronement in Jerusalem by having Yahweh enthroned there also over the ark. Likewise David's desire to permanently locate the ark in a physical temple in Jerusalem can be seen as a desire to legitimate the enthronement of his dynasty in that city. As Adele Berlin noted, "temple-building is crucial to the dynastic promise. The link between the two is common in ancient Near Eastern temple-building literature, where the builder of the temple receives a divine blessing for dynastic stability". God's response was that He needed no temple, but He would build David's "house" or dynasty. But on the other hand, David often 'gets it' about the lack of need for the ark's physical presence. His psalms speak of how he lived permanently beneath the shadow of the cherubic wings, as if he lived on the mercy seat, on the sprinkled blood. In 2 Sam. 15:24-29 he flees from Absalom, and refuses the suggestion he take the ark with him. In fact he initially wants to take it but re-thinks. But, so true to real spiritual life, he also had tendencies towards needing the physical and religious when it came to the ark. Just as we pine for the religious at times, whilst also rejoicing in God's presence in our hearts quite regardless of religious context. David wrote at least two Psalms about bringing the ark to Zion, Ps. 68 and Ps. 132. Ps. 68 clearly expects God to bring victory to Israel because of the ark's presence in Zion, and Ps. 132 seems to reason that once the ark is in Zion it will be there forever. This wasn't to be the case. But we see in David's reasoning that he still considered the ark as some kind of physical guarantee of God's presence, and the legitimization of his own enthronement in Jerusalem- and that of his dynasty after him, as he imagined. He was proven wrong- the ark disappeared, his dynasty was cut off from being the kings of Judah, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. But God's spiritual presence in human hearts continued and became the stronger after these things. We marvel at how God works through human weakness to achieve His wider purposes.

1Sa 4:4 So the people sent to Shiloh and they brought from there the ark of the covenant of Yahweh of Armies, who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God-

There is a juxtaposition between the presence of Yahweh at the ark, and the corrupt sons of Eli being present "with" the ark. The opposition may be between their being "with" the ark, but Yahweh being "above" it. Being in the presence of the ark had done those men no spiritual good, and so it was vain to suppose that being "with" it would provide salvation. His presence "above" the ark may also suggest that Yahweh and the ark were not the same thing at all.

"The ark of the covenant of Yahweh of Armies, who sits above the cherubim" is a lengthy title for the ark; again we have the impression of them trusting in the religious rather than the spiritual.

1Sa 4:5 When the ark of the covenant of Yahweh came into the camp all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth resounded-

Such was the depth of their belief in mere religion. This is the language of deep

religious joy (1 Kings 1:45; Ezra 3:12,13; Mic. 2:12). One lesson we learn is that religious passion, deep faith in the external symbols of the religion (the ark, in this case) is absolutely nothing to do with really knowing God in relationship. I have suggested that the historical records of the Bible were rewritten under inspiration in Babylon, with special reference to the events of the restoration. In this case the connection would be with the great shout and echoing land of Ezra 3:12,13 when the rebuilt temple was dedicated. But some wept at that time; for it had not been built according to the commandments of Ez. 40-48, and therefore the more spiritually minded wept as they realized that the temple and kingdom had not been restored as potentially possible. The connection of the language is in that here again the people had shouted with passion and the earth had echoed- but Yahweh was not among them, and they were slain. The ark was for them just a box and not the real presence of God. They wrongly equated God with the symbolism of Him, assuming that God was with them if the ark was with them (:7).

1Sa 4:6 When the Philistines heard the noise of the shout they said, What does the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean? When they understood that the ark of Yahweh had come into the camp-
Note the parallel in :7 between the ark coming into the camp, and God coming into the camp [as they understood it]. Like Israel, they wrongly equated God with the symbolism of Him, assuming that God was with them if the ark was with them. Form replaced content. The externalities overshadowed and then eclipsed the essence.

1Sa 4:7 they were afraid, for they said, God has come into the camp. They said, Woe to us! Nothing like this has happened before-
God's experience with Israel led to His humiliation before the nations. Seeing the ark represented the very presence of God, the capture of the ark was in a sense the capture of God (1 Sam. 5:7,11 cp. 4:7). Ps. 78:61 comments: "He delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe". And likewise at the cross, crucifixion meant humiliation in some sense for God.

"God has come into the camp" reflects how they viewed the ark as the 'god' of Israel. And that was clearly how Israel themselves viewed the ark. They came to view their God as if He were just the same kind of god as the surrounding nations had, whose presence was in a symbol, which gave victory if carried into battle. In fact the shekinah presence of Yahweh was *over* the ark, on the blood sprinkled mercy seat or lid of the ark, between the cherubim. The presence was not the ark itself.

1Sa 4:8 Woe to us! Who can deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness-
They refer to Yahweh in the plural, and we wonder if this too was how Israel conceived of their God. For Aaron had made the gold calf and told them that "these be your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4). The desire to believe in a plurality of gods somehow beneath the banner of "one God" is a basic human tendency in all religious systems, and came to term in the false doctrine of the Trinity. And yet we see how jumbled was the message which had come down to the Philistines- that the Egyptians had been plagued "in the wilderness" by the multiple gods of Israel. It is a sign of Divine inspiration and purpose that the basic message about Yahweh has been accurately preserved in His word.

We have here the fulfilment of the Song of Moses at the Red Sea: "Fear shall take hold of the inhabitants of Palestina [Philistia]" (Ex. 15:14).

1Sa 4:9 Be strong, and behave like men, you Philistines, so that you will not be servants to the Hebrews as they have been to you. Strengthen yourselves like men and fight!-

These words are quoted about our call to likewise bravely fight against apparently impossible odds- and win (1 Cor. 16:13). This indicates how context [contrary to what is often claimed] is not always the critical issue in interpretation. For typical of Hebrew midrash, the New Testament quotations of Old Testament phrases are often without any attention to context, just taking phrases of Old Testament scripture and applying them to some other context. When you go back and look at the surrounding context of the Old Testament quotation, there is often no relevance nor appropriacy at all (although sometimes there is).

1Sa 4:10 The Philistines fought and Israel was defeated and they fled every man to his tent and there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand Israelite foot soldiers were killed-

The Hebrew word translated "thousand" doesn't literally mean 1,000 in every occurrence; it can refer to a grouping or family, and in a military context, to a regiment or military subdivision. But the slaughter was far greater than at the first battle. This was clearly punishment for misusing the ark of God as mere religious tokenism and as a totem for good luck and success. With what hurt must God view the similar usage of the symbol of the cross, and the taking of His Name in vain today.

1Sa 4:11 The ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed-

As discussed on :7, the taking of the ark of God into captivity was in a sense God going into captivity. It seems the ark was taken before the men were killed. But the order is reversed in :17 to reflect how much the ark meant to Eli. And yet his love of external religion didn't mean he was thereby spiritual nor saved from his condemnation.

1Sa 4:12 A man of Benjamin ran out of the army that day and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and earth on his head-

There may be some significance to this in that it was Benjamin who were chosen by God through Samuel as the first kingly tribe. Why mention he was from Benjamin? The "man of Benjamin" who features throughout the books of Samuel is Saul. So we wonder whether this was Saul, and yet he failed to discern the warning from the death of Eli and his sons at the hand of the Philistines. For the circumstances of the end of Saul and Eli were so similar. We note how the birth of Ichabod is very similar to that of Benjamin, with the death of their mothers in depression and despair.

1Sa 4:13 When he came, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God-

The paramount importance given to the ark is continually stressed. He was worried far more about the ark than about his sons. And yet his lack of discipline of his sons led to his condemnation. His love of the religious externalities didn't save him. "By the road" is LXX "by the gate"; he was watching, but he was a blind watchman (:15),

'watching' for the external religious symbol of the ark, when he was blind to real spirituality. Recall how he had no conception that a woman could pray to God in her heart.

When the man came into the city and reported what had happened, all the city cried out-

The record emphasizes Eli's love for the ark; even after the shock of hearing that his sons had been killed, it was only when he heard that the ark had been taken that he had a stroke and died (:18). Likewise his daughter in law died with mourning for the ark on her lips (:22). But this love of the external things of one's religion (see on :10) wasn't the same as true spirituality. For all Eli's love of the things associated with the true God, he was severely condemned for not having the glory of God and care for His people at heart (see on 1 Sam. 3:13). It's not difficult to love the external trappings of our religion- the church hall, the social events, the regular activities, the general ambience. But this isn't the same as true spirituality.

1Sa 4:14 When Eli heard the noise of the crying he said, What does this noise mean? The man hurried and told Eli-

The historical records were rewritten under inspiration in exile, with the Babylonian captivity presented as having been experienced in essence in Israel's earlier history. This is a parade example, for the phrase "the noise of the crying" is used in Jer. 25:36 of how the shepherds of Israel (cp. Eli and his sons) would make a noise of crying at the Babylonian invasion (also in Zeph. 1:10).

1Sa 4:15 Now Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were bad so that he could not see-

We noted on 1 Sam. 3:2,3 that at that point Eli's eyes had begun to grow dim, and this is associated with the waning and extinction of the oil lamp which was intended to burn always before Yahweh. Now, Eli is completely blind. The light has gone out within him and within the tabernacle.

1Sa 4:16 The man said to Eli, I am the one who came out of the army, and I fled today from the battle. He said, What happened, my son?-

Fleeing before enemies was a sign Israel had broken covenant. This is the point of the history here. Mere possession of the ark and ritual obedience was just mere religion, and was not at all associated with the real, saving presence of God amongst men. This was all so relevant to the exiles, for whom these histories were later rewritten and presented.

"What happened, my son?" is literally 'What is the word?'. Eli used the same term in 1 Sam. 3:17 where he again asks "my son" Samuel 'What is the word?'. And it had been a word of condemnation. And now in response to the same question, he hears the fulfilment of it, in the news of the death of his sons. But even personal condemnation, the fulfilment of the threat of judgment upon him, meant less to him than the loss of the ark. We see reflected here how personal relationship with God, even the issues of personal salvation or condemnation, can be subsumed in human psychology beneath the obsessive burden of religion and religious symbolism.

1Sa 4:17 The man who brought the news answered, Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Your two sons Hophni and Phinehas are dead, and the ark of God has been captured-

1 Sam. 2:34 had given Eli this very sign: "This will be the sign to you which will

come on your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall both die". The idea of a prophetic sign to Eli was surely that he was to take note of it and then repent. But it seems the die the sons died, he also died. It was as if he refused to respond to it, and therefore was slain the same day. And so the idea of the "sign" was that it was to be immediately responded to. Eli died at a great age; God had been so patient with him, giving him so many opportunities to repent, and then at the very end of his life , on the very last day of it, he was given the fulfilment of this sign to urge him personally towards repentance. And still he refused, being concerned merely about the loss of the ark as a religious symbol.

1Sa 4:18 When he made mention of the ark of God-
Eli, although apparently righteous himself in many ways and loving the ark of God above all, was rejected specifically because "he frowned not" upon his sons' apostasy; he personally was counted as 'kicking' at God and profiteering from His sacrifices, even though he himself seems to have truly loved God (1 Sam. 2:29; 4:18). Because Eli wouldn't exercise discipline, he was somehow seen as committing those very things which he failed to rebuke. The man who wouldn't discipline his wayward ox was to be treated like as if he had committed the crime the ox did, and therefore must die if the ox killed a man (Ex. 21:29).

Eli fell off his seat backward by the side of the gate and his neck broke and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had judged Israel for forty years-
He honoured his sons above God, to make himself "fat with the chiefest of all the offerings". The description of Eli as being fat surely reflects his guilt (1 Sam. 2:29; 4:18). And yet he appeared on the surface to run his family life on a spiritual footing.

1Sa 4:19 His daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was pregnant, near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God was taken and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labour and gave birth, but was overcome by her pains-
If Eli was 98 (:15) and his daughter in law was young enough to have a child, we can conclude that she was much younger than Phinehas, who was likely in his 70s. He was known for sleeping with other women, so we can assume he had had a number of relationships.

1Sa 4:20 As she was dying the women attending her said, Don't be afraid, for you have given birth to a son. But she didn't answer, neither did she pay any attention-
The possibility of future things continuing through her son was unimportant to her. For her, the present glory of being in the High Priestly family, even though that family had been condemned to destruction, was everything. And the ark likewise was everything for her, the quintessence of her religion, without which all was meaningless. She is similar to Eli in that the ark meant more to her than anything else (:18).

1Sa 4:21 She named the child Ichabod saying, The glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband-
Phinehas' wife honestly thought that her apostate husband and father-in-law were "the glory of Israel". But she was not without some spirituality, or at least religiosity, because she considered the ark to be the even greater glory of Israel (:22). As noted on :18, like Eli, she considered the ark more important than anything else, even her

family. And yet this is the point- that mere love of religious symbolism is nothing at all in spiritual terms.

Eli's daughter in law had died muttering "Ichabod", 'the glory is departed', because of the loss of the physical ark. But she saw things only in terms of physical visible religion. Glory was in fact given to God even in the loss of the ark, because the Philistines decide they must give glory to God by returning the ark to Him with offerings (their wise men advised "you must make images of your tumours and your mice that are destroying the land, and give glory to the God of Israel", 1 Sam. 6:5); He was to be given glory, *kabod*, heaviness, so that He would lighten His hand. It was a magnificent defeat; Israel on earth lost, but Yahweh won, hence Dagon falling mutilated and defeated before Yahweh.

1Sa 4:22 She said, The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken-
The relevance to the exiles is that the shekinah glory had literally departed from Jerusalem when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and Judah went into captivity; "departed" is the word used for the exile. The visions Ezekiel showed progressive departure of "the glory of the God of Israel" (Ez. 8:4) from the temple to the East of Jerusalem and then further away to Babylon. And the painful thing for Judah was the ark was apparently lost. But the spiritually minded would have seen from the connection with the ark's previous captivity that actually the presence of God and the ark were two different things. The ark was not to be seen as a mere piece of religious and nationalistic symbolism. The loss of it was not to be mourned unduly because personal relationship with God was still possible, and that is of paramount value. The physical glory of Yahweh which dwelt between the cherubim had departed. We marvel that it was still there through all the years of abuse by Eli and his sons. Her grief should have been for the reasons why that glory departed. But like many religious people, she was focused merely upon the external. However the record will describe the return of the ark, and this would've given hope to the exiles. The Philistines knew the story of the Exodus, and in 1 Sam. 5 will perceive that the ark represents Israel; they reason that they should let it go, and give it gold and silver, lest they suffer the fate of the Egyptians who refused to let Israel go.

"The glory is departed from Israel" is literally, "Where is the glory?". Sharing the spiritual blindness of Eli, she could not conceive of God's glory as being anywhere but over a wooden box. This gives depth and perspective to David's frequent observations that he saw God's glory in all the earth. This woman saw it solely over a box.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 5

1Sa 5:1 Now the Philistines had taken the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod-
This continues the theme developed in 1 Sam. 4 of how having the ark as mere religious symbolism was not the same as having relationship with God. It was taken away from Ebenezer, the rock of help, for God was no longer their rock; see on 1 Sam. 6:15; 7:12. And yet misusing it was going to bring judgment. This was relevant encouragement to the exiles as they mourned how the temple vessels had been taken to Babylon and were being misused, as in the drinking feast of Dan. 5. "Ashdod" is a

form of the word translated "spoiler" or "robber" frequently used of Babylon (Is. 33:1; Jer. 4:13,20; 6:26; 9:19 and often). These historical records were intended to be discerned by the exiles as speaking to them.

This journey of 60 km. was surely done without the ark being carried by Levites. Uzzah was later slain for just steadying the ark; whereas Samuel appears to have slept next to it, and here the Philistines manhandle it on a long journey. Uzzah was slain but they weren't. Again we see how boundaries of holiness are relative, and God looks at the heart; something clearly was very wrong in Uzzah's heart, in a way it was not wrong in the hearts of the child Samuel or these Philistines. Attitude and heart are paramount in God's judgment of men.

1Sa 5:2 They took the ark of God into the house of Dagon and set it beside Dagon-
This connects with how the Babylonians took the temple vessels into the houses of their gods in Babylon.

1Sa 5:3 When the people of Ashdod arose early the next day, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Yahweh-
The phrase 'fell on his face to the ground before' is usually used of worship. Although the ark was indeed just a wooden box, God would not be mocked, and expressed His wish that the Philistines would quit their fish god Dagon and worship Him. See on :12. But laying flat on his face before the ark could suggest Dagon has been slain by Yahweh. There are virtually no undamaged statues of gods or idols discovered by archaeologists- because it was normal for the victors to damage or mutilate the idols of their enemies. This is what Yahweh is doing here to Dagon, as if He has won and is now mutilating the opposing god. And yet Yahweh's people had been slain before the Philistines and Dagon their god. We see here the paradox- it was a "magnificent defeat" just as was the cross. Apparent defeat is actually Yahweh's longer term victory. His people may be defeated on earth, but He wins in Heaven; and that is a theme of the book of Revelation.

In the context of the exiles, the gods of Babylon were likewise judged- "Bel bows down, Nebo stoops" (Is. 46:1). Again we see how the ark narrative in 1 Sam. 4-6 was probably rewritten for encouragement to the exiles. And to teach them that the ark's presence amongst them was not of essential importance. Rather were they to see God's personal presence in their heart, according to the promises of the new covenant they were offered.

They took Dagon and set him back in his place-
This need to "set him back in his place" connects with the mockery of idol worship found in the restoration prophets. The same phrase is used in :11. The worshippers of Dagon had to return their god to his place by themselves; but the ark was returned to its place by God working through the oxen and cart, which represented the cherubim.

1Sa 5:4 When they arose early the next morning, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Yahweh and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were broken off, lying on the threshold. Only Dagon's torso was intact-
A fish has no head, palms nor hands. The idol image was reduced to all it was- a mere fish. We saw on :3 that the phrase 'fell on his face to the ground before' is usually used of worship. It was God's intention that the Philistines come to acknowledge His supremacy, and perceive their idols for what they were, stripped of all they had added to them. "Torso" is not in the original; literally, "only Dagon was left to him".

1Sa 5:5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor anyone who comes into Dagon's house will tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod, to this day-
The Philistines are therefore those who jump over the threshold, but that term is used to describe the priests of Yahweh's temple who were no better (Zeph. 1:9 "In that day, I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their master's house with violence and deceit"). The priests may particularly be in view, whose master was Yahweh and whose house, the temple, they had defiled by their idolatry. The idea is that the temple of Yahweh had been effectively turned into that of pagan gods- despite Josiah's apparent reforms. This whole message is a stern warning against mere tokenism in repentance and reform, and challenges to the core all our self-examination and the results thereof. These priests were filling Yahweh's house with the rewards of their violence and deceit. Typical of the prophets, Zephaniah focuses upon the apparently negligible (the personal gains arising from deceit) rather than what we might consider the more obvious issues of offering children to Moloch.

1Sa 5:6 But the hand of Yahweh was heavy on the people of Ashdod and those nearby, and He destroyed them, afflicting them with tumours-
This is the reference of Ps. 78:66, which refers to how the ark was taken from Shiloh in Ephraim into the land of the Philistines, who were smitten in their private parts with tumours; but then the ark was returned, not to Shiloh in Ephraim, but to Kirjath Jearim in Judah, and thence to Jerusalem in Judah. But the question for us is the degree to which God ordered this transfer of the ark from Shiloh to Jerusalem (as the pro-Davidic author of Ps. 78 claims); or whether David manipulated it that way, and God went along with it.

1Sa 5:7 When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening they said, The ark of the God of Israel must not stay with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god-
This was a tacit recognition that the God of Israel was real, and was greater than their god Dagon. Yet like many, they preferred to trundle along undisturbed in their religious ways, even when they had been demonstrated as false and the true way offered to them. They didn't want His abiding presence to continue with them; for "stay" is the usual word used for God's dwelling or abiding amongst His people.

1Sa 5:8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines together and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? They answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried over to Gath. They carried the ark of the God of Israel there-
As noted on :7, they could have had the presence of Israel's God amongst them, but they chose not to. The language recalls how the Gentile inhabitants of the land asked the Lord Jesus, the true ark, to leave them- even when He had done great miracles amongst them (Mt. 8:34).

1Sa 5:9 But after they had carried it there, the hand of Yahweh was against the city, causing panic, and He struck the men of the city, small and great, and tumours broke out upon them-
I suggest that this was not because God didn't want the ark nor His presence to be amongst them. He did. The punishment was because they were misusing the ark. "Tumours" were the punishment for disobedience to the covenant (Dt. 28:27). The

Philistines were being punished in this way because they had been called to accept Yahweh's covenant but had refused, as noted several times throughout this chapter.

1Sa 5:10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God came to Ekron, the Ekronites cried out, They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!-

Perhaps the thought was that Ekron worshipped Baal Zebub and not Dagon, and therefore the ark of Israel's God would be vanquished by that god (2 Kings 1:2). But the entire Philistine confederacy knew that they were spiritually beaten before Yahweh. Literally, as in :11, “to me, to slay me and my people” (as AVmg.). The implication is that this was a message from the god of Ekron, tacitly recognizing that he was no match for Yahweh. See on 1 Sam. 6:9.

1Sa 5:11 They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and they said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place so that it does not kill us and our people. For there was a deadly panic throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there-

The Philistines knew the story of the Exodus (1 Sam. 4), and now they perceive that the ark represents Israel; they reason that they should let it go, and give it gold and silver, lest they suffer worse plagues and the fate of the Egyptians who refused to let Israel go. The story of the ark's journey into exile from Shiloh and return to Jerusalem therefore speaks of Judah's exile and return; see on 1 Sam. 4:22. The ark narrative material in 1 Sam. 4-6 is clearly a literary unit, perhaps edited under inspiration in the exile. The exile and return of the ark becomes the exile and return of God's people, although they returned without an ark and without the visible shekinah glory. That physical religious symbolism was replaced by them, people, the people of God, with His presence in their hearts.

See on :10; 1 Sam. 6:20. The same phrase for "go back to its own place" is used in :3, where the worshippers of Dagon had to return their god to his place by themselves; but the ark was returned to its place by God working through the oxen and cart, which represented the cherubim.

God's experience with Israel led to His humiliation before the nations. Seeing the ark represented the very presence of God, the capture of the ark was in a sense the capture of God (1 Sam. 5:7,11 cp. 4:7). Ps. 78:61 comments: "He delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe". And likewise at the cross, crucifixion meant humiliation in some sense. But the point for the exiles to understand from this record was that even in captivity, Yahweh was still alive and active, and would not be mocked. We too are to personalize the history of Israel and see it speaking to our situations.

1Sa 5:12 The men who didn’t die were struck with the tumours, and the cry of the city went up to Heaven-

A cry going up to heaven is the language of God's sensitivity to situations upon earth. The subtext is clearly that God was sensitive even to the sufferings of His Gentile enemies. And as noted on :3, it was God's desire that the Philistines repented. He was not at all heartless towards them.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 6

1Sa 6:1 The ark of Yahweh was in the country of the Philistines for seven months-
LXX adds "And their land swarmed with mice" (as in :4). The question of course which dominated their thinking was whether their sufferings were all just coincidence, or whether this was due to Israel's God. And yet at the end of 1 Sam. 5 it is clear they recognized the supremacy of Yahweh; and yet by all means men seek to wriggle and squirm against the most evident proof, even if they are brought to admit His existence and activity, they will still seek to dismiss it later (see on :9). This is why "evidences for the existence of God" are not ultimately powerful of themselves; there has to be a movement within the heart of those experiencing them, and a conscious desire not to deny them further.

1Sa 6:2 The Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, asking, What shall we do with the ark of Yahweh? Show us how we should send it back to its place-
Circumstances repeat within the lives of God's people, both over time and space. The calling of diviners for help when they were clearly beaten and revealed as having no wisdom... all recalls the situation when seeking to interpret the visions of Pharaoh and the kings in the book of Daniel. There is the same hallmark left from the same Divine hand that was operating. And the continuities in God's operations can be perceived within our own lives, and between our lives and those of others contemporary with us. This is one advantage of meeting together in fellowship with other believers; if we talk about His hand in our lives [rather than social chit chat] we perceive that man is not alone, the same God is working and has worked in others' lives as He does in our life. See on :20.

1Sa 6:3 They said, If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, don't send it empty; by all means return Him a trespass offering, then you will be healed and you will know why His hand has not been removed from you-
The Philistines were aware of Israel's exodus from Egypt and the judgment upon the Egyptians (1 Sam. 4:8). The Egyptians had given presents to Israel when they left, so that Israel were "sent out" from Egypt "empty" (s.w. Ex. 3:21). It seems the Philistine elders had this in mind. They recognized they were as Egypt before Yahweh; and yet they didn't take the Divine hint to go further, and be those Egyptians who went with Israel to inherit the land. They also had some moral sense that they had sinned against Yahweh. All the time, as noted throughout 1 Sam. 5, Yahweh was seeking to bring them unto Himself; but they refused, thinking that a tokenistic offering to Him would allow them to just continue with their existing religious practices.

1Sa 6:4 Then they said, What should the trespass offering be, which we should send to Him?
The real existence of Yahweh and His claim upon them is recognized.

They said, Five golden tumours and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague struck you all and your lords-
The trespass offering was to be in the form of the judgments experienced for the trespass, mice (see on :1) and tumours. This was some kind of recognition that the judgments experienced were just.

1Sa 6:5 Therefore you must make images of your tumours and your mice that are destroying the land, and give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lift His hand

from you, your gods and your land-
Eli's daughter in law had died muttering "Ichabod", the glory is departed, because of the loss of the physical ark. But she saw things only in terms of physical visible religion. Glory was in fact given to God even in the loss of the ark; He was to be given glory, *kabod*, heaviness, so that He would lighten His hand. It was a magnificent defeat; Israel on earth lost, but Yahweh won, hence Dagon falling mutilated and defeated before Yahweh. Giving glory to God meant repentance and acceptance He was right and they were wrong, and that they had stolen what was His (exactly the same context in Josh. 7:19). They were not far from the Kingdom of God. They very well perceived what had happened, and the path required to reconciliation with Yahweh. And yet in :9 we see their return to the idea that maybe this was all coincidence. As noted on 1 Sam. 5:12, God was seeking their repentance and coming to Him. The exiles were likewise asked to repent and give glory to God (s.w. Jer. 13:16); they too were guilty of mere religious tokenism toward Yahweh and His ark and presence; they were no better than these Philistines, but just as there was a path to repentance for the Philistines, so there was for the exiles.

1Sa 6:6 Why do you harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had done wonders among them, didn't they send the people away and they departed?-
The Philistine logic equates the ark with God's people. They argued that the ark must be sent away just as the people were sent away. The argument also clearly recognizes Yahweh as supreme over them, as He was over Egypt. But then we come in :9 to the slipping back into secular thinking, wondering if after all this was all chance and coincidence. It's like the atheist confronted with empirical evidence for God, being forced to accept it, and yet slipping back into the hope this just all coincidence.

Hebrew thought and language tends not to use abstract terms but rather uses language which alludes to physical body parts- e.g. to be stubborn is to be 'hard hearted' (1 Sam. 6:6), 'look' becomes 'to lift up the eyes' (Gen. 22:4), anger is 'to burn in the nostrils' (Ex. 4:14), to reveal something is to 'unstop someone's ears' (Ruth 4:4), stubbornness is to be 'stiff necked' (2 Chron. 30:8), to prepare oneself is to 'gird up the loins' (Jer. 1:17), to determine to go somewhere is 'to set one's face' (Jer. 42:15; Lk. 9:51).

1Sa 6:7 Now therefore prepare a new cart, and get two milk cows which have never been yoked; tie the cows to the cart and bring their calves home from them-
The language of chariot ["cart"], calves and the ark of Yahweh's glory upon it recalls the cherubim of Ezekiel's visions. The exiles were being bidden believe that the prophecies of restoration could easily be fulfilled, just as they had been in these historical precedents.

1Sa 6:8 Put the ark of Yahweh on the cart and put the jewels of gold, which you are sending Him for a trespass offering, in a chest beside it- and send it away-
They had opened the ark because they wanted to get the jewels they imagined were hidden within it, and perhaps they really were there. Maybe when Hophni and Phinehas were slain, they were bearing the breastplate, which was then put within the ark or associated with it. But now they learned their lesson, not to open the ark. Rather, the jewels of gold which were the images of the tumors and mice were not to be placed within the ark, it was not to be opened again, but rather placed beside it in a separate chest. It was as if the "jewels" they made were appropriate penitence for

seeking to steal Yahweh's jewels. "And send it away" alludes to the Egyptians sending the Israelites away with jewels.

1Sa 6:9 If it goes up to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil; but if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us; it was a chance that happened to us-
And yet the preceding verses speak of making a trespass offering to Yahweh and finely appreciating the nature of their sin and the appropriate repentance for it. We noted on 1 Sam. 5:10 their acceptance of Yahweh's supremacy over their gods. But as discussed on :1, in the face of every rational, empirical evidence for the one true God and His ways, men must still of themselves choose to come out of denial and believe. By all means men seek to wriggle and squirm against the most evident proof, even if they are brought to admit His existence and activity, they will still seek to dismiss it later.

1Sa 6:10 The men did so, and took two milk cows, tied them to the cart and shut up their calves at home-
The natural desire of the cows would be to return to their calves and not run away from them.

1Sa 6:11 They put the ark of Yahweh on the cart, and the chest with the mice of gold and the images of their tumours-
The cameraman of Divine inspiration is as it were zoomed in close up, so that we see the Philistines carefully doing these things.

1Sa 6:12 The cows went straight towards Beth Shemesh; they went along the highway, lowing as they went, and didn't turn aside to the right hand or to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh-
The drivers of an ox cart would go before it, not follow behind it. In this they were being further humbled, that they were not in fact in control, and were potentially being led by God's Spirit in this makeshift imitation of the cherubim... to the people of Israel. But they failed to follow. And again, the lesson was for the exiles, that they too should follow God's cherubic leading back to their God and their land. Just as Ezekiel's visions of the cherubim tried to teach them. The cows going "straight" is to be connected with the straight feet of the cherubim, and how they too travelled in a straight path (Ez. 1:7,9,12 etc.).

1Sa 6:13 The people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it-
This was a priestly city, which internally corroborates with the statement in :15 that the Levites were immediately present to offer sacrifice. It is this kind of internal consistency which to me is the greatest argument for a Divinely inspired Bible. This verse is the clear fulfillment of Ps. 126:5: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy". But that is specifically a song of degrees or ascents, a prophecy of the restoration of the exiles. The restoration was to be modelled upon historical precedents such as these. And this is why these historical records were rewritten under inspiration for the encouragement of the exiles.

1Sa 6:14 The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh and stood there beside a great stone. The people split the wood of the cart and offered up the cows for

a burnt offering to Yahweh-
The cart came to Joshua / Jesus. Perhaps this too had intentional meaning for the exiles, who were to return at a time when there was a priest called Joshua (Hag. 1:1; 2:4; Zech. 3:1 etc.). "The field of..." may suggest he was a Levite or priest who had a "field" as permitted by the law.

I will suggest on Ecc. 10:9 that Solomon in his apostacy later cynically refers to this incident: "Whoever splits wood may be endangered thereby". The same phrase is used. They split wood and sacrificed with joy that the ark had returned to them; but then they looked inside the ark and were slain. And so, Solomon reasons, wisdom and Yahweh worship are pointless. But of course the point was that they were disobedient. The ark was indeed a blessing, but they abused it through harnessing its return to their own self interest and love of wealth, just as Solomon did.

1Sa 6:15 The Levites took down the ark of Yahweh and the chest with the jewels of gold and put them on the great stone, and the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices to Yahweh that day-
See on :13. We noted on 1 Sam. 5:1 how the ark had been taken away from Ebenezer, the rock of help. For Yahweh was no longer their rock. Its return to a great rock / stone (:14) was therefore showing that God was eager to restore relationship with His people and undo what had gone so wrong between them; just as was the case at the restoration. But as the exiles refused to make use of it, so now also.

1Sa 6:16 When the five lords of the Philistines had seen this. they returned to Ekron the same day-
I discussed on :9 how they had previously been forced to accept the empirical evidence before them for the existence of Yahweh and His supremacy and claims upon them. But then they slipped back to the suspicion that it was all chance and coincidence. But now, they return to Ekron with this further demonstration that Yahweh is for real, and there was no question of chance coincidence. But they still refused to believe, just as so many today. Again we have to observe how men must still of themselves choose to come out of denial and believe. By all means men seek to wriggle and squirm against the most evident proof, even if they are brought to admit Yahweh's existence and activity; but they will still seek to dismiss it later. Being trounced by the power of argument and observed reality is still not enough to make men believe, because belief must ultimately be a human choice and not forced upon a man by the weight of empirical evidence alone.

1Sa 6:17 These are the golden tumours which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering to Yahweh: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath and one for Ekron-
We wonder if this alludes to the fact that the Philistines had labelled them.

1Sa 6:18 The number of golden mice was according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, fortified cities and country villages. The great stone on which they put the ark of Yahweh remains to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh-
Again we get the impression that they perceived very well the complete nature of their guilt, and their desire to demonstrate that their every village had to be covered by this admission of trespass against Yahweh, and seeking to do something about it. But see on :9.

1Sa 6:19 But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh because they had looked into the ark of Yahweh. He killed seventy of the men, and the people mourned, because Yahweh had struck the people with a great slaughter-
I suspect this was because they wanted to find any more jewels which the Philistines might have placed there. In the face and presence of the things of the supreme glory of Jehovah of Israel, they scavenged around in a spirit of petty materialism- just as men gambled for the clothes of Jesus at the foot of His cross. "Seventy" follows some manuscripts, whilst others give a figure of 50,070. Remember that "thousands" in Hebrew can refer not to the literal number but to groups, regiments, families etc. The idea may be the men of 70 families.

Ez. 7:19 defines “silver and gold” as Israel’s stumblingblock- moreso than idols. They just so loved wealth. The men of Bethshemesh looked into the ark to see if there were any more jewels left in it (1 Sam. 6:19 cp. 6,15); they trampled upon the supreme holiness of God in their crazed fascination with wealth. The early corruption of Christianity was due to false teachers who like Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15); they taught false doctrine "for filthy lucre's sake" (Tit. 1:11 AV). Time and again the NT warns against elders who would be motivated by the love of "filthy lucre" rather than the Lord Jesus and His people (1 Tim. 3:3,8; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2). The Greek translated " filthy lucre" is hard to understand; it doesn't just mean 'money'. It suggests profit that is somehow filthy, morally disgusting. This is what money turns into, in God's eyes, when men so love it.

The judgment upon the Israelites at this point was intended to teach them that their religious usage of the ark was wrong. They assumed that having the ark literally with them meant they were right with God. Just as they had wrongly assumed that having the ark with them would guarantee them victory against the Philistines.

1Sa 6:20 The men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God?-
This was to be David's later feelings when Uzzah was slain for not being respectful to the ark (2 Sam. 6:9). Circumstances repeated, and David failed to learn the lesson. We wonder if indeed David consciously repeated the words of the men of Beth Shemesh. I suspect he didn't, but rather his words are recorded in a similar way, to show to us readers the similarity. We are intended to learn from history, even though so few do. This is why so much of the Bible is history. We note from 1 Sam. 7:3 that at this time, the Israelites were generally following other gods. They considered Yahweh one of many gods, and at this point, they wanted no more to do with Him because He seemed to them an unreasonable God.

The Israelites at this point are feeling and speaking just like the Philistines- they too want the ark, and Yahweh, to "go from us". They see God as His ark, the external visible religious symbol became God for them- just as so many fail to separate church from God. The loss of church, of religion, means they have no relationship with God. Israel now had the same religious view of the ark as the Philistines, and were punished for this. Form triumphed over content, religion over spirituality, and God was and is displeased by this. God's people too often view their God and their faith as mere religion, just as do the people in the world around us.

To whom shall He go from us?-
By reasoning like this they were repeating the very attitudes and words of the Philistines. As David failed to perceive the similarities between his position in 2 Sam

6:9 and that of the men of Bethshemesh, so they had failed to learn from the lesson of the Philistines. And ended up saying the same words as they did (1 Sam. 5:11).

1Sa 6:21 They sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath Jearim saying, The Philistines have brought back the ark of Yahweh; come down and take it up to your place-
This repeats the attitude of the Philistines, seeking other towns to take custody of the ark. As noted on :20, all concerned failed to perceive that history was repeating, and they were not learning the lessons. This is perhaps the greatest tragedy of history, of the entire Divine-human encounter.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 7

1Sa 7:1 The men of Kiriath Jearim came and fetched up the ark of Yahweh and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of Yahweh-
We assume they were Levites, and Abinadab and Eleazar are common Levitical names. "On the hill" is rendered "Gibeah" in 2 Sam. 6:3,4. Josh. 15:57,60 mention Gibeah as a village not far from Kirjath-jearim.

1Sa 7:2 The ark stayed for a long time in Kiriath Jearim, twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after Yahweh-
This lamenting after Yahweh may have been the result of 20 years of work by Samuel, at a time when they were oppressed by the Philistines (1 Sam. 13:19-22). The "twenty years" period doesn't bring us to any significant event; it doesn't bring us to the time of David or his bringing of the ark to Zion in 2 Sam. 6. It may therefore mean that it took 20 years for Israel to come to the repentance of :3,4, and that is the significant end of this 20 year period.

1Sa 7:3 Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, If you do return to Yahweh with all your heart-
Returning to Yahweh with all the heart was the appeal also made to the exiles. The same word for "return" is used about both repentance and also their literal return to the land. This is the phrase used of how an Israel who had broken covenant were to return to Yahweh with all their heart (Dt. 30:1,2,10).

Then put away the foreign gods and Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to Yahweh, and serve Him only, and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines-
This worship of other gods would explain their attitude in 1 Sam. 6:20 "Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God?". They considered Yahweh one of many gods, and at that point, they wanted no more to do with Him because He seemed to them an unreasonable God.

1Sa 7:4 Then the people of Israel removed the Baals and Ashtaroth and served Yahweh only-
Yahweh is "one", and this simple reality requires that He is served "only". This is an outcome of believing in one God. At baptism, we changed masters, from 'sin' to 'obedience'. It may seem that we flick back and forth between them. In a sense, we do,

but from God's perspective (and Rom. 6:16-20 describes how *God* sees our baptism), we don't. The recurring weakness of natural Israel was to serve Yahweh *and* the idols (1 Sam. 7:4; 2 Kings 17:41; Zeph. 1:5). For the new Israel in the first century, the temptation was to break bread with both the Lord Jesus and the idols (1 Cor. 10:21,22). But there is no lack of evidence that this was actually counted as total idol worship in God's eyes; thus the prophets consistently taught the need for wholehearted devotion to Yahweh, and nothing else. In essence, we have the same temptation; to serve God and mammon, to have a little of both, to be passive Christians; to flunk the challenge of the logic of devotion.

Baal and Ashtaroth referred to here are not simply two separate gods. "Baals" is masculine plural, and "Ashtaroth" is feminine plural. The idea is, all the gods of whatever gender.

1Sa 7:5 Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray for you to Yahweh-
"Mizpah", 'watchtower', was an appropriate place for Samuel the prophet to have a base. The gathering was intended for repentance, but also as a strategic beginning of a campaign against the Philistines. See on :6.

1Sa 7:6 They gathered together to Mizpah and drew water, poured it out before Yahweh and fasted on that day. They said there, We have sinned against Yahweh-
Samuel's language and teaching was absorbed by David, who spoke of pouring himself out like water in repentance (Ps. 22:14; 62:8); and the same figure is used by the exiles in Lam. 2:19, perceiving the relevance of this history for themselves, as intended. But Samuel had in turn picked up this image from his mother Hannah (1 Sam. 1:15). We see here the passage of thought and imagery through the generations of spiritual people. And that passage can continue to us in our hearts. For who has not repented to the point of feeling poured out like water.

Samuel judged the people of Israel in Mizpah-
This could be a general statement, for Mizpah means "watchtower" and would have been an appropriate place for a prophet to issue his judgments from. But this information may specifically refer just to Samuel at that time, judging the people in the sense of warning them of their condemnation, which elicited their repentance.

1Sa 7:7 When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. When the Israelites heard it, they were afraid because of the Philistines-
Repentance meant that God was with them. But they feared whether He really was with them enough to defeat the Philistines, because there was that nagging doubt as to whether they had really been forgiven. This is so typical of God's people of all times.

1Sa 7:8 The Israelites said to Samuel, Don't cease to cry to Yahweh our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines!-
Their desperate plea to Samuel reflects their recognition that prayer was the critical factor. This desperate request for Samuel's continued prayer in fact reflects a level of genuine faith and spirituality, even though as noted on :7, their faith was not total.

1Sa 7:9 Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to Yahweh, and Samuel cried to Yahweh for Israel, and Yahweh answered him-
The desperate crying of the suckling lamb was to reflect the crying of Samuel to Yahweh. They were to be living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), offered "whole", every part of

the offering was to be given to Yahweh, none went to the priests, the entire animal was consumed.

1Sa 7:10 As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to fight against Israel, but on that day Yahweh thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines, and confused them; and they were struck down before Israel-
The pathetic bleating of the lamb elicited the mighty thunder of God's voice in response, so awful that the Philistines were paralyzed with fear because of it. This was an abiding illustration of the power of prayer, just as incense [prayer] in the book of Revelation elicits the pouring forth of bowls from Heaven upon the earth. But the Divine response had to be followed up on the ground- Israel had to go forth and strike down the paralyzed Philistines.

1Sa 7:11 The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and killed them, all the way to Beth Kar-
David's victory over Goliath led to the same kind of victory over the Philistines. Israel chasing their enemies was a blessing for obedience to the covenant. But until recently they had been disobedient. Their sincere prayer and repentance was counted as obedience to the covenant, and these blessings flowed from it.

1Sa 7:12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called it Ebenezer, saying, Yahweh helped us until now-
The ark had been taken into captivity from Ebenezer (1 Sam. 5:1), the rock of help, for God was no longer their rock. But the revival of the name Ebenezer was therefore showing that God was eager to restore relationship with His people and undo what had gone so wrong between them; just as was the case at the restoration.

1Sa 7:13 So the Philistines were subdued and they came no more within the border of Israel-
This may not be literally the case, but the sense may be that they didn't come and permanently settle within the borders as they had before.

The hand of Yahweh was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel-
This doesn't mean that they didn't invade Israel, but rather that Yahweh's hand was against them. That potential wasn't always made use of during Samuel's life.

1Sa 7:14 The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel recovered its border out of the hand of the Philistines. There was peace between Israel and the Amorites-
And yet Gath seems to have remained in Philistine control. For Goliath was from there, and David took refuge in Philistine controlled Gath. So the idea may be that the border was restored up until Gath and Ekron.

1Sa 7:15 Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life-
Seeing Samuel lived into the reign of Saul, we can assume that his judging in the sense of teaching and saving the people [the idea of 'judging' in Hebrew] continued into Saul's reign.

1Sa 7:16 He went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah; and he judged Israel in all those places-
There were later schools of the prophets in Bethel and Gilgal and we wonder whether

Samuel founded them. This work covered at least 28 years of his life, a great example of "keeping on keeping on". This circuit was fairly localized, forming a circle with a circumference of about 35 miles.

1Sa 7:17 He always returned to Ramah where his home was, and there he judged Israel. He built there an altar to Yahweh-
Although from Ephraim, Samuel clearly acted as a priest, making offerings at various points in his life, as well as doing the priestly duties "before Yahweh" from a child. He was potentially set up to be prophet, priest and anointed, Messianic king (1 Sam. 2:10), but it seems he failed to live up to the potential. Instead, he anointed David to be prophet, priest and anointed king. And he too failed, as did Solomon, and so the potential came to ultimate term in the Lord Jesus. We note that Samuel also judged or taught Israel at Ramah, his home. This was about four miles from "Gibeah of Saul". For Saul to have not recognized nor known Samuel speaks much of how Saul was totally not a religious, spiritual person.

According to Dt. 12:11-14, the people were to worship at the sanctuary and not build such high places for sacrifice. But Samuel had built an altar at Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17) and I suggest on 1 Sam. 9:6 that Saul met Samuel in Ramah on a day when Samuel was sacrificing at this "high place". This may possibly be another point [in addition to making his corrupt sons judges] where Samuel fails. Or it could be that he figured that seeing the people weren't switched on enough to go the sanctuary to worship, it was better to build an altar locally for them to at least make some dedication to Yahweh rather than none at all. One often faces such pastoral decisions.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 8

1Sa 8:1 When Samuel was old he made his sons judges over Israel-
Samuel was not that old; he died well into the 40 year reign of Saul and judged Israel all the days of his life, overlapping the kingship of Saul. So this was an exaggerated statement, made because they were making excuses to have a king. God's comment was that they had rejected Him as their king. But we have here possibly the only negative incident in the record of Samuel's life. He was indeed a fine man, but in his attitude to his sons he failed. His actions provoked Israel to demand a human king; but God doesn't blame Samuel for that, instead He sees that the people were using Samuel's misjudgment as an excuse. We also again observe that two men can commit the same sin or make the same misjudgment [think of Uzzah compared to others who touched the ark], but be judged differently. Because the heart position is all important.

Samuel was in his 50s or 60s at the time of 1 Sam. 8:1 when he made his corrupt sons judges over Israel. Eli had become judge of Israel at age 58 (1 Sam. 4:15,18). It seems that Samuel's later life had unfortunate parallels with that of Eli. Eli may well have had his sons Hophni and Phinehas in his 50s, because his daughter in law was pregnant at the time of his death at 98. It would seem that when Samuel was about the same age as Eli, he also had sons, who turned away from God just as had Eli's sons. And the people likewise complained (1 Sam. 8:4 = 1 Sam. 2:23). The fact Samuel made them judges despite their immorality would suggest he had gone the way of Eli in turning a blind eye to them. So although Eli's bad example to Samuel was apparently ignored by him and Samuel's spirituality was commendable, finally in later life it seems that example did rub off upon him.

1Sa 8:2 The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba-
1 Chron. 6:28 gives the name of the firstborn as Vashni, meaning "weak", rather than Joel as in 1 Sam. 8:2, meaning "Jehovah is God". But this could be a scribal error. If we stick with "Vashni", we have an example of how character and personal history became reflected in the names by which men were remembered by. We note they were judges in Beersheba, a long way from Ramah and the small circuit of towns judged by Samuel.

"Abijah", 'Yah is my father', probably reflects how Samuel found Yahweh to be his father, seeing his own two father figures somewhat failed him. Elkanah was passive and left the whole 'Samuel' project to Hannah, and agreed to Samuel being abandonned at the temple as a toddler, only visiting him once / year. And his de facto father, Eli, was corrupt. But spiritual experience of a father can't be passed on to his sons. Yah was indeed as a Father to Samuel, but he got to that through his own hard life experience. Abijah presumably had a good father in Samuel- so he was a son of God in name only. This is all so psychologically credible- for a father who had hard times but came to God through them, to want to unload his experience onto his son.

1Sa 8:3 His sons didn't walk in his ways, but turned aside after money, taking bribes and perverting justice-
This is described in terms of breaking the law of Moses (Ex. 23:6,8; Dt. 16:19). To "pervert justice" was to break the covenant (Dt. 27:19 s.w.). So for Samuel to make them judges was a big sin on his part [although it could be argued they only did this after he appointed them as judges]. But the fact they took bribes and perverted justice says much about the general state of spirituality within Israel. Unlike Eli, Samuel could declare his personal innocence (1 Sam. 12:4); and his own personal "ways" are declared here to be of integrity. Nor was there any abuse of the sanctuary, for the sons were operating in Beersheba (:2), quite far from Samuel in Ramah and the surrounding towns where his ministry was focused. We note from 1 Chron. 6:33 that Heman, an active servant of the Lord as a temple singer, was in fact Samuel's grandson. So faith skipped a generation.

1Sa 8:4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel to Ramah-
"Israel" was far larger than the small circuit of towns around Ramah where Samuel judged, and Beersheba where his sons judged. So it could be argued that the "elders of Israel" were using the local situation in Beersheba as a pretext for demanding Samuel's blessing upon their idea of having a human king.

1Sa 8:5 and they said to him, Look, you are old and your sons don't walk in your ways; now appoint a king to judge us like all the nations-
They were hinting that the situation was Samuel's fault because his sons didn't walk in his ways. It may also have been somewhat of an exaggeration to cite Samuel's age as a reason, for he lived many years after this; and Eli had become judge of Israel at 58 and judged until his death at 98 (1 Sam. 4:15,18). The previous judges of Israel were rarely hereditary and had instead been specifically raised up by God. So their case was weak. The truth was that they wanted to be "like all the nations". This is the term used about the attitude of the Jews who were therefore taken into exile (Ez. 20:32). Again we see how the history here has been rewritten to show similarities with the exiles. "The nations" in Canaan believed that their king was the representative of their

god Baal, and Israel wanted a king "like" that, on that basis. The request for a king was not therefore a total rejection of Yahweh, at least technically, although it seems connected with idolatry in :8. But they rejected the judges, 'saviours', whose role was intended to be teachers as we see from Samuel, because they wanted a warrior to be their military figurehead. They wanted a military leader and not a spiritual leader to be their judge. They were not simply asking for "judges" to now be called "kings". They wanted a different kind of structure as a nation, they wanted a leader to whom they could pledge their allegiance. Man needs a person to worship, to give allegiance to. That need is met in God, but they didn't want that. The problem, i.e. corruption of Samuel's sons, was actually unrelated to the answer they propose, i.e. a king. Injustice of judges didn't mean that a king would judge rightly. But this obvious flaw in their reasoning isn't exposed back to them. Their request is taken by God at face value and responded to. His Son likewise refrained from pointing out obvious contradictions [e.g. the rich young man claiming he had served God from his youth, the Saducees who denied resurrection asking who will be married to whom at the resurrection]. Rather did He, like His Father, reason from the statements of men, accepting them for a moment as true.

1Sa 8:6 But this displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. Samuel prayed to Yahweh-

God did "give" them a king (s.w. 1 Sam. 12:13). In essence, we often get what we ask for. But the critical thing, therefore, is to desire the right things. In the end, we get the essence of what we desire, and God's response to prayer is part of that. Our desires are therefore critical. Instead of arguing back with them, Samuel takes their request to Yahweh in prayer. And this is often all we can do in the face of bad behaviour and unreasonable demands from others.

1Sa 8:7 Yahweh said to Samuel, Listen to the people in all that they tell you; they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not be king over them-

Three times we read that Samuel was to "listen to the people" (:7,9,20). They were given what they asked for. Despite being warned of the consequences. We see the huge and even tragic extent to which God, like the father of the prodigal son, gives man what he really wants. This means that our heart desires are so critically important- because we will get them. The Psalms and Proverbs often make the simple point that the righteous will receive the desires of their heart:

"Delight yourself in Yahweh, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4); "He will fulfil the desire of those who fear Him" (Ps. 145:19); "What the wicked fear will overtake them, but the desire of the righteous will be granted" (Prov. 10:24); "The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, but the desire of the diligent shall be fully satisfied" (Prov. 13:4).

All those who "love His appearing" will be saved; those who merely do good works and approve the Lord's teaching will not be, because "I never knew you". Our self examination should be well capable of answering the question "Do I want to be in the Kingdom more than anything else?". We should be able to say whether or not this is our dominant desire. If it is, we are assured that in the end we will have it.

"The voice of the people" is the same phrase translated "the noise of the people" in Ex. 32:17, when Moses and Joshua heard the voice of the people worshipping the golden calf. Clearly there is an association with apostacy. "Rejected" is the word for 'despise'. The other reference to Israel despising / rejecting Yahweh is in Num. 11:20, where the people despise the manna and demand meat to eat, and in saying this

despise / reject Moses as their leader, blaming him for not providing a more varied diet. And again, God is angry. Their complaint now that Samuel is "old" wasn't quite legitimate; they were led by Moses until he was 120 years old. They despised him, they wanted a handsome, tall warrior to lead them, not Samuel on Yahweh's behalf. And thus they despised Yahweh, whose style it is to work through the weak and humanly weak.

Their rejection of God meant His rejection of them; if one side rejects another then the relationship is broken. The same word is used in Hos. 4:6: "Because you rejected knowledge [i.e. relationship], I will also reject you". God's ultimate response to this was to use this term of His rejection of Israel and Judah when they went into captivity: "Yahweh has rejected them" (Jer. 6:30; 7:29 s.w.), "my God will cast them away [s.w. "reject"]" (Hos. 9:17). He uses the same word of rejecting "Jerusalem the city which I had chosen" (2 Kings 23:37). And yet there is good reason to think that this 'rejection' actually happened at Samuel's time: "Yahweh was angry, and greatly abhorred [s.w. rejected] Israel; so that He forsook the tent of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men; and delivered His strength into captivity, His glory into the adversary's hand" (Ps. 78:59-61). The destruction of the tabernacle at Shiloh, where Samuel grew up, appears to have been broadly around the time the ark ["His glory"] was taken into captivity by the Philistines at the end of Eli's life. It was around this time that Yahweh "rejected" Israel- in response to their rejection of Him. And yet He gave them a king and tried to work through the monarchy, until when that failed, He articulated that "rejection" by sending His people away, out of His house and His land. Which is the language of divorce. Israel were "the wife of youth" who was "rejected" and sent away (Is. 54:6 s.w.). Again we see a gap period between the pronouncement of judgment, and the realization of that judgment. His huge patience spanned the centuries during which the monarchy existed. "Yahweh rejected all the seed of Israel... until He had cast them out of His sight" (2 Kings 17:20). And yet in allusion to this, Jer. 31:37; 33:26 protest that God will not "cast off [s.w. reject] all the seed of Israel [note the repetition of that phrase] for all that they have done". His final grace is to force the marriage through to eternal success.

The idea of :7,8 is that 'They didn't reject you, they rejected me, but they rejected you, in that you are with Me'. A parade example of God manifestation or representation by a man. God comes over as sensitive to Samuel's feeling that he himself had been rejected, and we feel Him as it were putting His arm around Samuel and comforting him in his rejection; by saying that it was essentially all about a rejection of Him rather than Samuel personally. We learn if nothing else that God is sensitive to a person's feelings of rejection.

1Sa 8:8 As they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, in forsaking Me and serving other gods, so they also do to you-
This connects their desire for a king with idolatry. As noted on :5, "the nations" in Canaan believed that their king was the representative of their god Baal, and Israel wanted a king "like" that, on that basis.

Israel sinned not only by worshipping idols but by thereby omitting to worship God as He required ("forsaking Me and serving other gods"). Sins of omission are our greatest temptation. So let us really realize: none of us sins or is righteous unto ourselves. There are colossal ramifications of our every sin and our every act of righteousness on others.

1Sa 8:9 Now therefore listen to their voice, but protest solemnly to them and show

them what the king who shall reign over them will do-
See on :19. God's hurt at this point opens another window into His comment in Dt. 17 that Israel would desire a king to reign over them, and therefore a king should be regulated by His laws. God foreknows human failure, and yet is hurt by it. It is indeed hard to be God, foreseeing so much failure. Dt. 17 said that Israel must have a king whom God chose, and God did choose Saul- but He chose a man exactly whom they would have chosen, the tallest man in Israel, strong, handsome and a warrior. God wanted to set Saul up for success not failure, and indeed the path of monarchy was not at all doomed to failure. Yet the choice of it was a stepping back from direct relationship with God as their King. They wanted a mediator, a go between, just as they didn't want the intimacy of hearing God speaking directly to them at Sinai. And God didn't turn away from them because of this, He settled for a lower level relationship.

Yahweh gave them a king in His wrath (Hos. 13:11). He was angry with them as was Samuel, and expressed that anger by answering their prayer for a human king: "I gave you a king in My anger, and have taken him away in My wrath". As explained on Hos. 9:15, Israel's rejection of God for a human king made God "hate" them. It was effectively a divorce from Him; this is how seriously God sees our turning to visible human help rather than to Him. God so respected human freewill decisions that even when His wife wanted to go off with another man, He "gave" her this; and even worked through the system of human kingship in order to continue some level of relationship with Israel, such was His love for them. God sees a connection between His giving of a king, and His taking away of a king. Before they had a king, they were exclusively His. So the taking away of their king was in fact not simply a punishment, but in wrath He remembered mercy, and hoped that this would in fact be the path back towards their accepting Him as their king. So often we see God's hope for restoration expressed within and next to His angry statements of judgment. His anger is therefore unlike human anger; there is always the love which seeks longer term restoration.

He allows us our freewill; and yet seeks to persuade us against our requests. But God never forces. And here we see in this 'protestation' a parade example of this. He was willing to work through a human kingship, as He was through a physical temple, which He also didn't want. And yet by making use of such Divine concessions to human weakness, we make the path of true spirituality so much harder.

1Sa 8:10 Samuel told all the words of Yahweh to the people who asked for a king-
The name "Saul" means "asked for". It is very similar to "Samuel", "asked of God" (1 Sam. 1:20). Samuel was called to be a prophet, priest and anointed king (see on 1 Sam. 2:10), but he apparently failed to live up to this potential and was potentially replaced by Saul. He too failed, as did David and Solomon later, with all the potentials only coming finally true in the Lord Jesus.

1Sa 8:11 He said, This is what the king who shall reign over you will do: he will take your sons and appoint them to serve with his chariots and to be his horsemen, and they will run before his chariots-
Israel were told three times that Saul would have many chariots (1 Sam. 8:11,12). If they were spiritually aware, they would have realized that by multiplying horses and chariots, he was going to be a King who ruled in studied disobedience to the Mosaic Law (Dt. 17:16-21). They were given the spiritual potential to grasp this. But they were already hard bitten in their rebellion, and this potential spiritual help went

unheeded (although God still gave it to them potentially, even at a time when it seemed pointless. He is so ever willing to coax His people back!).

1Sa 8:12 he will appoint them to be captains of thousands and captains of fifties; he will assign some to plough his ground and reap his harvest, and to make his weapons of war and the equipment for his chariots-
The captains of thousands and fifties were originally appointed by God; and yet now they were hearing that Saul was going to appoint them. If they were truly spiritually minded, they would have perceived that such a king and situation was not for them. And yet it seems the more the point was made, the deeper was their insistence upon the path they had chosen. This is sadly typically human.

1Sa 8:13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks and bakers-
To take a daughter is a phrase elsewhere translated 'marry... daughters' (Gen. 19:14), and whenever the word "take" is used in connection with "daughters" the reference is usually to marriage. The idea could be that like many monarchs of the time, Saul would 'marry' his female slaves. They were then unable to marry anyone else, might never have children by him, and would be condemned to a dumb life of servitude as cooks, bakers etc. "Perfumers" seems a strange example to give, until we realize that this is the word for "apothecary", the word used of how apothecaries were to work in the tabernacle making the oils and incense for tabernacle service (Ex. 30:25,33,35; 37:29; 1 Chron. 9:30). What was clearly a service to God was going to be reappropriated to Saul. For he effectively was going to replace God as the master of their devotions and service.

1Sa 8:14 He will take your fields, your vineyards and your olive groves, even their best, and give them to his servants-
As we learn from the later incident with Naboth's vineyard, a man's fields were his inheritance from Yahweh. To sell them or be willing to give them to another was therefore a rejection of their inheritance. They were being told that God would give them an unspiritual and disobedient king. And they eagerly said yes to that. Perhaps because in their hearts they simply didn't register nor believe that Samuel was speaking God's word to them. Or this may be simply a case of how all spiritual logic is thrown to the winds in the face of a carnal course of action that the flesh has decided upon. The critical issue is whether or not we accept God's word as His word, and respond to it. Or whether our belief in Divine inspiration of His word, the Bible, is mere lip service, that crumbles to nothing in the face of group think and obsession with a carnal narrative.

1Sa 8:15 He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage to give to his officers and his servants-
As noted on :13, the king was to replace Yahweh to them. Instead of tithing to Yahweh, they would be tithing to their king.

1Sa 8:16 He will take your male and female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work-
The repeated stress upon "the best" recalled how "the best" was to be given to Yahweh, both specifically as the firstfruits, and also to fulfil the spirit of the entire law (Num. 18:12,29). Indeed "the best" was to go to the Levites (Num. 18:30). But to give "the best" to a human king, who was not a Levite, was going to preclude serving

Yahweh with "the best", and the Levites also would suffer. They were therefore being told that effectively, this king was going to 'play God', and not merely be His representative on earth. Knowing this, their persistence in their choice was indeed a rejection of Yahweh.

The king was to take away their donkeys (1 Sam. 8:16), and the narrative of the call of Saul in 1 Sam. 9 begins with his almost obsessive desire for donkeys. Saul is presented as the exact fit to the prophecies of the awful king the people would be given if they wished to go the path of kingship. Yet Saul's failure was far from inevitable. The predictions about him could have been voided by his own freewill. Like Nineveh, he lived in the gap between the statement of judgment and its fulfilment. In the context of donkeys, he is told not to "set his heart on the donkeys", 1 Sam. 9:20 Heb. He is being invited *not* to be like the awful king he potentially could be. But like so many, he wasted that potential. Samuel never stole a donkey (1 Sam. 12:3), whereas Saul was to steal the donkeys of Israel (1 Sam. 8:9,11). Israel consciously chose a king who would take their donkeys, and rejected God's judge, Samuel, who never took their donkeys. The way Samuel protests this fact in 1 Sam. 12:3 suggests he felt some bitterness and resentment about his rejection by Israel. And God comforts him that He feels the same.

1Sa 8:17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his servants-
Again, the king was to replace Yahweh to them. Instead of tithing to Yahweh, they would be tithing to their king. These warnings were only perceptible by those who were aware of the law of Moses and were already tithing as required. And so it is that people are confirmed in the path they wish to go; if they are ignorant of God's word or not already practicing it, then in situations like these they are confirmed further down the path to spiritual disaster.

1Sa 8:18 You will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen, but Yahweh will not answer you in that day-
Now it was as if Samuel on Yahweh's behalf was crying out to the people, and they were refusing to listen (:19). And so their later crying out to Him would likewise go unheard. His response to us is related to our response to His word. If His word abides in us, we therefore will ask what we will according to that word, and be heard (see on Jn. 15:7). We may also note that although the people cried out at the abuses of Saul, many of them still preferred him to David and were fiercely loyal to him. Just as people are to abusive spiritual and secular leaders. These historical records help us see our human nature in the mirror. Samuel is alluding to Dt. 17:15, "You shall set him king over you, whom Yahweh your God shall choose". The same word for "choose" is used. Despite their desire to choose their own king, and God disagreeing with it, He and not they chose the king. He intervened to as it were make them obedient, even in this wrong choice they had made. We marvel at His grace. For Saul's choosing was totally of God and not man.

By insisting on their request for such a king, the people were asking for their own condemnation. Because Saul is presented as a judgment upon them, making them cry to Yahweh because of his oppression just as they did when ruled by Pharaoh. All condemnation is ultimately self inflicted, just as in the Lord's parable those who refuse the call to the Kingdom say "I beg you, have me excused / rejected". Here we read that they chose their king, but God chose Saul. But He chose according to how they would've chosen, so in effect, they chose. We marvel at God's deep attention to the essential desires of people on earth, and how He gives us what we really want.

Therefore it is of paramount importance to desire the right things, to want His Kingdom above all, to love His Son's appearing; and all who do shall have their heart's desire.

There is no historical record of Israel ever crying out to God [for that is how the word for "to cry out" is usually used] because of their king. We can deduce that God by grace didn't judge them as severely as He now threatens. In wrath He remembers mercy.

1Sa 8:19 But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, No; but we will have a king over us-

"Refused" is related to the word for "reject" in :7. Their rejection of God was essentially a rejection of His word through Samuel. Our attitude to God's word is our attitude to Him. "Refused to listen" is literally 'refused to obey'. Most texts add "the voice of Samuel". So we have an obvious connection with :9, where God tells Samuel to hearken / obey the voice of the people- because they refused to hearken / obey His voice to them through Samuel. So we are left with the conclusion: If we don't obey God's voice, then He will obey our voice. And our voice is that of our natural desires, obedience to which is the path to destruction. So by obeying God's voice, we are strengthened not to obey our own voice, the voice of the flesh. The same contrast is found in 1 Sam. 15:1,24: Saul is asked to hear the voice of Yahweh, instead of hearing the voice of the people. It's a case of the voice / word of man [including our own voice and the voice of men around us]- or the voice / word of God.

According to Hos. 13:10, they also asked for a new system of princes to replace the judges: "Where is your king now, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges, of whom you said, 'Give me a king and princes?". Often in Hosea, God appeals to Israel to let Him be their 'king'. But there is a Hebraism whereby a husband is called the 'king' of his wife. God's appeal was reflected in Hosea's desire for Gomer to as it were re-marry him, to let him truly be her king / husband. And yet she felt like Israel: "What then should a king do [for] us?" (Hos. 10:3). She was so selfish that she didn't see anything in it for her… when *so* much love was being offered to her. We will note on Hos. 9:15 that Israel's desire for a human king was a rejection of God as their king / husband, and had been tantamount to adultery. Israel's demand for a king as recorded in 1 Samuel graciously omits to record that they also asked for "princes", even though they had already had "judges" raised up by God. They wanted a king and a royal family, to be the equivalent to the Divine "judges" or saviours whom He had raised up. So often the Divine record reflects God's grace.

1Sa 8:20 so that we may be like all the other nations, and so that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles-

They may be alluding to the appointment of Joshua to "go out before" the people (s.w. Num. 27:17). Quasi spiritual or Biblical allusion is typical of people in this situation. They are blind to reason because the flesh has hardened their hearts, and they are confirmed in that by God's Spirit acting upon them. The people wanted a king to "go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20), but they were disappointed in Saul ultimately. For it was effectively David who went out before the people to fight their battles (s.w. 1 Sam. 18:13,16). And David was only successful because he recognized that it was Yahweh who 'went out before' to fight his battles (s.w. 2 Sam. 5:24), rather than any human king or leader.

Their desire for a king to judge them would have made Samuel redundant as their judge. But Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life (1 Sam. 7:15). So even under Saul's kingship, there was still recourse to God's man.

1Sa 8:21 Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them before Yahweh-
Samuel hereby acts as a mediator after the pattern of Moses. Yahweh of course knew the words spoken, so the repeating or mediating of the words of the people was therefore perhaps in the form of intercession for them. Or perhaps he was simply sharing them with Yahweh, just as David shares his situation with Yahweh in prayer, as Hezekiah did, and as we should. This openness before God, sharing our situation and the words we have heard, is for our benefit; it serves as a reminder that indeed God hears every word.

1Sa 8:22 Yahweh said to Samuel, Listen to them and give them a king. Samuel said to the men of Israel, Every man is to go back to his town-
It could appear that Samuel didn't immediately tell them God's agreement. Perhaps this was because he still hoped they might yet repent of their choice. There is a strong manifestation of Yahweh in Samuel at this time. Samuel was to give them a king, but that was on behalf of Yahweh, for it was He who at this time gave them a king in His anger (Hos. 13:11).

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 9

1Sa 9:1 There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of valour-
The Hebrew phrase "might man of valour" is usually employed about military prowess. Kish had presumably got a name for himself in previous conflicts with the Philistines; "Kish" means "bow" so perhaps he was famed as an archer. The relevance to the exiles was that the "mighty men of valour" had not saved Jerusalem and had been taken into captivity (s.w. 2 Kings 24:14), because they had not learned the lesson taught by Samuel's mother Hannah, that the valour of the mighty is brought down before God, and the humble and weak exalted (s.w. 1 Sam. 2:4).

1Sa 9:2 He had a son whose name was Saul, an impressive young man; there was not among the people of Israel a more impressive person than he. From his shoulders and upward he was taller than any of the people-
The name "Saul" means "asked for"; for the people had asked for him (1 Sam. 8:10). It is very similar to "Samuel", "asked of God" (1 Sam. 1:20). Samuel was called to be a prophet, priest and anointed king (see on 1 Sam. 2:10), but he apparently failed to live up to this potential and was potentially replaced by Saul. He too failed, as did David and Solomon later, with all the potentials only coming finally true in the Lord Jesus.

Saul is described as both chosen by God, and also the one the people chose. It was as if God understood the spirit of what the people wanted, and gave it to them. All confirmation that we are given the essence of what we really desire, no matter how well or not we verbalize it. So the essence is to watch our desires. "Impressive young man" is literally "a chosen young man", and indeed he had been chosen by God, exactly in accordance with their desires. The word is used about David (Ps.

89:19). God's potential plan for Saul was transferred to him. And from thence to Solomon and finally to the Lord Jesus. This is how God works to this day, transferring potentials from one to another when the first option fails.

The height of Saul was of course irrelevant, because as Samuel was taught when anointing David, God looks on the heart and not the outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7). We note too how the handsome Absalom was spiritually empty. But it's as if God gave Israel exactly the kind of king they wanted- one who appeared well outwardly. Not just a king, but a king of the type they would want. Saul's physical height surely reflected his narcissism, contrasting with the humble king of God's choice, not the peoples' demand, "whose heart will not be lifted above his brothers" (Dt. 17:20). The heart is the mind, which is in the head- and Saul's head was higher than all the other people, "his brothers". This is the scene described in Romans 1; God confirms sinful people in their own desires, giving them a mind that wants to commit perversion- because that is what they want to do.

1Sa 9:3 The donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. Kish said to Saul, Take now one of the servants with you and go to look for the donkeys-

Donkeys were the animal of nobility at the time (Jud. 5:10; 10:4; 12:14 cp. Zech. 9:9). The idea may be that Kish too had had the potential to be a leader but lost / failed it. Or that Saul was unconsciously seeking to be king but couldn't find it in his own strength. Yet the donkeys were found by God for Saul, even though he himself failed to find them. The idea may be that Saul was indeed lacking in spiritual qualification to be king, but Yahweh was prepared to make up for this, because He wanted Saul to realize the potentials He had given him. See on :6.

The king was to take away their donkeys (1 Sam. 8:16), and the narrative of the call of Saul in 1 Sam. 9 begins with his almost obsessive desire for donkeys. Saul is presented as the exact fit to the prophecies of the awful king the people would be given if they wished to go the path of kingship. Yet Saul's failure was far from inevitable. The predictions about him could have been voided by his own freewill. Like Nineveh, he lived in the gap between the statement of judgment and its fulfilment. In the context of donkeys, he is told not to "set his heart on the donkeys", 1 Sam. 9:20 Heb. He is being invited *not* to be like the awful king he potentially could be. But like so many, he wasted that potential. Samuel in :20 is asking him not to think about donkeys, but rather about being king on God's behalf. But he failed, and remained focused on the material and immediate things of himself.

1Sa 9:4 He passed through the hill country of Ephraim and the land of Shalishah, but they didn't find them. Then they went through the land of Shaalim and they weren't there; he went throughout the land of the Benjamites, but they didn't find them-

If as suggested on :3 the donkeys were a symbol of leadership or kingship, Saul was being taught that finding them was to be of God's grace or gift, and not any amount of human strength. "Shalishah" is literally 'the land of threes', and tripilisms were to occur throughout Saul's subsequent experience. Three signs, three men meeting him, etc. were all to be signs to him that God was working with him quite separate to his own qualification or human strength in seeking for it. See on :13.

Leaving out the vowels, "Shalishah" is related to the Hebrew word for 'Saul', and "Shaalim" to that for Shmuel, Samuel. Saul was searching for Samuel, in the hand of providence, just as Samuel was searching for Saul; when in secular terms, Saul was searching for donkeys and Samuel was probably mentally searching for a candidate to

anoint as king as he had been commanded. See on :11 for how the hidden hand of providence was at work.

The theme of 'finding' is so stressed in this narrative. Saul didn't find the donkeys, despite his obsessive search for them which left him without money and bread. This is said twice in :4. We note that in the Hebrew of :20, they are called the donkeys which Saul had lost. He takes it therefore so seriously. But he 'finds' things from the way of God's Spirit. Truly "Vain was the good which in the world we sought". Things go so well once we are going the way of the Spirit. But perhaps this is why highly committed levels of following the Spirit are found in older people, who have had to learn empirically that you don't find what you seek in this world. You don't "find" what you seek, in family, in relationships, in wealth, in career... only in the things of the Spirit and the Kingdom. But many like Saul never really learn it. So consider all the occurrences of the same Hebrew word for "find": Saul's servant 'happened' to find a coin so that Saul was confident to visit Samuel "I have here at hand [s.w. find] the fourth part of a shekel" (1 Sam. 9:8); "they found young women" who told them where Samuel was (1 Sam. 9:11), who told them that they would "immediately find" Samuel (1 Sam. 9:13), contrasting with how Saul didn't find his lost donkeys immediately nor after a long search; the donkeys were "found" anyway but not by Saul (1 Sam. 9:20; 10:2); Saul would "find two men by Rachel's sepulchre" (1 Sam. 10:2); three men would "find" ["meet"] Saul and guide him further (1 Sam. 10:3, showing how in fact it was God who was searching for Saul and "found" him); the Spirit would come upon Saul and he was to "do what your hand finds [s.w.], for God is with you" (1 Sam. 10:7). Saul didn't find the donkeys, and Samuel tells him to stop taking thought or 'setting his heart' on finding them, but rather focus on the things of the Kingdom. And like Saul, whatever we find to do for this will prosper. Saul was given God's Spirit to change his heart, from secular things to the things of the Kingdom. Possibly Ecc. 9:10 alludes here: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, where you are going". But instead, Saul became obsessed with 'finding' David in the desert scrub, just as he had been obsessed with finding the donkeys. But as Jonathan said, "The hand of Saul my father will not find [s.w.] you" (1 Sam. 23:17). Saul allowed personal pride and jealousy to lead him to search for the wrong things, which he never "found".

1Sa 9:5 When they reached the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, Come, let us return, lest my father stop caring about the donkeys and be anxious for us-

This indicates at least some humanity in Saul. He is presented as a secular, unspiritual man who has all the same not a bad person. Out looking for lost animals, he was met by God and called. He was encountered by God without previously searching for Him, just as he was when he returned from working in the fields and found Jabesh under attack (1 Sam. 11:5). The call of God comes in the midst of everyday life. Just as the disciples were casting their net into the sea, the Lord Jesus called them. Simon of Cyrene was coming out of the fields when he was pressganged into carrying the Lord's cross, and likely came to faith in Him because of it. The call of God is presented here as being of Divine grace alone. It's not that these men were searching for God, but rather He was in search of man. It's not so much that we know God, but rather than we are known of Him (Gal. 4:9). Nowhere is God's personal grace clearer than when we reflect upon our calling; and that is especially true for those who were called through being born into a believing family.

1Sa 9:6 The servant said, Look now, in this city there is a man of God, and he is a man who is held in honour. All that he says comes true. Now, let us go there; perhaps he can tell us which way to go-

There is quite a theme of servants bringing blessings or good news (1 Sam. 9:6; 16:16; 25:14 cp. Gen. 41:10; 2 Kings 5:3). This may be to reflect God's interest in the significance of the lowly. The servant doesn't even know Samuel's name, and Saul is ignorant completely about the presence of any man of God, nor did it occur to him to go there. We note the extensive search for the donkeys and the concern to find out their fate from a man of God. See on :7. This would be understandable if as suggested on :3 they were symbols of leadership or even kingship. "Which way to go" could imply they were lost. Or "tell us the way we go" may mean that they sensed their journey was pregnant with undisclosed meaning, and they wanted a prophet to explain it to them. We note that the land of Zuph is literally the land of the prophet. They were taking the hints that something greater was afoot than merely a search for lost donkeys.

"This city" in the land of Zuph may be Ramathaim Zophim, the ancestral home of Samuel, Ramah in the land of Zuph (1 Sam. 1:1). We note that Saul's servant and uncle seem to know Samuel, but Saul is presented as the unspiritual one of the family who apparently has no clue about Samuel's existence. Samuel had built an altar at Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17), and it was this "high place" which is referred to in :12.

1Sa 9:7 Then Saul said to his servant, But if we go, what shall we bring the man? For the food is finished from our bags and there is no gift to bring to the man of God. What do we have?-

Again we see Saul's unspirituality. He assumed that one had to pay a man of God before getting a consultation. They were still far from home and were now without food. As noted on :6, this reflects the earnestness of Saul's desire to find the donkeys; see on :3. Saul clearly sees Samuel as no more than a fortune teller. Saul later would insist on offering the sacrifices without Samuel's presence in 1 Sam. 13, and in 1 Sam. 15 he thinks that his disobedience can be dealt with merely by offering sacrifice, leading to the condemnation from Samuel in 1 Sam. 15:22 "Has Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Yahweh?". Perhaps in this early incident we can detect Saul's legalism, his religious rather than spiritual mindset, and perhaps this was one reason he failed to retain the generous gift of the Spirit he received.

1Sa 9:8 The servant replied, I have a quarter of a shekel of silver. I will give that to the man of God to tell us our way-

The need to be told their way, when they had given up searching for the donkeys, could mean that they were actually lost. Most people didn't travel far from their birthplaces. This is the same phrase as in :6, and it only recurs in the Bible in Jer. 42:3, where the Jews after the captivity ask Jeremiah to ask God to show / tell them the way to go. But when told, they refused to walk in it. This confirms our frequent observation that these historical records were rewritten for the instruction of the exiles.

1Sa 9:9 (In earlier times in Israel when a man went to inquire of God he would say, Come and let us go to the seer, for he who is now called a prophet was before called a seer)-

This clarifying note would be appropriate if as I have suggested these records were rewritten during the exile. Perhaps too the record is clarifying that a "man of God" or prophet was a seer of Divine visions, and not a person caught up in cultic, ecstatic "prophecy" as known amongst the Gentiles.

1Sa 9:10 Then Saul said to his servant, Good. Let us go. So they went to the city where the man of God was-
There is a strange repetition here of Samuel's command that Israel were to "go" to their own "cities" (1 Sam. 8:22 s.w.). It's as if Saul obeyed this by going to Samuel.

1Sa 9:11 As they went up the hill to the city they found young girls going out to draw water and they asked them, Is the seer here?-
The water may have been necessary for the religious service Samuel was doing there. In 1 Sam. 7:6 he had used the drawing and pouring out of water to symbolize the pouring out of hearts in repentance, and it cannot be coincidence that drawing water is again featuring in his work. We note that Saul was not present at such gatherings. In this case he was being asked himself to pour himself out to Yahweh in repentance.

We may wonder why this story is recorded in such detail. The details aren't random. They are all the hand of providence, the guidance of the Spirit, over and above Saul's freewill. He just happened to have a servant who knew Samuel, that servant [unknown to Saul] happened to have a coin without which Saul would've been ashamed to visit a prophet; they just happened to give up hope of finding the donkeys when they were near a place where Samuel was; it just happened to be a feast day when Samuel was in that village; and they just happened to meet water carrying girls who directed them to Samuel, who just happened to be walking the street where they were walking. He didn't meet Samuel near his home, but rather at the most distant point of Saul's journey searching for the donkeys. Putting these things together- this was all of God. And so we can be comforted that there is no random in our lives. See on :4.

1Sa 9:12 They answered, He is. Look, he is ahead of you. Hurry now, for he has come today into the city because the people have a sacrifice today in the high place-
This implies that Saul was ignorant of the sacrifices. Samuel travelled on a circuit, enabling the people to come and sacrifice. He acted as a priest although he was not a Levite and was a prophet. So Saul would later surely realize it had been of God's providence that he happened to be in the town when Samuel was there running a feast.

According to Dt. 12:11-14, the people were to worship at the sanctuary and not build such high places for sacrifice. But Samuel had built an altar at Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17) and I suggest on 1 Sam. 9:6 that Saul met Samuel in Ramah on a day when Samuel was sacrificing at this "high place". This may possibly be another point [in addition to making his corrupt sons judges] where Samuel fails. Or it could be that he figured that seeing the people weren't switched on enough to go the sanctuary to worship, it was better to build an altar locally for them to at least make some dedication to Yahweh rather than none at all. One often faces such pastoral decisions.

1Sa 9:13 As soon as you have come into the city you will immediately find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not eat until he comes, because it is he who blesses the sacrifice. Afterwards, those who are invited eat. Now therefore go up, for at this time you should find him-

Their language was to make the point that Saul had not found the donkeys (:3 s.w.), but instead he had found Samuel; and through Samuel, God had found him. Although Saul knew nothing about these things, he was to find that he was in fact amongst those invited (:22,24). "Invited" is the common word for "call". The whole account here is a parade example of God's calling of men, always taking the initiative, and bursting into the lives of otherwise secular people. Standing on a street distributing New Testaments, we are the vehicles for that same call of God into the lives of men and women on the street.

The narrative has given the impression of Saul spending a lot of time searching for donkeys and getting nowhere. But now the tempo radically changes. He must "make haste" because Samuel "just now" had arrived to offer sacrifice "today". And Saul must encounter him "as soon as" he goes through the city gates. There is a sense of urgency for Saul to just catch Samuel before he offers the sacrifice, and so he is told to quickly go to meet him "immediately". This is how the Spirit works. The years spent apparently coasting along in some pursuit or enterprise abruptly come to an end and we must respond to the calling of the Spirit "immediately". The record of the Spirit's work here is absolutely credible because this is how God works oftentimes with man.

1Sa 9:14 They went up to the city. As they came into the city, Samuel came out toward them, to go up to the high place-

The old Yiddish verse came powerfully true: "And going out to meet Him / I met Him coming toward me". But we note that Samuel is presented as coming toward them, on his way up to the high place. The impression therefore is that somehow they were walking away from the high place. And Samuel met them head on, and they turned around and followed him.

The Lord Jesus called men, arresting them with His radical call in the very midst of daily life, just when they were throwing a net into the sea, at the most utterly inconvenient moment, even the most humanly inappropriate moment- such as being on the way to your father's funeral. The Son of God was actually acting as His Father had done. Gideon was called whilst in the middle of threshing wheat in a time of famine (Jud. 6:1), Saul whilst he was out looking for lost cattle (1 Sam. 9:10) and again whilst he was coming home from work one evening (1 Sam. 11:5); David whilst he was looking after the sheep; Samuel whilst he was asleep; Amos whilst he was leading the flocks to water (Am. 7:14); and see too 1 Kings 11:29; 19:16; 2 Kings 9:1-13,18. In other words, the call of God comes to us right in the midst of ordinary, mundane life. Of this there can be no doubt. And the Lord Jesus called men in just the same way.

1Sa 9:15 Now Yahweh had revealed to Samuel a day before Saul came, saying-

Heb. "had uncovered Samuel's ear". We see here the intimacy between God and His man. The idea is that God had lifted a corner of Samuel's turban so as to whisper a confidential secret into his ear. And this intimacy extends to all God's people. What we hear in the ear, that we must preach on the housetops (Mt. 10:27). This is built on the language of 1 Sam. 9:15,25, where God speaks in Samuel's ear, and then he speaks that word to Saul on the housetop. The Lord is saying that in essence, we are all in Samuel's position; we hear the word of this world's salvation, the word about "the Kingdom" as it was for Saul, and that very fact is in itself the imperative to overcome our natural reservations and share it with those for whom it is intended- even if, as with Saul, we consider them unlikely and unspiritual hearers.

"Revealed" in 1 Sam. 3:7,21; 9:15 is the word used of how Yahweh had revealed Himself to the tribe of Levi and called them to be His priests (1 Sam. 2:27), and Eli as it were was in the loins of his father Levi, according to the principle of Heb. 7:10. But the line of Levi and Eli had potentially been rejected because of Eli's apostasy. The Divine intention was to replace them with Samuel as a prophet-priest and perhaps king (1 Sam. 2:10), revealing Himself to him, although he was not a Levite. But this potential was only partially fulfilled by Samuel, and despite possibilities in David and Solomon, it only came to full term in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

1Sa 9:16 Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man out of the land of Benjamin, and you must anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, and he will save My people out of the hand of the Philistines, for I have looked on My people, because their cry has come to Me-

"I will send you" was achieved through the chain of events which led to Saul coming to Samuel. Unknown to him, all this was God's hand in sending him to Samuel.

Their request for a human king was, as God Himself mightily demonstrated to them, an utter rejection of Him, and He grieved because of it. And yet when God gave them a King, He expresses His decision in quite a different tone; as if He had compassion upon their humanity, their wrong desire to have a human king. He is indeed compassionate to us even in moral failure, and here exhibits amazing understanding of the human condition. And that is even more enhanced through the work and mediation of His Son. Here God speaks as if the gift of Saul was akin to the provision of Moses, to save poor Israel from their unwarranted persecution. For God looking upon His people because of their cry is the language of His gracious deliverance of His weak, idolatrous people from Egypt. Actually, Saul was slain by the Philistines- in His foreknowledge, the Almighty knew all about Saul. But in His pure grace, He doesn't reflect this in the way He speaks at this time.

1Sa 9:17 When Samuel saw Saul, Yahweh said to him, Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He will have authority over My people-

Saul didn't recognize Samuel when they met (:18), so Samuel might have been disappointed that the chosen man was not one of his various protégés amongst the people he ministered to. But he would have recalled the chilling prophecy he had given Israel of the kind of man this was, or would become. It would have been hard for Samuel to be civil to him, especially seeing he so strongly disagreed with Israel having a king. But presumably he was also aware that God was going to try to work through this man, and that his words of prediction need not come true if the man repented. Indeed Samuel didn't resent Saul but seems to have even loved him, kissing him and weeping for him. Such was his humility. The intended impression is that Saul went out looking to find his donkeys, but the Lord found him through Samuel. Many likewise have been out searching and hoping to find something secular, didn't succeed or failed dramatically- and were found by the Lord for Himself.

1Sa 9:18 Then Saul came near to Samuel in the gate and said, Please tell me where the seer's house is-

It is unclear whether this means that they were in Ramah, Samuel's home, or whether this was one of the towns which Samuel visited on his circuit. If indeed it was Ramah, then this was only 5 miles from Gibeah of Saul. That Saul didn't know anything much about Samuel nor did he recognize him when they met... is all a tacit reflection of his lack of interest in spiritual things. It wasn't apparent that Samuel was the priest or

prophet. Contrary to the style of that time, and religion generally, he wore no special clothes that pointed out his ministry. The girls in :13 had told Saul that he would find Samuel immediately he entered the city. He enters through the gate of the city and immediately meets Samuel "in the gate". But Saul doesn't quite believe the girls, and asks this person whom he meets where Samuel's house is. His slowness to believe is made clear. And yet we also note that although on some level he was expecting to meet Samuel immediately on passing through the gate, entering the city, he doesn't imagine that the man he meets is in fact Samuel. One conclusion would be that Samuel didn't look like a prophet or religious man. Perhaps that was one reason Israel rejected this humble, unassuming man for a king like Saul. Samuel's humility is shown by how he loves Saul, kissing him, weeping for him, and enthusiastic about his kingship- when Samuel was being replaced by Saul. And when Saul was replaced by Samuel with David, there is no hint that Samuel considers that he himself is best qualified to be the replacement. He was a kingmaker, and this required humility. Clearly Samuel also perceived that Saul was not set up for failure, and that his prophecies about Saul's future failure were conditional.

1Sa 9:19 Samuel answered Saul, I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today. In the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is in your heart-

"Let you go" reflects how Saul was somehow under arrest by God, as it were detained before Yahweh. When he was earnestly seeking to now get home to his worried family as quickly as possible. It was the offerers who ate of their own sacrifices after Samuel's blessing. Saul had not sacrificed and yet he was invited to eat of the meat offered. This was only done by the Levites, and Saul was a Benjamite. All through, he is being shown God's grace, although sadly he refused to be permanently convicted by it. And perhaps he is being invited to act as a Levite, as Samuel did, although he was not from the tribe of Levi. In this case, the hope was that he would become a king-priest. For Saul to go in front of Samuel to the high place would have been a mark of extreme respect, perhaps implying that Saul was to replace Samuel's role as a non-Levitical priest. So much potential was lost by Saul, as it is in the lives of so many. Wasted potential is the tragedy of the cosmos.

We enquire when chronologically did Samuel's words come true, "and will tell you all that is in your heart". We can read this as Samuel saying that he would let Saul go in the morning. And now he would tell him all that was in his heart- i.e. the words of :20. Because in Samuel's later speech to Saul in 1 Sam. 10, he says nothing to Saul about what was in Saul's heart. So we conclude that what was in Saul's heart was the donkeys. He was obsessed about them. And he is told not to "worry", to set his heart, upon them- but rather upon the things of the Kingdom. And God's Spirit was given to Saul so that his spirit or heart would be taken over by the things of the Kingdom, and not secular things like donkeys.

Another option is that the words of 1 Sam. 10, told to Saul the next day, were a telling of Saul all that was in his heart. In that Saul subconsciously had thought about being king of Israel, and now this subconscious thread in his heart was being addressed and made possible. Just as the things of the Kingdom may be subconsciously in the heart of secular people, but the calling of God reveals them to them, and they are asked to consciously believe and grasp them.

1Sa 9:20 As for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, don't worry about them; they have been found. To whom has all the desire in Israel turned? Is it not to

you and all your father's house?-
This could equally be translated to mean that all that is desirable in Israel is for Saul and his father's house, and so he therefore need not worry about losing a few donkeys. Saul was being shown that God knew all about his situation; and knew how long he had been searching. The implication may be that Samuel had found the donkeys (hence Samuel later he insists he never stole donkeys, 1 Sam. 12:3); on :3 I suggested they represented kingship or leadership. They had been found by Samuel, by God, and were now being given to Saul.

Saul is introduced as a man obsessed with donkeys (see on :19); he combs a large area, reflecting almost an OCD, until he is left without bread and without money. The Hebrew suggests "the donkeys which you lost", as if he saw it as his fault; at least, they are called his donkeys, even if technically they belonged to his father. Three times Saul has to be assured that the lost donkeys had been found (1 Sam. 9:20; 10:2,9), perhaps reflecting his deep distress and obsession about their loss. Samuel will warn Israel that their king will take their donkeys from them, and protests that he himself has never taken a donkey from them. But Saul's taking of Israel's donkeys wasn't inevitable, Saul wasn't set up for failure. For Samuel here pleads with him to quit his obsession with donkeys, not to "worry" or set his heart upon them, and instead focus upon leading God's people. Saul failed ultimately to take that appeal. But we see here how predestiny and foreknowledge are all the same conditional, and human freewill is always valued and respected. God indeed directs history, history is His story, but in a beautiful way, human freewill isn't compromised.

But we could as well translate the Hebrew here as "belonging to you are Israel's best / desirable things". He's being told not to worry about a few lost donkeys, because all Israel's best things are to be his. In this case, the allusion is to the prediction of the bad king in 1 Sam. 8:10-16. Saul is being warned that he would have all Israel's desirable things at his disposal. And the nudge is to warn him not to misuse them, not to set his heart upon them. Always there is the plea not to be that bad king. For he was not set up to inevitable failure; no man is. For God wants to save all men. See on 1 Sam. 9:3.

1Sa 9:21 Saul answered, Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And is not my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me like this?-
Benjamin was indeed the smallest of the tribes according to Gen. 49:27, but that tribe had been made even smaller and humiliated within Israel by the fairly recent events of Jud. 19-21. This could be genuine humility, or the standard expression of 'humility' which almost goes with the territory of being given a great promotion. Kish is introduced as a mighty man of valour (:1), and I suggested on :3 that the donkeys had significance as the animals of leadership or even kingship. These questions are left open by the record, to exercise our thinking. Was Saul initially humble, or only on a surface level?

1Sa 9:22 Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the guest room, and made them sit in the best place among the guests, about thirty people-
We see reflected here the very small scale of Samuel's efforts. He came to this town to enable the people to offer peace offerings; after he blessed the offering, the offerers then ate their own offering. But only 30 people did this, and as with Hannah and Elkanah, it is likely that there were married couples amongst those 30. For many years Samuel made his circuits, encouraging the people in their devotion to Yahweh. But

only 30 [at the most] offered peace offerings. The impression from the record is that most of Israel were far gone in idolatry and secularism, at least until they faced a real crisis from their neighbours.

1Sa 9:23 Samuel said to the cook, Bring the portion which I gave you, telling you to set it aside-
Samuel clearly had been told that the king to be anointed was coming to him, and he absolutely believed this, to the point of making very detailed plans. "The cook" is literally the slaughterer. We get the impression that although Samuel was not a Levite, in practice he pretty much took over from Eli as high priest, and this "cook" who dealt with the sacrifices was effectively his Levite, an assistant with the sacrifices.

1Sa 9:24 The cook took up the thigh and what was on it and set it before Saul-
AV "the shoulder and that which was upon it". This is the imagery of Is. 9:6; 22:22 "The government shall be upon his shoulder", again hinting that Saul was to be king. This was what was to be given to the priests (Ex. 29:27; Lev. 7:32-34; 10:14,15; Num. 6:20; 18:18). Saul was set up to be a king-priest. His later condemnation for offering the sacrifice was because of his attitude of heart, and not just because he was not a Levite.

Samuel said, Here is what has been kept for you! Eat it because it has been kept for you for this occasion since I said, 'I have invited guests'. So Saul ate with Samuel that day-
This could be an intensive plural for the one great guest.

1Sa 9:25 When they had come down from the high place into the city, he talked with Saul on the housetop-
What we say to the Lord Jesus in His ear in the bedroom in the darkness, will be openly spoken by the Lord Jesus at the judgment (Lk. 12:2,3). God dwells in darkness (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12). Speaking in the bedroom in secret with the knowledge we will be openly rewarded is the language of prayer (Mt. 6:6). Our private relationship with the Lord now, praying to Him in our bedroom, meditating about Him there, will then be spoken out loud. But there is a related statement from the Lord: What we hear from Him in the ear, we must speak openly (Mt. 10:26,27; after the pattern of Isaiah in Is. 22:14). Putting these passages together, we get the picture of us speaking to God through Christ, talking in His ear, as one might whisper something very personal into a friend's ear, in the darkness of our bedroom. And then the Lord whispers back in our ear, i.e. His revelation to us (through the word) is very personal and not perceived by others; but we must openly, publicly act upon it. And this private relationship we have with the Lord in our prayer life will then be revealed openly at the judgment. God told Samuel " in his ear" about Saul's future, and although the message must have been hard to relay to Saul, Samuel did so, on the housetop (1 Sam. 9:15,25). The similarities with the Lord's words are too close to be accidental. Surely He saw each of us as passing through the essential experience of Samuel.

1Sa 9:26 They arose early, at daybreak, and Samuel called to Saul on the housetop, Get up, that I may send you away. Saul arose, and they went outside together-
"Called" translates the same Hebrew word used for "invited" in :25. Consistently we have the language of Divine calling. Saul is presented as being absolutely obedient to Samuel and the Divine calling- at this stage.

1Sa 9:27 As they were going down to the outskirts of the city Samuel said to Saul, Tell the servant to go on ahead of us (and he did so), but you stay here first, so that I may tell you the message of God-
"Message" translates the standard Hebrew *dabar* for "word". "Tell you" is better "make your hear / be obedient". The same phrase is used of how Israel at Sinai were made to hear the word of God (Dt. 4:10) as a condition for entering covenant with Him. The subsequent activity of God's Spirit upon Saul was indeed to potentially make him hear / be obedient to the word of God to him. Only the day before he had been out looking for lost donkeys, with not a real thought for Yahweh. And now God was seeking to make him obedient to the word of the Kingdom. But as Saul's subsequent life demonstrates, although God through His Spirit does seek to make us obedient to His word, He will never ultimately force us.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 10

1Sa 10:1 Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, Hasn't Yahweh anointed you to be prince over His inheritance?-
The significance of the kiss was maybe to simply show this secular man that actually, God really loved him. He really wanted Saul to work out well, and was not at all predestining him to failure. He was reminded that he was only prince over God's inheritance; the kingdom was always to be God's, and not Saul's. And yet he later reasoned with Jonathan as if the kingdom was theirs and not God's. All his angst about David becoming king would have not been an item had he believed that the Kingdom is God's and not ours. An inheritance was all a man had, and was more important to him than his own life. And we God's people are His inheritance... We are no mere plaything within the boundless function of an omnipotent being.

Samuel's kissing of Saul may reflect a genuine fondness for him (1 Sam. 10:1); hence he is told to stop grieving that Saul has gone wrong (1 Sam. 16:1). And yet it was through Samuel that God had foretold what a bad man Saul would be. But Samuel's grief and fondness for Saul surely reflects how he understood that those prophecies were not inevitably going to be fulfilled. Samuel knew that Saul could have acted otherwise as he lived in the gap between prophecy and fulfilment.

1Sa 10:2 When you have departed from me today you will find two men by Rachel's tomb, in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah, and they will tell you, 'The donkeys which you went to seek have been found, and your father has stopped caring about the donkeys, and is anxious for you, saying, What shall I do for my son? '-
Rachel's grave was on the road from Bethel to Ephrath / Bethlehem (Gen. 35:16-20; 48:7). Assuming Samuel and Saul were in Ramah, to go here was a long way out of Saul's way if he were returning home. Especially as he presumably wanted to get home as soon as possible to comfort his anxious father. Samuel's statement that Kish was anxious for Saul confirmed what Saul himself had been thinking (1 Sam. 9:5). To go there was therefore a test of his obedience- and he passed it. He did indeed begin well. Spiritual paths often do begin with simple tests like this.

This detail would be relevant for the exiles, for whom this history was apparently rewritten. For Jer. 31:15 seems to imply that as the exiles of Judah were marched into captivity from Jerusalem, they passed Rachel's tomb and wept there for their lost children. The idea was that not only Samuel but others were also prophets in Israel, and these were the men whom Saul ought to be associated with when he became king.

1Sa 10:3 Then you will go on from there and you will come to the oak of Tabor. Three men will meet you there, going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread and another carrying a bottle of wine-
"Tabor" may possibly be a form of "Deborah", referencing the oak of Deborah, Rebecca's nurse; Deborah was buried beneath an oak "under Bethel" (Gen. 35:8), It could equally refer to the tree under which the judge Deborah had more recently judged Israel, again nearby, between Ramah and Bethel (Jud. 4:5). Saul was to be further introduced to the faithful within Israel, whom Samuel hoped he would associate with. Perhaps these faithful men also had Divine revelation about Saul as Samuel had had, or maybe he got word to them of his plans for Saul. .

The priests were God's representatives, and for a man to 'appear before the Lord' effectively referred to his appearance before the priest. When we read of "men going up to God at Bethel", the 'house of God' (1 Sam. 10:3), we aren't to think that God Himself lived in a house in Bethel. The reference is to the priests, His representative, being there.

1Sa 10:4 They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them-
A symbolic gift of food [for two loaves is not much] reflected acceptance of the person receiving the food, and even acceptance of them as a leader.

The extent of God's activity for us is simply huge. Just consider all the apparently insignificant details added in to God's plan for making Saul king here and in :3. One of this, two of that, three of those... why such detail? It's the same question as to why is the cosmos so vast, the range of plant and animal life on earth so huge and varied. Perhaps in Saul's case all the detail was necessary in order to try to build faith in him, and to demonstrate for all time the capability of God to have micro level involvement and control in human experiences.

Saul had no bread with him (1 Sam. 9:7); God saw his lack and would provide. His inadequacies were covered by God's potential provision. But the loaves were intended for offering to God, and Saul was to accept them, implying he was to eat them; Saul's lack of bread would be met in this way. By accepting the offerings intended for God, he was to act as a priest and to accept them on God's behalf. For the loaves were intended for sacrifice to God. He was to see that God wanted him as His representative, and if he accepted this, then his human inadequacy [lack of bread] would thus be met. He was being set up for success, not failure.

1Sa 10:5 After that you will come to the hill of God-
A place called Gibeath-Elohim. The hill of God probably means the ark was there. Again it was in Philistine hands, and again it had failed to help Israel. If this is the Gibeah of Saul where Saul was from, we learn that he had grown up where the ark was, admittedly under Philistine control, and where there was a school of the prophets taught by Samuel (1 Sam. 19:20). But he didn't recognize Samuel when he met him and apparently was totally disengaged with Yahweh worship. Hence the surprised "Is Saul also among the prophets?", and the wonder of how God's Spirit transformed such a secular man.

Where the garrison of the Philistines is, and when you come near to the city you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, a tambourine, a pipe and a harp being played before them. They will be prophesying-
Again Saul is being shown that there were other spiritually minded believers in Israel,

right under the noses of the Philistine garrison. Saul didn't even know Samuel to look at, and he clearly moved outside the sphere of believers. He appears to have felt lost when actually not that far from home (1 Sam. 9:6,8), so he may never have travelled far from his birthplace- like many rural folk in Israel at the time. The Biblical idea of prophesying is speaking forth God's word, not necessarily predicting the future. But it may be that these prophets were doing both, speaking under inspiration of Saul's future kingship.

1Sa 10:6 and the Spirit of Yahweh will come mightily on you, and you will prophesy with them, and you will be changed into another person-
Here we see the essence of the work of the Spirit; it is not so much the miraculous gifts, as the internal change of the person. And that is what we so desperately need, and is a strong reason in our age to encourage people to accept the Lord Jesus and be baptized, knowing that this leads to the gift of the same transforming Spirit in the hearts and persons of people. And this transformation is our greatest need. Whilst the gift of the Spirit as we currently experience it is predicated upon the Lord's death and resurrection, through which His Spirit is poured out upon His people (Jn. 7:39), yet clearly God even in Old Testament times was active through His Spirit directly on human hearts. The parallel in :9 says that Saul was 'given' (s.w. "changed" in :6) another heart. The same word is used in Ps. 105:25 of how God turned or changed the heart of the Egyptians towards hatred of His people. It is the word used of how Gentiles will be "converted" or turned to Yahweh (Is. 60:5)- by His work upon them, and not their own unaided intellectual searching for truth. The Spirit is not simply the power of God but also His mind and thinking, which precedes or is the essence of His actions. To be given God's Spirit is essentially to have our spirit changed; His breathing, His mind, becomes ours. And this is what happened to Saul. But as we see from his later life, God will not force a man to be other than what he himself wishes to be. If we wish to be spiritually minded, we will be helped toward this by the Spirit. If we do not, then as with Saul, an evil spirit from God will confirm us in the psychological path we prefer to take.

1Sa 10:7 When these signs have happened, then do as occasion demands, for God is with you-
"As occasion demands" is hard to translate. Literally, "do what your hand shall find". I have discussed on 1 Sam. 9:4 how Saul didn't "find" the donkeys but was "found" by God and "found" everything he needed whilst he was in the way of the Spirit, doing the work of the Kingdom. Although the Spirit would come upon him and transform him, he would still have freewill and was to act on his own initiative, having God "with" him as he did so. This gives quite some insight into the operation of the Spirit to this day. And yet this doesn't preclude the need to follow specific commands as we have in :8. Here we see the interplay between human action and God's confirmation. Saul was to do as he could in response to his calling, and God would work with that. This is the work of the Spirit. The idea seem to be that Saul had God with him and was to act in response to his calling. Whatever he did would prosper. The fact God departed from him (1 Sam. 28:15) was a sad reflection of how initially God had been with Saul (1 Sam. 10:7). In Saul's case it was given by the pure grace of how God calls otherwise unspiritual people. But in response to their rejection of His Spirit, God will send an evil spirit to confirm them in that rejection, as happened later in Saul's life.

1Sa 10:8 Go down before me to Gilgal and I will come down to you, to offer burnt offerings and to make sacrifices of peace offerings. Wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you must do-

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. Take Saul. At the beginning of his intended ministry, he was told by Samuel to wait for his coming, when he would offer sacrifices. Saul obediently obeyed; yet when he was tested on this very point in this very way at a later stage, he failed. It is for this reason that circumstances repeat so strangely in the lives of God's people. See on 1 Sam. 16:3.

An alternative is that this command was not for immediate obedience, and it was only later that Saul had to wait for Samuel at Gilgal- and he failed.

1Sa 10:9 When Saul had turned to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart, and all those signs happened that day-

This gift of another heart was through the Spirit coming upon him (see on :6,10). "The same word is used for the transformation of Moses' rod into a serpent (Ex. 7:15), or the Nile water to blood (Ex. 7:20)- and the "overthrow" of Sodom (Gen. 19:21,29). This is the work of the Spirit- a fundamental transformation and reconstitution of a person's mind. But they have to be willing to accept it in an ongoing way. I have seen so many transformed by the birth of water and Spirit- but not continuing to run with it. And so it was to be with Saul. "Gave" is the same word for "changed" in :6. So "Another heart" is clearly parallel with "another person" (:6). The heart is the person, and the Spirit is a term which embraces the heart / mind.

This is further evidence that God can work directly upon the hearts of people, including those like the Egyptians who are not His people. The heart of Saul was likewise turned (s.w. Ps. 105:25 He turned their heart"). This is effected today by the work of the Holy Spirit directly upon human spirits / hearts.

The association of an Angel with God's "good spirit" in Neh. 9:20 suggests that the good and evil spirits that troubled Saul were actually Angelically-controlled dispositions of mind, co-ordinated by two different Angels. This giving of a new heart to Saul by the Angel (1 Sam. 10:9) appears to be the basis of Jer. 31:33, where God says He will make a new Covenant with them (remember it was an Angel who made the Old Covenant also), when He "will put My Law in their inward parts... and will be their God". This giving a new heart to Israel described here and in Jer. 32:39 and Ez. 36:26 appears to be over and above Israel's personal spirituality, although as with the case of Saul it will probably be a vast magnification of some small spiritual effort made of their own freewill, as Saul must surely have had. Again we see how the record of Saul was rewritten [under inspiration] for the exiles. Yet these words are quoted in the New Testament about God doing this to our hearts now (Heb. 8:10); inviting us to read the other passages in the New Testament concerning the Spirit creating a new mind or creation in us as referring to God being willing to do the same to us as He did to Saul (Acts 15:8,9; 2 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 3:14-20).

1Sa 10:10 When they came to the hill a band of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God came mightily on him and he prophesied among them-

The hill was where the Philistine garrison was (:5). Although at that time the Israelites were allowed some autonomy, they were in power over Israel in this area. The association of this place with the outpouring of the Spirit was surely to teach Saul

that he was going to be empowered by the Spirit to defeat the Philistines and lead Israel to freedom from them. It was he, therefore, who should have fought Goliath, and he would have won, through the work of the Spirit. But Saul didn't want to use the potential. Hence his bitter jealousy of David was based upon a sense that David had the faith to use the potential of the Spirit which he did not have. And it is spiritual jealousy which is the very worst and bitterest form of jealousy. Possession of the Spirit did not mean that someone was necessarily acceptable in God's sight, e.g. Saul possessed it for a time as did the judges of Israel (Num. 11:17) although they were not righteous; they did not believe the report of Joshua and Caleb and therefore were condemned to die like the other Israelites, despite their having the Spirit - Psalm 82:1-7 says as much.

1Sa 10:11 When all who knew him before saw that he prophesied with the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?-
It is possible that somehow there were people from Saul's home village who were present at the garrison of the Philistines when Saul began prophesying there. But it could also be that he continued prophesying on the way back to his home (see on :13), leading to this comment. The idea is that a totally secular man could instantly be transformed by the Spirit. This amazement by those who knew him, marvelling that he was the son of Kish, who also was not perhaps known for his spirituality, is also seen in the transformations of secular lives which the Spirit works today.

1Sa 10:12 A man who lived there answered, Who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb: Is Saul also among the prophets?-
As suggested on :11, the idea may be that Kish was not known for his spirituality. This amazing transformation of Saul therefore gave birth to the proverb, because it meant that the unspiritual way in which he was raised was no barrier to the work of the Spirit upon Saul's heart. This really does happen today also, and such transformations are the greatest advertisement for the Gospel. "Who is their / his father?" may mean that Saul now appears as a spiritual person, whereas his family background wasn't spiritual. Hence the comment "What has happened to the son of Kish?", as if Kish wasn't a spiritual person. The transformation of the Spirit means that we are a new creation, and bad family background or even apparent genetic spiritual disadvantage is nothing compared to the transformation of the Spirit. Old things have passed away and all things have become new- we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

1Sa 10:13 When he had stopped prophesying, he came to the high place-
LXX "to Gibeah". It's possible that on the way home to Gibeah of Saul, he met people who had previously known him (see on :11). If we retain the reading "the high place", we conclude that the work of the Spirit led him to come and make a sacrifice at the high place; when from the account in 1 Sam. 9, it seems he had never made such a sacrifice in his life. And this is where the work of the Spirit leads- to the principle of sacrifice.

1Sa 10:14 Saul's uncle said to him and to his servant, Where did you go? He said, To seek the donkeys. When we saw that they were not to be found we came to Samuel-
"Seek" is not really the word one would use for searching for lost cattle. It is the word more usually used for seeking in prayer or worship. The transformation of the Spirit

led to Saul's vocabulary changing; and he now speaks of Samuel as if he was of course known to the family. When in reality Saul didn't recognize Samuel when he met him, indicating he had never attended Samuel's meetings. Such change in language is a typical reflection of the Spirit's transforming work.

1Sa 10:15 Saul's uncle said, Please tell me what Samuel said to you-
I suggested on 1 Sam. 9:3 that the donkeys were a symbol of leadership or even kingship. Therefore Samuel's commentary upon them being lost but then found was significant to Saul's uncle. We note that Saul's servant and Saul's uncle speak as if they know Samuel, whereas Saul doesn't recognize him nor apparently know much about him. He was not the spiritual one in the family, but he was the one chosen to be transformed by the Spirit. Truly old things passed away and all things became new in this new creation of the Spirit; background and previous spirituality was and is irrelevant to the work of the Spirit.

1Sa 10:16 Saul said to his uncle, He told us plainly that the donkeys were found. But concerning the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel spoke, he didn't tell him-
We wonder why he didn't, especially given the amazing signs and wonders he had experienced in the wake of the statement about him becoming king. Indeed, he had been anointed to be king. His silence could have been bashful humility, or it could have been a lack of faith in running with the possibilities now opened up to him. The fact Saul does nothing until he is called by the Ammonite crisis indicates his passivity to the call. See on :21.

1Sa 10:17 Samuel called the people together to Yahweh to Mizpah-
"Mizpah" means watchtower, an appropriate place for a prophet to make statements. But Samuel called the people "to Yahweh". It was a calling to Him, to repentance. Just as Saul was called, so the people were called. 'Calling' is a major theme in this section.

1Sa 10:18 and he said to the people of Israel, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all the kingdoms that oppressed you-
This is said in the context of the people wanting a human king to lead them. They were bidden reflect how it was God who had led them and saved them from their enemies, even leading them out of Egypt. The local neighbouring tribes they were up against were nothing compared to Egypt. "Oppress" is the word used of how Israel were oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 3:9). But the intention, as with Israel's latter day oppression, is that it would lead them to cry out for Yahweh's salvation, 'Jesus': "For they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them" (Is. 19:20 s.w.). All the judges were therefore types of the ultimate deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus in the last days.

1Sa 10:19 but you have this day rejected your God, who Himself saves you out of all your calamities and your distresses-
The stress is upon "who Himself". God had saved them by His direct leadership, and not through any human king. But always humanity shies away from the wonder of direct personal relationship with God. Many today prefer to hide at the bottom of a huge supposed hierarchy of priests, bishops, denominational membership etc.- rather than accept direct personal relationship with God. Just as God wished to speak

directly to Israel, but they ran away from Him and wanted Moses instead to report to them what God had said. See on 1 Sam. 12:6.

You have said to Him, 'No! Set a king over us'. Now therefore present yourselves before Yahweh by your tribes and by your thousands-

God does make concessions to human weakness; He gave them a king in His wrath, Hosea says. But using those concessions ultimately makes obedience harder. It was God's wish that Israel would not have a human king; hence His sorrow when they did (1 Sam. 10:19-21). Yet in the Law, God foresaw that they would want a human king, and so He gave commandments concerning how he should behave (Dt. 17:14,15). These passages speak of how Israel would choose to set a King over themselves, and would do so. Yet God worked through this system of human kings; hence the Queen of Sheba speaks of how *God* had set Solomon over Israel as King, and how he was king on God's behalf (2 Chron. 9:8). Israel set a king over themselves; but God worked with this, so that in a sense *He* set the King over them. God's ideal was that the Levites would live from the tithes given by Israel (Dt. 14:27); but He foresaw that this ideal level wouldn't be reached by them, therefore the Levites were given land on which to grow their own crops for survival. However, it must be noted that by opting to make use of God's concessions to human weakness, real spirituality became harder to achieve. Thus it was harder to accept Yahweh as King if they had a human king demanding their allegiance.

1Sa 10:20 So Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel together, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken-

To gather representatives from all the tribes would have taken significant planning, and also their willingness to participate.

1Sa 10:21 He brought the tribe of Benjamin forward by their families, and the family of the Matrites was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken, but when they sought him he could not be found-

Clearly it was God who chose Saul by this very public method of drawing lots, probably chosen by the urim and thummim. Yet Israel chose Saul, we are told. God again shows how He chose the man they would have chosen, and the peoples' joy in Saul shows that indeed He had chosen as they would have done. Again we learn that we get what we really want if it is our heart's desire. And that principle applies positively to we who seek His Kingdom above all.

Again we have questions which the record leaves hanging intentionally open. Was he hiding because he was humble? 1 Sam. 15:17 could encourage us to read him this way; he was exalted when he was "little" in his own eyes. And this was understood by Saul, who changed his name to Paul, the little one, in seeking to emulate the early spirit of Saul. Or because as suggested on :16, he failed to have the faith to be proactive after his anointing? The fact Saul was present at the gathering surely means that he had come along expecting to be pronounced king. Perhaps his nerve failed him, a kind of stage fright at the last minute. Human motivation and spirituality is nearly always mixed, and perhaps that is why these questions are left hanging.

1Sa 10:22 Therefore they asked of Yahweh further, Did the man come here? Yahweh answered, He has hidden himself among the baggage-

We think of the Lord's parable of the man who hid his talent in the earth. Saul had after all been anointed to be king, and had experienced signs confirming that. David

continually accuses Saul of "arrogance" in the Psalms he wrote reflecting upon Saul's persecution of him (e.g. Ps. 10:2); whereas Saul begins as an apparently humble man who doesn't feel worthy to be king, hiding himself to avoid being king (1 Sam. 15:17), and restraining himself when some mocked him as an inappropriate leader (1 Sam. 10:27). Saul's descent into apostasy was therefore primarily a descent into pride. Being called to do something for God so often makes men pride, when the invitation is intended to humble us; just as David's psalm of humility in Psalm 8 after killing of Goliath was a protestation of humility. "Who am I, to do this work for You?" ought to be our sense. However we will note on Ps. 10:10 that Saul had a false humility; so perhaps his initial humility was not genuine.

For the tallest man in Israel to hide... was impossible. It's as if resistance to the Spirit's call is futile. We cannot hide from it. In fact we have no choice but to totally surrender to the way of the Spirit, and resistance or backtracking on it will lead to the tragedy of Saul.

1Sa 10:23 They ran and fetched him, and when he stood among the people he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders and upward-
Truly God gave them just the kind of king they wanted. His unusual height made him the ideal person to fight Goliath, and his failure to do so suggests a failure to rise up to the potential given him. Perhaps the extensive prophesying from him and others right under the noses of the Philistines in :5,6 was about victory over the Philistines. Hence his bitter spiritual jealousy of David, who did rise up to the potential.

1Sa 10:24 Samuel said to all the people, You see the one whom Yahweh has chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? All the people shouted, Long live the king!-
As found often in Daniel, Gentile kings were addressed with the wish that "O King, live for ever". They were greeting their new king just as the Gentile nations did; and yet no man is immortal, and this was a phrase better not used by those who believed in the mortality of man, and that no king was in fact immortal. Or we could translate "Let the King save!". But this was a rejection of Yahweh as their saviour, and their insistence upon a visible leadership rather than accepting God's invisible leadership.

1Sa 10:25 Then Samuel told the people the regulations of the kingdom, wrote them in a book and laid it up before Yahweh. Samuel sent all the people away to their homes-
These regulations were perhaps the laws in Deuteronomy about how the king of Israel should behave, not multiplying horses etc. Being laid up before Yahweh may have meant placing it in a pouch on the ark. But *mishpat,* "regulations", is also more commonly the idea of a verdict or judgment. It could be that Samuel wrote down his inspired judgment on this matter from God- that He didn't want them to have a king but was going along with their request, even though it meant their rejection of Him.

1Sa 10:26 Saul also went to his house to Gibeah and with him the valiant men whose hearts God had touched-
These men were those who like him had experienced the work of the Spirit directly upon their hearts (see on :6,9). The same word is used of how God touched [AV "plagued"] the hearts of the Egyptians (Ex. 9:14). He can work directly on the human heart; this is the work of the Spirit, which is exactly what is needed by we weak minded people who want to be spiritual. Our deepest need is met in the Spirit, and yet it is this very topic which has provoked so much fear and controversy in the circles of

believers. "The valiant men" is AV "a band of men", presumably the prophets of :5. They were to spiritually teach him in order to prepare him for kingship. Whether he paid attention or not we don't know; all we next read of him is that he was working in his fields and came home one evening to hear of the crisis at Jabesh (1 Sam. 11:5).

1Sa 10:27 But some worthless fellows said, How can this man save us? They despised him and brought him no present-
Clearly Saul was considered a nobody who had no military experience. It could however be that these worthless fellows were those who considered him to be spiritually unqualified to be king; and by thinking that of the man God had chosen and was in process of transforming, they were categorized themselves as unspiritual people.

But he was as though he had been deaf-
See on :22; Ps. 38:13. David learnt the secret of seeing the positive in our weak brethren, and he didn't let all that was wrong with Saul interfere with this. He describes himself as responding to criticism like this: "I as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:13). Yet he was alluding to how Saul, when likewise criticized by "sons of belial", "was as though he had been deaf" to their words (1 Sam. 10:27 RVmg.). He saw the good in Saul, he remembered that one good example he showed- and it empowered him to follow it.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 11

1Sa 11:1 Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, Make a treaty with us and we will serve you-
Nahash is the Hebrew word for serpent. Although God foreknew Saul's ultimate failure, he was set up as the potential Messianic seed who could crush the serpent; see on 1 Sam. 13:13. He failed to realize his potential, and was confirmed in that by the evil spirit from Yahweh which later afflicted him. For the significance of Jabesh, see on :9.

1Sa 11:2 Nahash the Ammonite said to them, On this condition I will make it with you, that each of you has his right eye put out, bringing disgrace on all Israel-
Saul's work was to remove the disgrace or "reproach" from Israel. When Goliath reproached Israel, it was Saul, Israel's tallest man, who was potentially empowered to fight him and remove the reproach. But he failed to do so, and when David did (1 Sam. 17:26 s.w.), Saul fell into a complex of spiritual jealousy. See another example of this in :13. To put out the right eye was a living shame; perhaps the right eye was chosen because it was perceived as the eye most used in one to one combat. The relevance to the exiles is that very often, the word for "reproach" is used of their situation. Yahweh was powerful to remove this from them- if they accepted His leadership and didn't hanker for the immediate restoration of the kingly line as a condition for their return.

There are clear similarities between the situations in 1 Sam. 11 and that in David's victory against Goliath in 1 Sam. 17. The difference is that in 1 Sam. 16 we learn that God's Spirit departed from Saul and came upon David. It has been observed: "First a

challenge is issued by an alien (11:2; 17:23), followed by terror and fear in Israel (11:4; 17:24). After a search (11:3-4; 17:24), a deliverer appears for Israel (11:5-6; 17:25), and succeeds in delivering Israel from the foe (11:7-11; 17:50). The deliverer is recognized and made a leader for Israel (11:15; 17:55-8, 18:5)". The significance is that Saul could have been the heroic Israelite saviour against Goliath and the Philistines in 1 Sam. 17, just as he had been against Nahash and the Ammonites in 1 Sam. 11. His victory over Nahash was set up to encourage him that he could likewise defeat Goliath. But he failed to be taught, and just flunked out of the exercise.

1Sa 11:3 The elders of Jabesh said to him, Give us seven days so that we can send messengers to all the borders of Israel, and then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you-

We wonder why Nahash agreed to this. His pride was apparently such that he considered that even if this were to be done, he would still win. It was again a case of pride going before a fall. Given the size of the land, it would have taken seven days to inform all Israel and get a response. See on 1 Sam. 14:10.

1Sa 11:4 Then the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these words to the people, and they all wept aloud-

The messengers went throughout Israel, just as messengers had recently gone throughout Israel inviting them to the gathering at Mizpah regarding having a king. And there was apparently no response. They were all therefore psychologically set up to hope that the promised new king would actually bring the charismatic deliverance they expected of a king. This setting up of expectation was all from God. He really wanted to arrange things so that Saul had the support and respect of all Israel. Saul's ultimate failure was therefore all the more culpable, because he had been set up for success- as is everyone called by God.

It's quite likely that Saul, being from Gibeah, had relatives in Jabesh. Because at the time of Jud. 19-21, a generation previously, the Benjamites from Gibeah had been almost wiped out by the other tribes of Israel. and those tribes had vowed not to give their daughters as wives to the Benjamites. Israel then lamented that the tribe if Benjamin would become extinct. But Jabesh was the only city that had not joined in the agreement, and so the tribes went there, massacred the people, and saved 400 virgins from there and gave them to the Benjamites to marry. The people of Jabesh were likely sceptical of the other Israelites, and would have looked to Saul as their only logical saviour. One reconstruction is that the people of Gibeah, who knew Saul had been anointed and who had exclaimed "Is Saul also among the prophets?", all the same assumed he couldn't save them. For they wept, rather than suggested Saul went and saved them. His earlier filling with the Spirit had dissipated and now he had to be filled again with the Spirit; indeed this is what the Spirit filled life is about, being refilled with the Spirit.

1Sa 11:5 Just then Saul came, following the oxen out of the field, and he said, What is wrong with the people that they weep? They told him what the men of Jabesh had said-

I pondered on 1 Sam. 10:16 why he didn't immediately tell others of his calling to be king, especially given the amazing signs and wonders he had experienced in the wake

of the statement about him becoming king. Indeed, he had been anointed to be king. His silence could have been bashful humility, or it could have been a lack of faith in running with the possibilities now opened up to him. The fact Saul does nothing until he is now called by the Ammonite crisis could indicate his passivity to his calling. See on 1 Sam. 10:21.

The Lord Jesus called men, arresting them with His radical call in the very midst of daily life, just when they were throwing a net into the sea, at the most utterly inconvenient moment, even the most humanly inappropriate moment- such as being on the way to your father's funeral. The Son of God was actually acting as His Father had done. Gideon was called whilst in the middle of threshing wheat in a time of famine (Jud. 6:1), Saul whilst he was out looking for lost cattle (1 Sam. 9:10) and again now whilst he was coming home from ploughing [following the oxen] one evening; David whilst he was looking after the sheep; Samuel whilst he was asleep; Amos whilst he was leading the flocks to water (Am. 7:14); and see too 1 Kings 11:29; 19:16; 2 Kings 9:1-13,18. In other words, the call of God comes to us right in the midst of ordinary, mundane life. Of this there can be no doubt. And the Lord Jesus called men in just the same way.

1Sa 11:6 The Spirit of God came mightily on Saul when he heard those words, and his anger was kindled greatly-
This seems another example of the Spirit of God touching his heart, giving him feelings, initiatives and ideas; all part of the Spirit of God touching his heart or mind (see on 1 Sam. 10:6,9,26). And the Spirit can work likewise today if we are open to receive it. The idea may be that when Saul heard those words, he became very angry in his spirit / mind, and the Holy Spirit then engaged with *his* spirit. His anger became God's anger, his flame of zeal to do something about the situation, to save... became taken over by God's Spiit and used by God. So far in the Biblical record, the phrase "his anger was kindled greatly" has only been used [twice] of God's anger being greatly kindled (Num. 11:10,33). And in that context, Yahweh's anger was greatly kindled when He "heard" (s.w. "heard those words") Israel's words of complaint (Num. 11:1). So as Saul could hear words and have his anger greatly kindled, so could God. God's Spirit and Saul's spirit intertwined. This is expressed as God's Spirit coming mightily on Saul. And we now better understand why Saul is condemned because he did not execute [literally "do"] Yahweh's wrath with Amalek (1 Sam. 28:18). In 1 Sam. 11:6, Saul's wrath had been Yahweh's wrath, Saul's spirit was Yahweh's Spirit, they both heard the words about Jabesh and the threat of Nahash, and were filled with kindled wrath. When Saul sought to express that against Nahash, God's Spirit was with him. But with Amalek, Saul had fallen out of sync with God's Spirit. And so that Spirit departed from him. His will was no longer that of his heavenly Father. This was the struggle of the Lord, "not My will but Yours", the subjugation of the human spirit and will to that of God.

1Sa 11:7 He took a yoke of oxen, cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, Whoever doesn't come forth after Saul and after Samuel, this is what shall be done to his oxen-
See on 1 Sam. 14:28,31. This is similar to what was done to call Israel to action against Gibeah and Benjamin (Jud. 19:29,30), and Jabesh were the ones who singularly refused to participate and respond. I suggest on :9 that Saul was seeking to show grace to them. Samuel was clearly identified with Saul and was effectively the

joint leader at this point. He fades from view as Saul becomes more confident, and pride took over within him. Saul was a Benjamite, from Gibeah, sometimes called "Gibeah of Saul". Jabesh had been the only town to show grace to his tribe and city. Clearly this recent history is in Saul's mind because he cuts up the oxen and sends out the pieces just as the Levite did in the drama that led to the battles of Gibeah. His anger was that they were to be shamed, when he considered them the best of the best. And as discussed on :6, these feelings were God's. He feels of all His people that we are the best of the best, simply because He loves us.

The dread of Yahweh fell on the people, and they came out as one man-
This continues the theme of the Spirit of God being at work on human hearts, giving not only individuals but a whole people the required psychological attitudes and dispositions. The falling of the Spirit of God upon Saul is perhaps reflected in how an awareness of Yahweh "falls" on the people. And it is the common experience of the Spirit which leads to unity, "the unity of the Spirit", "as one man".

1Sa 11:8 Saul numbered them in Bezek and there were three hundred thousand men of Israel and thirty thousand of Judah-
As often noted, "thousand" doesn't mean necessarily a literal 1000, but can refer to families or military regiments. The size of Judah, a tenth of the entire community, is roughly appropriate to the twelve tribe nation. Bezek is about 20 miles from Jabesh.

1Sa 11:9 They said to the messengers who came, Thus you shall tell the men of Jabesh Gilead: 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have deliverance'. The messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, and they were glad-
Jabesh was the town who had refused to help the rest of Israel in the war against Gibeah and Benjamin in Judges 19-21. That Saul should now help them was therefore an act of grace; although it could be read as him rewarding them for not turning against his tribe, the Benjamites (1 Sam. 9:1). But the fact the other tribes came to support Saul in saving Jabesh would indicate that he was spearheading a movement of grace. He did indeed begin well. See on :7. "You shall have deliverance / you shall be saved" is a clear statement of faith. Saul was confident he would win and save Jabesh. In fact this is the ultimate statement of faith- that we will be saved by grace.

1Sa 11:10 Therefore the men of Jabesh said to the Ammonites, Tomorrow we will come out to you and you can do to us what seems good to you-
The implication was that they had not had any offer of help and therefore the Ammonites in the pride were off guard (see on :3).

1Sa 11:11 The next day Saul put the people into three companies, and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and slaughtered the Ammonites until the heat of the day. Those who remained were scattered, so that no two of them were left together-
They had marched 20 miles overnight from Bezek, and were exhausted- and then entered battle at dawn. The victory was clearly a case of God empowering the weak. By splitting the people into three groups, Saul was trying to imitate Gideon (see too 1 Sam. 13:2), and likewise when he prohibited the men to eat anything while they were pursuing the Philistines (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5). And yet it was Gideon who refused the request of Israel to make him king; Saul's modelling upon Gideon was only superficial. Likewise we see

many similarities between Saul's victory against the Ammonites and that of Jephthah in Jud. 10. Possibly Jephtah's foolish oath, that cost him the life of his daughter, was behind Saul's later oath to slay even his own son Jonathan if he had eaten during the campaign of 1 Sam. 14. Perhaps that oath was because of his desire to be a cardboard imitation of Jephtah- but as with his imitation of Gideon, it was without spirit and purely superficial.

1Sa 11:12 The people said to Samuel, Who was it who said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?'. Bring those men out so that we can put them to death!-
Saul was set up by God to fulfil all the hopes and expectations of Israel about a human king. See on :4. The desire to kill fellow Israelites reflects the degree of cult following which Israel felt towards Saul. They failed to perceive that it was Samuel and God who had effectively challenged whether Saul should reign over them.

1Sa 11:13 But Saul said, No-one is to be put to death today, for today Yahweh has worked deliverance in Israel-
And the principle holds true. If we are in awe at the great deliverance Yahweh has worked in His Son, there should be maximum forgiveness and no judgment of our brethren. See on 1 Sam. 14:45. As noted on :2, there is another connection with the conflict with Goliath. Yahweh again "worked deliverance in Israel" (s.w. 1 Sam. 19:5); but it was through David. It could have been through Saul, through whom He worked such deliverance at the start of his reign (s.w. 1 Sam. 11:13). It was because David had the faith and humility to do what Saul potentially could have done, that Saul fell into a complex of spiritual jealousy against David.

David many years later copies Saul's spirit here in 1 Sam. 30:23 ["But all the wicked men and troublemakers among David's followers said, Because they didn't go with us we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, just each man's wife and children; then he can take them away and depart.
David said, You must not do that, my brothers, with what Yahweh has given us. He has preserved us and delivered the forces that came against us into our hand"]; and we see his humility in being willing to credit Saul with something good, and even being willing to learn from a man who hated him and later went wrong before God.

1Sa 11:14 Then Samuel said to the people, Come, let us go to Gilgal and reaffirm the kingship there-
We may well ask why this was necessary, seeing God had publically chosen Saul by lot in 1 Sam. 10. And why do this exactly at this time, after rather than before the victory? Perhaps this was all part of God psychologically setting up Saul to be a successful king. The introduction of him to Israel as their king was at a time when God had made him fulfil all their secular desires for a king. He was riding a surge of mass support. His failure was thereby the more culpable.

"Reaffirm" can mean to "renew" [as AV], and the word is elsewhere translated "rebuild". Renewal of the covenant did happen several times in Israel's history, and always it was after Israel had broken the covenant. There seems an intentional ambiguity as to what "kingship" was renewed- was it Yahweh's kingship, or that of Saul? It could be argued that it was Yahweh's kingship and not Saul's that needed "renewal" or rebuilding. But perhaps the ambiguity was intentional. The people were being given the chance at Gilgal to "renew" their acceptance of Yahweh as their king.

But the next verse shows that they there reaffirmed Saul as their king. And then right away follows the wrath of God upon Israel through the hailstorm and Samuel's speech in 1 Sam. 12, where he basically condemns Israel for having chosen Saul. This would explain Hosea's comment that "all their wickedness was in Gilgal" (Hos. 9:15). We look in vain for evidence of some particular Israelite wickedness in Gilgal- until we accept that their refusal to accept Yahweh as king in Gilgal was the epitome of their wickedness. But this appeal to renew the kingship, to reaffirm Yahweh as their king, happened right after Saul had won a great victory and shot to rock star status with the people. By choosing a human king, they were making their loyalty to Yahweh as their king so much more difficult.

Israel had been given a chance to reject the kingship of Saul. But they had insisted upon it, and so they were reaffirmed in their choice. Despite setting Saul up for success, God gave them a king in His wrath (Hos. 13:11) knowing how things would turn out and their motives in asking for a king, and this seems to be the reference of Hos 9:15: "All their wickedness is in Gilgal; for there I hated them". The mention of Gilgal is difficult because we are unaware that there was any more idolatry there than elsewhere. But probably the reference is to the way that Israel's demand for a human king at Gilgal was the epitome of their unfaithfulness to Yahweh; they thereby rejected Him as their king, master and husband; see on Hos. 10:3. Here we see God split- on one hand giving them their desired king and setting him up for success, on the other, knowing how things would turn out, doing so in anger. They of course claimed to still have Him as their king, just as Gomer protested she was still Hosea's wife whilst having affairs with others. As Hosea went through flashes of hatred against Gomer, so did God. But His hatred was for a moment, because Hosea's prophecies go on to declare His undying love for His people. We see here how answered prayer isn't necessarily an indication that we are pleasing to God, just as unanswered prayer is no indication of His displeasure. For He answered their prayer, giving them exactly the kind of king they desired- "in His wrath".

1Sa 11:15 All the people went to Gilgal and there they made Saul king before Yahweh in Gilgal, and there they offered sacrifices of peace offerings before Yahweh, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly-

The fact we have peace with God must inevitably produce joy, not necessarily arms round the neck and grinning from ear to ear, but the real spiritual joy of being at one with God. 1 Sam. 11:13- 15 recounts the offering of the peace offering to commemorate God's salvation of Israel, and their renewal of their covenant with Him. We should be able to say, at any given point in time, that we are confident that if Christ comes now, we will be saved. And in our times the breaking of bread meeting is an equivalent for the peace offering.

We note however that they offered peace offerings and rejoiced- despite having rejected Yahweh as their king, and His giving them a king in His anger (Hos. 10:13). This was not necessarily to say that they didn't have peace and fellowship with God. It simply reflects the complex standing of sinful, weak man before God when He has made major concessions to human weakness, and they have been made use of. But we note that the usual sequence is of sin offering, burnt offering [dedication after receiving forgiveness] and only then peace offering, celebrating peace with God. Here they claimed to celebrate peace with God, without recognition of sin and consequently vowing devotion to Him. For that alone is the way to actual peace with God. We may sing hymns and "Amen" words which glorify peace with God, just as

they did, without first passing through the prerequisite experience of repentance, forgiveness and dedication to Him. And we can claim peace with God, as they did, when God is in fact angry, as He was with them at this time.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 12

1Sa 12:1 Samuel said to all Israel, I have listened to all that you said to me, and have made a king over you-
It was God who made Saul king (Hos. 10:13); Samuel here speaks on God's behalf, although not as a mere instrument of communication. Rather he is very much of one mind with Yahweh. Indeed God had listened to all they asked for, because Saul was set up by God to be exactly what they asked for. He was not only tall and apparently a born leader, but he was set up with dramatic military success just before he was proclaimed king. And military leadership was what Israel were looking for.

1Sa 12:2 Now, the king is your leader; I am old and grey-headed and my sons are with you, and I have been your leader from my youth to this day-
Samuel is making it clear, perhaps not without a touch of resentment, that they had chosen Saul over himself. "My sons are with you" could imply that he knew they were worthless and were another indicator that he was unable to lead the people because of them. Or he could be saying that his worthless sons were on their side, and they along with his sons had rejected him. He comes over as a faithful, hard working old man who had been rejected by his people and his sons; and yet thereby came to close relationship with God, not merely speaking on His behalf, but having the very same thoughts and positions as God.

1Sa 12:3 Here I am. Testify against me before Yahweh and before His anointed-
The reference is to Saul; he would have had in mind how his mother had hoped that he would be Yahweh's anointed (1 Sam. 2:9,10). It seems Samuel and Saul stood together before the people. Again we see Samuel's humility; he was not the anointed whom his mother had expected him to be. So often pride in a person comes from parental expectations of them. They easily become frustrated that they are not the one they feel they were born to be. And twice Samuel anoints other men to be Yahweh's anointed. When one of them doesn't work out, he is not chosen as the alternative. All to help him overcome any potential pride, and we all have had the same Divine humbling hand at work. "Here I am" was the phrase he used to God as a child in the sanctuary, and perhaps he is addressing the words to God again at this point. He is before Yahweh, to be used even in retirement as He wishes and not as his parents expected or hoped.

Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Of whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you-
This speech clearly inspired Paul, when he likewise affirms that his ministry has been with integrity (Acts 20). The insistence he had not stolen donkeys may refer to the donkeys of Saul which were lost and apparently found by Samuel (see on 1 Sam. 9:20). Saul accepts here that Samuel never stole his donkeys. Samuel never stole a donkey (1 Sam. 12:3), whereas Saul was to steal the donkeys of Israel (1 Sam. 8:16).

Israel consciously chose a king who would take their donkeys, and rejected God's judge, Samuel, who never took their donkeys. The way Samuel protests this fact in 1 Sam. 12:3 suggests that despite his humility, he felt some bitterness and resentment about his rejection by Israel, chafing a bit at God's humbling hand as discussed above on this verse. But God comforts him that He feels the same.

1Sa 12:4 They said, You have not defrauded us or oppressed us, neither have you taken anything from any man-
This is tantamount to saying that unlike Eli with his sons, Samuel was known not to have profited from the corruption of his sons (1 Sam. 8:3). For Samuel's sons are in view (see on :2). We note they were judges in Beersheba (1 Sam. 8:2), a long way from Ramah and the small circuit of towns in that vicinity which had been judged by Samuel.

1Sa 12:5 He said to them, Yahweh is witness against you and His anointed is witness this day that you have not found anything in my hand. They said, He is witness-
Samuel is setting this up as a kind of court case, where he is tried and found innocent, with Yahweh and Saul as witnesses corroborating the testimony of the people. Saul was witness in that Samuel is at pains to show that Saul never gave him anything in return for being anointed by Samuel. It was all God's choice. And we can infer from this that he never accepted the coin which Saul's servant intended to give him.

1Sa 12:6 Samuel said to the people, It is Yahweh who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt-
Samuel had earlier made the point that it was Yahweh *Himself* who had brought the people out of Egypt (1 Sam. 10:19). But in practice He had done this through appointing Moses and Aaron. The judges and Samuel were appointed in the same sense. Hos. 12:13 uses the same phrase to say that it was by a prophet that Yahweh brought Israel up out of Egypt. And Samuel was the prophet of their times who had been used by God. But the ministry of prophets was to come to an end in Saul, who didn't continue prophesying after.

1Sa 12:7 Now therefore stand still, that I may plead with you before Yahweh concerning all the righteous acts of Yahweh, which He did to you and to your fathers-
"To plead" is to enter into judgment, but the context implies a debate, hence the questions now asked. The process of final judgment likewise will involve questions and statements regarding our lives, such as the dialogues in the parable of Mt. 25.

The righteous acts Samuel now pleads with Israel to accept all refer to His gracious saving of a sinful Israel. For in acts of saving sinners, Yahweh declares His righteousness; and thus Paul perceives that His righteousness was supremely declared on the cross. These "righteous acts" were the great acts of :24; Yahweh's greatness is supremely shown in the way He saves sinners and continues working with them when they are unworthy and of minimal response to His grace. Indeed this is what the history of God's encounter with man is all about. Samuel was pleading with the people to realize that God's grace over history meant they should never abuse that grace as it had been abused before. And the record of God's history with His people is likewise an appeal to us not to abuse grace.

1Sa 12:8 When Jacob had come into Egypt and your fathers cried to Yahweh, then

Yahweh sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place-
The 'settling' in the land meant the destruction of nations like the Ammonites and Philistines who were currently threatening Israel. And this of course was done without any human king; the leadership by Moses and Aaron was the pattern Israel were intended to follow.

1Sa 12:9 But they forgot Yahweh their God, and He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Hazor, into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them-
The danger was that through having a human king, Israel would again forget Yahweh their God. At Samuel's time, Israel were under Philistine domination, with the Israelites living under the control of Philistine garrisons in their towns (1 Sam. 10:5). This therefore was because Yahweh had brought this situation about, in response to Israel forgetting their God. The relevance to the exiles was that they felt forgotten by Yahweh when it was in fact a case of them having forgotten Him; and that was why they were in the hands of their enemies, in exile (s.w. Is. 49:14; 51:13; Jer. 3:21; 13:25; Hos. 2:13). They were not to look for a human king to lead them back from exile, but to rather believe that Yahweh Himself could do this.

1Sa 12:10 They cried to Yahweh and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken Yahweh and have served the Baals and Ashtaroth; but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies and we will serve You'-
This was not the best attitude. Surely they should have confessed and forsaken their sin of idolatry, promising to serve Yahweh; and then ask for deliverance from their enemies. But they appear to make serving Yahweh dependent upon whether He saved them from their enemies in response to their desperate plea. And yet despite this poor attitude, Yahweh was still pitiful toward them. Such was and is His grace. At the point of Jud. 10:13, Yahweh had said that because Israel had persistently forsaken Him and served other gods, "I will save you no more". But they did continue to forsake and serve other gods, and yet He continued to save them. This is simply His grace, exercising His right to not do according to the judgment He states, just as parents do with disobedient children.

1Sa 12:11 Yahweh sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety-
The deliverance from enemies was through judges like Samuel, and not through a king. Their request for a king to save them from their enemies was therefore a rejection of how God had worked with them in the past. It was as good as saying that they were rejecting Yahweh's salvation, which is what they did when they rejected Jesus, Yehoshua, Yahweh's salvation, and instead pledged their loyalty to Caesar as their only king.

We notice that Samuel refers to himself in the third person. When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". Amos, in the same way, was told not to keep on prophesying; but he replies: "I am no prophet… the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy" (Am. 1:14,15 RV). It's almost contradictory: 'I'm not a prophet… I am a prophet'. He was truly selfless, like, John, just a voice for God. Samuel spoke of himself at a distance from himself when he told Israel: "The Lord sent Jerubbaal… and Samuel… and delivered you" (1 Sam. 12:11).

The history so far quoted has shown that Yahweh personally intervened to save His people [not a king], and that He had used the judges as leaders in order to militarily save Israel (:11), or had sent individuals like Moses to lead them (:8). All this is effectively appealing to Israel to abandon their desire for a human king, even at this late stage, and with Saul appearing such an ideal saviour and candidate. It is in fact a last minute appeal for repentance. God's desire that they abandon the plan was very strong. For this comes after the anointing of Saul, after the election of Saul by God before all Israel, and after the Divinely empowered victory over Amalek. God was leading them the way they wanted to go, and yet pleading with them to go a higher way. And so He oftentimes works with man. They repent after the thunder and hail destroy their crops- but it was the poor kind of repentance which is only mental, and still they clung on to the wrong course, in their case, desiring a human king.

The kingship treaties of the surrounding world all presented the king as the chosen, blessed representative of the god they worshipped, absolutely commended by the god. The whole account of Saul's kingship is the very opposite; Yahweh, the God of Israel, warns the people against the king He is giving them.

In assessing the character of Samson and how he judged Israel 20 years (Jud. 15:20), we must factor in 1 Sam. 12:11, a comment about Samson that commentators have generally not given due weight to: "Yahweh sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety". The context is Samuel arguing that Israel didn't need a king to deliver them from their enemies, because they had had judges like Samson who delivered them. This certainly suggests that Samson did achieve something more than a few personal scraps with the Philistines, motivated by his personal anger issues. But it's not recorded. The Philistines themselves described him as "our enemy, the destroyer of our country who has slain many of us" (Jud. 16:24). Which encourages us to think that in God's wisdom, He has intentionally chosen to just record Samson at his worst, the low points of his life. To demonstrate that a believer [as Hebrews 11 treats Samson] may have very low moments, poor motivations etc. and yet still be a believer. It's no bad exercise to mentally write a spiritual autobiography of yourself, recording only you at your lowest moments. And yet by grace through faith, you too will be saved eternally.

1Sa 12:12 When you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to reign over us', when Yahweh your God was your king-

The threat from Nahash had apparently been there for quite some time, and was not only against Jabesh but "against you". Their desire for a king was not only a rejection of Yahweh as king, it was a seeking for military deliverance from their enemies by a charismatic, powerful army leader, rather than through faith in Yahweh. They may not have worked it all out psychologically, it was all unconscious; but the truth was, they knew subconsciously that for Yahweh to deliver them, they had to trust Him and be solely obedient to Him, and quit their idols. But if they could find a strong military leader to deliver them, then they were free to continue the status quo in their religious lives.

1Sa 12:13 Now therefore, see the king whom you have chosen and whom you have asked for; Yahweh has set a king over you-

The people chose Saul. But God did. We conclude that He chose the man whom they would've chosen- handsome, the tallest man in Israel etc. He knew whom they

would've chosen, and so He chose such a person. As noted on 1 Sam. 11:4, God gave them exactly the kind of king they wanted; tall, strong, and now with a record of military deliverance behind him. God had thereby psychologically set them up to hope that the promised new king would actually bring the charismatic deliverance they expected of a secular king- and he did. This setting up of expectation was all from God. He really wanted to arrange things so that Saul had the support and respect of all Israel. And He gave them what they wanted. As Samuel stood there with Saul next to him, the tallest man in Israel who had just won a miraculous victory over their enemies- he was indeed the king they had asked for. Given in God's anger (Hos. 10:13). Saul's ultimate failure was therefore all the more culpable, because he had been set up for success- as is everyone called by God.

1Sa 12:14 If you will fear Yahweh and serve Him, listen to His voice and not rebel against the commandment of Yahweh, then it will be well with both you and the king who reigns over you-

If all Israel had been obedient to Yahweh, then Saul would have been too and all would have been well for him. If a majority are spiritually minded, this can at times and in some ways influence a potentially weaker minority; even though the reverse is more often true. And yet Saul made the people "follow him trembling" because they weren't, *en masse*, spiritually stronger than him (1 Sam. 13:7). The application to the exiles was in that they had rebelled against Yahweh's commandment, and therefore things had not gone well for them and their king had been deposed (s.w. Is. 1:20; Lam. 1:18).

The principle explained here shows for all time that God didn't set Saul up to be a failure. The prophecies about him in 1 Sam. 8 could have been voided by his obedience. But he chose not to. As with Nineveh, there is always the real possibility of changing outcomes during the gap between prophecy and fulfilment. This is why it is foolhardy to try to work out chronologies of latter day events according to Bible prophecies- because Israel's repentance can affect the nature of their fulfilment and they are not duty bound to come to pass.

We note too that the new relationship between Yahweh and His people was still based upon some kind of covenant, disobedience to which would bring judgment (:15). Still He sought some level of covenant commitment with them, even if it was a lower level of commitment from them than He desired.

1Sa 12:15 But if you will not listen to the voice of Yahweh but rebel against the commandment of Yahweh, then the hand of Yahweh will be against you, as it was against your fathers-

This point is being made in the context of warning them of the dangers of having a king. They were to be aware that humans are like sheep, and tend to go where they are led. By having a human king, they would be more likely to follow him rather than obeying the voice of Yahweh. In some contexts it is true that the stronger and more charismatic the human leader, the harder it is for the flock to have a personal relationship with Yahweh.

1Sa 12:16 Now therefore stand still and see this great thing which Yahweh will do before your eyes-

To "stand still and see" was the language of the invitation to behold the miracle of the salvation at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13, cp. 2 Chron. 20:17). And again, thunder and water were involved. But it was here an invitation to see their material blessings

destroyed, after the pattern of the plague of hail destroying the harvest of the Egyptians. But through that judgment, salvation was intended to come in that it would elicit their repentance. So "stand still and see" still has a salvation context.

1Sa 12:17 Isn't it wheat harvest today? I will call to Yahweh to send thunder and rain, and you shall know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the eyes of Yahweh, in asking for a king-
This recalls the plague of thunder and hail upon Egypt which destroyed their harvest. The language of calling to Yahweh also recalls Moses in Egypt. They had acted as Egypt, who were led to destruction through their king; and so they were punished likewise.

1Sa 12:18 So Samuel called to Yahweh, and Yahweh sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared Yahweh and Samuel-
To fear Yahweh is parallel here with knowing and seeing the greatness of their sin (:17). And yet such is the perversity of human nature that despite perceiving their sin, there was no change of plan. And in fairness, it seems God had chosen to give them their request, and had set things up for Saul already by this point. We can imagine the people being angry with Samuel for destroying their harvest by his prayers, but they "feared" him, perceiving the connection between Yahweh and Samuel.

1Sa 12:19 All the people said to Samuel, Pray for your servants to Yahweh your God that we do not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for a king-
They feared death from the hail, it was so strong. Again we note that they ask Samuel to pray for them not to die, rather than directly praying to Yahweh themselves and repenting to him. Humanity shies away from the wonder of direct personal relationship with God. Many today prefer to hide at the bottom of a huge supposed hierarchy of priests, bishops, denominational membership etc.- rather than accept direct personal relationship with God. Just as God wished to speak directly to Israel, but they ran away from Him and wanted Moses instead to report to them what God had said. See on 1 Sam. 12:6.

We see here how repentance has different levels. We expect them at this point to say something to the effect: 'And because we have sinned, we hereby ask that Saul not be our king, but just our military leader, our general; and we will go back to how things were before, we will "renew / rebuild the kingship of Yahweh over us as we were asked to in 1 Sam. 11:14". But there is none of that. Samuel however assures them that he will pray for them, and they should be careful to remain in covenant with Yahweh. We too face the reality of different qualities of confession, remorse and repentance in our own lives, and in those of others. Especially in family and church life. We are incapable of sifting through levels of remorse and repentance; our duty is to forgive. We see here how their rather low level of repentance, although sincere enough, was accepted. They could remain within covenant relationship with God even with that. But they were urged to remain in that covenant relationship. We likewise may choose to remain in relationship with those whose repentance or remorse appears shallow, and who remain in the grip of the wrong decisions they have taken because they aren't strong enough to retract them or totally quit them.

1Sa 12:20 Samuel said to the people, Don't be afraid. You have indeed done all this evil, yet don't turn aside from following Yahweh, but serve Yahweh with all your heart-

This is Samuel's response to their request that he pray for them and save their lives. He agrees (:23), showing the degree to which prayer for others can indeed save them; but not before warning them that they are not to think that his prayer for them releases them from personal spiritual obligation. The people were very prone to dump their spiritual responsibilities upon others, and this was all part of the reason why it were better for them not to have a king.

Serving God with the complete heart precludes turning aside to idols (:21). We have no mental space for them. If we don't serve God whole-heartedly, we will serve the idols of this present age. There's no third road.

As discussed on :14, there was no inevitability about the prophecies concerning Saul in 1 Sam. 8. They did not have to come to pass. Just as after his rejection as king, Saul could still have been saved- so after Israel's rejection of God as King, they could still be His people and serve Him with all their hearts. God so respects human freedom that He doesn't tell them to the effect 'Well if you are indeed penitent, then drop your idea of having a human king'. He accepts that having a human king is still their heart position, and seeks to still work with them and have them as His people. This is such a far cry from simplistic church judgments against 'sinners' and demanding quantifiable signs of repentance.

1Sa 12:21 Don't turn aside to go after vain things which can't profit or save you, for they are vain-

Only God can save [AV "deliver"]. The Israelites were looking for a king to deliver them, and they are being warned that only Yahweh can save / deliver, as He had done through the saviours raised at the time of the Judges. No king can deliver / save of himself, and to believe this was another form of idolatry. The idols are described repeatedly as vain and foolish- words which are so true of the spirit of our age today. Dt. 32:15–24 describes just how angry God gets when His people give their devotions to these things: Israel "scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know ... that your fathers did not fear... and He (God) said: 'I will hide My face from them... for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith. They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; they have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols... I will heap disasters upon them". Is. 65:3 LXX is just as clear: "[Israel] burn incense on bricks to demons, *which exist not*". The idols of the nations, representing as they did the supposed 'demons' of the cosmos, were "vanity" because what the demons and gods they supposedly represented did not exist – they are "beings that are nothing" (1 Sam. 12:21 LXX), "a thing of nought" (Jer. 14:4). Their equivalent in our age is to fill the mind with things of nothing.

The lesson for the exiles was not to look to nations or idols which also could "not profit" (s.w. Is. 30:5; 44:9,10; Jer. 2:8,11 etc.).

1Sa 12:22 Yahweh will not forsake His people-

God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel if they forsook Him; and they had (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). God will only not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). But Samuel assures them the paradoxically, Yahweh will not forsake them- because of His grace and desire to as it were will through His plan of salvation.

For the sake of His great name, because it has pleased Yahweh to make you His own people-
Samuel assures them that God's amazing grace to His people is part of His essential character which is "His great Name".

1Sa 12:23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against Yahweh in ceasing to pray for you; I will instruct you in the good and the right way-
Samuel said that to cease to pray for sinful Israel would be to sin against the Yahweh. The need is in itself the call to prayer. To not pray for people is a sin- one of the easiest sins of omission to commit. And our sins against those sinful people we omit to care for are sins against Yahweh. He watches very carefully our attitudes to hopeless sinners- because we ourselves are in that same category before Him.

1Sa 12:24 Only fear Yahweh and serve Him in truth with all your heart; consider what great things He has done for you-
The great things Samuel has just listed in their history all involved the greatness of God's grace in saving His sinful people, as discussed on :7. These "great things" were the "righteous acts" of :7, the paradoxical, fathomless grace of :22. Yahweh's greatness is supremely shown in the way He saves sinners and continues working with them when they are unworthy and of minimal response to His grace. Indeed this is what the history of God's encounter with man is all about.

1Sa 12:25 But if you still do wickedly you will be consumed, both you and your king-
In the face of so much Divine activity to save them, they would be destroyed if they continued to work against God's efforts to save them. And indeed Saul and Israel were "consumed" together in the massacre by the Philistines (s.w. 1 Sam. 26:10). It was because despite all God's efforts with them, they had continued to "do wickedly". "Your king" may be to contrast with Saul being called Yahweh's anointed in :3,5. If they sinned, and Saul refused to act as Yahweh's anointed, then he would simply become again "your king", the man they wanted. As with several Old Testament characters, Saul could have been Yahweh's anointed and was set up to be that. But he and Israel failed to be and want His Christ. And this came to its full term in their rejection of His Son as the Christ / anointed.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 13

1Sa 13:1 Saul reigned a year, and when he had reigned two years over Israel-
This may be some idiom now hard to understand, perhaps meaning 'when his reign was established'; some versions of LXX omit the verse. Or remembering that the chapter breaks are artificial and not inspired, it could be that the events of chapter 12 are within the first year of his reign and what we now read is in the second year. If Saul reigned forty years (Acts 13:21) but was rejected in the second year of his reign, then his reign would have been miserable indeed, the majority of it spent knowing he had been rejected. However the 40 year reigning period may need to be interpreted some other way, for his son Jonathan appears to already be an adult at this time (:2). I suggest that this is an idiom or metaphor here, which we may not currently be able to decode. Paul speaks of Saul reigning 40 years having just spoken of the 40 years wandering, which is also not an exact figure as they wandered 38 years. Saul, David and Solomon are all recorded as reigning 40 years, and we wonder whether this isn't a literary device rather than a literal figure.

1Sa 13:2 Saul chose three thousand men of Israel, of which two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the Mount of Bethel, and one thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin, and the rest of the people he sent back to their tents-
This continues Saul's imitation of Gideon, sending potential soldiers back home because he believed God could save by many or by few. Saul was trying to imitate Gideon (see too 1 Sam. 13:2), and likewise when he prohibited the men to eat anything while they were pursuing the Philistines (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5). And yet it was Gideon who refused the request of Israel to make him king; Saul's modelling upon Gideon was only superficial. As in 1 Sam. 11:11, he seems to have split the troops into three groups of 1000 each, again imitating Gideon. His aim was to use them to attack the Philistine garrisons in Gibeah, Michmash and Bethel.

It seems the 2000 and 1000 were some kind of permanent force under the command of Saul and Jonathan. Jonathan must have been very young at this time, if indeed Saul reigned 40 years (Acts 13:21); although I suspect the reference to 40 years is symbolic. Paul says it to make a similarity with the 40 years in the wilderness he has just spoken about. The reigns of Saul, David and Jonathan were all 40 years, so this may be an example of where Semitic languages use numbers and periods in a non literal sense.

1Sa 13:3 Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear!-
"The garrison" could be "the governor", suggesting Jonathan assassinated him. If Geba is the same as Gibea, the home of Saul and Jonathan, this would make sense. "Hebrew" is literally 'one who has passed over'; he may have in view the Israelites who were on the other side of the Jordan river. Having attempted to follow Gideon's example of not needing many men (see on :2), he now is desperate for every Israelite he can get; his faith didn't hold up. Despite Jonathan's victory it seems Saul himself didn't bring deliverance from the Philistines, for by the time of the conflict with Goliath the Hebrews were under severe threat from them. So Saul's early promise of being a military deliverer just didn't come true. His failure to live up to his potential as a king and military leader led to his depression and jealousy complexes. If he had humbly accepted he was not the man best fit to be king, and just lived a quiet life with the Lord after his rejection as king, then he would still have been saved.

1Sa 13:4 All Israel heard that Saul had attacked the garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were gathered together to Saul in Gilgal-

I suggest the sense of "All Israel heard..." runs on from :3. Saul asked all Israel to "hear" when he blew the trumpet. But they were to "hear say" that he had slain the Philistine garrison. When it was Jonathan who had done so. He clearly was seeking to present himself as the deliverer from the Philistines, which is what Israel expected from their king. We see too the seeds of jealousy which would twice lead him to try to kill his own son Jonathan.

As noted on :2,3, Saul's imitation of Gideon by sending soldiers home was merely surface level spirituality. Now he wanted every soldier he could get. We note that Saul was given credit in the publicity material [as it were] for the attack, when it was Jonathan who did it. We therefore see pride creeping in to Saul. See on :17. Saul

was potentially enabled to free Israel from the Philistines, but he failed to have the personal faith required. The main victories against them were by Jonathan and David. And this explains his great jealousy against them both, even planning to slay Jonathan at least twice (1 Sam. 14:39; 20:33).

1Sa 13:5 The Philistines assembled themselves to fight with Israel: thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen and people as numerous as the sand which is on the seashore, and they came up and encamped in Michmash, east of Beth Aven-
See on 1 Sam. 14:28,31. As often noted, "thousand" doesn't mean necessarily a literal 1000, but can refer to families or military regiments. Otherwise in this case the proportion of horsemen and chariots is wrong. It was Israel who were to be as the sand on the seashore, but the Philistines were a quasi Israel.

1Sa 13:6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in great peril and the people were distressed, they hid themselves in caves, thickets, rocks, coverts and in pits-
This is alluded to in Heb. 11:38, implying amongst these people who hid were those with faith. And the context of Heb. 11 is faith in the things of the Kingdom and Messiah Jesus. They believed that although they were now in free fall before their enemies, the day of Israel's Kingdom and true saviour Messiah would one day come. To flee is not necessarily a lack of faith (Mt. 10:23).

1Sa 13:7 Now some of the Hebrews had gone over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead, but Saul was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling-
Israelites persecuted for their faithlessness crossed the Jordan into the territory of Gad (1 Sam. 13:7). This is fair commentary upon the situation in Josh. 22:19,25, where the Israelites accused Gad of falling away from Yahweh worship, and the people of Gad explained that they feared that the other Israelites would make the Jordan a boundary which they would use to exclude them from Yahweh worship. All these fears and speculations about the future are here shown to be inappropriate. Actually the very opposite worked out. And this is the problem with so many divisions between brethren; they are based upon fears of possible futures, and the passage of time often shows the opposite working out. See on 1 Sam. 14:16.

1Sa 13:8 He waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel, but Samuel didn't come to Gilgal-
This refers to the command of 1 Sam. 10:8. All the other signs and commands had been fulfilled by Saul, but this one required patience and the need to remember it. Perhaps he assumed that because he had kept all the other commands at that time, this one needn't be obeyed. It's as if obedience to all those commands given in 1 Sam. 10 was required to make his kingship valid. And yet it seems rather a "one strike and your out" mentality to remove the future kingship from him for this one failure. The reasons for rejection were because of Saul's heart. There was nothing wrong with Saul offering the sacrifice. He had earlier been given the "thigh and what went with it" when first anointed by Samuel as king (1 Sam. 9:23,24). This was what was to be given to the priests (Ex. 29:27; Lev. 7:32-34; 10:14,15; Num. 6:20; 18:18). Saul was set up to be a king-priest. But God had been searching for a man after His heart. Saul had God's heart in the matter of rescuing Jabesh, but not in anything else. So Saul's rejection from the kingship was not because of a technical disobedience, but because his heart was not right. Another alternative is that in his opening training when first called to the kingship, Saul had been trained to wait until Samuel came and made the offerings (1 Sam. 10:8). And he obeyed. Now the lesson learned is repeated- and he

fails. We have similar things in our lives. There are similarities of circumstance not only within our lives, but between our lives and those of others. Thus as Samuel tarried longer than Saul expected, so Amasa "tarried longer than the set time which [David] had appointed him" (2 Sam. 20:5). Circumstances repeat within our lives and between our lives and those of others in Biblical history; that we might learn the lessons and take comfort from the scriptures, that man is not alone.

"The time set" can refer to a feast, but also simply to a festival arranged by Samuel for the making of peace offerings. Samuel was not a Levite, and the gatherings for the peace offerings were therefore not necessarily to keep Mosaic legislation.

And the people were scattered from him-
They were no longer following him trembling (:7), but were scattered from him.

1Sa 13:9 Saul said, Bring here the burnt offering to me, and the peace offerings. He offered the burnt offering-
Saul was not wrong to offer the offerings because he wasn't a Levite. For neither was Samuel, and David wasn't either and yet made such offerings (2 Sam. 24:25). The point is that he wasn't obedient to Samuel's inspired words, and was likely not qualified to make the offerings as he was not at peace with God.

Are we going to be like those Israelites who offered a peace offering, when actually they were not at peace with God at all (1 Sam. 13:9; 2 Kings 16:13; Prov. 7:14; Am. 5:22)? Are we going to be like Israel, who offered peace offerings, and then rose up from their tables to worship idols and indulge their flesh (Ex. 32:5,6)? These are challenges especially appropriate to the breaking of bread meeting, which is a kind of new covenant equivalent for the peace offering.

We need to be aware how kingship was understood at that time in both Canaan and the surrounding area. The king was seen as a king-priest, his absolute authority meant that he was both a political and religious leader. God's style was different. Samuel continued as priest, and Saul was intended to be the political leader who could unite Israel according to their desire for a king, and then lead them to military victory. But they also wanted a king "like the nations" around them. And Saul's understanding of kingship was likewise influenced by the surrounding, worldly view of kingship. It was this which led him to sin by assuming the priestly office and thus considering Samuel unnecessary.

1Sa 13:10 As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering Samuel came, and Saul went out to meet him, to greet him-
The idea seems to have been that the war of independence against the Philistines was to be begun by sacrifice and establishing peace with God first. But Saul didn't see the importance of this and impatiently wanted to get on with the campaign, without waiting for Samuel to pronounce God's blessing upon it. Saul wanted to push through the sacrifices as mere ritual, trusting in his own strength for the looming war. This was what was so displeasing to God; the issue was not that Saul wasn't a Levite. For neither was Samuel. He was judged for these things apparently harshly, losing the kingship because of it. But his actions which are condemned reflected deeper bad attitudes. We too have surely been guilty of over hasty prayer, dashing into enterprises in our own strength and with prayer and spiritual devotion effectively relegated to a mere formalism, assuming that time is of the essence rather than spiritual devotion. Circumstances repeated to give him another chance to learn the same lesson (1 Sam. 14:10), but he failed again.

It seems that Saul was about to offer the peace offering after having offered the burnt offering, but then Samuel arrived. And he never got to offer the peace offering. The burnt offering represented dedication to God, and always preceded the peace offering in the Mosaic legislation. Peace with God could only be celebrated after offering total devotion to Him. And Saul it seems was stopped from making the peace offering, because he was not at peace with God.

1Sa 13:11 Samuel said, What have you done?-
Surely said to recall the situation in Eden when God questioned Adam and Eve, who had been established by Him as the rulers of His Kingdom as it then was (s.w. Gen. 3:13; 4:10). And there is a similar initial attempt to deny any wrongdoing. See on :43. Saul repeats these words to Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14. It's a psychological classic- putting his own condemnation upon another, and transferring his punishment onto an innocent person whom he had set up to take that punishment.

Saul said, When I saw that the people were scattered from me and that you didn't come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines assembled at Michmash-
Saul says the truth, to an extent. His trembling followers were deserting by the hour (:7,8) and the Philistines were only ten miles away. He needed to go ahead as quickly as possible instead of waiting for Samuel's religiosity. He gave in to the common human feeling, that religion is fine but we have to get on and live our secular lives as secular people. And he was severely judged for this attitude, as a warning to us all. And as noted on :16, his fears and perceived need to act quickly were in fact misplaced.

The people were scattering away from Saul, and he gives that as the reason for his disobedience. We may consider that rejection from kingship because of offering sacrifice was rather extreme and legalistic. I suggest that the essential reason for his rejection was that he had failed to lead Israel. They were scattering away from him; he had failed to inspire them spiritually to remain and fight in faith. I suggest on 1 Sam. 15:24 that this was the same reason why he was rejected from being king then. He was failing to be a true King for them.

In :2, Saul had sent some of his men home in imitation of Gideon. But now his remaining men start to leave him. Gideon's forces were twice reduced by God. But now Saul faces the second reduction, he goes into crisis mode and his faith fails. His imitation of Gideon had been of a surface nature. He had not really accepted the principle that God can save by many or by few.

1Sa 13:12 I thought 'Now the Philistines will come down on me to Gilgal, and I haven't entreated the favour of Yahweh'. I forced myself therefore, and offered the burnt offering-
Saul passes off his inattention to spiritual things and treating the offerings as mere rituals by saying that in fact he wanted to ask Yahweh's favour. Saul had been commanded to wait for Samuel. That was the commandment he disobeyed (:13). "Forced myself" is always elsewhere translated "restrained myself". But the opposite was the case. He had no restrained himself and waited for Samuel. Yet Saul implies he had been tempted to dash into battle without seeking Yahweh's favour, but he restrained himself. We have a chilling insight here into mentality and self justification which we have surely all had at times. And it cost Saul the Kingdom.

"Said I" [NEV "I thought"] is Saul's self talk. We have a lot of information about his self talk. Later he says, clearly within his heart, that his daughter will be a snare to

David, the Philistines will kill David etc. This is there to show that he was not a man after God's heart.

Saul argues he could not make any supplication to God without sacrifice. But he could have just prayed. He has the same misconception as Eli, who thought prayer could not be offered privately. Saul says he refrained himself to offer sacrifice, as if it had been an act of self control. When in fact it was his impatience and lack of trust in God which led him to do it, along with his fear that if he delayed more, his men would leave him. Samuel's delay was therefore to test what was in his heart. Would he personally pray and go to war? Would he delay further, losing more of his men as he did so, trusting God could save by many or few? His response showed his heart and this was what God was looking at.

Samuel's telling Saul of his rejection by God was similar to how he had had to tell Eli the same, including that he was to be replaced by another. One experience, even in childhood, prepared him for another similar one.

1Sa 13:13 Samuel said to Saul, You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of Yahweh your God which He commanded you- Saul later admits he has "done foolishly"; but David uses the same term about himself several times, e.g. when he numbered Israel. He thereby shows that he doesn't consider himself essentially better than Saul; he rather sees himself as the one who believed in God's grace whereas Saul proudly believed only in himself.

Saul had been commanded to wait for Samuel. That was the commandment he disobeyed. David felt preserved by God from Saul and his other enemies (1 Sam. 30:23; 2 Sam. 22:44), because he had preserved or obeyed [s.w.] God's ways (2 Sam. 22:22,24; Ps. 18:21,23); whereas Saul didn't obey / preserve them and was destroyed (1 Sam. 13:13,14; 1 Chron. 10:13). Hence Ps. 145:20: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy".

We enquire why Samuel appears to judge Saul so harshly for this. It's true that Saul shouldn't have offered the sacrifices without a priest; yet David offered exactly the same types of offerings likewise, e.g. in 2 Sam. 24, and is accepted for doing so. And surely it counts positively that Saul even wanted to offer them? Whilst Saul was not set up to fall, it seems this hard judgment of him was because God knew that in his heart he was far from God and had not retained the major outpouring of the Spirit which he had received. And so he is told that he would be replaced by a man who had God's heart (:14), because he had shown here that he didn't have a Godly heart.

For now Yahweh would have established your kingdom in Israel forever- God had set up Saul with the chance of success, and even of becoming the Messianic king with an eternal kingdom. See on 1 Sam. 11:1. We see here the various possible futures which God is aware of and has set up. This makes us appreciate more the huge significance of human freewill decisions. They open up various pathways and destinies which God has enabled. Saul chose not to go this pathway towards the eternal Kingdom, and so there kicked into operation the pathway to destruction which Israel had been warned of when he first became king. But God's foreknowledge in no way made it inevitable that Saul go down that path.

This may not be removing Saul from kingship, but simply saying that his descendants would not be king. He would not be the father of a royal dynasty. The personal removal of kingship would come in 1 Sam. 15. Saul's later argument with

Jonathan that Jonathan might not become king is therefore a disbelief of this judgement. Jonathan's comment to David that David would be king and he would be next to him... reflects his faith in this judgement.

1Sa 13:14 But now your kingdom shall not continue-
Perhaps it was God's plan to immediately remove the kingship from Saul, but in practice He yet further delayed it in the hope of Saul's more meaningful repentance.

Yahweh has sought for Himself-
God was and is in search of man, looking at human hearts. God's search for man is a repeated theme of the prophets. "Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, I saw your fathers" (Hos. 9:10). "He found him in a desert land… He encircled him, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of his eye" (Dt. 32:10). "I have found David my servant" (Ps. 89:20). "I said, Here am I, here am I… I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people… I called, no one answered" (Is. 50:2; 65:1,2; 66:4). Jeremiah speaks of running to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, searching her squares on God's behalf, to see if he could find a single man who did justice and wasn't greedy (Jer. 5:1,5; 6:6,13; 8:10). God looked, and was deeply shocked that He found no man: "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His own arm brought salvation" (Is. 59:16). It's not simply so that men search for God and then find Him in Truth. He is in search for man. So it's not us as it were reaching out to God; He is fervently reaching out to us, and we have to come to realize that. We don't so much as find God, as realize that He already is earnestly with us. This explains how wonderful is the moment when both sides meet; all heaven rejoices when the woman finds her lost coin, or the shepherd His sheep. As the Yiddish proverb says, "And going out to find Him, I met Him coming towards me".

The Hebrew for "seek" is that for "require". The requirement was that God's king would have God's heart and go the way of His will. The same Hebrew term is used for how Saul sought the man David, firstly when seeking a man to calm his mania, and then seeking the man David to slay him (1 Sam. 16:16; 25:29 and so often). Saul was surely being nudged to perceive that the man he was seeking was in fact the man God had been seeking to replace him. Jer. 5 speaks of God searching for those who are searching for "truth" with Him, and David so often speaks of searching for God in his psalms. But Saul was searching for David, for donkeys... God had given Saul a new heart (1 Sam. 10:9) but now his heart is found deficient. He had failed to retain the spirit / heart that he had been given. Just as men receive the Spirit at baptism, but fail to retain it or be re-filled with it. God is still in search of hearts / minds that are after Him, that want to do His will. We are to let the mind of Jesus be in us, to beg God to create in us a new heart, to feed that mind, to work together with God to form it.

We may well enquire why God would as it were be bothered to remove Saul, and find a good replacement in David. His reaction to Israel's insistence on having a king was to tell them what a bad man he would be, and how they would beg for him to be removed. God could have adopted the approach that "You chose the bed, so you must lay on it". But once Saul is being a bad king, God starts looking for a good man to replace him. We again marvel at how God changes because of His compassion.

Samuel surely would have thought of the curse upon Eli in 1 Sam. 2:35 "I will raise Me up a faithful priest who shall do according to that which is in My heart and in My mind". Surely this was to be him, Samuel? As discussed earlier, Samuel was surely

the ideal candidate. But to save him from pride, he was to be the kingmaker rather than the king. God's search for a long and a priest with His mind only came to full term in the Lord Jesus, who came to do God's will having His law in his heart (Ps. 40:8). We too are to aspire to this, doing the will of God from or in our hearts (Eph. 6:6). We may too quickly assume that the man after God's own heart was David. God indeed "tried" with David as He did with Saul. But His search for such a man to be king was only finally met in the Lord Jesus. This would make better sense of our inevitable feeling that David was not totally after God's own heart- no man apart from the Lord has been.

A man after His own heart-

"After" can mean "in pursuit of" as in "the police are after him" and "the miner went after gold". David's heart wasn't totally as God's, but it was his desire for this that Yahweh so loved.

David had been chosen to replace Saul because David was a man after God's own heart. But this didn't lift David up with pride. He realizes that the kingship would be nothing but grace (Ps. 119:76,77) and tender mercy toward him. We can also reflect that being after God's own heart didn't mean he was perfect; for Ps. 119 contains many verses where David at this time of scrutiny by God admits to sin and longs to be more spiritually minded. But we too can be after God's heart without being perfect; He looks at the overall desires of a person rather than actual achievement.

On the other hand, this high estimation led to David subsequently being over confident as to the state of his heart (e.g. Ps. 26:2). David was confident not only of legalistic obedience but also of a heart in which God would find nothing wrong. Indeed David had been considered a man after God's own heart, but it seems this led David to assume that from then on, his heart would be always found perfect before God. He didn't remain the idealistic, spiritually minded shepherd boy. And this assumption that how he was at one point in his life was how he would always be... led him into his sin with Bathsheba.

Spiritual mindedness is the seal of the Spirit, the guarantee that we will eternally be there with Christ in His Kingdom; for having "Christ in you" is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). To bring every thought into captivity to Christ; to be able to say with Paul "but we have the mind of Christ". But I think that Paul got there (in the end), and like me you've probably met even a few in your ecclesial experience who apparently 'got there' by the end of their days – who had "the mind of Christ", and whom we laid to rest in sleep knowing that truly, "I knew a [wo]man in Christ". For all his failure and dysfunction, David is given the amazing accolade – 'a man after God's own heart' (Acts 13:22). And remember, this was God's very own estimation of David. We really can be 'after God's own heart / mind'. We must not think that human nature of itself precludes this; for it didn't stop David coming to this point. May we find true fellowship with each other as we walk towards that same goal, knowing that "we all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (Jesus), are (being, slowly) transformed into the same image, from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

It's worth remembering that at the point he was told that another person was to replace him, Saul didn't know David. He may well have assumed that the person in view as a replacement was in fact his son Jonathan. This would explain the tensions between Saul and Jonathan.

And Yahweh has appointed him to be prince over His people, because you have not kept what Yahweh commanded you-

The fact God allowed Saul to continue ruling may mean that even this change of

purpose with Saul was open ended, and could still be changed if he repented. For David had not yet been anointed.

1Sa 13:15 Samuel arose and went from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men-
Decreased from the 1000 in each brigade of :2. Some would have deserted or fled over the Jordan (:7), others were slain. We note Samuel's continued involvement in things. For indeed Saul had been raised up by God with the potential ability to free Israel from the Philistines.

1Sa 13:16 Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash-
Saul had justified his offering because he considered that time was of the essence in attacking the Philistines. But in fact it seems he didn't do so. And it was to be Jonathan acting alone who gained the victory and not himself. Saul was therefore dominated by thoughts of how the situation required him to act, and quickly; rather than waiting in faith, and then he would have realized that neither his action nor immediacy of action were actually required.

1Sa 13:17 Raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned towards Ophrah in the land of Shual-
This left the camp depleted, opening up the camp to Jonathan's attack. This raises the question as to whether acts of faith require us to all the same act wisely. Ophrah was the home of Gideon (Jud. 8:27), whom Saul was imitating at least on a surface level (see on :2-4). Perhaps the Philistines were aware of this and sought to reverse his "three companies" strategy in imitation of Gideon by sending out their marauders in three companies.

1Sa 13:18 another company turned towards Beth Horon, and another company turned towards the border land overlooking the valley of Zeboim facing the wilderness-
There seemed a particular emphasis upon the territory of Benjamin, as if the Philistines were punishing them for having a member of their tribe become king. This would have taught the people the folly of what they had done. And it thereby created pressure upon Saul to defeat the Philistines. The fact he personally didn't win the dramatic victories against them [Jonathan and David did] all contributed towards his failure and depression.

1Sa 13:19 Now there was no smith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears-
The Babylonians did the same to the Jews in the time of Nebuchadnezzar; they took captive all the metalworkers so they couldn't make weapons (2 Kings 24:14; Jer. 24:1; 29:2). Again, we see evidence that the choice of events to record is in order to help the exiles see that their situation was not unique and was not without historical precedent.

1Sa 13:20 All the Israelites went down to the Philistines to have their ploughshares, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened-
"Went down" suggests a reversal of the situation at the conquest of the land, where the local inhabitants remained in the mountains and Israel in the lowlands.

1Sa 13:21 The price was two thirds of a shekel to sharpen a mattock and a ploughshare, and one third for the forks and axes, and to set the goads-
We may well ask why such detail is given. The amount of detail given in the Biblical record varies enormously. It can be likened to a cameraman zooming in and out; and here the zoom is very much on the fine details, the goads being "set", and coins being handed over. The prices were high, that may be the idea- with the implication that the Israelites were impoverished and unable to afford much agricultural technology, and therefore enduring a hard life under Saul's reign. This all sets up David for mass popularity after he led Israel to victory against the Philistines.

1Sa 13:22 So on the day of battle no soldier had either sword or spear among the people who were with Saul and Jonathan; only Saul and Jonathan his son had swords and spears-
The result of this was that the Israelites became skilled in the use of slings and bows. It was this which resulted in David being an expert slinger and able to slay Goliath. If they had had access to swords, then the logical thing would have been to try to fight Goliath with sword and spear. But there was no expertise in the use of these weapons. And so we see how providence works out. Because of their oppressed situation, David became a skilled slinger- and slew Goliath.

1Sa 13:23 The garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash-
"When the Philistines heard that Saul with his six hundred men had joined the small force already at Geba with Jonathan, they sent a body of men to occupy an eminence higher up in the defile which lay between Geba and Michmash. The purpose of this was to keep the route open, that so, when they pleased, they might send a larger body of troops up the defile in order to attack Saul. It would also keep a watch upon his movements, though they could have had no expectation that he would venture to attack them. It was this garrison which Jonathan so bravely attacked, and by his success prepared the way for the utter defeat of the enemy".

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 14

1Sa 14:1 One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armour, Come, let us go over to the Philistines' garrison on the other side-
A fair case can be made for thinking that this young armourbearer was David. We marvel at Jonathan's initiative and spiritual ambition.
But he didn't tell his father-
It seems Saul was deeply aware that he had not delivered Israel from the Philistines because he hadn't the faith to do so; and so he was deeply spiritually jealous of Jonathan and later David. It's worth remembering that at the point he was told that another person was to replace him (1 Sam. 13:15), Saul didn't know David. He may well have assumed that the person in view as a replacement was in fact his son Jonathan. This would explain the tensions between Saul and Jonathan, and why Jonathan didn't tell Saul of his plans. For Saul had taken credit for Jonathan's previous victory (see on 1 Sam. 13:4).

1Sa 14:2 Saul stayed on the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron; the people who were with him were about six hundred men-

"Pomegranate tree" is "Rimmon" and could possibly refer to a place name. Saul no longer had two groups of 1000 under his direct control (1 Sam. 13:2).

1Sa 14:3 Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of Yahweh in Shiloh was there, wearing an ephod. The people didn't know that Jonathan had gone-
Yet Eli's family had been cursed in 1 Sam. 2,3. It could be that this person in later life experienced the curses. But it would be far from the only time in Bible history where a curse is pronounced but not carried out. There is a gap between Yahweh's prophetic pronouncements, and their fulfillment. And in that gap there is the possibility for repentance. In 40 days, Nineveh was to be destroyed; but it didn't happen, because they repented. This is what gives intensity to our prayers and repentance, knowing we too live in such a gap. This Ahijah could be the Ahimelech of 1 Sam. 21:1.

1Sa 14:4 On each side of the pass by which Jonathan intended to go over to the Philistines' garrison there was a rocky crag; one was called Bozez and the other Seneh-
Literally, a tooth of rock. To climb it with enemies at the top would have seemed a mad idea. "Bozez" can also mean "slippery", again presenting the impression that to abseil it with enemies above and watching was almost suicidal. But Heb. 11:34 clearly sees what they did as "by faith".

1Sa 14:5 The one crag was on the north in front of Michmash and the other on the south in front of Geba-
Bozez was the northern crag, and Seneh the southern one. "Was on" is literally 'was set as a pillar'. We get the impression of needing to make an almost perpendicular, vertical assent of sheer rock.

1Sa 14:6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armour, Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised people-
The implication was that because they were circumcised, they were in covenant with God; and therefore He was able to use them. Covenant relationship involves far more than circumcision, but clearly Jonathan felt in covenant with God, at a time when many in Israel were clearly not. He believed that for those in covenant, one man could make a thousand flee. And this is what indeed happened. Even though Israel were probably generally not in covenant with God and had effectively rejected that covenant by insisting on a human king, the blessing of covenant relationship could still apply to individuals. And so it is today for those who feel they live in the midst of an apostate church.

Perhaps Yahweh will work for us, for nothing can hinder Yahweh from saving, by many or by few-
The idea of the Hebrew underlying "Perhaps..." is rather that surely, Yahweh will do so. We note that Jonathan's motivation was to save- to save others. There was no desire merely for personal glory nor settling perceived old scores.

1 Sam. 30:21 LXX says that in his fight with the Amalekites, David "had caused them [the 200 weaker of his soldiers] to remain by the brook of Bosor". This would mean that the decision to leave them was David's and not theirs. He had learned the lesson of Gideon, and knew he didn't need numbers for victory. It was the lesson of his friend Jonathan's victory, that the Lord could save by many or by few (1 Sam.

14:6). We may learn a lesson [and David may have been Jonathan's companion at that time], and then find our grasp of it tested again, decades later.

"Hinder" or 'restrain' [as in restraining the clouds from raining, or a woman's womb from pregnancy] is the same word used [unusually and rather strangely] in 1 Sam. 9:17 of how Saul would "reign over" the people. He would restrain them. But Yahweh is not restrained. As the Lord was to later teach, if we can believe, anything is possible; it's not the case that "If You can do anything, please do". Rather is it that we limit what God will do by our own faith level. The unrestrained nature of Yahweh, His boundless possibility, should inspire our faith as it inspired Jonathan.

1Sa 14:7 His armour bearer said to him, Do all that you have in mind; I am with you according to your heart-

This is a colloquial expression and is therefore hard to translate. We really are reading the actual words said by this brave young man in response to Jonathan's spiritual ambition. The idea is "On with you; I will follow". "According to your heart" is the same Hebrew as we have recently encountered in 1 Sam. 13:14- Yahweh sought a man "after his own heart". At one with Him. It's as if we are given now an example of what that means. If indeed the armour bearer was David, he was both after God's heart and after Jonathan's heart- which implies Jonathan's heart in this matter was God's heart.

Ps. 35:2,3 presents God as our armour bearer- if we do His will. He carries our shield and draws out and gives us the spear or weapon we need in whatever conflict, 'With us wherever we go'. Armour bearers were seen as totally loyal- as Jonathan's was to him, and as Saul's was to him. We are therefore given the impression of God's total loyalty to us wherever we go on our initiative in His service. Jonathan took amazing initiative here. He was alone before God, neither the people (:3) nor his father knew what he was doing. Such is the spirit of all God's true children- we think of Nehemiah looking around the ruins of Jerusalem at night, alone. Relationship with God is about individual initiative and enterprise, no matter how tiny and low level- and He is so eager to be our armourbearer in it.

It seems that the armourbearer was David. He and Jonathan grew up only 10 miles away from each (Jonathan in Gibeah of Saul, David in Bethlehem). In the early Israel of those days, it is almost certain that they knew each other from their youth. So it is possible to speculate that David was in fact "the young man that bare (Jonathan's) armour" in the heroic conquest of the Philistine garrison in 1 Sam. 14. Note how Saul also calls him "young man" in 1 Sam. 17:58. There was evidently an intense spiritual and physical rapport between Jonathan and his armour bearer which was similar to that described between Jonathan and David. "I am with thee according to thy heart" (14:7 AV) has firm connection with David and Jonathan being described as having their souls knit together in 1 Sam. 18:1. The record of David's battle with the Philistines in 2 Sam. 5:17-24 has certain similarities with the exploits of 1 Sam. 14:8-11; as if, years later, David replicated his early adventure of faith. David already had a reputation in Israel for being "a mighty valiant man, and a man of war... and the Lord is with him" (1 Sam. 16:18), even before the Goliath incident. This would be understandable if he had gone with Jonathan in chapter 14. His becoming *Saul's* armourbearer (1 Sam. 16:21) would then be seen as a logical promotion from being Jonathan's armourbearer.

1Sa 14:8 *Then Jonathan said, We will cross over to them and let them see us-*

"See us" is the word for denuding, also translated "exile". The exiles were encouraged

that what seemed impossible could be achieved.

1Sa 14:9 If they say 'Wait until we come to you!', then we will stay where we are and will not go up to them-
This seeking for a sign connects with Gideon's similar desire before going into battle. There are clear connections between Jonathan and Gideon; compare 1 Sam. 14:10-20 with Jud. 7:3,10,11,14,22. Jonathan's son was called Merib-baal (1 Chron. 9:40), meaning 'rebellion against Baal', an epithet for 'Gideon'. Gideon was Jonathan's hero; it's not wrong to have such Biblical heroes! Saul also imitated Gideon, but on a surface level; for Gideon refused to be king over Israel because Yahweh was their king. See on 1 Sam. 19:5.

1Sa 14:10 But if they say 'Come up to us!', then we will go up, for Yahweh has delivered them into our hand. This will be the sign to us-
Such an invitation would be a sign of pride, laughing at the two young men who had no chance of climbing up and then fighting them. Again, as with Nahash (see on 1 Sam. 11:3), pride was to go before a fall. And Jonathan perceived this, hence his giving them an opportunity to mockingly and arrogantly invite them up to them.

1Sa 14:11 *So they revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, and the Philistines said, Look, the Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in!-*
From their perspective so high above them, indeed the two men would have appeared as small animals emerging from their holes and crawling upwards to their destruction.

1Sa 14:12 The men of the garrison shouted to Jonathan and his armour bearer, Come up to us and we will show you something! Jonathan said to his armour bearer, Come up after me, for Yahweh has delivered them into the hand of Israel-
Jonathan's confidence was because he saw their extreme arrogance. He was utterly persuaded after the victory over Nahash because of his pride (see on 1 Sam. 11:3) that therefore God would surely give the victory.

1Sa 14:13 Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet and his armour bearer followed, and the Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armour bearer followed and killed behind him-
It has been observed that "a single stone rolled down upon them while thus clambering up the precipitous side of the cliff would have sent them to the bottom". The arrogance of the Philistines in not doing so was what brought about the victory; see on :10. If indeed David was the armour bearer, we have the impression that he who began inspired by Jonathan, following his example, moved ahead to in turn inspired Jonathan. And this is indeed what true spiritual fellowship and friendship is all about.

"Killed behind him" suggests Jonathan brought the men down, presumably with sling stones (:14 LXX), and then the armour bearer killed them after they had fallen. Just as David did to Goliath.

1Sa 14:14 That first slaughter by Jonathan and his armour bearer killed about twenty men in an area of about half an acre-
LXX "with darts and slings and stones of the field". I noted on 1 Sam. 13:22 that because of their lack of iron weapons, the Israelites became skilled in the use of slings and bows. It was this which resulted in David being an expert slinger and able to slay

Goliath. If they had had access to swords, then the logical thing would have been to try to fight Goliath with sword and spear. But there was no expertise in the use of these weapons. And so we see how providence works out. Because of their oppressed situation, David became a skilled slinger- and slew Goliath. And Jonathan likewise. This was all a preparation for the victory against Goliath.

1Sa 14:15 Then panic struck the whole Philistine army, those in the camp, in the field, and among all the outposts and raiding parties, and the ground shook. There was panic-
Unaware that there were only two attackers, the Philistines would have run in confusion to the narrow tongue of land where the exit was, which served as a bottleneck. It seems that Yahweh then sent an earth tremour, which would have added to their sense of panic. This was also the Divine element in it all, lest it appear totally a victory for human strength and bravery. God likewise works in human life today, lest any man should boast. The Philistines out in the field on raiding parties would have been panicked by the sight of the garrison rushing down the pass at great speed.

1Sa 14:16 Saul's watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin saw that the army had melted away and scattered-
They would have had a wonderful view across the pass of two men causing an army to flee. It was the view in mind in Heb. 11:34: "Through faith... turned to flight the armies of the aliens". It was a powerful visual fulfilment of how one man in covenant relationship with God could cause a thousand to flee before him. The Philistines would have fled down steep descent of Aijalon toward Bethel (:23)—the same pass where Joshua had won his first great victory. The idea is that there was a reconquest of the land, in God's strength. The tables had turned; the people had followed Saul trembling and melted away (1 Sam. 13:7,8), but now the Philistines were doing just this (Heb.). "Melted away" is the same word used of how the inhabitants of Canaan were to melt at the conquest by Joshua. The impression is of a reconquest of the land.

1Sa 14:17 Then Saul said to the men with him, Count now and see who is missing from us. When they had counted, Jonathan and his armour bearer were not there-
Saul was so proud that he was most concerned as to who was going to get the personal glory for this victory which he himself should have gotten; for he was Divinely set up as Israel's military saviour.

1Sa 14:18 Saul said to Ahijah, Bring the ark of God here. For the ark of God was with the Israelites at that time-
LXX "the ephod". The word "bring hither" is usually used of the ephod. "Withdraw your hand!" (:19) is more appropriate to getting a yes / no decision from the urim and thummim within the ephod, which was required in order to eliminate options and decide who was missing. The presence of the priest logically suggests the ephod with Urim and Thummim was present rather than the ark.

1Sa 14:19 While Saul was talking to the priest the tumult in the camp of the Philistines went on and increased, and Saul said to the priest, Withdraw your hand!-
This again reveals Saul's impatience to put spiritual things first. He failed to learn the lesson he failed to learn in 1 Sam. 13:10. Circumstances repeated to give him another chance, but he fails again. He considered religious / spiritual things as a mere

formality, and wanted to get on with the work in his own strength without waiting for God's word to him.

"Withdraw your hand!" could mean that Saul is asking the priest to give up enquiring of God through the ark, because he sees that there is great confusion amongst the Philistines and he doesn't want to waste any more time but feels he must move into battle with the Philistines as soon as possible. This was exactly the position he had been in in 1 Sam. 13- he had wanted to engage in battle with the Philistines quickly, and so he gave up waiting for Samuel to come. He is tested again on this point, and again fails. Situations repeated in his life, as they do in ours. We note that the ark actually doesn't help him- which is a great theme of 1 Samuel, that the ark doesn't help of itself. See on 1 Sam. 4.

1Sa 14:20 Saul and all the men with him were gathered together and came to the battle, and found that every man's sword was against his fellow; a very great confusion-

"Confusion" is the word used of how an Israel faithful to the covenant would destroy the inhabitants of Canaan with "confusion" (Dt. 7:23). Jonathan shows himself very aware of the covenant and word of Moses, presumably as a result of Samuel instructing him.

1Sa 14:21 Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines previously and had gone with them into the camp, turned to join the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan-

One letter different would turn "Hebrews" into "servants". This reading would make better sense here, and the idea would be that the servants were freed.

1Sa 14:22 Also all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines had fled, followed hard after them in the battle-

This again supports the impression that they were chasing their enemies as promised for obedience to the covenant. And yet by grace, the righteousness and blessing of Jonathan was really being extended to them.

1Sa 14:23 So Yahweh saved Israel that day, and the battle moved beyond Beth Aven-

The reference is to Bethel. See on :16. The judges had been Israel's saviours on Yahweh's behalf, and the idea seems to be that although they now had a human king, God saved them just as He had done under the judges.

1Sa 14:24 The men of Israel were in distress that day-

The same word used of how they had been distressed by the Philistines in 1 Sam. 13:6. The idea was that Saul was effectively oppressing them as the Philistines were. LXX "Saul did very foolishly".

Because Saul had bound the people with an oath saying-

He had called out to them the words of the curse, and made them shout back their consent. Again, a surface level imitation of Moses without any spirit to it, just as he imitated Gideon in the same way.

Cursed is the man who eats any food before evening, and I have been avenged of my enemies. So none of the people ate any food-

See on 1 Sam. 11:11 and on 1 Sam. 14:27,31. This was a surface level imitation of Gideon winning a great victory when desperately hungry. But he failed to follow

Gideon's example of refusing to be Israel's human king when asked to be, because Gideon unlike Saul believed that Yahweh alone was to be Israel's king. Such surface level imitation of others' spirituality is something which can be fallen into so easily. Saul's desire for personal vengeance upon his enemies is sadly deficient in any desire to see God's glory. God patiently tried to correct him by then asking him to work for Him, as His agent, in executing *His* vengeance or punishment upon *His* enemies (1 Sam. 15:2).We would have given up with Saul, but God so patiently still wanted Saul as His man.

1Sa 14:25 All the army came into the forest, and there was honey on the ground-
The promised land was to flow with milk and honey to those who kept covenant. And yet Saul was precluding the people from experiencing the blessings of the covenant by petty legalism and a desire for personal control. The people were obedient to his word, but then totally disobeyed Yahweh's command about not eating blood as a result of it (1 Sam. 14:25,33).

1Sa 14:26 When they had come to the forest the honey was oozing out, but no-one tasted any because the people feared the oath-
As noted on :25, the idea is that the land was literally flowing with honey; and they were precluded from experiencing that blessing because they feared Saul and had made a covenant with him, rather than glorying in the fulfilment of Yahweh's covenant with them. "Oozing" is literally 'flowing like a river'. And likewise, obedience to narcissistic leaders precludes so many from experiencing the blessing of true covenant relationship with Yahweh on a personal level.

1Sa 14:27 But Jonathan hadn't heard when his father commanded the people with the oath, so he dipped the end of his rod into the honeycomb and ate some, and his eyes brightened-
The allusion is to Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit and having their eyes enlightened. But everything is inverted. Jonathan had done the right thing, and Saul's attempt to play God had gone totally wrong and brought curse instead of blessing. The allusion to the events of Eden is to demonstrate how Saul had everything so spiritually inverted, because he was just trying to follow spiritual precedent on a surface level without any spirit to it. We noted on 1 Sam. 13 that Saul's rejection as king was not simply because of some technical infringement, but rather because of his state of heart. And here we see the state of his heart, playing God, eager to condemn, to transfer his own guilt and need for judgment onto another.

Paul may have had Jonathan in mind as typical of the church when he spoke of our eyes being enlightened (Eph. 1:18), using the very words of 1 Sam. 14:27 concerning Jonathan. He was a type of us, devoted to David-Jesus. Saul saw Gideon as his spiritual hero, and this was a senseless, surface level imitation of Gideon devoid of spirit: 1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 13:6 = Gideon offering before fighting Midian; 14:5,20 = Jud. 7:22; 14:24 = imitating Gideon and his men going without food; 14:28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5; 11:7 = Gideon killing his father's oxen. But he failed to follow Gideon's example of refusing to be Israel's human king when asked to be, because Gideon unlike Saul believed that Yahweh alone was to be Israel's king.

1Sa 14:28 Then one of the people said, Your father bound the people with an oath saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats food this day'. The people were exhausted-
"Cursed is the man..." reflects the Mosaic making of covenant with Israel. Again we

see Saul attempting to mimic spiritual precedent, as he did the example of Gideon and God forbidding Adam to eat the fruit in Eden, but with no spirit to it. He was all about surface level spirituality and appearances, and he came therefore to such a tragic end. A true warning for us all.

1Sa 14:29 Then Jonathan said, My father has troubled the land-
Unlike Saul, Jonathan's Biblical allusions are appropriate. Here he refers to how Simeon and Levi provoked problems amongst the inhabitants of the land (Gen. 34:30), and how Achan stopped Israel from victory against those inhabitants by his own pride and narcissism (Josh. 7:25). A far greater victory could have been one against those inhabitants, but Saul had precluded it by his arrogant legalism.

In both the Achan story and here in 1 Sam. 14, the guilty party is chosen by lot and progressively going through families to reveal the guilty. Jonathan's perception of Saul as Achan is confirmed by the events of 1 Sam. 15, where Saul keeps for himself the best things which were intended to be dedicated to Yahweh- just as Achan did. And there are other parallels. Both Saul and Achan were associated with a group of 3000 soldiers when they stole the spoil (Josh. 7:4; 1 Sam. 13:2). Ai was near Beth Aven (" Ai, which is near Beth Aven", Josh. 7:2), and this is where Saul troubled Israel (1 Sam. 14:23). Saul expresses his sin in the very Hebrew words used by Achan, who said "I have sinned.... and broken the covenant" (Josh. 7:15), whereas Saul says likewise "I have sinned... and broken the commandment" (1 Sam. 15:24). Saul like Achan came to his end by dying along with his sons, and ultimately being burnt with fire ["burnt them" in Josh. 7:25 is the same phrase used of Saul and his sons in 1 Sam. 31:12). But Saul seems to challenge the connection with Achan; he instead transfers it onto Jonathan, in a classic case of psychological transference. For he uses the words of Joshua to Achan when he asks Jonathan "My son, tell me what have you done?" (1 Sam. 14:43 = Josh. 7:19). Saul is Achan, the troubler of Israel, and the connections made by the record make this clear. But he seeks to transfer this on to Jonathan. Again we see the Biblical record giving us in depth psychology of the human condition. We must beware of this tendency to transfer our guilt onto others, instead of trusting that it has been transferred onto the Lord Jesus as the ultimate guilt offering. Again the record makes a point in this connection; the people argue in 1 Sam. 14:45 “Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance (Heb. 'shuah', alluding to 'Joshua', Yahoshuah', Yah's salvation) in Israel?”. They are saying: "Jonathan is Joshua and you are Achan, whereas you are trying to say that you are Joshua and Jonathan is Achan, talking to him in the very words of Joshua to Achan".

Please look how my eyes have been brightened because I tasted a little of this honey-
Jonathan is aware of how his father has alluded to God's command in Eden about not eating the fruit. He now acts like Eve, justifying what he has done and encouraging others to do so as she did to Adam. But he does so to demonstrate how Saul has got it all the wrong way around.

1Sa 14:30 How much better it would have been if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies? Would not the slaughter among the Philistines have been greater?-
This reflects Jonathan's humility. He had won a great victory against the Philistines, slaying many of them. But he considers it a small victory compared to the potential possible, which his father had precluded.

1Sa 14:31 They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. The people were exhausted-
Their exhaustion is now stressed again (:28). They still refused to follow Jonathan's example and eat. They so feared the oath to Saul, far more than seeing beyond that to the obviously correct spiritual argument of Jonathan. This reveals the fear of Saul in which they lived.

1Sa 14:32 and they pounced on the spoil, and took sheep, cattle and calves and killed them on the ground and ate them with the blood-
The essence of this has been seen so many times in church history. An insistence upon petty legalism leads people to commit major sin. They are more obedient to the party line and the barked orders of their leadership, than to God. And the legalistic demands of their elders lead them to make utter shipwreck of their faith, breaking the most elemental principles of their covenant with God. Now that sundown had come and they were free from the oath to Saul, the people were totally disobedient to the covenant. They ate blood, and also killed calves and mothers on the same day (disobeying Lev. 22:28). For all this, they were to have God against them and be cut off from God's people; their behaviour in 1 Sam. 14:32 is portrayed as breaking every principle of the commands about eating blood in Lev. 17:10-14.

1Sa 14:33 Then they told Saul, Look, the people are sinning against Yahweh, eating meat with the blood-
The people were obedient to his word, but then totally disobeyed Yahweh's command about not eating blood as a result of it (1 Sam. 14:25,33).

He said, You have broken faith-
He means, broken the covenant. But he has it all the wrong way around. For a land flowing with honey was a blessing for keeping the covenant, and he was precluding them from receiving that blessing by his arrogant legalism.

Roll a large stone here at once!-
This could represent the rolling away of their sin through repentance. But it may simply be that he was telling them to kill the animals and put their heads on a large stone to allow the blood to drain out. See on :35.

The great stone was to be a makeshift altar (:35), and he encouraged the people to offer sacrifice upon it. He was asking them to what he had done in 1 Sam. 13, and had been condemned by Samuel for doing so. It was as if he sought to justify his own sin by encouraging others to do it en masse. And that is psychologically credible. That's just what people do today. Likewise men insist upon some letter of the law when huge evil is in their hearts, in Saul's case, the plan to murder his own son for the sake of jealousy. We see the same in the hypocrisy of the Jewish leadership at the time of the Lord's crucifixion.

1Sa 14:34 Saul said, Go out among the people and tell them, 'Each man bring to me here his ox and sheep; kill them here and eat; don't sin against Yahweh by eating meat with the blood'. So each of them brought his ox with him that night, and killed them there-
But the commands of Lev. 17:10-14 were clear that doing this just once would lead to having God against them and being cut off from God's people. But Saul thinks that can just be disregarded if they get it right in future. He plays God, just as he did when

framing his commandment in terms of the Mosaic covenant, and the command of God in Eden.

1Sa 14:35 Saul built an altar to Yahweh. This was the first altar that he built to Yahweh-
Saul had commanded them to roll a stone so as to prop up the slain beasts upon it and let the blood drain out (:33). It seems he now capitalizes on what had been done and declares this to be an altar to Yahweh, in surface level imitation of how the patriarchs had set up altars in thankfulness to Yahweh. But Saul is just declaring this an altar in an opportunistic sense; and unlike the patriarchs, he had never made an altar to Yahweh before. We get the impression that he just called it an altar and imagined the slain animals left to drain upon it as some kind of sacrifices. But typical of Saul, he didn't have the patience to do as David did, who built an altar and sacrificed burnt and peace offerings upon it (2 Sam. 24:25). Literally "it he began to build as an altar to Yahweh", implying he didn't bother to finish it. Saul's impatience and subsequent lack of spiritual depth is what cost him the Kingdom.

We can infer that Saul rather liked building altars. As discussed on :33, he kept on sacrificing despite having been condemned for doing so in 1 Sam. 13. He was subconsciously struggling to accept God's rejection of him because of an issue relating to sacrifice. Accepting God's condemnation is critical. Having done so, we can move on to experience His grace. The argument in Romans depends upon this sequence.

1Sa 14:36 Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning, and let us not leave any of them alive. They said, Do whatever seems good to you-
David may be referring to this when he condemns Saul in Ps. 119:150: "They draw near who follow after wickedness, they are far from Your law". "Draw near" is a common idiom for offering sacrifice and worshipping God. But that sacrifice must be from men who are near to God's law, and not offering just as mere tokenistic ritualism. He may be alluding to Saul's insincere sacrifices and religious rituals which led to his rejection and David's choice as the next king (1 Sam. 14:36,38; 15:22).

But the priest said, Let us enquire of God-
Saul was not bothered about enquiring of God and having His blessing. It was all a question of external surface level religion. The law required that Israel go into battle having sought God's blessing. Saul wants to do this, but he gets no answer. Again he is being tested along the lines of how he was in 1 Sam. 13- to rush into battle without seeking God's blessing in the right way.

1Sa 14:37 Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel? But He didn't answer him that day-
Saul ultimately was judged as not enquiring of God (1 Chron. 10:14). Yet on a surface level he did (1 Sam. 14:36,37) and did so desperately at the end of his life. We have here a powerful challenge to our prayer life. For we can enquire of God on a surface level, as a kind of formality, to soothe the religious conscience which is somewhere in every man. But this is not to really enquire of Him.

Just before his final fight with the Philistines, "Saul enquired of the Lord (but) the Lord answered him not" (1 Sam. 28:6), and therefore he went to a witch. But in God's final analysis of Saul, Yahweh says that He smote Saul because Saul sinned against God's word by *not* enquiring of God, but of a witch (1 Chron. 10:13,14). But Saul *did*

enquire of God (see 1 Sam. 14:37 s.w. 28:6), but God didn't answer him (note how often in the records it is stated that David enquired successfully of Yahweh). The point is that although Saul prayed to God and enquired of His word on the surface, in his heart, he did nothing of the sort; and therefore his prayer and enquiry was reckoned never to have happened. And we must ask how much of our prayer and Bible study is seen by God as being only spoken and read on a surface level. This was exactly the problem of natural Israel. "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled (in prayer) upon their beds" (Hos. 7:14). "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7).

1Sa 14:38 Saul said, Come here, all you chiefs of the people and let us find out which of us has sinned today-
See on :36. Saul thinks that God's lack of answer by Urim and Thummim is because someone amongst the people has sinned. But Saul's awful hypocrisy here was rebuked at the end of his life. God refused to give Saul an answer from Urim and Thummim because of his sin in not sincerely enquiring of the Lord (1 Sam. 28:6). He was made to learn that it was he and not Jonathan who had sinned at this time.

1Sa 14:39 For as Yahweh lives, Who saves Israel, even if it is Jonathan my son, he must die. But there was not a man among all the people who answered him-
Clearly Saul wanted to kill Jonathan. Saul was potentially enabled to free Israel from the Philistines, but he failed to have the personal faith required. The main victories against them were by Jonathan (1 Sam. 13,14) and David. And this explains his great jealousy against them both, even planning to slay Jonathan at least twice (1 Sam. 14:39; 20:33). See on 1 Sam. 20:30,31.

1Sa 14:40 Then he said to all Israel, You stand on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. The people said to Saul, Do what seems good to you-
The whole situation was contrived, so that Jonathan would stand publically before the people and be openly condemned. I suggest that Saul wanted to kill Jonathan because he was jealous of him, and he tried to do so again when he threw a javelin at him.

1Sa 14:41 Therefore Saul said to Yahweh, the God of Israel, Show me the right answer-
Or "show the innocent". Surely the armour bearer also ate the honey. Yet Saul intentionally sets up this kangaroo court to find Jonathan alone guilty. He sets up the choice as between the people on one side, and he and Jonathan on the other. Clearly he expected that he and Jonathan would be chosen, and then out of Jonathan and himself, Jonathan would be chosen. It was all set up by Saul from the start.

Jonathan and Saul were chosen, but the people escaped-
LXX adds: “And Saul said, O Lord God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant to day? If the iniquity be in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord God of Israel, give Urim: and if it be in thy people Israel, give Thummim”. Saul sees the lack of immediate answer as being because Jonathan has sinned. And yet lack of immediate visible answer to prayer is not necessarily because of sin. We see here Saul's huge problem with impatience. He wanted everything immediately and before his eyes. When it didn't happen, he starts the blame game. We see this today in so many, who cannot wait for God because they demand He always acts in what they consider to be "real time", immediately and just as they envisage His response.

1Sa 14:42 Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. Jonathan was selected-
As suggested above, I think this was all orchestrated by Saul to lead up the a public condemnation of Jonathan, whom he wished to kill- so deep was his jealousy that great victories were won without him and by another. LXX adds: "And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son: whomsoever the Lord taketh by lot, let him die. And the people said unto Saul, This thing shall not be. And Saul prevailed over the people, and they cast lots between him and Jonathan his son, and Jonathan was taken".

1Sa 14:43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what you have done!-
This is the same question which Samuel rhetorically asked Saul when he condemned him to lose the kingship (1 Sam. 13:11). Yet Saul now assumes the authority of Samuel in asking the question. It is a psychological classic; the man condemned by a question then asks that question of another, seeking to condemn him too. Things like this are powerful internal evidence that the Biblical record is true, and these words were actually said and these situations really happened.

Saul is also seeking to emulate the question of faithful Joshua to wicked Achan (Josh. 7:19). But he has it all the wrong way around, yet again. For Saul was like Achan, precluding the people from the victory which could have been theirs.

Jonathan told him, I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand, and now must I die?-
The Hebrew can also be read as him expressing willingness to die. But I suggest he phrases it like this, standing before all Israel, to elicit their sympathy and mass protest against his father's decision.

Jonathan's willingness to die may reflect the degree to which he understood that sins of ignorance are still sins and culpable. This principle is indeed true, and should be one driver in our desire to understand God's will.

1Sa 14:44 Saul said, God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan-
This indicates Saul's insincerity. He calls God as a witness that Jonathan must die; when clearly, he has orchestrated the whole situation because he wanted to slay Jonathan from jealousy. Saul's desire to slay his son is however deeper than simple jealousy. Saul has been told in 1 Sam. 13 that his kingdom, his dynasty, will not endure. Jonathan therefore was not going to be king, and Saul therefore viewed his son as useless. He was only interested in Jonathan insofar as his own dynasty could continue as king. If that had been cut off, then he wanted Jonathan dead. We have a window here into his extreme narcissism.

1Sa 14:45 But the people said to Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it!-
They are alluding to the words of Saul himself, who had put a stop to the call to slay those who resisted his kingship (1 Sam. 11:13). And the principle holds true. If we are in awe at the great deliverance Yahweh has worked in His Son, there should be maximum forgiveness and no judgment of our weak brethren. Jonathan had expressed absolute faith that God would work with him (:6), and He did.

As Jonathan wrought great salvation in Israel in 1 Sam. 14:45, so did David (the same phrase occurs in 1 Sam. 19:5). As Saul tried to kill an innocent Jonathan out of

jealousy of his victory, so he did David- thus Jonathan shared the sufferings of David, as we do of Christ. Another example of this will be found in 1 Sam. 20:33, where Saul tries to kill Jonathan with a javelin, as he did to David. Yet wonderfully, David seems to have counted Jonathan *as if* he actually had been the champion against Goliath; he describes him as "the mighty" (2 Sam. 1:27), using the same Hebrew word translated "champion" in 1 Sam. 17:51 concerning Goliath. Likewise the Lord Jesus Christ shares his victory with us to the extent that he counts us *as if* we were the victors on Calvary.

As Yahweh lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day! So the people rescued Jonathan so that he didn't die-
"Worked with God" alludes to Jonathan's trust that Yahweh would work with him regardless of his weakness (:6). Jonathan was therefore know as the worker together with God, and Paul makes him representative of us all when he uses this phrase of us. This is alluded to in Mt. 10:30; Lk. 21:18. See on 2 Sam. 1:23.
Paul speaks of the church as workers together with God (2 Cor. 6:1), probably alluding to Jonathan having "worked with God" here. Jonathan is seen as representative of us all. Our Lord too seems to have seen in Jonathan a type of ourselves. In the context of warning us that loyalty to Him would mean confessing him before men and conflict between fathers and sons, he encourages us that not a hair of our head will perish (Mt. 10:30 cp. Lk. 21:18). This is picking up the application of this phrase to Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:45.

1Sa 14:46 Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own land-
It could be argued that the extent of the victory over the Philistines was again hindered by Saul. For we get the impression that after his loss of face regarding Jonathan, he stopped pursuing the Philistines. And so instead of wiping them out, they escaped to "their own land". Which of itself is a tacit recognition that the land of Israel was not free of the Philistines.

1Sa 14:47 After Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah and the Philistines; wherever he turned he defeated them-
However by David's time, he had to fight these same powers, and the situation at the time of Goliath indicates the abiding strength of the Philistines. Perhaps the record here reflects how Saul liked to see things; hence :52 reminds us that he failed to rid Israel of the Philistines throughout his reign.

1Sa 14:48 He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them-
Here we have an example, common in the Hebrew Bible, of a summary statement being made and then an explanation is given of how the stated situation came about. And so here we have the explanation concerning the Amalekites in the next chapter.

1Sa 14:49 Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua, and the names of his two daughters were Merab the firstborn and Michal the younger-
1 Sam. 31:2; 1 Chron. 10:2 read "Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua", whereas 1 Sam. 14:49 has "Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua". "Ishvi" may be another name for Abinadab; or we may note that the word means "and the second...", which would make sense in 1 Sam. 14:49. The genealogies of 1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39 also mention

Esh-Baal or Ishbosheth; perhaps his name mentioning the "Baal" compound was the reason for its exclusion. Having such a name reflects upon Saul's lack of total devotion to Yahweh.

1Sa 14:50 and the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. The captain of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle-
God gave Saul's wives to David (2 Sam. 12:8), which would've involved David being married to both a mother and daughter- for he had married Saul's daughters. And this giving of Saul's wives to David may not have occurred simply after Saul's death. For David's eldest son, Amnon, was borne by Ahinoam (2 Sam. 3:2), who was initially Saul's wife (1 Sam. 14:50). Now this is not to justify sin. Adultery, taking another's wife or husband, is all wrong. Let there be no mistake. But God at times sees the bigger, or longer, perspective, and tolerates things which we may quite rightly find intolerable. And if He loves us despite of our sin and failure- are we surprised that we are invited to show love to others in the face of their sin and failure toward us? A black and white insistence upon God's standards being upheld in the lives of others, demanding their repentance for having hurt us, is what has caused so much division between believers. Whilst God alone will apportion the guilt for this, in the final, unalterable, ultimately just algorithm of Divine judgment, it's worth observing that the fault for division isn't always with the sinners, the wider thinkers, the freewheelers; but with the inflexible intolerance of those in power. We must recognize that there will be anomalies in the lives of our brethren- just as there are in the lives of us all (if only we would examine ourselves ruthlessly enough to see them). And in some ways at some times, God goes along with them.

"Grammatically, "Saul's uncle" might refer either to Abner or to Ner, but it is almost certain that it must refer to the latter, so that Saul and Abner were first cousins". See on :51.

1Sa 14:51 Kish was the father of Saul and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel-
See on :50. Josephus reads this as: "And Kish the father of Saul and Ner the father of Abner were sons of Abiel".

1Sa 14:52 There was severe war against the Philistines all the days of Saul, and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he took him into his service-
This was in fulfilment of Samuel's inspired warnings of how Saul would pressgang men into his service. See on :47. He failed to rid Israel of the Philistines throughout his reign, even though he had been Divinely set up to do so.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 15

1Sa 15:1 Samuel said to Saul, Yahweh sent me to anoint you to be king over His people Israel. Now therefore, listen to the words of Yahweh-
We could interpret Samuel as meaning that he had anointed Saul to be king, and God had set Saul up for success. Yet he had been rejected from the kingship due to his impatient disobedience in 1 Sam. 13. But despite that, which apparently happened early in his reign (1 Sam. 13:2), he remained king. The fact God didn't immediately depose him may simply have been because he was being given a chance to repent.

And perhaps now with the set of instructions given him regarding Amalek, he was being given an opportunity to prove he had learned the lesson, and to undo his mistake. He fails spectacularly, but we marvel all the same at God's grace in trying by all means to save him. We note too that Saul's calling began with sets of detailed instructions from Samuel, which he obeyed. Circumstances repeat in our lives, as God seeks to help us learn the lessons.

The Hebrew is literally "Listen to the voice of the words of Yahweh". See on :22. His "voice" was to be heard, but instead Saul heard the "voice" of the people (:24) and the "voice" of the bleating sheep which Saul coveted as his own (:14). And there we have it- the power of God's voice in His word must be louder than the voice of human opinion and the call of materialism and self-enrichment. This is the power of accepting God's word in the Bible as indeed His inspired voice. Hence :22,23 accuse Saul of not listening to the voice of Yahweh.

1Sa 15:2 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel, opposing them when they came up out of Egypt-

It was God who was to do this; Saul is being invited to be His agent on earth, and not rule and fight in his own strength and to his own glory. For this was his problem. Saul's desire for personal vengeance upon his enemies in 1 Sam. 14:24 was sadly deficient in any desire to see God's glory. God patiently now tries to correct him by now asking him to work for Him, as His agent, in executing *His* vengeance or punishment upon *His* enemies, in respect of His people Israel. And yet Saul fails, because he is more interested in showing off the best animals he has captured and to have a powerful king whom he has conquered publically paraded. Rather than slaying the king and the animals as requested.

1Sa 15:3 Now go and attack Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have; don't spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and nursing baby, ox and sheep, camel and donkey'-

The reason for this command was because God wanted the glorification of His Name and His people, and if these things and persons were preserved, then they would have been paraded to Saul's glory. See on :2. And that was indeed his motive in preserving them. "Utterly destroy" translates the word used for religious devotion. Amalek was to be devoted to Yahweh in its condemnation, and the murder of everything living was to be seen as a sacrifice to Him. To keep some of His offerings for himself was therefore effectively Saul thieving from God.

Perhaps the command to destroy even the memory of Amalek meant that even their animals should be destroyed, lest any should even think "This is an Amalekite sheep". The call to spiritual mindedness means making similar decisions at times.

Despite his rejection by God in 1 Sam. 13 and poor behaviour to Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14, God now gives Saul a mission. Elijah likewise was relieved of his ministry on Horeb, and yet God still worked with him and gave him work to do for Him. We too must sense God's refusal to give up with man and His intense desire to work with us, even if on a lower level than what we were potentially capable of.

1Sa 15:4 Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim-

'Place of lambs'. The area was known for sheep and animals; the very best of the very best was kept by Saul for himself when clearly it was intended for devotion to Yahweh.

Two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah-

The proportion of the men of Judah is very small. It could be that Saul was seen as

showing nepotism to the tribe of Benjamin and his support within Judah was waning. "Thousand" more likely refers to a brigade or family.

We note that the large numbers who now came to Saul contrast with the 600 men he managed to summon in 1 Sam. 13, and the impression that many of his soldiers drifted away from him. Saul now seems to command Israel's loyalty again. Although it was Jonathan's exploits that had for a time reduced the Philistine threat, Saul perhaps had taken credit for that as he did for Jonathan's exploits in 1 Sam. 13:3,4. Despite his rejection from the "kingdom" in 1 Sam. 13, God is still clearly open to using him and giving him opportunities for obedience- and perhaps that is why He moved the men of Israel to loyal support of Saul at this time.

1Sa 15:5 Saul went to the city of Amalek and laid wait in the valley-
I have noted earlier that Saul tried to emulate the examples of faithful men like Moses and Gideon. Here he is copying Joshua (Josh. 8:4). But he was emulating on a surface level only, with no real spiritual attention.

1Sa 15:6 Saul said to the Kenites, Go away from among the Amalekites so that I don't destroy you with them, for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites-
He could have been commanded to do this by God through Samuel. But if not, this shows some spiritual awareness and familiarity with Biblical history- which makes his sins all the more culpable. By doing this, Saul lost the advantage of making a surprise attack. But he put grace and care for people first (or perhaps at least Samuel insisted he did), and won the victory all the same.

1Sa 15:7 Saul attacked the Amalekites from Havilah to Shur east of Egypt-
This is not the Havilah near Yemen. It means "circle" and must refer to some spot in the south of Judah. "Shur" is literally "the wall", referring to the wall which ran from Pelusium past Migdol to Hero, resulting in the name "Mizraim" for Egypt, meaning 'the enclosed / fortified'. The idea is that Saul destroyed them to the Egyptian border.

1Sa 15:8 He took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people-
"Agag" is the same consonants as "Gog", the leader of the latter day invasion of Israel in Ez. 38. But it is a generic name for the ruler of Amalek, like "Pharaoh". "Utterly destroyed" is the word for sanctification / devotion to Yahweh. The idea isn't that every Amalekite was destroyed, as David later fights with them. It could be argued that by keeping the best of the animals, and needing to care for them and not over drive them, Saul's men therefore didn't destroy as many Amalekites as they otherwise could have done.

We wonder why Saul spared Agag. Maybe Saul was so narcissistic he fancied having a great long as his personal slave. We wonder why otherwise Saul would have wanted to keep Agag alive.

1Sa 15:9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, cattle, fat calves and lambs and all that was good, and wouldn't utterly destroy them; everything that was bad and worthless they destroyed utterly-
I suggested on :2,3 that the reason for this command was because God wanted the glorification of His Name and His people, and if these things and persons were preserved, then they would have been paraded to Saul's glory. And that was indeed

Saul's motive in preserving them. By having a live, conquered king and impressive fat animals, Saul could boast of his personal military prowess. And the whole exercise he had been given in fighting Amalek had been designed to help him unlearn his personal pride, and work on God's behalf to God's glory, rather for his own. He failed totally. He ended up offering to God that which was "bad and worthless". And then trying to lie his way out of it. "Bad" is the word for "despise", and is used about how Eli and his sons had despised Yahweh's offerings (1 Sam. 2:30). Saul was intended to replace Eli but he had not learned from history. The relevance for the exiles was that they were in exile because they had likewise despised Yahweh's offerings (Ez. 22:8).

We observe that Saul spared Agag, although he was under the ban, and had to be slain; and yet had been so eager to kill his own son Jonathan. Clearly personal jealousy issues were huge in Saul's mind, rather than any obedience to Yahweh. We see too how Saul's disobedience was also because of materialism. He wanted those fine sheep for himself, just as he enters the record obsessed with lost donkeys.

1Sa 15:10 Then the word of Yahweh came to Samuel saying-
Samuel was apparently not with Saul at this time (:12), although hovering nearby.

1Sa 15:11 It grieves Me that I have set up Saul to be king- God 'repented' (AV), He changed His mind about setting Saul up as king. And yet He gave them a king in His wrath, warning Israel how Saul would work out, although He set Saul up for success. And yet when indeed Saul fails, God changes His mind and as it were regrets having made Saul king. We have here an insight into how God feels. He enters fully into the human situation, limiting His omniscience and omnipotence to do so; and therefore has such conflicted feelings within Him, just as His many changes of mind within Him were kindled together in Hos. 11:8.

For he has turned back from following Me and has not obeyed My commandments-
"Turned back" suggests God did consider Saul to have initially followed Him.

Samuel was troubled and he cried out to Yahweh all night-
God tells Samuel of His rejection of Saul, implying this opportunity to change His earlier rejection of Saul in 1 Sam. 13 has again not worked out; and Samuel cries to Him all night. I think the implication is that Samuel was pleading with God to consider another future with Saul (1 Sam. 15:11,35; 16:1). We should be awed by Samuel's love for Saul and desire to make him work out spiritually. Amos 7:1-6 is another case- God reveals His intention regarding Israel, but then Amos makes a case against this and is heard. In fact, these and other examples suggest that this is almost a pattern with God- to devise His purpose, and then in the 'gap' until its fulfillment, be open to the persuasion of His covenant people to change or ammend those plans. This could be what Am. 3:7 is speaking of: "Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets". It's as if He reveals His plans to them *so that* they can then comment upon them in prayer.

1Sa 15:12 Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning- There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:12); David (1 Sam. 17:20;

29:11); Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 29:20). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

And he was told: Saul came to Carmel and he set up a monument for himself, then went down to Gilgal-

We see here Saul's vanity, wishing to memorialize his own great victory, although that victory had been given by God. We must be warned by this not to glory in and seek to memorialize that which was given us by God's grace and as part of His wider purpose.

"Monument" can mean "altar", so we note again Saul's love of building altars and sacrificing, as if to undo or disprove his condemnation for earlier offering offerings without Samuel. See on :22.

1Sa 15:13 Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, Yahweh bless you! I have obeyed the commandment of Yahweh-

Saul speaks of "Yahweh your God" in :15, as if he felt unable to say that Yahweh was fully his God, even though he here uses the Yahweh Name as a formality. Personal relationship with God is not the same as using the right Hebrew names for Him and the correct religious language.

1Sa 15:14 Samuel said, Then what is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What does this lowing of cattle mean?-

We sense through the record how angry Samuel is that Saul can tell such a childish lie; we hear the bleating and lowing of cattle coming down through the centuries, such is the power of the inspired word.

The Hebrew in :1 is literally "Listen to the voice of the words of Yahweh". See on :22. His "voice" was to be heard, but instead Saul heard the "voice" of the people (:24) and the "voice" of the bleating sheep which Saul coveted as his own (:14). And there we have it- the power of God's voice in His word must be louder than the voice of human opinion and the call of materialism and self-enrichment. This is the power of accepting God's word in the Bible as indeed His inspired voice. Hence :22,23 accuse Saul of not listening to the voice of Yahweh.

1Sa 15:15 Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to Yahweh your God. We have utterly destroyed the rest-

Saul had defeated the Amalekites in the south, near the border with Egypt (:7), had then gone up to Carmel in the north to build a memorial (:12), and was now in Gilgal (:12). This must have required at least a week. And the animals were still alive. Saul's story was clearly untrue. We note he speaks of "Yahweh your God", as if he felt unable to say that Yahweh was fully his God, even though he uses the Yahweh Name as a formality (:13). Saul excuses himself by blaming it on the people, as if he is not really king. And further, he reasons that they devoted "the rest" to Yahweh. He refuses to see that the commandment was to devote all to Yahweh. But he considers

he devoted something, so that, surely, was good enough. And this is not so far from our own weakness, faced with the demand for our all, and total devotion after the pattern of the crucified Christ.

1Sa 15:16 Then Samuel said to Saul, Stop! I will tell you what Yahweh said to me last night. He said to him, Tell me-
Samuel as a child had to tell Eli of God's rejection of him, a message he also heard at night, and His replacement of him with someone else. This prepared Samuel for doing this very same thing years later, with Saul (1 Sam. 15:16); and to some extent, he too failed in ways similar to Eli, and was in a sense replaced. Whilst it's impossible to attach meaning to events at the time they happen, they potentially prepare us for later use by God if we are willing to be used.

1Sa 15:17 Samuel said, When you were once little in your own sight, weren't you made the head of the tribes of Israel? Yahweh anointed you king over Israel-
"Little" is the word Saul earlier used in saying that he was from the littlest / smallest tribe in Israel. Pride was Saul's problem. A fair case can be made for his humility in not punishing those who initially mocked him, his hiding amongst the baggage, his not telling his uncle about his calling. But David in the Psalms frequently complains of Saul's pride. Saul appears to have changed his name to 'Paul', "the little one", at the time of his first missionary journey- in order to not be like Saul in his later life, but "little". His preaching of the Gospel was thus related to his own realization of sinfulness, as reflected in his name change. And so it has ever been. Saul becomes Paul in so many lives. True self-abnegation, recognition of our moral bankruptcy, our desperation, and the extent of the grace we have received…these two paradoxical aspects, fused together within the very texture of human personality, are what will arrest the attention of others in this world and lead them to the Truth we can offer them.

Another take is that we can translate: "Are you so little in your own eyes?". The argument is that 'You are the king of Israel, you are over the people not beneath them. So you can't claim to be king, and yet also argue that the people made you do what you didn't want to do. In fact you are very big in your own eyes, rebellious and stubborn, and not so little as you are now making out to be'.

1Sa 15:18 and Yahweh sent you on a mission and said-
"Mission" is AV "journey". It is the word used of how Saul went on his "way" to find the lost donkeys (1 Sam. 9:6,8), and as part of his calling process he was sent on journeys and was obedient. But now he had not been obedient. And yet Saul arrogantly insists that he has gone on the "mission" or "way" (:20 s.w.).

'Go, and utterly destroy those sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are destroyed'-
The mission had been total destruction of the Amalekites. But Saul was content with just a tokenistic victory. We learn here that he was told they were "sinners". He was asked to manifest Yahweh's judgment against sin. But he ignored that dimension, and saw himself as simply glorifying himself.

1Sa 15:19 Why then didn't you obey the voice of Yahweh-
Israel did not obey / hearken to the voice of Yahweh, and He did not hearken to their voice in prayer (Dt. 1:45; 9:23; 28:15; Josh. 5:6; Jud. 2:20; 6:10 cp. Dt. 8:20 s.w.). 2 Kings 18:12 states this specifically. God hearkened to Joshua's voice in prayer (Josh.

10:14) because Joshua hearkened to His voice. It was to be the same with Saul. He didn't hearken to God's voice (1 Sam. 15:19) and God didn't hearken to Saul's voice in prayer in his final desperation at the end of his life (1 Sam. 28:18, although he hearkened to the voice of the witch, 1 Sam. 28:23). If God's word abides in us, then our prayer is powerful, we have whatever we ask, because we are asking for things according to His will expressed in His word (Jn. 15:7). See on :23.

But took the spoils and did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh?-
Sins of omission, serving God partially and not wholly, for the sake of appearance, are described here as "evil". And they are our most likely form of sin.

1Sa 15:20 Saul said to Samuel, But I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh, and have gone on the mission which Yahweh gave me and have brought Agag the king of Amalek-
This is Saul at his most inexcusable, seeking to save face before Samuel by lying when the evidence of the bleating animals was for all to hear in the background. He had indeed "gone on the mission" given by Yahweh, but had not fulfilled it as required. We too can have the illusion that because we are involved in God's work, have "gone on the mission", that we are thereby justified. But God works through all manner of sinful people, and awareness of His activity in and around our lives doesn't mean we are therefore pleasing to Him.

And have utterly destroyed the Amalekites-
He had not utterly destroyed them, for David later had to smite them (s.w. 2 Sam. 1:1). Saul was empowered to smite the Amalekites but he didn't completely do this. As often happens, God then passed on the job to another, in this case David. We can see His hand working in similar ways today. This seems to be the idea of Esther 4:14. If she had not saved her people, then God would have pursued another plan to the same end.

1Sa 15:21 But the people took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of the devoted things, to sacrifice to Yahweh your God in Gilgal-
This is alluded to by Solomon in Prov. 21:27: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind!". Solomon may have in view Saul's rejection from the kingship for his wrong attitude to sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:21,22). Likewise the attempts of Absalom and Adonijah to take the throne from David and Solomon involved the offering of sacrifices (2 Sam. 15:12; 1 Kings 1:9). What Solomon says in the Proverbs is true on one level, but he harnesses Divine truth to justify himself and his own agendas; just as we can.

Again we note "Yahweh *your* God". Not "our God" or "my God". Yet he freely uses the Yahweh Name in addressing Samuel in :13. It was as if he felt unable to say that Yahweh was fully his God, even though he here uses the Yahweh Name as a formality. Personal relationship with God is not the same as using the right Hebrew names for Him and the correct religious language.

1Sa 15:22 Samuel said, Has Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Yahweh? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams-
The point was that God didn't need the sacrifices of themselves. The essence He sought was an obedient heart toward His voice. So often, form comes to eclipse content with religious people; the external sacrifices are seen as of supreme importance, rather than the attitude behind them. We recall how Saul earlier had thought that he couldn't go to Samuel unless he had a gift for him; and likewise it

seems he thinks here that sacrifice of itself can somehow save him. David learnt from this and reflects this spirit after his sin with Bathsheba, when he accepts that God takes no pleasure in burnt offerings of themselves (Ps. 51:16,17). We too are to learn from these historical records, because there surely will come times when the essence of the lesson and the issues surfaces in our life experience.

The Hebrew in :1 is literally "Listen to the voice of the words of Yahweh". His "voice" was to be heard, but instead Saul heard the "voice" of the people (:24) and the "voice" of the bleating sheep which Saul coveted as his own (:14). And there we have it- the power of God's voice in His word must be louder than the voice of human opinion and the call of materialism and self-enrichment. This is the power of accepting God's word in the Bible as indeed His inspired voice. Hence :22,23 accuse Saul of not listening to the voice of Yahweh.

The reference may be to Saul's love of building altars and offering voluntary sacrifices. He is being told that this cannot replace obeying Yahweh's actual commands. Saul's stubbornness was in refusing to accept he had sinned. His own pride and ego thus became his idol, for there is no reference to Saul worshipping actual idols.

David may be referring to this when he condemns Saul in Ps. 119:150: "They draw near who follow after wickedness, they are far from Your law". "Draw near" is a common idiom for offering sacrifice and worshipping God. But that sacrifice must be from men who are near to God's law, and not offering just as mere tokenistic ritualism. He may be alluding to Saul's insincere sacrifices and religious rituals which led to his rejection and David's choice as the next king (1 Sam. 14:36,38; 15:22).

The words of Mk. 12:33 allude to a number of OT passages which also show the superiority of knowledge and practical service over sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8). Putting them together we find the following parallels:

To obey God’s word is better than sacrifice
To listen to God’s word is better than sacrifice
To show mercy is better than sacrifice
To know God is better than sacrifice
To be humble and just is better than sacrifice
To understand God is better than sacrifice.

Understanding God, hearing His word, knowing God in ongoing personal relationship (all acts of the intellect) are therefore paralleled with practical things like loving out neighbour, showing mercy, justice etc. These practical things are an outcome of our correct knowledge of / active relationship with God.

1Sa 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as the evil of idolatry-

We wonder if he destroyed all witchcraft in order to transfer onto the witches his own sin of rebellion and the punishment for it. This is again a psychological classic- to transfer personal guilt and need for punishment onto others. The sin of omitting obedience was as bad as committing witchcraft (1 Sam. 15:23). Even though Saul partially obeyed God's commandments (1 Sam. 15:20), his omissions of some of them led to God declaring that Saul had in fact turned back from following His commandments (1 Sam. 15:11). Sins of omission are our strongest temptations. We note that Saul does commit the sin of witchcraft at the end of his life. When Samuel has taught him here that this sin is one of the greatest sins he could commit. But at this point, Saul had cut off all or killed all the witches he could find in Israel. He is being told that his sin of rebellion is as bad as the very sin he so hates and prosecutes.

Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh, He has also rejected you from being king-

Our attitude to God's word becomes His attitude to us; see on :19. We later read that God's "soul" departed from Israel, because "the Lord has rejected you" (Jer. 6:8,30). The connection is because these historical records were intended for the exiles to learn from. This is the same language used about Saul- God rejected him, and so His spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:14). The implication was that God's very soul / spirit is "with" us, and therefore He can be so terribly wounded by us in His heart by the rebellions of those in covenant relationship with Him. For His heart / soul / spirit is *so* close to us His beloved people.

Although it is true as it was with Saul that those who reject Yahweh's word are rejected (1 Sam. 15:23), God's grace is beyond such a simplistic picture. Israel were to despise / reject God's word (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44 s.w.). Israel rejected Yahweh when they wanted Saul to be their king (s.w. 1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19), and yet He did not reject them immediately because of that. The relevance to the exiles was in that they were in captivity because they too had rejected God's word and therefore God had rejected them (2 Kings 17:15 cp. 2 Kings 17:20; 23:27), because they rejected His prophetic words, He rejected them (Jer. 6:19,30; Hos. 4:6), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44; Jer. 31:37 s.w.). For ultimately God has not rejected / cast away His people (Is. 41:9; Jer. 33:26; Rom. 11:2). This is the mystery of grace, no matter how we may seek to explain it away by Biblical exposition and balancing Bible verses against each other. Although this rejection seems final, later God still have Saul His Spirit, as if in a desperate attempt to bring him, almost force him, to personal spirituality and salvation. Even if he was not to be king, he could still have been saved. But he rejected even that. This willingness of God to re think even at that stage is perhaps reflected by Samuel returning or repenting (s.w.) after Saul in :31. And it is clear from 1 Sam. 16:1 that Samuel did consider Saul to still have some chance with God.

1Sa 15:24 Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned-

The very words of Judas (Mt.27:4). Again, we see clearly David as a type of Christ. David said these same words to Nathan and was accepted, but Saul wasn't. Clearly the words were like so much in his life, a mere religious formality and not from the heart.

David was after God's heart. We see for all time that repentance can be feigned, a mere form of words with a desire to appear right before men. And this merits rejection.

I have transgressed the commandment of Yahweh and your words because I feared the people and obeyed their voice-

This fear of the people contrasts with the warning given to him in 1 Sam. 12:14: "If you will fear Yahweh and serve Him, listen to His voice and not rebel against the commandment of Yahweh, then it will be well with both you and the king who reigns over you". He feared the people rather than Yahweh. And so many likewise fear the opinion of others rather than feel the depth of their personal relationship with God.

Their words, and the unspoken 'word' of their silent opinion of Saul, struggled within Saul's mind against the words of God. And because he didn't have a deep seated respect for God's word as the ultimate authority, he therefore gave in to their words. We have this same struggle almost minute by minute in daily life. It's not only our familiarity with the Biblical text which will assist us towards victory, but our

base, core conviction that God's words are of ultimate authority. One reason for Saul's lack of respect for Yahweh's words is that he seems to see them as Samuel's words ("your words"); hence he feels he has sinned against Samuel more than against God; see on :25. Our attitude to God's word, our approach to the inspiration of the Bible, will be related to our obedience to it.

Saul had been anointed king of Israel, on God's behalf. His duty was to lead them, not be led by them. In this sense he is admitting his failure to be king. He had already been removed from being king but had insisted on remaining king. He is admitting his failure as a king. We need to ask: 'And what should he have now done?'. So he should have now recognized his failure as a king, resigned from the kingship, let David take over- and walk humbly with his God to ultimate future salvation. But as with so many, the pride and prejudice of the flesh took over. Saul's second rejection at this point was not simply because he didn't kill Agag and kept the cattle for himself. The essence was that he was on his own admission listening to the people, being ruled by them, rather than spiritually leading them. I suggested on 1 Sam. 13:15 that this was the same reason why he was rejected from being king then.

Saul obeyed the voice of the people and the voice (s.w.) of the sheep and oxen that he covered (1 Sam. 15:24,24). Later he obeys the voice of Jonathan and promises not to kill David (1 Sam. 19:6) the voice of the witch and of his servants who persuade him against his will to eat (1 Sam. 28:22,23). We have the impression of a man readily persuaded by voices. If he had had a fundamental commitment to obey the voice of Yahweh as he was repeatedly asked, he would not have listened to these other voices. Nor the voices in his own head. Likewise those without a fundamental commitment to God's word are open to all the other voices around them, and likewise have no moral compass nor ethical direction. The Hebrew for 'to hear' is the same as 'to obey'. Samuel had told Saul he would be made to hear or obey God's word (1 Sam. 9:27 "that I may tell you the message of God" uses the word for to hear / obey, the hint being 'that I may make you hear / be obedient to the message'). But he failed to make use of this be ause he found the voice of other things more attractive to hearken to.

1Sa 15:25 Now therefore, please pardon my sin and come back with me so that I may worship Yahweh-

Saul's religiosity is reflected by the way in which he asks Samuel to "pardon my sin", when he ought instead to have been asking this of God. For Yahweh is the God who delights to pardon sin (s.w. Ex. 34:7). But whilst Saul uses the correct vocabulary, he misdirects it- to Samuel and not to God. And he ends up using the very phrase of Pharaoh (Ex. 10:17), also without ultimate sincerity. And we note Pharaoh also asked Moses to pardon his sin, rather than asking Yahweh directly. By contrast, David asks God directly to "pardon my sin" (Ps. 25:18; 32:5). In this we see how David was a man after God's heart and Saul wasn't. They both sinned, but it was the response they made to their sin which reflected the real state of their heart. Saul's motive is clear- he wants Samuel to return to Gilgal and publically justify Saul by presiding over the sacrifice of the best animals at Gilgal, although this was perhaps not what Saul had initially planned. For he kept them for himself.

That the repentance was insincere is shown by the statement in :26 that Saul has rejected Yahweh's word, and has "turned away from following Me" (:11). True repentance would have involved still following Yahweh; the righteous man falls seven times but rises up again. And in this we see the difference with David's heart, who wanted to continue following despite his conviction of serious sin.

1Sa 15:26 Samuel said to Saul, I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of Yahweh, and Yahweh has rejected you from being king over Israel-
For "rejected", see on :23. Samuel appears to have concluded that Saul is now finally rejected and beyond the hope of reformation by repentance. "Return" is the word usually used for repentance. Samuel didn't see Saul's repentance as sincere, and so he would not turn again with him. And yet he apparently gives in and does so in :31. This could have been due to fear of Saul, who apparently got physically violent with him (see on :27). Or it could have been because he still entertained the desperate hope that perhaps Saul had turned again / repented. And perhaps he is rebuked for this in 1 Sam. 16:1.

1Sa 15:27 As Samuel turned to go away, Saul grabbed the skirt of his robe and it tore-
The translation here is misleading. He grabbed the hem, the outer border of the garment, probably at the neck or shoulder, literally grabbing him by the collar. It's possible that Saul intended the mantle to tare, because it symbolized Samuel's prophetic authority. And Saul dearly wished for God's words through Samuel to be untrue. But denial of God's word, rejecting the inspiration of the Bible, will not save us. And we see that such positions are ultimately motivated by a desire to demonstrate God's judgments of us as being untrue and somehow negated by our negation of them.

This can also be translated as Samuel tearing Saul's robe. When David does the same to Saul, he is alluding to this.

1Sa 15:28 Samuel said to him, Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbour of yours who is better than you-
Put this together with later verses in :29,35: "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee (Saul)... and hath given it to (David)... the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that he should repent... and the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel" (AV). This juxtaposition of such conflicting statements seems to intentionally give us insight into the deeply conflicted feelings of God, which were perhaps reflected in Samuel (see on :31).

I suggested on :27 that it was Saul who had torn the Kingdom. Those who are deprived of the Kingdom will have made the decision themselves. Samuel knew that Yahweh had already decided to given the kingdom to another, as already expressed in 1 Sam. 13; and he knew that God had already selected this "neighbour"; for Bethlehem was only 12 miles away from Gibeah of Saul. But Samuel had still gone on hoping for Saul, and was apparently not proactive in seeking for this replacement- hence the implicit criticism of him by God in 1 Sam. 16:1.

Perhaps David took a cue from these words, and started thinking of Saul as his neighbour. And then his mind went to Lev. 15:18; if Saul was his neighbour, he was to love him as himself, and not take vengeance.

"Better" recalls the description of Saul in 1 Sam. 9:2: “and there was no man among the sons of Israel better than him”. David was "better" than Saul in that he was a man "after" God's own heart, i.e. he was seeking for that heart, as in "the Police are after him", "the miner is after gold". In the same way as there are to be shepherds according to God's heart (Jer. 3:15), and Eli was to be replaced by such a man: “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is within my heart and within my soul" (1 Sam. 2:35). And the reason for chosing David is stated in 1

Sam. 16:7- Yahweh looks to the heart. Externally, David was not necessarily "better" than Saul, and his Psalms frequently reference his "sins and faults of youth".

1Sa 15:29 The Strength of Israel will not lie nor change His mind, for He is not a man that He should change His mind-
We read in this very context that God has changed His mind about Saul. Why the obvious contradiction? It is so glaring that it must be intentional. I suggest the impression being given is that God is conflicted within Himself. He could have not changed His mind about Saul- He had after all predicted how Saul would be, Israel had agreed to that, and so there was nothing more for God to do. His change of mind was in that He didn't want His beloved people to suffer under Saul, and so He had changed His mind about leaving them to suffer the results of their choice- and had gone on to choose a king who would be good for them. It is the choice of David which is wherein God changed His mind; His mind change was in not leaving Israel to the consequences of their sin. His change of mind was about judgment upon His people. They had absolutely consciously chosen it for themselves despite warning- but still God feels sorry for them, despite no real signs of repentance. From His basic pity for His people. And such relenting from judgments, or ameliorating their effects, is to be found all through the prophets. But this feature of God should lead us to repentance, rather than abusing His grace. Joel 2:13 is clear- because Yahweh does relent from judgment, therefore "Tear your heart, and not your garments, and turn to Yahweh, your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity".

God does change His mind; the Hebrew for "lie" here can mean "retract", and clearly God does often retract His judgments upon men if they repent. So these words may solely and specifically reference this case of God's rejection of Saul as king and His choice of David. Saul wants God to change His mind about this, but he is clearly being told that in his case, this isn't going to happen. Saul's "kingdom", either his personal kingship or his dynasty, had already been removed in 1 Sam. 13:13,14- but God had been open to ammending that. Saul's behaviour in 1 Sam. 14 and then with the Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15 meant that the window of opportunity was now closed. And meantime, it seems God had "found" David as a replacement; we are given the impression that God began searching in 1 Sam. 13:13,14, and then in 1 Sam. 15:28 He says that He has given the kingdom to Saul's neighbour. The statement that God will not lie i.e. retract is perhaps referencing the choice of David as a replacement: "Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David" (Ps. 89:35- also alluded to in Ps. 110:4 "Yahweh has sworn, and will not change His mind: You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek"). His choice of David would not be changed, but this didn't mean that Saul personally was rejected from salvation. Sadly he saw only the kingship and not personal salvation and relationship with God.

And yet despite these apparently final words of rejection of Saul and replacement with David, Samuel mourns for Saul with the implication that he is begging God to even so, rethink and find a way for Saul (1 Sam. 15:31); hence God's rebuke of Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul... since I rejected him", 1 Sam. 16:1. He knew God well enough to know that He does rethink. We have many examples likewise in the prophets. 'This is it... no re-thinking, no about turn again... I will save you no more'. But still God does.

God does not "repent" as men do, but He can still change His mind. Samuel therefore wept to God for Saul to change his mind, and therefore for God to relent on His stated purpose concerning him (1 Sam. 15:11). Saul had been rejected in 1 Sam.

13, but he was given a chance to change that (see on :1), and continued as king. So perhaps the idea here is that God would not any longer change His mind over Saul. The rejection of him in 1 Sam. 13 was now confirmed. Yet despite telling Saul that "the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent", Samuel appears to have continued praying for a change of mind from God and Saul; we can conclude this from the way God had to keep telling Samuel to stop (1 Sam. 15:25; 16:1). This is very similar to how God told Ezekiel that He would not spare nor repent of His attitude to Israel, and will judge them according to their ways (Ez. 24:14); yet according to His grace, it is many times recorded that He did and will spare them, and does not judge them according to the merits of their sins.

LXX adds: "And Israel shall be divided to two: and God will not turn nor repent, for he is not as a man to repent". The division of the kingdom was therefore ultimately traced back to Saul's apostasy.

1Sa 15:30 Then he said, I have sinned, yet please honour me now before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me so that I may worship Yahweh your God-

Again we note "Yahweh *your* God". See on :21. It really was all about appearances before men in the religious group, rather than before God. We note that all the elders of Israel were present there in Gilgal. Perhaps there was some truth in Saul's excuse that in fact he intended to offer the best animals to Yahweh at some big gathering proclaimed at Gilgal; for he had had at least a week to gather the elders. Saul had gone up to Carmel in the north of the land to proclaim his victory (:12), and perhaps he intended to offer the best animals in front of an Israel gathered to behold his military glory, and to view the humbled Agag before him. What was wrong with all this was that he had disobeyed Yahweh's commandment for the sake of his own pride, and was using the service of God for his own ego. And this pride was so disgusting to God, as it is to this day. Saul was therefore desperate that his display of victory, his victory triumph, not be marred by Samuel snubbing it.

1Sa 15:31 So Samuel went back with Saul-

"Return" or "went back" is the word usually used for repentance. In :26, Samuel didn't see Saul's repentance as sincere, and so he would not turn again / go back with him. And yet he apparently gives in and does so now. This could have been due to fear of Saul, who apparently got physically violent with him (see on :27). Or it could have been because he still entertained the desperate hope that perhaps Saul had turned again / repented. And perhaps he is rebuked for this in 1 Sam. 16:1.

And Saul worshipped Yahweh-

Worship like prayer can be on a surface level, or the real thing. Saul "worshipped the Lord" merely for the sake of appearances, because this was what his position required of him, the hymn being sung which he had to go along with.

1Sa 15:32 Then Samuel said, Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites! Agag came to him confidently, thinking, Surely the bitterness of death is past-

I explained on :31 that the gathering at Gilgal had been set up as a kind of victory triumph to Saul's glory. Saul did not intend to kill Agag, and Agag had got that impression, that he would not taste the bitterness of death. It had been Saul's idea to parade him live, in some kind of Roman victory triumph- to Saul's glory. He had been commanded to kill him immediately exactly so that this would not be the case.

Samuel therefore killed him, although it seems not at the victory triumph but privately, so that Saul could not glory in him.

1Sa 15:33 Samuel said, As your sword has made women childless, so your mother will be childless among women! Samuel cut Agag in pieces before Yahweh in Gilgal-
See on :32. "Before Yahweh" implies there was a high place there, or possibly the ark.

1Sa 15:34 Then Samuel went to Ramah and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul-
The idea is that they both returned to their homes, for Samuel had his home in Ramah. The fact Saul returns to his home village at this point could suggest he was as it were resigning from being king.

1Sa 15:35 Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death-
This is proof enough that Samuel was resurrected to see Saul on the day of his death. Ramah was less than ten miles from Gibeah so it could be implied that Samuel went into hiding until his death.

Yet Samuel mourned for Saul, and Yahweh grieved that He had made Saul king over Israel-
We note the parallel in feeling between Yahweh and Samuel. Samuel's desperate desire for Saul to repent, for the project with him to work out, reflected that of God. And God's efforts with people are similar to this day. And like Samuel, we should have His saving, hopeful heart for the lost and stubborn.

Any separations from brethren are brought forth from much sorrow; Corinth ecclesia were told that they should have mourned as they withdrew from one who had left the faith (1 Cor. 5:2). "The whole house of Israel" were commanded to "mourn" the necessary destruction of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:6). Samuel mourned and God repented when Saul was finally rejected (1 Sam. 15:35). Paul wept when he wrote about some in the ecclesia who had fallen away (Phil. 3:17-19). It must be said that 'block disfellowship'- the cutting off of hundreds of brethren and sisters because theoretically they fellowship a weak brother- hardly enables 'mourning' and pleading with each of those who are disfellowshipped.

Samuel's mourning for Saul reflects his love for him and his desire to make things work for him. This is an essay in humility, seeing he was himself the ideal candidate for king and his maternal expectations were that he would be the anointed one.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 16

1Sa 16:1 Yahweh said to Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?-
This sounds like a rebuke of Samuel for still entertaining the hope that Saul might repent. For his mourning may be mourning in prayer before God, asking Him to still accept Saul. I noted on 1 Sam. 15:26 that Samuel appears to have concluded that Saul is now finally rejected and beyond the hope of reformation by repentance, and therefore refused to "return" with Saul. "Return" is the word usually used for repentance. Samuel didn't see Saul's repentance as sincere, and so he would not turn again with him. And yet he apparently gives in and does so in 1 Sam. 15:31. This could have been because he still entertained the desperate hope that perhaps Saul had

turned again / repented. And he is now rebuked for this. We learned from 1 Sam. 15:28 that Samuel knew that Yahweh had already decided to given the kingdom to another, as already expressed in 1 Sam. 13; and he knew that God had already selected this "neighbour". But Samuel had still gone on hoping for Saul, and was apparently not proactive in seeking for this replacement- hence now the implicit criticism of him by God.

God tells Samuel of His rejection of Saul, and Samuel cries to Him all night. I think the implication is that Samuel was pleading with God to consider another future with Saul (1 Sam. 15:11,35; 16:1). Amos 7:1-6 is another case- God reveals His intention regarding Israel, but then Amos makes a case against this and is heard. In fact, these and other examples suggest that this is almost a pattern with God- to devise His purpose, and then in the 'gap' until its fulfillment, be open to the persuasion of His covenant people to change or ammend those plans. This could be what Am. 3:7 is speaking of: "Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets". It's as if He reveals His plans to them *so that* they can then comment upon them in prayer.

Samuel's kissing of Saul may reflect a genuine fondness for him (1 Sam. 10:1); hence he is told to stop grieving that Saul has gone wrong (1 Sam. 16:1). And yet it was through Samuel that God had foretold what a bad man Saul would be. But Samuel's grief and fondness for Saul surely reflects how he understood that those prophecies were not inevitably going to be fulfilled. Samuel knew that Saul could have acted otherwise as he lived in the gap between prophecy and fulfilment.

Fill your horn with oil and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided a king for Myself from among his sons-
"Provided for Myself" could be an implied rebuke that Samuel had not been more proactive in searching him out. Literally, "seen", which could suggest God had searched for David and found him, having foreseen him from afar.

1Sa 16:2 Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hears it he will kill me. Yahweh said, Take a heifer with you and say, I have come to sacrifice to Yahweh-
We get the impression that this is intended to recall Moses' weak reluctance to do God's work. Samuel was it seems rebuked for holding on to the dream that Saul would work out well in the end, and for not being proactive in seeking the neighbour of Saul whom Yahweh had already appointed to be king. "Go" in :1 is responded to with apparent defiance: "How can I go?". It seems Samuel was well known for going to villages and homesteads to offer sacrifice. They would have been voluntary peace offerings, with the people invited to eat of the offering; even though in this case Samuel himself brought the animal. That could imply that Jesse was not forthcoming in providing the offering.

1Sa 16:3 Call Jesse to the sacrifice and I will show you what you must do. You are to anoint for Me the one whom I name to you-
Samuel had commanded Saul earlier to wait until God would show him what he must do (the very same phrase is in 1 Sam. 10:8). Now, God was telling Samuel to do what Samuel had told Saul to do. And Samuel had observed Saul's testing, his initial obedience and his later failure. This is how God works, repeating circumstance between the lives of people, bringing people into our lives from whom we are to learn; and then we are tested just as they were. David may have reflected on this, for he in turn uses the phrase of how he was waiting for God to lead him further (1 Sam.

22:3). He would have remembered how Samuel had come to his father's house and likewise waited for God to show him what he had to do.

1Sa 16:4 Samuel did what Yahweh said and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, Do you come peaceably?-
This may reflect their deep fear of Saul. For the last we knew, the elders of Israel, including of Bethlehem, had gone to Gilgal and witnessed Samuel snubbing Saul over the matter of Agag; and it was known that Samuel had withdrawn credibility from Saul. And Saul was doubtless fuming and cussing Samuel about that. So a visit from Samuel was not particularly to be welcomed.

1Sa 16:5 He said, Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to Yahweh. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice. He consecrated Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice-
We wonder whether Jesse and his wife were very faithful people. His other sons all supported Saul (1 Sam. 17:13). He was surely one of the elders of Bethlehem who were not comfortable with the idea of a visit from Samuel, the peripatetic priest (:4). He was here asked to consecrate himself, but Samuel ends up having to consecrate him, and Samuel has to provide the animal for the peace offering himself (:2). And it's possible to understand Ps. 51:5 as meaning that David may have been an illegitimate child. The description of David's other sons as "rejected" (:7) uses the same word as used of Saul's rejection by God; a rather strong term, which seems to imply they were rejected by God as they had rejected Him.

1Sa 16:6 When they had come he looked at Eliab and said, Surely Yahweh's anointed is before Him-
The very structure of Biblical Hebrew as a language is often instructive as to how God wishes us to perceive things. There is actually no literal word in Biblical Hebrew for 'to think' – instead there is a word meaning 'to say in one's heart'. And there are times when the word is wrongly translated simply "say"– here NEB correctly renders as "thought" instead of NEV "said". This provides a window into understanding how the Greek *logos* means both 'speech' and 'reason'; and sets the backdrop for the repeated teaching of Jesus that God counts human thoughts as if they are the spoken word or acted deed. But my point is that the Hebrew Bible continually focuses our attention upon the internal thought processes – for here is the real 'Satan', the real enemy to true spirituality.

Samuel's comment about Eliab was presumably to himself (1 Sam. 16:6); Saul's "I'll strike [David] to the wall" was surely said to himself (1 Sam. 18:11); likewise his explanation of his plan to trap David via his daughter Michael was all hatched out within his own brain (1 Sam. 18:21); other examples in 1 Sam. 27:12; 1 Kings 12:26 etc. Only God knew what those men 'said in their heart'; and yet He has recorded it in His inspired word for all generations to see. In this alone we see how ultimately, nothing remains secret; at the day of judgment, what we spoke in darkness (i.e. In our own minds) will be heard in the light of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12:3).

We enquire why Samuel apparently didn't learn from God's rejection of Saul, who like Eliab was young, handsome and strong. The similarities between Eliab and Saul are clear. Perhaps it wasn't so much that Samuel had failed to learn his lesson. Rather he may have thought that God was still going to choose on the basis of how He had chosen Saul- chosing the man whom Israel would've chosen. But in this case, he was wrong- God had changed approach. He was not giving Israel the kind of king

they would want, but rather He was now more proactively working through their desire for kingship, and giving them a man after His heart, who would be good for them rather than bad. We see in this case how God's thinking develops over time. He repented or changed His mind about leaving Israel to suffer the results of their conscious choice of a king. Now He intervenes to choose a good king for them. But Samuel is still assuming that God is chosing as He had done previously.

1Sa 16:7 But Yahweh said to Samuel, Don't look at his appearance or height, because I have rejected him. I do not look at the things man looks at; man looks at the outward appearance but Yahweh looks at the heart-
Samuel appeared to have assumed that Eliab must be Yahweh's anointed, seeing he was tall and handsome (1 Sam. 16:7). But he had not learnt the lesson he should've learnt from his experience with Saul, who was exceptionally tall, and yet was no leader of God's people. God tries to remind Samuel of this by saying of Eliab: "I have rejected him"; God had used the very term about Saul very recently (1 Sam. 16:1,7 RV). Ps. 89:19,20 imply that God had specifically told Samuel to anoint *David*- so his desire to anoint tall, handsome Eliab appears to have been a failure on Samuel's part, rooted in simply not joining the dots. And even when David was brought in, Samuel seems to have somewhat failed in his judgment- for he was impressed by David's fair appearance (1 Sam. 16:12), when God had just laboured the point to Samuel that the choice of a ruler was *not* to be based upon his appearance. See on :5.

1Sa 16:8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, Neither has Yahweh chosen this one-
In all close friendships there are some aspects which just could not have been contrived by human arrangement, and which add to the closeness and sense of specialness which those relationships have. There were such aspects with David and Jonathan, intensifying the love of David for Jonathan. For example, it was a beautiful coincidence that they both happened to have a brother called Abinadab (1 Sam. 16:8 cp. 1 Chron. 8:33).

1Sa 16:9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. He said, Neither has Yahweh chosen this one-
It's unclear whether the sons and Jesse knew what was happening. We get the impression Jesse ushered each of his sons before Samuel, perhaps to receive from him a part of the meat of the peace offering. However by this stage they had not yet sat down to eat the peace offering (:11). As they passed by him, Yahweh signalled to Samuel whether or not this was the chosen son. And David was anointed in the presence of his brothers (:13). See on :10.

1Sa 16:10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. Samuel said to Jesse, Yahweh has not chosen these-
This statement is hard to understand unless Samuel had told Jesse his intention. In which case there was clearly some agreement from Samuel in this risky venture. For Samuel is alluding to Dt. 17:15, "You shall set him king over you, whom Yahweh your God shall choose". The same word for "choose" is used. Despite their desire to choose their own king (1 Sam. 8:18 s.w.), and God disagreeing with it, He and not they chose the king. He intervened to as it were make them obedient, even in this wrong choice they had made. We marvel at His grace. For David's choosing was totally of God and not man.

1Sa 16:11 Samuel said to Jesse, Are all your children here? He said, There is still the youngest; he is keeping the sheep. Samuel said to Jesse, Send and get him, for we will not sit down until he comes here-

It's possible to understand Ps. 51:5 as meaning that David may have been an illegitimate child. This would also account for the diffidence in inviting him, and answering the question as to whether David was one of "your children". The youngest son had a bad lot in life, serving his older brothers and doing the dumb jobs like minding the sheep. But from this kind of hopeless, bottom of the ladder or hierarchy situation, God prepares those whom He can use.

"The youngest" is literally "the littlest / shortest", and David is presented as not as tall as Eliab. We wonder whether he was short- again, showing how God chooses not as man does. The short, youngest, runaround servant brother. The Septuagint includes a Psalm 151, which was also found in the Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 at Qumran. In this psalm David speaks in the first person about himself, and says: "Smaller was I than my brothers" [see J.A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll*]. In Ps. 119:141, reflecting on his younger life, David recalls: "I am small and despised". Saul and Eliab are both noted as tall, as is Goliath. But it was David the small who was chosen to bring down Goliath and not those with the human qualification of being tall.

1Sa 16:12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with a beautiful face and handsome appearance. Yahweh said, Arise, anoint him, for this is the one-

"Ruddy" could mean he was a redhead, which was unusual for Semitic peoples and considered handsome. A red head amongst dark haired Semtic folks may well have been seen as weird and unusual. As any unusual appearance was seen sceptically. Again, it is the outside God uses. We have just read that Yahweh doesn't look at the appearance. It could be that God is as it were making a concession to human weakness by giving them a good looking king. Or it could be that like Moses, the idea is that he was "fair to God".

1Sa 16:13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers-

It's unclear whether or not they understood this anointing to be as a king to replace Saul. For they "followed Saul" (1 Sam. 17:13). Perhaps they did perceive what it was all about, but their jealousy over his choice led them to support Saul. There are similarities with the hateful jealousy of Joseph's brothers concerning his choice, as one of the youngest. David's Psalms connect being "anointed" with having opposition, and this was doubtless rooted in his own experience (Ps. 2:2; 89:51; 105:15). But surely Ps. 45:7 was also based upon David's case: "You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, even your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows". The choice of David is here predicated upon his love of righteousness "above" his brothers. The "gladness" at the anointing was likely only for Samuel and David, as the brothers were doubtless bitterly jealous onlookers. However when this is quoted about the Lord Jesus in Heb. 1:9, "gladness" is translated by a Greek word meaning 'exaltation'; as if the anointing was a sign of David's exaltation above his brothers.

And the spirit of Yahweh came mightily on David from that day on. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah-

This is the same phrase used of how the Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul and

empowered him after his anointing to liberate Jabesh (1 Sam. 10:6,10; 11:6). This is in line with how in Judges the Spirit comes upon men to liberate Israel from their enemies. So we wonder whether David's victory over Goliath which we will now read of is the result of this rush of Spirit upon David. Saul didn't win the victory because the Spirit was now not with him, but with David.

Anointing is clearly associated here with the gift of the Spirit. The oil poured on the head represented the Spirit influencing the mind. Is. 61:1 continues the connection: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me”. But Paul says that if we are "in Christ", in the anointed one, we too are anointed. The promise of baptism with the Spirit (Jn. 1:33) appears to allude to the idea of anointing with oil. We thus become the specially chosen ones, empowered to do God's will and influenced in our hearts. It is the power to be obedient: “And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ez. 36:27). It is the way to understanding and relationship with God: God “filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Ex. 31:3). The Spirit gives ability or empowerment: "I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord” (Mic. 3:8; Zech. 4:6). But as we learn from Saul, we must continue to be filled with that Spirit and not resist the operation.

The Spirit departed from Saul and came to David (:14). This was the Spirit which had made Saul a new man and given him new heart in order to do God's work. This spoke of his psychological strengthening and transformation, which continues to be the work of the Spirit to this day. But the Spirit as it were transferred from one to the other because it was given for the intention of making them saviour king of Israel. That intention transferred from Saul to David and therefore the Spirit was transferred from Saul to David.

The Spirit came on David as it did on Samson (1 Sam. 16:13); they were both empowered to kill lions, whilst keeping the fact a secret. And in both those acts they were taught that they would deliver God's people from the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:34-37). Indeed, David's confident words that God would deliver him from the Philistines were evidently inspired by Samson, the renowned one-man deliverer from Philistine armies. Both Samson and David wrought "great salvation" for Israel (1 Sam. 19:5 cp. Jud. 15:18). As Samson was characterized by his love of that riddle (the word occurs nine times in Jud. 14:12-19, and Jud. 15:16 Heb. is also some kind of riddle), so David uses the same word to describe how he chose to put forth a riddle (Ps. 78:2). Psalm 3 is full of reference to Samson's fight at Lehi. It was also written at a time when David was betrayed by his own people. And his failures with women would make another parallel.

1Sa 16:14 Now the spirit of Yahweh had departed from Saul and an evil spirit from Yahweh troubled him-

See on :13. In Old Testament times, an evil or unclean spirit referred to a troubled mental state (Jud. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:10); and in every Old Testament reference to evil spirits, they were sent by God, not an orthodox ‘Devil’. In New Testament times, the language of evil spirit/demon possession had come to refer to those suffering mental illness. The association between demons and sickness is shown by the following: “They brought unto Him (Jesus) many that were possessed with demons: and He cast out the spirits with a word… that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Mt. 8:16,17). So human infirmities and sicknesses are described as being

possessed by “demons” and “evil spirits”. See on :15. But in this case we can also understand this as an inclination towards moral evil. Saul was being psychologically confirmed in the path he wished to go.

Saul's moral decline is clearly related to this evil spirit from God. But he didn't lose personal responsibility. It's like probing whether a drunk man is responsible for his actions whilst drunk, and is he responsible for getting drunk if he is alcohol dependent. Human responsibility cannot be totally removed from the equation. The Kingdom was torn from him (1 Sam. 15:28) and so now the Spirit is taken from him. Clearly one function of the Spirit was to enable him to lead Israel. Hence it was transferred to David, the chosen king. And yet Saul remains king of Israel and God gives him His Spirit still at times- because He never loses hope of winning Saul back to Himself.

The same word for "departed" is used in 2 Sam. 7:15 of Yahweh's mercy or grace departing from Saul. One dimension of having the Spirit is to abide in God's mercy and grace. In that position, our sins and indeed our whole person is covered and we are accepted as we are. David uses the same word in 2 Sam. 22:23 and Ps. 119:102 of how he has not departed from God's ways. God confirms this by saying that indeed David had not departed from Him (1 Kings 15:5). This clearly doesn't mean he never sinned. 'Not departing' seems to be the same idea as the Johannine concept of us abiding in God and Him abiding in us through His Spirit.

1Sa 16:15 Saul’s servants said to him, See now, an evil spirit from God troubles you-
See on 1 Chron. 21:30. "Troubles" is the word for 'made afraid'. Saul became paranoiac as a result of his own insecurities, which in turn were rooted in his own lack of faith and security in God's grace. His pride also contributed majorly, so that he ever feared losing his crown and glory. These psychological processes were confirmed by God. This is how His Spirit works upon the human spirit. His Holy Spirit will likewise confirm us in the upward spiral of spirituality we wish to take, working through our own psychological processes. Had Saul accepted he was not to be king any longer, he wouldn't have had this fear of losing the crown. And could have lived at peace with God and been eternally saved.

1Sa 16:16 Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is a skilful player on the harp. When the evil spirit from God comes on you, he can play and you will feel better-
There is quite a theme of servants bringing blessings or good news (1 Sam. 9:6; 16:16; 25:14 cp. Gen. 41:10; 2 Kings 5:3). This may be to reflect God's interest in the significance of the lowly. I suggested on :15 that God's Spirit worked to confirm Saul's own psychological processes, freely chosen by him. No amount of music would change this. At best only a surface level, placebo effect would be achieved. We too must beware of the power of music. It is good if it confirms us in the upward path we are going; but we must beware of the possibility that like Saul, we can be unspiritual people who are made to feel only temporarily better by music. The essential issues are as outlined in :15, and will not be changed by music.

1Sa 16:17 Saul said to his servants, Find me someone who can play well and bring him to me-
"Find" is literally to see or provide. The Hebrew language reflects certain realities about the nature of God's ways. The common Hebrew word for 'to see', especially when used about God's 'seeing', means also 'to provide'. Abraham comforted Isaac

that "God will see for himself [AV 'provide'] the lamb" (Gen. 22:8 RVmg.); and thus the RVmg. interprets 'Jehovah-Jireh' as meaning 'the Lord will see, or provide' (Gen. 22:14). The same word is used here when Saul asks his servants to "provide" him a man. When Hagar said "You God see me" (Gen. 16:13) she was expressing her gratitude for His *provision* for her. What this means in practice is that the fact God sees and knows all things means that He can and will therefore and thereby provide for us in the circumstances of life; for He sees and knows all things. "Provide me" is the same phrase used of God also seeing or providing Himself a man, also David. We wonder what is the purpose of this parallel. Possibly Saul was being led to see that Yahweh had done just what he had done- searched and found a man from Jesse's sons, called David. And further, Yahweh actually used Saul's searching for and finding David in order to Himself search for and find David and bring him to the court.

1Sa 16:18 Then one of the young men said, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilful in playing, a mighty man of valour, a man of war, who speaks well and is good-looking, and Yahweh is with him-
"Seen" means "provide"; see on :17. "Young men" means just that, and is not the usual word used of Saul's servants. Perhaps they had grown up with him, having also been taken from Bethlehem to serve Saul, as Samuel had predicted Israel's king would do. They say nothing of David's victory over lion and bear which he mentions in 1 Sam. 17:34-36. Instead, David was known by the other youngsters for having fought valiantly against the Philistines. His fights with the wild animals were personal things to him, he didn't share them with others, and only *in extremis* did he tell Saul about them in order to let him fight Goliath. There are private things which occur within our experience with God, deliverances so amazing and personal it's not appropriate to publically share them with others.

1Sa 16:19 Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, Send me David your son, who is with the sheep-
This was in fulfilment of Samuel's warning that Israel's king would take their young men to serve him. And yet through this curse, blessing was to come. God is never defeated by sin but somehow works through it in a wider sense. They only had a "few sheep" (1 Sam. 17:28); David was not from a wealthy family, he was "a poor man" as he says himself (1 Sam. 18:23). His later abuse of the "poor man" Uriah once he was rich (2 Sam. 12:3 s.w.) was therefore the more culpable.

Saul adds the detail that he knows David is with the sheep. We wonder whether the story of David's calling from the sheep to be anointed had been shared to him. Presumably by David's rejected brothers, who we are told "followed Saul".

1Sa 16:20 Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a bottle of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul-
Bread and wine had been sent to Saul during the process of training him in 1 Sam. 9. Perhaps this was to recall that, in an attempt to prod Saul back to his earlier spirituality. We marvel at God's continued working with this man, despite having already twice rejected him. His activity with those who apparently leave Him is amazing. Situations are arranged to restimulate their previous spiritual connections.

1Sa 16:21 David came to Saul and stood before him. Saul loved him greatly and he became his armour bearer-
For "loved him", see on 1 Sam. 18:20. But by 1 Sam. 17:15,56, David has returned to

the sheep and Saul is ignorant of him. Saul's mental illness may well have involved short term memory loss, and he may have totally forgotten about the young David who came to play for him and was then dismissed; or perhaps David himself wanted to leave the court. This verse could also be a summary statement of what happened, and then 1 Sam. 17 explains how it came about, with that chapter climaxing in David's glory and, as we would learn here, promotion to Saul's armourbearer, carrying the very armour of Saul which he himself had declined to use.

Saul loved David. David had spiritually helped him, and the very special relationship between the spiritual helper and the helped had fully developed. Yet in such cases it isn't uncommon for there to arise a bitterness between the convert and the converter; exactly as happened with David and Saul.

However it is quite legitimate to translate: "He loved him greatly" as meaning David loved Saul. It is in fact ambiguous, although the NEV like most versions opts for Saul loving David. But "it seems unlikely in a verse in which David is undoubtedly the subject of three of the four waw-consecutives, and Saul the referent of each of their respective object markers, that we would switch subject and object for the penultimate waw-consecutive verb with no indication that this is taking place". After all it is hard to understand Saul loving David when he must surely have guessed that David was the chosen replacement for him; I noted on :19 that Saul seems to have known what happened when Samuel visited Jesse and anointed David. Of course it can be that love and hatred coexist in human relationships- that would make the record yet again, psychologically credible. But David's love for Saul likewise was mixed with much anger and hatred for him, as expressed in the Psalms. This again is the coexistence of love and hatred in relationships- which we actually see all the time. Love-hate is indeed a feature of the records. Jonathan and Michal loved David but Michal seems not to have been always loyal to him. Saul loves Jonathan and wants the best for him but then also hates him and at one point tried to kill him, and then they die together on Gilboa. Samuel loved Saul but was angry with him. All this is perhaps background to the feelings of God towards Saul- anger but love, and therefore multiple second chances. Withdrawing His holy Spirit, giving Saul the evil spirit, but then seeking still to put His Holy Spirit back into Saul. Likewise between God and Israel, giving them a king in His anger, but then re-working the whole thing to still keep loving them.

1Sa 16:22 Saul sent to Jesse saying, Please let David stay with me, for I am pleased with him-

See on :21; 1 Sam. 17:58. "Stay with me" is "Stand before me", as if this was an official position. But as noted on :21, we may be reading here a summary statement of what Saul did to David after the victory over Goliath, and now in 1 Sam. 17 we are to read how this situation came about. This is typical of Hebrew writing and prose style.

1Sa 16:23 When the spirit from God was on Saul, David took the harp and played, and Saul was refreshed and felt better and the evil spirit departed from him-

The effect was produced not just by unaccompanied music of itself, as if some kind of music therapy could of itself make a man spiritually minded rather than carnally minded; but because David says that he sung hymns, or at least, words, upon the harp: "sing praises to Him with the harp" (Ps. 33:2); "I will open my riddle on the harp" (Ps. 49:4); "I will praise You with the harp for Your faithfulness, my God" (Ps. 71:22); "Sing praises to Yahweh with the harp, with the harp and the voice of melody" (Ps. 98:5); "sing praises on the harp to our God" (Ps. 147:7). These Psalms

are all clear that David's playing of the harp meant singing spiritual songs as he did so. Ps. 92:2,3 is clear: "to proclaim Your grace in the morning and Your faithfulness every night... with the harp". Harp playing along doesn't proclaim grace, but singing words accompanied by a harp does indeed do so. It was through David's Holy Spirit inspired words, in those Psalms just quoted, that the Holy Spirit drove out the evil spirit from Yahweh. Although the Holy Spirit had been removed, God still wanted to give it to Saul and He sought to do so through His Spirit-words through David.

Saul would be "well" after David played for him. But the Hebrew word is never used in a medical sense, of feeling well rather than sick. Often it has the sense of well spiritually. Obedience to the covenant meant things would go "well" (Dt. 5:33; 19:13). "It shall be well" with the righteous (Is. 3:10). The evil spirit from Yahweh departed and then Saul was spiritually well. We can conclude that the evil spirit was therefore confirming Saul in his sin. We note too the power of spiritual music in helping people depart from the way of sin, and how third parties can play a role in helping spiritual victory. But it was not simply the music that calmed Saul, the idea surely was that it was David's Spirit inspired Psalms that he sung which have Saul spiritual strength. It's a good exercise to think which Psalms he used for this; I have suggested above that all the Psalms that mention "the harp" may have been those David played at this time. We see how God's Spirit through David's Psalms was still at work to reverse the effects of the evil spirit. Always God's desire is for us to be spiritual, even if He confirms is in our choice of sin. This explains why Saul was "refreshed" by David's Psalms; this is a form of the word ruach. He was re spirited by the Spirit from David's Psalms. Just as later God would as it were force His Spirit upon Saul as he went to persecute David. Again we see God's desire for Saul to be spiritual. Just as the kingship was taken away from him on 1 Sam. 13 and again in 1 Sam. 15, so the Spirit is removed and yet still given to him. God is the God of second and multiple chances. And so God works oftentimes with man, giving us the consequences of our actions, the withdrawal of His Spirit- and yet always seeking to impose His Spirit again upon us. This ebb and flow is what spiritual life is about, but we either go the way of an upward spiral, or like Saul, downward to destruction.

According to Ps. 35:13 "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth, I afflicted my soul with fasting. My prayer returned into my own bosom". Saul is in view (see on Ps. 35:12). The sickness of Saul was psychological, and David not only played the harp for him but also prayed and fasted in sackcloth for him. This again is something we don't see in the historical records.

I explained on :16 that Saul's illness was confirmed by God through His Spirit working on Saul's psychological issues, which arose from his own unspirituality. Music could not resolve those issues, apart from by some temporary placebo effect. And we must be aware likewise of 'feel good' religion caused by music. This is not to decry the use of music, but it is a caveat sounded by Saul's case.

We could also entertain the possibility that God departing from Saul may mean that the Angel physically left him; for God makes His Angels Spirits, and He works through them (Ps. 104:4)- the Hebrew for 'depart' can imply physical movement (it is also translated 'withdraw', 'pluck away' etc.). At times in our lives we may feel the presence of God coming and going. Perhaps such feelings are connected with the presence or absence of our Angel, although the Angel leaving us does not necessarily imply God's displeasure with us. The Angel may return to God (cp. Angels ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder) to report on His actions or to seek further commands; or they may depart from us in order to give us a feeling of spiritual

depression so that our faith is tempted all the more. Job and Jesus on the cross are prime examples of this- hence the real anguish of the Lord's cry "My God, My God (a reference to His Angel?), Why hast Thou forsaken Me". In this case, an added trial of the crucifixion would have been that Jesus did not feel at His spiritual strongest to face the ordeal. Job explains how all things in life come and go in rhythms, and so also does our spirituality (Job 12:15; 34:29; 36:32; 39:3- the context of each of these needs to be studied to get the point). So the Lord was perhaps on a spiritual 'low' cycle due to the Angel not being with Him. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10. However, the essential reference here is as explained on :16; God was confirming Saul's spirit psychologically by His Spirit acting upon him.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 17

1Sa 17:1 Now the Philistines gathered their armies to battle and assembled at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and they encamped between Socoh and Azekah in Ephesdammim-

David and Goliath

David must be one of the greatest types of Christ. At this time of the David and Goliath conflict he was a shepherd, despised by his brethren, trying to save Israel at a time of dire physical suffering and spiritual apostasy. These connections alone should make us scan this record for deeper Messianic allusions. The giant strongman falling to the earth because of a stone suggests Nebuchadnezzar's image of Dan.2, where the stone refers to Christ. Note how lion and bear (17:34 cp. Dan. 7:4,5) and brass and iron (17:5-7 cp. Dan. 2:32,33) are all mentioned in the record. Goliath's death by a fatal wound in the head (1 Sam. 17:49) must look back to Gen.3:15, again connecting David and the stone with the seed of the woman (Christ) and equating Goliath with the seed of the serpent. This is confirmed by the repetitious description of Goliath in battle with David four times as covered in "brass" from head to foot (17:5,6); which is related to the word translated "serpent" and is a symbol of sin. According to some etymologists, "Philistine" fundamentally means 'one who rolls in the dust', i.e. a serpent; and significantly, Goliath is several times described as "the Philistine". But he may also look ahead to a latter day personification of militant Palestinians, also to be brought down by the Son of David. Six being the number of the flesh it is significant that his "height was six cubits and a span... his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels" (17:4,7). It is even possible that the "man of sin" of 2 Thess.2 refers back to Goliath as his prototype, in which case the image of Dan. 2 and the man of sin are equated.

Goliath, representing the seed of the serpent, a personification of sin (i.e. the Biblical devil), needed a man to fight him (17:8,9). The men of Israel cowered in fear, wishing they could only have the strength and courage necessary, but looking one on another helplessly as the invincible giant made his boast. How to overcome him and the evil intent of this man against God's people was what the men's conversation revolved around: "Have you seen this man that is come up? Surely to defy Israel is he come up". They also discussed the glorious reward being offered: "It shall be, that the man

who kills him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and make his father's house free in Israel" - and throw in his daughter for good measure too (17:25). But "all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid" (17:24). This may well refer to those who thought about being Israel's "champion" in fighting Goliath, rather than speaking about the Israelite army as a whole. Now what more precise description could we wish for of our feelings in the struggle against sin? There seems a similarity here with men and Angels weeping because no man was found worthy to look upon or pen the book of life (Rev.5:3-5)- until our Lord prevailed on the cross. 'Golgotha' meaning 'The place of the skull' or even a form of Gol Goliath, may well be the place near Jerusalem where David buried Goliath's skull (17:54), greatly strengthening this connection. "Ephes-Dammim" meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam.17:16) coincided with the daily sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

The ultimate wager

If David represents the Lord Jesus and Goliath represents sin personified, then his supporting Philistines must be the armies of our individual sins, depending for their strength and power on this principle of the devil (cp. Goliath). The Israelites were effectively the servants of the Philistines before this battle, although with a theoretical chance of freedom; and similarly with mankind before Christ's death. However, this relationship between Israel and the Philistines was now to be formalized and made permanent: "Choose you a man for you...if he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants" (17:8,9). This was exactly the contest between sin and our Lord; if He had failed in His mission, we would have permanently been in bondage to sin, as we were effectively even before the cross.

Something of the same wager is implied in Gen. 3:15, another prophecy of the cross- either the man kills the snake by hitting it on the head, or the snake will bite the man’s heel. He has to kill it outright, first time. Yet thanks to His victory we are now free from sin- and more than that, our sins (cp. the Philistines) should now be subservient to us; Rom. 6:17,18 may even be referring back to this passage: "You were the servants of sin, but (by baptism into Christ's death)... being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness". This sheds more light on the immense pressure on our Lord, knowing that just one slip would result in the permanent servitude of man to the sin which he hated. No wonder He appeared a man of sorrows.

Despised and rejected

Plenty of other details now appear relevant to the Lord's crucifixion. Both his family and the men of Israel generally rejected David's claims to be able to save Israel (1 Sam. 17:28-30). Eliab's "Why did you come down here?" matches Christ's brothers telling him "depart hence" (Jn. 7:3). The crucifixion psalms emphasize how the Lord Jesus felt rejected by both Israel and His family as He fought His Goliath then (e.g. Ps. 69:8). Arguing back from the experience of his Lord, it would seem that David was really hurt and cut by the discouragement he received. 'Eliab' meaning 'God of my father' invites comparison with the Jews who despised our Lord's claims at the time of His death. The alternative rendering 'God is my Father' would connect with Israel being God's son (Ex. 4:22).

It is twice stressed that David's brothers "followed Saul" (1 Sam. 17:13,14); is it possible to argue back from this that Christ's brothers were strong Judaists? His family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution (Ps. 31:11), fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did (Ps. 31:11 = Mt. 26:56). David's being sent by his father to see his brethren has echoes of Joseph's experience- which was also highly typical of the Lord Jesus. Joseph's problems with his brothers may well indicate a great barrier between the Lord Jesus and His natural brothers (who surely would have always resented the fact He was the firstborn in the eyes of their mother, whilst they were most likely convinced He was illegitimate).

David's other brothers also have names which have connections with an apostate Israel; see on :13. Similarly, Saul too represented the Jewish system, as the one who appeared superficially to Israel to be the one who could overcome all enemies, i.e. sin in the parable (1 Sam. 8:20). Doubtless one of the reasons they were attracted to Saul was because his large warrior physique made him seem a match for the giant Philistines in these man to man duels that often decided whole battles in those days. And the men of Israel should have learnt at the time of the crucifixion that the Law which appeared so powerful to save was unable to do so. By contrast we are specifically told that David was not of unduly great height (so 1 Sam. 16:7 implies), but was chosen because of the spiritual state of his heart.

We have seen how Goliath was a 'man of sin'; the New Testament concept of Satan can describe both the Jewish system and also sin, because "the strength of sin is the (Jewish) law". The great height of both Saul and Goliath would inevitably have been noticed; as if to imply that Saul (representing the Law) was as superficially as powerful as Goliath was. There seems to be a verbal connection at least between the Jews' mocking question of Christ "Where is Your father?" (Jn. 8:19) and Saul's "whose son is this youth" (17:55)- or was Saul's question also a subtle accusation of illegitimacy? Ps. 106:13 also seems to describe Israel's rebellions in language relevant to Saul, as if he represented them: "They sang His praise (cp. Saul prophesying). They soon forgat His works; they waited not for His counsel" - cp. Saul in 1 Sam. 13:8. Note how Saul lost the animals (asses) he was given to look after; while David preserved his father's sheep, maybe looking forward to the Jewish system's inability to save its people compared to Christ's keeping of us.

Of sheep and shepherds

We can now attempt a more chronological analysis of the confrontation between David and Goliath: "And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and went, as Jesse commanded him" (17:20). There being no human reason for David to leave his shepherding (17:28), there may be the implication that Jesse knew more about David's mission than appears on the surface. Thus David could say to Eliab concerning his coming to the battle "Is there not a cause" (17:29)- i.e. 'I'm not just here to bring provisions- but for something far more important'. It would be fitting if Jesse represented God, in which case the commandment to go and see the brethren would correspond to Joseph being told by Jacob (cp. God) to go and see his brethren (Gen. 37:13). This resulted in his figurative death and resurrection in the pit, comparable with the Son being sent by the Father to inspect the Jewish vineyard, with the subsequent murder of Him by the husbandmen (Lk. 20:14).

"As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise..." (Jn. 14:31) is in the context of Christ's going to fight sin on the cross; and it connects very nicely with David receiving the father's command and arising to go. David leaving the sheep and going to fight Goliath recalls the parable of Christ as the good shepherd leaving the

flock and going to save the lost sheep (Lk. 15:4-6). The shepherd goes alone at night up into the hills (cp. Isaac going to be sacrificed in the hills), and carries the lamb on his shoulder- as Christ carried the cross of our sins on his shoulder to redeem the lost sheep of mankind (Is. 53:6). This lost sheep parable is also picked up in 1 Peter 2:25: "For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls" (i.e. Christ the shepherd). But this in turn is quoting Is. 53:5,6: "All we like sheep have gone astray... but he was wounded (on the cross) for our transgressions", which is thus the parallel to the saving of the lost sheep. This interpretation of the lost sheep parable- i.e. that the shepherd going to save the sheep represents Christ going to die on the cross- was first prompted by David leaving the sheep with the keeper to go and fight Goliath, representing Christ's saving us from sin on the cross. The leaving of the sheep with the keeper perhaps looks forward to Christ's entrusting the disciples to the Father's care in those agonizing days while death parted him from them, as David's encounter with Goliath did. David's subsequent leaving of them altogether to go and live in the King's court clearly looks forward to our Lord's ascension to Heaven after his victory over the real Goliath.

Note how in the fight with Goliath, David progressively shed all human distractions; he left the sheep with a keeper, then on arrival at the battlefield he "left his things in the hand of the keeper of supplies" (17:22), and finally left Saul's armour behind, representing the Law as a means of overcoming sin. And there must also have been progressive stages in our Lord's coming towards that state of total faith necessary for His final victory. David "ran into the army" after leaving behind "his things", and also ran towards the Philistine. The eagerness of our Lord to fight sin, despite knowing the supreme difficulty and seriousness of failure, sets us a matchless example of the enthusiasm we should have in our striving against sin.

Revving up the faith

"He came to the trench as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle" (17:20). What a terrifying sight and sound that must have been; and similarly the strength of sin and man's inability to overcome must have struck fear into our Lord's heart as he came closer to the cross. David as a newcomer and onlooker would especially have noticed the obvious weakness of Israel. His seeing the weak knees of all the warriors of Israel must have made him feel like his Lord did on contemplating the fact that He personally would have to overcome sin: "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his own arm brought salvation... for he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation... the garments of vengeance" (Is. 59:16,17). Connect this with David's shunning of such physical armour for its spiritual counterpart. Is there a conscious allusion to David and Goliath here?.

David asked about the promised reward for killing Goliath as if it was a genuine motivation for him to rev up his faith and go ahead. "The man who kills him, the King will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel" (17:25). Our victorious Lord received these rewards in the form of the spiritual riches of greater understanding of the Father, being given us, God's spiritual daughter, in marriage, and us being made free from the legal requirements of the Law. This again suggests that Saul in his heavy duty taxation system represented the demands of the Mosaic law, from which the victory of the cross made us free. Amazingly, it was the beauty which our Lord saw in us which inspired him to take a deep breath of faith and step forward.

Angelic help

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (17:26). At least three times David stresses that he will overcome Goliath with the help of the Angelic armies: "This... Philistine shall be as (the lion and bear I killed with Angelic help), seeing he (also, like them) has defied the armies of the living God ('God of the living ones'?- i.e. the Angel cherubim, 17:36). Thus David says to Goliath "I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts (invariably an Angelic title of God), the God of the (Angelic) armies of Israel" (17:45). The Messianic parable is so complete that this triple emphasis on David's Angelic help must have relevance to Christ's overcoming of sin on the cross. It seems highly likely that it is through the Angels that Christ (and ourselves in our crosses) received power to overcome sin (cp. Goliath), over and above any human strength which we can muster. One can therefore better understand the spiritual panic of our Lord when He felt this Angelic presence and help withdrawn on the cross (Mt. 27:46).

Total faith

"And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (17:32). This must be another John 14 allusion- this time to "Let not your heart be troubled" (Jn. 14:1), spoken by Jesus as he was about to go forth to the cross, as David was about to fight Goliath. His subsequent references to his earlier delivering of sheep out of the mouth of the lion and bear indicate that Israel were in the same situation as those lambs had been; again, as if the good shepherd David/ Jesus had left the sheep safely (17:20) and gone to save the lost- and almost killed- sheep of Israel, both natural and spiritual. And on another level our Lord's previous triumphs of faith, not least in the wilderness temptations, would have given him courage for the ultimate spiritual test of the cross.

Such was his totality of faith that David could calmly call out " I will smite you, and take your head from you" (17:46). David's emphasis on cutting off Goliath's head (cp. :54) and the stone hitting the forehead perhaps indicates that the significance of Christ's victory over the devil was that men now have the possibility of sharing His victory over the mind of the flesh. This is where the real David and Goliath battle is worked out so many times each day. David continued: "That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel", which seems to be referred to in Jn.14:31: "That the world may know" that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself through Christ's loving obedience to the Father (cp. Jn. 17:23).

Brief battle

David crossed the brook and then cast the stone at Goliath (17:49). This connects with our Lord crossing the brook Kidron, and maybe echoes him being a stone's cast distant from the disciples (Lk.22:41). There is a continued emphasis on David's zeal to fight Goliath- as the Lord had to fight sin: "David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and" disarmed him (17:51). There is a possibility that this is consciously referred to in Col. 2:15, where we read that Christ on the cross "Disarmed (NIV) principalities and powers, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them"- as if Goliath represented the Law and the sin engendered by it which our Lord conquered on the cross.

Triumph over every sin

"And the men of Israel and Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines" (17:52). That shout of glee and triumph should be ours on considering Christ's victory- and because the devil has been destroyed by his death, we should enthusiastically pursue our sins right back to their source, confident we will have the victory- as the Philistines were chased back to their home towns, such as Sharaim,

meaning 'two gates'- as if hinting at the promise that Abraham's seed, both Christ and us, would inherit the gate of our enemies. Note that the enemies that the seed of Abraham would conquer are our sins (Gen. 22:18 cp. Lk. 1:73-75; Acts 3:25-27; Mic. 7:19). David seemed to have anticipated that his victory would be pressed home by the Israelites attacking the individual Philistines: "The Lord... will give you into *our* hands" (17:47). And no doubt our Lord hoped that He eventually would see that the travail of His soul had produced the same effect in us. So let us too arise, shout, and pursue those sins which appear so triumphant.

The "reproach" was taken away from Israel by David's victory (1 Sam. 17:26), as Christ carried away the reproach of our sins on the cross (Ps. 69:9; Rom. 15:3). Therefore we can stand unreproachable before God at judgment, with no sin at all against us- due to Christ's victory (Col. 1:22).

Additional homework for the enthusiast would be a study of Psalms 8 and 144 (see notes there), both of which appear to be about the David and Goliath struggle, and are therefore a description of our Lord's feelings after his resurrection. Ps.144:3 is amazing: " What is... the son of man (Jesus) that You take account of him?", showing our Lord's humility is such that even now He is amazed that God bothered to help Him.

Political aspects

The different metals which feature in the description of Goliath all find their place in the beasts of Daniel 7, which are destroyed by the coming of Christ. This implies that the nations of the world are confederate under one charismatic, seemingly invincible leader; the latter day Goliath. Hit by David's stone, Goliath keeled over "upon his face to the earth" (1 Sam. 17:49), just as Dagon his god had done earlier. Thus Goliath was treated like his gods, as the lives of people of this world consist in the idols of materialism they possess. Perhaps this "man of sin" will likewise be a Philistine / Palestinian? We have mentioned the evident similarity between Daniel's image and the Goliath man of sin. The place of the conflict was a little South of Jerusalem, halfway between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean. This sounds suspiciously like the king of the north planting his tents (cp. the Philistine's) "between the seas (Dead and Mediterranean) in the glorious holy mountain" (Dan. 11:45). The Philistines making their constant painful incursions into an apostate Israel may well have links with the Palestinian activities today. Goliath was from Gath (1 Sam. 17:4), meaning "winepress", with its Armageddon and judgement hints. Similarly the conflict lasted for 40 days (1 Sam. 17:16)- another link with the coming Divine judgements. David's mocking "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" matches "Who are you, O great mountain?" which was to be destroyed "not by might.. but by My spirit" (Zech. 4:6,7), as Goliath was killed by David without a sword in his hand, i.e. not by human might. Note that the Philistines were pitched on a mountain, comparing with the description of Babylon as "O great mountain". Thus the king of the North, the man of sin, Babylon, Daniel's image of the last days are all alluding to Goliath, implying that Christ will destroy all of them during one conflict. It is worth questioning whether all these various systems in opposition to Christ will be separate at the time of His return; present developments suggest there may be one huge opposing system (the beast) which incorporates all these historical precedents. But now the possibilities are opened up to the reader to work through 1 Sam. 17 again from this political/ latter day prophecy perspective.

Matchless Jonathan

It must be significant that straight after the fight between David and Goliath, representing Christ's conquest of sin on the cross, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with

the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul... then Jonathan and David made a covenant" (1 Sam. 18:1,3). After the cross, a new covenant was made between Jesus and us, making Jonathan representative of us. The extraordinary bond between David and Jonathan then becomes a type of our relationship with Jesus after His victory on the cross. To confirm the covenant, "Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle", pointing forward to our total divesting of human strength and giving it to our Lord when we appreciate the greatness of His victory without those things (cp. 1 Sam. 17:39).

Jonathan lived in an environment which was bitterly opposed to David; yet he stuck up for him, at the risk of embarrassment and opposition, and certain damage to his own prospects (1 Sam. 20:31); as we should in this wicked world. As Saul cast a javelin at David, so he did at Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:33); as we should fellowship the sufferings of David's greater son. Saul's hate of David resulted in Jonathan being "grieved for David, because his father had done him shame" (1 Sam. 20:34). Is this not our response to our world in its' ceaseless blasphemy of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Only occasionally could Jonathan and David meet, brief moments of intense fellowship away from the rest of the world, strengthening each other's hand in the Lord (1 Sam. 23:16), reconfirming their covenant together (1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8,16; 23:18). No wonder their goodbyes were so hard: " they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded" (1 Sam. 20:41). Not surprisingly, they looked forward to the promised day of David's Kingdom: "You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto you" (1 Sam. 23:17). Our communion meetings with the Lord during our wilderness journey must surely mirror those meetings.

The depth of the David/Jonathan relationship introduces to the pages of Scripture the idea of *agape* love- a love higher than normal human experience. "The beauty of Israel is (singular- about Jonathan, :25) slain upon your high places... I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant have you been unto me: your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:19,26). Such love should typify our relationship with Jesus. But does it?

Our Inspiration

The David and Goliath conflict was not only inspirational to Jonathan, but to the men of Israel generally. It seems from 1 Chron. 11:13,14 that soon after the fight with Goliath, there was another skirmish with the Philistines at Pas-Dammim [RVmg. 'Ephes-Dammim'- the same place where David fought Goliath]. Again, the men of Israel fled, but those who held fast were given a "great deliverance" ["salvation", RVmg.], just as David is described as achieving. Those men who stayed and fought were doubtless inspired by David; just as we should be, time and again, by the matchless victory of our Lord on Golgotha.

1Sa 17:2 Saul and the men of Israel assembled and encamped in the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines-

The idea seems to be that the Israelites were proactive in setting the battle in array against the Philistines, but once faced with Goliath, they lost their nerve. As explained on :1 this reflects our confidence in overcoming sin in our strength being dented once we realize the enormity of the struggle and strength of the opposition.

1Sa 17:3 The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, and there was a valley between them-

The valley of Elah was described by one visitor as "strewn with rounded and waterworn pebbles". Consistently, the Biblical record is credible.

1Sa 17:4 A champion went out of the camp of the Philistines named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span-
Joshua / Jesus had destroyed most of the Anakim (Josh. 11:21,22), but the Israelites failed to capitalize on his victory. With the result that the few Anakim left in Gath had spawned Goliath. It's all a parable of what happens unless we totally root sin out of our lives and capitalize on the Lord's work. Depending how a cubit is defined, Goliath's height was between nine feet nine inches and eleven feet four inches.

1Sa 17:5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head and he wore a bronze coat of mail which weighed five thousand shekels-
About 157 pounds. It is copper which is really being referred to here as bronze was unknown then. I have often suggested that these historical records were rewritten under inspiration in Babylon for the encouragement of the exiles, and maybe the reference to bronze was inserted then. "Coat of mail" is literally 'scale armour', strengthening the connection between Goliath and the seed of the serpent, to be slain by a blow to the head. Goliath's scales also made him the embodiment of their fish god Dagon.

1Sa 17:6 He had bronze shin armour on his legs and a javelin of bronze between his shoulders-
"Javelin" could also be translated as some kind of armour, possibly for the throat. He was covered in armour, that is the impression. David's slingshot was therefore amazingly accurate, entering the one point which was not covered. He would have looked like a living metal image (see on :1).

1Sa 17:7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam and his iron spear's head weighed six hundred shekels, and his shield bearer went before him-
About 25 pounds. All the armour made Goliath very cumbersome in movement. David had the faith to see through all this, whereas the external appearance was all that the other men saw.

1Sa 17:8 He stood and shouted to the armies of Israel, Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me-
The Targum adds: "I am Goliath the Philistine of Gath, who slew the two sons of Eli the priest, Hophni and Phinehas, and carried away captive the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Dagon my idol, and it was there in the cities of the Philistines seven months. Moreover in all the wars of the Philistines I go forth at the head of the army, and we have been victorious in war, and have cast down the slain as the dust of the earth, and hitherto the Philistines have not honoured me, to make me captain of a thousand over them. But as for you children of Israel, what valiant deed has Saul the son of Kish of Gibeah wrought for you, that ye have made him king over you? If he be a valiant man, let him come down and do battle with me; but if he be a coward, choose you". Saul as the tallest Israelite was indeed the appropriate, intended person to fight on Israel's behalf, not least because God had given him the potential power to defeat the Philistines. The idea is that Israel were to send the man they had chosen to fight Goliath. And the man they had chosen as their

leader was Saul. But he failed to respond. Literally, Goliath says he is "*the* Philistine". He was the personification of all human strength represented by the Philistines. Saul's failure to face Goliath really sets him up for the path of jealousy which will now wreck the rest of his life. Had he had the humility to accept he was not really the one to be king, and accepted the twice repeated statements from God about this, he could have lived humbly with his God and been saved, and lived a calm and peaceful life.

There are clear similarities between the situations in 1 Sam. 11 and that in David's victory against Goliath in 1 Sam. 17. The difference is that in 1 Sam. 16 we learn that God's Spirit departed from Saul and came upon David. It has been observed: "First a challenge is issued by an alien (11:2; 17:23), followed by terror and fear in Israel (11:4; 17:24). After a search (11:3-4; 17:24), a deliverer appears for Israel (11:5-6; 17:25), and succeeds in delivering Israel from the foe (11:7-11; 17:50). The deliverer is recognized and made a leader for Israel (11:15; 17:55-8, 18:5)". Saul is therefore being shown to be no longer able to lead Israel.

1Sa 17:9 If he is able to fight and kill me, then we will be your servants, but if I overcome him and kill him, then you will be our servants, and serve us-

This wager (see on :1 for the typical significance), typical of how conflicts were resolved at the time, meant in practice that Saul was wary of allowing anyone to take it up. His allowing David to do so, without armour, without explaining his planned strategy of using a sling, but only on the basis of his faith in Yahweh... therefore shows at least some spiritual perspective in Saul. And it is also a tacit admission of his own lack of such personal faith.

"Overcome" is the word Saul will later use about David (1 Sam. 26:25), where he sees in David's prevailing over / overcoming Goliath a sign that David will ultimately prevail to become king in his place. Saul realized that Samuel had indeed chosen his successor as king, and it was David; and that kingship was guaranteed by his victory over Goliath. For Saul to seek to kill David when David had overcome even Goliath... was therefore futile. Saul realized this, but obsessively continued in it. Such is the obsessive, blind nature of jealousy.

Nations at the time saw all conflicts as between their gods and those of the enemy. Hence Goliath curses David by his gods (:43). "Serve" has the frequent connotation of serving in worship. Whoever won this duel would make the losers serve them and their gods. Hence Goliath's claim that he defies "the armies of Israel" (:10), alluding to the title "Yahweh of armies". And David's perception that this was all about the glorification of Yahweh's Name in all the land.

1Sa 17:10 The Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day! Give me a man and let us fight one another!-

Goliath's defiance of Israel is a major theme (1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). Later Philistine defiance is described with the same word (2 Sam. 21:21; 23:9). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross should be to us. The history here would have been inspirational when the Assyrians likewise defied the living God, and again this is a theme of the record (2 Kings 19:4,16,22,23; 2 Chron. 32:17 s.w.). It was also inspiration for the exiles when they were reproached / defied (s.w. Neh. 6:13). For another allusion to David and Goliath in the Assyrian context, see on :11.

Earlier, Nahash had "defied" Israel (1 Sam. 11:2, to make Israel a defiance / reproach, s.w., by making them gouge out their right eyes). Saul had then saved Israel from that reproach and defiance, but now he cannot or will not do so. The Spirit has

departed from him and is upon David, and it is he who removes the "reproach" from Israel (:26).

1Sa 17:11 When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine they were dismayed, and terrified-
Being "dismayed and terrified" is the term David in turn uses to his son Solomon (1 Chron. 22:13; 28:20). He was thereby urging Solomon not to worry if he was out of step with all Israel; if they were dismayed and terrified, he was still to walk in faith as David had done at the time of the Goliath crisis. It is also used to urge the people toward the spirit of David rather than that of Israel in 2 Chron. 20:15,17. The same phrase is also used in urging the people of Judah in Hezekiah's time to consider the Assyrians to be as a Goliath which they like David could vanquish (2 Chron. 32:7). See on :10. The exiles likewise were urged not to be dismayed and terrified at the reproach of men (Is. 51:7; Jer. 30:10), very clearly making the history with Goliath relevant to their times. Saul is clearly not acting as king of Israel. For he had been desired by the people so that "our king will go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20). But Saul flees from Goliath, whereas David runs toward him. Later Saul asks David to "fight Yahweh's battles" (1 Sam. 18:17). This was the job description of Israel's king, and so Saul is effectively showing himself not fit for purpose as king, and suggesting David is better as king. It was only pride that made him want to cling on to the throne. He should've accepted he was not the man to be king, and lived humbly with his God and let David be the king.

1Sa 17:12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse. He had eight sons and was considered an old man in the days of Saul-
Heb. "that Ephrathite", meaning 'the one already mentioned'- in the account of David's anointing.

1Sa 17:13 The three eldest sons of Jesse had gone after Saul to the battle. Their names were Eliab the firstborn, next to him Abinadab and the third Shammah-
I suggested on :1 that the sons of Jesse, David's brothers, were against him and were identified with Saul. In the type being worked out here and as explained on :1, they represented Israel after the flesh in their initial rejection of the kingship and anointing of the Lord Jesus. Abinadab means "The Father is willing"; cp. "All day long have I stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:21). Shammah means 'desolation, astonishment, ruin'. God would "make your land desolate (*shammah*)" (Jer. 4:7), and Israel were to be an astonishment to the world after their rejection.

1Sa 17:14 David was the youngest; and the three eldest followed Saul-
It is stressed that David's brothers "followed Saul" and were "gone after Saul" (see on :13). And yet Saul had been dismissed from his kingly role, and in the presence of Jesse's sons, David had been anointed as his replacement. This could suggest that the brothers jealously refused to accept this and were strongly supportive of Saul.

1Sa 17:15 Now David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem-
AV "went and returned from Saul", as if this was a permanent leaving of Saul by David. In :56, Saul is ignorant of him. Saul's mental illness may well have involved short term memory loss, and he may have totally forgotten about the young David

who came to play for him and was then dismissed; or perhaps David himself wanted to leave the court. Rather like Daniel slipping away from high profile court life when promoted to it, because of his conscience toward God.

1Sa 17:16 The Philistine drew near morning and evening and took his stand for forty days-
"Forty" seems a round number; Saul, David and Solomon are all recorded as reigning 40 years, but there are some chronological difficulties if the figure is taken literally. Ancient battles rarely took so long. It seemed that the Philistines really wanted to resolve things by a duel, but the Israelites were scared. The idea may be that he offered the duel for 40 days, and if Israel refused, then the confident Philistines would attack the psychologically worn down Israelites. Perhaps it was on the final day of the challenge that David intervened. This would also explain why Saul was so desperate that despite the serious implications of the wager, he agreed to allow David to do it.

1Sa 17:17 Jesse said to David his son, Now take an ephah of parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers-
Perhaps the information about the 40 days wager, and the time running out, is inserted in :16 to show the hand of providence in Jesse sending David at the end of the period. If David was famed as a man of war already, we wonder why he was not with the army. Perhaps his return from Saul was because he didn't want to be in such an unspiritual environment; and his brothers considered him too young for army service (:28).

We note that both Saul and David were sent by their fathers with the words "Take now" (1 Sam. 9:3 "Take now one of the servants with you and go to look for the donkeys"). Likewise in :22 David leaves his things or [Heb.] "bags". The same word is used of Saul hiding amongst the bags (1 Sam. 10:22 s.w.). We continually see parallels between the two men. They both sinned seriously, but the difference was David's heart for God and willingness to go His way. Perhaps shown by how he left the bags and ran to battle, whereas Saul tried to hide amongst the bags.

1Sa 17:18 and take these ten cheeses to the captain of their thousand-
Supporting evidence for the comment I often make that the word "thousand" is not always to be taken literally, and can refer to a group / regiment / family. This avoids the problem of otherwise unrealistically large numbers being spoken of at places in the record.

See how your brothers are doing and bring back news-
The Hebrew means "their pledge"; they were to return a collateral on a loan. This is rather curious, until we note that David's son Solomon in the Proverbs is quite obsessed with forbidding it in very strong terms (Prov. 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13- all quite some emphasis*).* Perhaps Solomon recalled some bad experience in his family because of this. David's brothers, Solomon's uncles, were to return a collateral. Perhaps this ruined the family and Solomon's wisdom has some human element in it, reflecting his own bad experiences in his family life. But there is nothing wrong with giving or taking collateral for a loan (Ex. 22:25-27); what is condemned in God's law is the abuse of the debtor and the abuse of the situation. See on Prov. 6:1.

1Sa 17:19 Saul and David's brothers and all the men of Israel were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines-
The two camps were on two mountains, divided by the valley where Goliath made his

challenge twice / day. It seems both sides fought a bit in the valley and then returned to their mountain top camps.

1Sa 17:20 David rose up early in the morning- There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:12); David (1 Sam. 17:20; 29:11); Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 29:20). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

Left the sheep with a keeper and took the gifts, and went as Jesse had commanded him; he came to the camp as the army was going forth to the battle, shouting the war cry-
See on :20. "The war cry" likely included some reference to Yahweh, and yet clearly the Israelite didn't really believe it; whereas David did.

1Sa 17:21 Israel and the Philistines put the battle in array, army against army-
David was walking with his brothers at this time (:23), so this may not have to mean that actual combat was going on. Rather would there have been an exchange of curses and facing off against each other, as was typical of ancient battles, rather than actual combat.

1Sa 17:22 David left his things with the keeper of supplies and ran to the army and came and greeted his brothers-
David could have returned home after leaving his things. But we get the impression from his "running" that he was zealous for involvement in this conflict.

1Sa 17:23 As he talked with them Goliath came up, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, out of the ranks of the Philistines. He shouted the same words, and David heard them-
"The same words" might mean 'the same words which David had heard that he was shouting, but now, David heard them for himself first hand'. David's desire was clearly to engage with him.

1Sa 17:24 All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were terrified-
The armies were each on a mountain, divided by a valley. They fled back to the top of the mountain. Fleeing before their enemies each day was living out the curse for disobedience to the covenant, and surely they were being taught that this was their essential problem. Here we have an example of how as explained in the previous chapter, man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. His terrifying appearance ought not to have disconcerted those who had God's outlook,

and looked not on the outward appearance. David's smallness / shortness (see on 1 Sam. 16:11) contrasts with Goliath's unusual tallness. But we have learnt from the rejection of Saul and Eliab that height is not to be feared. This perhaps also prepared David not to fear Goliath's height.

1Sa 17:25 The men of Israel said, Have you seen this man who keeps coming up? He comes up to defy Israel. The king has promised to give great riches to the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel-
I have noted several times that Saul seeks to emulate previous Biblical characters. This offer of his daughter in return for a military victory recalls Caleb's offer of Josh. 15:16. But always Saul is portrayed as only imitating on a surface level. And in this case, he didn't give David his daughter on the terms here offered.

1Sa 17:26 David said to the men who stood by him, What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine-
It is as if David wishes to clarify the reward. It could be that to marry Saul's daughter, whom he would have met in his time playing the harp for Saul, was something which further motivated him.

These are David's first recorded words. It has been argued that the first recorded words of Biblical characters are highly indicative of the real nature of the person. We think of Jacob and Esau's first recorded words in Gen. 25. David's first words here possibly indicate a dual motivation; he was interested in the reward, possibly captivated by the offer of Saul's daughter; and yet wanting God's glorification through the removal of reproach. Perhaps we are being introduced to David's abiding weakness for women. If he were the illegitimate son of his mother ["in sin did my mother conceive me" and we note the absence of any birth account for him, strange when compared to the information about other leaders], rejected and despised by his older half brothers, sent off to mind the sheep... a kind of male Cinderella, he would have longed for love. So his tendency to womanizing and wanting love is on one hand understandable. David's final end, being warmed by Abishag, with the frail Bathsheba nearby... is perhaps an appropriate tragic ending to this aspect of his life. If Saul were tall and handsome presumably his daughters were attractive women, and so David asks twice about this promised reward... as it made the unattainable apparently attainable for him.

And takes away the reproach from Israel?-
Saul's work was to remove the disgrace or "reproach" from Israel (s.w. 1 Sam. 11:2), as he had done with the Ammonites. When Goliath reproached Israel, it was Saul, Israel's tallest man, who was potentially empowered to fight him and remove the reproach. But he failed to do so, and when David did, Saul fell into a complex of spiritual jealousy. See on 1 Sam. 19:5 for another example.

Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?-
David was inspired by Jonathan's similar attitude in 1 Sam. 14:6; he may have been the armourbearer for Jonathan at that time. This is the intention of true fellowship, to take inspiration from each other.

1Sa 17:27 The people repeated to him what they had said: This is indeed what is promised to the man who kills him-
See on :26. The freedom from taxation, which was one of the bad things Saul was prophesied as doing to the people, meant that for that man, Saul was no longer to have

kingly power over him. David was to be king, and his victory freed him from Saul's kingship.

1Sa 17:28 Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?-
They only had a "few sheep"; David was not from a wealthy family, he was "a poor man" as he says himself (1 Sam. 18:23). His later abuse of the "poor man" Uriah once he was rich (2 Sam. 12:3 s.w.) was therefore the more culpable.

I know your pride and the presumption of your heart; you have only come down to see the battle-
He may mean that David was just trying to provoke someone to go out and fight Goliath, so that he could watch the fight. For the two armies were not themselves engaged in battle, being on opposite mountains divided by the valley of Elah. David comes over as anything but proud. The false accusation of Eliab reveals more about himself than it does about David. It is a classic case of transference; in this case, transferring his pride onto David and judging him for it. For Eliab was smarting under his own sense of hurt pride in that he had been rejected from being anointed king in favour of his kid brother. "I know the wickedness of your heart" of course recalls how Yahweh had found David to be a man after His own heart. Eliab thereby places himself at variance with God's judgment, because he judges according to the outward appearance. Again we see the state of the heart, and the invisibility of it, to be such a major theme in the Saul-David story. Clearly Eliab was aware of David's anointing as king, and yet like Saul, personal bitterness at being rejected as king in favour of David had made him bitter. Both Eliab and Saul are noted as tall men. But their human advantage and resource didn't empower nor qualify them. They both became parade examples of how human might doesn't bring victory nor even qualification for the fight.

1Sa 17:29 David said, What have I done now? Can I not speak?-
This has the ring of credibility to it; it is exactly how a youngest brother would talk to his oldest brother when falsely accused. We get the impression that false accusation of David was frequent; as noted on :28, the brothers transferred guilt for their own attitudes onto David.

1Sa 17:30 He turned away from him toward someone else and said the same, and the people answered him as before-
David seems to have wanted the reward clarified; it was attractive to him. There can be few men who do not have at least some attraction to the father and family of their wife. David really loved Saul's daughter, indeed the prospect of marrying her may have been a large motivator behind his zeal in fighting Goliath and the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:26,30; 18:26). Saul was not a totally unspiritual man; there are many hints that he had a spiritual side. It's rare indeed that a totally unspiritual person can love a highly spiritual person like David. And yet this fine relationship ended in an intense love-hate affair. So many of the Psalms contain references to Saul's smear campaign against David (Ps. 27:12; 31:13; 109:23 cp. 1 Sam. 26:19). This frequency of reference in itself indicates the weight with which this tragedy rested upon David's mind.

1Sa 17:31 When the words of David were heard, they repeated them to Saul and he

sent for him-
I suggested on :16,17 that the 40 day period of the challenge to a duel was coming to an end and Saul was desperate.

1Sa 17:32 David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of this Philistine. Your servant will go and fight him-
LXX has this as addressed to Saul, urging him not to have a faint heart because of this Philistine. These were the words of the Lord to His people just before going out to the cross (Jn. 14:1).

1Sa 17:33 Saul said to David, You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight him; you are only a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth-
David makes a play on these words by saying that he is "not able" (s.w.) to go against Goliath with Saul's armour. He was indeed not able to fight in human strength, only in God's. See on :42. Goliath had challenged Israel to provide a man "able to fight with me" (:9). Saul sees as Goliath sees, on the external rather than the internal and spiritual. He considers David not able. He fails to see that ability and empowerment is from the Spirit, which has now been taken from him and given to David.

1Sa 17:34 David said, Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock-
The young men in 1 Sam. 16:18 say nothing of David's victory over lion and bear which he mentions here. Instead, David was known by the other youngsters for having fought valiantly against the Philistines. His fights with the wild animals were personal things to him, he didn't share them with others, and only *in extremis* did he tell Saul about them in order to let him fight Goliath. There are private things which occur within our experience with God, deliverances so amazing and personal it's not appropriate to publically share them with others.

1Sa 17:35 I went out after it and struck it, and rescued it out of its mouth. When it turned on me I caught it by its beard and killed it-
Lions and bears don't have beards, so the "beard" likely refers to the chin, as the place where the beard grows. The 'rising up' ["turned on me"] of the wild animal against David was to prepare him for the 'rising up' of Goliath against him (:48 s.w.). Circumstances repeat in our lives; even incidents from youth are used to prepare us for similar circumstances, in essence, so that we have our faith tested and developed.

"Turned on me" is literally 'arose against me'. The same word is used of Goliath 'rising' to attack David (:48). There are other similarities between Goliath and the lion / bear. David 'went out' after the lion/bear (:35); as he would "go out" (s.w.) after Goliath. (:55). David "smote" the animals (:35) as he "smites" Goliath (:46,49,50). David "forcibly [seized]" the animals (:35) just as he "prevailed" (s.w. 'seized') Goliath (:50). He killed the beasts (:35) just as he killed Goliath (:50,51). As God saved him from the hand / paw of the beasts, so He would save David from the hand of Goliath (:37). David perceived this, in faith, he realized that his past experiences alone in the desert scrub were being used to prepare him for this moment; and so he can confidently say that "the uncircumcised Philistine" would "be like one of them [the lion/bear]" (:36).

"Killed it" is better as AV "Smote and slew". Two separate Hebrew words are used. David's two fold killing of Goliath reflected this. The same two words are used in :49,50- David "smote" Goliath with the stone and "slew" him by decapitation. He

clearly had this as his intended battle plan. Because he perceived that how he "smote and slew" the lion in his youth was programmatic for what he was now called to do. We too can perceive at times how earlier experiences, including those in childhood and youth, were intended to set us up for later experience.

1Sa 17:36 Your servant-
Often David calls Saul his master, describing himself as Saul's servant (1 Sam. 17:32,34,36; 20:8; 24:6; 26:16,19; 29:3,4; 30:15). This was no formal "Sincerely your brother and fellow-servant". This was a real conscious putting of himself down, as the Lord Jesus felt he was a worm rather than a man (Ps. 22:6). If only we would concentrate upon our own status and show some true respect for others on account of their being in the ecclesia, having even been anointed spiritually at their baptism (2 Cor. 1:21) as Saul was.

Killed both the lion and the bear. This uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God-
The armies of God are the Angels, but David saw the trembling armies of Israel as their manifestation upon earth.

1Sa 17:37 David said, Yahweh who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. Saul said to David, Go; and Yahweh be with you-
To agree to take up the challenge, with the conditions attached of :9, meant that Saul must have believed David had a chance of victory. And yet David was just a youngster with no armour. He didn't explain to Saul that he would be using a sling, he gives his confidence for victory as being in God Himself, and his previous experience of this. So Saul's decision to let the duel go ahead, given the consequences attached to it, was surely based on faith and spiritual reasoning. Saul was not completely unspiritual; and that is the tragedy of the man. Although it could have been a case of not being able to tell my courage from my desparation, as the 40 days of challenge were drawing to a close.

"Delivered me" is 'snatched me'. The connection is with how David had snatched / delivered / rescued the lambs from the paw of the beasts (:35 s.w.), saving them at the last moment; and God in like manner would give David snatching away / deliverance from Goliath as he snatched Israel from him. It is salvation for salvation. Our experience of God's salvation leads us to save others. He saves us that we might save others. And our salvation by God is on account of our salvation of others. Although in this case, David reasons that his salvation of the sheep was achieved by God saving him. This deep interconnection between our saving others and God saving us means that witness and ministry to others, unto their salvation, is an inevitable part of the believing life.

1Sa 17:38 Saul dressed David in his own clothes. He put a bronze helmet on his head and put a coat of mail on him-
To be dressed in the clothes of a king effectively meant that the king was ceding power to the person now wearing his clothes. The significance of this would only afterwards have been apparent to Saul. Saul would have realized that his anger with Samuel for as it were deposing him from the kingship was inappropriate- for he had effectively resigned it to David himself. We note that Saul's armour was parallel to Goliath's, who also had a bronze helmet on his head, a sword and a coat of mail (:5,51). David would not fight the enemy on the enemy's terms but in the totally

different paradigm of trust in Yahweh. We too are not to match helmet for helmet, armour for armour, human sword for human sword. All human resource is as nothing compared to simple trust in Yahweh, motivated by seeking His glory. We wonder whether Saul's dressing of David in his own clothes was so that if David won, people would think it was Saul. We recall the significance of a king wearing his own clothes to battle in the battle of Ahab and Jehoshaphat against the Syrians. A king in battle was known by wearing his own clothes. Again we see Saul's vanity and pride; for earlier he took credit for Jonathan's victory against the Philistines. All we know so far in the Bible about slingers is that the tribe of Benjamin were excellent slingers (Jud. 20:16), able to hit a target "at a hair's breadth". Saul was from Benjamin. Victory against Goliath with a sling would've been possible for him. But he thought in terms of human defence and strength and so it was for David to win in this way.

1Sa 17:39 David strapped his sword onto his tunic and he tried to move, but he was not used to it. David said to Saul, I can't go with these; I am not used to them. So David took them off-

He didn't explain to Saul that he would be using a sling, he gives his confidence for victory as being in God Himself, and his previous experience of this. The human method he would use was secondary, David is presented as going ahead in total faith. Our human methods must likewise be sidelined. See on :37.

1Sa 17:40 He took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag. His sling was in his hand as he drew near to the Philistine-

David took five stones but used only one. Was he faithless and doubting that the first one would hit home? Do those five stones represent the five books of Moses which Ps. 119 tells us was Christ's study all the day, it being through the word that Jesus overcame the mind of sin? Or did he aim to use the other four on Goliath's four giant sons (2 Sam. 21:16-22)? That shows supreme spiritual ambition. In reality those four were killed later by David's closest followers- and they must have their counterparts amongst us.

David and Goliath are indeed compared in terms of resources, of which they each have five. Goliath has: helmet, armour, shin protectors, sword [scimitar] and spear (17:5–7). David also has five items: stick, stones, bag, pouch, sling (:40); and picked up five stones, perhaps also in reference to Goliath's five items of armour. We see God's man operating according to a totally different paradigm. He has no defence in contrast to Goliath's heavy defence; Yahweh is his defence, as David often says in the Psalms. We enquire why David took a staff in his hand. It played no role in his slinging, and presumably he dropped it as he ran and then slung his stone. I suggest he took it as intentional parody of Goliath's mighty spear. David went into battle dressed as a shepherd. Shepherds were despised, but the image of shepherding / feeding flocks is used by God as His picture of what it is to be king over His people: "He also chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that have their young, He brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he was their shepherd according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands" (Ps. 78:70-72 and elsewhere). David was therefore acting as king- because he had been annointed king of Israel. Again we see paradigms turned upside down. The despised shepherd is the king and functions as a king.

1Sa 17:41 The Philistine advanced and came near to David with his shield-bearer in front of him-
The focus of the record is zoomed close in on the characters, so that it is easy to play Bible television with the record.

1Sa 17:42 When he looked at David he despised him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome-
Goliath and Saul had the same attitude towards David's youth (:33). As Goliath despised David (1 Sam. 17:42), so did Michal. The same word is used (2 Sam. 6:16). Goliath despised David because he was "ruddy" or redheaded. As discussed earlier, David's red hair would have been highly unusual in Semitic society. And anything unusual was not seen as cute, but rather as something strange and worthy of ridicule. Perhaps this too contributed to David's craving for love and intimacy, and contributed to his problem with women.

"When he looked..." shows again how Goliath was looking at the outside. But David's anointing showed how God "looks" at the heart and not at the external appearance.

1Sa 17:43 The Philistine said to David, Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks? The Philistine cursed David by his gods-
LXX adds "David said, Nay, but worse than a dog". This would reflect his deep humility, which we also see in his later reflections in Ps. 8 and Ps. 144 that he was most unworthy to have attained the victory. We note that in 1 Sam. 24:14 he also likens himself to a dog. He had a low self image.

"Sticks" suggests Goliath saw his supremacy in terms not only of his height, but his superior military equipment. Again and again, he [like Saul and Eliab] looks at the external and human resource. The whole story shows how experience [David was young compared to "the man" Goliath], stature and resources do not necessarily give victory, and God works outside of them according to a totally different paradigm.

1Sa 17:44 He said to David, Come here and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the animals of the field-
The same phrase is used in Ps. 79:2 of how Israel were indeed given to the birds and beasts. The implication is that there was no David to arise to save them, because they had rejected him.

1Sa 17:45 Then David said to the Philistine, You come against me with a sword, a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of Yahweh of Armies, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied-
David could have drawn the contrast between Philistine weaponry and his own sling and stone. But instead he makes the contrast between human strength, and the name of Yahweh. Although the armies of Israel were cowering in unbelief or at best, very weak faith... David has the grace to talk not simply about *his* God but the God of those weak armies of Israel. We note the parallel between the armies of Israel and the Angelic armies of Yahweh in Heaven. We note the same parallel in 1 Chron. 14:15. David believed this, even though the armies of Israel didn't.

1Sa 17:46 Today Yahweh will deliver you into my hand-
The idea behind "today" is "right now" (as in 1 Sam. 14:33 s.w.).

I will strike you down and cut off your head. I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines today to the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth- Note how the Angelic 'hosts' of God are contrasted with the 'hosts' of the enemies of God's people (2 Sam. 5:24; 1 Sam. 17:45,46; Is. 37:36). David and Goliath is the great example- David came to the *hosts* of the Philistines in the name of the God of Angelic *hosts*. And hence his faithful confidence that "the battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam. 17:47). This is a comfort not only in times of physical danger but in realizing that in any situation, there are far more with us than with our opponents. In every 'battle', we of course should be 'on the Lord's side'- and the battle is His, and ultimate victory assured. Perhaps these things are the reference of the enigmatic Song 6:13, which speaks of the dance or company of the two hosts- those of Angels and the corresponding hosts on earth?

That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel-
David had a vision of all the *eretz* promised to Abraham coming to accept Israel's God, and he often develops this thought in the Psalms. His language here seems to have inspired Elijah (1 Kings 18:36). May our language likewise be an inspiration to others rather than pulling them downwards spiritually.

1Sa 17:47 and that all those here may know that Yahweh doesn't save with sword and spear, for the battle is Yahweh's and He will give you into our hand-
David's language inspired others (see on :46), but he himself in these words seems to have been inspired by the song of his ancestor Hannah (1 Sam. 2:2-10), which is so similar in spirit to these words. This is how functional believers interact with each other, inspiring and encouraging to faith and good works and words. This was especial encouragement for the exiles, that God would restore them without their own military strength but by faith (Hos. 1:7; Zech. 4:6).

1Sa 17:48 When the Philistine came closer to attack David, David ran quickly towards the Philistine army-
Goliath 'rose up against' Yahweh and His people (s.w. 1 Sam. 17:48) just as a lion had 'risen up' against David in his youth (s.w. 1 Sam. 17:35). Goliath was in view in Ps. 139:21, where David speaks of how those who rise up against Yahweh are hated by him. The visual image is of David running towards the huge army and them fleeing; one man was as it were chasing thousands, because he was in covenant with God and receiving His blessing.

1Sa 17:49 He put his hand into his bag, took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead and he fell on his face to the ground-
LXX "The stone penetrated through the helmet into his forehead". The hyper accuracy of the slingers of Benjamin is mentioned in Jud. 20:16. Again there could be the hint that this victory ought to have been won by Saul or his tribe of Benjamin. But they didn't rise up to it, whereas David did; and this heightened the sense of chronic jealousy against him afterwards. Goliath fell forward, face down. The force of being hit by a stone would have naturally made him fall backwards. But God made him fall forward to show the victory was from Him. And Goliath in this way bowed before Yahweh. Just as his god Dagon had done in 1 Sam. 5:3. Goliath's head was cut off (:51) as was Dagon's (1 Sam. 5:4). Again we see how the battle was a vindication of Yahweh over the gods of the Philistines.

1Sa 17:50 So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him without a sword in his hand-
The record seems to glory in the fact that David didn't use the human strength and most powerful technology, but triumphed by faith through the weaker things of this world.

1Sa 17:51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine, took hold of his sword, drew it out of its scabbard and killed him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled-
We see here the way that whole masses have their faith focused in one person who is their figurehead. By contrast, the Israelites had no equivalent champion. God sent a young unarmed man out of nowhere to save His people.

1Sa 17:52 The men of Israel and Judah arose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gate of Ekron. The wounded of the Philistines fell down all the way to Shaaraim, Gath and Ekron-
The geography is absolutely accurate, as Gath was at the entrance to the valley of Elah. The mass of historical and geographical material in the Bible is so great that any uninspired writer would have made many slips.

1Sa 17:53 The Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines and plundered their camp-
David was as one man chasing the Gentile armies because he was experiencing the blessings of obedience to the covenant; but all Israel seem to share in them. We note that after Saul was anointed, he was granted victory over Nahash, the serpent. Now after his anointing, David is granted this victory. The idea was that God was repeating His project with Saul with David. Thus the Spirit was transferred from Saul to David.

1Sa 17:54 David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem-
This was done at a later date, as Jerusalem wasn't then in Israelite hands. This would have given rise to the name Golgotha, skull of Goliath; see on :1. Or it could be that as Nob was near Jerusalem, it is counted as Jerusalem. For this was where Goliath's sword was taken (1 Sam. 21:9).

But he put his armour in his own tent-
A man's own tent refers to his own house (1 Sam. 2:35; 4:10; 13:2); presumably back in Bethlehem. But he later presented Goliath's sword as an offering to Yahweh, and it was laid up at the tabernacle at Nob (1 Sam. 21:9). Or this can be translated that David wrapped Goliath's armour in Goliath's tent. The Israelites spoiled the camp of the Philistines, but all David wanted was Goliath's armour to be displayed as a reminder of God's triumph over human might. His later request for Goliath's sword to defend himself therefore reflets a low ebb for David spiritually.

1Sa 17:55 When Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the captain of the army, Abner, whose son is this youth?-
Saul's mental illness may well have involved short term memory loss, and he may have totally forgotten about the young David who came to play for him and was then dismissed; or perhaps David himself had wanted to leave the court and had slipped away.

Abner said, As your soul lives, O king, I don't know-
He doesn't swear as Yahweh lives, as is commonly found in the Bible, but by Saul's own life. Perhaps he felt that Yahweh was no authority to Saul to make an oath by. We note that this way of swearing by the life of the person being spoken to [rather than by Yahweh] is used of men to Saul (1 Sam. 17:55), by Uriah to David when he knew David had slept with his wife (2 Sam. 11:11) and by Hannah to Eli (1 Sam. 1:26). In every case the implication is that the speaker didn't think that the person being addressed really feared Yahweh.

1Sa 17:56 The king said, Find out whose son the young man is!-
David had previously played the harp before Saul. In :15 AV we read that he "went and returned from Saul", as if this was a permanent leaving of Saul by David. Now Saul is ignorant of him. Saul's mental illness may well have involved short term memory loss, and he may have totally forgotten about the young David who came to play for him and was then dismissed; or perhaps David himself wanted to leave the court. Rather like Daniel slipping away from high profile court life when promoted to it, because of his conscience toward God.

The question 'Who is this?' as asked by Boaz of Ruth (Ruth 2:8) is to be understood as a statement of intended action and not read on face value. Likewise Nabal's 'Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?' (1 Sam. 25:10). The same kind of question is asked by David about Bathsheba, even though he knew who she was because she lived next door to him and was the wife of his close friend (2 Sam. 11:3). Likewise when Saul enquires about who David is after his victory over Goliath, it is not because he doesn't know him. For David had been already at the court of Saul. The question 'Who is this?' means that the questioner wants to do something for the person being enquired after.

1Sa 17:57 As David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him to Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand-
This could imply that David was seeking to slip away from the battlefield and return home, but Abner "took him and brought him", possibly implying the use of an element of force. In this we see David's humility; that having done the job for God, he wished to slip away out of the spotlight, and return to his few sheep in the wilderness. We have in Psalm 8 David's thoughts at this moment, looking at the stars, the work of God's fingers, as his success with the sling stone had been the work of David's fingers, and marvelling at God's grace to him as a man.

1Sa 17:58 Saul said to him, Whose son are you, young man? David answered, I am the son of your servant Jesse, the Bethlehemite-
This cannot mean that Saul didn't know David, or who his father was; for in 1 Sam. 16:19, before the Goliath incident, "Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son" to ease Saul's depressions. So the question here perhaps maybe implied something like: 'Whose son are you? Jesse's? No, from now on you're adopted into my family, you're *my* son now, after all, you've been like a brother to Jonathan all down the years'. The fact that David replied that he was *Jesse's* son may have been a polite refusal to accept this position. It may be that Saul had tried to adopt David earlier, when after David had been at the court for some time, Saul asked Jesse if David could " stand before me" (1 Sam. 16:22). Another way of understanding Saul's apparent lack of knowledge of David, after having had much intimate association with him at the court in the past, is to conclude that Saul *pretended* not to know David. In

chapter 16, David has left his shepherding and is at the court, as Saul's personal counsellor and armourbearer. In chapter 17, he is back keeping the sheep. It may be that he ran away from the court after Saul tried to adopt him. In other words, he found that despite the close spiritual relationship he enjoyed with the family, Saul was overpoweringly possessive, and he just had to leave. Accordingly, Saul disowned him, hence his very public appearance of ignorance concerning who David was (17:55,56). When David later "avoided out of (Saul's) presence" (1 Sam. 18:11), this would not have been the first time he had gone through this. His desire and need to do this was made all the more complex by his falling in love with Saul's daughter, Michal (1 Sam. 18:26,28). We can well imagine how we would have loved to be Jonathan's brother-in-law. David and Michal were a marriage made in Heaven- that went wrong.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 18

1Sa 18:1 When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan became bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul-
The same phrase is used of Jacob's love for Benjamin in Gen. 44:30: "seeing his soul is knit up with the lad's soul". This phrase does not therefore speak of any homosexual love between David and Jonathan. We note that David was both hated and loved by many people. Jonathan and his sister Michal, even Saul at one point, all Israel, all Saul's servants (:22)... but David is never recorded as loving anyone. This perhaps all sets him up for his sin with Bathsheba.

See on 1 Sam. 17:1; 23:16,18. Saul loved David. David had spiritually helped him (1 Sam. 16:23), and the very special relationship between the spiritual helper and the helped had fully developed. Yet in such cases it isn't uncommon for there to arise a bitterness between the convert and the converter; exactly as happened with David and Saul. In response to his victory over Goliath, "Jonathan loved him as his own soul. *And Saul* took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house" (18:1,2). This seems to show Saul's response to David as parallel with Jonathan's response. Saul's possessiveness towards David was surely an indication of how closely he felt towards him. That he wouldn't allow him to return to his father's house suggests that Saul wanted to have David as his adopted son. His delight that David was in love with Michal was a strange mixture of motivations; genuine joy at having David as his son-in-law, and also glee that perhaps David would die whilst raising that strange dowry. See on :20.

It must be significant that straight after the fight between David and Goliath, representing Christ's conquest of sin on the cross, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul...then Jonathan and David made a covenant" (1 Sam. 18:1,3). After the cross, a new covenant was made between Jesus and us, making Jonathan representative of us. The extraordinary bond between David and Jonathan then becomes a type of our relationship with Jesus after his victory on the cross. To confirm the covenant, "Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle", pointing forward to our total divesting of human strength and giving it to our Lord when we appreciate the greatness of his victory without those things (cp. 1 Sam. 17:39). A good example of how the souls of David and Jonathan were spiritually knit together is shown by the identical style of prayer they

had (1 Sam. 20:12 cp. 23:10; the question arises: Who influenced whom?). After Christ's victory on the cross, He entered into a covenant with us His church. The intricately related friendship between David and Jonathan thus becomes typical of that between the Lord Jesus and ourselves. The idea of souls being knit together occurs in Col. 2:2,19, concerning how our hearts and souls are knit together with the Lord Jesus Christ. This alone encourages us to see Jonathan as typical of ourselves.

1Sa 18:2 Saul took him that day and would not let him go home to his father's house-
This seems to show Saul's response to David as parallel with Jonathan's response. Saul's possessiveness towards David was surely an indication of how closely he felt towards him. That he wouldn't allow him to return to his father's house suggests that Saul wanted to have David as his adopted son. His delight that David was in love with Michal was a strange mixture of motivations; genuine joy at having David as his son-in-law, and also glee that perhaps David would die whilst raising that strange dowry. David was "pleased" to be Saul's son in law, as Saul too was "pleased" at the prospect (1 Sam.. 18:20,26, the same Hebrew word is used); this indicates the complexity of the relationship.

1Sa 18:3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul-
See on :1,2. We are not told what were the terms of that covenant, but I suggest it was that Jonathan as the heir to the throne resigned that to David, aware that God had chosen David and not himself to replace his father. This shows a great humility towards God's word, requiring the resignation of human advantage in this life. The covenant was reaffirmed in 1 Sam. 20:8. This was the nature of Biblical covenants, and we reaffirm the new covenant [which is what Jonathan and David's covenant pointed forward to] each time we take the cup of the covenant in breaking bread.

1Sa 18:4 Jonathan stripped himself of the robe he was wearing and gave it to David with his tunic and even his sword, his bow and his belt-
The robe was his royal robe. Jonathan was resigning all power and hope for future kingship to David. I suggested on :3 that the covenant was to the effect that Jonathan agreed that David should replace Saul as king, rather than the throne going to himself. To give clothes to another suggests giving of an office, as we see in the experiences of Joseph and Daniel. He gave the clothes appropriate to the next in line to the throne to David. For his / *the* robe- see on 2 Sam. 1:23. Jonathan stripped himself of his "robe... and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle" (1 Sam. 18:4 AV). The triple phrase "and / even to..." indicates the totality of this stripping. "Bow" and "sword" often occur together as almost an idiom for human strength (Gen. 48:22; Josh. 24:12; 2 Kings 6:22; 1 Chron. 5:18; Hos. 1:7). Not only did he give David the weapons of his human strength (cp. 1 Sam. 13:22), but he appears to have stripped himself almost physically bare (cp. Mic. 2:8). Stripping like this is almost always associated with shame. The same word occurs in relating how the Philistines stripped Jonathan of his clothes and weapons, as he lay slain on Gilboa (1 Sam. 31:8,9). This all seems to suggest that Jonathan was saying to David: "I deserve to have been killed by Goliath (cp. the devil), so in a sense I will 'die' now by entering into a covenant with you, knitting my life / soul with yours. Rather than the Philistines (cp. our sins) killing, shaming and stripping me, I'll do it to myself'. Isn't this exactly our response to the cross in the ongoing 'baptism' we commit ourselves to? And of course we shouldn't miss the connection with Israel stripping themselves, deeply conscious of

their sins, and then entering into covenant with God (Ex. 33:6). Yet does the cross of Christ really fill us with that sense of shame, that desire to throw away all our human strength and knit our souls with that of Christ...?

1Sa 18:5 David went out wherever Saul sent him and behaved himself wisely, and Saul set him over the men of war, which pleased all the people and Saul's servants-
We get the sense that David pitted his wisdom against Saul's anger and bitter persecution; David's wisdom is mentioned in tandem with Saul's anger against him (1 Sam. 18:5,11,15,30). "David behaved himself wisely (AVmg "prospered") in all his ways; and the Lord was with him" runs like a refrain through 1 Sam. 18:5,14,15,30. These words are referring back to Dt. 29:9: "Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do" . David's charmed life and prospering despite all manner of plotting against him was due to his single-minded devotion to the Law; to those very chapters which tired Bible readers are wont to skip over as boring and not motivating. Yet David found something immensely inspiring and practical about the Law. The word made him wiser than his foes (Ps. 119:98), and Ps. 119 was written at the time of Saul's persecution.

1Sa 18:6 When David and the men returned from the slaughter of the Philistine the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul with tambourines, with joy, and with instruments of music-
See on 2 Sam. 1:23. The women were of course attracted to David, the young, handsome bashful hero. Yet ostensibly they came out to greet Saul; whereas the focus was clearly upon David. It was a perfect set up for Saul's jealousy.

We could read this as out of sequence with :1-5. Now the narrative addresses Saul's jealousy and explains how it arose. David returned from killing Goliath; the women come out to congratulate David, all apparently in love with the classic handsome hero; and Jonathan also loves him. Possibly David alludes to this when he laments that Jonathan's love for him surpassed the love of women (2 Sam. 1:26).

1Sa 18:7 The women sang one to another as they played, Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands-
It became a kind of proverb in Israel that David was worth ten thousand; it was said right towards the end of his life (2 Sam. 18:3). This further developed Saul's jealousy, because he failed to perceive that the whole conflict was about the glory of God and not the human channel through which that was achieved. "His ten thousands" may refer specifically to Goliath through the idea of a plural of majesty; hence David is said to be worth ten thousands of Israelites (2 Sam. 18:3).

1Sa 18:8 Saul was very angry; this song displeased him and he said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed only thousands. What more can he have but the kingdom?-
We have a record here of what he said in his heart. He kept recycling those words in his mind, and it made him jealous and bitter. We too must beware of recycling upsetting words in our hearts. Saul was "displeased", the word used in Is. 15:4 of how "life shall be grievous unto him". But it was the fault of his own jealousy and lack of humility towards God's plans for David. What should Saul have done? Accepted Samuel's statements that he would not continue as king, because a replacement had been found. And walked humbly with his God the rest of his days.

1Sa 18:9 Saul eyed David from that day and onward-
Saul was precious in the eyes of David (1 Sam. 26:21 s.w.), although Saul's eyes were only to destroy David. We see the chasmic difference in outlook, in "eyes", or worldview between these two men.

1Sa 18:10 The next day an evil spirit from God came mightily on Saul, and he prophesied in his house. David played his harp, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand-
It could be that we have here a case of both the evil and holy Spirit working upon Saul. For prophesying is a term always used about the work of the Holy Spirit with men, and we recall how the holy Spirit had earlier made Saul prophesy (1 Sam. 10:10). His jealousy complex was confirmed by God's evil spirit. But Saul was given strength from the Holy spirit to resist this. It was as David was singing Psalms, a source of the Holy Spirit for Saul, that this was confirmed by a special outpouring of holy Spirit. And it was a strong influence insofar as it made him prophesy or speak forth God's word. But Saul allowed his jealousy complex, confirmed by the Lord's evil spirit, to triumph.

In Old Testament times, an evil or unclean spirit referred to a troubled mental state (Jud. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:10); and in every Old Testament reference to evil spirits, they were sent by God, not an orthodox 'Devil'. In New Testament times, the language of evil spirit/demon possession had come to refer to those suffering mental illness. The association between demons and sickness is shown by the following: "They brought unto him (Jesus) many that were possessed with demons: and He cast out the spirits with a word… that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Mt. 8:16-17). So human infirmities and sicknesses are described as being possessed by "demons" and "evil spirits". It is absolutely understandable that the day after the women greeted David as having slain his ten thousands, Saul suffered an attack of jealousy, depression and bitterness. It was his own fault, originating in his pride and narcissism. But because he didn't resist it and fed it, God confirmed him in the mental attitudes he chose, to the point that his evil spirit / disposition was sent by God. This is how the Spirit works, and also positively, through the Holy Spirit. See on 1 Sam. 19:8,9.

1Sa 18:11 and he threw the spear saying, I will pin David to the wall! David escaped from his presence twice-
The javelin or spear was like a diadem, the emblem of regal authority. Kings of the time are portrayed holding a spear or javelin as a sign of their kingship. So as with dressing David with his own clothes to fight Goliath, Saul was again inadvertently handing or throwing the kingship (represented by the javelin) to David. And later Saul would have reflected on this. He should have just humbled himself, resigned the kingship voluntarily, and lived at peace with God the rest of his days in hope of future salvation.

We note Goliath also had a javelin, which David was saved from. Again circumstances repeat in the lives of God's servants. We are taught and then the lesson is repeated. David returned to Saul after the first javelin incident presumably because he was sure that if it happened again (which it did), then surely God would again save him from a javelin. We note too that Saul's final end was to be pinned to the wall of Beth Shan. We are judged as we judge.

See on 1 Sam. 17:58. As noted on :8, the Biblical record states the self talk of people as if it is their actual spoken words. As the Lord Jesus was to later teach, thoughts are as culpable as the words and actions. Samuel's comment about Eliab was presumably to himself (1 Sam. 16:6); Saul's "I'll strike [David] to the wall" was surely said to himself (1 Sam. 18:11); likewise his explanation of his plan to trap David through his daughter Michael was all hatched out within his own brain (1 Sam. 18:21); other examples in 1 Sam. 27:12; 1 Kings 12:26 etc. Only God knew what those men 'said in their heart'; and yet He has recorded it in His inspired word for all generations to see. In this alone we see how ultimately, nothing remains secret; at the day of judgment, what we spoke in darkness (i.e. in our own minds) will be heard in the light of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12:3).

1Sa 18:12 Saul was afraid of David because Yahweh was with him but had departed from Saul-
Saul came to this conclusion from observing things great and small in his life, as well as in his internal awareness of God's presence; and his watching of David (:9) revealed to him that the Spirit of Yahweh was surely with this man and not him. David was the fulfilment of Samuel's words to him about a replacement being raised up. To try to murder him was therefore not only futile but a blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, going against God's clearly demonstrated intentions. And yet David in depression felt that Saul would one day kill him (1 Sam. 27:1), despite all the evidence in the bigger picture that God's Spirit was working to establish him.

1Sa 18:13 Therefore Saul sent David away from him and made him his captain over a thousand, and David went out and came in before the people-
See on :16. The idea perhaps was that he sent David off with some symbolic responsibility, to some outpost where he would not be in the public eye. To fire him from kingly service would provoke the wrath of the masses.

1Sa 18:14 David behaved himself wisely in all he did, and Yahweh was with him-
That Ps. 119 was written at this time is evident. It mentioned David as a young man devoting himself to the word rather than riches(:72)- the riches which could have been his if he mentally surrendered to Saul, or if he killed Saul and took the kingdom. He often laments how he is in exile from Yahweh's word (:43,46,54), which would have been on account of his being away from the sanctuary at Gibeah. He pleads the promise of the word that he would be preserved from Saul's persecution (v.41,58), and several times mentions Saul's attempts on his life (v.87,95,109,110). The following verses are evidently relevant to this period: 61,63,67,79,84 (= 1 Sam. 27:1),95,98 (= 1 Sam. 18:14,15),110 (cp. the 'snaring' with Michal),119 (the emphasis is on 'You will destroy the wicked like Saul- one day),125 (David is often called Saul's servant),150,154 (= 1 Sam. 24:15),157,161,165,176. Therefore in the face of such hatred and pain, feeling he must be careful of every step he took, emotionally and physically, David could rejoice: "I will walk at liberty (AVmg. 'at large'): for I seek thy precepts".

1Sa 18:15 When Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he stood in awe of him-
Saul's jealousy was on account of David's spirituality and victories, especially over Goliath, which represented Christ's conquest of sin (1 Sam. 18:7,8; 19:8,9), and his subsequent popularity with the people. This was because these things were potentially

possible for Saul, but he had refused to rise up to them. Saul watched David's spirituality, observing the close fellowship David had with God (1 Sam. 18:15,28). The Jews were jealous of the evident moral perfection of the Lord Jesus, and his popularity with the people which he seemed to effortlessly achieve. Joseph's brothers had a similar motivation to Saul. David as a type of Christ comes out clearly here. But "stand in awe" is also translated 'gathered together' in the context of Saul's persecution of David (Ps. 56:6; 59:3).

1Sa 18:16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them-
The people wanted a king to "go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20), but they were disappointed in Saul ultimately. For it was effectively David who went out before the people to fight their battles (s.w. 1 Sam. 18:13,16). And David was only successful because he recognized that it was Yahweh who 'went out before' to fight his battles (s.w. 2 Sam. 5:24), rather than any human king or leader. The victories granted him were clearly setting him up to be a popular king. Saul would've reflected how he himself had set David up for this, by letting him fight Goliath and then making him a military commander. He thereby was showing he himself was not fit to be Israel's king, whereas David was.

1Sa 18:17 Saul said to David, here is my elder daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight Yahweh's battles-
"Yahweh's battles" is a repeat of David's phrase in 1 Sam. 17:47, where he triumphed that "the battle is Yahweh's" and therefore would not be won by human valiance or strength. Saul again is shown to be alluding to spiritual ideas, but getting things absolutely the wrong way around. Saul asks David to "fight Yahweh's battles". This was the job description of Israel's king, and so Saul is effectively showing himself not fit for purpose as king, and suggesting David is better as king. It was only pride that made him want to cling on to the throne. He should've accepted he was not the man to be king, and lived humbly with his God and let David be the king.

Saul thought, Don't let my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him-
Again as noted on :8 and :11, we have recorded the inward words, the self talk, of a man who lived thousands of years ago. The thoughts of Saul are recorded in Heaven, and in this case are recorded in God's inspired word. Our self talk is no less significant to God. Saul tried to kill David by sending him into dangerous battle; and that is what David did to Uriah. David failed to remain impressed by the grace shown him at this time- that he survived by grace. He ends up acting like Saul his abuser, as so many do, instead of being humbled by God's grace so that they break the cycle.

1Sa 18:18 David said to Saul, Who am I, and what is my clan or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?-
This reflects David's humility. He could easily have argued that by slaying Goliath, Saul should have given him his daughter for free as promised. But humility often involves not making the obvious argument, true as it may be.

1Sa 18:19 But when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as his wife-
There's a repeated circumstance of a woman promised in marriage to a man being given to another- in the lives of Samson and David. Circumstances repeat between the

experiences of God's children; and if we perceive that, then we will realize that man is not alone. No experience is so awfully unique or without precedent. This is the value of the histories God chose to record in the Bible. Perhaps David was being warned by this not to be like Samson, for whom women were his downfall. And he failed to perceive that. It could possibly be inferred from :25 that Adriel paid Saul a large dowry for his daughter.

We could infer from :25 that Saul was paid a large dowry and this avarice is what led him to break his word to David.

1Sa 18:20 Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David, and when they told Saul he was pleased-

The statement that Michal loved David in 1 Sam. 18:20 is about the only example of love marriage in the Old Testament or a statement that a woman fancied a man. We note how by 2 Sam. 6:18 she watches David out of her window and "despising him in her heart". And she is punished for that by barrenness. She let him out of a window in loyalty to him (1 Sam. 19:12) but in 2 Sam. 6 she watches him from a window and despises him. The other women who watched from windows in the Bible are both bad- the bad woman of Proverbs 7 who watches a man from her window and goes out to seduce him; Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30-37) and Sisera's mother (Jud. 5:28,29). Infatuated love turned to hatred, and so again we see how psychologically credible are the Biblical histories. Her possession of teraphim and falsely telling her father that David had threatened to kill her... all suggest an unspirituality. We could assume that although her father was now dead by the time of 2 Sam. 6, Michal had moved from love of David to the love of her father Saul and what he stood for. Therefore in 2 Sam. 6:16 as she looks out from her window, Michal is described as being "Michal daughter of Saul". In the previous window scene she is called "David's wife Michal" (1 Sam. 19:11). And again we see this so often- one partner with a mission becomes hated by the other partner when they no longer support the mission, and return to the loyalties of their youth. Both Michal and her brother Jonathan are described as loving David with the same Hebrew word *ahab*. But her love didn't abide the test of time; Jonathan's did. David may well have this in mind when he laments at Jonathan's death that Jonathan's love was more wonderful to him than the love of women (2 Sam. 1:26).

David was "pleased" to be Saul's son in law, as Saul too was "pleased" at the prospect (18:20,26, the same Hebrew word is used); this indicates the complexity of the relationship. See on :1,2. As Jonathan's close friend, it was inevitable that David got to know his sister, Michal. David and Michal began their relationship on this basis. Jonathan's spiritual side would have had some reflection in his sister. For even Saul their father had a spiritual side, and it is fair to assume that Jonathan's mother was also a spiritual woman. It is easily overlooked that David later married Saul's wives (2 Sam. 12:8)- including the mother of Jonathan and Michal. So now we can reconstruct the complex spiritual and emotional situation. David without doubt experienced a state of 'in-loveness' with Jonathan. His lament of 2 Sam. 1 is proof enough of this. The spirituality which was in Jonathan was also seen in Michal his sister. And David loved Saul, too. Again, his lament over him is proof of this- it shows that David's loving respect for him was not just the result of a steely act of the will, forcing himself to patiently respect Saul. There was something in him which he loved. And we can assume that David did not just marry women whom he didn't spiritually love. There was therefore something in Saul's wives which was spiritual. And the whole thing was not just one way. Jonathan loved David, "Michal, Saul's

daughter loved David" (18:20), and Saul clearly had love-hate feelings for David; there was something about him which he deeply loved and respected. The intensity of his hatred of David must have been psychologically connected to a deep-seated love. "He loved him greatly" is the comment of 16:21. The seeds of the love between David and the house of Saul would have begun early on. The reason *why* all this information is included is to provide comfort for us in the incredible emotional and spiritual complexities which we find ourselves in. In the flesh, David cannot have known which way to turn, mentally, spiritually, emotionally. Yet in the Spirit he could turn to his Heavenly Father, whose mind can totally fathom our pain, who can know in totality our every situation.

Michal has many similarities to Rachel in the book of Genesis. They each had an older sister who was set up to be their husband's wife. The fathers were both obsessive and unpleasant, and both fathers pursued after their husbands. Both women present as not very spiritual in that they had teraphim [household idols], which they both use to deceive their fathers to save their own skin, and to help their husbands save their lives from the murderous intent of their fathers. They both lie to their fathers. In the teraphim incident, Rachel claims to be sick and Michal claims David is sick. Both have husbands who work for their father, who deceives their husbands. Both had to chose their husbands over their fathers. Both had an older sister, Leah cp. Merab. The fathers of both women made an agreement with the sons in law [David and Jacob] to give them their daughters in marriage for a dowry [years of labour, killing Goliath], but deceived them. David effectively paid two dowries in order to marry Michal- slaying Goliath, and then 100 Philistine foreskins. Jacob also pays two dowries, each of seven years labour. Each woman had a time of infertility. In Michal's case this is recorded in 2 Sam. 6:23 "Michal, daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death". That could imply she had a child the die she died- she died in childbirth. Which would be another parallel with Rachel. This verse however stands in tension with 2 Sam. 21:8 "the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel" (NEV). The translations squirm around this by translating "bore" as "brought up for", or by appealing to a changed text which read "Merab" for Michal. But the Hebrew is simply as NEV- that Michal had five children by the man whom her older sister was married off to rather than David, and then she marries David. All spaghetti junction in terms of relationships, and all reminiscent of the Jacob-Rachel-Leah mess. All so mixed up and intertwining it's hard to get any mental map of it. Apparently both Michal and Merab were at one point married to the same man, Adriel. By the intrigue of their father. Just as with Laban and his daughters Rachel and Leah.

Clearly Jacob, Laban and Rachel are reflected in David, Saul and Michal. All these connections cannot be mere coincidence. We naturally enquire why such similarities constantly occur between the lives of God's people. We see the same thing today, the deeper we engage with other believers and get to know them. The repeated circumstances occur over time [between us and earlier believers we meet in the Bible] and also horizontally between us and present believers whom we know. We see the same Divine hallmark and way of operating in our lives, as comfort that indeed man is not alone- not least because our apparently unique situations aren't in fact so unique.

1Sa 18:21 Saul said, I will give her to him so that she can be a snare to him, and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Therefore Saul said to David, You shall this day have a second opportunity to be my son-in-law-
See on :11. By describing his daughter as a "snare" to a righteous man, Saul shows his

insensitivity to the way the law of Moses warned against women who were as snares. Even in the cynicism of Ecclesiastes, written in Solomon's later life, he still uses words and phrases which have their root in his father David- e.g. his description of women as snares in Ecc. 7:26 goes back to how his father dealt with women who were a snare (1 Sam. 18:21). And the whole description of old age in Ecc. 12 is based on his father's experience with Barzillai (2 Sam. 19:35). The lack of true faith amongst many raised as believers may be related to all this too. We each need to seriously examine ourselves in this connection, and know the meaning of personal conversion.

1Sa 18:22 Saul commanded his servants, Speak to David secretly and say, 'Look, the king is pleased with you, and all his servants love you; now therefore be the king's son-in-law'-
All this intrigue was so far from the shepherd boy who simply loved God. See on 1 Sam. 20:13. It is quite clear that David distrusted Saul, and so he communicates through his servants. But it is all rather simplistic and primitive as it was obvious they had been set up by Saul. And if Saul were genuine, he would have fulfilled his promise and given David his daughter freely.

1Sa 18:23 Saul's servants told David this. David said, Does it seem to you a light thing to be the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man-
They only had a "few sheep" (1 Sam. 17:28); David was not from a wealthy family, he was "a poor man" as he says himself. His later abuse of the "poor man" Uriah once he was rich (2 Sam. 12:3 s.w.) was therefore the more culpable.

The young David in Saul's court in 1 Sam 18:23 calls himself a poor and lightly esteemed man; and he uses these words "poor and lightly esteemed" about himself in Ps. 119:141, suggesting Ps. 119 was written as reflection on this period of David's life. David's thought was that although he was poor, he believed Yahweh's word of promise that he would become king.

And little known?-
"Lightly esteemed" is the word David will later use in Ps. 38:7 about being "loathsome" after his sin with Bathsheba. What had been mere words expressing theoretical humility were now translated into actual ownership. Our expressions of humility likewise are brought into reality by God's hand, often working through our own sins.

1Sa 18:24 The servants of Saul told him what David said-
Saul had a network of spies watching David (1 Sam. 18:20,24; 19:11,19; 23:7,13,25; 24:1; 27:4). In the type of Christ, this looks ahead to Mk. 3:2; Lk. 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; Jn. 11:57.

1Sa 18:25 Saul said, Tell David, 'The king desires no dowry except one hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged on the king's enemies'. Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines-
This could possibly suggest that Saul had given Merab to Adriel rather than David because Adriel paid a large dowry. That David casually killed 200 men instead of 100 reflects his failure to perceive the value and the meaning of the human person, even if they were Gentiles.

1Sa 18:26 When his servants told David this, he was pleased to be the king's son-in-law. Before the allotted time-

David was "pleased" to be Saul's son in law, as Saul too was "pleased" at the prospect (1 Sam. 18:20,26, the same Hebrew word is used); this indicates the complexity of the relationship. See on :2.

There can be few men who do not have at least some attraction to the father and family of their wife. David really loved Saul's daughter, indeed the prospect of marrying her may have been a large motivator behind his zeal in fighting Goliath and the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:26,30; 18:26). Saul was not a totally unspiritual man; there are many hints that he had a spiritual side. It's rare indeed that a totally unspiritual person can love a highly spiritual person like David. And yet this fine relationship ended in an intense love-hate affair. So many of the Psalms contain references to Saul's smear campaign against David (Ps. 27:12; 31:13; 109:23 cp. 1 Sam. 26:19). This frequency of reference in itself indicates the weight with which this tragedy rested upon David's mind.

"Before the allotted time" is as AV "And the days were not expired". The days not expired may refer to the days he was given to bring the 100 foreskins. Or they could be the days during which he was supposed to have married Merab. By the end of those days he did in fact end up married to one of Saul's daughters. And so Saul had kept his side of the deal, to give David a daughter within a certain time period; and smugly thought how smart he was, seeing he had presumably received a big dowry from Adriel for Merab.

1Sa 18:27 David arose and went with his men and killed two hundred of the Philistine men, and David brought their foreskins-

We see here the beginning of hints that David sunk into blood lust, culminating in the comment that he couldn't build the temple because of his attitude to shedding blood. He need not have murdered these men in order to get their foreskins. And he did so "that he might" marry Michal. Rather than for any more spiritual motive. If he had circumcised them rather than murdering them, he might have brought them within the hope of Israel.

And gave them in full number to the king so that he might be the king's son-in-law. Saul gave him Michal his daughter as his wife-

A more arrogant man than David would have insisted that Saul keep his offer, that the man who slew Goliath could freely marry his daughter. He could likewise have insisted that Saul give him Merab as promised. But he instead is zealous to meet Saul's new demands, bringing 200 and not just 100 foreskins, and doing it earlier than the deadline given (:26).

1Sa 18:28 Saul saw and knew that Yahweh was with David, and Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him-

See on 1 Sam. 17:58. The fact his own daughter was one of the many daughters in Israel who loved David was all so hard for Saul. If he had accepted God's rejection of him as king, he could still have built a personal relationship with God and lived in sure hope of eternal salvation in the Kingdom. But he didn't, and only hoped that he would somehow be able to destroy David and establish his own kingdom, despite God's word to the contrary.

1Sa 18:29 Saul was yet the more afraid of David, and Saul was David's enemy continually-

The more Saul perceived the hand of God in David's life, the more he feared and

hated him. He realized, as he thought about it, that the man set to replace the king... was now the king's son in law. But by the king's own device and encouragement. It seems that spiritual jealousy, the cancer which stalks churches and Christian relationships, is the worst form of jealousy. It knows no bounds.

1Sa 18:30 Then the princes of the Philistines went forth and whenever they did so, David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed-
David's commentary upon this is in Psalm 8, written in reflection upon his victory: "Yahweh our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:9). It was David's name which was much set by (1 Sam. 18:30); but David's desire was it should be Yahweh's Name which was now made majestic after the defeat of Goliath, and not his name. The idea seems to be that David was more successful in the field of battle than the other servants of Saul; instead we read that he behaved himself more wisely than them. This is to equate his victories with his wisdom, rather than his own strength or felicity in combat.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 19

1Sa 19:1 Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David-
The simple appeal was that if David was no more, then Jonathan would be king, and the existing courtiers would remain in power. Whereas David, from another tribe, and with every reason for bitterness against Saul, would not remove them from power. But Samuel's words about David were surely known by Jonathan, and he had himself made a covenant to give the kingdom to David (see on 1 Sam. 18:3,4). It could be that Saul "told" them to kill David in a mad outburst of anger whilst throwing one of his tantrums. But those words are here recorded. It could be that Saul was sharing with them a specific plan of killing David the next morning (:2); and I note on :11 that it seems his servants go along with it. *S*aul had been told that David would be king and he was no longer to be king. To seek to murder David was a foolhardy refusal to accept God's word. Had Saul humbly accepted he was not to serve as king, he could've walked humbly with his God in sure hope of eternal salvation. And saved himself all his mental health issues that clouded the rest of his life and led to his tragic death by suicide.

1Sa 19:2 Jonathan told David, Saul my father seeks to kill you. Now therefore, please take extra care of yourself in the morning; hide in a secret place and stay there-
This is the same word for "hiding place" as in Ps. 119:114: "You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in Your word". When hiding from Saul in the wilderness [s.w. of David's "hiding places" at this time in 1 Sam. 19:2; 25:20], David hoped in the prophetic word that one day Saul would be no more and David would be king. See on 1 Sam. 20:13.

1Sa 19:3 I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are and I will talk with my father about you, and if I find out anything, I will tell you-
The idea seems to be that Jonathan would walk with Saul in the field, the open countryside in Gibeah where David also lived with Michal; and then Jonathan would tell David as soon as possible what he had learned. To facilitate this, David needed to

be in the same "field" or area of countryside, so that when Jonathan had finished his chat with his father, he could immediately inform David. Presumably Jonathan wanted to talk with his father out of earshot of anyone else.

1Sa 19:4 Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, Don't let the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you and he has worked well for you-
Jonathan's intensity of relationship with David meant that he was not ashamed to speak up for him: "Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not *the king* sin against his servant... because his works have been to thee-ward very good: for he... slew the Philistine" (19:4,5). Note how he calls Saul "the King", suggesting a certain detachment from him. The vision of David standing triumphant over Goliath still motivated Jonathan, to the extent that he could stand up in that hostile environment and testify to the love of David, the extent of his selfless victory, and the urgent need for this to be recognized by men. The spirit of our preaching only occasionally matches this example. No wonder the record stresses Jonathan as being typical of ourselves.

1Sa 19:5 he put his life in his hand and struck the Philistine-
David lived permanently in the intensity of that victory (s.w. Ps. 119:109).

And Yahweh worked a great victory for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced-
Yahweh had earlier "worked deliverance in Israel" through Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 11:13); but now it was worked through David. It could have been through Saul. It was because David had the faith and humility to do what Saul potentially could have done, that Saul fell into a complex of spiritual jealousy against David. See on 1 Sam. 17:26 for another example. David's confident words that God would deliver him from the Philistines [which Jonathan here quotes] were evidently inspired by Samson, the renowned one-man deliverer from Philistine armies. Both Samson and David wrought "great salvation" for Israel (1 Sam. 19:5 cp. Jud. 15:18).

That Jonathan saw David as his personal hero, succeeding where he failed, can be found in the following consideration. Jonathan seems to have seen Gideon as his hero [compare 1 Sam. 14:10-20 with Jud. 7:3,10,11,14,22. Jonathan's son was called Merib-baal (1 Chron. 9:40), meaning 'rebellion against Baal', an epithet for 'Gideon']. Yet in 19:5 he says that "David put his life in his hand", exactly as Gideon did (Jud. 9:17). In other words, Jonathan saw David as the perfect fulfilment of all he spiritually wished to be, he felt that *David* lived up to the example of his hero Gideon, whereas he did not. Is this how dynamically and intensely we relate to our Lord Jesus? For this is what the David and Jonathan relationship points ahead to.

But there are similarities also with Samson. The Spirit came on David as it did on Samson (1 Sam. 16:13); they were both empowered to kill lions, whilst keeping the fact a secret. And in both those acts they were taught that they would deliver God's people from the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:34-37). Indeed, David's confident words that God would deliver him from the Philistines were evidently inspired by Samson, the renowned one-man deliverer from Philistine armies. Both Samson and David wrought "great salvation" for Israel (1 Sam. 19:5 cp. Jud. 15:18). As Samson was characterized by his love of that riddle (the word occurs nine times in Jud. 14:12-19, and Jud. 15:16 Heb. is also some kind of riddle), so David uses the same word to describe how he chose to put forth a riddle (Ps. 78:2). Psalm 3 is full of reference to Samson's fight at Lehi. It was also written at a time when David was betrayed by his own people. And his failures with women would make another parallel.

Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to kill David without a cause?-
The desire to slay innocent blood points forward to the Jewish desire to do the same to the Lord, articulated through Judas (Mt. 27:4).

1Sa 19:6 Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: As Yahweh lives, he shall not be put to death-
Yet Saul did try to kill David. He is here taking the Yahweh Name in vain.

Saul obeyed the voice of the people and the voice (s.w.) of the sheep and oxen that he covered (1 Sam. 15:24,24). Later he obeys the voice of Jonathan and promises not to kill David (1 Sam. 19:6) the voice of the witch and of his servants who persuade him against his will to eat (1 Sam. 28:22,23). We have the impression of a man readily persuaded by voices. If he had had a fundamental commitment to obey the voice of Yahweh as he was repeatedly asked, he would not have listened to these other voices. Nor the voices in his own head. Likewise those without a fundamental commitment to God's word are open to all the other voices around them, and likewise have no moral compass nor ethical direction. The Hebrew for 'to hear' is the same as 'to obey'. Samuel had told Saul he would be made to hear or obey God's word (1 Sam. 9:27 "that I may tell you the message of God" uses the word for to hear / obey, the hint being 'that I may make you hear / be obedient to the message'). But he failed to make use of this because he found the voice of other things more attractive to hearken to.

1Sa 19:7 Jonathan called David and told him all this. Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before-
We may consider both Jonathan and David to have been naive in believing this. But the situation was nuanced because all of them loved each other. Saul had loved David and told Jesse he wanted David as his son. Saul's daughters loved David and he likewise. It was all so interwoven, just as relationships are today, resulting in people doing things or trusting people when to onlookers, this is ridiculously unwise and naive. The record here has absolutely every verisimilitude to real life and is absolutely psychologically credible.

1Sa 19:8 There was war again. David went out and fought the Philistines and killed them with a great slaughter, and they fled before him-
The next verse records Saul suffering from an evil spirit. Clearly what is in view is the spirit of jealousy, arising from his own lack of faith, pride, refusal to accept Yahweh's word about the passing of the kingship to David, indeed a whole nexus of unspirituality. But Yahweh's Spirit worked to confirm that spirit, those wrong psychological positions which Saul allowed to operate and progress within him. Just as the Holy Spirit works positively in the heart / spirit / mind of the spiritual. Likewise in 1 Sam. 18:10, the 'evil spirit' also comes to Saul after a military incident which provoked his jealousy of David. Clearly 'spirit' is being used to refer to the spirit / mind of Saul, and not any external cosmic being. But then we will go on to read how the Spirit of God came upon Saul to influence him to repentance. We see God's careful balancing and working with men's hearts, always leading them to salvation. It's possible, from the use of the terms "that day" and "the morning", that all the events of this chapter up to :18 occurred on the same day and night. We could equally translate that "there had been war again" and David had done these things. The memory of David's recent victory kept re-playing in Saul's mind. And was confirmed

by the evil spirit from Yahweh, although through David's psalms, which were of God's Spirit, He sought to ameliorate that.

1Sa 19:9 An evil spirit from Yahweh came on Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing his harp-
Saul's jealousy, confirmed by God psychologically confirming him in it through the Spirit, was on account of David's victories, especially over Goliath, which represented Christ's conquest of sin (1 Sam. 8:7,8; 19:8,9), and his subsequent popularity with the people. Saul watched David's spirituality, observing the close fellowship David had with God (1 Sam. 18:15,28). The Jews were jealous of the evident moral perfection of the Lord Jesus, and his popularity with the people which he seemed to effortlessly achieve. Joseph's brothers had a similar motivation to Saul. David as a type of Christ comes out clearly here.

Saul was gripping his javelin or spear, the symbol of his kingship. By doing so his body language was reflecting his desire to grip on to power rather than resign it to David. Perhaps Saul also carried a javelin and held it in his hand at home because he was paranoid he might be assassinated and thus lose his kingdom. If he had humbly resigned power, he would have avoided all the mental and spiritual health issues.

1Sa 19:10 Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear-
Saul "sought" David, implying a great level of mental effort (1 Sam. 19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the type of Christ, the Jews sought to kill the Lord (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8).

But he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and the spear went into the wall. David fled, and escaped that night-
Compare this with the Lord Jesus Christ slipping away from Jews bent on killing him, Jn. 8:59; 7:19. The stress on "that night" suggests the events of this chapter all happened on the same day and night. David fled- but just down the hill to his own house, because Saul later asks for him to be brought "up" to him.

1Sa 19:11 Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him and to kill him in the morning-

We wonder why Saul wanted to wait until morning to arrest and slay David. Possibly the plan was to do as was done to Nabal, to falsely accuse him before a court and slay him. This would explain David's frequent complaint in the Psalms that he was the victim of false accusation.

LXX "It came to pass in that night, that Saul sent messengers to the house of David to watch him, in order to slay him in the morning". "That night" means the same night after the morning referenced earlier: "please take extra care of yourself in the morning". The events of this chapter all happened the same day. Saul had planned to murder David in the morning, Jonathan knew that and warned David of what would happen "in the morning". But then Saul repented and Jonathan and David believe this, and David stays at his home that night. This is psychologically credible; because Saul had loved David, he was a family member and friend, and Saul's behaviour against David would have been brushed off by them all as one of his bad turns caused by his mental illness.

They presumably didn't charge into the house and murder David there because Saul feared a public uproar if he did so. David's escape to his house implies he didn't

think Saul would follow him there; he assumed this was just another temper tantrum. Ps. 59 refers to this time, and seems to speak of Saul's thugs roaming the streets looking to kill David. For the first time, the servants of Saul become proactively aggressive, having accepted his charge to kill David given in :1.

Michal, David's wife, told him, If you don't save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed-

Ps. 130:6 seems to allude here: "My soul longs for the Lord more than watchmen long for the morning; more than watchmen for the morning". Watching for the morning is the phrase used about the plot to slay David by morning (1 Sam. 19:2,11). Ps. 130:6 would therefore have originated with David's reflections that whatever the careful watchings of man to destroy him, his focus was upon longing for the Lord.

1Sa 19:12 So Michal let David down through the window. He fled and escaped-

Escape through a window and down a wall is something experienced by the spies in Jericho (Josh. 2:15), and Saul in Damascus (2 Cor. 11:33). Again we note how circumstances repeat between the experiences of God's children; and if we perceive that, then we will realize that man is not alone. No experience is so awfully unique or without precedent. This is the value of the histories God chose to record in the Bible. See on 1 Sam. 18:20. It is circumstantially likely that the house was on the town wall, repeating the situation of Rahab and Saul. For surely the house was surrounded by Saul's men.

1Sa 19:13 Michal took an idol and laid it in the bed-

This speaks so much of her unspirituality and that of her father. The use of teraphim was common in Israel at the time (Jud. 17:5; 18:14) and continued until the time of Josiah (2 Kings 23:24) and then were used even in exile (Zech. 10:2). These teraphim were often life size male images. Michal was barren (2 Sam. 6:23 implies she never had a child), and she may well have had this particular one as an idol for fertility, which involved using it as a kind of sex toy. Yet David, the man after Go's own heart, had fallen in love with this unspiritual woman and married her.

Put a pillow of goats' hair at its head, and covered it with the clothes-

Heb. "Put the quilt of goat's hair at its head, and covered it with the coverlet". She wrapped the head of the image in a hairy rug to resemble a man's hair, and then covered it with a square piece of woollen cloth.

Michal has many similarities to Rachel in the book of Genesis. They each had an older sister who was set up to be their husband's wife. The fathers were both obsessive and unpleasant, and both fathers pursued after their husbands. Both women present as not very spiritual in that they had teraphim [household idols], which they both use to deceive their fathers to save their own skin, and to help their husbands save their lives from the murderous intent of their fathers. They both lie to their fathers. In the teraphim incident, Rachel claims to be sick and Michal claims David is sick. Both have husbands who work for their father, who deceives their husbands. Both had to chose their husbands over their fathers. Both had an older sister, Leah cp. Merab. The fathers of both women made an agreement with the sons in law [David and Jacob] to give them their daughters in marriage for a dowry [years of labour, killing Goliath], but deceived them. David effectively paid two dowries in order to marry Michal- slaying Goliath, and then 100 Philistine foreskins. Jacob also pays two dowries, each of seven years labour. Each woman had a time of infertility. In Michal's case this is recorded in 2 Sam. 6:23 "Michal, daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death". That could imply she had a child the die she died- she died in childbirth.

Which would be another parallel with Rachel. This verse however stands in tension with 2 Sam. 21:8 "the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel" (NEV). The translations squirm around this by translating "bore" as "brought up for", or by appealing to a changed text which read "Merab" for Michal. But the Hebrew is simply as NEV- that Michal had five children by the man whom her older sister was married off to rather than David, and then she marries David. All spaghetti junction in terms of relationships, and all reminiscent of the Jacob-Rachel-Leah mess. All so mixed up and intertwining it's hard to get any mental map of it. Apparently both Michal and Merab were at one point married to the same man, Adriel. By the intrigue of their father. Just as with Laban and his daughters Rachel and Leah.

Clearly Jacob, Laban and Rachel are reflected in David, Saul and Michal. All these connections cannot be mere coincidence. We naturally enquire why such similarities constantly occur between the lives of God's people. We see the same thing today, the deeper we engage with other believers and get to know them. The repeated circumstances occur over time [between us and earlier believers we meet in the Bible] and also horizontally between us and present believers whom we know. We see the same Divine hallmark and way of operating in our lives, as comfort that indeed man is not alone- not least because our apparently unique situations aren't in fact so unique.

1Sa 19:14 When Saul sent messengers to take David she said, He is sick-
LXX adds: “they [the messengers] brought word that he was sick”. This sounds a rather lame response by men who had been sent by Saul to kidnap David from his own home and then murder him somewhere (see on :1,11). Clearly they baulked at actually performing what they had agreed to do.

1Sa 19:15 Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed so that I can kill him-
"Bring him up" may mean that Saul's home / palace was on the hill of Gibeah, and David’s in the lower town. Saul now wanted to personally murder David; whereas it seems from :1,11 that the plan originally had been for his servants to do the job, and that is also the impression given in Ps. 59, which has a title assigning it to this time. We sense Saul drunk with the obsession of jealousy, with the hatred in his heart which leads to murder.

1Sa 19:16 When the messengers came in, there was just the idol in the bed, with the pillow of goats’ hair at its head-
After this incident, circumstances repeat for Saul. He again sends messengers to take David at Naioth, but they are overcome by the Spirit; and then he goes himself. And still doesn't get David. He was unwilling to perceive the clear patterns in his life which reflected Yahweh's Spirit.

1Sa 19:17 Saul said to Michal, Why have you deceived me like this and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped? Michal answered Saul, He said to me, ‘Let me go! Why should I kill you?’-
We are surely intended to compare her response to that of her brother Jonathan, who stood up for David (:1) and was prepared to die for it at the hands of his father. "Why have you deceived me?" is word for word what Saul was later asked by the witch at Endor on the last night of his life (1 Sam. 28:12). Saul's words were to return to him,

placed in the mouth of another woman. For by our words we are judged. The deceiver was deceived, as happened with Jacob.

1Sa 19:18 Now David fled and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and lived in Naioth-
"Naioth" means "the dwellings" and seems to refer to a kind of college of instruction Samuel had built up at his home in Ramah. The Targum renders the word “house of instruction”. It would have been the first of the schools of the prophets. This would account for the prophets appearing at that place (:20).

1Sa 19:19 Saul was told, David is at Naioth in Ramah!-
Saul had a network of spies watching David (1 Sam. 18:20,24; 19:11,19; 23:7,13,25; 24:1; 27:4). In the type of Christ, this looks ahead to Mk. 3:2; Lk. 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; Jn. 11:57.

1Sa 19:20 Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying and Samuel standing as head over them, the spirit of God came on the messengers of Saul and they also prophesied-
As explained on :18, there was a school of the prophets at Naioth, headed up by Samuel. This incident is looking ahead to the experience of the enemies of the Lord Jesus in Jn. 7:46. These messengers were those mentioned in :1 and :11, the servants of Saul who had agreed to murder David. They, Saul and everyone involved is here given a taste of the power of God's Spirit. He is able to take over the human mind by His Spirit, and make us spiritual; but as discussed on :24, He will not treat us as robots, overpowering us so that we have no choice but to be saved. We are to follow onwards in the path His Spirit sets us upon.

1Sa 19:21 When Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. Saul sent messengers again the third time and they also prophesied-
We wonder if the content of the prophesy here mentioned was that David would be king.

1Sa 19:22 Then he went himself to Ramah, and came to the great well that is in Secu, and he asked, Where are Samuel and David? Someone said, They are at Naioth in Ramah-
LXX "the well of the threshing-floor that is in Sephi (or, the hill)". If we go with the LXX, we note that a well is not usually on a hill [LXX "the hill"], whereas a threshing floor is typically in an elevated area where the wind can blow the chaff away; the Hebrew can equally mean a cistern, perhaps for gathering rain water. And threshing is associated with judgment. He was brought to realize that in his attitude to David, he was facing judgment. And there was, unusually, water next to it, the symbol of cleansing. For there was a well or cistern next to this threshing floor. It was a nudge towards his repentance, and he apparently followed this for a short time and was confirmed in it by the Spirit. Or if Secu is the same as Shocoh of 1 Sam. 17:1, this was the scene of David's victory over Goliath. Again this would have prodded Saul's conscience, and the Spirit confirmed him in responding to this prodding.

Saul ought to have learnt from experience. He had sent messengers to take David from his own house and murder him, but when they failed, he went himself; and failed to find David. Now circumstances repeated, as they do in lives where God is at work. When he is calmly told that David is at Naioth, and realizes that his messengers

have been overcome by the Spirit; he ought to have realized that he would not prevail alone. But he continues; and despite his headlong folly, by pure grace, God's Spirit attempts to yet again burst into his life and turn him around.

1Sa 19:23 So he went towards Naioth in Ramah. Then the spirit of God came on him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah-
See on :24. This overpowering by the Spirit was not due to encounter with people or some kind of group psychology. We get the impression Saul had come alone; and now on the final stage of the journey, he was overcome by the Spirit in a deeply personal meeting with God. See on :24.

1Sa 19:24 He stripped off his clothes and he also prophesied before Samuel, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?-
The Spirit of God usually confirms the human spirit in the way the person wishes to go. But here we see how God at times makes a direct entrance into a person's life through His Spirit, as He had initially with Saul as he was out looking for lost donkeys. Twice God had told him that he was rejected from the kingship for his disobedience. But God dearly loved Saul, and really wanted their relationship to work, despite his mental illness and unspirituality. We marvel at God's desire to save and not to condemn, to accept rather than reject; and His tireless attempts to work even with the proud who have apparently turned away from God. For here God yet again comes into Saul's life and tries to almost force him to be humble.

To take off his kingly clothes before Samuel represented his willingness to resign the kingship for the sake of Samuel's prophetic word about David replacing him. We noted how Jonathan had willingly done this of his own initiative. But time and again, Saul refuses to follow on from the path God's Spirit placed him upon. Although the kingship had been removed from him, Saul still could have been saved and lived a Spirit filled life. But he was now obsessed with retaining what he had, his status as king, and personal salvation and relationship with God simply didn't figure in his thinking. But God at this point forces Himself again upon Saul by giving him His Spirit, so eager to still have him as His child. And David seems to have recognized this abiding involvement of God's good Spirit in Saul's life, in that he refuses to kill Saul when given the opportunity- exactly because he is still Yahweh's anointed, the Spirit is still on him, as it were. We must remember that when dealing with God's fallen people; His Spirit is still working with them, nobody is totally abandoned by Him, He will still be trying with that person. So we see God on one hand pushing Saul downwards through His evil spirit, and yet countering that push with the influence of His spirit the other way. The question of course is how strong are those respective movements or pushes or influences. We cannot measure them as we have no metric for them, but we are assured that their respective strengths are in a perfect balance and proportion that can only be called Divine.

Saul removed his royal clothes and laid on the earth in penitence, moved by the Spirit. I suggest this was what happened and not some ecstatic trance or being slain in the Spirit in the style of modern Pentecostalism. This explains why in 1 Sam. 20, Jonathan believes his father now has no malice towards David as he's over it, and why David was even willing to come near Saul's court.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 20

1Sa 20:1 David fled from Naioth in Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, What have I done? What is my iniquity? What is my sin before your father-
David was clearly upset that Saul's oath before Yahweh not to kill him had been broken so unashamedly (1 Sam. 19:6). He quotes the words of Jacob in Gen. 31:36; perhaps not because the surrounding context was relevant, but because God's word and Biblical precedent was ever on David's mind. See on 1 Sam. 20:13. This all recalls "You seek to kill me... which of you convicts me of sin?" (Jn. 8:37,40,46). Again, we see clearly David as a type of Christ.

These three questions are all tantamount to saying "I have done nothing wrong and I am being unfairly persecuted". Psalm 7 appears to be relevant to this time. Especially Ps. 7:3: "Yahweh, my God, if I have done this, if there is iniquity in my hands...". This is one of those powerful incidental proofs that the scriptures are accurate and inspired; it is circumstantially credible that a man would use the same turn of phrase both to God and to his close friend. It was this experience of false accusation which perhaps led David to be over confident of himself spiritually, and is all part of the backdrop for the shameful failure with Bathsheba. Most people have experienced false accusation, and we must beware that this doesn't lead us to fail to perceive that we are sinners and liable to fall to temptation in other areas.

That he seeks my life?-
Saul sought the life of David (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:1; 22:23; 23:15; 25:29; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the Psalms, David frequently imprecates judgment upon those who sought his life (s.w. Ps. 35:4; 38:12; 40:14; 54:3; 63:9; 70:2; 71:13; 86:14). He loved Saul, the life of Saul was precious in David's sight, indeed the historical records seem to emphasize David's patient love of Saul; and yet in the Psalms he gives vent before God to his anger with Saul and desire to see Saul punished and judged by God. This is absolutely true to human experience; we may act with great patience and apparent love toward those who abuse us, and yet within we fume about it. The lesson of David is that we are to pour out those feelings to God in prayer, leaving Him to judge. And yet his bitterness with Saul must be balanced against his treating Saul's life as "precious" when he had the chance to murder him, twice. And his totally genuine weeping for him when he died. As with many strands in David's personality, the balance between the good and the bad was only lightly tipped towards the good in the overall analysis.

1Sa 20:2 He said to him, Far from it; you shall not die. Look, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me, so why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so-
In the type of Christ, this is Jn. 7:20. We see the complexity of the situation, psychologically. Jonathan loves David more than he does his father Saul, but he also doesn't want to believe that his father is an inveterate liar who would take Yahweh's Name in vain by making an oath and then breaking it (1 Sam. 19;6). Clearly his father did do things without disclosing them to Jonathan. But he is in denial at how bad his father really was towards David, the man and brother he dearly loved and respected. We see precisely the same kinds of apparently contradictory behaviours in relationships all around us. As observers we may see how people are obviously naive to believe others... but within those relationships, vision is not at all so clear. It was all so interwoven, just as relationships are today, resulting in people doing things or trusting people when to onlookers, this is ridiculously unwise and naive. The record

here has absolutely every verisimilitude to real life and is absolutely psychologically credible.

Jonathan was persuaded Saul would not now harm David, despite all the evidence so far. Perhaps the gift of the Spirit at Naioth had led to Saul saying that he accepted David as king, and he had stripped off his kingly robe. But this intensity of spirituality was but for a moment as it is today with those who don't refill themselves with the Spirit.

1Sa 20:3 But David took an oath and said, Your father knows well that I have found favour in your eyes, so he says, 'Don't let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved'; but truly as Yahweh lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death-

As Saul had sworn by Yahweh not to kill David (1 Sam. 19:6), so David swears in response that Saul does want to kill him. The way Saul had broken that oath was clearly distressing to David. Yet David's faith in the message of Samuel that he would become king is now at maximum stretch. He feels Saul is about to kill him, and gives in further to these feelings when he says he will surely be killed by Saul (1 Sam. 27:1).

LXX "the space is filled up between me and death". Here we have a slip in David's faith that he would in fact become king. We see it again when he flees to the Philistines.

1Sa 20:4 Then Jonathan said to David, Whatever your soul desires, I will do it for you-

Jonathan recognizes that what David has said in :3 is true, and as noted on :2, he realizes that indeed he is just refusing to see evil in his father. His loyalties were torn between David and Saul, and now by saying this he comes down on the side of David. "Soul" is the word for "life" in :1, and Jonathan surely means 'Whatever it takes to save your life, I will do'. As noted on :3, we might wish to see at this point more faith by both of them in Samuel's prophetic word that David shall become king. Their faith in that word went up and down, with 1 Sam. 23:17 being a high point in it.

We naturally ask why David was even willing to accept an invitation to Saul's court, after all that Saul had done. Surely it was because Saul had removed his royal clothes and lain on the earth in penitence, moved by the Spirit. I suggest this was what happened and not some ecstatic being slain in the Spirit. David was willing to accept this as legitimate only if there was abiding evidence that Saul of his own will wanted to continue in that path.

1Sa 20:5 David said to Jonathan, Look, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to dine with the king; but let me go so that I can hide myself in the field until the third day at evening-

This dining was presumably to keep a peace offering and eat together of the sacrifice. Saul for all his unspirituality continued an outward semblance of religious obedience and peace with God- as we can through partaking in the breaking of bread (the Christian equivalent of the peace offering), whilst harbouring obsessive hatred against our brethren in our hearts. The breaking of bread is our peace offering... but do we slip back into the lack of peace with God and our brethren afterwards?

1Sa 20:6 If your father misses me at all then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem, his city, for it is the yearly sacrifice there for all the family'-

This was a lie, as David was in the field (:5). It raises the question as to whether a lie is acceptable at times. We think of the Hebrew midwives in Egypt and Rahab, whose lie was an act of faith. It is also the same lie that God encouraged Samuel to use when he went to Bethlehem to anoint David as Saul's replacement, under the guise of offering a sacrifice there. Possibly David was seeking to provoke Saul to recall this and to react badly, because he wanted to demonstrate to Jonathan that his father Saul hadn't really changed his attitude.

1Sa 20:7 If he says, 'Very well', your servant will have peace; but if he is angry, then know that evil is determined by him-
The reference to "peace" is appropriate if as suggested on :6 a peace offering celebration is in view. This is appropriate language given that context, and confirms us in believing that we are reading the actual words spoken by men millennia ago.

1Sa 20:8 Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of Yahweh. But if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself; why should you bring me to your father?-
As discussed further on :9, there is an element of doubt now in David as to Jonathan's loyalty. He reminds him that their covenant that he should be king was before Yahweh. And he entertains the fear that Jonathan might bring David to Saul to be murdered by him; again, a lack of faith in the prophetic word that he would become king. See on :4. We note too that David calls Jonathan his master, recognizing that his life is completely in Jonathan's hands.

1Sa 20:9 Jonathan said, Never! If I should know that evil were determined against you by my father, wouldn't I tell you?-
We are reading a realistic record of the conversation between two friends, one of whom has conflicted loyalties, and the other naturally fears the integrity and trust in the relationship is thereby under threat. For :8 appears to be David somewhat doubting Jonathan, and Jonathan responds with passion, coming down on David's side with his loyalty.

1Sa 20:10 Then David said to Jonathan, Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?-
Clearly the two of them were not to be seen together. And it seems Jonathan had not even one trusted servant who could take a message to David; they had to somehow meet so that Jonathan could tell David in person. This is a tacit reflection of the anti-David feelings amongst the courtiers of Saul.

1Sa 20:11 Jonathan said to David, Come, let us go out into the field. They both went out into the field-
Presumably they had this conversation in the field because they were scared of being overheard; see on :10. They also wanted to map out exactly the place where they would meet for Jonathan to share the news with David.

1Sa 20:12 Jonathan said to David, By Yahweh, the God of Israel, when I have sounded out my father, by this time tomorrow or the third day, if he is favourable toward you I will send and tell you-
- see on 1 Sam. 18:1-3. AV "Jonathan said unto *David*, O Lord God of Israel...". He was aware that he was speaking to Yahweh, or before Yahweh, when speaking to

David. And we should be likewise aware. Jonathan is seeking to allay the understandable fears of David, that Jonathan would sacrifice his loyalty to David for the sake of that to his father Saul. But Jonathan swears before Yahweh that his loyalty has come down solidly on David's side.

1Sa 20:13 Yahweh deal with me severely, if my father intends evil against you and I don't disclose it to you so that I can send you away safely. May Yahweh be with you, as He has been with my father-
The last phrase reflects the continued struggle of feeling within Jonathan, torn as he was between loyalty to Saul and David. Perhaps he is putting in other words the Biblical comment that the Spirit departed from Saul and came to David; God's providential working to make Saul king was transferred to David, and Jonathan here recognizes that. The meaning in practice of the Spirit being with someone is that they have God "with" them. The promise of the Comforter is likewise of presence. But the Hebrew seems to imply that Yahweh had been with Saul and would continue to be with him. This surely bespeaks a lack of appreciation of the seriousness of Saul's apostasy. Despite Saul commanding Jonathan by clear pronouncement to kill David (1 Sam. 19:1 Hebrew), Jonathan assures David that Saul is not really intending to kill him; the implication is that he felt David's fear of Saul was somewhat exaggerated (1 Sam. 20:1,2). David gently pointed out, in the spirit of Christ, that Jonathan did not realize how deceptive Saul was (1 Sam. 20:3). Saul gave the impression that he 'delighted' in David (1 Sm. 18:22), using the very same word as in 1 Sam. 19:2: "Jonathan... *delighted* much in David". In other words, Saul and our surrounding world can appear to have the same attitude to David / Jesus as ourselves. The massive difference between the world's attitude to Christ and our own should become more and more apparent to us, despite the external similarities between us and them. Jonathan's familiarity with his father led him to overlook the manic danger which he posed for David, although at other times Jonathan seems to have faced up to it squarely. Our sense of the seriousness of sin likewise tends to blow hot and cold.

1Sa 20:14 But while I live, show me the grace of Yahweh so that I will not be killed-
Jonathan here reverts to a stronger faith in the prophetic word that David would indeed be king. He imagined that this would typically involve the slaying of the family of the former king. David feared Jonathan would betray him to death at the hands of Saul; Jonathan feared David would kill him when he became king. It is all so absolutely credible as a psychological narrative, although at this point Jonathan appears to have more faith in the prophetic word of David becoming king than David himself does.

1Sa 20:15 Also, do not cut off your kindness from my house forever, not even when Yahweh has cut off all the enemies of David from the surface of the earth-
Jonathan through faith in Samuel's prophetic word is sure that David will become king, and he sees this as requiring the cutting off of Saul and all David's enemies. He may use 'cutting off' in the sense of cutting off their descendants and family name, and he begs David to show mercy to his own line. As David is nervous of his friend Jonathan, so Jonathan here and in :42 seems also to have almost feared that David would take revenge or punish him in some way, on account of his close relationship with his sinful father. It must have seemed impossible to Jonathan, living at a time of kinship-based revenge, to believe that ultimately David would not react strongly against Saul's hatred of him. And we too, ever conscious of our sinful associations,

struggle to reassure ourselves of the love of Christ that passes knowledge, just as Jonathan must have looked deeper and deeper into the malice-less love of his friend David.

The covenant between Jonathan and David was an eternal one ("for ever", 1 Sm. 20:15; 23:17), and was reconfirmed during their brief meetings together, during which they earnestly looked ahead to the Kingdom (1 Sam. 23:17). And as we are all too painfully aware, our friendship with the Lord Jesus reflects the frustration of the Jonathan / David relationship, the accumulated tension of being unable to express their spiritual communication with each other, the pain of physical distance, Jonathan not knowing David's geographical location, having to live up to appearances and expectations in the David-hating court of his bitter father, struggling for the courage to stand up for his best friend. The sheer human pain of it all is so thoroughly revealed to the sensitive reader of the records. There is a purpose in this: it is to take us further in appreciating the true nature of our relationship with Christ.

1Sa 20:16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Yahweh will require it at the hand of David's enemies-
Jonathan proposed it, but David agreed to it. Jonathan accepts that Saul his father would have their behaviour against David "required" of them, at the hands of David. But the covenant was that Jonathan and his family would be spared.

1Sa 20:17 Jonathan made David swear again, for the love that he had for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul-
We might think that the motive for Jonathan requiring David's oath was more for the sake of his own security. But we are told here that the motive was love for David. Hence LXX "And Jonathan sware again to David". A double oath before Yahweh was the strongest kind of oath they could enter between them. Jonathan's love for David was based upon his respect for him and conviction that he would rightly be the next king instead of himself. It's as if in the tension of the storyline, with both sides distrusting the other despite their friendship, the Divine narrator steps in to assure us of Jonathan's absolute sincerity for David.

1Sa 20:18 Then Jonathan said to him, Tomorrow is the new moon and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty-
This implies that David regularly sat at the new moon peace offering feasts with Saul. Despite all the bitterness Saul felt toward him, he went through the motions of eating at the same religious table with him, in the name of celebrating our common peace with God. Those who complain of insincerity at the communion meal, with brethren hating brethren as they sit there, must realize that there is nothing new under the sun. Faithful men have passed this way before.

1Sa 20:19 When you have waited three days, go down quickly to the place where you hid yourself when this started, and stay by the stone Ezel-
Ezel is literally 'to go' and may refer to a stone set up as a signpost. LXX "heap of stones".

1Sa 20:20 I will shoot three arrows to the side of it as though I shot at a mark-
This whole intricate plan was because Jonathan lacked a single faithful friend or messenger through whom he could communicate with David. He had to do so himself

directly. We see here his very difficult situation within the household of Saul, and the extent of opposition to David there.

1Sa 20:21 Then I will send the boy saying, 'Go, find the arrows!'. If I tell the boy 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them', then come, for you are safe, as Yahweh lives-
As noted on :20, Jonathan lacked even one faithful messenger. He couldn't even trust this "boy"; see on :39.

1Sa 20:22 But if I say this to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you', then go your way, for Yahweh has sent you away-
The plan was originally that Jonathan and David would not meet each other. But such was their love for each other, that we see that they did briefly embrace. It has all the makings of a wonderful story with every bit of psychological credibility, and the closer we analyze it we are left with no doubt that what we are reading actually happened. Histories and records of the time all tend to embellish events with so much extra that it is hard to know what really was said or done. But the Biblical record shows such powerful internal evidence of being what it claims to be, the inspired word of God.

1Sa 20:23 Concerning the matter which you and I have spoken of, behold, Yahweh is between you and me forever-
Jonathan is at pains to persuade David of his loyalty, as well as continuing to harbour just a slight fear that in the day of David's exaltation, he might be tempted still to wipe out the entire family of Saul including Jonathan and his family.

1Sa 20:24 So David hid himself in the field, and when the new moon had come, the king sat down to eat-
I have suggested that eating at the new moon festival meant eating the peace offering, which Saul hypocritically did.

1Sa 20:25 The king sat on his seat by the wall as usual and Jonathan sat opposite and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty-
We enquire why the detail that Saul's personal seat was "by the wall". A king and leader would usually sit in a central place in the room. Perhaps the detail reflects how Saul feared someone might come behind him and kill him, and so in his paranoia or intense anxiety, he insisted that his seat was to be by the wall. Clearly Saul was ill, but those mental issues were intertwined with his moral issues and lack of heart for Yahweh. His mental illnesses or conditions were not ultimately a justification for his wrong behaviours towards David.

The Divine cameraman zooms in close up. "As usual" again shows that these peace offering feasts, the rough equivalent to the breaking of bread service under the new covenant, were held regularly. And David was usually in attendance at them, despite Saul's obvious insincerity towards him. See on :18. The fact Abner and not Jonathan sat by Saul's side, with Jonathan opposite Saul, would suggest a distance between them, with Abner now hoping to be next in line to the throne after Saul; an honour which Jonathan had resigned to David.

1Sa 20:26 Nevertheless Saul didn't say anything that day, for he thought, Something has happened to him. He is not clean. Surely he is not clean-

This reinforces the suggestion that the new moon feast was a religious feast, and the eating together was eating the peace offering, even though Samuel wasn't present to bless it. We note too how David was well known for his observation of the Mosaic law; for it was not allowed to eat the peace offering whilst unclean (Lev. 7:20,21).

1Sa 20:27 On the next day after the new moon, the second day, David's place was empty again. Saul said to Jonathan his son, Why didn't the son of Jesse come to eat, either yesterday or today?-
In the type of Christ, this looks ahead to Jn. 7:11. If David had been unclean, he would have been clean by sundown. If the excuse of :28 was true, it should have been presented at the start. Jonathan therefore clearly comes over as lying. "The son of Jesse" may suggest Saul found it hard to frame the word "David", meaning "beloved"- of God.

1Sa 20:28 Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem-
As noted on :27, this was obviously a lie as the excuse would have been given at the start of the feast. Jonathan's lie could be justified, but he might as well have been honest with Saul, and explained that David was frightened of Saul because of his erratic behaviour against him.

1Sa 20:29 He said, 'Please let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city. My brother has commanded me to be there. Now, if I have found favour in your eyes, please let me go away and see my brothers'. That is why he has not come to the king's table-
This would have restimulated Saul's memories of his daughter Michal saying that David had asked her "Let me go away...". He would have felt both his children were lying to him because of their greater loyalty to David. Jonathan's lie was really without any credibility, for nobody in Israel, let alone a Saul supporter like David's brother, would have demanded David's presence at home rather than with Saul at the palace. "Go away" is the word for 'flee'. It was again designed to probe the sincerity of Saul's apparent repentance when he took off his kingly robes and lay in penitence all night before Yahweh in the previous chapter. The expected response from Saul, if he were penitent, would have been 'Flee back home? No, he's safe here, I'm so sorry for what I did to him but I've repented now'. But instead we see Saul's angry reaction, showing how he had reverted to type. He failed to have what Paul would later call 'repentance not to be repented of'. So often one observes this in pastoral exeperience- someone is baptized, or has a deep spiritual experience at some point in their life, displays amazing spirituality and commitment- and then reverts to the previous mentality. They have failed to walk in the Spirit, to be refilled by the Spirit, to totally surrender their heart.

1Sa 20:30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, You son of a perverse rebellious woman, don't I know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the confusion of your mother's nakedness?-
David loved Saul, his daughters and his son Jonathan; and later David was to marry Saul's wives. These wives were given into David's bosom (2 Sam. 12:8); in other words, they were really close in their relationship; so close, 2 Sam. 12:8 implies, that David had no real emotional need to take Bathsheba. Even while Saul was alive there was probably some attraction chemistry going on between David and those women.

This may well be reflected in Saul's fury with Jonathan, which hints at least two things: firstly, Saul had a bad relationship with his wife; and secondly, he suspected some kind of unfaithfulness in her with David, perhaps only on a mental level. His paranoia would have led him to suspect all his wives of unfaithfulness. Saul perhaps feared that when David became king and he was deposed, then David would marry his wives, including Jonathan's mother. Just as Absalom took David's wives and lay with them as a sign of his taking of power from David. Even if this were to be how David exercised his kingship, Saul was struggling against the prophetic word which said David was to replace him as king. Literally "son of a woman that is snatching away a man" [as in the Vulgate, "traitorous woman" LXX]. We are familiar from Proverbs with the image of a whore snatching away a man into her clutches. Saul is cursing his own wife as a whore. NLT renders "You son of a whore". Possibly she had already had an affair by David and had had a child by him.

1Sa 20:31 As long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth you will not be established, nor your kingdom. Therefore now send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die!- Saul assumed that Jonathan was to replace him as king, and assumed Jonathan would want this. He was deeply aware of Samuel's words that Saul's kingdom was not to be established, and was to be given to David. And yet he reasons as if this is not going to happen. This is typical of man's denial of the truth of God's word. The king of God's intention would only have his children as kings, i.e. become a dynaty, if he was devoted to Yahweh's ways. Thus Dt. 17:20: “That his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel". Saul didn't do this; and yet like most human kings, he was desperate for a dynasty. He refused to accept that a dynasty of kings was conditional on his spirituality. Rather he assumed the dynasty must happen.

All of us in Christ experience a massive sense of paradox. We live and work in this world, doing the things of this world in our daily occupations, yet in the more important side of our lives we have this high spiritual relationship with the Lord Jesus and the Almighty Sovereign of this universe. This is - or ought to be- part of our hour by hour experience in this life. A little imagination of Jonathan's situation soon shows that our dilemma was exactly matched by his experience. He was the King's son, heavily taken up with the day to day running of the Kingdom, clearly tipped to succeed the King, and possibly take over as regent on Saul's retirement. Saul effectively says as much during his explosion at Jonathan for befriending David. So there was Jonathan, going up the ladder towards Kingship, when he had no real interest in this, and when he had firmly decided that David would be king, not himself , when the Kingdom was established (1 Sam. 23:17). There must be hundreds of Christians-come-high flying executives worldwide who can identify completely with this scenario.

The bitterness underlying Saul's words in 1 Sam. 20:30,31 indicates a certain element of love-hate in Jonathan's relationship with Saul. We can sense this in the record of 1 Sam. 14, when Jonathan overcame the Philistine garrison whilst his father cowered away in nervous faithlessness. How jealous Saul must have been! Jealousy was one of Saul's characteristics, and it is subconsciously a major feature of the world's aggression towards us; for the world *is* passively aggressive (cp. Gen. 3:15), if only we manifest Christ as we should. Saul almost seems to have contrived his command not to eat on pain of death in order to incriminate his son, whom he knew would not have heard his prohibition. The way in which he says that even if it were

Jonathan who had eaten, then he must die (1 Sam. 14:39), seems to suggest that Saul was actually looking for an excuse to kill Jonathan. This love-hate relationship between Jonathan and Saul is exactly typical of ours with the world and our own flesh.

1Sa 20:32 Jonathan answered Saul his father, Why should he be put to death? What has he done?-
We notice that when Saul tried to put Jonathan to death when he had done no wrong, Jonathan accepted it (1 Sam. 14:43). But he protests strongly when his father treats David the same way. This reflects his deep humility, accepting his own death as he felt a sinner even if innocent of what he was accused of. But he stands up for David, as we should for the Lord Jesus. The answer to Jonathan's question was "Because Saul is jealous of him". When people are pressed to answer the hard questions which they cannot answer, they often become aggressive. And this is just what happened here (:33). Again and again, the record has every psychological verisimilitude and reality.

1Sa 20:33 Saul cast his spear at him to strike him. By this Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death-
Saul was potentially enabled to free Israel from the Philistines, but he failed to have the personal faith required. The main victories against them were by Jonathan (1 Sam. 13,14) and David. And this explains his great jealousy against them both, even planning to slay Jonathan at least twice (1 Sam. 14:39; 20:33). See on 1 Sam. 14:45.

A sensitive heart will constantly be looking to the Lord Jesus for inspiration. For it's hard to maintain the intensities of which we have written. Consider how Jonathan suffered the same suffering as did David, in that Saul tried to kill him with a javelin. Jonathan felt the shame of David, and grieved for him. David is set up in the record as a type of Jesus, and Jonathan as a type of those with whom Jesus has made a covenant after His defeat of sin on the cross [cp. the fight with Goliath]. Jonathan lived in an environment which was bitterly opposed to David; yet he stuck up for him, at the risk of embarrassment and opposition, and certain damage to his own prospects; as we should in this wicked world. As Saul cast a javelin at David, so he did at Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:33); as we should fellowship the sufferings of David's greater son. Saul's hate of David resulted in Jonathan being "grieved for David, because his father had done him shame" (1 Sam. 20:34). Is this not our response to our world in its' ceaseless blasphemy of Christ?

1Sa 20:34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully-
If as suggested this feast was a kind of peace offering celebration, this refusal to eat with them on the second day was a sign of refusing religious fellowship with his own father. To eat with someone, or not do so, was a major statement in ancient society. It was as good as quitting relationship with Saul. See on :33.

The Hebrew implies Jonathan felt shamed for the sake of the shame put on David, and was angry because of it. This again bears the hallmark of psychological credibility; for there's a definite link between shame and anger. Take a man whose mother yelled at him because as a toddler he ran out onto the balcony naked, and shamed him by her words. Years later on a hot Summer evening the man as an adult walks out on a balcony with just his underpants on. An old woman yells at him from

the yard below that he should be ashamed of himself. And he's furiously angry with her- because of the shame given him by his mother in that incident 20 years ago. Shame and anger are clearly understood by God as being related, because His word several times connects them: "A fool's *anger* is immediately known; but a prudent man covers his *shame*" (Prov. 12:16); A king's *anger* is against a man who *shames* him (Prov. 14:35). Job's *anger* was related to the fact that he felt that ten times the friends had *shamed* him in their speeches (Job 19:3). Frequently the rejected are threatened with both shame and anger / gnashing of teeth; shame and anger are going to be connected in that awful experience. They will "curse [in anger]... and be ashamed" (Ps. 109:28). The final shame of the rejected is going to be so great that "they shall be greatly ashamed... their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be. Because Paul's preaching 'despised' the goddess Diana, her worshippers perceived that she and they were somehow thereby shamed; and so "they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:27,28). It's perhaps possible to understand the wrath of God in this way, too. For His wrath is upon those who break His commands; and by breaking them we *shame* God (Rom. 2:23); we *despise* his desire for our repentance (Rom. 2:4). But if we are saved from God's wrath through Him, if our sin is dealt with, we can live in this world without shame. Because all anger is dealt with.

1Sa 20:35 In the morning Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little boy went with him-
As noted on :39, Jonathan was driven to use a child because he didn't want to use anyone who might just guess something was going on in this apparent archery practice.

1Sa 20:36 He said to his boy, Run, find now the arrows which I shoot. As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him-
This apparent missed shot was to give Jonathan the excuse to shout out words to the boy which were really addressed to David.

1Sa 20:37 When the boy had come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the boy, Isn't the arrow beyond you?-
The boy ran to where the arrows had fallen, near the target. But the arrow shot beyond him was purposeful, so that he could shout the words of :38 which were really intended for David.

1Sa 20:38 Jonathan called after the boy, Go quickly! Hurry! Don't delay! Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master-
These words were intended to be heard by David, who was to not delay in fleeing. But Jonathan's love for David led him to change plans at the last minute; which is completely imaginable in such a relationship and emotional moment. The whole ruse with the archery practice had been in order to relay these words to David. But then the plans change- and Jonathan meets David face to face, because love overpowers him. For if Jonathan had shot the arrow not "beyond" the boy, and had instead called out something like "Come back to me", David would have understood that all was good

and he could return to the palace and Jonathan. But still Jonathan insists on meeting David.

1Sa 20:39 But the boy didn't know anything. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter-
As noted earlier, this whole intricate plan was because Jonathan lacked a single faithful friend or messenger through whom he could communicate with David. He had to do so himself directly, and it was critical that even "the boy" didn't perceive what was going on. We see here his very difficult situation within the household of Saul, and the extent of opposition to David there.

1Sa 20:40 Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy, and said to him, Go, take them to the city-
As discussed on :38, this was a change of plan at the last minute.

1Sa 20:41 As soon as the boy had gone David got up from the south side of the stone, fell on his face to the ground and bowed himself three times. They kissed one another and wept one with another, and David wept the most-
They agree that if Jonathan shoots arrows well beyond David, then David should flee. Obviously they did not intend to meet if this were the case; otherwise there would have been no point in the arrangement about the arrows. David did need to flee, so Jonathan shot the arrows beyond him. Yet somehow Jonathan and David took a chance and crept towards each other. David went towards Jonathan, somehow hoping that he would meet him. And Jonathan went to find David, hoping against hope that he *wouldn't* flee immediately, as they had arranged. This explains the intensity of their meeting together: "they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded" (AV). "Until David exceeded" defies complete translation and interpretation. It clearly does not mean that David cried until he stopped crying. David "exceeded" in that he went somewhere beyond; Strong defines the Hebrew word as meaning 'to be made larger in the mind'. In a sense David broke down emotionally, and yet on another level he went beyond, into a level of relationship which was beyond normal emotional experience. In like manner he commented that his love for Jonathan was beyond the love of women; the love of David for Jonathan pointed forward to that special emotional and spiritual bond in Christ which passes the human experience of love (Eph. 3:19).

1Sa 20:42 Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, because we have both sworn in the name of Yahweh, saying, 'Yahweh shall be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, forever'. David arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city-
See on 1 Sam. 23:16,18. We are of course invited to see the two friends returning to such different lives. David to the outlaw life of the free scrubland, and Jonathan walked alone uphill back to the court life, fraught as it was with political tensions, anger and frustration. Both lives were equally serving Yahweh, and many servants of God in different situations have reflected upon this truth. We are all called to different situations.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 21

1Sa 21:1 Then David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, Why are you alone and no-one with you?-
The same expression is used in 1 Sam. 16:4 of how the elders of Bethlehem feared when Samuel came to them. Saul's fear and paranoia had spread to the whole land. And that is psychologically credible. We see those on God's side, Samuel and David, rising above this spirit. Alternatively we can understand the priest's "trembling" as out of respect for David. The word is usually used in this sense; "Eli was trembling for the ark of God" (1 Sam. 4:13), and men trembled at God's word (Ezra 9:4; 10:3; Is. 66:2,5).

This Ahimelech could be the Ahijah descendant of Eli of 1 Sam. 14:3 ["Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of Yahweh"]. He was the son of Ahitub (1 Sam. 22:9). As Ahitub's son, he was in the line of Eli. Yet Eli's family had been cursed in 1 Sam. 2,3. It could be that this person in later life experienced the curses. But it would be far from the only time in Bible history where a curse is pronounced but not carried out. There is a gap between Yahweh's prophetic pronouncements, and their fulfillment. And in that gap there is the possibility for repentance. This is what gives intensity to our prayers and repentance, knowing we too live in such a gap.

The Lord refers to Ahimelech as "Abiathar the high priest" (Mk. 2:26). There were times when two high priests held the office at the same time (Num. 19:3; 1 Chron. 24:3; 1 Kings 1:45 cp. 1 Kings 2:27). Or His idea may have been "Abiathar who was the high priest later on", just as we read of Jesse begetting "David the king" (Mt. 1:6), not immediately, but only later was he king. Or "Rahab the harlot" (Heb. 11:31), "Mathew the publican" (Mt. 10:3).

1Sa 21:2 David said to Ahimelech the priest, The king has charged me with a task and has said to me 'Let no-one know anything about it or what I have commanded you'. I have told the young men to go to a meeting place-
The LXX makes the last sentence part of Saul's supposed command, and makes it purposefully unclear what their mission was, giving it a code name which Ahimelech would not perceive: "and I have charged my servants to be in the place that is called, The faithfulness of God, phellani maemoni". But we wonder whether David's lie was right or even necessary. He was simply desperately hungry and needed help for his men. If he had told Ahimelech the truth, he likely would have helped him. But he clearly doubts Ahimelech's loyalty to him and therefore makes out that he is still working for Saul, and just needs some help whilst on a secret mission for the king. I noted throughout 1 Sam. 20 that David struggled with elements of distrust even for Jonathan. He must have felt so lonely, and must have had the impression that every man's hand was potentially against him. This again is absolutely how a man going through his experiences would have felt. It is absolutely psychologically credible, and such internal harmony gives us every reason to believe this record is true and is indeed inspired by God. Or it may be that he was seeking to preserve the priest from trouble with Saul.

We have to note that this was a lie, and that lie caused the deaths of men, even priests of Yahweh. There are so many lies in David's life. He told Jonathan to lie to Saul about why he was absent from Saul's table, pretends he is having a mental breakdown in order to get out of Gath, he deceived Achish later about his activities, killing innocent villagers so none would be left alive to reveal his lies, and then the whole deceptive mess over the death of Uriah... In those days, as in some areas today, lying your way out of something was seen as effective diplomacy. And yet David

bleats on about his integrity and how he is innocent and has served God in truth... whilst on balance he seems to emerge as God's man, he undoubtedly was a mixture of good and bad. Even if the good just about triumphed, and the bad was ultimately trumped by his having a heart for God. We wonder about things so often with David. Did he lie in order to save Ahimelech from trouble with Saul or from Doeg? Did he lie from lack of faith? Was he giving Ahimelech a hidden message- that he was on a job for the real king, Yahweh? As so often, there is no clear answer and we are left to conclude David's motives were mixed.

"What I have commanded you" is literally "what I have appointed you to do". The same word was used by Samuel when telling Saul that Yahweh had found another man to be king, whom He would "appoint" or "command" to be prince over His people (1 Sam. 13:14). It's possible that David is being subtle, or deceitful, by actually having in view that "the king" he speaks of is not Saul but Yahweh, who has appointed or commanded him. David so often refers to Yahweh as the true king (Ps. 5:2; 20:9; 24:7-10; 29:10; 68:24; 145:1).

I have argued on 1 Sam. 22:9 that David is lying to Ahimelech all through this encounter; see notes there.

1Sa 21:3 Now therefore what do you have to hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever there is here-

We wonder if David had only four men with him. Hence he asks for five loaves of bread. We note how although David was at a low point here, he still represented the future Lord Jesus- who was the only other man in scripture to have "five loaves", and who gave them to those who were "with Him".

1Sa 21:4 The priest answered David, There is no common bread here, but there is holy bread, if the young men have kept themselves from women-

It has often been said that there were no Mosaic restrictions upon how the shewbread could be used after it had been taken out of the holy place. It seems this request was adding a fence to the law. But Lev. 24:9 is clear: "It shall be for Aaron and his sons; and they shall eat it in a holy place". But we note Ahimelech calls it "holy bread", and his condition that the men had not slept with women would've been irrelevant if it were now not "holy bread". I suggest this was an ad hoc decision to give the holy bread to non Levites, but he sets this condition to at least give some semblance of sanctity. He surely knew what was going on, and that David's story about being on a mission for Saul was untrue. He knew surely these men hadn't slept with women recently. The Lord interprets the incident this way, commenting that Ahimelech gave these men the bread which was meant only for the priests, and so he did that which was "not lawful". It could be that Ahimelech perceived that David and his men were a new king-priesthood. Who had no sanctuary and served God spiritually rather than through ritual. We know that at this time, Ahimelech enquired of Yahweh for David (1 Sam. 22:10), so probably he asked whether David could have the hallowed bread- and got a positive answer.

1Sa 21:5 David answered the priest, Truly, women have been kept from us for about three days. When I go on an expedition the bodies of the young men are holy; they are even for an ordinary journey; how much more so today?-

We again note David's careful observance of the Mosaic law, even when on the run from Saul; and he often refers to this in Ps. 119, the Psalm he wrote at this time. It could be that David had last slept with Michal three days ago, before fleeing Gibeah.

Or maybe he means that for sure, he could vouch that his men had been with him for three days without women nearby. Or maybe "three days" is a general statement.

David's argument seems to be that he was on a special journey, perhaps hinting at a holy journey; and "how much more so today?" could suggest this was a Mosaic feast day. We wonder why Ahimelech apparently has "no bread" at all to give David. How come they had no food? Possibly this was the day of atonement, the only fast required under the Mosaic law. David's assurance that his men hadn't slept with women recently would then be behind his exclamation that it was bizarre to even think they had been sleeping with women on the day of atonement. That would well explain the force of "how much more so today?". David later asked Nabal to give his men food because they were asking on a feast day (Heb., 1 Sam. 25:8 NEV "at a good time"). This is a parallel with how he asks Ahimelech to give his men food because, he implies, it is a feast day (see on 1 Sam. 21:5). So circumstances had repeated. David's request for food from Nabal on a feast day ought to have reminded him of how at a low spiritual point, he had asked the priests of Nob for the same. And it led to their death. We likewise are to perceive the connections between our life experiences, and to learn the lessons. "How much more so today?" may also mean that it was the Sabbath, which would explain perhaps why Ahimelech couldn't prepare more food for David, rather than him implying they had not a morsel of food in the house. And it is in this context that the Lord uses the incident, in justifying His men for 'working' on the Sabbath.

1Sa 21:6 So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there apart from the Bread of the Presence that had been taken from before Yahweh, to be replaced by fresh hot bread-

The Lord Jesus speaks of how David ate the shewbread unlawfully, seeking to demonstrate that the spirit of the law replaces the letter. Some have argued that the bread they ate was not the actual shewbread, but the old shewbread; and there was no legislation governing what might be done with this. We could assume that true to the spirit of Jewish midrash, the Lord was making an exaggerated point. Or it could be that He meant that it was "not lawful" to eat the used shewbread according to the spirit of the law, but not the letter of it. However Lev. 24:9 is clear: "It shall be for Aaron and his sons; and they shall eat it in a holy place". “Aaron and his sons shall eat…the bread that is in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of meeting… but an outsider shall not eat them, because they are holy. And if any… of the bread remains until the morning then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy” (Ex. 29:32-34). And the Lord is clear too that David "ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat" (Mt. 12:4). We also note that the Lord stresses that David himself entered the holy place and took the bread and himself gave it to "those with him", just as Mark records how the Lord chose His men to "be with Him". Lk. 6:4 is clearest: "he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone". But David's entry into the holy place is stressed in the other records: "he entered into the house of God" (Mt. 12:4), "he went into the house of God" (Mk. 2:26). Luke's language recalls the Lord taking bread and giving to His disciples. The priest "gave" him the bread, but *nathan* can mean he assigned him or permitted him to take the bread. Perhaps his enquiry of Yahweh for David had been specifically about whether to permit David to do this. "So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread" would seem to be saying that the bread was still holy or hallowed at the point the priest gave / allowed

David to take it. We are thereby led to think that David's action was not so much because he was hungry, but because he wanted to take the bread and give it to his men as a religious act, acting as their priest. The loaves of shewbread weren't large- the table of shewbread, on which the shewbread was to be arranged in two rows of six, was only three feet long and one and a half feet wide. The loaves weren't large and could hardly have seriously met a hunger need. They were "cakes" (Lev. 24:5) rather than loaves. Rashi translated "How much more then today, when there shall be holy bread in their vessels" i.e. bodies. This would confirm the suggestion that David's men ate "holy bread".

1Sa 21:7 Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before Yahweh; his name was Doeg the Edomite, the best of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul-
In the type of the things concerning the Lord Jesus, in some way Doeg may point forward to Herod, who was also an Edomite. We note that he was "detained before Yahweh", he was obedient to parts of the Mosaic law. So was Saul; and so were the wicked men who crucified our Lord, David's greater son. Or his being 'detained' may have been because it was the day of atonement (see on :5) and he was unable to travel over the feast. Saul had defeated the Edomites (1 Sam. 14:47), so Doeg had perhaps betrayed his own people and joined Saul. We have perhaps an insight into his character just because of this. Or Doeg being detained before Yahweh may have been because he had made a vow, or possibly, was becoming a proselyte. This then adds more background to David's ranting against him in Ps. 52:1-4 as being a liar, using deceitful words. What were these words? No specific lie of Doeg is recorded, but the accusation of being a serious liar makes sense if he had made false vows to Yahweh. Psalm 52 was likely later rewritten, under inspiration, during the exile; for Edom was a much hated ally of the Babylonians who eagerly destroyed Jerusalem and murdered the priests (Lam. 4:21,22; Mal. 1:2–5; Joel 3:19; Ez. 25:12; 35:3,15; Ps. 137:7; Obadiah 11).

"The best of the herdsmen" is LXX "tending Saul's mules / donkeys". In this case we see again how Saul was obsessed with donkeys. He is introduced to us like this, and Samuel warns that Saul when king would take Israel's donkeys. It seems this streak of petty materialism continued with Saul throughout his life.

1Sa 21:8 David said to Ahimelech, Don't you have here a spear or sword? I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me because the king's business required haste-
Scoring David out of ten for spirituality, he scores sadly here. He had turned down spear and sword when fighting Goliath, and had confidently stated that as the battles are Yahweh's, these weapons give no defence. And he lies about things in order to get them. And we even wonder whether he was correct to pretend to be a servant of Saul as king, when Yahweh had clearly rejected Saul as king and chosen David. But despite this weak point in his faith, he still also asked Ahimelech to enquire of God for him (1 Sam. 22:10).

1Sa 21:9 The priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah is here, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it; there is no other except that here. David said, There is none like that. Give it to me-
David's eager taking of the sword of Goliath ("There is none like that; give it to me") contrasts sadly with his earlier rejection of such weapons in order to slay Goliath. And

David later reflects how he knew that his faithless taking of that sword and the shewbread would lead to the death of Abiathar's family (1 Sam. 22:22). But still he did it. This was one reason why he is criticized by God as having shed too much blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

Without doubt we have David here at a low point in his faith. But overall he was still seen by the Spirit in NT times as the man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Stephen positively comments about David that he found grace before God (Acts 7:46), and often subsequent kings are judged according to whether they walked in the ways of David (2 Chron. 17:3; 7:17; 29:2; 34:2; 1 Kings 11:6; 14:8; 15:11). This is quite some benchmark. The fact his dynasty continued for 467 years is amazing, and surely some sign of God's acceptance of him. Positively, we think of David's valuing and respect for Saul's life as "precious", on two occasions refusing to kill him; his refusal to let Abishai kill Shimei; his anger over the murder of Ishbosheth, Saul's son; his grace to the crippled Mephibosheth; his insistence that soldiers too weary to go on fighting should still be equally rewarded; his appreciation of the men who risked their lives to bring him water from the well of Bethlehem; his love for Absalom; his desire to put things right for the Gibeonites whom Saul had wrongly abused, his mourning for the death of Abner- and Saul, for that matter. And there is the comment that he ruled with justice and equity (2 Sam. 8:15; 23:3).

Negatively, we think of his apparently casual slaying of 200 Philistines to get their foreskins; the whole mess with Bathsheba and Uriah; his request for the sword of Goliath and faithless flight to live with the Philistines; his ethnic cleansing of villages to save his own image with the Philistines; his hot blooded desire to kill Nabal and his family; his insistence on taking the census which led to judgment on Israel; his breaking up of Paltiel and Michal's marriage; his bloodthirsty desire for vengeance on his enemies portrayed in the Psalms, offsetting his grace to them in practice; his strange absence from the faithful listed in Hebrews 11.

The end synthesis of all this is that God saw him as having a heart after His own, and he found grace in God's eyes (Acts 7:46).

1Sa 21:10 David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath-

Ahimelech confirms to Saul that he had enquired of Yahweh for David (1 Sam. 22:10), and that he had also done so previously. We wonder what at this point David enquired about. The fact he went to Gath right afterwards makes it likely that it was something to do with this. But I suggest it was unlikely that Yahweh would have confirmed David in that decision, nor that He required David to take Goliath's sword. So we may well imagine David being disobedient to the answer to his enquiry.

Why did David take Goliath's sword to Gath, the home town of Goliath? Surely as an act of repentance. But to gift a sword was understood as a request for something or the permission to use something. Even as recently as the coronation of King Charles III in the UK, the practice persisted. The Crown's official website explained: "The Sword of Offering, which symbolises the protection of good and the punishment of evil, will be delivered to the Archbishop of Canterbury and will be placed in The King's right hand. The King will rise, and the Sword will be fastened at His Majesty's waist using the Sword Belt. The King will offer the Sword at the Altar, where it will be received the Dean. The Sword will then be redeemed with the offering of 100 newly minted 50ps, by the Lord President of the Council, who will carry it before The King for the remainder of the Service. Traditionally, the Sword is offered to Westminster Abbey in payment for hosting a Coronation Service, and redeemed by

offering a symbolic payment". Egyptian art likewise depicts the gift of weapons as a sign of submission and dominance on the part of the recipient. David was surrendering to the Philistines. We recall how Jonathan gave his weapons to David as a sign of this and his surrendering of power to David. What was David requesting? Safety and protection from Saul. What property was he asking to use? Presumably somewhere for him and his men to live in Gath.

We sense he was utterly desperate to do this, he was not thinking straight. We wonder if he took Goliath's sword back to Goliath's home town in an attempt to make peace with the Philistines and live with them. They seemed the only people he could feel safe with. He would rather risk torture and death at the hands of the Gentiles than persecution from God's own people. His decision making here bears all the hallmarks of a man at the very end of his emotional and nervous ability to cope.

Many of the Psalms appear to be paired; Ps. 56 and Ps. 57 are an example. They are very similar. The title of Ps. 56 ["when seized by the Philistines in Gath"] therefore provides a context for Ps. 57, which was "A poem by David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave" (Ps. 57:1). David's time when seized by the Philistines in Gath could refer to some unrecorded capture and detention of him in Gath- the home town of Goliath, whose sons / relatives had also been slain by David's men, and David had slain "ten thousands" of Philistines. Or it could refer to the time when he was serving Achish king of Gath and had to feign himself mad in order to get released. Perhaps things were far tougher for David at that time than recorded in 1 Sam. 21:10-15. Whatever, David took comfort from his rescue from Gath (Ps. 56) and reapplied it to the situation with Saul (the subject of Ps. 57). And this is how we too pass through life- experiences in one situation strengthen us for another.

1Sa 21:11 The servants of Achish said to him, Isn't this David the king of the land? Didn't they sing one to another about him in dances saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?'-

By going to Goliath's home town, David should have known this was a foolish decision and this was going to happen. As noted above, David's decision making here bears all the hallmarks of a man at the very end of his emotional and nervous ability to cope. We notice how the Philistines were not in close contact with the Israelites, and assumed David was the king; when this was far from the case. These words would have been potential encouragement to David to perceive that God's purpose with him, to make him king, would ultimately succeed. That passing encouragement was given to him at a time when all seemed hopeless for his cause. And God likewise works with us today.

1Sa 21:12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath-

This is the very phrase used of how Israel were "much afraid" of Goliath of Gath, whereas David wasn't but had calm faith (1 Sam. 17:24). The implication is that David's faith was at a far lower point than it had been then.

1Sa 21:13 He changed his behaviour before them and pretended to be mad, scrabbled on the doors of the gate and let his saliva fall down onto his beard-

Going down South to Achish of Gath and playing the mad man has sad connections with the patriarchs going down to Egypt in times of weak faith. I have noted that David was under extreme nervous stress at this time. Although he was acting, we

sense he was not far off actually experiencing a mental breakdown; for his decision making was really very confused and desperate in running to Achish.

Psalm 34 was written as reflection upon his deliverance from Gath (Ps. 34:1). But in that Psalm, David reflects that it is good not to tell lies (Ps. 34:13 "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking lies"). But David himself has been noted for how many lies he told, not least in this context both to Ahimelech [resulting in his flight to Gath] and then in Gath (Ps. 34:1). So here we have some kind of repentance for his behaviour in Gath. And this leads to his higher point of faith as discussed on 1 Sam. 22:23.

1Sa 21:14 Then Achish said to his servants, Look, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me?-

We wonder whether Achish realized that David was acting, for he speaks of him 'playing the madman' (:15). In this case, he was trying to do David a favour by letting him get away from Gath, knowing that his people were close to murdering David. The reason why he should do this isn't clear, but David's desperate prayers were heard through God manipulating circumstance and situation to enable Achish to want to release David, the public enemy number one for his own people.

1Sa 21:15 Do I lack madmen that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?-

See on :14. Achish says he doesn't want David in his palace, but for David to get from the palace to safety in the wilderness would have required a further display of God's saving providence. Ps. 34 [title] says that Achish "drove him away"; but we sense that this may have been an appearance by Achish, because he may well have actually wanted to save David (see on :14). See on Ps. 34 for more on David's situation at this time.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 22

1Sa 22:1 David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him-

As noted on 1 Sam. 21:14,15 and Ps. 34, this was all an amazing deliverance by God through raising up situations in Achish's life where he apparently wanted to help David escape. David's brothers had originally been followers of Saul and appeared jealous and dismissive of David. Perhaps Saul's irrational obsession had led him to persecute them, even though they were his supporters, simply because they were David's family.

1Sa 22:2 Everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt and everyone who was discontented gathered themselves to him and he became their captain. About four hundred men were with him-

We could assume that the distress and discontent was with Saul, and the debts due to his excessive taxation of them. David was therefore their logical captain. "Distress" is the word usually used of suffering for disobedience to the covenant (Dt. 28:53,55,57; Jer. 19:9). But all the same, they were driven by their disobedience towards David. The lesson for the exiles was that despite their suffering "distress" in exile in response to their breaking of covenant, there was a way out- if they accepted the greater son of David.

"In debt" is translated 'taxed' in Ps. 89:20-22: "I have found David My servant, I have anointed him with My holy oil, with whom My hand shall be established; My arm will also strengthen him. No enemy will tax him, no wicked man will oppress him". By being on the run from Saul, David paid no tax; and this attracted those who were heavily taxed by Saul.

"Discontented" is literally 'bitter of soul'. The same phrase is used of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:10); these were her spiritual descendants.

David's men represent the followers of the Lord Jesus (cp. Heb. 13:13). David's motley crew were bitter men, "them that are set on fire... whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Ps. 57:4). It was push factors [such as the debts created by Saul's merciless taxation] rather than pull factors which led them to David, as it is sometimes with those who come to the Lord Jesus today. So rough were they that David says that having to live with them almost destroyed him spiritually (1 Sam. 26:19). This typology would explain why the body of Christ seems [at times] full of mixed up men and women with hard words- who eventually will be the rulers in Messiah's Kingdom, after the pattern of David's men.

1Sa 22:3 David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab, and he said to the king of Moab, Please let my father and my mother come and stay with you-

Samuel had commanded Saul to wait until God would show him what he must do (the very same phrase is in 1 Sam. 10:8). Then in 1 Sam. 16:3, God was telling Samuel to do what Samuel had told Saul to do. And Samuel had observed Saul's testing, his initial obedience and his later failure. This is how God works, repeating circumstance between the lives of people, bringing people into our lives from whom we are to learn; and then we are tested just as they were. David may have reflected on this, for he in turn uses the phrase of how he was waiting for God to lead him further. He would have remembered how Samuel had come to his father's house and likewise waited for God to show him what he had to do. We recall that David was descended from Ruth, a Moabitess. At the time of the Assyrian onslaught upon Jerusalem, "Let My outcasts dwell with you, Moab" (Is. 16:4) alludes here- and thus reflects how God saw Saul as being as bad as the Gentile, hate filled Assyrians.

Until I know what God will do for me-

This phrase is used in 1 Sam. 28:15 about waiting for a prophetic revelation. David had only been told that he would be king; the path there was not revealed to him, rather like our path to the Kingdom. Again it is hard to know David's level of faith here. He could on one hand be seeking God's guidance; or he could be overlooking the obvious plan of God that he should be king. "Know" can mean to understand or know, or, to experience. Again we are invited to ponder whether this was a calm statement of trust that he would experience what God would do for him in making him king; or whether he means that he has no idea what God has in store for him. Which would reflect a low point in his faith in God's promise to make him king. Time and again we have these invitations to ponder David's real spiritual strength, and to conclude that his strength was only made perfect through much weakness.

1Sa 22:4 He brought them before the king of Moab and they lived with him all the while that David was in the stronghold-

The singular "stronghold" may suggest that throughout David's time running from one hiding place to another, he was in fact in one great fortress provided by God. But "the stronghold" in :5 seems to refer to a fortress in Mizpeh.

We must compare Moab's apparent help of David with 2 Sam. 8:2 "And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts". This could be because Moab had murdered or betrayed David's parents, or it could be another example of David just using people and being ungrateful. Despite his being a loyal friend to Jonathan and Abiathar, rewarding them for their loyalty.

1Sa 22:5 The prophet Gad said to David, Don't stay in the stronghold. Depart, and go into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and went into the forest of Hereth-
This could be the time of Ps. 63. This was completely counter instinctive, just as many of God's directions are to us. They appeared to finally have found refuge in Moab, and the king had accepted David's parents. But now they were bidden return to Judah. There was to be an exact equivalent in the Lord's experience (Jn. 11:7,8 cp. Jn. 7:1).

David's whole experience with Saul was of course led and arranged by a loving Father. The sensible thing would have been for David to get out of Saul's way and lay quiet- and this is what he tried to do, by going to Moab. But then God tells him to go back into Judah. This was political suicide. It made no human sense to expose himself to Saul again. And then God tells David to go and fight with the Philistines in order to rescue the people of Keilah (1 Sam. 23:2). Yet the men of Keilah weren't allies worth having- even they were prepared to betray David to Saul, and by this action he made the Philistines hate him yet more, so refuge amongst them was no longer possible. Again and again, God led David into situations that were politically suicidal, that only made things worse for him… because He wanted David to trust in Him alone. And so it happens in our lives. Time and again.

1Sa 22:6 Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. Now Saul was sitting in Gibeah under the tamarisk tree in Ramah with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him-
Again the Divine cameraman zooms in close up upon this man Saul, just as the record does as he sat under a pomegranate tree in 1 Sam. 14:2. However the Hebrew *eshel* is the usual word translated "grove", which has associations with idol worship. Saul's daughter Michal had an idol in her home and we suspect Saul was not totally averse to idolatry despite his obedience to parts of the Mosaic law. "Ramah" may be better translated "on the height", unless we take "Gibeah" as the name of the general district.

"With his spear in his hand" is the image we are repeatedly given of Saul in the records. It was the symbol of his kingship, and he was desperately gripping hold of it rather than giving it up as he should have done. Whether at home, sitting under a tree (1 Sam. 22:6)... he is pictured as madly gripping on to it. He even sleeps with the spear in the ground next to him (1 Sam. 26:7). In this lies the significance of David taking the spear from Saul but then returning it to him. What should Saul's response have been? To tell David to keep the spear and be king, whilst he retired and walked quietly with his God (1 Sam. 26:21,22). And it was that gripping on to power that was his death. If the Amalekite is to be believed, he said that Saul at his last end "was leaning on his spear" (2 Sam. 1:6), presumably before falling upon his own sword in suicide (1 Sam. 31:4). David by contrast had learnt from his victory over Goliath "that Yahweh can give victory without sword or spear" (1 Sam. 17:47).

David had a stronghold [s.w. fortress] in the cave of Adullam. But he was told by the prophet Gad to leave it and go into Judah, which seemed totally counter instinctive. As soon as David does this, his location is reported to Saul- but all this was to teach him that God was his stronghold / fortress, and Psalm 62 is perhaps his reflection upon that, leading him to conclude that God *alone* is his stronghold (1 Sam. 22:4-6). But David only got to that realization of Ps. 62:2 through losing his natural stronghold. We may lose a home, a relationship, use of a body part... all under God's hand, to bring us to Him.

1Sa 22:7 Saul said to them, Listen now, you Benjamites!-
Saul had failed to unite Israel into one nation as was intended for the king of Israel. He may have reasoned that although he was not to be king of Israel, he could still be king of Benjamin his tribe. Or his focus upon his own tribe reflects how Saul never really seriously wanted to act as king of all Israel, but only sought his own benefit. Thereby he himself showed that he was not fit to be king of Israel; his attitude asked for his rejection, just as the fool's mouth asks for the strokes of condemnation.

Will the son of Jesse-
Saul finds it impossible to speak of "David", the "beloved" of God. His despite of Jesse explains why Jesse had to flee to Moab as we have just read.

Give each of you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?-
The idea is that this is what Saul claims to have done for the men standing around him.

1Sa 22:8 Is that why all of you have conspired against me-
"None of you... You all conspired" reflects the extreme loneliness of the obsessively jealous man. This is where it leads to. We see here how his paranoia developed to such an extent that he felt so terribly alone. He had cursed his wife, Jonathan's mother, and had seen his children Michal and Jonathan defending David from his intentions.

So that there is no-one who tells me when my son makes a treaty with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you who is sorry for me or tells me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as he does today?-
Saul's cursing of any who didn't feel sorry for him is repeated by David, who often in his Psalms brings down curses upon any who don't feel pity for him in his brokenness, even if that brokenness was a consequence of his own sins. See on Ps. 109:22. What Saul says here is conspiracy theory gone wrong, but this is what happens when jealousy takes a grip upon the human mind. They come to see everyone as suspicious and somehow against them.

We have an example here of conspiracy theories breeding other ones and becoming established in the mind as fact. Saul decides that his son Jonathan wants the throne from him, and was using David's rebellion to get it. But Jonathan had made it clear he didn't want the throne, and was loyal to David. And Samuel had made it clear to Saul that his dynasty wouldn't continue.

It seems the covenant Jonathan made with David in 1 Sam. 20:16 he had now spoken openly of. And that is indeed how it is, our secret covenant relationship with the Lord we inevitably speak of to others, even if initially we intend to keep it secret.

1Sa 22:9 Then Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, said-

"Doeg" means 'the fearful one', and his name immediately suggests a connection between him and the paranoid Saul.

I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub-
The fawning courtier Doeg describes David as Saul does, "the son of Jesse". He gives Ahimelech's full name, which means "Brother of the king". He may even have somehow been Saul's relative by marriage. But jealousy leads to the destruction of every relationship.

In Psalm 52, David rants about Doeg being a liar. The historical record shows Doeg as being strictly truthful in what he said to Saul about David. "David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest" (1 Sam. 21:2) and this is exactly what Doeg says: "I saw the son of Jesse come to Nob to Ahimelech the priest." (1 Sam. 22:8). Doeg informs that the priest gave David the sword of Goliath. That is exactly what happened: "The sword of Goliath... is here... David said, "There is none like it; give it to me"" (1 Sam. 21:10). Doeg informs Saul that the priest provided David with food, and that was the case: "The priest gave him holy bread" (1 Sam. 21:7). But David repeatedly claims that Doeg was a liar and had a "deceitful tongue". We could assume that in fact Doeg said other things about David which aren't recorded, and here we have a typical case of where the Biblical evidence must be put together in order to get the complete picture. Or it could be that even by saying things which are truthful, we can do so in a way that is in fact proactively destructive ["devouring", :4) and deceitful- in the sense of being unfaithful to David. We wonder why David's anger is not so much with Saul but with Doeg. It was Saul who commanded Doeg to kill Abimelech and the priests because of Doeg's informing on him. Possibly he as it were forbad himself to curse Saul- and so he redirects his anger with Saul onto Doeg. Rather than taking a more spiritual attitude. We also wonder why David's anger is with Doeg for being a liar, rather than a murderer: "The king said to Doeg, You turn and attack the priests! Doeg the Edomite turned and attacked the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five people who wore a linen ephod. He struck Nob, the city of the priests, with the edge of the sword, men, women, children and nursing babies, and cattle, donkeys and sheep" (1 Sam. 22:18,19). David apparently never mentions this, but rather rants about Doeg being such a liar. Possibly Doeg had become a proselyte, and therefore was deceitful to then kill Yahweh's priests.

We also observe that it was David at this time who was the liar. But he likes to focus on Doeg as a liar. Doeg was more a murderer, seeking to ingratiate himself to Saul his boss in return for power and wealth- than a liar. I suggest that David is making Doeg out to be a liar and punishing him because this is what David is guilty of. Rather like the pastor committing adultery who beats up on a member of his congregation for falling into sexual sin. The evidence for David's lying at the time is significant. He lies to Abimelech: "The king has commissioned me with a matter and said to me, "Let no one know anything of the matter with respect to which I am sending you and about which I have commissioned you" (1 Sam. 21:3). David was in fact fleeing from Saul, who was determined to kill him (1 Sam. 20:30-42). He totally fabricates words which he claims Saul had spoken and that he is quoting verbatim. Neither did he receive any commission from king Saul. This was all deliberate deception. When asked why he is travelling alone, David lies by saying that his "young men" are going to meet up with him soon at a pre-arranged location: "And as for the young men, I have made an appointment for such and such a place" (1 Sam. 21:3). David wants the priest to believe that David is accompanied by an entourage from the king. When asked by the priest if the young men for whom he asks food are ceremonially clean, David tells another lie: "Indeed women have been kept from us as

always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?" (1 Sam. 21:5). The record is clear that David was alone and didn't have these "young men" actually with him. David comes to Nob alone (1 Sam. 21:1,2), and leaves Nob alone (1 Sam. 21:11). Then he alone flees to Philistine territory unaccompanied (1 Sam 21:11-16), and he leaves Philistine territory alone (1 Sam. 22:1). No one joins him until we learn from 1 Sam. 22:1,2 that after reaching the cave of Adullam, "his brothers and all his father's house heard and came down there, and there were gathered to him any man in distress". David's reason as to why he had no sword is so blatantly untrue that surely Abimelech must have wondered whether David was being truthful: "I took in hand neither my sword nor my weapons because the king's commission was urgent" (1 Sam. 21:9). If indeed he was commissioned by Saul to do something that needed a weapon, surely he would have taken the weapon with him. Quite possibly Ahimelech was telling the truth to Saul when he claimed that he knew nothing of David's rebellion. David's lies therefore led Ahimelech to a position which cost Ahimelech and his family their lives. Hence David later rues that he was responsible for their deaths, and we could even argue that Psalm 52 is David's self hatred over this matter, condemning himself as a liar.

1Sa 22:10 He inquired of Yahweh for him, gave him food, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine-
We only learn at this point that Ahimelech enquired of Yahweh for David. When David visited him, David was at a very low point spiritually. Scoring David out of ten for spirituality, he scores sadly here. He had turned down spear and sword when fighting Goliath, and had confidently stated that as the battles are Yahweh's, these weapons give no defence. And he lies about things in order to get them. And we even wonder whether he was correct to pretend to be a servant of Saul as king, when Yahweh had clearly rejected Saul as king and chosen David. But despite this weak point in his faith, he still also asked Ahimelech to enquire of God for him; we see here how complex is human faith and spirituality. Faith and unbelief can coexist, and only God can form the final judgment of men, simply because we cannot.

Ahimelech confirms to Saul that he had enquired of Yahweh for David (1 Sam. 22:10), and that he had also done so previously. We wonder what at this point David enquired about. The fact he went to Gath right afterwards makes it likely that it was something to do with this. But I suggest it was unlikely that Yahweh would have confirmed David in that decision, nor that He required David to take Goliath's sword. So we may well imagine David being disobedient to the answer to his enquiry. It was also likely that this enquiry was about whether David should be given the shewbread.

1Sa 22:11 Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub and all his father's house, the priests who were in Nob; and they all came to the king-
Clearly it was Saul's intention to destroy the priest and all his family; the verdict was decided well in advance. That they all came to the king, unsuspecting, indicates their loyalty to him.

1Sa 22:12 Saul said, Listen now, you son of Ahitub. He answered, Here I am, my lord-
Again we see Ahimelech's loyalty to Saul. It is a sad feature of jealousy that it leads men to destroy even their best supporters, so blinded do they become by the objective of destroying their enemy.

1Sa 22:13 Saul said to him, Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword, and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as he does today?-
Again, we see how jealousy leads to an obsessive 'guilt by association'. And beyond that, an imagination of things which are simply not the case, e.g. that Ahimelech and David had made a conspiracy to murder Saul. And we see this sad nexus of broken down spirituality going on in groups of believers worldwide.

1Sa 22:14 Then Ahimelech answered the king, Who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and is taken into your council, and is honourable in your house?
Ahimelech like Jonathan bravely speaks up for David, as we should for Jesus, despite knowing the consequences he faced. For he was accused of treason and conspiracy to murder the king. We note that David had been so close to Saul that he had once been in his inner council, the group of men who now stood around Saul. And David was still respected in Saul's family. Ahimelech is bravely trying to make a desperate appeal for David and for his own life. He begins by justifying David before he moves to justify himself as innocent of any plan to kill Saul.

1Sa 22:15 Is this the first time I have inquired of God for him? Be it far from me! Don't let the king accuse his servant or any of the house of my father, for your servant knows nothing at all of all this-
He protests that it is strange indeed to condemn David and Ahimelech for inquiring of God. But so we see happening today; if you break bread with this one or that, then you are guilty by association. And worthy of spiritual death.

1Sa 22:16 The king said, You shall surely die Ahimelech, you and all your father's house-
Saul is quoting the words of Yahweh concerning Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17). We have observed this earlier with Saul; he quotes Biblical phrases or alludes to Biblical characters, but far out of context. It's as if he wants to justify his own native jealousy and pride beneath a veneer of spirituality and vague Biblical allusion. And the same thing can happen today.

1Sa 22:17 The king said to the guards who stood around him, Turn and kill the priests of Yahweh because they have sided with David, and because they knew that he fled, and didn't tell me-
What began as a passing suspicion in Saul's mind, that David was planning to murder him, developed into something grotesque. Saul now assumed Ahimelech was in league with David; and so were all the priests with him. And so they must all be slain for conspiracy to murder him. There was no Mosaic legislation calling for the execution of those who conspire to murder, if it doesn't come to pass. And the unspiritual mind will go the same path; fantasy and unpleasant imagination about someone is dwelt upon, until it actually becomes true in the person's mind.

But the servants of the king wouldn't put forth their hand to strike the priests of Yahweh-
This reflects the tension which so many have felt, torn between loyalty to the politico-religious leadership of the time, and true spirituality. The same phrase "lift up the hand against" in the context of murder is used of how David refused to lift up his hand

against Saul as Yahweh's anointed. But this family of Ahimelech were also that; for they too were anointed as priests. Yahweh's anointed referred to His priests as well as His kings. We see here how even Saul's inner circle had some conscience and were unhappy with Saul's position. But still they passively went along with him and legitimized his hold on power.

1Sa 22:18 The king said to Doeg, You turn and attack the priests! Doeg the Edomite turned and attacked the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five people who wore a linen ephod-
Clearly ephods were worn apart from the high priestly ephod. We noted this when discussing how Samuel wore an ephod as he ministered to Yahweh as a child. LXX has 305 people. "Turn" may suggest he was to surround them, to round them up, and then murder them.

1Sa 22:19 He struck Nob, the city of the priests, with the edge of the sword, men, women, children and nursing babies, and cattle, donkeys and sheep-
This may account for the figure of 305 slain, according to :18 LXX. We see how guilt by association is like a disease which spreads. Saul had assumed Ahimelech was guilty by association with David, and he then made the other 85 priests guilty by association. And now in turn, Doeg extends this guilt to include the entire town, including newborn babies and animals. Guilt by association is one of the most insidious sins of the Christian life. And yet it so easily becomes somehow sanctified and made respectable by church policies. This total destruction of everyone in Nob suggests Saul kidded himself that he was called to practice the 'ban' of total destruction upon them, or to fulfil the prophecy of 1 Sam. 2:33 that all Eli's descendants would be wiped out. But this was precisely what he had failed to do with the Amalekites, as he saved their cattle and many of the people. It was for this that he had been rejected as king. We have an insight here into his psychology, and it is an absolutely psychologically credible picture. He has transferred his guilt over not totally destroying the Amalekites, and now is totally destroying the people of Nob- imagining that in fact he has to do this in obedience to God. And this would explain why he also killed the animals at Nob- because this was what he was supposed to have done to the Amalekites. In a perverted way, he is seeking to overturn the reason for his rejection as king.

1Sa 22:20 One of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to David-
If Doeg acted alone, as we have the impression he did from :18,19, the escape of at least one would be unsurprising. Again we see how the whole situation is so circumstantially credible.

1Sa 22:21 Abiathar told David that Saul had killed Yahweh's priests-
Doeg slew them, but clearly Saul was the one counted responsible. Just as it was the Jews and not the Romans who slew God's Son. To slay such a large community of priests shows how Saul was not interested in true spirituality; for they would have been a major loss to God's people, and service of Yahweh would have been so much the harder without them.

1Sa 22:22 David said to Abiathar, I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul-

Yet again, the record has every semblance of absolute credibility. For this is the kind of premonition which is true to real life. Contemporary histories are full of flourishes and embellishments, in stark contrast to the truth of God's word.

I am responsible for the death of all the people of your father's house-
As with his feeling of unnecessary guilt over the plague that struck Israel for refusing to pay the required tax when they were numbered, so here again we mull whether David was rather too emotionally taking at least some false guilt. But constantly we are left to ponder things with David- because the overall judgment of him appears to be that he was indeed a man after God's heart, a believer, but the good side in him only just tipped the balance against the other side. It would appear from Ps. 18:45 that Saul was supported by foreign mercenaries in his campaign against David. When Saul is no more, David therefore exalts that "The foreigners shall fade away, and shall come trembling out of their close places". This alludes to how Saul's persecutors of David included "foreigners" such as Cush (see on Ps. 7:1) and Doeg the Edomite.

David's eager taking of the sword of Goliath (1 Sam. 21:9- "There is none like that; give it me") contrasts sadly with his earlier rejection of such weapons in order to slay Goliath. And David later reflects how he knew that his faithless taking of that sword and the shewbread would lead to the death of Abiathar's family (1 Sam. 22:22). But still he did it. This was one reason why he is criticized by God as having shed too much blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

1Sa 22:23 Stay with me, don't be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you will be safe-
This is alluded to in Jn. 14:1 "Do not let your heart be disturbed. Believe in God, believe also in me"; 15:4 "Abide in me and I in you",20 "A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you". David's men are clearly presented as the disciples of Jesus, and ourselves. Saul sought the life of David (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:1; 22:23; 23:15; 25:29; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the Psalms, David frequently imprecates judgment upon those who sought his life (s.w. Ps. 35:4; 38:12; 40:14; 54:3; 63:9; 70:2; 71:13; 86:14). He loved Saul, the life of Saul was precious in David's sight, indeed the historical records seem to emphasize David's patient love of Saul; and yet in the Psalms he gives vent before God to his anger with Saul and desire to see Saul punished and judged by God. This is absolutely true to human experience; we may act with great patience and apparent love toward those who abuse us, and yet within we fume about it. The lesson of David is that we are to pour out those feelings to God in prayer, leaving Him to judge.

"You will be safe" implies David was now confident that he would be kept safe from Saul until he became king and Saul was dead. David has been through a very weak period, taking Goliath's sword, fleeing to Gath, lying to Abiathar... but now his faith rallies and he is again confident that he will indeed be preserved from Saul. 1 Sam. 23 goes on to picture David as strong in faith again. This resurgence of faith was triggered by his repentance for his visit to Nob, and by his commitment to Abiathar, his looking out of himself to the salvation of another.

Psalm 34 was written as reflection upon his deliverance from Gath (Ps. 34:1). But in that Psalm, David reflects that it is good not to tell lies (Ps. 34:13 "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking lies"). But David himself has been noted for how many lies he told, not least in this context both to Ahimelech [resulting in his flight to Gath] and then in Gath (Ps. 34:1). So here we have some kind of repentance for his behaviour in Gath. And this leads to his higher point of faith as discussed here on 1 Sam. 22:23.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 23

1Sa 23:1 David was told, The Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors-
A lesser man would have considered that he had so many issues that he just couldn't possibly get involved in the issues of others. But like the Lord looking beyond His own immediate pain to the fate of the women lining the via Dolorosa, so David looked beyond his immediate circumstance to the needs of others- even those who would later betray him. This grace is the more wonderful because the people of Keilah were for Saul and against David (see on :7); it was grace indeed on David's part, and he was confirmed in it by God.

1Sa 23:2 Therefore David inquired of Yahweh, Shall I go and attack these Philistines? Yahweh said to David, Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah-
The Hebrew phrase "attack... and save" is used in Jud. 3:31 of the judge Shamgar, also in the context of attacking Philistines. David is being pointed back by this allusion to the zeal of Shamgar the son of Anath, 'the answer'. The answer to David's question was in Shamgar. David was spiritually and mentally exhausted at this time, and God's way forward for him at this time was to get up and be proactive for others. That is not always the right answer for us in our low moments, but when it is, we will be directed to it by God, perhaps through allusion to Biblical characters.

'Attack the Philistines' is the same phrase used seven times of 'killing the Philistine' when David killed Goliath (1 Sam. 17:26,36,46,49,50,57; 18:6). God was calling David back to his higher self- when he had just offered Goliath's sword back to the Philistines. The same term was used by the priest in reminding him that this sword had been taken when "you killed / slew / attacked" the Philistine.

We recall that just prior to this, David had taken Goliath's sword to the Philistines and sought to get onside with them against Saul. This was displeasing to God and yet he was saved by grace from the situation (see on Psalm 34). Now God seeks to help David never do this again, by sending him to fight the Philistines and kill them- the very people David has just been asking to help him and trying to live with. But despite God's arrangement of things, David will fail again when in 1 Sam. 27 he again flees to them for help against Saul and again tries to ingratiate himself to them.

1Sa 23:3 David's men said to him, Look, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then, if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?-
David's whole experience with Saul was of course led and arranged by a loving Father. The sensible thing would have been for David to get out of Saul's way and lay quiet- and this is what he tried to do, by going to Moab. But then God tells him to go back into Judah (1 Sam. 22:5). This was political suicide. It made no human sense to expose himself to Saul again. And then God tells David to go and fight with the Philistines in order to rescue the people of Keilah. Yet the men of Keilah weren't allies worth having- even they were prepared to betray David to Saul, and by this action he made the Philistines hate him yet more, so refuge amongst them was no longer possible. Again and again, God led David into situations that were politically suicidal, that only made things worse for him… because He wanted David to trust in Him alone. And so it happens in our lives. Time and again. There was to be an exact equivalent in the Lord's experience in returning to Judah (Jn. 11:7,8 cp. Jn. 7:1).

1Sa 23:4 Then David inquired of Yahweh yet again. Yahweh answered him, Get up and go down to Keilah, for I will deliver the Philistines into your hand-
Like Gideon, David's faith wavered and he wanted a second confirmation. He "inquired of Yahweh" as he had done through Ahimelech (1 Sam. 22:10), so presumably he did so through Ahimelech's son who had fled to be with David with the ephod (:6). "Get up and go" could be read as a slight rebuke of David's inaction; for God loves a "yes straight away" attitude from His children. Perhaps David was being directed back to Gideon (Jud. 7:9) and Moses, who were addressed by God with the same words (Dt. 9:12). He would have earlier seen Moses as Judaism does today, the unreachable acme of spirituality and closeness to God. But now he was being taught, as we are, that no Biblical character is a mere Sunday School figure; but rather our real practical inspiration. Elijah was addressed in the same way in 1 Kings 21:18, directing him back to Gideon (Jud. 7:9), David (1 Sam. 23:4) and Moses (Dt. 9:12).

1Sa 23:5 David and his men went to Keilah and fought against the Philistines and carried off their livestock and killed them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah-
By doing so, David was burning any possible bridges he had with the Philistines; for he had taken refuge with Achish in Gath before and nearly perished because of it. When he again goes there in 1 Sam. 27:1, he is really going against God's education of him and intention for him. For God had sent him against the Philistines in 1 Sam. 23 to help him realize that he was not to consider refuge with them again.

1Sa 23:6 When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, he brought an ephod with him-
Here we have an example of how a statement is given either before or after a historical description, explaining how that historical situation came about. Here, the fact Abiathar was with David with the ephod explains how David had inquired of Yahweh in :4, and how he would inquire now in the next verses.

We can conclude that the priest brought the breastplate too- for the breastplate was not to be parted from the ephod (Ex. 28:28; 39:21). This therefore meant a mobile sanctuary, making everywhere they went holy ground.

The other reference to a town with gates and bars is in Jud. 16:3 [the same words used], where Samson is miraculously delivered from entrapment in Gaza / Gath, the very town from which David was graciously delivered. We keep seeing connections with the Samson story; David is being nudged to 'learn the lesson of Samson!', for whom women were his downfall. But he didn't ultimately do so; all these nudges went unheeded by him.

1Sa 23:7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah and he said, God has delivered him into my hand, for he is trapped by going into a town that has gates and bars-
Again we have an example of Saul's inner thoughts being described as his spoken words; because this is how God reads our words in our hearts- as if we spoke them. The Hebrew for "delivered" also means 'rejected' [s.w. "forsaken", Jer. 19:4]. We have an insight into how Saul justified his persecution of David. He liked to think that God had rejected David, and therefore David's thought to be king was treason. Of course it was Saul whom God has rejected, but in a classic case of psychological transferrence, Saul transfers this on to David as the rejected one, and sees it as his job to judge David for it. Otherwise it is hard to understand how Saul persecuted David,

knowing that God had told him that he was rejected as king, and that God had chosen David to be king. Saul assumes that the people of Keilah are going to be on his side and will agree to betray David. David presumably knew this when he was first told about their calamity, and wondered if he should go and save them. His decision was therefore an example of him showing extreme grace. The pain of it was all the more tragic in that Keilah was in Judah and these people were from David's own tribe.

1Sa 23:8 Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men-
Keilah had just been attacked by the Philistines, and now it had Saul's army marching towards it; thus Saul is shown to be no better than the Philistines. He as the king of Israel ought to have saved Keilah from the Philistines; for Israel wanted a king to save them from their enemies. The fact David had saved them would have provoked Saul's jealousy.

1Sa 23:9 David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him, so he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring the ephod here-
"Plotting evil" is the phrase only elsewhere used by Solomon, when repeatedly he condemns those who "plot evil" in his Proverbs (Prov. 3:29; 6:14; 12:20; 14:22). All Solomon writes is true, but he always harnesses God's truth to the agenda of his own self justification through knocking down the enemies of his father. And the house of Saul were still around and feared by Solomon as potential threats to his kingship. We can misuse Divine truths in the same way.

1Sa 23:10 Then David said, O Yahweh the God of Israel, Your servant has definitely heard that Saul intends to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake-
See on 1 Sam. 18:1-3. Saul had come to besiege Keilah and force them to deliver David to him. It could be that his guilt by association complex was so strong that Saul was wanting to destroy all Keilah because David had saved them and was living with them. But another possibility is that David is being as it were manipulative with God, alluding to the situation with Lot and Sodom, exaggerating Saul's desire to destroy him into Saul wanting to destroy all Keilah.

David's conscience was clearly dwelling on how 85 priests at Nob had been killed by Saul and Doeg for his sake. He was careful to learn his lesson and didn't want this to be repeated.

1Sa 23:11 Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? Yahweh, the God of Israel, I beg you, tell Your servant. Yahweh said, He will come down-
"The men" is 'the lords'. The logical order of the questions would seem to require that David would first ask whether Saul would come down. Perhaps David assumed that Saul would come down, for after all, Saul was pursuing him. So we see some humility in David asking for confirmation of what appeared obvious. "Deliver me up into his hand" is a repeat of the situation in the life of Samson (Jud. 15:10-13), when again "the men of Judah" 'delivered [Samon] into the hand' of the Philistines. The similarity is clear- and so often we note how situations in David's life were directing him back to Samson. It's as if God was warning him about a weakness for women- and in the matter of Bathsheba, David failed to learn the lesson of Samson which God had been gently trying to teach him for many years previously.

We note the play on the idea of 'delivering'. The men of Keilah had been delivered by David from their enemies, but they wanted to deliver him into the hand of his enemies (:11,12,20). This is a classic cameo of human ingratitude. Grace didn't find any response, in this case. But David is taught to deal with it by simply accepting it, and not trying to force gratitude. Which is really how God deals with human ingratitude. Saul will now be 'delivered into David's hand' and he spares him (1 Sam. 24:18; 26:8). David learnt the lesson. We share God's grace to us with others, regardless of their response. Because this is how He sheds His grace upon men. And understanding that removes all the angst we would otherwise feel about human ingratitude. Likewise although we aren't saved by good works nor earning points, it is also so that "God is not unmindful to forget" our labours of love. The natural desire for human appreciation and gratitude is felt strongly by parents, by carers for old people... by those in Christian ministry. The cross is the answer. There we see God's grace lavished upon all men. With so little response, appreciation and gratitude. David had been "delivered" from Goliath, so he was asked to "deliver" Keilah, but the men of Keilah didn't appreciate that but thought to "deliver" him to Saul. David is then delivered by grace from Saul on the conical hill, he is not "delivered into Saul's hand" (1 Sam. 23:14), indeed in the Psalms he often marvels at how God had not "delivered me into the hand of my enemies" (Ps. 31:8 etc.); and Saul is then "delivered" into David's hand so that he may release him by grace.

David had "definitely heard" that Saul would come down. But he doesn't trust his own intelligence or the hearing of his own ears. He wants this confirmed by God. Perhaps he was entertaining the dream of living safely with the grateful people of Keilah and thereby being safe from Saul. For surely his experience should have told him that Saul would come down. He probably got the impression that some of the people of Keilah would hand him over to Saul, but he struggled to believe that people he had saved from death at the risk of his own life... could be so ungrateful. And so he asks God to show him.

1Sa 23:12 Then David said, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? Yahweh said, They will deliver you-

God appears to only answer one request at a time. And then the other request has to be repeated. This would be understandable if the ephod contained the stones of urim and thummim, which flashed out only a binary, yes / no response to a question. Therefore only one question could be answered at a time. There seems something similar in 2 Sam. 2:1, when David had to ask twice before being told into which town he should move to establish his new kingdom: "'Shall I move into one of the towns in Judah?' The Lord answered, 'Yes!' David asked, 'Move where?' 'To Hebron' He answered". And possibly "Hebron" was an answer given after many other requests for God to choose between various towns.

We note that both the propositions which God said would happen [Saul coming to Keilah, the men of Keilah delivering David to him] never actually happened. But in God's purpose they would have happened- had David not acted in the way he did. But we note that God didn't add any condition, such as "Unless you flee". David had to work that out. We see here how God's purpose is in a way open ended [cp. Nineveh's predicted destrution in 40 days]. But in the gap between pronouncement and actualization, human freewill can change the outcome on the ground. We marvel at God's knowledge- He knows how things would have worked out contingent on things like David chosing to trust the people of Keilah since he had saved them. He knew that *if* David remained in Keilah and *if* Saul had besieged Keilah with David inside

the city, *then* the people of Keilah would have surrendered David to Saul. That scenario didn't happen, but God knew how things would have gone if it had happened. His knowledge of all potential scenarios makes His knowledge vast beyond words. He not only knows everything now happening, but all the possible situations. His pain at human failure is thereby the greater, as well as His joy when we respond rightly. For He sees all the dimensions surrounding human behaviour. He has 'middle knowledge', the contingent knowledge of everything on the scale in between the possibility of being and that of not being.

David here experienced extreme ingratitude- those he saved would turn against him. But he simply moved on from them. And this paved the way, in God's spiritual education of him, for him to show grace to the ungrateful Saul in 1 Sam. 24- and then moving on from him.

1Sa 23:13 Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and left Keilah, and went wherever they could go. Saul heard that David had escaped from Keilah so he gave up going there-

Saul had a network of spies watching David (1 Sam. 18:20,24; 19:11,19; 23:7,13,25; 24:1; 27:4). In the type of Christ, this looks ahead to Mk. 3:2; Lk. 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; Jn. 11:57. If the people of Keilah had appeared grateful for David saving them, and were vowing total loyalty to him even if Saul besieged their town, then David's actions here would have seemed foolish. People didn't know Saul was thinking of coming against Keilah. They would have wisely crowed after the event that David ought to have remained with the grateful people of Keilah. But the ways of God are always geared ultimately toward our salvation, and involve our doing things which seem counter intuitive and not the humanly smart thing to do.

1Sa 23:14 David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds and in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day-

Saul "sought" David, implying a great level of mental effort (1 Sam. 19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the type of Christ, the Jews sought to kill the Lord (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8).

But God didn't deliver him into his hand-

The contrast is with the men of Keilah, who would have delivered David into Saul's hand. Yahweh is presented as kinder than men; and any undue fear of Him as a hard God must always remember this.

1Sa 23:15 David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life when he was in the wilderness of Ziph, in the forest-

Saul sought the life of David (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:1; 22:23; 23:15; 25:29; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the Psalms, David frequently imprecates judgment upon those who sought his life (s.w. Ps. 35:4; 38:12; 40:14; 54:3; 63:9; 70:2; 71:13; 86:14). He loved Saul, the life of Saul was precious in David's sight, indeed the historical records seem to emphasize David's patient love of Saul; and yet in the Psalms he gives vent before God to his anger with Saul and desire to see Saul punished and judged by God. This is absolutely true to human experience; we may act with great patience and apparent love toward those who abuse us, and yet within we fume about it. The lesson of David is that we are to pour out those feelings to God in prayer, leaving Him to judge.

1Sa 23:16 Jonathan, Saul's son, went to David into the forests and strengthened his

hand in God-
We observe how he is called "Saul's son", emphasizing the extreme difficult of their relationship and their very different environments. And yet faithfulness to God was possible in both. Only occasionally could Jonathan and David meet, brief moments of intense fellowship away from the rest of the world, strengthening each other's hand in the Lord, re-confirming their covenant together (1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8,16; 23:18). No wonder their goodbyes were so hard: "they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded" (1 Sam. 20:41). Not surprisingly, they looked forward to the promised day of David's Kingdom: "Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee" (1 Sam. 23:17). Our communion meetings with the Lord Jesus during our wilderness journey must surely mirror those meetings.

Just the same phrase is used of how David later strengthened himself in Yahweh, with 600 of his own men against him and wanting to kill him (1 Sam. 30:6). It happens with us too that the encouragement others give us, we later have to give to ourselves when alone and isolated.

1Sa 23:17 He said to him, Don't be afraid, for the hand of Saul my father will not find you; you will be king over Israel and I shall be next to you. Saul my father well knows that-
See on 1 Sam. 20:15 and 1 Sam. 20:30,31. As noted on 1 Sam. 20:3, when David feels Saul is about to succeed in killing him, we might have wished to see at times more faith by both of them in Samuel's prophetic word that David should become king. Their faith in that word went up and down, with 1 Sam. 23:17 being a high point in it, and 1 Sam. 27:1 being the low point in it. Jonathan totally believed Samuel's prophetic word, even though it meant that he would not be king himself. And Saul too knew this. His efforts to kill David were therefore futile, for he was thereby seeking to as it were disallow that prophetic word coming true. But knowing all this, Saul still tried to murder David. His jealousy blinded him to such an extent that he was simply blind to the implications of the Divine word which on another level he believed. We can know things on one level, but act totally contrary to that knowledge. Jonathan's utter faith in the prophetic word surely encouraged David, whose faith in that word [that he would survive to become king] often wavered. Jonathan's extreme, self sacrificial loyalty to David contrasts with the fickle disloyalty of the Ziphites. God does counter negative experiences with positive ones, if we have eyes to perceive.

1Sa 23:18 They both made a covenant before Yahweh, and David stayed in the forests but Jonathan went home-
The record powerfully presents the picture of David and Jonathan as two men living in totally different worlds, and yet being bound together, despite the tangles of their lives, by the hope of the Kingdom, and the pure intensity of their spiritual bond with each other in the Lord. The love of David for Jonathan is surpassing. The juxtaposition of their lifestyles is shown by passages like this, where Jonathan goes to "his house" (Heb.) whilst David is in the forests; and 1 Sam. 20:42, where Jonathan returns to the city and David goes into the scrubland.

"Jonathan Saul's son (note the emphasis again!) arose, and went to David *into* the wood" (1 Sam. 23:16). We are invited to imagine Jonathan walking into the wood, stumbling through it, until he found David, concealed in some deep thicket; and then, after brief but intense fellowship, stumbling back through the undergrowth, brushing himself down, and returning to his stately home. The same impression is

given by 1 Sam. 20:42: "We have sworn both of us... and David arose and departed (to his den): and Jonathan went into the city". There seems more than an echo here of Abraham and Lot parting company in Gen. 13:8-12. How many of us, coming out of a memorial meeting and returning to the world, have gone through the same emotions. The clandestine nature of the David: Jonathan friendship is surely replicated between us and Christ. The love of David for Jonathan is Christ's love for us. Their souls were "knit", a Hebrew word also translated "conspire", hinting at the secretiveness (1 Sam. 18:1). Yet as Jonathan became too involved in his surrounding world (so it seems), so we run a similar gauntlet. The question arises: Should Jonathan have run away from his situation, and gone to join David in the wilderness, like others did? Should we? To close down a career, move down the property ladder, change our eating, travelling, holiday habits.... or stay where we are in Saul's court, to some degree living out a lie, hoping Gilboa won't come for us?

1Sa 23:19 Then the Ziphites came to Saul in Gibeah saying, Isn't David hiding among us in the strongholds in the forest, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of the desert?-
These people come over as proactively seeking to betray David. Doubtless Saul had been offering major incentives to people for information leading to the capture or destruction of David. That David could later weld these people together into one kingdom was only achieved thanks to his great grace and forgiveness.

1Sa 23:20 Now therefore, O king, come down when you are ready; our part will be to deliver him into the king's hand-
Saul's spies aimed to *deliver* David into Saul's hands, looking ahead in the type of Christ to Lk. 20:20. We are intended to compare this with :14: "But God didn't deliver him into his hand". The men of Keilah likewise would have delivered David into Saul's hand. Yahweh is presented as kinder than men; and any undue fear of Him as a hard God must always remember this.

1Sa 23:21 Saul said, Yahweh bless you, for you have had compassion on me-
David's later criticism of Saul's blessing of the greedy (Ps. 10:3) may refer to his blessing of the Ziphites for betraying David to him. They were "greedy" in that they did so in hope of reward from Saul. Saul doesn't become an atheist. Rather he likes to think that Yahweh's blessing will be with those who take his side in his obsession against David. This is how extreme jealousy can totally unbalance and pervert the perspective of the believer who gives in to it.

In 1 Sam. 23:21 Saul thanks the Ziphites for their "compassion" to him by informing him of David's location. "Compassion" translates the Hebrew word for 'spare'. Saul felt the Ziphites had spared him. But in 1 Sam. 24:10 he finds that it is in fact David who spares him. So God continued to work with Saul, despite having rejected him as king- for He still wanted to lead Saul to repentance and ultimate salvation. This is an amazing reflection of how God never gives up working with men.

1Sa 23:22 Please go and make sure and find out where his haunt is and who has seen him there, for they tell me that he is very crafty-
The "they" refer to Saul's network of spies seeking to inform on David. Perhaps this desire for the names of those who had reported sightings of David was because Saul

had promised a reward for every sighting. "His haunt" is literally 'his foot'; the idea is they were treating him like a wild animal they were tracking and hunting.

1Sa 23:23 So find out all the hiding places he uses and come back to me with definite information, and I will go with you. If he is in the area I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah-
This sounds like some kind of 'final solution' to eliminate David by listing all his possible hiding places in the area. We note Saul's personal obsession: "I will go with you... I will search him out". Jealousy can progress to a point where a man becomes shameless in his addiction to personal hatred.

1Sa 23:24 They set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul, but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah on the south of the desert-
"Arabah" is GNB "a desolate valley"; "to the south of Jeshimon" (ESV). "The wilderness of Maon" is the conical hill of Maon, identified as Tell Main about 10 km. south of Hebron. It was around this that Saul chased David.

1Sa 23:25 Saul and his men went to seek him. When David was told, he went down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard that, he pursued David into the wilderness of Maon-
"Stayed in the wilderness of Maon“ is LXX "which is in the wilderness of Maon”, i.e. the conical hill (see on :24). We could read this trust in a rock or hill as a denial of David's oft proclaimed trust in Yahweh as his rock. We may love the words of scripture, or the words of hymns or songs, but still not get the reality of them when tested. As will be explained on :26, it seems David thought this rock was an area where he could hide undetected from Saul. Perhaps he saw in it a kind of representation of God whom he often calls his rock. He would have really felt God was no longer his rock when that rock appeared to be his destruction (see on :26). But then when he was saved, he would have understood that God is a "rock" not in the sense of some obvious and visible fortress of defence; but in more subtle yet more powerful ways.

1Sa 23:26 Saul went on one side of the mountain and David and his men on the other, and David hurried to get away for fear of Saul, for Saul and his men surrounded David and his men to take them-
"Surrounded" is 'encircled'. It's also the word for 'crown', as if Saul was crowning David as king. Just as casting his spear at David was giving him the symbol of kingship. David had been encircled in Gath, and had learnt there that Yahweh's Angel encamps around those who fear Him- for Ps. 34:8 is his commentary upon that deliverance. Now he is to learn the lesson again. And it will give him strength for his next life episode, in 1 Sam. 24, when he sees Saul encircled by his soldiers camping around him- and realizes that this is no barrier, because Yahweh's Angel encamps around him [David]. Perhaps the "messenger" that came to Saul in :27, and thus spared David's life, was indeed a *malak* in the sense of an Angel, the Angel encamped around David. In Ps. 5:12 David had expressed his faith and understanding that the righteous are encircled by God's gace: "For You will bless the righteous. Yahweh, You will surround him with grace as with a shield". But as with us, our theoretical understanding of grace, enshrined in the words we say to others, the words we sing, even in our statements of faith... has to be tested in practice. And this is really what so

much of life is about, translating our head knowledge to felt experience, engrained in our core personality.

David bore a charmed life from Saul's persecution; humanly, he should surely have perished at this point (1 Sam. 23:26,27; 27:1). This looks ahead to Jn. 7:30 in the type of Christ. The "rock" or "mountain" was a cone shaped hill. David went one way around it and Saul another, chasing him; this is the idea behind "surrounded". David with his large company of men must have felt unable to stop and fight Saul because they were so outnumbered. David originally intended to hide out there. But now Saul was on him, and as David moved ever higher up the tracks towards the top of the cone shaped hill, it was only a matter of time before Saul caught up with him at the top. David was very close to death at this point; but his desperate prayers as he went higher up the cone shaped hill received a truly miraculous answer (:27).

1Sa 23:27 But a messenger came to Saul saying, Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land!-

The way Saul returns from pursuing David because of a rumour of invasion is so similar to Rabshakeh's retreat from Jerusalem after rumours of incursions. Circumstances repeat within our lives and between our lives and those of others in Biblical history; that we might learn the lessons and take comfort from the scriptures, that man is not alone.

1Sa 23:28 So Saul returned from pursuing David and went against the Philistines. Therefore they called that place Sela Hammahlekoth-

ESV "The rock of escape", GNB "The rock of division", LXX "The divided rock", perhaps connecting with how Moses divided the rock in the desert to bring forth water whereby Israel survived when otherwise they would have died.

1Sa 23:29 David went from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi-

This verse appears to belong to the next chapter. The Bible's chapter divisions were not inspired and were added some time after the originals were written.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 24

1Sa 24:1 When Saul had returned from pursuing the Philistines he was told, David is in the wilderness of En Gedi-

Saul had a network of spies watching David (1 Sam. 18:20,24; 19:11,19; 23:7,13,25; 24:1; 27:4). In the type of Christ, this looks ahead to Mk. 3:2; Lk. 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; Jn. 11:57.

1Sa 24:2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel-

They were not all Benjamites. They were doubtless chosen for their loyalty to Saul, even if that loyalty had been bought. That David could later weld the kingdom together was only achieved by his great grace and forgiveness.

And went to seek David and his men-

Saul "sought" David, implying a great level of mental effort (1 Sam. 19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the type of Christ, the Jews sought to kill the Lord (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8).

On the rocks of the wild goats-
LXX "in front of Saddaeem"; GNB "east of Wild Goat Rocks". Even in these desperate straits, David still had time to reflect that as "the high hills are a refuge for the wild goats" so Yahweh would be for him (s.w. Ps. 104:18). Goats were unclean and a symbol of the rejected. And yet Yahweh is a refuge even for the unclean. This was how David appears to have felt. Or we could note that Saul and his men were scampering over the rocks like goats, whereas David and his men were near the sheep pens, in a cave as if they were sheep (:3). The separation between sheep and goats is therefore being made clear.

1Sa 24:3 He came to the sheep pens by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were hiding in the innermost parts of the cave-
David and his men were temporarily living ["hiding" is a poor translation] in the cave, and must've watched Saul and his men drawing near. And then, Saul walks away from the men and starts walking right towards them. They withdraw deeper into the cave. As when being chased ever higher up the conical hill in 1 Sam. 23:26, it must have seemed that the end had now come. Saul puts his cloak down and goes further into the cave, to relieve himself and maybe have a rest; presumably he wasn't feeling well and just wanted to be alone. He was after all an elderly man now, if indeed he reigned a literal 40 years (Acts 13:21).

It must've been so very weird; there was enough time for David to discuss with his men whether to kill him or not. But by the nature of the situation, the discussion lasted only a few seconds; for in the time it takes a man to go to the toilet, David cut off the skirt of Saul's robe. There are times when in a few seconds we end up acting according to our true inner convictions. This was clearly no coincidence; it was all too weird. Likewise the way circumstances repeated in 1 Sam. 26 was so strange. Again David stands over the weak Saul, again his men urge him to murder him, giving the same reasoning as before, and again David resists. And again David calls to Saul and demonstrates his sincerity and integrity. Our lives aren't random chance; circumstances repeat in order to give us the opportunity to learn from mistakes, i.e. to not make the same mistake again; or even when we respond properly, the circumstance can repeat in essence so that we have our right choice reinforced by repeated experience. Just as a teacher makes students repeat exercises so that they 'get the point'. This gives extra point to David's warning of Saul in 1 Sam. 26:19- that if Saul were doing what he was doing against David just because other men had stirred him up to it, then this was especially culpable. For David twice had been stirred up by *his* men to slay Saul, and had not done so.

Saul had 3000 warriors with him, and David and his few men were trapped in a cave. But Saul had a call of nature, the need to defecate, a moment when man is totally isolated, alone and vulnerable. It was at that point that God was trying to teach Saul something of His grace. And in essence, this is His style of teaching to this day. Saul would have removed his kingly robe to defecate and left it on the cave floor whilst he went to defecate. And it was then, as Saul was alone, vulnerable and defecating, that David cut off a corner of the kingly robe. Saul would have later reflected upon this.

1Sa 24:4 The men of David said to him, Look, the day of which Yahweh said to you, 'I will deliver your enemy into your hand and you can do to him whatever you wish'. Then David got up and cut off a corner of Saul's robe secretly-

There is no such oracle recorded; this doesn't mean it wasn't said e.g. by Gad or some other prophet. In this case, we might focus upon the phrase "That you may do to him as it shall seem good unto you". There are times when there is no moral right or wrong in a situation; but what matters is the motive behind the decision we reach. God Himself slew Saul, so perhaps it wouldn't have been a sin for David to have killed him; for David had never been told specifically that he was not to kill Saul just because Samuel had anointed him. But this was the position David came to in his conscience, and he therefore had to uphold it. We so often hanker after a right/wrong, black or white, this is a sin or it isn't. But often the choices are left to us to exercise our conscience, so that the choice is made by us, from the heart, rather than as a matter of legalistic obedience. David had to do what 'seemed good unto him'. In 2 Sam. 18:4 there's a sad contrast with David's resoluteness here – for he uses the same Hebrew words in saying that "whatever seems good unto *you* I will do" at the time of Absalom's rebellion. We are called to do what seems good unto *us* rather than what seems good to those around us.

There are times when we can assume too quickly what God's word or will is. Perhaps David's men assumed that surely God meant them to kill Saul at this point, and went on to assume that this was the word of the Lord. We think of Nathan too quickly telling David that his plan for a temple was indeed God's will. Or the disciples warning Paul, through the Holy Spirit, that he would suffer at Jerusalem- but then telling him that therefore he should not go there. When Paul had had revelation that he should in fact go to Jerusalem. The simple lesson is that we do need to pray and meditate before assuming we have Divine direction in a matter. And it is that process which leads to intimacy with Him.

Another reading would be that God hadn't said this at all (1 Sam. 24:6 Heb. could be read as a denial that God had said this), but David's men urged him to see providence at work, as if to say 'This is the day that God is saying to you, that you can now kill Saul'. Trying to work out what providence is telling us is quite a challenge. There are some who claim to have 'had a word from the Lord' when as in this case, it is their imagination and flawed interpretation of circumstance. Even those within the ecclesia can urge us against our conscience, and David is presented as standing alone in his decision making. This is very hard when we're surrounded by those who have stood with us in hard times, our friends and faithful supporters. We risk alienating them by our insistence upon following our conscience and the principle of respecting the value and meaning of persons, even if they are our abusers and enemies.

The skirt was the hem of blue which was to remind the Israelite of their dedication to Yahweh's holiness. Num. 15:38,39 decreed that this was to be done so that they remembered to keep all the commandments of Yahweh; but Saul is noted for *not* having done this (1 Sam. 15:22-28). David forgave Saul but didn't naively blind his eyes to Saul's unspirituality; and he didn't trust Saul again. Forgiveness isn't the same as reconciliation. Often people needlessly beat themselves up that they've not forgiven because they don't trust. It could be argued from the ambiguous Hebrew of that Samuel had torn Saul's kingly robe earlier- to show that his kingdom had been torn from him. David was clearly aware of this and was seeking to remind Saul of God's word. His intention was that Saul would humble himself before God's word and let David be king. We can imagine David approaching Saul with a knife in his hand. His thoughts were surely struggling within him as to whether to stab Saul to death, or use the knife to just teach Saul a lesson and appeal to him. And to David's credit, his better thinking triumphed.

1Sa 24:5 Afterwards David's conscience smote him, because he had cut off a piece of Saul's robe-

David's heart smote him- but David hadn't done anything wrong. Indeed it could be argued that what he did was right and commendable in spiritual terms. Conscience isn't ultimately reliable (1 Cor. 4:4); we will be judged in the light of God's word, and not whether we have felt OK or not about our actions in life. His sensitive conscience appears again in 2 Sam. 24:10, where again his heart smote him for doing something which wasn't wrong in itself, i.e. to number Israel. His conscience was aware, perhaps, that we can do things which aren't wrong in themselves but which were performed with a wrong attitude. And this is no bad example for us to take. Perhaps we have another example when he said that he had caused the death of all the priests at Nob. The blame for that was surely more with Saul and Doeg than with David. I don't think that David is being presented as unusual in this; after all, we have more information about David than about any other OT character. Such fluctuations in the accuracy of conscience are normal to any man.

The only other time we read of David's heart smiting him is in Ps. 102:4, where he speaks of himself as a lonely bird in the wilderness, chased by his enemies, but with a heart so smitten that he feels like dying: "My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread" (Ps. 102:4). It would appear that David's heart didn't just smite him for that moment; but it was an ongoing feeling he had during that period of his wilderness life. This was the power of false guilt for David. The lesson here is that we shouldn't just let our conscience smite us, do something about it at the time, and then forget all about the issue. Believing and feeling God's forgiveness may take a period of time; and the receipt of that forgiveness shouldn't necessarily take away our sense of failure, just as it doesn't within human relationships.

David's extreme respect for Saul is shown in the fact that Yahweh had explicitly told him that he would deliver Saul into David's hand, and David was free to do as he wished to him; but because of his genuine respect for Saul, David didn't take the liberty of killing him; indeed, he even felt guilty at cutting off the blue ribbon from Saul's coat (1 Sam. 24:4,5). Such was David's *respect* for Saul. It's shown again in the way that David fairly evidently wanted to fight against Saul with the men of Achish, evidently wanting to turn against them and fight for Saul- as they correctly guessed (1 Sam. 29:8). This would have been suicidal. For Saul wanted to kill him, and the Philistines also would have tried to kill David as a result of this. He would have had no place to run. But even to the point of political suicide and the serious risking of his own life, David so loved his enemy. This true love leads to and is related to true respect. This kind of respect is sadly lacking in our society, and has rubbed off upon our relationships within families and ecclesias. David's love for his enemy was perhaps shown in the way that cutting off the skirt of the robe, ripping Saul's kingly garment, showing him grace, was all angled towards leading Saul to repentance. And that is what we must wish for our worst enemies, sincerely and from the heart.

1Sa 24:6 He said to his men, Yahweh forbid that I should do such a thing to my lord, Yahweh's anointed, to lift my hand against him, since he is Yahweh's anointed-

We are all anointed in that we are in Christ, the anointed (2 Cor. 1:21). The same radical respect which David showed, we should show to each other. David's attitude seems to have influenced Saul's men, for his armour bearer refused to slay Saul (1 Chron. 10:4,5). But David's attitude towards Saul was actually an encouragement to

himself. For he too was Yahweh's anointed, and no hand could be lifted against him unless Yahweh allowed it. The same phrase "lift up the hand against" in the context of murder is used of how Saul's guards refused to kill the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:17). For they too were anointed as priests. Yahweh's anointed referred to His priests as well as His kings.

Often David calls Saul his lord or master, describing himself as Saul's servant (1 Sam. 17:32,34,36; 20:8; 24:6; 26:16,19; 29:3,4; 30:15). This was no formal "Sincerely your brother and fellow-servant". This was a real conscious putting of himself down, as the Lord Jesus felt he was a worm rather than a man (Ps. 22:6). If only we would concentrate upon our own status and show some true respect for others on account of their being in the ecclesia, having even been anointed spiritually at their baptism (2 Cor. 1:21) as Saul was.

David has a clear belief that the man anointed by God is not to be slain. But he himself was God's anointed king. His respect of Saul's anointing was therefore the guarantee that he himself would not be slain, as God's anointed. We could wonder whether David's extreme emphasis upon not killing or harming Yahweh' anointed was because he hoped that this would be a guarantee that he too, as Yahweh's anointed, would not be harmed or slain. We are left to ponder such motives in Biblical characters, because we must likewise ponder our own motives. In 1 Sam. 26, David mocks Abner for not guarding Saul, Yahweh's anointed, and proclaims him worthy of death; but Abner had been struck by a deep sleep from Yahweh so he was innocent really of this. Likewise when the Amalekite comes to David with the news that he had slain Saul in his death throes, David has the man killed because he had killed Yahweh's anointed. This appears extreme. David certainly had no value for human life by behaving like this. So... we ponder whether his extreme position about "Yahweh's anointed" was purely motivated. As suggested above, he may possibly have been thinking that if he displayed respect for Yahweh's anointed, then Yahweh would not allow him to be slain- as he too was Yahweh's anointed. And possibly he was seeking to inculcate in Israel a respect for Yahweh's anointed, in order to safeguard himself [as also Yahweh's anointed] from ever being murdered by his own people. Human motivation is rarely pure. Perhaps this is why we have the idea of our very conscience being cleansed in Christ. And there is nothing like meeting the crucified Lord Jesus at the memorial meeting to elicit self examination of motives.

1Sa 24:7 So David restrained his men with these words, and didn't allow them to attack Saul. Saul got up out of the cave and went on his way-

David could easily have reasoned that if his men killed Saul, then he had not done it. But his ethics and spirituality were far higher than that. He realized his men were under his control, and so he restrained them. "Restrained" or "rebuked" is Heb. 'to tear apart'. David had to really 'lay into' his men to stop them killing Saul. By going the way of grace, he ended up falling out with his own friends and supporters. This frequently happens when we seek to live by grace in reality; it can be a very lonely path. It's clear from Abishai's attitude in 1 Sam. 26:8 that David failed to totally convince his men to share his attitude to Saul. For David's grace towards Saul was a hard act to follow.

David had restrained or withheld his own men from murdering Saul, but Abigail perceives that over and above his own mental effort to do this, Yahweh had confirmed David in it (1 Sam. 25:26 "since Yahweh has withheld you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand"). And she sees her appeasement of David as

likewise controlled by Yahweh to preserve David as innocent from avenging himself, so that he could indeed become king.

1Sa 24:8 David also got up afterwards and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, My lord the king! When Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and showed respect-

David's respect to Saul simply because he was the anointed king is really remarkable. He could easily have reasoned that Saul had twice been told by Samuel that his kingship had been removed and transferred to David, and therefore it was questionable whether Saul really was the anointed of Yahweh; for David had been anointed king in his place. But grace always falls on the side of giving a man the benefit of the doubt. And in practice, David's grace, like all grace, was motivated by a simple love of Saul as a person. We are all anointed in that we are in Christ, the anointed (2 Cor. 1:21). The same radical respect which David showed, we should show to each other.

1Sa 24:9 David said to Saul, Why do you listen when men say 'David is trying to harm you?'-

We get the impression from the record that it was Saul who was creating this false accusation, as part of his paranoid mindset that had jumped from one conspiracy theory to another. It was Saul who was influencing men to think like that. But David had clearly chosen his words carefully for this brief speech. He seeks to give Saul the benefit of the doubt, as grace does (see on :8), and to make it as easy as possible for Saul to repent. He sets us a stellar example for behaviour in interpersonal conflict.

Part of the reason for Saul's obsessive conspiracy theories about David may have been that there were a group of Benjamites who wanted David dead. Because they didn't want the kingdom to go to a man from Judah. They fed Saul theories about David seeking his life. We noted earlier that Saul listened to the voices of many people rather than of God through Samuel- and here we have an example.

1Sa 24:10 Look, today your eyes have seen how Yahweh had delivered you into my hand in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, I will not lift up my hand against my lord, for he is Yahweh's anointed-

David is seeking to build psychological bridges with Saul. He is supposing for a moment that Saul only hated him because he listened to what others said about David (:9), and David is saying that he too had people in his life who told him to kill Saul, but he refused to listen to them. As discussed on :8, David could have reasoned that Saul was no longer Yahweh's anointed and the anointing had passed to him. And indeed it had. But by stressing that Saul *is* Yahweh's anointed, he may be following the position of Samuel, that despite all his rejection by God, Saul could still pull round and be Yahweh's anointed king. Grace includes this element of determined hopefulness for the repentance even of those who appear far gone.

"I spared you" reflects the fact that had David killed Saul, it would in a way have been legitimate. David was faced not so much with a choice between obedience and disobedience, but between showing a high level of grace and, on the other hand, doing what was politically expedient and legitimate. And it is in these choices that spiritual maturity is shown.

In 1 Sam. 23:21 Saul thanks the Ziphites for their "compassion" to him by informing him of David's location. "Compassion" translates the Hebrew word for 'spare'. Saul felt the Ziphites had spared him. But in 1 Sam. 24:10 he finds that it is in

fact David who spares him. So God continued to work with Saul, despite having rejected him as king- for He still wanted to lead Saul to repentance and ultimate salvation. This is an amazing reflection of how God never gives up working with men.

1Sa 24:11 Moreover, my father-
Seeking to remind Saul of how he had asked Jesse to let David come and live at the court and effectively become his son.

Look, here is a piece of your robe in my hand; by the fact that I cut it off and didn't kill you, you can know and see that I have no desire to hurt you and have not sinned against you-
"I have not sinned" was to later become "I have sinned" when confronted by his sin with Bathsheba. This is the same phrase as David later uses when he confesses his sins regarding Bathsheba, in Ps. 51:3: "For I acknowledge my transgressions". This very phrase is here used by David in insisting that he did *not* acknowledge any transgression in him whilst in exile from Saul. What he said and felt then may have been relatively true, compared to the unspirituality of Saul and the false accusations against him. But perhaps there was an element of the overly self righteous in his words, and the sin with Bathsheba made him realize this. When we experience abuse, false accusation and downright evil from others, this can result in our failure to realize that we too our sinners. We become fixated upon the sin of the other. David it seems fell into this trap.

Though you hunt me to take my life-
Despite all his radical grace toward Saul, David was not naive and he refused to slip into denial of the obvious misbehaviour of the object of his grace. Saul was trying to kill David; he was lifting up his hand against David as Yahweh's anointed, whereas David didn't do so.

1Sa 24:12 May Yahweh judge between me and you, and may Yahweh avenge the wrong you have done me; but my hand shall not be against you-
Despite the amazing grace shown, David cannot resist this reference to inevitable judgment which faced Saul for his behaviour. David at this time was meditating deeply upon the Mosaic law, as Ps. 119 makes clear. Perhaps a critical verse for him was Lev. 19:18: "You shall not avenge... but love your neighbour as yourself". God had already termed David and Saul neighbours (1 Sam. 15:28). Perhaps David took a cue from those words, and started thinking of Saul as his neighbour. And then his mind went to Lev. 15:18; if Saul was his neighbour, he was to love him as himself, and not take vengeance.

1Sa 24:13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness, but my hand shall not be against you'-
Alluded to in Ps. 5:4, where the same word for "wickedness" is used: "For You are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness, evil can't live with You". Despite showing such wonderful grace to Saul, David did not justify his wickedness but names it for what it is. Grace is not naivety.

1Sa 24:14 Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?-
This reflects the broken down psychological state of David. He felt himself as good as dead, powerless, tiny and insignificant as a flea. 1 Sam. 17:43 LXX adds "David said,

Nay, but worse than a dog". This would reflect his deep humility, which we also see in his later reflections in Ps. 8 and Ps. 144 that he was most unworthy to have attained the victory. We note that here in 1 Sam. 24:14 he also likens himself to a dog. He had a low self image.

"A flea" is literally, one flea. Saul and 3000 of Israel's warriors were chasing one flea. This is how low David felt, and likewise "a dead dog" is a figure of a man who has run out of highway and is no longer what he once was. David's self perception was very low at this point. On one hand, he felt that he need not slay Saul as God would take care of this and be true to His word to him. But at one and the same time, he felt so low in his self image. And so it is oftentimes with man in Christ. This is not hypocrisy, nor necessarily weakness of faith. It is what it is to be human. And our creator "remembers that we are dust".

1Sa 24:15 May Yahweh therefore be the judge and give sentence between me and you; may He plead my cause and deliver me out of your hand-
See on Ps. 119 (introduction). Solomon alludes here in Prov. 3:30 "Don't strive with a man without cause if he has done you no harm". To strive or plead a cause is the very phrase used of the opposition of Saul (1 Sam. 24:15) and Nabal to David (1 Sam. 25:39); and in both cases, David had done them "no harm", the phrase used of David's innocence before Nabal (1 Sam. 25:21,28) and Saul (1 Sam. 24:11). Clearly Solomon has these incidents in view, and again his statements of truth have a subtext of justifying his father David, with whom he was psychologically obsessed.

That Ps.119 was written at this time is evident. It mentioned David as a young man devoting himself to the word rather than riches(:72)- the riches which could have been his if he mentally surrendered to Saul, or if he killed Saul and took the kingdom. He often laments how he is in exile from Yahweh's word (:43,46,54), which would have been on account of his being away from the sanctuary at Gibeah. He pleads the promise of the word that he would be preserved from Saul's persecution (v.41,58), and several times mentions Saul's attempts on his life (v.87,95,109,110). The following verses are evidently relevant to this period: 61,63,67,79,84 (= 1 Sam. 27:1),95,98 (= 1 Sam. 18:14,15),110 (cp. the 'snaring' with Michal),119 (the emphasis is on 'You will destroy the wicked like Saul- one day),125 (David is often called Saul's servant),150,154 (= 1 Sam. 24:15),157,161,165,176. Therefore in the face of such hatred and pain, feeling he must be careful of every step he took, emotionally and physically, David could rejoice: "I will walk at liberty (AVmg. 'at large'): for I seek thy precepts".

Legal language is disproportionately common in the Bible. The idea of a Divine, heavenly court is common. God is the judge who upholds the weak, those who are condemned by human judgment (1 Sam. 24:15; Ps. 9:4; 43:1; 140:12; Lam. 3:58; Mic. 7:9); He is even portrayed as the one appealing for justice (Ps. 74:22). If God is the only and ultimate judge, then *His* judgment is all that ultimately matters, and in this sense human 'sentences' or judgment from the court of human opinion are reversed by Him (Prov. 22:22,23). Yet the pain of being judged by those around us is highly significant to us mortals; and time and again, Scripture is reminding us that we should not pay deep attention to this, because God's judgment is what ultimately matters; and the Divine court is sitting in session right now, at the very same time as those around us are judging us with their meaningless human judgments. This, then, is the ultimate answer to the pain of being slandered and defamed, being misunderstood and misrepresented, or feeling that persecution by worldly powers is not noticed by God.

1Sa 24:16 When David had finished saying this to Saul, Saul said, Is this your voice, my son David? Saul wept aloud-
The shame with Saul is that he did have a conscience and a spiritual side. He thereby becomes an even stronger warning to us all; for obsessive jealousy can enmesh any of us if we allow it to. We wonder why Saul queries whether this is really David's voice. Perhaps there was a considerable distance between them; or David's voice was strained by emotion; or Saul so wished this was all a dream and this hadn't really happened. Again, each of these options has absolute credibility and reflects that this record is true and accurate as to what really happened and was said. It is no cunningly devised fable.

1Sa 24:17 He said to David, You are more righteous than I, for you have been good to me, whereas I have done evil to you-
God's goodness to David was what empowered him to do good to Saul. 'Doing good' is the word used in Ps. 13:6 "I will sing to Yahweh, because He has been good to me", written by David reflecting upon the pain of Saul's persecution of him. Like us, our faith that God will finally come through for us *in the future* should give us joy *now*. This faith in God finally 'being good' to David led him to be the same to Saul- the word is used of how David was 'good' rather than evil to Saul, not slaying him when he had the opportunity (1 Sam. 24:17). Just as we deserve to die, but experience God's grace.

1Sa 24:18 You have declared this day how you have been good to me, because when Yahweh had delivered me into your hand, you didn't kill me-
David doing good to Saul is alluded to by him in Ps. 119:65: "Do good to Your servant according to Your word, Yahweh".
The doing good would specifically refer to the fulfilment of the prophetic word that David would be king and Saul's persecution would end. "Do good" is the phrase used of how David did good to Saul by not killing him, but rather trusting in God's word about Saul's destruction. And on that basis, David in Ps. 119:65 appeals for God to do him good, by ending Saul's persecution and establishing David as king.

It seems God would have given Saul into David's hand when "a deep sleep from the Lord" fell upon Saul at the very time David intended to kill him (1 Sam. 26:12). Saul himself realized that the Lord had delivered him into David's hand to kill him (1 Sam. 24:18). God thus confirmed David in his intentions- and yet at the last minute, it seems, David chose an even higher level; of love and deep respect for this spiritually sick man.

1Sa 24:19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away unharmed? Therefore may Yahweh reward you with good for what you have done to me today-
Saul knew of courses that Yahweh's reward for David would be that he would be made king in Saul's place (:20). Saul recognizes that David's grace is absolutely and radically different to all secular wisdom and ways of behaviour. Saul was out seeking to find David; and David had found Saul. "Unharmed" is literally "the good way". It is the term used of how Samuel taught Israel "the good way" despite their choice of Saul (1 Sam. 12:23; also 1 Kings 8:36). David alludes to this when he says that God teaches even sinners the good way (Ps. 25:8). This was relevant to the exiles, whom God also sought to teach the good way (Jer. 6:16). The idea is that even at this late

stage, by preserving Saul's life, David was hopeful that he would still go in the good way. And Saul perceived this.

1Sa 24:20 Now I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands-
Saul is alluding to Samuel's words of rejection to him, "But now your kingdom shall not be established" (1 Sam. 13:14). Saul now at this point perfectly understood God's word to him. But he relapsed into his other narratives and continued to persecute David. The truth of Samuel's words about David replacing Saul now became apparent to Saul- when he perceived how gracious David was. This was to be the lead characteristic of a king, a man with God's own gracious heart. Yet Saul's understanding was just theoretical, for he continues trying to murder David. Again we see how understanding God's word in crystal clarity is not of itself enough; it must be acted upon, and not just held in the mind for a few brief moments when the penny drops and we see everything clearly.

1Sa 24:21 Swear now therefore to me by Yahweh, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house-
It was usual for a new king to destroy the family of the king he had usurped, and there are Biblical examples of this. Jonathan was likewise concerned about this. We note that Saul sees swearing by Yahweh as a binding oath, but earlier he had sworn by Yahweh to Jonathan that he would not kill David- and totally disregarded it. He must surely have been aware of this big paradox. We may wonder why David having the upper hand as he did at this point, didn't ask Saul to swear by Yahweh not to kill him. He was aware Saul had earlier made such an oath and broken it. Perhaps in love he didn't want to lead Saul yet further into sin, for he knew that Saul was likely to break such an oath. We can apply that principle too in our dealings with those in spiritual weakness.

1Sa 24:22 David gave his oath to Saul. Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold-
This continues the theme developed in the descriptions of David's meetings with Jonathan; one returns to their house, whilst David goes out into the scrubland again. Forgiveness is not the same as trust being restored. We must forgive, but we are not obligated to trust until that trust has been credibly restored.

It was usual for a new king to destroy the family of the previous dynasty. Through the incident with the Gibeonites in 2 Sam. 21, God took care of this. For there was a famine that was blamed upon Saul having slain the Gibeonites, and God judged that the bloodguilt rested upon Saul's descendants and they had to be executed: "There was famine during the reign of David, year after year for three years. David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord replied, "It is because of the bloodguilt of Saul and his house, for he put some Gibeonites to death" (2 Sam. 21:1). We ponder how there was bloodguilt on Saul's descendants. Saul's sins were not to be visited upon his descendants (Ex. 18:2; Dt. 24:16; Jer. 31:29) and Num. 35:33 is clear that Saul personally was responsible: "Blood pollutes the land and the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it". When asked what can make amends, the Gibeonites naturally ask for the blood of Saul's family. But this is apparently in line with what Yahweh Himself had told David here. It seems rather politically convenient for David that here we have the destruction of the potential claimants to his throne. That is what David humanly would have wanted,

but grace and his honouring of his promise to Saul stopped him from killing the descendants of his enemy, the previous king. Usually a new king destroyed the family of the previous dynasty. But God through the incident of the Gibeonites works to ensure that this happens anyway, as some kind of reward for David's attempt to live by grace and integrity in the matter.

We note that the two occasions when David spares Saul's life by grace are in 1 Sam. 24 and 26. In between them is the Nabal / Abigail story in 1 Sam. 25, where David is wildly eager to murder Nabal and his family and then is calmed down by Abigail. We see here how David, as every man, may reach peaks of grace and wisdom, and yet in between them act ungraciously. This is psychologically credible, and reflects the struggle of every man to live on a level of high grace to others. But we wonder whether David's grace to Saul was possibly only achieved by psychologically transferring his anger onto another, in this case Nabal, and madly seeking to murder him rather than Saul. David resisted taking revenge upon Saul, but he over eagerly seeks to take revenge on Nabal- a man who unlike Saul was not seeking to chase and destroy him. In this case, Abigail becomes David's alter ego, the voice of his own better conscience speaking through another. David relents and repents of his desire to murder Nabal, and God then slays Nabal. But that is just what Saul did, relenting for a moment of his desire to kill David, and then being removed by God in God's good time. And God works thus oftentimes with man, putting our better side and better inner voice into the mouth of another... in my own case, often the mouth of my wife.

We reflect that Saul also had spared a king [Agag] whom he should have killed. And had lost the kingdom because of it. Now Saul is in Agag's position. For all time we see that the same action can be performed by men with totally different motives, just as David later acted as a priest when Uzziah was condemned for doing so.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 25

1Sa 25:1 Samuel died, and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and they buried him at his home in Ramah. David went down to the wilderness of Paran-
In the type, we see a foretaste of the death of John the Baptist, the Lord's first teacher, and how He goes out afterwards into a deserted place. We note too how Israel loved Samuel and respected him, although they did the very opposite of what he had taught them. We can have an emotional, sentimental attachment to the things of our religion, whilst having hearts far from God's word in practice. Paran is LXX Maon, as in :2.

1Sa 25:2 There was a man in Maon who had property in Carmel, and the man was very wealthy. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel-
Nabal meaning "fool" is one of the sources for the Lord's parable of the rich / wealthy fool. Maon was a mile north of Carmel, and they are mentioned together in Josh. 15:55. The complete geographical and historical agreement of the books of the Bible, clearly written at different times, is such that there must have been a higher, singular hand behind them all. And that hand was that of God, through His inspiration of the entire volume.

The sheep shearing festival was known as a time of payment of debts. David was hungry, and recalled Nabal was in his debt. As David's men had guarded Nabal's

sheep and servants without payment. So it was the logical time to ask for some payment in the form of food. The refusal was therefore especially irksome to David.

There are clear connections between Nabal and Saul, signposted to us by the comment that Nabal sat down to eat a meal like a king (:36 "like the feast of a king"). Probably subconsciously, David allows himself to be led by these connections into transferring his anger with Saul onto Nabal. Rather should be have perceived the similarities, and also allowed God in His own time and according to His will, to deal with Nabal. "Nabal" means "fool" and Saul has been called foolish by Samuel ("You have done foolishly", 'been a Nabal', 1 Sam. 13:13), and he will later admit to David "I have done foolishly", 'been a Nabal', 1 Sam. 26:21. David calls himself Nabal's son (1 Sam. 25:8). But David also refers to Saul as his father (1 Sam. 24: 11) and Saul calls David his son four times (1 Sam. 24: 16; 26: 17,21,25). Nabal lived in Maon and Carmel (25:2), places associated with Saul (1 Sam. 15:5, where Saul built a monument to himself, so it was very Saul-associated territory; 1 Sam. 23:25). Both Saul and Nabal refer to David as the “son of Jesse” (1 Sam. 25:10; cp. 1 Sam. 20:30; 22:7), and both ask "Who is [he]?". Both Nabal and Saul repay David “evil for good” (1 Sam. 25:21; cp. 1 Sam. 24:17). David graciously overlooked this for Saul, but he counts Nabal's drunken refusal to help David as a huge "evil". The evil done by Saul was far greater than that by Nabal. But David wants to requite the evil of Saul ad so he transfers it onto Nabal. Nabal’s servants betray him to Abigail (1 Sam. 25:17), just as Saul's servants apparently did- for he complains that they “have conspired against me” (1 Sam. 22:8). As Saul’s daughter isn't loyal to him and is on David's side (1 Sam. 19:11–17), likewise with Abigail to Nabal (1 Sam. 25:19.36–37). Nabal has three thousand sheep (1 Sam. 25:2), and Saul has three thousand chosen men (1 Sam. 24:2; 26:2).

Saul describes himself as a "fool" (1 Sam. 26:21) and Samuel likewise calls Saul a fool (1 Sam. 13:13). So we can see here how David's desire to kill Nabal was a reflection of his desire to kill Saul. He had restrained himself from killing Saul, but transfers that death wish onto Nabal; rather like an addict quitting one addiction but moving to another one. He is restrained from killing Nabal by Abigail, who seems to imply that if he were to do so, then his own kingship would be somehow impugned. This is exactly how David had reasoned about why he refused to kill Saul when he had the chance to. And so Nabal dies by God's hand rather than David's sword, just as Saul would. The incident was to surely underline this lesson to David. This is why in the next chapter, 1 Sam. 26, David again is given the chance to kill Saul just as he was in 1 Sam. 24, and he refuses to. He needed the lesson from his near failure in 1 Sam. 25 in order to maintain his resolve not to kill Saul. We marvel at how God works through human weakness in order to strengthen His people.

1Sa 25:3 His name was Nabal and his wife’s name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but the man was harsh and mean; he belonged to the family of Caleb-

Continually in Biblical history we encounter good men with bad descendants, and the opposite. This is to be expected, because true spirituality is not genetic; each must forge their own relationship with God, and Godly parenting is but setting a person on the right path, for them to later exercise their own freewill. "Harsh" is LXX "hard", and is the basis for the "hard man" of Mt. 25:24. Continually we discern the Lord's mind saturated in Old Testament history, and consciously or unconsciously forming the characters of His stories from those He had encountered in the scriptures. Caleb's family had settled in Hebron in the south (Josh. 15:13; 1 Sam. 30:14), but it seems Nabal had separated from them and gone to live alone in the north near mount

Carmel- although it makes more sense to understand Carmel as a place in Judah. Nabal the fool is alluded to in Ps. 14:1; Prov. 30:22. Solomon writes the truth in Proverbs, but he likes to allude to the enemies of his father, ever seeking to use God's truth to justify himself and his family.

1Sa 25:4 David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep-
David had been glad for just five loaves of bread from Abiathar. And now he was desperate for food again. Survival was based on a hand to mouth existence amongst the peasant class, and for those on the move without land to farm, just getting enough food would have been a major issue.

1Sa 25:5 David sent ten young men and said to them, Go up to Carmel and go to Nabal and greet him in my name-
David obviously knew Nabal, and had effectively worked for him as a kind of security service for his flocks and shepherds. He apparently hadn't been paid for this, and yet had not taken the liberty of helping himself to Nabal's flocks. Nabal's claim he didn't know David's name (:10) was in response to these greetings in David's name.

1Sa 25:6 Say to him, 'Long life to you! Peace to you and to your house and to all that you have-
These were standard terms of greeting, perhaps consciously omitting the name Yahweh because David considered that Nabal was effectively an atheist, the fool who said in his heart that there was no God (Ps. 14:1). One theme of the records is the invitation to consider the sincerity of motive in even the best of God's servants, in this case David and Abigail. David here wishes peace to Nabal and his family ["house"]. But very soon, he is charging off to murder them all. His statement here that he wished peace to Nabal's family is immedicately shown to be lacking in integrity. It is mere formalism.

1Sa 25:7 I have heard that you are shearing your sheep. Your shepherds have been with us, and we didn't hurt them, nothing of theirs was missing all the while they were in Carmel-
This may be a way of saying that David and his men had not been paid for their protection services, and yet had not helped themselves to anything from Nabal's flock.

1Sa 25:8 Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find grace in your eyes, for we come at a good time. Please give whatever you can to your servants and to your son David'-
"Good time" is a phrase used about a feast day, and it is thus rendered in GNB. The Mosaic feasts were to celebrate God's saving grace, and implied that the memory of that was to be reflected in our giving / grace to others. And yet instead of demanding wages, David asks for "grace". David asked Nabal to give his men food because they were asking on a feast day (Heb., 1 Sam. 25:8 NEV "at a good time"). This is a parallel with how he asks Ahimelech to give his men food because, he implies, it is a feast day (see on 1 Sam. 21:5). So circumstances had repeated. David's request for food from Nabal on a feast day ought to have reminded him of how at a low spiritual point, he had asked the priests of Nob for the same. And it led to their death. We likewise are to perceive the connections between our life experiences, and to learn the lessons.

1Sa 25:9 When David's young men came they said this to Nabal in the name of David, and waited-
It is emphasized that they spoke in David's name (:5), and this was to elicit Nabal's denial of that name; see on :10.

1Sa 25:10 Nabal answered David's servants, Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants who break away from their masters these days-
As noted on :5, David and Nabal knew each other. To claim not to know a man's name was a great insult, for all that a man was and stood for was bound up in his "name". This is the significance of the Yahweh Name. Nabal clearly knew that David had been a servant of Saul, and he likes to believe the narrative that David was a runaway slave. He uses the same phrase as Saul contemptuously used of David, "the son of Jesse".

1Sa 25:11 Shall I then take my bread, my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I don't know where?-
We note all the personal pronouns, "I", "my". He presents as the classic narcissist. Nabal did know from whence they were, and he knew the name of David. This idea of 'I don't know your name, nor where you are from' is common in Semitic languages, and may explain why the Jews in Rome claimed not to know Paul. It is the language of absolute rejection, and was used about the Lord Jesus. We note all the personal pronouns in this sentence, just as in the parable of the rich fool, which is based upon Nabal. David later reflected that bread, water and meat was provided for Israel in the wilderness (Ps. 78:20); he saw his wilderness experiences as similar to theirs, being led towards the same kingdom of God.

1Sa 25:12 So David's young men turned and went back and told him all this-
David sent messengers to Nabal meaning well to him, and they were rudely rebuffed, resulting in his anger which only Abigail's grace and wisdom saved him from (1 Sam. 25). And yet the same situation repeated in its essence when he sent messengers to Hanun who were likewise misinterpreted and rebuffed (2 Sam. 10:3). Again, David got angry- but there was no Abigail to restrain him, and he did get into an impossible fight… from which by grace God delivered him. Could it not be that David failed to learn from his previous experience…? Circumstances repeat within our lives and between our lives and those of others in Biblical history; that we might learn the lessons and take comfort from the scriptures, that man is not alone.

1Sa 25:13 David said to his men, Every man put on his sword! Every man put on his sword and David also put on his. About four hundred men followed David and two hundred stayed by the baggage-
The same word is used of David girding himself with Saul's sword, and then rethinking and taking it off. Abigail has jogged his memory by speaking of his enemies being cast out as sling stones. He has the humility to take off his sword. And it is that humility to admit error which was really his saving grace.

David has slipped from the day when he had fought Goliath without a sword, insisting that Yahweh saves without swords. And it was not so long ago that there was no sword amongst the Israelites apart from with Saul and Jonathan. This is clearly a low point of faith for David. "Hundred" may mean a family or military division. To have had 600 males with him would have meant that along with accompanying

family, David's group would have been several thousand strong. They would have been very vulnerable if they were this many. David's anger and intention was wrong, but it can be understood very easily in terms of psychological transference. His repressed anger with Saul was transferred onto the family of Nabal. Again, the record is absolutely psychologically credible.

Taking 400 armed men to slay Nabal and his family was reflective of Saul coming with 3000 men to hunt David, "just one flea" in the desert. David's apparent forgiveness of Saul was not totally pure; because clearly he has transferred his anger with Saul onto Nabal, and now David the abused is the abuser.

1Sa 25:14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, Look, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them-
There is quite a theme of servants bringing blessings or good news (1 Sam. 9:6; 16:16; 25:14 cp. Gen. 41:10; 2 Kings 5:3). This may be to reflect God's interest in the significance of the lowly.

1Sa 25:15 But the men were very good to us and we were not hurt, nothing was missing as long as we were with them in the fields-
The reason they praise David's men for not taking anything is because they realized Nabal hadn't paid for their services. They could legitimately have helped themselves to some animals for food. And yet the men of David hadn't taken this out upon them, because they recognized that they were not Nabal.

1Sa 25:16 They were a wall to us night and day all the while we were with them keeping the sheep-
We think of Jacob keeping the sheep day and night (Gen. 31:40), sustained by God's protection. The gift sent to pacify David in :18 is also an allusion to Jacob doing the same to Esau.

1Sa 25:17 Now therefore consider what you should do, for evil is determined against our master and against all his household; he is such a worthless fellow that one can't even speak to him-
As on :25, we note that this is an unusual way for servants to speak about their master. It seems Abigail was effectively running the household and the servants were in tune with her attitude to Nabal. She may even be one of the base images for the depiction of the wise woman of Prov. 31.

David had himself spoken evil ["determined evil"] against innocent people. But David was so sensitive to words spoken against *him* that he breathes out the deepest condemnation upon those who had spoken evil against *him (s.w. Ps. 109:20)*. We get the impression that David is not adequately aware of the huge grace he himself had received. Otherwise there would have been at least some desire for the repentance and salvation of his enemies. This is so markedly lacking in the Psalms of David.

1Sa 25:18 Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread, two bottles of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys-
This recalls Jacob's pacification of Esau by sending huge presents ahead of him. Abigail bows before David as Jacob does before Esau. David was coming against Abigail with four hundred men, just as Esau had come against Jacob with the same numbers (Gen 32:6); her learning from this incident surely reflects her spirituality.

We note the uses the Yahweh Name a significant seven times; although all the same, her behaviour is clearly overarched by the simple human motive of self interest and self preservation. Abigail takes the blame. The "bottles" of wine would have been adult goat skins filled with wine; the whole animal had its insides removed through the head and the skin was then left intact. This was a fair amount of food, but it had to feed 600 males and likely many women and children.

1Sa 25:19 She said to her young men, Go on before me; I am following you. But she didn't tell her husband, Nabal-
As noted on :18, she seems to be seeking to follow Biblical precedent, copying the example of Jacob seeking to appease Esau.

1Sa 25:20 As she rode on her donkey and came down in a valley, and there were David and his men coming down towards her, and she met them-
The impression is that they both descended, she from mount Carmel and David from mount Paran, and they met in a valley. They would have observed each other from a distance coming down the valley side .

But "valley", AV "covert of the hill", is the same word for "hiding place" in Ps. 119:114: "You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in Your word". When hiding from Saul in the wilderness [s.w. of David's "hiding places" at this time in 1 Sam. 19:2; 25:20], David hoped in the prophetic word that one day Saul would be no more and David would be king.

1Sa 25:21 Now David had said, Surely for nothing I have kept all this fellow's possessions in the wilderness, so that nothing was missing. He has returned me evil for good-
The point was that Saul admits that he has done evil to David whilst David has done him good. So Nabal is another Saul, but David fails to display grace to him. Rather he transfers his anger with Saul onto Nabal. "For nothing" suggests that Nabal had not paid wages for the work of David's men, and now in their time of need he would not even share basic food with them. Solomon alludes here in Prov. 3:30 "Don't strive with a man without cause if he has done you no harm". To strive or plead a cause is the very phrase used of the opposition of Saul (1 Sam. 24:15) and Nabal to David (1 Sam. 25:39); and in both cases, David had done them "no harm", the phrase used of David's innocence before Nabal (1 Sam. 25:21,28) and Saul (1 Sam. 24:11). Clearly Solomon has these incidents in view, and again his statements of truth have a subtext of justifying his father David, with whom he was psychologically obsessed.

1Sa 25:22 God deal with David severely, if I leave alive one man of his by the morning-
David is here quoting the words of Saul when he too sought to 'avenge himself' on his enemies; and he foolishly wishes to slay Jonathan: "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan" (1 Sam. 14:24,27,44,45). Like Jonathan, Abigail hadn't heard when Nabal [like Saul] made his statements (1 Sam. 14:27). David has transferred his anger with Saul onto Nabal, and comes out with a huge number of men to slay Nabal- and thus he is acting like Saul. And now we see him actually using the words of Saul. We have a tendency to become like what we hate, and the abused will always act like their abuser in some way- until and unless they learn God's grace. David's desire to destroy the entire family and animas [the dogs who urinate against the wall] of Nabal is similar to Saul destroying all the animals,

family and children of the priests at Nob. I suggest therefore that David's apparent grace to Saul in the previous chapter was not total. Possibly his grace to Saul in the next chapter is more truly gracious, having learnt the lesson from the Abigail incident.

His anger with Nabal and desire to slay all "that piss against the wall" who lived with "this fellow" (1 Sam. 25:21,22 AV) is expressed in crude terms; and he later thanks Abigail for persuading him not to "shed blood" and "avenging myself with mine own hand" (1 Sam. 25:33)- the very things he elsewhere condemns in his Psalms (e.g. Ps. 44:3). Time and again in the Psalms, David uses that Hebrew word translated "avenging myself" about how God and not man will revenge / save him against his enemies, for God saves / avenges the humble in spirit not by their strength and troops but by His. But in the anger of hot blood, David let go of all those fine ideas. He had some sort of an anger problem. And he surely swears by God's Name far too loosely here.

"One that urinates against a wall" could mean a dog; for it is dogs and not males who urinate against an object like a wall. David wanted to kill everybody there even down to all the dogs. But he has just told Saul that he feels like a dead dog. And now he wants to make dead dogs of Nabal's household, leaving him nothing but dead dogs. He is wanting to make people like him, which is typical human response: 'You make me feel a dead dog, so I'll kill your dogs'. Reading the reference to dogs would fit in with the mention that Nabal is descended from Caleb, which means "dog".

1Sa 25:23 When Abigail saw David she hurried and alighted from her donkey; she bowed down before David with her face to the ground-

Perhaps imitating the Godly Rebekah, of whom the same phrase is used (Gen. 24:18,46). She then copied Rebekah in immediately dropping all and accepting the invitation of marriage (:41).

1Sa 25:24 She fell at his feet and said, On me, my lord, on me be the blame, and please let your handmaid speak in your ears. Hear the words of your handmaid-

Abigail's plea "Hear the words of your handmaid" (1 Sam. 15:24) was repeated by the woman of 2 Sam. 20:17. But Abigail herself had modelled her behaviour on women like Rebekah (1 Sam. 25:23 = Gen. 24:18,46). This is how functional fellowship occurs between God's people, both over time and in contemporary relationships. We copy that which is Godly and good which we observe in other believers, both those we know and those we meet in the Bible.

1Sa 25:25 Please pay no attention, my lord, to this worthless fellow Nabal. As his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is his nature; but I, your handmaid, didn't see your young men whom you sent-

It was unusual for a woman to speak like this about her husband, even if she thought this in her heart. For a woman was defined by the men in her life, particularly her husband. Abigail is truly unusual in her attitude here. But she was no mere liberated woman; she believed in David and wanted to serve him and take his side against Nabal her husband. Like Jonathan, her loyalties were conflicted, but she came down on the right side. See on :17.

1Sa 25:26 Now therefore my lord, as Yahweh lives and as your soul lives, since Yahweh has withheld you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now therefore let your enemies and those who seek evil to my lord be like Nabal-

Saul "sought" David, implying a great level of mental effort (1 Sam. 19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the type of Christ, the Jews sought to kill the Lord (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8). Abigail was clearly very aware of David's sparing of Saul; indeed seeing that David and Nabal knew each other, she may have spoken with David before. David had restrained or withheld his own men from murdering Saul (1 Sam. 24:7), but Abigail perceives that over and above his own mental effort to do this, Yahweh had confirmed David in it. And she sees her appeasement of David as likewise controlled by Yahweh to preserve David as innocent from avenging himself, so that he could indeed become king.

"Yahweh has withheld you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand" is in the past tense. Abigail seems aware of what has happened in the previous chapter- Yahweh withheld David from killing Saul. And she asks David to consider Nabal as Saul and to do the same again.

Abigail's appeal to David not to avenge himself but let God do so... was exactly the reasoning of David to Saul and often in his Psalms. Abigail was David's better side speaking, his alter ego. She was of good understanding / insight (:3), so perhaps she consciously presents her argument as being that of David's alter ego. David is likewise described as both attractive / handsome, and wise (1 Sam. 16:12; 18:5,30). Six times Abigail calls herself David’s maidservant, and fourteen times she calls him her lord. This is just as David has been calling Saul his lord and presenting himself as Saul's servant. Abigail is seeking to help David see himself as Saul and to pull out of the similarities with Saul. Through such language, she is also saying that she sees David as her king- with possible hints at seeing him as her husband. Hence her final comment, that David could "remember" her after Nabal dies. Straight after this incident, David again has the chance to kill Saul (1 Sam. 26), but surely he was fortified against that choice by the Abigail experience. Perhaps that second chance to take vengeance on Saul was provided as a test as to whether he had learnt the lesson from Abigail; and he had.

We note that the two occasions when David spares Saul's life by grace are in 1 Sam. 24 and 26. In between them is the Nabal / Abigail story in 1 Sam. 25, where David is wildly eager to murder Nabal and his family and then is calmed down by Abigail. We see here how David, as every man, may reach peaks of grace and wisdom, and yet in between them act ungraciously. This is psychologically credible, and reflects the struggle of every man to live on a level of high grace to others. But we wonder whether David's grace to Saul was possibly only achieved by psychologically transferring his anger onto another, in this case Nabal, and madly seeking to murder him rather than Saul. David resisted taking revenge upon Saul, but he over eagerly seeks to take revenge on Nabal- a man who unlike Saul was not seeking to chase and destroy him. In this case, Abigail becomes David's alter ego, the voice of his own better conscience speaking through another. David relents and repents of his desire to murder Nabal, and God then slays Nabal. But that is just what Saul did, relenting for a moment of his desire to kill David, and then being removed by God in God's good time. And God works thus oftentimes with man, putting our better side and better inner voice into the mouth of another... in my own case, often the mouth of my wife.

Abigail wishes all David's enemies would "Be like Nabal", implying she believes and wishes Nabal her husband would die. Her request to be remembered by David and frequently calling him her "lord" are all a hint she wants to become David's wife-

and it's as if she wishes death on her husband to that end. Again we ponder her motives for wishing death to her husband... was it all so spiritually motivated, or was it simply a case of wanting "out" from a horrible marriage and dreaming of being the wife of the handsome, charismatic and up-and-coming David...

1Sa 25:27 Let this gift which your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord-
Abigail perceives David's men as not simply his servants, but following him as their lord. This again invites us to see David and his men as types of the Lord Jesus and His followers / disciples.

1Sa 25:28 Please forgive the sin of your handmaid, for Yahweh will certainly make for my lord a sure house, because my lord fights the battles of Yahweh-
Here Abigail uses the very words of Saul, when he offers his daughter in marriage to David if he "fights the battles of Yahweh" (1 Sam. 18:17). This could be another quite subtle 'come on' for David to consider marrying her.

She alludes to David's description of the conflict with Goliath as being Yahweh's battle. But she feels Yahweh will only give David a "sure house" if he doesn't take vengeance; the promise of his future kingship over Israel was conditional. And surely she had within her some desperate hope that she somehow might become his wife and help build that sure house. And that well motivated desire was allowed to come true by providence. Abigail quotes the promise of a priest being raised up with a "sure house" (1 Sam. 2:35), imagining that David was to become a Messianic king-priest; and to have blood on his hands would preclude that. Abigail's phrase "a sure / established house" (1 Sam. 25:28) is used in the promises to David (2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Kings 11:38). It's as if she was so in tune with God's ways that she had some premonition of His intentions with David, although she saw these as conditional upon David not shedding the innocent blood of her family. Or perhaps the promise of 1 Sam. 2:35 about a priest with a "sure house" had already been developed by Samuel in relation with David, and Abigail was aware of that. The promises to David which mention a sure house for him would therefore only be confirming what had already been promised. She implies in :30 that David had been promised quite a few "good things" beyond simply being king.

The reference to "a sure house" is repeated in Nathan's prophecy about David in 2 Sam. 7:5-17 and also she alludes to Samuel's prophetic words about David. Likewise Abogail's prediction that God wuld sling out all David's enemies connects with 2 Sam. 7:11 "The Lord will give you rest from all your enemies". We could conclude that her words were spoken under Divine inspiration. And yet she is David's alter ego, speaking his own better thoughts back to him. Clearly this was all from God. God spoke to David through Abigail, his alter ago, just as He does at times to us today. Her speech also presents as well formulated to the point that it could well have been by direct inspiration.

She begs David not to kill Nabal and her family "because my lord fights the battles of Yahweh". She implies that any taking of personal vengeance is not a battle of Yahweh.

Let evil not be found in you all your days-
This could be translated "evil has not been found in you / touched you all your days", the idea being that David had been miraculously preserved from Saul's "evil", and Abigail feared this would end if he now murdered the whole family of Nabal. Or she

could simply be wishing that David continue to be innocent before God; a fine desire for any of us to have for another, especially for our future partner.

1Sa 25:29 Though men may rise up to pursue you-
David in the Psalms records how he hated those who 'rose up' against him, and that includes Saul. Saul 'rose up' against David (s.w. 1 Sam. 25:29; 26:2), and then evil men 'rose up' against David out of his own family (2 Sam. 12:11 s.w.), especially Absalom who rose up against his father (2 Sam. 18:31,32 s.w.). But David has a tendency to assume that all who rose up against him were arising against God. It's not always so that our enemy is God's enemy. Relationships and the hand of God in human affairs and relationships is more complex than that. And David in Ps. 139:21,22 goes further, to assume that his hatred of people is justified, because they must, he assumes, hate God because they are against him. Solomon seems to make the same mistake when he alludes to such 'risings up' in Prov. 28:28. We must note that "all in Asia" turned away from Paul personally (2 Tim. 1:15), and yet according to the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Rev. 2,3, there were many faithful individuals amongst them.

And to seek your life-
Saul sought the life of David (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:1; 22:23; 23:15; 25:29; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the Psalms, David frequently imprecates judgment upon those who sought his life (s.w. Ps. 35:4; 38:12; 40:14; 54:3; 63:9; 70:2; 71:13; 86:14). He loved Saul, the life of Saul was precious in David's sight, indeed the historical records seem to emphasize David's patient love of Saul; and yet in the Psalms he gives vent before God to his anger with Saul and desire to see Saul punished and judged by God. This is absolutely true to human experience; we may act with great patience and apparent love toward those who abuse us, and yet within we fume about it. The lesson of David is that we are to pour out those feelings to God in prayer, leaving Him to judge.

Yet the life of my lord will be bound in the bundle of life with Yahweh your God-
Abigail is convinced that Yahweh will preserve David from Saul's persecution, and she implies that she sees her husband as part of that persecution. She uses the figure of a valuable life carried in a bundle, alluding to a woman carrying her precious newborn baby swaddled and close to her body. But she implies that the woman represents none other than Yahweh Himself; an unusually intimate allusion. And she sees David, the angry man with his sword coming to slay her, as the newborn baby, about to become the new king, a life “bound in the bundle of living in the care of the Lord”. Abigail was of very fine spiritual perception.

Abigail is reminding David that Yahweh has preserved him. But David's ire with Nabal was because David considered that he had preserved Nabal's men and interests- and he had not been rewarded for it. Abigail is pointing out what David himself often said in his Psalms- that Yahweh has protected David amazingly. What God does for us, we are to do for others- regardless of their gratitude.

"The bundle" could be a technical term from shepherding, referring to the cache of various animals kept within a storage space. The various animals each had a pebble which the shepherd used to count and ensure all his animals were safe. But the lives of the likes of Saul and Nabal would be hurled away; the pebbles representing them would be thrown away because they were lost. "A find encountered by archaeologists investigating burial sites in northern Iraq at Nuzi near the Tigris, dating to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. In one of the graves, a clay oval container/carved stela filled with 48 stones was found, with an inscription on it: “the stones refer to sheep and goats: 21 mother sheep, 6 lambs, 8 adult males/rams, 4 lambs, 6 mother goats, 1

billy goat, 2 young goats." Beneath this inscription was another reading, "the seal of Ziqarru, the shepherd," suggesting the meaning and origin of this Assyrian artifact. According to archaeologists referring to other similar discoveries and texts, this type of object (a hollow tablet, container, or cloth bag/pocket) filled with pebbles and accompanied by an appropriate description was used by ancient shepherds of the Levant to count their flocks as they returned from pasture to their pens. Pebbles placed in such an object denoted animals in a safe place and no longer in danger".

He will hurl out the lives of your enemies as though from the pocket of a sling-
She continues her allusion to his victory over Goliath in :28. Surely she had been amongst those women who praised David for slaying his ten thousands. And her words here are nothing less than a death wish against her own husband, leading up to her pregnant request that at this point, David should "remember" her. Clearly she wanted to be his wife.

1Sa 25:30 When Yahweh has done to my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel-
I suggested on :28 that Abigail was aware of a body of material promised to David, far beyond simply the promise of kingship. She therefore mentions a promise that he would have a "sure house". This was one of "all the good" things promised to him.

When David writes in Ps. 110 of how "Yahweh said unto my Lord", he is quoting the very phrase used by Abigail years before, when they weren't even married. He was unconsciously alluding to the words of his wife before they were married, even years later. It is of course true that context plays a vital part in Biblical interpretation. But this can lead us to overlook the fact that many New Testament quotations of the Old Testament- many of those in the early chapters of Matthew, for example- are picking up words and phrases from one context and applying them to another. Paul himself did this when he quoted the words of the poet Aratus "We are all the offspring of Zeus" about our all being the offspring of the one true God.

1Sa 25:31 then this will not be on your conscience, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself-
She seems to perceive that the promises to David (see on :30) were conditional upon him not avenging himself. Whilst all Abigail says is wise, spiritual and true, we are again left in these records pondering the totality of her motives. She wanted to save her own life and that of her kids. Whatever higher motivation she had, of saving David from sin and encouraging his faith in God's prophetic word, she also wanted to save her own skin. We note that her 153 Hebrew words here are the longest speech of any woman recorded in the Bible. She is an unusual and powerful mediator.

Shedding blood "without cause" echos the very words David frequently uses in his Psalms about how Saul wanted to shed David's blood "without cause". Abigail, consciously or unconsciously, is leading David to see that he is behaving exactly like Saul. His desire to murder all Nabal's family with his few hundred armed men... was as bizarre and out of order as Saul with 3000 men chasing David to kill him, when David was but "a dead dog, one flea". The psychological credibility is amazing. For typically men act and become like those they despise the most. David's apparent stellar grace towards Saul is nuanced by him now behaving just like Saul. David the abused sets out to abuse just like he has been abused. And this nuances all his apparent grace, forgiveness and respect towards Saul. It was as was, but it was nuanced by not being total. 1 Sam. 24-26 is all about David avoiding bloodshed. But

the apparent grace towards Saul in 1 Sam. 24-26 is nuanced by his acting just like Saul in 1 Sam. 25.

David was later precluded from building the temple because he had shed innocent blood. So her appeal didn't have abiding influence, and we read no more of her. The immediate reference to David's other wives in :43 perhaps leads us to conclude that she had morally misjudged David, and marriage to him was not to turn out as she fantasized. Her appeal is indeed spiritually based, but as with so many Biblical incidents and in so much of our "good deeds"- the motives were mixed. She wanted to save her life and that of her kids. And all the 'spiritual' reasoning was only to that end. She argues as if David has never sinned up until this point, but slaying her and her kids would be a sin. This was flattery- for David was hardly sinless at this point, as he admits about his early life in Ps. 119. Her speech appeals to David's self interest- to achieve her self interest. She was both smart and beautiful, and she knew this- and clearly used it to get her end. This is not necessarily morally wrong, in the context of saving innocent life- but it was all the same human. She surely fell at David's feet with her cleavage showing, as charmingly as possible. She as a married woman definitely gives David the come on. She asks him to 'remember her', calls him her "Lord" 15 times, fawns at the feet of the landless, homeless David as his "handmaid" when she was clearly mistress of the situation; and as soon as Nabal dies, David responds by asking her to marry him. If she was indeed the peerless paragon of virtue, she would have responded that he was under the one man: one woman ideal of Genesis, and so she would prefer not to marry him as he was already married, and in fact Ahinoam is the name of one of Saul's wives so he was married to a woman whose husband was still alive [God comments: "I gave your master's wives into your bosom"]; and the king of Israel should not multiply wives (Dt. 17:17). She knew he was to be king, that was politically as well as spiritually obviously going to happen. And to be one of the new king's wives was something she clearly wanted. Even though she surely guessed he would take more wives once he became king. If the Lord's line were traced through Abigail and her children by David, we might have reason to think she was indeed spiritual. But that isn't the case and her offspring with David have no Biblical significance.

When Yahweh has dealt well with my lord, then remember your handmaid-
Fourteen times, Abigail calls David her "lord"- which can hint that she saw him as her husband ["Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord"]. This could be taken as asking David to consider marrying her at some point if Nabal died. It could be that when the thief on the cross asked to be remembered for good, he had in mind Abigail's words: that when David returned in glory in his Kingdom, "my Lord, then remember thine handmaid". This was prefaced by her asking: "Forgive the trespass of thine handmaid... a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God: and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out" (1 Sam. 25:29-31 AV). And David's response was marvellously similar to that of the Lord to the thief: "Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person" (1 Sam. 25:35). It would seem that the thief saw in David a type of the Lord, and saw in Abigail's words exactly the attitude he fain would have. And the Lord accepted this.

1Sa 25:32 David said to Abigail, Blessed is Yahweh, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!-
We see here the interplay of Divine sovereignty and human volition. She purposed of herself to meet David, but David perceives that she had been sent to him by God.

David perceives that God can withhold a person from sinning, just as He did to Abimelech with Sarah, and as His Spirit today can "keep us from falling" (Jude 24). There is an element in all this of God acting over and above our own strength against temptation. It is all the gift / grace of the work of His Spirit.

1Sa 25:33 Blessed is your discretion, and blessed are you for keeping me this day from the guilt of bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand-
We wonder if by this point David had already prayed the prayer of Ps. 19:13 asking to be kept back from presumptuous sins. If so, the answer came even when he was spiritually weak.

See on :22. David was tested by God in the matter of sparing the life of his enemy Saul- and he came through the test with flying colours (1 Sam. 26). But just before that, he had been tested again in the same area in the matter of Nabal- and he initially failed, intent as he was to take the life of his enemy Nabal (1 Sam. 25). But before the Nabal incident, he had again resisted the temptation to take vengeance. Thus a circumstance can repeat over a matter in which we were previously both successful and unsuccessful.

Many have struggled to reconcile the statement that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) with the fact that his life contains many examples not only of failure, but of anger and a devaluing of human life. He was barred from building the temple because of the amount of blood he had shed (1 Chron. 22:8). The figure of 'shedding blood' takes us back to the incident with Nabal, where David three times is mentioned as intending to "shed blood" (1 Sam. 25:26-33), only to be turned away from his sinful course by the wisdom, spirituality and charm of Abigail. David started out as the spiritually minded, humble shepherd, full of faith and zeal for his God. Hence Jehoshaphat is commended for walking "in the first ways of his father David" (2 Chron. 17:3). It seems to me that the comment that David was "a man after God's own heart" refers to how he initially was, at the time God chose him and rejected Saul. But the trauma of his life, the betrayals, jealousies and hatred of others, led him to the kind of bitterness which so often surfaces in the Psalms and is reflected in several historical incidents where he lacks the value of others' lives which we would otherwise expect from a man who walked so close with his God.

1Sa 25:34 For indeed, as Yahweh the God of Israel lives who has withheld me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely there wouldn't have been left to Nabal by the morning light so much as a single male-
David recognizes that he has been kept back from sinning by a Divine force far greater than himself. And that kind of strengthening, the strength we so desperately need in our spiritual struggles, is no less available today through the work of the Spirit given to us (Jude 24).

We note the three references here to Yahweh withholding David from the sin in view (:26,34,39). And there are three references to David's desire to avenge himself (:26,31,33). Clearly God does withhold from sin- at His initiative. Likewise He did with Abimelech. This is another outpouring of His grace through His Spirit, and Paul explains that the work of the Spirit is the parade example of how God's grace and not human works lead His people to salvation.

1Sa 25:35 So David accepted from her what she had brought him and he said to her, Go up in peace to your house. I have listened to your words and have granted your request-

Note the similarities between the David / Nabal / Abigail experience and those of Jacob, whilst he too kept flocks (1 Sam. 25:35 = Gen. 32:20; 25:18 = Gen. 32:13; 25:27 = Gen. 33:11). Abigail had consciously sought to emulate Jacob in appeasing David with presents sent before her, and God's wider providence played along with this. The granting of her request suggests that David is effectively king in this situation- he has the power to slay Nabal but decides not to, because of the request from Abigail.

1Sa 25:36 Abigail came to Nabal while he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. Nabal's heart was merry, for he was very drunk. Therefore she told him nothing until the morning-
If the "feast" of :8 was a religious feast, then we have Nabal doing something similar to what happened at the church in Corinth; the Lord's feast was turned into an excuse for drunken revelry. Nabal clearly pretended to kingship himself, and Abigail must have seen the stark contrast between him and David.

1Sa 25:37 In the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him what had happened; and his heart failed and he became like a stone-
To have been saved by a woman from death due to his own foolishness... was too much for him. If he had humbled himself in repentance and acceptance of grace, he perhaps wouldn't have had a stroke. The ten day period before his death was maybe a time of testing (Dan. 1:14,15), to see if he would repent deep within him. But he didn't, and so he was slain by Yahweh (:37). We marvel at God's desire to save even the likes of Nabal and Saul, and our outreach should be mightily inspired thereby.

1Sa 25:38 About ten days after that, Yahweh struck Nabal so that he died-
The experience of the Lord smiting Nabal led David to perceive that Yahweh would likewise smite Saul and he himself need not murder him (1 Sam. 26:10).

This was encouragement to David to realize that if he didn't take vengeance upon Saul, then likewise his time would come to die from Yahweh's hand rather than David's. This is how God works with us too; we are provided a smaller scale worked example of how things can be over a larger issue, if we continue faithful. We note that "ten days" is a period of testing in Dan. 1:14,15.

1Sa 25:39 When David heard that Nabal was dead he said, Blessed is Yahweh, who has upheld my cause against Nabal, and has kept back His servant from doing wrong. Yahweh has returned the wrongdoing of Nabal on his own head-
God's judgment is ongoing. He considered David's case against Nabal in the court of heaven, and judgment was given and carried out. It was in David's favour, despite him being very unspiritual and cranky at the time. "We make the answer now". Judgment day will not be a time when God considers evidence for the first time, weighs it up and delivers a verdict. That considering of evidence is ongoing right now, and the last day of judgment is for our benefit and not His.

David sent and asked Abigail to become his wife-
This may have meant that he inherited Nabal's wealth. But it is more likely that Abigail resigned all that for the outlaw life. Thus Abigail's secret wish came wonderfully true because it was rightly motivated.

1Sa 25:40 When his servants had come to Abigail to Carmel they said, David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife-

It's not clear whether this was a second visit after she had agreed, or whether he sent and took her as his wife anyway. The next verse would imply the latter, although she was ready and willing. David presents here as doing the right thing. Despite Abigail's beauty, he doesn't grab her for himself. Rather he waits for God to give him the beautiful woman in His time and according to His will. Later David fails to retain this lesson, in that he grabs Bathsheba for himself because, again, she is a beautiful woman. God worked through all this strange stuff with Abigail and Nabal. For Nabal was a descendant of Caleb, who had been given Hebron (Josh. 14:13,14). Nabal was a big time landowner. And now, as married to Nabal's wife, that inheritance passed to David; and thus he was declared king in Hebron. All through God graciously working through David's sinful desire to murder Nabal and his family.

1Sa 25:41 She arose, bowed herself with her face to the earth and said, Your handmaid is ready to be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord-
She had earlier copied the example of Rebekah (1 Sam. 25:23 = Gen. 24:18,46). And God played along with this, by giving her an opportunity to further copy Rebekah's example by leaving all immediately.

1Sa 25:42 Abigail hurried and got onto a donkey, with five of her maids who followed her, and she went with the messengers of David and became his wife-
We get the impression of haste, of walking away from a prosperous life to become second wife to a man who was an outlaw. She was inspired by Rebekah's example (see on :41), who also took her maids and left immediately with Isaac's messengers.

1Sa 25:43 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they both became his wives-
Heb. 'had taken'. Ahinoam comes first in his list of wives in 2 Sam. 3:2.

1Sa 25:44 Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim-
Gallim was in Benjamin, near Saul's home town of Gibeah (Is. 10:30), so we can read this as meaning that Saul was trying to cement his own leadership of his tribe, thinking that he might at least remain leader of Benjamin even if he lost the kingship over all Israel. He repeatedly tried to vainly get around God's clear words to him, as many do today.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 26

1Sa 26:1 The Ziphites came to Saul to Gibeah saying, Isn't David hiding in the hill of Hachilah, which is before the desert?-
Saul had his spies everywhere, and David also had spies (:4). This complex game of espionage and subterfuge was so far from the peaceful hills where he had played his harp and drawn close to God as a youth. But those peaceful days are used to prepare us for later, more complex tests of our faith.

The first time David spared Saul's life, the Ziphites again had betrayed David to Saul, and in the same area. His men again wanted to kill Saul, and again David restrains them with the same argument about the Lord's anointed. David takes something belonging to Saul and then calls out to him from a safe distance, and both times Saul enquires "Is this your voice, my son David?" (:17 = 1 Sam. 24:16). These similarities point up the way that God repeats situations to test our responses. I've suggested earlier that David's apparent stellar grace to Saul was in fact nuanced by his

transferal of his anger onto Nabal. In that incident, God restrains David from slaying Nabal, by grace. And now David has the opportunity to demonstrate that he's learnt the lessons.

1Sa 26:2 Then Saul went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph-
David in the Psalms records how he hated those who 'rose up' against him, and that includes Absalom. Saul 'rose up' [NEV "went down"] against David (s.w. 1 Sam. 25:29; 26:2), and then evil men 'rose up' against David out of his own family (2 Sam. 12:11 s.w.), especially Absalom who rose up against his father (2 Sam. 18:31,32 s.w.). But David has a tendency to assume that all who rose up against him were arising against God. It's not always so that our enemy is God's enemy. Relationships and the hand of God in human affairs and relationships is more complex than that. And David in Ps. 139:21,22 goes further, to assume that his hatred of people is justified, because they must, he assumes, hate God because they are against him. Solomon seems to make the same mistake when he alludes to such 'risings up' in Prov. 28:28. We must note that "all in Asia" turned away from Paul personally (2 Tim. 1:15), and yet according to the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Rev. 2,3, there were many faithful individuals amongst them.

1Sa 26:3 Saul encamped by the road on the hill of Hachilah, which is before the desert, but David stayed in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul had come after him into the wilderness-
A group of 3000 men on the move (:2) would have created a fair dust cloud. But it seems that David "saw" this in that he heard it, and need to confirm Saul's presence there (:4).

1Sa 26:4 David sent out spies and found that Saul had certainly come to that place-
The sending out of spies is associated with taking the land of Canaan; it seems from :5 that David was buoyed up by his marriage to Abigail and the encouragement taken from the Divine judgment upon Nabal. Although he will go "down" again by 1 Sam. 27:1, he seems here very proactive and not on the back foot against Saul.

1Sa 26:5 David set out and came to the place where Saul had encamped. He saw the place where Saul and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his army were lying; Saul lay among the wagons and the people were encamped around him-
As noted on :5, David is not so much on the run from Saul, but seeking him out. After the assurance received in 1 Sam. 25 that God would avenge him against Saul, and with Abigail so strongly encouraging him in this regard, it could be argued [although see later] that David now sets out to demonstrate to Saul that he is not going to avenge himself. I therefore suggest that he intentionally went into Saul's camp to take away Saul's private property but not slay him. We can sense the encouragement of his Godly wife Abigail in this mission. For a large burden of her message to him in 1 Sam. 25 was that he would not be slain by Saul, and if he followed the path of not avenging himself, he would surely become king.

1Sa 26:6 Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? Abishai said, I will go down with you-
As explained on :5, David can be read [but see later] as proactively seeking to get

close to Saul but not slay him, so fired up is he with the idea of not avenging himself and inviting God to act against Saul by his own lack of vengeance. But he still seemed to want some company in this bold mission. It seems Ahimelech turned down the invitation and only David and Abishai went (:7).

The situation here differs from that in 1 Sam. 24 when David previously spared Saul's life. Here, he intentionally goes out to find Saul. David states in :15 "Someone came to destroy the king". The Hebrew, *echad,* means one specific person. Who was that person- Abishai, or David? Surely David. For it was he who proposed 'going down to Saul' and invited another warrior to accompany him. My suggestion is that David went down to Saul with the intention of killing / destroying him. He didn't come to just teach Saul another lesson by stealing his spear. He came to destroy him. "Go down" can allude to physical descent into the valley, but the idiom is of attacking. The same word is in :10, "descend into battle". "There came a man to destroy the king" (:15) uses the same word as in :7 when David and Abishai "come" to Saul.

So to summarize. David restrained himself from killing Saul in 1 Sam. 24. But he then takes offence at the drunken words of Nabal about him in 1 Sam. 25, and sets off to murder Nabal, his wife, kids and animals. His apparent restraint from killing Saul now appears not so stellar, because he had only transferred that desire to murder onto his anger with Nabal. But he is restrained from doing that by God's grace through Abigail. He again appears to have earned a "well done" by listening to Abigail. But again, this is nuanced. Because he then sets off to murder Saul. And pulls out of it at the very last minute. His sneaking through the guards and 3000 soldiers encamped around Saul would have been foolhardy without God's help. God empowered him to do this, by making the soldiers fall into a deep sleep. He and Abishai come to Saul and find Saul's spear stuck in the ground by Saul's pillow [AV "bolster"]. This was an obvious psychological invitation to simply take the spear and strike Saul's head with it, killing him in one blow. We recall that earlier David had taken Goliath's weapons and struck his head off with them. All with God's strength and empowerment. We conclude that God was showing David that indeed he could slay Saul. David was confirmed in his death wish concerning Saul. But he chose a higher path. And to his huge credit, David pulls out of it at the very last moment, and also avoids the temptation to take up Abishai's offer of doing the job rather than David's own hands. Although again this act of self control and bringing himself under restraint is nuanced- because he seems to transfer his death wish against Saul onto Abner (see on :16). And so oftentimes it is with man. Our finest moments and deeds and words are often in fact nuanced by a lack of totality in their devotion. Indeed all our righteousness is as filthy rags. Although the conscience can be cleansed, in the Lord Jesus. And we marvel that for all this, David was beloved by God and seen by Him as a man after His own heart.

1Sa 26:7 So David and Abishai came to the army by night and Saul lay sleeping among the wagons, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the soldiers lay around him-

The cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed in close up, so that we can envisage the situation. AV has "within the trench". The idea is that the wagons were arranged in a circle around Saul, giving him maximum human protection, and probably reflecting his paranoia of being slain.

1Sa 26:8 Then Abishai said to David, God has delivered your enemy into your hand

today. Now therefore please let me strike him to the ground with one stroke of my spear; I will not strike him a second time-
This whispered conversation was absolutely contrary to the entire spirit of David's mission in visiting Saul (see on :5). David could have reasoned that his hand would not be upon Saul if Abishai slew him. But he realized that we are not to get around God's word. Indeed God had delivered Saul into David's hand, but that didn't mean that David had to kill him. GNB suggests Abishai wanted to slay Saul with his own weapon just as David had done to Goliath: "Now let me plunge his own spear through him and pin him to the ground with just one blow". This kind of out of context allusion to Biblical history was used by Saul too, and is a warning to us.

As David had been restrained from murdering Nabal by Abigail, so now David restrains Abishai. We are to do for others spiritually what God, by grace, has done to us.

1Sa 26:9 David said to Abishai, Don't destroy him, for who can put forth his hand against Yahweh's anointed and be guiltless?-

David's argument against killing Saul was that he didn't want to be guilty of slaying Yahweh's anointed. But he could have personally gotten around this by allowing the eager Abishai to do it. But he was spiritually mature enough to realize that sin can be committed vicariously and we cannot seek to cleverly get around Divine principles.

We are all anointed in that we are in Christ, the anointed (2 Cor. 1:21). The same radical respect which David showed, we should show to each other. David's attitude seems to have influenced Saul's men, for his armour bearer refused to slay Saul (1 Chron. 10:4,5). But David's attitude towards Saul was actually an encouragement to himself. For he too was Yahweh's anointed, and no hand could be lifted against him unless Yahweh allowed it. The same phrase "lift up the hand against" in the context of murder is used of how Saul's guards refused to kill the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:17). For they too were anointed as priests. Yahweh's anointed referred to His priests as well as His kings.

1Sa 26:10 David said, As Yahweh lives, Yahweh will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go into battle and perish-
This indeed happened. It was the fulfillment of 1 Sam. 12:25: "But if you still do wickedly you will be consumed, both you and your king". "Perish" is s.w. "consumed"; David seems aware of Samuel's words and is alluding to them. In the face of so much Divine activity to save them, they would be destroyed if they continued to work against God's efforts to save them. And indeed Saul and Israel were "consumed" in the massacre by the Philistines. It was because despite all God's efforts with them, they had continued to "do wickedly".

1Sa 26:11 Yahweh forbid that I should put forth my hand against Yahweh's anointed; but now please get the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go-
Yahweh had indeed restrained David from killing Nabal and his family in 1 Sam. 25, and now David was reflecting that by restraining Abishai from doing so, and asking Yahweh to continue to forbid or restrain him from murdering Saul.

David was tested by God in the matter of sparing the life of his enemy Saul- and he came through the test with flying colours (1 Sam. 26). But just before that, he had been tested again in the same area in the matter of Nabal- and he initially failed, intent

as he was to take the life of his enemy Nabal (1 Sam. 25). Thus a circumstance can repeat over a matter in which we were previously unsuccessful.

1Sa 26:12 So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head and they went away; and no-one saw it or knew about it, neither did anyone awake, for they were all asleep because a deep sleep from Yahweh had fallen on them-
It seems God would have given Saul into David's hand when "a deep sleep from the Lord" fell upon Saul at the very time David intended to kill him. Saul himself realized that the Lord had delivered him into David's hand to kill him (1 Sam. 24:18). God thus confirmed David in his intentions- and yet at the last minute, it seems, David chose an even higher level; of love and deep respect for this spiritually sick man. The deep sleep from Yahweh recalls that sent upon Adam. Perhaps this was confirming David's plan of his own volition to try to bring Saul to repentance; for the hope was that he would awake to new life created from him.

The cruse or jar of water may have been the jug into which Saul urinated, in obedience to Mosaic commands to keep military encampments ritually pure. For water was typically carried in skins not in an open jar / cruse. The same word is used of the widow's cruse of oil. And the Hebrew for "water" also refers to urine, translated elsewhere "piss" in the AV. Perhaps this was to bring Saul's mind back to how David had earlier chosen not to slay him in the cave whilst Saul was going to the toilet. David took away the spear, the symbol of Saul's kingship, and took it to himself. He invites Saul to send a man to get it back. But surely Saul ought to have responded "No, keep it. I'm not worthy to be king, I've been rejected from the kingship, you're to be the next king, you keep it". But he doesn't. We perceive that David, in love for Saul, was seeking to give him opportunities to repent. And this is how we should act to even our worst enemies.

1Sa 26:13 Then David went over to the other side and stood on the top of the hill far off, a great space being between them-
All this was carefully planned. Saul was at the foot of "the hill of Hachilah" (:3), and this presumably was where David stood.

1Sa 26:14 and David called to the army and to Abner the son of Ner, Don't you answer, Abner? Then Abner answered, Who are you who calls to the king?-
Abner, father of Ner, had a son and a father also called Ner, meaning "light" or "lamp". But darkness had been sent upon him. We get the impression that David was particularly hostile to Abner. Ner was Saul's uncle (1 Sam. 14:50). Abner had been captain of the army at the time of David's victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:55); perhaps he was the logical one to have fought Goliath, but he lacked David's faith. He therefore had a particular jealousy complex against David.

1Sa 26:15 David said to Abner, Aren't you a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord, the king? Someone came to destroy the king your lord-
The criticism of Abner seems rather extreme seeing God had made Abner fall asleep; see on :16. But perhaps Abner was guilty because the falling asleep was in confirmation of his own attitude. "Someone", *echad*, is specifically one person; see on :6.

1Sa 26:16 What you have done is not good. As Yahweh lives, you are worthy to die

because you have not kept watch over your lord, Yahweh's anointed. Where are the king's spear and the jar of water that was at his head?-

"You are worthy to die" means "You will surely die"; the same phrase in 1 Sam. 30:31; 2 Sam. 12:5. This is a death threat to Abner. We enquire why David maxes out on Abner- who after all had been given a deep sleep by Yahweh so that he was unable to protect Saul. I suggest again that David is transferring his desire to kill Saul onto Abner, just as he had transferred it on to Nabal earlier. It seems David learnt only a little from each of the incidents in the previous chapters, and was still transferring his anger with Saul onto others- rather than forgiving Saul from the heart and meaning what he meant when he spoke of not touching Yahweh's anointed. Abner later goes over to David's side, and when he is tragically stabbed to death by one of David's own men [Joab], David gives a eulogy in which he presents Abner as truly having top bloke status with him. Abner therefore presents as not a bad man in the end. But here, David is seething with anger against him; we feel that anger seething through these recorded words. But it was illegitimate anger, anger wrongly placed- because David had simply transferred his anger with Saul onto Abner.

David has a clear belief that the man anointed by God is not to be slain. But he himself was God's anointed king. His respect of Saul's anointing was therefore the guarantee that he himself would not be slain, as God's anointed. We could wonder whether David's extreme emphasis upon not killing or harming Yahweh' anointed was because he hoped that this would be a guarantee that he too, as Yahweh's anointed, would not be harmed or slain. We are left to ponder such motives in Biblical characters, because we must likewise ponder our own motives. In 1 Sam. 26, David mocks Abner for not guarding Saul, Yahweh's anointed, and proclaims him worthy of death; but Abner had been struck by a deep sleep from Yahweh so he was innocent really of this. Likewise when the Amalekite comes to David with the news that he had slain Saul in his death throes, David has the man killed because he had killed Yahweh's anointed. This appears extreme. David certainly had no value for human life by behaving like this. So... we ponder whether his extreme position about "Yahweh's anointed" was purely motivated. As suggested above, he may possibly have been thinking that if he displayed respect for Yahweh's anointed, then Yahweh would not allow him to be slain- as he too was Yahweh's anointed. And possibly he was seeking to inculcate in Israel a respect for Yahweh's anointed, in order to safeguard himself [as also Yahweh's anointed] from ever being murdered by his own people.

This approach answers questions which otherwise appear to have no good answer:

- Why did David go down to Saul?
- What is the function of the record of David ranting at Abner rather than at Saul?

Often David calls Saul his master, describing himself as Saul's servant (1 Sam. 17:32,34,36; 20:8; 24:6; 26:16,19; 29:3,4; 30:15). This was no formal "Sincerely your brother and fellow-servant". This was a real conscious putting of himself down, as the Lord Jesus felt he was a worm rather than a man (Ps. 22:6). If only we would concentrate upon our own status and show some true respect for others on account of their being in the ecclesia, having even been anointed spiritually at their baptism (2 Cor. 1:21) as Saul was.

David says that the servants of Saul are "worthy to die" because they fell asleep as a result of "a deep sleep from the Lord" which fell on them, and therefore didn't protect Saul (1 Sam. 26:12,16). Were they really that guilty of death for this? There

doesn't appear to be any Biblical command David was quoting. We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

1Sa 26:17 Saul knew David's voice and said, Is that your voice, my son David? David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king-
This was precisely the situation in the previous such incident in 1 Sam. 24:16. The lesson was being repeated. We wonder why Saul queries whether this is really David's voice. Perhaps there was a considerable distance between them; or David's voice was strained by emotion; or Saul so wished this was all a dream and this hadn't really happened. Again, each of these options has absolute credibility and reflects that this record is true and accurate as to what really happened and was said. It is no cunningly devised fable.

1Sa 26:18 Why does my lord pursue his servant? What have I done? What evil am I guilty of?-
The "why" was a deep rhetorical question, and was still aimed at eliciting repentance in Saul; as was this whole escapade to steal Saul's spear. We marvel at the unceasing desire of God through David for Saul's repentance, even at very late stages. In the type of the Lord Jesus, this looks forward to the Lord's question "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (Jn. 8:46).

1Sa 26:19 Now therefore, please let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If Yahweh has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering-
David simplistically speaks as if "an offering" can resolve any issue with God; he was to mature through the Bathsheba crisis to understand that God wants broken hearts rather than an offering (Ps. 51:18,19). "Stirred up" is the word used for 'entice', 'persuade' etc., and is used of God stirring up or psychologically stimulating David to number Israel (2 Sam. 24:1). This is how His Spirit works. And we know that His evil Spirit worked upon Saul. But David knows this is not an irresistible influence from God upon those He just decides to destroy; through repentance and sacrifice, things would be different. Hence GNB: "If it is the LORD who has turned you against me, an offering to him will make him change his mind".

But if it is men who have done it-
We get the impression from the record that it was Saul who was creating this false accusation, as part of his paranoid mindset that had jumped from one conspiracy theory to another. It was Saul who was influencing men to think like that. But David had clearly chosen his words carefully for this brief speech. He seeks to give Saul the benefit of the doubt, as grace does (see on 1 Sam. 24:8), and to make it as easy as possible for Saul to repent. He sets us a stellar example for behaviour in interpersonal conflict.

May they be cursed by Yahweh, for they have driven me out so that I can't have a part in Yahweh's inheritance; they have said 'Go and serve other gods!'-
This remains an abiding lesson; for this is the result of driving people away from the visible sanctuaries and meetings of God's people.

David seems to have held the idea that Yahweh could only be worshipped in the land of Israel- hence he blames Saul for driving him out of the land and thus making acceptable worship impossible for him. This was the same misunderstanding as held by the exiles in Babylon and also Jonah; and yet for all that misunderstanding, David was still a man after God's own heart. Saul drove David away from his presence and

that of Yahweh, to become a fugitive and vagabond; Saul would not accept any sacrifice from David (1 Sam. 26:19). This has so many connections with the driving out of Cain in Gen. 4:14. In other words, Saul was saying that David was not spiritually fit to be in the land and must therefore be destroyed. So many of the Psalms contain references to Saul's smear campaign against David (Ps. 27:12; 31:13; 109:23 cp. 1 Sam. 26:19). This frequency of reference in itself indicates the weight with which this tragedy rested upon David's mind.

David's men represent the followers of the Lord Jesus (cp. Heb. 13:13). David's motley crew were idolaters and bitter men, "them that are set on fire... whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Ps. 57:4). So rough were they that David says that having to live with them almost destroyed him spiritually. This typology would explain why the body of Christ seems [at times] full of mixed up men and women with hard words and a tendency to idolatry- who eventually will be the rulers in Messiah's Kingdom, after the pattern of David's men.

This is another example of thoughts and attitudes being understood as effectively spoken words. David argues that being driven out of Israel led to worshipping idols, and yet he had taken his parents to Moab. Perhaps they had turned away from Yahweh as a result.

David's reasoning is that if he has sinned and Saul is judging him for it, then the matter could be resolved by Saul saying what the sin was, and then all David needed to do was to offer a sacrifice and the matter should end. David reveals a very shallow transactional view of atonement for sin. Just offer a sacrifice and all must be good. And there should be no further consequence nor judgement. Although his sin with Bathsheba wasn't God's will, God used it to educate David in these areas. He learned that sin may be forgiven but still has consequences. And he learnt God's grace, in that he was brought to realize that there was no sacrifice that could deal with his sin.

This second option was clearly that which David liked to assume was the case, as he insists the first option couldn't be true, in that he has no unforgiven sin that Saul may judge him for. David's position here is like he had when he spared Saul's life before. He says that Saul is just believing slander about him. But he is in this case whitewashing Saul's persecution of him. Saul was not a victim of misinformation. He had been informed by God through Samuel that he was not to be king, and was to be replaced by David. Saul cannot be justified on the basis that he was merely misinformed about David. Likewise at Saul's death, David appears to whitewash him and his behaviour. I suggest David was doing something often observed. The abused whitewash their abuser but then transfer their feelings onto another person, who is often a minor player in the scene. And so David transfers his anger onto Abner. We don't need to read psychology but rather just slowly and carefully read these Bible accounts, as they reveal human psychology to us. And in this case, total forgiveness would have removed the anger and broken the circles.

1Sa 26:20 Now therefore, don't let my blood fall to the earth far from the presence of Yahweh-

See on 1 Sam. 27:1. GNB "Don't let me be killed on foreign soil, away from the LORD". David seems to be saying that Saul's persecution was driving him out of the land of Israel to Gentile lands such as Achish in Gath where he had a strong chance of death. But he was wavering in believing the promise that he would indeed become king, a promise so firmly believed in by those close to him like Jonathan and Abigail.

He also, like the exiles, seems to mistakenly think that Yahweh's presence is only in the land of Israel.

For the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains-

Saul "sought" David, implying a great level of mental effort (1 Sam. 19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the type of Christ, the Jews sought to kill the Lord (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8). This reflects the broken down psychological state of David. He felt himself as good as dead, powerless, tiny and insignificant as a flea. He had a low self image.

Partridges can easily be caught as they tend to gather in groups [coveys] in fields. It was a disproportionate expenditure of effort to go hunting just one of them in mountains. Partridges were hunted by repeatedly making them rise up in flight until they were too exhausted to mount up again- and then they could be captured and killed. This is how David felt, and it leads to his collapse of faith in 1 Sam. 27:1, where he concludes that Saul is going to capture and kill him. The outlaw life had finally exhausted him in every way.

1Sa 26:21 Then Saul said, I have sinned-

The very words of Judas (Mt.27:4). Again, we see clearly David as a type of Christ.

Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes today-

David alludes to Saul's words in Ps. 49:8 "life is costly", s.w. "My soul was precious". David is alluding to this; Saul's human life had been precious or costly to him, but he was unable to redeem Saul eternally. Only God could do that, if Saul by faith accepted God's grace. The death and life of Saul had been precious in David's eyes, and so David's life was precious in Yahweh's eyes (s.w. Ps. 116:15). Again we are taught that God's attitude to our salvation and our life is directly related to our attitude to the life and salvation of others; and this is why we are to perceive the value, the preciousness, of human life and salvation. It is why making others stumble from the path to eternal life is so serious to God.

I have played the fool, and have erred very seriously-

Saul "erred" or 'wandered' out of the way; this is s.w. Ps. 119:10 "let me now wander". David seems to have initially written Ps. 119 in his wilderness years; he is asking to be stopped from going the path of Saul. We recall that Samuel had rebuked Saul as a "fool" when Saul is first told that the kingship had been removed from him and would be given to David (1 Sam. 13:13). Saul understood very clearly what was happening. His personal spiritual salvation was still possible if he had just accepted that he could not be king. But his last words, in his death throes, reflected a concern that he would be dishonoured by the Philistines. Appearance became all important to him, once he had tasted power and kingship.

1Sa 26:22 David answered, Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and get it-

David clearly distrusts Saul and will not even walk over to him to return his spear. He had earlier refused that spear at the time of the Goliath battle, and he does so again now. Forgiveness and grace must be shown even to the likes of Saul, but this is not

the same thing as trusting the person again; at least not until they have acted in such a way as to rebuild trust.

"With his spear in his hand" is the image we are repeatedly given of Saul in the records. It was the symbol of his kingship, and he was desperately gripping hold of it rather than giving it up as he should have done. Whether at home, sitting under a tree (1 Sam. 22:6)... he is pictured as madly gripping on to it. He even sleeps with the spear in the ground next to him (1 Sam. 26:7). In this lies the significance of David taking the spear from Saul but then returning it to him. What should Saul's response have been? To tell David to keep the spear and be king, whilst he retired and walked quietly with his God (1 Sam. 26:21,22). And it was that gripping on to power that was his death. If the Amalekite is to be believed, he said that Saul at his last end "was leaning on his spear" (2 Sam. 1:6), presumably before falling upon his own sword in suicide (1 Sam. 31:4). David by contrast had learnt from his victory over Goliath "that Yahweh can give victory without sword or spear" (1 Sam. 17:47).

1Sa 26:23 Yahweh will reward every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, because Yahweh delivered you into my hand today and I wouldn't put forth my hand against Yahweh's anointed-

This sounds rather self righteous and legalistic, as if David is saying that he has consciously gone up to Saul that night and refused to take his life, in order to get a reward for his righteousness. He comes over as self congratulatory in the extreme. We can also muse as to whether "Yahweh delivered you into my hand" suggests David was given the option of killing Saul; but he chose a higher level.

David's logic here seems to be saying that he only spared Saul so he would be spared, and that nuances his apparent grace to him. To have in the hand means to have power over. And throughout 1 Samuel, when Yahweh delivered enemies into the hand of His people, it meant that the enemies were to be slain (1 Sam. 14:10,12,37; 17:46,27; 23:4,14; 24:10; 28:19; 30:23). David had Saul in his hand. Possibly God gave him the chance to kill Saul. David could have legitimately killed him. The soldiers were made to sleep by God, and Saul's spear [which he had earlier thrown at David] was there right by Saul's head. And Abishai was offering to do the job. David's refusal to kill Saul was therefore highly commendable. David went out to kill him, he could have killed him, God set up the opportunity to do so, but at the last moment David chose a higher path.

1Sa 26:24 As your life was respected this day in my eyes, so let my life be respected in the eyes of Yahweh and let Him deliver me out of all oppression-

David was soon disbelieving this logic in 27:1. Heb. "save me from all distress". David later reflects in Ps. 34:6 that he, the poor lowly man, has indeed been saved from all his distress. But Ps. 34 is titled as having been written after David escaped from Gath the first time, in 1 Sam. 21. It seems David rewrote his Psalms, tweaking them as new experiences occurred which confirmed his earlier deliverances. And so he now makes this edit to Ps. 34 after his deliverance from Saul and his realization that his prayer of 1 Sam. 26:24 "Save me from all distress" had been answered.

As suggested on :23, David appears to have consciously pulled off this feat of sneaking up on Saul as he slept in order that his life should be respected and valued. This could reflect a very low self image and a craving for respect and being valued; his self image seems very low to describe himself as a flea (:20).

1Sa 26:25 Then Saul said to David, May you be blessed, my son David. You will do

great things and will surely triumph. So David went on his way, and Saul returned home-

Saul sought to "prevail against him" (Ps. 13:4), but Saul here used the same word in telling David (in a rare moment of reality and humility) that he knew that David would prevail against *him*. Those flash moments of reality and humility which Saul had are to be our warning. The Psalms condemn him as generally proud. We must live life in a spirit of humility, rather than just experiencing a few flash moments of it.

"Triumph" is the word used about David triumphing over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:9). Saul perceived in David's prevailing over / overcoming Goliath a sign that David would ultimately prevail to become king in his place; the "great things" refer to the things of the future kingdom. Saul realized that Samuel had indeed chosen his successor as king, and it was David; and that kingship was guaranteed by his victory over Goliath. For Saul to seek to kill David when David had overcome even Goliath... was therefore futile. Saul realized this, but obsessively continued in it. Such is the obsessive, blind nature of jealousy.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 27

1Sa 27:1 David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the Philistines, then Saul will give up looking for me any more in Israel and I will escape from him-

I suggested on 1 Sam. 26:20 that David was mentally, spiritually and physically exhausted at this time. He has just complained that Saul's persecution was driving him out of Israel into the territories of idol worshippers. And it seems he is making this a self fulfilling prophesy, because his faith now takes a nosedive. It's a classic example of self talk affecting behaviour, in the end. For "David said in his heart" that he would perish by Saul's hand, even though we have just learnt again in 1 Sam. 26 that Saul was in fact placed by God in David's hand. David has stated clearly in the wilderness Psalms that he feels absolutely in God's presence, even as if he is on the lid of the ark, with the cherubic wings overshadowing him- despite not being near the sanctuary. But his faith in this reality has well nigh collapsed in 1 Sam. 26:20 GNB "Don't let me be killed on foreign soil, away from the LORD". He sees Yahweh as only present in Israel, and considers Him absent from Gentile lands. But David's Psalms say the opposite. It can be that we believe and think on a spiritual level one moment, and then in a quite opposite way the next hour or day. Or it can be that at the very same time, we on one level believe and yet on another level, we don't. Yet David was the man after God's own heart. This contrast between David's words in the Psalms and his historical reality isn't necessarily hypocrisy. It is what it is to be human, when man at his best still has righteousnesses which are filthy rags. It may be that David is not being presented as more hypocritical or duplicitous than any other man. It's simply that we have so much information abut him that we are enabled to get insight into how a Godly man actually is in practice. And this is a great comfort. For we all are disappointed with our failure to persistently, consistently and totally attain to total faith and spiritual mindedness. Perhaps we have these snapshots into David's psychology as comfort to us.

David has just stated that one day Saul will perish in battle (26:10), so he need not make Saul perish himself. But now his self talk has persuaded him that it is he who shall perish. Again we see how many can on one hand believe and be so spiritual,

but on another, be so faithless. Or how whatever peak of faith we reach at one moment will not carry over into the future. Just as Saul's moment of repentance didn't. We live in an eternal now, with no credit, as it were, for any past strengths. Another example: "Nothing better" is literally 'there is no good for me'. But Ps. 119 has David often saying he hopes for "good" according to God's word of promise to him, e.g. "Do good to Your servant, according to Your word"

As noted on 1 Sam. 20:3 ("there is but a step between me and death"); 26:20, when David feels Saul is about to succeed in killing him, we might have wished to see at times more faith in Samuel's prophetic word that David should become king. His faith in that word went up and down, with 1 Sam. 23:17 being a high point in it, and 1 Sam. 27:1 being the low point in it. It is to this time that he alludes in Ps. 119:25: "My soul is laid low in the dust; revive me according to Your word!". David felt at times that he would surely perish ["in the dust"] at Saul's hand. But he was revived from that depression by his faith in God's prophetic word that he would indeed one day be king and Saul's persecution would pass. David felt that he would one day be slain by Saul, yet in Ps. 13:3 and often in the Psalms he persuades himself, in the course of the same prayer, that in fact God will save him and keep His promise to make him king in Saul's place. Psalm 13 is an example: "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart every day? How long shall my enemy triumph over me? Look, and answer me, Yahweh my God. Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death... But I trust in Your grace. My heart rejoices in Your salvation. I will sing to Yahweh, because He has been good to me". This leads us to think that David was not so much wavering in faith over time, but at one and the same time having both faith and unbelief. Which surely all of us can relate to. This going over to the Philistines to fight for them as a mercenary was a total lack of faith in the word of Yahweh about David which Abner recalls in 2 Sam. 3:18: "Yahweh has said concerning David: 'I will deliver My people Israel from the hands of the Philistines and all its other enemies through My servant David'".

The Hebrew is literally 'he said to his heart'. We see here another of many suggestions that man has as it were two people within him, there's a battle going on between the voice of the flesh and the real heart of David. David's heart was after God's own heart. But at this point, that heart listened to the other voice within him. This is the voice or 'person' Paul speaks of in Romans 7, and what the Bible at times calls 'satan' or 'the devil', the adversary / false accuser. David kept telling himself that Saul would defeat him, and he acted accordingly, and his negative self-talk led him into a faithless situation. Moses likewise said within himself "I am a foreigner in this land" – and his self-talk led to the very public 'word' of naming his son 'Gershom' (Ex. 2:22). Yet it seems that David later perceived his error, and the importance of self-talk. For in the Psalms, he characterizes the wicked in Israel as being distinguished by what they say in their heart, in their self-talk. Take Psalm 10: "He has said in his heart, "I shall not be moved"... he has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see it"... he has said in His heart "You (God) will not require it"" (Ps. 10:6,11,13). Or we could also conclude that at one and the same time as realizing the importance of positive self talk, David also fails in this.

1Sa 27:2 David and the six hundred men who were with him left and went to Achish the son of Maoch, king of Gath-

I suggest that David was at very low ebb here spiritually. He had taken refuge with Achish in Gath before and nearly perished because of it; for this was the home town of Goliath. Afterwards, God had sent him against the Philistines in 1 Sam. 23 to help

him realize that he was not to consider refuge with them again. For his defeat of them at Keilah was intended by God to make David realize he had now burnt his bridges with the Philistines. So now when he again goes there, he is really going against God's education of him and intention for him. And yet by grace he is preserved.

David had 600 soldiers and their families with him- a large entourage of probably a few thousand people. He had apparently run a protection racket involving Nabal, guarding sheep and isolated farmsteads. He was a military force to be reckoned with, as shown by his behaviour whilst with Achish. Saul had 3000 men under his command, David had 600. We pause to enquire whether David was solely a pious shepherd boy who was fleeing from Saul's obsessive persecution. He was a considerable chieftain, with a strong military reputation. And we enquire whether as time progressed, he was not in some way thinking of taking the throne from Saul by force, whilst sparing Saul's life. And Saul correctly perceived this. Again we wonder at the contrast between this historical David, and the David of Ps. 119 and elsewhere who is waiting patiently in faith for God's word of promise to him to come true. At the same time as having that faith, he was certainly giving the appearance of trying to make it come true in his own strength. This may account for his self talk at this time, that Saul would one day win, and therefore he offered himself to Achish as a mercenary. There is further evidence from 1 Chron. 12 that David was joined by some of Saul's disillusioned warriors, and that David's intention was to use this large force "to make war against Saul": "The following joined David at Ziklag while he was still in hiding from Saul son of Kish; these were the warriors who gave support in battle; they were armed with the bow and could use both right hand and left hand to sling stones or shoot arrows with the bow; they were kinsmen of Saul from Benjamin... Of Manasseh also there fell away some to David, when he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle; but they didn't help them; for the lords of the Philistines sent him away after consultation, saying, He will fall away to his master Saul to the jeopardy of our heads" (1 Chron. 12:1,2,19). This seems to imply that David was fully intending to go with the Philistines to attack and kill Saul, and then to be made some kind of vassal king of Judah on behalf of the Philistines. This was politics at its worst, and a far cry from the David who twice refused to slay Saul and instead wanted to wait for God's word of promise to come true.

1Sa 27:3 David lived with Achish at Gath with his men, each one with his household, and David had with him his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife-

This was a major move by the Philistines, to allow 600 Israelite soldiers (:2) to live with them- under the leadership of David, who had slaughtered so many Philistines. And in addition, their wives and children apparently came with them. They would have formed a significant proportion of Gath's population. It was normal that there would be general opposition to these foreigners coming in to live amongst them; not to mention pressure on resources. See on :5. We get the impression that it was Achish alone who so wanted it. Quite why, we cannot immediately discern. It was clearly of God, to grant David a way of escape from Saul; although it was also not the ideal refuge which God wanted him to take (see on :2). Again we see God confirming us in the way we choose to take, even if it isn't a good path.

1Sa 27:4 When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath he stopped searching for him-

Saul had a network of spies watching David (1 Sam. 18:20,24; 19:11,19; 23:7,13,25;

24:1; 27:4). In the type of Christ, this looks ahead to Mk. 3:2; Lk. 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; Jn. 11:57. Saul "sought" David, implying a great level of mental effort (1 Sam. 19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the type of Christ, the Jews sought to kill the Lord (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8). To the Hebrew thinker, there is an unmistakable similarity between the Hebrew words Shaul and Sheol (grave); it is a matter of pointing. In the same way as Judas personified the Jewish system and the flesh behind it (hence they are both called the devil), Saul too personified what was evil; he was the great enemy, the satan, of David, as the Jews and the flesh were the great satan for Christ. In this we see David as a type of Christ.

That Saul kept hunting David is proof enough that his repentance in 1 Sam. 26 and promise to cease... was but the intense spirituality of a fleeting moment. "Fled" is the same word used of how David had previously fled for fear of Saul to Gath (1 Sam. 21:10). He had been saved from that situation by grace, and would have surely sworn not to make the same mistake again. But we are so slow to learn lessons. Yet still he was a man after God's heart. After going to Achish before, God had told David to smite the Philistines in order to save Keilah. He was trying to get David to burn all bridges with Achish. But David is now trying to rebuild those bridges.

1Sa 27:5 David said to Achish, If I have found favour in your eyes, let me be given a place in one of the cities in the country to live in. Why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?-

I noted on :3 the pressure on resources created by having 600 soldiers and their families living in the same small town. "In the country" would have referred to the territory accepted as Philistine controlled, which Saul would fear to enter lest he be accused of invading the Philistines.

1Sa 27:6 Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day, therefore Ziklag belongs to the kings of Judah to this day-

Ziklag was presumably near Beersheba (Neh. 11:28). "To this day" shows this section was written or edited before the captivity but after the division of Judah and Israel. Parts of the histories were clearly rewritten for the encouragement of the exiles, but from this and other such verses, we can conclude that not every section was. Ziklag had been passed from Judah to Simeon (Josh. 15:31; 19:5) and then passed to the Philistines (1 Sam. 27:6)- because if we don't want the kingdom, it will be lost to us.

1Sa 27:7 David lived in the country of the Philistines for a full year and four months-

LXX "four months", although 1 Sam. 29:3 implies a period longer than that. It was whilst in Ziklag that a significant part of Saul's army defected to David (1 Chron. 12:1-7,20-22), along with some of Saul's own brothers (1 Chron. 12:2). They defected "because of Saul" (1 Chron. 12:1). He was himself personally responsible for these defections. His mental illness and obsession had likely led him to accuse his own army and brothers of being on David's side.

1Sa 27:8 David and his men went and made a raid on the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites; those were the inhabitants of the land from ancient times as far as Shur and Egypt-

"Shur" is literally "the wall", referring to the wall which ran from Pelusium past Migdol to Hero, or perhaps to the line of fortified towns along it, resulting in the name "Mizraim" for Egypt, meaning 'the enclosed / fortified'. Hence LXX "behold, the land

was inhabited, (even the land from Gelampsur) by those who come from the fortified cities even to the land of Egypt".

The note that these peoples were the original inhabitants of the land is an allusion to the fact they should have been driven out by Israel earlier. And so David's wrong behaviour was used by God to further His original purpose, reflective of the mixture of motive we find in David.

1Sa 27:9 David attacked the land and saved neither man nor woman alive; he took away the sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels and the clothing, then he returned to Achish-

See on :11. It's recorded that in the ethnic cleansing which David performed, he took the spoil of those settlements for himself (1 Sam. 27:9 AV). Indeed when he destroyed Ziklag, he took away their herds "and said, This is David's spoil" (1 Sam. 30:20). We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood and lack of integrity in hot blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

However it could be argued that he was fulfilling the command given to Saul to totally destroy the Amalekites and leave none remaining. Saul was empowered to smite the Amalakites (1 Sam. 15:3,7), but he didn't completely do this. As often happens, God then passed on the job to another, in this case David. We can see His hand working in similar ways today. This seems to be the idea of Esther 4:14. If she had not saved her people, then God would have pursued another plan to the same end. What David did here was surely wrong, but we suspect he justified it by arguing that he was fulfilling the command to totally destroy the Amalekites, which Saul had failed to obey and had therefore been rejected from kingship. It's a classic example of mixed motives- doing what was politically expedient and faithless, under the guise of careful obedience to Divine commandment.

1Sa 27:10 When Achish said, Against whom have you made a raid today? David would say, Against the South of Judah, or against the South of the Jerahmeelites, or against the South of the Kenites-

There are Biblical examples of believers telling lies as acts of faith; Rahab and the Hebrew midwives in Egypt are examples. But David's dishonesty here, which required him to slay every living being in the towns he attacked (:11), seems inexcusable. These areas are specifically listed in 1 Sam. 30:29 as being David's friends and supporters.

1Sa 27:11 David saved neither man nor woman alive to bring them to Gath, thinking, They might inform about us, saying, 'David has done this. This was what he did all the time he lived in the country of the Philistines'-

Innocent people were slain by David's sword for the 'political' reason that he had to keep Achish 'in the dark' about what he was really up to. And so in case a 5 year old say something incriminating later, David simply killed the little boy. So often, unthinkably evil things are done from fear, the fear which is not of faith nor love. For love casts out fear. We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

1Sa 27:12 Achish believed David, saying, He has made his people Israel abhor him so much that he will be my servant forever-

This was also surely David's intention. But he could have avoided this by simply trusting that God's prophetic word for him would come true. The way Achish presents

as naive is probably how he really was; his military leaders were far more realistic about David. But God used this to enable David to have his intended, faithless way of taking refuge in Gath. And yet God by grace saved David from where it all led, by blocking him from fighting Saul at the time of the battle of Gilboa. For surely there was part of David that wanted to do this, and yet part of him didn't want to- reflected in his ambiguous answers when quizzed on the matter. Those ambiguous answers weren't merely reflective of his desire not to fight Yahweh's anointed, but reflected his own mixed feelings- for part of him now wanted to slay Saul and get the Kingdom for himself by violence rather than faithfully waiting for Yahweh's word to fulfil.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 28

1Sa 28:1 In those days the Philistines gathered their armies together to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, You must certainly go out with me in the army, you and your men-

To go and fight God's people, specifically with Saul, Yahweh's anointed, was exactly against David's previous principles. But because he had lied about fighting and killing Israelites, he was now told to go and do it. He was being taught that boasting about things you haven't done is still counted as if you have done them. And he was now being forced to a position where he has to quit his sinful situation.

1Sa 28:2 David said to Achish, Then you will know what your servant can do-

David uses language in a vague way, all part of the great deceit he was showing to Achish as detailed at the end of 1 Sam. 27. That deceit couldn't go on for long; and it was God's grace which brought it to an end.

Achish said to David, Therefore I will make you my bodyguard for life-

David had earlier been Saul's bodyguard, now he was for Achish the Philistine. And again, the situation at the court must have been very politically fraught. For David had done so much evil to the Philistines, and it seems David's acceptance depended solely upon Achish having some personal enthusiasm for him. However this could mean that David was offered this position if he went out and fought against his people. However it seems from 1 Sam. 29:2 that David was already the bodyguard of Achish, and it was accepting this office which was used by God to save him as it meant he was at the rear of the army. It was the wrong decision- for he should have honestly stated he wouldn't fight God's people. But despite his failure, God used it by grace to save him from his hopelessly compromised position.

"Bodyguard" is literally 'the keeper of the head'. But David had previously cut off Goliath the Philistine's head and kept it. Achish is presented as naive, failing to pick up on David's elusive, double meaning statements about his loyalty to "the king" against the king's "enemies" (1 Sam. 28:12 etc.). And thinking that for sure, David has indeed been attacking Judah and now Judah hated him (1 Sam. 27:12), and that David is "an honest man... as an angel of God" (1 Sam. 29:6,9). Achish's military men however present as far smarter, quipping that David again will seek to take off the heads of Philistines (1 Sam. 29:4).

1Sa 28:3 Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city-

We note how Israel loved Samuel and respected him, although they did the very opposite of what he had taught them. We can have an emotional, sentimental

attachment to the things of our religion, whilst having hearts far from God's word in practice.

Saul had put away out of the land those who had familiar spirits and the wizards- Saul apparently had not used a witch before. He clamped down upon something which didn't directly affect him, in an attempt to show zeal for God's law. And this kind of thing goes on in all generations. We recall how the Jews were so zealous for some Mosaic rituals at the very time they crucified the Lord. "Put away" is the same word used for God 'departing' from Saul in :16,21 and earlier. Saul responded to his cutting off for his sins by cutting off others for their sins. It's a psychological classic. Our response to God's judgement should be repentance and release of others in response to our experience of forgiveness. But if we won't experience that, then we respond by transferring our guilt and sin onto others, and judging them for it. So much judgmentalism is a result of this scenario. Saul's rejection from being king was because of his disobedience, and Samuel had commented that disobedience is as bad as witchcraft. It's as if Saul wished to prove Samuel wrong, by condemning witchcraft- thinking that would somehow remove his condemnation for disobedience. Unlike David, Saul always seeks to deal with the judgment for his own sins by passing it off onto others.

1Sa 28:4 The Philistines gathered together and encamped in Shunem, and Saul gathered all Israel and they encamped in Gilboa-
The mutual gathering together of the two armies on opposite sides of a valley recalls the conflict with Goliath. But now David is on the other side, and Samuel is dead. Finer geographical details are given in 1 Sam. 29:1, where "the spring in Jezreel" is now thought to be the fountain at Ain Jalut, "Goliath's fountain", regarded as the scene of the defeat of Goliath. This would have heightened the connections with that battle, and highlighted the absence of David and Samuel.

1Sa 28:5 When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly-
This had happened before with Goliath, and David had urged the Israelites to not let their hearts be troubled. But now David was on the other side, or so Saul understood. He had a premonition of inevitable judgment to come. Instead of repenting, he just wanted to know in advance whether this was "it" or not. And that desire to know God's word was stronger than his desire to repent. And there is a warning in that to those whose passion for technical "knowledge" of God's word seems greater than their personal spirituality. See on :8.

Saul's fear of an enemy army was prohibited in Dt. 20:1: “When you go out to battle with your
enemies, and you see more horses, chariots, and people than you, do not be afraid of them for
your God Yahweh, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you”. Saul says Yahweh is not with him- "God is departed from me" (:15), but this is because Saul doesn't believe God is "with" him. As has often been observed, If God is not with us, who moved?

1Sa 28:6 When Saul inquired of Yahweh, Yahweh didn’t answer him, neither by dreams nor by Urim nor by prophets-
The urim and thummim were two stones associated with the ephod of the high priest, which flashed out binary yes / no answers. But they were apparently with David and

Abiathar, not Saul (1 Sam. 22:20; 23:6; 30:7). He may have tried to get other stones to replace them, but they failed to give answers, and he realized again that God's presence was with David and not himself.

"Saul inquired of Yahweh" but had no answer, and therefore he went to a medium. But in God's final analysis of Saul, Yahweh says that He smote Saul because Saul sinned against God's word by not enquiring of God, but of a medium (1 Chron. 10:13,14). But Saul did enquire of God (see 1 Sam. 14:37 s.w. 28:6), but God didn't answer him (note how often in the records it is stated by contrast that David enquired successfully of Yahweh). The point is that although Saul prayed to God and enquired of His word on the surface, in his heart, he did nothing of the sort; and therefore his prayer and enquiry was reckoned never to have happened. And we must ask how much of our prayer and Bible study is seen by God as being only spoken and read on a surface level. This was exactly the problem of natural Israel. "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled (in prayer) upon their beds" (Hos. 7:14). "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7).

In 1 Sam. 14:38 Saul thinks that God's lack of answer by Urim and Thummim is because someone amongst the people has sinned. But Saul's awful hypocrisy was rebuked now at the end of his life. God refused to give Saul an answer from Urim and Thummim because of his sin in not sincerely enquiring of the Lord.

At this very time, God was answering David by urim as to whether he should pursue the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30:7,8). Clearly, Saul's demise and David's rise are being compared and contrasted. But despite that, Saul personally could still have repented and been ultimately saved.

We note how Saul previously had asked / enquired of God and received no answer (1 Sam. 14:18,19,37-42; 23:6-12), whereas David had asked of God, including using the Urim and Thummim, and received answers (1 Sam. 22:15; 23:2-4,9-12; 30:7,8). Samuel explains that the lack of answer is because God is not with Saul and has "departed" from him (:16). Answered prayer and the gift of direction is therefore part of having God with us in life, answered prayer and the receipt of direction is therefore evidence that Yahweh has not departed from us. This is where an active prayer life is so critical to relationship with God, and likewise answered prayer is presented in the NT as evidence that the Lord abides in us and we in Him (Jn. 15:7).

Saul had been rejected from king in 1 Sam. 15:22,23 because he refused to listen to Yahweh's voice, with the comment that he has effectively committed witchcraft: “Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice. To listen is better than the fat of rams. Because rebellion is divination...". Now he is desperate to hear Yahweh's voice- and he commits divination in order to try to hear it. He is simply living out the truth of Samuel's words of rejection, despite trying so hard to deny those words by clinging on to the kingship. Because Saul didn't hear Yahweh's voice when he had it (1 Sam. 15:19), now he cannot hear it at all.

1Sa 28:7 Then Saul said to his servants, Find me a woman who has a familiar spirit so that I can go to inquire of her. His servants said to him, There is a woman who has a familiar spirit at Endor-

"A familiar spirit" is misleading, and many of the modern versions give something like "witch" or [ESV, GNB] "a medium". LXX has "a divining spirit". It doesn't mean she did actually have any such spirit; but that she was considered as having this. Such people were thought to be able to be possessed by the spirit of dead people, and to therefore speak in their name. But the Bible clearly teaches that the "spirit returns to God" (Ps. 146:4; Ecc. 12:7), and that death is unconsciousness. The spirit of dead

persons don't enter other people. I would go so far as to say that the record of the witch at Endor, who supposedly had a "familiar spirit", is deconstructing this belief. For Samuel himself appears, and speaks directly to Saul, and not through the "medium". The woman therefore screamed in shock when Samuel actually appeared. He was resurrected, briefly, in order to give God's final message to Saul. The people claiming to have "familiar spirits" lay on the ground and mumbled hard to understand words in a voice seeking to imitate the dead person (Is. 29:4) but Samuel appeared in person and spoke clearly to Saul, directly. We also note that Samuel appeared to Saul standing upright, because Saul bowed before him: "Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and showed respect" (1 Sam. 28:14). This was quite different to how the mediums lay on the ground and mumbled words into the dust.

Saul went to the medium because he had got no answer from Yahweh. He got no answer because God had already spoken, and he was still not paying attention to that word. His desire was not for a supernatural message from a medium, but that she raise Samuel so that he could get a message from Yahweh via Samuel. He crossed Philistine lines, walking all night many miles, to try to achieve this. His desire for a new word from Yahweh was huge; although clearly his hope was that Samuel could somehow persuade God to rethink, and to see Saul all good before God as he now faced judgment. Just as a believer may vainly hope their pastor will appear next to them at judgment day, and persuade the Lord to accept them. But the desire for a word from Yahweh all too late is a major theme of the pictures we have of rejection by God. We think of Amos 8:12 "They will wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they will run back and forth to seek the word of Yahweh, and will not find it". Or Ez. 7:26 "They shall seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders". Or how the foolish virgins were desperate for the oil of the word when it was too late. The rejected lamented they were getting no word from Yahweh because they had no prophet to declare it [just like Saul without Samuel]: "We see no miraculous signs. There is no longer any prophet" (Ps. 74:9); "her prophets find no vision" (Lam. 2:9). Mic. 3:6,7 appears to allude to Saul's experience on this very dark final night: "Therefore night is over you, with no vision, and it is dark to you, that you may not divine; and the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be black over them. The seers shall be disappointed, and the diviners confounded. Yes, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer from God". To seek God's word when it is too late is therefore a characteristic of those rejected at God's judgment. Saul had had free access to Yahweh's word through Samuel, and had despised it. Those who refuse to respond to God's word now, and leave their Bibles unopened, are in the same spirit. They will desire that word all too late.

En-dor was one of the Canaanite settlements which Israel had failed to conquer. The woman may have been a Gentile, explaining why she didn't recognize Saul despite his being the tallest man in Israel (Josh. 17:11-13). "The name may come from the term enna durenna, the Hittite term for the gods".

1Sa 28:8 Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothing, and went with two men to the woman by night. He said, Please consult a familiar spirit for me and bring me up the one I name-

Endor was the opposite side of Shunem (:4). Saul would have had to cross enemy lines to get there. Hence his disguise and journey by night. As he was so tall, he was

taking a huge risk. But he did so because he was so desperate to hear God's word, but as noted on :5, instead of repenting, he just wanted to know in advance whether this was "it" or not. And that desire to know God's word was stronger than his desire to repent. And there is a warning in that to those whose passion for technical "knowledge" of God's word seems greater than their personal spirituality.

By taking off his royal clothing, Saul was resigning his kingship. But he puts it on again when he goes into battle the next day. He had taken off that royal robe in the cave in order to defecate, and put it back on again. If he had resigned his kingship to David and repented even at this late stage, he would have been saved. What is so tantalizing is that he comes so close to potential salvation even at his miserable end.

"Bring me up" is literally 'conjure up' and is the same word used in 1 Sam. 15:23, "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft", or literally, 'conjuring up'.

1Sa 28:9 The woman said to him, Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who have familiar spirits and the wizards out of the land. Why then have you set a trap for me, to cause me to die?-

Wizards were really amateur psychologists, who weighed up their clients and were very perceptive of their background and needs. She surely knew this was Saul; he was famed as the tallest man in Israel, and had been apparently reigning 40 years (Acts 13:21). Cutting off "out of the land" would mean they had been forced into exile. She had not, perhaps because she repented, or was retained for her services to the house of Saul. She implies she knows who Saul is- because she says he has set a trap for her.

"Set a trap" is the very word used in the law of how the use of witchcraft would be a setting of a trap or snare for the faithful Israelite (Dt. 12:29-13:5). We could infer from this that the woman was acceptant that witchcraft was a snare, and she didn't wish to enter that snare. She was therefore a repentant witch who was being persuaded to return to her wrong behaviour by Saul. She possibly believes that he has the right on Yahweh's behalf to make an exception for her to do this (:10).

1Sa 28:10 Saul swore to her by Yahweh, As Yahweh lives, you will not be punished for this-

Saul appears to take Yahweh's Name in vain rather too often, for he had likewise sworn to Jonathan that he would not try to kill David. But Saul really tacitly admits that he is Saul, for only he had the power to ensure the woman wouldn't be punished for practicing witchcraft. Although by saying this, he was really playing God. For it was according to God's law that witches were to be punished. And yet he here abrogates God's law, in the name of God.

1Sa 28:11 Then the woman said, Whom shall I bring up to you? He said, Bring Samuel up for me-

The Bible doesn't teach any idea of an immortal soul. Death is unconsciousness. Only at the last day judgment will there be the gift of eternal life and eternal death to those responsible to God. We note that both the witch and Saul believed Samuel to be "down" in the grave and not "up" in heaven. The common idea that the souls of the righteous dead go to heaven on death is not supported in the Bible. This fits with the Biblical language of both good and bad being 'gathered to his kin' (Dt. 32:50) and 'sleeping with one's fathers' (1 Kings 11:43; 15:24; 22:50).

1Sa 28:12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice, and said to Saul, Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!-

LXX "When the woman saw Saul". That Samuel was resurrected is effectively stated in 1 Chron. 10:13 LXX: "Saul asked counsel of her that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of her, and Samuel made answer to him". God resurrected Samuel, and the woman screamed in genuine fear when she saw him. God answers a fool according to his folly (Prov. 26:5). Thus God resurrected Samuel when Saul asked the witch to bring him to life (1 Sam. 28). Of course witches have no power to contact the dead; yet God confirmed Saul in his stupidity. If men choose to follow the vain philosophy of the flesh, God will confirm them in their delusions (2 Thess. 2:11). In accord with this, God punishes men with a recompense which is appropriate for the kind of sin they commit (Rom. 1:27). But the woman composes herself and then tells Saul she knows who he is; but I suggest that she knew this anyway, because Saul was the tallest man in Israel and had been reigning for 40 years at this time, probably all her adult life. He was well known.

"Why have you deceived me?" is word for word what Saul had shouted at his daughter Michal for not letting him murder David in her home (1 Sam. 19:17). And now his words return to him, placed in the mouth of another woman. For by our words we are judged. This was yet another nudge for Saul to repent of his behaviour towards David, and his refusal to accept God's word about the transferral of the kingship to David. Perhaps if he had been willing to do this, even at this late stage, Saul himself may have been saved. Saul is asked many questions, and all of them are rhetorical and actually probing him towards his possible repentance.

It is possible that [as often in Biblical narrative] we have in :12 a summary position, and the following verses explain how this position came about. We could then read :13 as "The king *had* said to her..." etc.

1Sa 28:13 The king said to her, Don't be afraid-
This assurance could only come from Saul as king, waiving his own campaign of condemnation of witches. Only a king could pardon capital offences.

What do you see? The woman said to Saul, I see a god coming up out of the earth-
She speaks in vague terms. She means that a body is ascending out of the earth, in resurrection; the same word for "coming up" is used of this in :15. She uses the term *elohim*, showing that this term doesn't only refer to God Himself. Perhaps she saw a vision of Angels ascending with Samuel; *elohim* ascending is the term used of the vision of Angels ascending upon Jacob in Gen. 28:12. But she speaks of *elohim* as "an old man" (:14) in the singular. This shows that *elohim* doesn't have to refer to a plurality. This demonstration of grammatical usage surrounding *elohim* is useful in correcting those who mistakenly think that *elohim* in the Old Testament refers to God and Jesus. The Bible doesn't teach the person preexistence of the Lord Jesus. *Elohim* 'ascending' is the term used for the end of a theophany (Gen. 17:22; 35:13; Ps. 47:5; Ez. 9:3; 11:24). Perhaps she saw a kind of theophany, which then gave way to the resurrection of Samuel, who then spoke directly with Saul.

I suggested on :7 that the woman may have been a Canaanite. "The Canaanites considered the dead to be divine in the underworld, and so were called Elohim ("gods")", which would explain why she uses the word about Saul.

I suggested on :12 that :12 and :13 are a summary of how the woman later reacted. In this case, when asked to bring up Samuel, she speaks in vague terms of an old man arising dressed as a prophet. This was and is typical of how mediums work. Their skill is in then speaking in a voice which is very different to the voice they have been using to their client. That voice is muttering and vague, and is meant to be the

voice of the recalled dead person. Hence Isaiah mocks mediums for muttering out of the dust with strange noises. The woman was a medium rather than a "witch" as we may now understand a "witch". But the critical thing is that she screamed when she actually saw Samuel, as he was resurrected to speak directly with Saul. And seeing her scream is a pivotal point of the story, proving that indeed Samuel was resurrected, it is introduced in :12 and :13 as a significant aspect of the story, and then the next verses explain how that point came about.

1Sa 28:14 He said to her, What does he look like? She said, An old man is coming up-
LXX "An upright man". The *elohim* who "ascended" (s.w. 'come up') was Samuel. He was a manifestation of God to Saul.

He is wearing a mantle. Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and showed respect-
Wearing the prophetic mantle was typical attire for a prophet. It was that mantle which Saul had torn in 1 Sam. 15, and Samuel had interpreted this as meaning that the kingdom was to be torn away from Saul. As he saw the mantle, he would have remembered this. See on :17, where Samuel uses the word "torn". We note that Saul had removed his kingly clothing in order to deceive, whereas Samuel wears his prophetic clothing. Saul's deceit is thus presented against the truth of God and His word and servant.

1Sa 28:15 Samuel said to Saul, Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?-
We note that Samuel feels that Saul and not the witch has brought him up. The relationship is always between Samuel and Saul directly. Samuel had been resurrected because of Saul. Samuel's question is not a reflection of irritation, as if he had been woken up at 3 AM and was cranky with the interruption. He may well have asked the question in a gentle, caring way- for the question is seeking Saul's repentance and salvation. The answer was intended to be 'Because I now desperately seek the word of God which previously I despised'. But Saul doesn't make that answer.

"Disturbed" is literally 'troubled', and Samuel may be suggesting Saul is like Achan, the troubler of Israel, who stole from the spoil of Jericho just as Saul had done from the spoil of the Amalekites- which was the reason for his rejection. But the hint again would be that as Achan repented frankly and confessed his sin in detail, going to his death perhaps in hope of final salvation- so Saul could have done. Throughout the record there are continual nudges of Saul towards repentance, and we marvel at God's saving grace displayed in this way. God gently tried with Saul right up until his death, and He does the same with so many, even if He foreknows their rejection of all His nudges. Even if the nudges are gentle and rarely spelt out in clear direct terms. Even those who appear to be long gone from God will still be receiving these nudges to return. I cannot believe that man in this life can ever get to a point where repentance is impossible. And so Saul for sure had that possibility right to his miserable end on Gilboa.

This was really a rhetorical question. Saul had done so because he was more interested in knowing his immediate fate, than repenting. For he didn't need to see a resurrected Samuel to make him repent. We note that the conversation is directly between Samuel and Saul. The woman didn't act as a medium or intermediary between them, and so this incident is no evidence that witches or mediums have any real power. See on :21.

Saul answered, I am very distressed, for the Philistines make war against me and God has departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets nor by

dreams. Therefore I have called you so that you can tell me what I should do-
Saul knew what he should do, and what Samuel would essentially answer- "Repent!". But his fascination with knowing his immediate future stopped him from seeing this. And so Samuel gives him the answer, explaining what would happen if he still didn't repent. The fact God departed from him was a sad reflection of how initially God had been with Saul (1 Sam. 10:7). God can both give and take away His Spirit. In Saul's case it was given by the pure grace of how God calls otherwise unspiritual people. But in response to their rejection of spiritual things, it can be withdrawn from them.

1Sa 28:16 Samuel said, Why do you ask me, since Yahweh has departed from you and has become your adversary?-
LXX "and taken part with thy neighbour?". The reference was to David (:17). Yahweh can be a satan / adversary to people. But here the idea is that David, the one with whom God was, was now on the opposing side, with the Philistines. As Saul knew. He must have imagined that God was going to slay him at the hand of David, through David being with the Philistines. But that may indeed have been a possibility within the Divine program, but it didn't work out like that. Saul sees Samuel as somehow separate from God; whereas Samuel says there was no point in resurrecting him, since Yahweh had departed from Saul. He could work no special deal for Saul; Saul had to work it out with God directly. That was the unspoken, implicit message.

The question is rhetorical, perhaps asked in a gentle, seeking kind of way rather than in the spirit of 'This serves you right'. It is as to why Saul has come to Samuel when God has departed from him, as Saul himself states. The answer is that Saul is desperate to see Samuel because he believes a face to face meeting will lead to Samuel asking Yahweh to save Saul, as it were for old times' sake in the relationship between Saul and Samuel. Samuel had been Saul's 'go to' man for God, but it was mere religion, using a man as a kind of backdoor to get to God. Rather like desperately trying to get the funeral of an unbeliever performed by a pastor, in the hope this will save the unbeliever. Saul was condemned because he went to the witch rather than to God. Effectively Saul went to the witch in order to have a meeting with Samuel. But God condemned him for this: "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord slew him" (1 Chron. 10:13,14). We could say that Saul had no personal relationship with God because he didn't want one. Instead of trying to desperately achieve a face to face meeting with Samuel, or get another oracle from God, he should have reflected on the words from God he already had and prayed directly to God in repentance even at this late stage, and got himself right with God. But instead he went the way of religion by seeking to meet Samuel.

1Sa 28:17 Yahweh has done to you as He spoke by me. Yahweh has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbour, to David-
The language of "torn" was appropriate to the mantle which Saul had earlier torn, and which Samuel was now wearing, presumably intact now, representing how the kingdom would be given intact to David. The kingdom was only "given" potentially to David, for it took him some years to establish it under his rulership. David is perhaps called Saul's neighbour to remind him that the essence of the covenant was to love one's neighbour as themselves; and Saul had cruelly broken this through his hatred of David.

1Sa 28:18 Because you didn't obey Yahweh-
Israel did not obey / hearken to the voice of Yahweh, and He did not hearken to their voice in prayer (Dt. 1:45; 9:23; 28:15; Josh. 5:6; Jud. 2:20; 6:10 cp. Dt. 8:20 s.w.). 2 Kings 18:12 states this specifically. God hearkened to Joshua's voice in prayer (Josh. 10:14) because Joshua hearkened to His voice. It was to be the same with Saul. He didn't hearken to God's voice (1 Sam. 15:19) and God didn't hearken to Saul's voice in prayer in his final desperation at the end of his life (1 Sam. 28:18, although he hearkened to the voice of the witch, 1 Sam. 28:23). If God's word abides in us, then our prayer is powerful, we have whatever we ask, because we are asking for things according to His will expressed in His word (Jn. 15:7).

And didn't execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, therefore Yahweh has done this to you today-
"Therefore" suggests that the events of "this day", not the next day, had been done in order to confirm the earlier judgement that Saul had been removed from kingship. But as discussed before, this could have been accepted by Saul, and he could still have been finally saved had he humbly accepted it. And now he has the chance to do that but again refuses, clinging on to His spear, the symbol of the kingship, until he impales himself upon it [if we compare the account given by the Amalekite in 2 Sam. 1].

Saul is condemned because he did not execute [literally "do"] Yahweh's wrath with Amalek (1 Sam. 28:18). In 1 Sam. 11:6, Saul's wrath had been Yahweh's wrath, Saul's spirit was Yahweh's Spirit, they both heard the words about Jabesh and the threat of Nahash, and were filled with kindled wrath. When Saul sought to express that against Nahash, God's Spirit was with him. But with Amalek, Saul had fallen out of sync with God's Spirit. And so that Spirit departed from him. His will was no longer that of his heavenly Father. This was the struggle of the Lord, "not My will but Yours", the subjugation of the human spirit and will to that of God.

We wonder why Samuel didn't mention the obvious- that Saul had sinned by going to a witch, and was fulfilling Samuel's earlier words to him, that Saul's rebellion earlier was as bad as the sin of witchcraft, Heb. 'bringing up', the word used in Saul's request to 'bring up' Samuel. Perhaps Samuel, and God, were prepared to overlook this- but the essence of Saul's problem was his refusal to give up the kingship and to permanently repent of his previous weaknesses and failures. And that is the focus of what Samuel has to say, still therefore hoping, we can infer, that Saul would repent. Because Saul didn't repent, his sin of going to a medium is later mentioned against him.

Saul had twice been rejected by God; regarding not waiting for Samuel and being disobedient in 1 Sam. 13:13 ("You have not kept the commandment of Yahweh your God which He commanded you"), and then about Amalek. Perhaps "Because you didn't obey Yahweh" refers to the 1 Sam. 13 situation, and then the Amalek disobedience of 1 Sam. 15 is referenced. Or perhaps "You didn't obey Yahweh" also refers to the 1 Sam. 15 situation; because Saul's disobedience of 1 Sam. 13:13 was forgiven, and he was given another chance, which he then wasted by not obeying the commandments about Amalek. Such was God's desire to save him, and to change His rejection of him.

1Sa 28:19 Yahweh will deliver Israel and you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Yahweh will also deliver the army of

Israel into the hand of the Philistines-
LXX "Israel with thee... thy sons with thee", emphasizing how Saul's disobedience was to lead many others to destruction with him. This is the characteristic of sin- that it harms others. That they would "be with me" reinforces the teaching that all men, good and bad, go to the same place at death- the unconsciousness of the grave. The differentiation between them, as taught in the Lord's parable of the sheep and goats, is only finally made at the judgment of the last day. Far from supporting any idea of an immortal soul, this passage actually is designed to deconstruct those wrong ideas.

1Sa 28:20 Then Saul fell immediately his full length on the earth and was terrified because of the words of Samuel. There was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all that day and all that night-
Saul had earlier prostrated himself before Samuel in reverence. Now he again falls to the earth as he ought to have done before. He was passing through a figurative death, as did Daniel of whom the same words are used when he falls before the Angel, terrified and with no strength (Dan. 10:8,16,17). Saul now has the chance to realize that the wages of sin is death- and arise in repentance. Even at this late stage. But he refuses. Lying there, he could have accepted that he was having his judgment ahead of time, just as men are often given such opportunities today. But he died still clinging to his spear, the symbol of his kingship which he refused to let go, and impaled himself upon it.

Saul says nothing. There are clear similarities with what happened to Saul who became Paul, falling down and being speechless (Acts 9:7; 16:14). But Paul responded rightly, unlike king Saul. But the similarity shows that king Saul was being given the chance to respond.

1Sa 28:21 The woman came to Saul-
"Came... And saw..." suggests the woman wasn't present earlier. The meeting was between Saul and Samuel, totally without her mediation. LXX "went in". Again the point is made that the conversation was directly between Samuel and Saul; the woman was not acting as a medium between them. See on :15.

And seeing that he was very troubled she said to him, Look, your handmaid has obeyed you and I have put my life in my hands and have done what you told me-
She may intentionally refer to how David put his life in his hands for Saul's sake (1 Sam. 19:5). Perhaps she had repented of her witchcraft and was in fact on David's side.

1Sa 28:22 Now please listen to your handmaid and let me give you some food so that you may eat and have the strength to go on your way-
The contrast is with how Abigail had said these words to David, again in a context of food, and he had had the humility to hear the words of a woman. But Saul was proud to the last.

1Sa 28:23 But he refused and said, I will not eat. But his servants, together with the woman, urged him, so he listened to them. He got up from the earth and sat on the bed-
Literally, he was obedient to her voice. Whereas he had not been obedient to the voice of Yahweh; see on :18. LXX "sat upon a bench", recalling Eli sitting upon a bench the day when he and his sons died during another Philistine invasion. And they too had been told their ministry would be removed and passed to another (1 Sam. 4:13). From

these similarities we see how God's judgments work over the generations according to a similar hallmark; and we are therefore to learn from them.

Saul obeyed the voice of the people and the voice (s.w.) of the sheep and oxen that he covered (1 Sam. 15:24,24). Later he obeys the voice of Jonathan and promises not to kill David (1 Sam. 19:6), and the voice of the witch and of his servants who persuade him against his will to eat (1 Sam. 28:22,23). We have the impression of a man readily persuaded by voices. If he had had a fundamental commitment to obey the voice of Yahweh as he was repeatedly asked, he would not have listened to these other voices. Nor the voices in his own head. Likewise those without a fundamental commitment to God's word are open to all the other voices around them, and likewise have no moral compass nor ethical direction. The Hebrew for 'to hear' is the same as 'to obey'. Samuel had told Saul he would be made to hear or obey God's word (1 Sam. 9:27 "that I may tell you the message of God" uses the word for to hear / obey, the hint being 'that I may make you hear / be obedient to the message'). But he failed to make use of this because he found the voice of other things more attractive to hearken to.

1Sa 28:24 The woman had a fattened calf in the house. She hurried and killed it, and she took flour, kneaded it and baked unleavened bread with it-

Hurrying to dress the fatted calf is exactly the language the Lord uses about the celebrations at the repentance of the prodigal son. Perhaps He perceived that even at this very late stage, repentance was potentially possible for Saul, and the woman [perhaps also repentant] wanted him to repent. It was a kind of potential celebration. But the only thing to possibly celebrate was his repentance. But he still refused. We marvel at God's grace, and the hopefulness of His Son. His refusal to eat perhaps corresponds with that of the older brother in the prodigal parable, who "would not go in" (Lk. 15:28) and likewise went out into the night [as did Judas]. To kill the fatted calf was a major sacrifice for the woman. She surely could have offered Saul other food. I suggest she only did it for spiritual reasons. The only other time we read of flour being kneaded in haste with a calf slain was when Abraham and Sarah did this when the Angels came with the message of life out of death (Gen. 18:6,7). It is not impossible that there is allusion to this, and God was saying that His visitation of Saul through Samuel could be responded to by a fellowship meal. The word for "killed" used of the woman killing the calf is that used for ritual slaughter and sacrifice; and the sacrifice was accompanied by unleavened bread, as sacrifices were meant to be (Lev. 2:3-11). In this case, we have a bookend with how the Saul story began, with him being chosen as king at a ritual meal with Samuel. Perhaps this is why Saul refused it initially. But although he ate it for food, it seems all this potential was lost on Saul. Again we ask, What should Saul have done? He could have humbly repented and gone out to meet his death calm in the knowledge of God's ultimate acceptance. Instead he clung on to his spear to the bitter end, the symbol of his kingship, and committed suicide on it.

1Sa 28:25 She brought it before Saul and his servants and they ate. Then they got up, and went away that night-

They departed into the night (LXX), the language of condemnation. We naturally are invited to imagine Saul's feelings as he walked back that night; for he is the picture of all condemned by God after refusing every effort for their repentance. How a man meets his death is all important. Last minute repentance is always possible, as we see from the thief on the cross. A man may be an idolater all his days and repent at the

end and be saved (Ezekiel). Saul had to die, just as we do, the wages of sin is death, but he refuses to meet that inevitable death with repentance. David sins no less than Saul [keeping the Amalekite cattle cp. David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah seems to weight the balance of sin level in Saul rather than David's favour]. But David repents when confronted with his sins. Saul has always justified himself, transferred the guilt, said the right words [e.g. when confronted by David in 1 Sam. 24,26] and then carried on regardless.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 29

1Sa 29:1 The Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, and the Israelites encamped by the spring in Jezreel-

"The spring in Jezreel" is now thought to be the fountain at Ain Jalut, "Goliath's fountain", regarded as the scene of the defeat of Goliath. This would have heightened the connections with that battle, and highlighted the absence of David and Samuel; see on 1 Sam. 28:4, which also presents this battle in the same terms as that with Goliath.

Other battles had been fought on or near the plain of Esdraelon. Here Deborah and Barak defeated the host of Sisera (Jud. 4:15; 5:21). And here was where Gideon's 300 defeated hordes of Midanites. These similarities were to remind Saul that victory against a vastly superior force was totally possible. He had earlier imitated Gideon and now he was invited to really do so. At the same time, David was leaving behind some of his soldiers in preparing to fight the Amalekites, just as Gideon did. Again we see David and Saul in parallel. They were both invited to follow Gideon's example of faith in victory through a minority. Only David responded positively to this.

In 1 Sam. 28 we have seen Saul in a dilemma, and he isn't helped out of it- because he is impenitent, fundamentally. Now we have David in a dilemma. And he is saved from it. He and Saul sinned about the same, perhaps David moreso. But sin itself isn't the issue. It's man's dealing with it in humility that matters. And so David was preferred over Saul. The king of Israel was called to save Israel from the Philistines (1 Sam. 9:16 "anoint him to be prince over My people Israel, and he will save My people out of the hand of the Philistines"). But it had always been David who had done this- Saul had failed in this regarding Goliath and the liberation of Keilah. Now the Philistines again threatened Israel, and it was the duty of Israel's king to save Israel from the Philistines. Even at this late stage, Saul should have recognized that it was not for him to lead Israel in battle against the Philistines, seeing he had been twice rejected as king, and David was the king God had chosen. What should Saul have done? Desperately beg David to come and be king and lead Israel. But he refused to accept God's word about him right until the end. It was all about him... and not about God's glory and the salvation of His Israel.

The mention of Aphek, not far north of Philistine territory, compares with how in 1 Sam. 28:5, the Philistines are already at Shunem, close to Mount Gilboa where they would fight with Saul. The material in 1 Sam. 29 is backtracking. So when David was dismissed from the Philistine army, they were only at Aphek and had some marching to do before coming to Shunem. So at the point when Saul meets the medium, David is already free from the Philistines and potentially available to Saul. Even at that late point, he could perhaps have resigned the kingship to David and asked for his military help, which may have defeated the Philistines. For the king of Israel was to defeat the Philistines, and by accepting David as that king, Saul may yet have been saved.

"The spring in Jezreel" was likely the “spring of Harod” at which Gideon tested his men (Jud. 7:1). I have noted earlier that Saul had previously imitated Gideon, externally but not in spirit. Possibly the connection with the spring was to desperately seek to remind Saul, even at this late hour, that victory could be given to a far smaller group by God- if they totally trusted in Him as Gideon had. God's patient nudging of Saul towards true faith is amazing to perceive- and it went on right to the end of his life, right to the last day of that life. Just as God works oftentimes with man today.

1Sa 29:2 The lords of the Philistines marched on in units of hundreds and thousands, and David and his men marched in the rear with Achish-
The marching was northwards from Gaza / Gath to the area of Mount Gilboa in the north of the land. Marching in the rear as the vanguard was a place of trust (Is. 52:12). We are left to imagine what desperate plans were going through David's mind. He didn't want to fight his own people, he who had been so careful not to kill Saul. Achish was at the rear, out of danger's way. It appears David was already his personal bodyguard, so David would have been desperately praying that the Philistines would win and he would not be required to fight; or for some Divine intervention to save him. He of course should have done the honest thing and refused to fight. But having failed to do so, he was now in a very compromised situation. It was only by grace that he was saved from it. We have likely experienced such situations ourselves.

1Sa 29:3 Then the lords of the Philistines said, What about these Hebrews?-
This was the grace of Divine intervention. As discussed on :2, David got into it by his own weakness of faith. But God saved him from it now at the last minute by an unforeseen situation. The Philistines refused to have David and his men anywhere near the battle.

Achish said, Isn’t this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or rather these years, and I have so far found no fault in him?-
Achish seems to have been the sole supporter of David amongst the Philistines. Quite why he had this strange sympathy for David, even making him his personal bodyguard, is not explained. Clearly God's Spirit was at work giving this man an unusual attitude towards David. His idea was that David had once been Saul's servant but now was hated by him, and therefore David could be counted on as surely being against Saul. Achish failed to understand the love and grace which David had practiced toward Saul.

"Been with me" is AV "since he fell unto me", in the sense of deserting to his side (as in 1 Chron. 12:19). Achish presents as having totally fallen for David's fake narrative.

1Sa 29:4 But the princes of the Philistines were angry with him and said to him, Send the man back to the place you have appointed for him-
Presumably they refer to Ziklag, perhaps not without a hint of resentment and disagreement that Achish personally had appointed this place for David and his men.

He must not go down with us to battle, in case he turns against us during the fighting-
The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the Greek word *diabolos* to translate the Hebrew 'Satan'. Hence Devil and Satan are effectively parallel in meaning. Thus we read in the Septuagint of David being an adversary [Heb. *Satan*, Gk. *diabolos*] in 1 Sam. 29:4 ["turns against us"]; the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 19:22), Hadad, Rezon and other opponents to Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25). We face a

simple choice- if we believe that every reference to 'Satan' or 'Devil' refers to an evil cosmic being, then we have to assume that these people weren't people at all, and that even good men like David were evil. The far more natural reading of these passages is surely that 'Satan' is simply a word meaning 'adversary', and can be applied to people [good and bad], and even God Himself- it carries no pejorative, sinister meaning as a word.

How better could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord-
Achish chose to interpret the fallout between Saul and David as meaning that David would be loyal to him and not Saul. But his commanders argued the other way. "This fellow" reflects their deep dislike of David.

Than with the heads of these men?-
They recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

1Sa 29:5 Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, 'Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?'-
"Sang" is present tense "sing". The song about David having slain ten thousands of the Philistines was probably a battle song amongst the Hebrews, encouraging themselves by remembering previous victories against the Philistines. It was bizarre that Achish could be so taken in by David's narrative, but here we have an example of how God's Spirit can work in a man's mind.

If indeed Saul reigned literally 40 years (Acts 13:21), this celebration would have been quite some time previously. But the memory of that great humiliation was still very much alive amongst the rank and file of the Philistines. Achish seems so out of touch with these feelings that we wonder if he was himself actually a Philistine, or some non-Philistine who had taken power.

1Sa 29:6 So Achish called David and said to him, As Yahweh lives-
I have noted several times that the favour of Achish towards David was most unusual, and out of step with the feelings of the Philistine people in Gath, home town of Goliath. Here he swears by Yahweh [and you only swore by your own god in those times], and so we wonder whether he had been converted to David's God; hence his particular grace toward David. But David had lied to him repeatedly in giving the impression he had been attacking the Israelites, when in fact he had been massacring various non Israelite settlements. So in this case, Achish came to the one true God through the witness of one of His followers who was not of integrity before Him. This would then be a parade example of where truth must triumph over personalities and the bad advertisement for God given by some of His most apparently devoted followers. If Achish was in fact a quiet worshipper of Yahweh, this would explain his otherwise inexplicable favour towards David.

You have been upright and your conduct with me in the army has been good in my sight; I have not found evil in you since the day you came to me till this day. But

the lords don't approve of you-
This estimation however was based upon David's inveterate lying to him, and David massacring whole settlements lest a single person should survive to tell Achish what was really going on. We wonder how Achish felt afterwards, when he realized how badly he had been deceived; and whether he retained his faith in Yahweh by whom he has just sworn. But "till this day" could be Achish responding to David's double speak, by likewise hinting that David had previously been "good in my sight" until "this day"- when now, David was not good any longer.

1Sa 29:7 Therefore now return and go in peace; do not displease the lords of the Philistines-
To "return in peace" was a phrase sometimes used of returning from a military conflict in victory (Josh. 10;21; Jud. 8:9; 11:31; 1 Kings 22:28). Perhaps Achish is saying that he knows David wants victory, but he as it were grants this to him. David can be the victor without having to fight.

And so David was saved from a terrible hole which he himself had dug, by Divine grace alone. Just as happened the previous time he fled to Gath. And yet all this happens at a time when David has been incredibly weak in faith by living with the Philistines and murdering so many people to cover his lies to Achish.

1Sa 29:8 David said to Achish, But what have I done? What have you found against your servant all the time I have been with you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?-
This is one of those statements which is left purposefully unclear as to its import, so that we can reflect upon it. There may be no correct answer; it is left for our imagination. David may have been gasping thankfulness to God at the deliverance from his hard situation, and just went along with the appearance he had given of being supportive of the Philistines by making this insincere protest. In this case, this was hardly an example of the "integrity" and "uprightness" which David glorifies in his Psalms, and which he insisted he was full of (Ps. 25:21). Indeed he claims that his integrity is the basis of his acceptance by God (Ps. 26:1).

Or it could be that David evidently wanted to fight against Saul alongside the men of Achish, but planned to turn against them and fight for Saul, sandwiching the Philistines between the Hebrews- as they correctly guessed. This would have been suicidal. For Saul wanted to kill him, and the Philistines also would have tried to kill David as a result of this. He would have had no place to run. But even to the point of political suicide and the serious risking of his own life, David so loved Saul his enemy. This true love leads to and is related to true respect. This kind of respect is sadly lacking in our society, and has rubbed off upon our relationships within families and ecclesias. But whether all of his 600 men were equally convinced to take this huge risk is unclear. We note that David elsewhere often uses the phrase "my lord the king" to refer to Saul. If indeed David intended to turn against the Philistines and support Saul in a pincer operation against them, Saul could have still won the battle of Gilboa. But Saul didn't repent nor accept David as king, even in the last days of his life. Had he done so, the pincer operation David planned would have happened, Saul's life would have been spared, and he could then have proclaimed David as king. And been finally saved. We see how God tries to give men salvation right to the end of their days.

1Sa 29:9 Achish answered David, I know that you have been pleasing to me, as an

angel of God, nevertheless the princes of the Philistines have said, 'He must not go up with us to the battle'-
Achish clearly felt David was God's representative to him, and thereby had come to accept Yahweh as his God (:6). "Been pleasing" or 'blameless' / 'good', is the same word used of how David was more "blameless / good" than Saul and so he had been chosen as king (1 Sam. 15:28). One theme of the narrative here is the replacement of Saul by David. And yet David was hardly "good" at this time, what with murdering all the Bedouins in their encampments, lying to Achish etc. Perhaps the idea is that just as Achish naively saw David as "good", God imputed righteousness and likewise saw a 'not good' David as "good". On the basis of counting him righteous because of his faith.

1Sa 29:10 Now get up early in the morning with the servants of your lord who have come with you, and depart as soon as it is light-
Achish seems to be saying that David's men were his servants, and is reminding him that he was David's "lord". Perhaps he too was slightly jittery about the whole idea of David's men coming to the battle. But probably by "your lord" he refers to Saul. For this is the context of :4 "How better could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord?". He would then be hitting back at David's ambiguous statement that he is ready to serve "my lord the king" (:8), without defining who that lord was, and having used the phrase often about Saul in the past. So it may well be that Achish presents as a naive ruler who easily changes his mind- for now he seems persuaded by his military commanders. So many kings are presented in the Biblical record like this, as naieve and fickle. This can be the result of absolute power and wealth. We may well ask why God allowed this whole scenario, with Achish believing David until the last minute and then changing his mind. Surely it was to bring David to his knees, begging God for a way out of what seemed an impossible situation, just as he had with Achish in Gath in 1 Sam. 21.

1Sa 29:11 So David got up early, he and his men, to depart in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel-
Ziklag was considered to be in the land of the Philistines (:4). There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:12); David (1 Sam. 17:20; 29:11); Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 29:20). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 30

1Sa 30:1 When David and his men had come to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid on the South and on Ziklag, and had attacked Ziklag and burned it-
These Amalekites were those whose settlements David and his men had been massacring. It was of course providential that David returned when he did, rather than remaining say another week in northern Israel fighting Saul's army. Although he experienced a tragedy, it is clear from the preceding chapters that all these things were closely orchestrated by God. He actually avoided having to face a huge Amalekite attack on him which he may or may not have fought off. For he only had 600 men, and the 400 Amalekites who escaped from him later were just a tiny minority of their forces. He later won because he attacked them whilst they were drunk and partying. But he may not have fared so well if caught by a surprise attack by much larger forces. So again his weakness was used in God's gracious, providential plan.

1Sa 30:2 and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They didn't kill any, but carried them off and went their way-
This is absolutely surprising, because David and his men had massacred the Amalekite settlements, leaving nobody alive to report to Achish what had happened. All through the record, there is the same hallmark of Divine grace. As often in the Biblical records, the people of God come over as less gracious than their surrounding Gentile neighbours. And yet all this happens at a time when David has been incredibly weak in faith by living with the Philistines and murdering so many people to cover his lies to Achish.

1Sa 30:3 When David and his men came to the city they found it had been burned, and their wives, their sons and their daughters taken captive-
Burning with fire was perhaps a sign of devotion of the town to their gods, just as Israel had burnt Hazor (Josh. 11:13) and Midian (Num. 31:10).

1Sa 30:4 Then David and his men wept aloud until they had no more power to weep-
Heb. 'lifted up their voices and wept'. The phrase occurs around 10 times in the Hebrew Bible, and the context of each usage implies that this was not just mourning for that which had been lost, but mourning in the desperate hope and plea to God that things might change. But they wept until there was no more power to weep; they felt that the loss was permanent and now in fact there could be no remedy. Surveying the smouldering town, with no life anywhere, it would have seemed at first blush that their families had been burnt to death. And it would have been hard, because of the heat and smoke, to ascertain in depth whether there were bodies beneath the burning ruins; but they assumed so. Perhaps it was only at :8 that David learned that there was the possibility of recovering the spoil, implying their families had been taken captives and not burnt. The relevance to the exiles was that captivity and a burnt city [as Jerusalem was burnt] might seem irreversible; but the potential for restoration was there for them as it was for David at this time.

1Sa 30:5 David's two wives were taken captive: Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail who had been the wife of Nabal the Carmelite-
It would have been a far cry for Abigail from the days of living in the prosperous family of Nabal in Carmel. We wonder whether these women were raped, which

would have been the usual thing in such circumstances. The taking captivity of the women is stressed three times (:2,3,5) as if this was the hardest loss to cope with.

1Sa 30:6 David was greatly distressed, for the men spoke of stoning him because they were grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters-
Stoning was the punishment for heresy. Their superstitious minds doubtless assumed David had sinned in some way, and they were all suffering the consequence of that sin. His apparent plan to lie to Achish and then turn around and fight for Israel (see on 1 Sam. 29:8) would have been hard to sell to 600 men. And there was likely a disease about the careful policy of lying to Achish about having attacked Hebrew settlements. We note how circumstances repeat in our lives- for later Shimei tried to stone David as he fled from Absalom.

"Grieved" or 'bitter' is corresponds with how David's men were those discontented with their lives (1 Sam. 22:2). They were following David for what they could get out of him, rather than from belief in him as Yahweh's choice as king because he had a heart after God. We note their mean attitude towards those who were too weak to continue to the battle, and David's contrasting, generous spirit. David's spirituality in the wilderness years is the more commendable when we realize how little encouragement he had spiritually from others. Hence he encouraged / strengthened himself.

There are strong parallels between David and Saul as Saul's reign comes to an end. Saul is reminded by the resurrected Samuel how he disobeyed God by not destroying the Amalekites, and therefore had been rejected; whereas at the same time, David was pursuing and defeating the Amalekites. At this point, Saul also is in great distress (s.w. 1 Sam. 28:15) but finds no comfort from God whereas David does. And yet all this happens at a time when David has been incredibly weak in faith by living with the Philistines and murdering so many people to cover his lies to Achish.

But David strengthened himself in Yahweh his God-
Just the same phrase is used of how Jonathan had met with David and strengthened himself in Yahweh (1 Sam. 23:16). It happens with us too that the encouragement others give us, we later have to give to ourselves when alone and isolated. With 600 of his own men against him, David literally had to grab hold of himself (Heb.) in Yahweh. And we must all pass through these times when even those on our side turn upon us, and we are left with Yahweh alone. We have to grab hold of ourselves (Heb.)- another of many indications of the two sides to our nature, and how the good must triumph over the evil.

1Sa 30:7 David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, Please bring me here the ephod. Abiathar brought the ephod to David-
We note that they had taken the ephod with them into battle. It was brought to David, because David was going to use it himself as the high priest did, such was his personal relationship with God. He didn't ask Abiathar to get an answer for him, he himself used the urim and thummim stones, and they flashed out answers in response to his prayers.

1Sa 30:8 and David inquired of Yahweh saying, Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them? He answered, Pursue, for you will certainly overtake them and recover all-
The urim and thummim in the ephod gave yes / no answers to the various questions posed. I suggested on :4 that this was perhaps the first intimation the men had that

their families were alive and not burnt to death. David would surely have seen the similarities between his situation and that of Abraham, who went to Damascus to rescue Lot with his 318 servants, and won an amazing victory. But David failed to follow Abraham as he might have done in this matter; see on :20. One advantage of familiarity with the Biblical record is that we perceive how circumstances repeat; what we pass through has its Biblical precedent in the biographies which were selected by God and recorded there, inspiring us to follow onwards in faith. Truly through patience and comfort of the scriptures we have hope (Rom. 15:4).

1Sa 30:9 So David and the six hundred men who were with him went to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind had stayed-
LXX "the superfluous ones stopped", the 200 weaker ones of :10, who were unnecessary for the victory. This would be a clear connection with Gideon, whose fighting force was also cut down by God next to a river. David had previously been in situations allusive to those featuring Gideon. He would have seen that this was God encouraging him in those similarities, urging him to follow Gideon's faith to the end. According to :21 LXX "he had caused them to remain by the brook of Bosor". See on :21.

1Sa 30:10 But David pursued the Amalekites with four hundred men; two hundred had stayed behind because they were so exhausted that they couldn't go over the brook Besor-
As noted on :9 and :21, this was because David made them remain behind. "Stayed behind" is the usual word translated "stood". It would be wrong to think they collapsed exhausted on the ground. They stood, at least in God's eyes. And perhaps they literally stood guard over the baggage (:24). We see the difference in how David treated his weak ones, and how the Amalekite treated his Egyptian servant who was too weak to continue.

1Sa 30:11 They found an Egyptian in the field and brought him to David, and gave him food and he ate, and they gave him water to drink-
Heb. 'they made him drink water'; here and in :12 the Divine cameraman is zoomed in close up upon this dehydrated man they found lying as good as dead in a field. We see them in :12 giving him exactly two clusters of raisins, and piece, but not all, of a cake of figs. This focus is perhaps to show how God always uses some human mechanism in the way He works, and that mechanism is often man at his weakest.

1Sa 30:12 They gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. When he had eaten, he revived, for he had eaten no food nor drunk any water for three days and three nights-
See on :11. They actually saved the life of that dehydrated man, left to die. Three days and nights of effective death and then resurrection, eating "a piece" of food as the Lord ate "a piece" of fish afterwards (Lk. 24:42), all makes him a strange type of the Lord Jesus. This supports the suggestion on :11, that the weakest of men are used by God and shown to have connection with the Lord Jesus.

1Sa 30:13 David asked him, To whom do you belong? Where are you from? He said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me because three days ago I fell sick-
Although the Amalekites were taking understandable revenge for David massacring

their settlements, they had not killed any of David's people, unlike David. And yet they are presented here as callous and uncaring (see on :16). The man had been left in the field immediately he fell sick rather than being cared for (he had not drunk water for three days, :12). For care for sick servants was a basic part of Middle Eastern culture at the time, and was also enshrined in the spirit of the law of Moses. Perhaps we are given this detail to highlight how amazing was God's grace in moving the Amalekites to not murder a single one of the many women and children they had taken captive.

1Sa 30:14 We made a raid on the South of the Cherethites and on the territory which belongs to Judah and on the South of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire-
This total honesty, admitting to Israelites that he had been part of raids on Judah, with the Cherethites being David's personal bodyguards, compares with the dishonesty of David, who said he had raided these areas when he had not. The contrast is intentional so that we see how even at this time of becoming king, David was so very weak spiritually. "Caleb" refers to Hebron, the town given him for an inheritance (Josh. 21:11,12). The man was his inheritance.

1Sa 30:15 David said to him, Will you lead me down to this raiding party? He said, Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me up into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to them-
To be delivered into the hands of his master Saul had been David's great fear for decades. He was now given an opportunity to reflect the grace he had been shown. And we too are given personal encounters and circumstances in our lives which provide us with opportunities. "Raiding party" is as in Ps. 18:29, "By You I advance against a troop"- surely David's later reflection on this victory. He achieved it by his single handed faith in God, for his men were bitter and depressed and wanted only to kill him, assuming all was lost.

1Sa 30:16 When he had led him down-
There are intended similarities with Moses coming down from the mountain and seeing Israel dancing in their drunken apostasy. That they didn't murder a single Hebrew captive is the more remarkable, seeing here and in :13 the Amalekites are presented in very bad terms.

There they were, spread around over all the ground, eating, drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines and out of the land of Judah-
The language of being spread abroad upon the *eretz*, the land / earth, is used of judgment. They had judged themselves by doing this. And yet we note that David and his men had pillaged the Amalekite settlements and taken their spoil for themselves. The spoil the Amalekites had now taken from David's encampment at Ziklag was likely comprised of animals and spoil which had originally been theirs, but David had taken it.

1Sa 30:17 David fought them from twilight to the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled-
We note how 400 Israelites defeated the Amalekites, and yet 400 Amalekites escaped. The similarity in the numbers may have been in order to teach David and his men that they too had only survived by a hairsbreadth. They were to remember in the exhilaration of victory that they had only just escaped with their lives by God's grace

in previous deliverances. And this feature is potentially built in to our experiences of success, if we will perceive it. We also see how outnumbered David was- he had 400 men, whereas just a minority of his enemies numbered 400 men. This great victory by David against a much larger force happened at the very same time as Saul was being defeated by the Philistines. Likewise David's consultation of the urim [and getting an answer] was done around the time Saul consulted the urim [and got no answer]. Through all the web of moral issues leading up to why the Amalekites had attacked Ziklag, God brought about an amazing closing scenario of Saul's demise and David's rise to the throne. God likewise weaves His bigger pictures through all the weak threads of our own poor decisions, sins and failures.

1Sa 30:18 David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives-
There is double emphasis upon the way that "all they had taken" was restored (:19). It was all clearly of God's restorative power, that the Amalekites didn't murder anyone, and all was restored. This would have been comfort to the exiles, that God is able to restore, just as He completely restored the fortunes of Job. "Rescued / recovered" is the same word used of the restoration of the exiles from Babylon (Ez. 34:10,12; Mic. 4:10; Zech. 3:2). See on :19.

1Sa 30:19 There was nothing missing, small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken. David brought back everything-
"Brought back" translates the word usually rendered 'return' in the context of the exiles returning and being restored at the restoration. This amazing restoration, beyond all Judah could ever have imagined possible, was potentially possible through a descendant of David at their time. But so much potential was wasted by their lack of faith and preference to remain in Babylon, as it is for so many today. See on :18.

1Sa 30:20 He took all the flocks and herds, which they drove before the other livestock, and he said, This is David's spoil-
This seems out of step with Abraham's attitude when he rescued Lot, refusing to take any spoil for himself. It's recorded that in the ethnic cleansing which David performed, he took the spoil of those settlements for himself (1 Sam. 27:9). And now when he destroyed Ziklag, he took away their herds "and said, This is David's spoil". We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood and lack of integrity in hot blood (1 Chron. 22:8). However, the idea may be that the spoil was designated "David's spoil" and then it was this which was divided amongst David's friends in Judah. It would have been a huge amount of spoil, because David sends it to so many people in Judah.

1Sa 30:21 David came to the two hundred men who had been so exhausted that they could not follow David, who had been left behind at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and the people who were with him. When David came near them he greeted them-
LXX "he had caused them to remain by the brook of Bosor". This would mean that the decision to leave them was David's and not theirs. He had learned the lesson of Gideon, and knew he didn't need numbers for victory. It was the lesson of his friend Jonathan's victory, that the Lord could save by many or by few (1 Sam. 14:6). We may learn a lesson [and David may have been Jonathan's companion at that time], and then find our grasp of it tested again, decades later.

1Sa 30:22 But all the wicked men and troublemakers among David's followers said-
As will be noted further on :23, the situation here is intended to be analogous to that after Saul delivered Jabesh Gilead. "Wicked men" likewise talked badly of Saul after his victory and clear election by God (1 Sam. 10:27; 11:12).

Because they didn't go with us we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, just each man's wife and children; then he can take them away and depart-
David's attitude is a radical inversion of all this. He not only shared the spoil with the 200 who didn't participate in the battle; he went and distributed the spoil far and wide amongst God's people. In this he looked forward to the Lord Jesus as it were sharing the spoils of His singular victory on the cross. The Lord's words of how He would "divide the spoils" of His victory may be consciously alluding to David's attitude at this point (Lk. 11:22).

1Sa 30:23 David said, You must not do that, my brothers, with what Yahweh has given us-
LXX "Ye shall not do so, after the Lord has delivered the enemy to us". If we realize that the victory is the Lord's and not ours, then all self seeking or taking of personal credit naturally finishes. David is in fact exactly copying the spirit of Saul in 1 Sam. 11:13: "Saul said, No-one is to be put to death today, for today Yahweh has worked deliverance in Israel". David now copies that spirit; and we see his humility in being willing to credit Saul with something good, and even being willing to learn from a man who hated him and later went wrong before God. The men of Jabesh are perhaps other examples of being positive about Saul's earlier life (1 Sam. 31:11). He saw the spoils as what they had been given, by grace, and now what they had fought for.

He has preserved us and delivered the forces that came against us into our hand-
David felt preserved by God from Saul and his other enemies (1 Sam. 30:23; 2 Sam. 22:44), because he had preserved or obeyed [s.w.] God's ways (2 Sam. 22:22,24; Ps. 18:21,23); whereas Saul didn't obey / preserve them and was destroyed (1 Sam. 13:13,14; 1 Chron. 10:13). Hence Ps. 145:20: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy".

1Sa 30:24 Who will listen to what you say? The share of the one who goes down to the battle shall be the same as the share of the one who stays with the baggage; they shall share alike-
LXX "for they are not inferior to us". The reference to staying with the baggage corroborates with the word used in :10; the 200 remained 'standing', standing guard, and not slumped on the ground. Again we note the contrast with how David values his weak servants, compared to how the Amalekite discarded his Egyptian servant when he was too weak to continue marching. See on :22. The word for "share" in 1 Sam. 30:24 is that used in Dt. 18:8, where the Levites were to have the same "portions" or "share". David's language choice was setting up his men to see themselves as a new priesthood.

1Sa 30:25 From that day forward he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day-
The law of Moses was added to in practical terms as situations arose in Israel's history. It was not seen as static, and this eased the way towards the idea that it could be amended and then abrogated by the Lord's work.

1Sa 30:26 When David came to Ziklag he sent some of the spoil to the elders of Judah, his friends, saying, Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of Yahweh-
Note the intended contrast between friends of David and enemies of Yahweh. David is careful to show that Yahweh's enemies were the Gentile marauders of His people, and not Saul and his supporters. This matches the Lord's dividing up the spoils of His singular victory (Lk. 11:22); see on :20,24.

This action reflects David's faith that he would soon become king; he was paving the way for his return to Judah as king after Saul's death. So he has recovered from his spiritual low point of 1 Sam. 27:1 when he is persuaded that Saul will kill him.

1Sa 30:27 He sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth of the South, Jattir-
Some of these places may have been plundered by the Amalekites, since they had invaded the south of Judah (:14). The Hebrews of Judah would have received news of Saul's defeat and murder at the same time as they received news of David's victory and evidence of it in the presents sent to them. The timing was clearly Divine; for David was thereby established as the logical next king of Judah. "Bethel" here is the small settlement near Ziklag (Josh. 15:30; 19:4; 1 Chron. 4:30), not the well known Bethel in the tribe of Benjamin.

1Sa 30:28 Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa-
This is not the Aroer on the river Arnon, but some smaller settlement in southern Israel. “Shama and Jehiel the sons of Hothan the Aroerite” were amongst David’s mighty men (1 Chron. 11:44). Perhaps David hid in the area whilst on the run from Saul, and these two men went off with him. Eshtemoa was a priestly city; it would seem the priests were largely supportive of David when on the run from Saul, perhaps due to Samuel's influence (Josh. 15:50; 21:14). Siphmoth was the home town of Zabdi, who had charge of David's wine cellars (1 Chron. 27:27). Those who supported him in his wilderness years, when he seemed a hopeless case, became exalted in his kingdom. And in the type, this is true of we who support the Lord Jesus in this life.

1Sa 30:29 Racal, the cities of the Jerahmeelites, the cities of the Kenites-
The record of these names may be in order to highlight the awful lie David had told Achish in 1 Sam. 27:10, claiming he had turned his hand against his friends and supporters: "When Achish said, Against whom have you made a raid today? David would say, Against the South of Judah, or against the South of the Jerahmeelites, or against the South of the Kenites". Racal is LXX "Carmel".

1Sa 30:30 Hormah, Borashan, Athach-
Hormah ["devoted"] is the Canaanite Zephath ["watchtower"] of Jud. 1:17. The strength of the Canaanites was devoted to Yahweh, and they were supportive of David when on the run from Saul (1 Sam. 30:30).

1Sa 30:31 Hebron and to those in all the places where David himself and his men used to stay-
The record has noted that some areas had betrayed him to Saul (we think of the men of Jabesh and Ziph); or like Nabal, refused to support him when in need. But clearly he had support amongst many in Judah, who had supported him over the years. And

he remembered exactly who they were, and sent these presents to them- now sensing that Saul's end was near and he was to become king at least over Judah.

1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 31

1Sa 31:1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell down slain on Mount Gilboa-
It is really stressed that Saul and Jonathan "fell" on Gilboa (1 Sam. 31:1,8; 2 Sam. 1:10,12,19,25,27), using a Hebrew word which is often associated with spiritual falling. The fact that "the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons" (1 Sam. 31:2) gives the impression of them fleeing from the Philistine soldiers. This sends the mind back to the Law's warning that an apostate Israel would flee before their enemies (Dt. 28:25). Saul and Jonathan are described in terms representative of apostate Israel; see Am. 2:14,15; Micah 1 and 2 and expositions there. But the fall of Israel was due to the fall of Saul (see on 1 Sam. 28:19); instead of being the king who led to victory as Israel had hoped and as God had enabled, he led to shame and defeat.

Earlier the Philistines had 'fallen down slain' after David's victory over Goliath (same words in 1 Sam. 17:52). That victory had now been reversed; for Saul was the antithesis of David. And yet we have noted that David was spiritually weak at this time. All this was by grace alone, God's grace towards David, because He recognized that beneath all David's weakness there was a heart after His own. Fleeing before enemies and falling down before them is the language of Israel's punishment for breaking the covenant. But David deeply laments the falling down slain of Saul and Israel (2 Sam. 1:19,25 "the beauty of Israel is slain... how are the mighty fallen... how are the mighty fallen... O Jonathan, you were slain on your high places"). We enquire whether Jonathan had slipped away from the covenant, seeing he too fell down slain; he is strongly identified with Saul in 1 Chron. 10:6: "So Saul died, and his three sons; and all his family died together". The curious expression 'on your high places' suggests of course the idolatrous high places, as if Jonathan had been as it were sacrificed on the altar of his own preferred 'high place'. Ez. 6:4 sounds so similar, using the same words for 'falling down' and 'slain': "I will cast down [make to fall down] your slain men before your idols". We see here the danger of the Jonathan choice- to reject coming out for David / Jesus, and instead to choose to remain 'in the world' and appear as of the world, whilst speaking up for David / Jesus at times. It could sadly be that like many who have made the Jonathan choice, he was caught up in that world and suffered their judgment. Or it could be that we have here an example of how good men can suffer the results of others' breaking of covenant. Although surely it is far from God to slay the righteous with the wicked, as Abraham argued regarding Lot in Sodom. Whatever, David's lament for those judged for breaking covenant makes him even more a man after God's own heart- for the condemnation of the wicked grieves God deeply, and is never done with any smug self satisfaction or lashing out in punishment.

1Sa 31:2 The Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons, and they killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul-
"Followed hard after" suggests the Philistines chased Saul. Just as he had chased David. We could see this as him reaping some poetic justice. Yet it could be that even in these last hours of his life, God was appealing to Saul to understand what he had done to David, and repent. Saul had chased David up a conical hill- and then the

arrival of the Philistines had saved David. Now Saul was chased by the Philistines up a conical hill- to death. Saul was being reminded of this, but not as poetic justice for the sake of it, but as a nudge to repentance. For God doesn't give up with man until his last breath, and it's only over when it's over. Likewise we ponder why Saul's sons were slain first, and then he was hit by an arrow (:3). That isolating him alone, having lost his sons [he would have perceived, although wrongly, that all his sons were slain] and therefore all hope of his kingly dynasty continuing, was perhaps also a desperate appeal for his repentance and acceptance that his "kingdom", his dynasty", was not to continue. Or again, we ponder the word used for "archer" in :3. It is the word 'to point out', and is the word more commonly used for a "teacher". Samuel says in 1 Sam. 12:23 that he will not cease to "teach [s.w. "archer"] you the good and right way". Perhaps again there is a hint that even at that final stage, God was appealing for Saul to be teachable. So likewise we ponder how after Saul's sons are killed, he appears to be isolated alone with his armourbearer. And the only other mention of Saul's armourbearer is when we read that this was David's role earlier (1 Sam. 16:21). Was not this also a nudge towards thinking of David, and repenting of how he had abused David his armourbearer? We have no insight into the final psychological moments of those who die after falling away from God, but very likely His efforts with them likewise continue to the end of life. These are only hints, because God makes His appeals subtly and not in a way which would railroad man into repentance. For man is free, created free by God, and He ever respects that human freedom He has granted to man. To railroad to repentance is not His style nor His way in this world.

1 Sam. 31:2; 1 Chron. 10:2 read "Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua", whereas 1 Sam. 14:49 has "Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua". "Ishvi" may be another name for Abinadab; or we may note that the word means "and the second...", which would make sense in 1 Sam. 14:49. The genealogies of 1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39 also mention Esh-Baal or Ishbosheth; perhaps his name mentioning the "Baal" compound was the reason for its exclusion. Having such a name reflects upon Saul's lack of total devotion to Yahweh.

1Sa 31:3 The battle went badly against Saul, the archers overtook him and wounded him badly-

This was all such a reversal of fortunes. When the Philistines stopped the Israelites from having metal weapons, they honed their skills as slingers and archers. But now it was Philistine archers who wounded Saul. Tragically, David would use archers to slay Uriah. His words of Ps. 64:7 were being fulfilled: "God shall shoot at them [David's enemies] with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded". But when this happened, David weeps and laments over Saul. The Hebrew for "wounded" may also be rendered “and he was sore afraid" [s.w. "be in anguish", Dt. 2:25] . This is the final end of the rejected. Fear. Alone with none to help.

1Sa 31:4 Then Saul said to his armour bearer, Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me!-

We see again the record present the demise of Saul and the rise of David. For David had earlier cut off the foreskins of 200 Philistines whom he has slain; “For Saul devised to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam. 18:25). But Saul now faces abuse [of his circumcision?] by the uncircumcised and will himself fall by their hand.

"Lest they mock / abuse me" were to be the very words of Zedekiah (Jer. 38:19). The message for the exiles was that their leadership had indeed acted and been judged as Saul, but there was hope for restoration in a revived David figure.

But his armour bearer would not, for he was respectful. Therefore Saul took his sword and fell on it-

This man, although close to Saul, had been influenced by the spirit of David who would not lift up his hand against Yahweh's anointed. He may well have been near Saul on the two occasions David had come close to him and had chosen not to slay him. We learn from this that there may be people who think rightly in positions we would not imagine. "Respectful" is literally "he feared", and David uses the word in 2 Sam. 1:10 in asking why the Amalekite did not "fear" to slay Saul as Saul requested. David appears aware of the faithfulness of Saul's armour bearer.

Saul was Yahweh's anointed, but he slew Yahweh's anointed- by killing himself. This was what he had attempted to do to David; and he ended up doing it to himself. And so is revealed a profound principle- that what we would wish to do to others, we ultimately do to ourselves. If we refuse to forgive them, we remain unforgiven. If we judge / condemn them and in our minds exclude them from God's Kingdom, we do the same to ourselves. If we wish our most difficult enemies salvation- we shall be saved. If we hate them and thereby kill them, as the Lord teaches- we hate and slay ourselves.

1Sa 31:5 When his armour bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell on his sword and died with him-

Fair attention is given to this man. As noted on :4, he was like Jonathan and many, in that his loyalties were divided. He was personally loyal to Saul, feeling that Saul's death was his death; and yet also loyal to the spirit of David, in that he would not slay Yahweh's anointed, and respected him as that right up to Saul's hopeless end. We may well meet him in God's Kingdom.

1Sa 31:6 So Saul died, and his three sons and his armour bearer and all his men, that same day together-

To all die on the same day was tragic; and recalls the deaths of Eli and his sons at the hands of the Philistines. They died in fulfilment of prophecies that they must be replaced by a faithful priest, of whom Samuel was a potential fulfilment. The situation with the deaths of Saul and his sons was so similar. We see the same Divine hand at work.

"Many of the people" (2 Sam. 1:4) is no contradiction with 1 Sam. 31:6, where “all his men” refers to Saul’s immediate body-guard..

1Sa 31:7 When the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, and those who were beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled, and the Philistines came and lived in them-

We enquire who is in view when we read that "When all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that they fled... they fled [also]" (1 Chron. 10:7). The reference to Saul being 'overtaken' in :3 and 1 Chron. 10:3 suggests it was Saul and his men who fled. This caused the men of Israel in the valley to flee; and then 1 Sam. 31:7 adds that the men of Israel "on the other side of the valley" [a separate group] fled, when they say that the "men of Israel" in the valley had fled. It was a collapse mentality, led by the fleeing of Saul. David in 2 Sam. 1 presents Saul as gallantly

fighting to the end, but he was surely imputing goodness to Saul. True to a man who disobeyed the covenant, he fled before his enemies, according to the curse of the covenant. And this led his men to progressively flee.

The valley of Jezreel is in view; it was the most fertile part of Israel. The translation may be better "on the side of the valley". The forsaken cities appear to apply only to that valley in 1 Chron. 10:7. "Beyond the Jordan" may mean 'on the river banks'. There is little archaeological evidence that the Philistines possessed the territory east of Jordan for very long. Soon after this, Abner proclaimed Ishbosheth as king at Mahanaim, about twenty miles east of the Jordan (2 Sam. 2:8). So these gains of the Philistines were short-lived, and they lacked the numbers of population to really settle all this territory. But the impression is given of a total Philistine victory in the north of Israel.

'Forsaken cities' is a term often used in the prophets of how Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were forsaken during the Babylonian invasion. The 1 Samuel record was surely written or edited as comfort to the exiles- that under David their prince, a glorious restoration was possible.

1Sa 31:8 The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa-

The fact this was done the next day suggests the battle continued into the late evening, with Saul fighting literally to the end.

1Sa 31:9 They cut off his head, stripped off his armour and sent into the land of the Philistines all around to carry the news to the house of their idols and to the people-

This may well have been to allude to what David had done to Goliath many years before, placing his armour in the tabernacle; the sting of which remained with them. But the record mocks how they had to take the news to their idols; unlike Yahweh who sees and knows all things, and even before they happen.

We note they stripped his armour. His crown and bracelet was taken by the Amalekite looter whom we learn of in 2 Sam. 1. The man came to spoil the slain bodies, and finding the crown and bracelet, took them to David, hoping for a reward.

If Saul was stripped, it means his royal robe was stripped off him. He had done this before when he was in the cave, and when he went to the medium. He should have stripped off those robes and given them to David, accepting God's word to him that this must happen. But he refused, and so it was done to him in his final condemnation. We either accept our condemnation now, or we will experience it at judgment day.

The death of Saul was 'published' (AV) by the Philistines. But David uses the word in saying "Publish it not" (2 Sam. 1:20). Perhaps he means that Israel were not to speak of this tragedy; hence he kills the Amalekite who 'published' the news to him (2 Sam. 4:10 s.w.).

1Sa 31:10 They put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan-

1 Chron. 10:10 says that they fastened the head of Saul in Dagon's temple. 1 Chron. 10:12 adds the detail that the bodies of his sons were likewise fastened to the wall. Herodotus writes of a great temple to Venus in Ashkelon. Clearly the Philistines had in memory how David had brought the head of Goliath to Jerusalem. They were seeking to as it were undo David's work and victory.

1Sa 31:11 When the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul-
They had been saved by Saul in 1 Sam. 11, maybe 40 years before (Acts 13:21). They had total loyalty to Saul even now at the end, when surely it was clear that David was the king of God's choice and Saul had sinned and failed. Perhaps they set a good example of appreciating the good a man once did or taught, even if in later life he turned away from God. As explained on 1 Sam. 30:23, this was how David treated Saul.

1Sa 31:12 all the valiant men arose and travelled all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan, and they went to Jabesh and burnt them there-
Cremation was not common amongst the Jews, but perhaps they did this lest his body be abused further, seeing that they were under Philistine domination. But the bones were buried (:13) so only the rest of the bodies were burnt. Or we can read "Burnt for them there", the burning referring to incense rather than the bodies.

1Sa 31:13 They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted seven days-
We recall how it was beneath a tamarisk tree that Saul had ordered the massacre of the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:6). Now it is his bones which are beneath such a tree.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: 2 Samuel

2 Samuel

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it,

respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 1

2 Samuel 1:1

It happened after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites-
Saul was empowered to smite or slaughter the Amalakites (1 Sam. 15:3,7 s.w.), but he didn't completely do this. As often happens, God then passed on the job to another, in this case David. We can see His hand working in similar ways today. This seems to be the idea of Esther 4:14. If she had not saved her people, then God would have pursued another plan to the same end.

And David had stayed two days in Ziklag-
Ziklag was about 90 miles from Gilboa where Saul had been slain (cp. 1 Sam. 27:6). A fast messenger would have taken two or three days to cover that distance with the news. The record has every 'ring of truth' to it in the details. It is this internal, circumstantial evidence which is to me the greatest proof that the Bible is indeed God's inspired word.

2 Samuel 1:2

it happened on the third day, that behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul-
LXX "From the people of Saul". We wonder whether the man was in fact as he claimed, an Amalekite who had been with Saul. For David had just been fighting the Amalekites (:1), and was near their territory. I wonder if in fact he was a local man who had heard or even guessed the news and had come with his own agendas. The record of Saul's death in 1 Sam. 31 contradicts the story of the Amalekite. But the Biblical record at times

describes things as they appear to be. The NT language of demons is another example. However the fact the man had Saul's crown and bracelets (:10) would suggest that he was one of the wandering types who hung around battlefields eager for the spoil.

The three days journey from Gilboa to Ziklag has been noted on :1, but we note that David had travelled with the Philistines almost to Gilboa (1 Sam. 29:1), and had then been sent back to Ziklag, and it had taken them three days to get there (1 Sam. 30:1). The record has every circumstantial evidence of being true.

With his clothes torn and dust upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and showed respect-
Literally, he made obeisance, the word being used specifically for worshipping God. He was showing that he accepted David as the new king. We note that all arguments that "Jesus received worship, therefore Jesus is God" are flawed in that the words for Divine worship are also sometimes used about the worship of men; and this is a parade example.

The language here is that of 1 Sam. 4:12, where a Benjamite has the same tokens of mourning when bringing the news of the disastrous defeat at Aphek. I noted above that the man came "from the people of Saul" (LXX). Perhaps he was an Amalekite associated with Saul. See on :4.

2 Samuel 1:3

David said to him, Where do you come from? He said to him, I have escaped out of the camp of Israel-
This suggests the Amalekite was on Israel's side, and I have suggested on :2,4 that he was effectively a Benjamite from Saul's tribe and close to Saul.

2 Samuel 1:4

David said to him, How did it go? Please tell me. He answered, The people have fled from the battle, and many of the people also have fallen and are dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also-
"Many of the people" (2 Sam. 1:4) is no contradiction with 1 Sam. 31:6, where “all his men” refers to Saul’s immediate body-guard. The report of the bad news here is exactly that of 1 Sam. 4:16, where a Benjamite reports a defeat in the same order: "The rout, the slaughter among the people, the death of the leaders, are mentioned in an ascending climax". This corroborates the suggestion on :2 that this Amalekite was in league with Saul quite closely.

2 Samuel 1:5

David said to the young man who told him, How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?-
David is skeptical of the man from the start, but accepts what he says at face value and judges him accordingly.

2 Samuel 1:6

The young man who told him said, As I happened by chance on Mount Gilboa, behold, Saul was leaning on his spear; and behold, the chariots and the horsemen followed hard after him-
'Happening by chance' contradicts his story that he had escaped out of the camp or army of Israel (:3). But David doesn't challenge this obvious contradiction, but rather judges the man according to his own words and claimed positions. Leaning upon his spear meant suicide; the contradiction was that Saul was utterly alone, and hadn't managed to kill himself by leaning upon his spear. There is no way chariots would have driven up mount Gilboa, which is a large conical hill surrounded by flat plains. It's impossible to think this man as it were stumbled across the scene on Gilboa by chance as he went about his business.

"With his spear in his hand" is the image we are repeatedly given of Saul in the records. "Leaning" is the word for trusting. It was the symbol of his kingship, and he was desperately gripping hold of it rather than giving it up as he should have done. Whether at home, sitting under a tree (1 Sam. 22:6)... he is pictured as madly gripping on to it. He even sleeps with the spear in the ground next to him (1 Sam. 26:7). In this lies the significance of David taking the spear from Saul but then returning it to him. What should Saul's response have been? To tell David to keep the spear and be king, whilst he retired and walked quietly with his God (1 Sam. 26:21,22). And it was that gripping on to power that was his death. If the Amalekite is to be believed, he said that Saul at his last end "was leaning on his spear" (2 Sam. 1:6), presumably before falling upon his own sword in suicide (1 Sam. 31:4). David by contrast had learnt from his victory over Goliath "that Yahweh can give victory without sword or spear" (1 Sam. 17:47). We have the picture of Saul with his last strength desperately clinging on to the symbol of the kingship. If he reigned 40 years he was now in his 60s or 70. To cling on to it was so pointless anyway. There is no necessary contradiction with him gripping onto his spear here, and committing suicide by falling upon a sword.

2 Samuel 1:7

When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, 'Here I am'-
This contradicts the account of Saul's death in 1 Sam. 31, and is a typical example of how a liar will fabricate details to try to make their story look first hand and credible.

2 Samuel 1:8

He said to me, 'Who are you?'. I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite'-
Here we have another internal contradiction within the man's story. If Saul wished to die not at the hands of the uncircumcised, why then would he agree to being slain by an uncircumcised Amalekite.

2 Samuel 1:9

He said to me, 'Please stand beside me, and kill me; for anguish has taken hold of me, because my life is yet whole in me'-
The man was perhaps aware of how David had spared Saul's life because he believed it was wrong to slay Yahweh's anointed. And so the man creates the story that Saul had all but killed himself by leaning on his own spear (:6), and the Amalekite had just helped him by putting him out of the agony of a bungled suicide. The story lacks credibility. "Anguish" is LXX "terrible darkness". This is the terrible darkness of condemnation which Jude speaks of.

2 Samuel 1:10

So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he had fallen. I took the crown that was on his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord-
As noted on :9, the man is trying to say that Saul was going to die anyway after having fallen upon his own spear in suicide (:6). In this case, there was no need to kill him, because Saul was going to die anyway in due course. The man's story is self contradictory. But David doesn't raise any of the obvious contradictions; like the Lord Jesus dealing with untruths told Him, he takes the words at face value and reasons with the man according to his own words. And this is a pattern for us, not to be so obsessed with "truth" that we demonstrate the contradictions in the words of others, but rather taking them at face value and drawing the conclusions from those words. In this case, despite all the contradictions, the man was saying that he had slain Yahweh's anointed, and that was the grounds of condemnation in David's eyes.

2 Samuel 1:11

Then David took hold on his clothes, and tore them; and likewise all the men who were with him-
David accepted that the man's story was true insofar as Saul was dead, with the crown and bracelets being evidence of that.

2 Samuel 1:12

They mourned, wept and fasted until evening, for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of Yahweh, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword-

We enquire why David weeps so sincerely for Saul. I don't believe it was mere theatricism, nor purely politically motivated by a desire to get the house of Saul onside with him in his new kingdom. There was something evidently genuine about his grief.

Ps. 35:14 is David's comment about his grief for Saul both during Saul's life and also at his death: "I behaved myself as though it had been my friend or my brother. I bowed down mourning, as one who mourns his mother". This is one verse which to me is a cameo of the extent of the victory which David won against the mind of the flesh, against our massive tendency to repay sin with sin, bitterness with bitterness, anger with anger. If we take nothing else away from this, please focus your mind on this, and keep the memory: Here David protests his love for the one who was persecuting him (Ps. 35:12) and is reflecting upon his attitude to Saul's death. "As one who mourns for his mother". This is surely one of the most powerful figures that could be employed. Picture a young man of say 24, in a dark blue suit, kneeling down at the graveside of his mother, surrounded by friends and relatives, bowing down heavily in his grief. Or picture a man of 34, 44, 54, hair greying and receding now, bowing himself down heavily. Or even 64, 74, alone in his grief, bowing down heavily to the green turf, muttering words about mum. Perhaps some of us haven't yet experienced this; many have. If you haven't, just imagine it. Surely it brings a lump to your throat. Now it was with this intensity of grief that David mourned the death or sickness of his persecutor. This is a wondrous reflection of his devotion, his true love, his triumph over bitterness and anger, over all the human actions that had been directed against him. The heavy bowing down of the Lord Jesus as he wept over Jerusalem, the city that hated and rejected him, whose leaders slew him, whose people screamed for his blood. David wept for Saul as if he was his friend or brother. Who was David's friend and brother? Surely Jonathan his brother-in-law. But he wept for Saul, David says, as he wept for Jonathan. This is testified to historically by David's lament of 2 Sam. 1. And still David sought out the house of Saul, “that I may shew the kindness of God” unto them (2 Sam. 9:3). It was the experience of Divine kindness that motivated David. As he hoped for fellowship at the King’s table in the future, so David delighted in inviting his former enemies to partake of his table, now *he* was king (2 Sam. 9:7,11,13). And if we hope to share the Lord’s table in the Kingdom, we must share it with our weaker brethren now. I see in all this such a triumph for David, that a man should reflect the love of God to such an extent, to love in the face of such hatred, to not just love those who loved him.

The choice of a man mourning his mother, rather than a man his son, his father or his sister, was intentional. A man mourns for his mother because of the deep bond he feels now severed, and from feelings of guilt over ingratitude to her, lack of appreciation for her. And this was how David genuinely felt for Saul, despite all Saul's evil against him.

The deep sorrow of the Lord Jesus for Judas and all those who turn away is surely typified here. Right at the bitter end, the Lord still referred to him as His friend (Mt. 26:50), even though a few hours before He had been speaking of how the faithful few were His friends, and how He would give His life for His friends (Jn. 15:13-15). Throughout His ministry, the Lord had spoken of the faithful as His friends (Lk. 14:20; 11:8; 12:4). This was the spirit of the Lord Jesus in His time of dying, this is what enabled Him to go through the mock trial, the intense degradation, the bitter pain of rejection, without bitterness and the sin of unholy anger. To be like David to Saul, like Paul to Corinth, like Christ to the Jews, like God to us, really is possible. If that's how we can live, we will truly be in the new life.

We must however compare this great love of David for Saul with the many bitter words of imprecation he says about him in his Psalms. See on :23. Perhaps one reason for David's sadness was that he realized that his overhasty prayers had in a way been answered. We really must be careful what we pray for, in case we receive it. Many human relationships include an element of love and hate [hence women remain in physically abusive relationships with men who protest "love" for them], and here David's love finally triumphs over the hate.

2 Samuel 1:13

David said to the young man who told him, Where are you from? He answered, I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite-
LXX "The son of an Amalekite sojourner". The man has already stated he is an Amalekite (:8), so the intention of David's question was not in order to elicit this information. Rather is David implying that it was even more wrong for an uncircumcised Gentile to slay Yahweh's anointed king of Israel.

We have here a typical response to grief. Having believed the man's news, David goes into the first stage of grief, crying and weeping. Then the anger comes- and he takes it out on the messenger and kills him. Of course he could justify it by reasoning that Saul had earlier been told to kill all the Amalekites. But the cult of respect for the "anointed" had been started by David himself; there was no Divine command that one who killed Yahweh's anointed must be slain. At least David should have asked the man if he knew Saul had been anointed by Yahweh. But David convicts the man of a supposed crime that he may or may not have been even aware he was committing. There is no attempt to save, just a desire to transfer blame and a blood lust. So although the man was lying

on some points and clearly wanted a reward for his news, David's behaviour was again hot blooded and disrespectful for human life. David's lament over Abner is similar to this over Saul, and the intention of that was to prove "Innocent am I, and my kingship" (2 Sam. 3:28). We wonder whether David's lament over Saul was likewise partly politically motivated, to stress that he had not slain Saul nor had anything to do with it, and therefore the Benjamites should unite with Judah under his kingship. The murder of the Amalekite messenger would have supported that narrative. Rarely does David's motivation appear totally pure. Just as his first recorded words were an enquiry about the reward offered, and then a comment about the triumph of God over the uncircumcised. So here with his lament and with the slaying of the Amalekite. And yet God looked at the positive in him. It's not that David was unusually hypocritical; I suggest rather it is that we have an unusually deep insight into his human character. But what is found there is actually typical of us all- a mixture of motives, with the good finally outweighing the bad, or the good seen by God over the bad.

He had just been fighting and totally massacring Amalekites and had killed many of them just days before, so he was psychologically liable to want to kill any other Amalekite he ran into. He failed to investigate further, and killed the man for having said he killed Saul- when in fact we know from 1 Sam. 31 that he hadn't killed Saul, and Saul had committed suicide. We note that David himself had only recently lied to Achish about his willingness to go and fight Saul and to kill Israelites- even though he hadn't actually done so. He had said that he had committed murder of Israelites when he hadn't- and now he slays a man who says he slew Saul when he hadn't. And yet David's words "Your own mouth has testified against you" (:16) are quoted by the Lord regarding how He will judge and condemn men at the last day (Lk. 19:22). Like His Father, the Lord picked out the good from David and focused upon it, and imputed righteousness to the rest.

2 Samuel 1:14

David said to him, How were you not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy Yahweh's anointed?-

We tend to be particularly judgmental in cases where we ourselves overcame a temptation. David could have used his hand to slay Saul and his own men urged him to do so, and would've done so; but David resisted (the same term for putting forth a hand upon the anointed is used in 1 Sam. 24:6,10; 26:9,11,23). And now he condemns to death a man who had done what he very nearly did, and what his own men wanted to do. And so the strongest condemnation for smokers comes from ex-smokers, and so forth. We need to be aware of this feature of human nature.

2 Samuel 1:15

David called one of the young men and said, Go near, and fall on him. He struck him, so that he died-
David had just slain the Amalekites with extreme brutality, slaying even their children so that none would be left alive to tell others that David's men had slaughtered them. David perhaps felt justified in this by Ex. 17:16, but I consider this was not David at his best. David still had that blood lust in him at this time. His slaying of this Amalekite could have been to demonstrate that he really was in lamentation for Saul's death and was truly sad, and believed that any who slew Yahweh's anointed must die the death. But his motives were surely mixed. He wanted to make a political statement to the house of Saul; and he also had blood lust in him from the recent fight with the Amalekites (:1). Not for nothing was he precluded from building the temple because God considered he had shed too much blood.

It seems to me that this was an over the top reaction, and yet again betrays a lack of value and meaning attached to the human person. There was no attempt to convert the frightened young man to grace, to the God of Israel. The summary slaying of Rechab and Baanah has some similarities (2 Sam. 4:12). We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

2 Samuel 1:16

David said to him, Your blood be on your head; for your mouth has testified against you saying, 'I have slain Yahweh's anointed'-
As noted above, the man's story had various points of obvious internal contradiction within it. But David doesn't dwell upon these, although he may imply he considers the man is lying about the details, but rather judges the man according to his words and intentions. This looks forward to how the Lord Jesus will judge according to our words (Lk. 19:22 alludes here), by which men shall be condemned (Mt. 12:37). The need to respect Yahweh's anointed however continues to our day, for we too are anointed, in that we are "in Christ", the anointed one, and anointed (2 Cor. 1:21). This deep respect for all others "in Christ" should impart to relationships "in Christ" an altogether unique quality, a love so unusual that it is enough to convert the world (Jn. 17).

2 Samuel 1:17

David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son-
David is careful to unite Saul and Jonathan together; as noted on :12, he mourned "as though it [Saul] had been my friend or my brother" [Jonathan].

2 Samuel 1:18

(and he commanded them to teach the children of Judah the song of the bow-
Saul was slain by a bow, and this was to be memorialized in the title. Similarly Ex. 3:1-22 is called "The Bush" in Mk. 12:26. Or the reference may be to Jonathan's fondness for archery (1 Sam. 20:20), and his gift of his own bow to David (1 Sam. 18:4). David and Saul had a highly complex relationship, pointing forward to the complexity of relationship between Christ and Israel. Consider the way that Jewry initially accepted John's Gospel of Messiah, how soon after the resurrection thousands of the priests who had rejected Christ then accepted him, and how even a few hours before the crucifixion the people shouted out for Jesus of Nazareth to be their Messiah-king. These are some of many hints that there was a complex acceptance-rejection relationship between Israel and Christ. Saul and David likewise had a mutual love and respect for each other. After all Saul had done to David, David's grief at his death in 2 Sam. 1 is deep indeed. David taught all Israel to regularly sing that song of grief for Saul, and his zeal to demonstrate his forgiveness to the house of Saul is outstanding. Saul's sons and family were also involved in the anti-David campaign.

Behold, it is written in the book of Jashar)-
Literally "the upright", showing how David imputed righteousness to Saul as an upright one. But this book has significantly not been preserved and was not Divinely inspired; because Saul is not ultimately in the book of God's upright ones.

2 Samuel 1:19

Your glory, Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!-
LXX "Set up a pillar, O Israel, for the slain that died upon thy high places". Or the Hebrew for "glory" is that for "gazelle" and may refer to the swiftness of Jonathan. If the LXX is followed, we see David unafraid to break the spirit of the Mosaic law in Lev. 26:1; just as David at times acted as a Levitical priest when he wasn't one. The reference to "high places" suggests idolatry, and there is the implication in the Psalms written against Saul that he was finally an idolater. The place of his death was therefore appropriate.

2 Samuel 1:20

Don't tell it in Gath. Don't publish it in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph-
But all these things did of course happen (1 Sam. 31:9). We must read this as David's bitter regret that it happened.

2 Samuel 1:21

You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain on you, neither fields of offerings-
LXX "Fields of firstfruits".

For there the shield of the mighty was shamefully cast away, The shield of Saul was not anointed with oil-
Shields were anointed with oil before going into battle (Is. 21:5). The idea may be that Saul's shield didn't save him, he perished as if he had not anointed it with oil; but the implication is that his anointing as king of Israel hadn't saved him. He had been rejected, in favour of David.

2 Samuel 1:22

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, Jonathan's bow didn't turn back. Saul's sword didn't return empty-
Jonathan and Saul's "bow... and sword" were used by them in the fateful battle on Gilboa. Does this mean that Jonathan was trusting in his human strength again? Psalm 44, which sounds very much like David's meditation on Israel's defeat on Gilboa, includes the comment: "I (David) will not trust in my *bow*, neither shall my *sword* save me" (Ps. 44:6). Or does it mean that although Jonathan gave David / Jesus his human strength, his bow (1 Sam. 18:4), but David gave it back to him, for him to use on his own initiative?

It is possible to Biblically reconstruct the battle of Gilboa, and thus to enter into the pathos of the whole scene yet more fully. Saul and Jonathan did not retreat / turn back, when the rest of Israel did (1 Sam. 31:1). Saul and his sons held their ground, slaying many Philistines. But then Jonathan was wounded by an arrow (the Hebrew word translated "slain" in 2 Sam. 1:19,22,25 means to pierce to death; crucifixion language), as was Saul. Yet they kept on fighting, until they were surrounded on all sides; they died "in the *midst* of the battle" (2 Sam. 1:25); they "perished" (2 Sam. 1:27), a Hebrew word also translated 'to have no way to flee'. They tried to flee, eventually throwing down their shields so that they could run faster (2 Sam. 1:21). Eventually Jonathan and his brothers, the cream of Israel, lay slain on Gilboa, and Saul then fell on his sword.

2 Samuel 1:23

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives-
LXX "Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and the beautiful". Or, "loving and kindly". Saul had been anything but this, but it is part of love to impute righteousness to a person, to see them positively after their death; and this is why God's love leads to His imputation of righteousness to us, as Rom. 1-8 explains. The sense of this verse in the Hebrew is that "Neither in their lives nor in their death were they divided". But they were deeply divided in their lives. We see here David wishing by all means to impute righteousness to both

Saul and Jonathan, even though he had suffered to terribly from Saul. We see here the measure of David. Despite his Psalms of imprecation against Saul, when Saul dies, he shows that in his heart he truly loved Saul and forgave him to the point of imputing righteousness to him. We must remember that when a man rails against another. The words are indeed sinful, for we shall be judged according to our words. But human nature is so contradictory that within there may also be a core love for the person being abused in hot blood. Thankfully God judges righteously, factoring in all the invisible things of the heart which man cannot; we cannot ultimately judge, and this inability is the reason why we must not judge.

In their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles. They were stronger than lions-
We could read this as a lament by David- Jonathan ought to have quit the court of Saul and come out to David in the wilderness. But he didn't, and so he died along with his father and was not promoted to second in command in the Kingdom of David, as he and David had earlier agreed. And David laments the unity between Jonathan and Saul.

There clearly were many divisions between Saul and Jonathan in their lives; we think of Saul's upbraiding of Jonathan in 1 Sam. 20:30: "O son of a perverse wayward woman! Don't I know you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and the shame of your mother's nakedness?". The claim they were undivided may be somewhat more than poeticism and seeing the good in the deceased; quite possibly Jonathan did veer towards Saul as opposed to David, and suffered for it. David's lament over Saul and Jonathan is extremely positive, after the spirit of the way in which Christ looks upon his dead saints (cp. God's positive comments on many of the kings after their death). Yet we know that Saul's death was in recompense for his dire apostasy. In that punishment, David observed, he and Jonathan "were not divided". This may suggest that in some sense Jonathan was too closely linked with his father, and was therefore implicated in his punishment. It can be shown that not all Saul's sons died on Gilboa; therefore there was special point to the fact that Jonathan died with his father in that way. David's command that there should be no dew or rain upon the mountains (2 Sam. 1:21) was to be picked up years later by Elijah, when he made the same imprecation against an apostate Israel (1 Kings 17:1).

Consider the following:
- The description of Jonathan as the son of Saul occurs a massive 23 times; the connection between them is certainly highlighted.
- Jonathan had Gideon as his personal hero. Yet there is ample evidence that Saul too saw Gideon in this light. Does this suggest that in his more spiritual days, Saul successfully imparted his spiritual enthusiasm for Gideon to his son in Sunday school lessons?
- Mephibosheth is called Saul's son (2 Sam. 9:7,10; 19:24), although he was actually

Jonathan's son. This suggests that the son was brought up in Saul's house. This certainly does not give the impression that Jonathan separated himself from his father's house.
- Jonathan was commander of the army (1 Sam. 13:2). When he gave "the robe that was upon him" to David (1 Sam. 18:4), he was effectively making David the commander (cp. 2 Chron. 18:9,29). Thus when "Saul set (David) over the men of war" (1 Sam. 18:5), he was tacitly going along with Jonathan's wish, even though by this time he had already heard the women praising David more than himself, and his bitter jealousy against David had already begun (1 Sam. 18:6). This little point simply shows the external unity of action between Saul and Jonathan.

This closeness in Jonathan's relationship with Saul shows the emotional tangle which Jonathan was in on account of his relationship with David. If we truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we are honest enough to come to terms with the pull of our own natures, we will be going through exactly the same. Our Lord seems to have seen in Jonathan a type of ourselves. In the context of warning us that loyalty to Him would mean confessing him before men and conflict between fathers and sons, he encourages us that not a hair of our head will perish (Mt. 10:30 cp. Lk. 21:18). This is picking up the application of this phrase to Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:45.

2 Samuel 1:24

You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet delicately, who put ornaments of gold on your clothing-
It was those daughters of Israel who had praised David more than they had Saul, and this had been the trigger for Saul's jealousy complex against David. Samuel had warned that Saul would make the daughters of Israel suffer, making them his slavegirls. But here again, David imputes righteousness to Saul, a sign of love. And that is the same outcome of the love of God for us in Christ. Our natural desire to speak no evil of the dead, to speak only good of them [*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*] and to remember them positively reflects how God looks at His dead children. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of all His saints".

2 Samuel 1:25

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places-
See on :22 for a reconstruction of the battle. I suggested on :23 that Jonathan died not at his spiritually best. The reference to *his* high places could imply that he died at the high places where he performed idolatry. We note the elements of idolatry in the names of his children.

2 Samuel 1:26

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women-
"The love of Christ, that passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:19) is clearly prefigured in David's feelings for Jonathan and the love of David for Jonathan. Despite many passionate relationships with women, experiencing the depth of human closeness more than many, David could sob: Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women". The Hebrew for " wonderful" has a root meaning 'separate'. This love of Jonathan was separate from all other love David had known. In this we see perhaps the first Old Testament foretaste of *agape* love, love beyond the *phileo* and *eros*. Emotionally and spiritually, Jonathan and David went way ahead of their time. David speaks of Jonathan's love in terms of male: female love. He describes him as "the beauty of Israel", "very pleasant hast thou been unto me"; and grammatically, "your love to me..." (2 Sam. 1:26) implies that the lover was female. These two brethren had a spiritual love for each other which totally transcended the gender division. In like manner, our Lord said that male believers could be His sister and mother. We are dealing with high things here. Yet the heights of the David: Jonathan relationship are set down here to challenge us to at least try to touch the sky, however briefly. And when David later wrote of how good and “pleasant” it is for brethren to dwell together in unity (Ps. 133), he surely had the pleasantness of his relationship with Jonathan in mind, and wished it to be shared by all his brethren.

David returned from killing Goliath; the women come out to congratulate David, all apparently in love with the classic handsome hero; and Jonathan also loves him (1 Sam. 18:1-6, see notes there). Possibly David alludes to this when he laments that Jonathan's love for him surpassed the love of women (2 Sam. 1:26).

2 Samuel 1:27

How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!-
"The mighty"- see on 1 Sam. 14:45. David had refused those same "weapons of war" in his victory over Goliath, and he may imply that now Israel were to learn the lesson- and trust in Yahweh rather than weapons. Indeed "the mighty" is the term used for Goliath in 1 Sam. 17:51. It's as if David sees this defeat as a reversal of his victory over Goliath. Although "the weapons of war" were Jonathan and Saul, in the immediate context.

We note how David's victory song recorded in 2 Sam. 22 has many allusions to his lament over Saul in 2 Sam. 1. Saul is lamented as having cast away his bow and shield, he lost "the battle" and turned back from his foes and was chased by them, until he and Israel perished on "their high places". 2 Sam. 22 has David glorying in how he won

victory on "the high places" with his bow and shield being blessed by God so that he never turned back from his foes and instead chased them until he had won the battle. He sees himself as succeeding in the ways Saul had failed.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 2

2Sa 2:1 It happened after this, that David inquired of Yahweh saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? Yahweh said to him, Go up. David said, Where shall I go up? He said, To Hebron-

David had been waiting to become king for very many years, if indeed Saul reigned 40 years (Acts 13:21). To the credit of his humility, he didn't immediately gleefully seize power. He asks God whether he should, and where in Israel he should make his base, presumably by using the urim and thummim in the breastplate which was then in his possession. He was then living in Ziklag, which was in Philistine territory and not then considered a city of Judah. We again get the impression that David's ascent of the throne was completely at God's behest, he did not at all grasp it, and as a result of his humbly accepting God's guidance. This contrasts with the declaration of Ishbosheth as king. His Psalms are full of requests to be guided, for God to teach him the way he should go in accordance with His word- and as discussed often on Ps. 119, I suggest that word is specifically the word of promise that he would be the king of all Israel. David inherited a situation where Israel had just been defeated by the Philistines, and there was apparently strong support for Saul's dynasty to continue amongst his tribe Benjamin and the northern tribes. Benjamites had been favoured by Saul and they didn't want to lose that. And David had vowed not to kill the descendants of Saul and Jonathan. Yet there were some amongst them who resisted his kingship and would use violence against him in this... Only by waiting on God's providential hand could this be resolved and he is to be commended for waiting some years for the hand of providence to remove Abner, Ishbosheth and then leave the only other contender against him to be the invalid Mephibosheth, who as a cripple was unable to lead the nation.

God's choice of Hebron is significant. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all left the land [as David did in a way by going to the Philistines] but all were led back by God to live at Hebron (Gen. 13:18; 35:27). Hebron was God's intended capital for David, but he fell in love with Jerusalem and then claims God has done so. God went along with David's choice, just as He allowed Israel to have a king and for a physical temple to be built.

2Sa 2:2 So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite-

This notice seems to pave the way for the note in 2 Sam. 3:2-5, that David took at least six other wives in the seven years he reigned in Hebron. We could get the impression

that David's spiritual life was in some areas in steady decline from the time he slew Goliath in his youth. And yet he died in faith.

The style of :2,3 is precisely that of the description of David, his wives and his men and their families going to Gath in faithless fear of Saul (1 Sam. 27:3). Perhaps the similarity in the records is to demonstrate how David's ascent to the throne was by grace. There are also many similarities with Jacob returning to his land after an exile, with his two wives. The Jacob-David parallels encourage us in seeing David as far from purely motivated, and being capable of living by grace and faith whilst also trusting in his own schemings.

2Sa 2:3 David brought up his men who were with him, every man with his household. They lived in the cities of Hebron-
Six hundred men with their families would have been a major group of people, too large to just settle in the existing city of Hebron itself. It has been estimated that the population of all Israel at the time was only 300,000 at the most, which meant that the 3,000 or so with David would have been the equivalent of a significant town.

We note these cities were "the places where David himself and his men used to stay / roam" (1 Sam. 30:31). The land of his wandering became his permanent abode; and there is some sense of that in the promise of the Kingdom to us. Just as there was for Abraham. And we wonder at Joshua being buried in the border of his inheritance, as if the idea was that he would rise again to inherit it. And we ask how it will be if the people of our suburb or village were to know that we shall eternally inherit that land...

2Sa 2:4 The men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah-
It was known that Samuel had anointed David king, nearly 40 years before (Acts 13:21). This was therefore an act of showing that they were in step with God's clear intentions for David, and we at times likewise have to make such demonstrations of being in step with the path God is clearly revealing.

They told David saying, The men of Jabesh Gilead were those who buried Saul-
It could well be that they told him this in disgust or warning, expecting David to take some sanctions against them. But David does the very opposite, and blesses his enemies. For a major theme of these chapters is his enthusiasm to show every grace possible to the supporters and house of Saul, although they were his enemies.

2Sa 2:5 David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead and said to them, Blessed are you by Yahweh, that you have shown this kindness to your lord, even to Saul, and have buried him-

The people of Jabesh knew there was a civil war going on between the supporters of Saul and those of David. They had consciously buried Saul as a statement of respect, which surely implied loyalty to the house of Saul. For who you officially buried was a major statement in those times. And they receive a message of blessing from David. This was an expression of grace by David which was unheard of in the hard world of those days.

2Sa 2:6 Now may Yahweh show grace and truth to you. I also will reward you for this kindness, because you have done this thing-
David sees himself as showing this grace in tandem with Yahweh. "Grace and truth" often refers to the covenant promises, and David wishes them to receive every blessing of the covenant, and on the basis of that covenant accept him as king. He is giving a spiritual dimension to the kingdom he wished to create, based around a common share in the covenant. And that indeed is the only true basis for unity. David however suggests in :7 that the "reward" he offers them is to come under his kingship. 'Reward' or 'doing' kindness / good is exactly the term David's wife Abigail had used of what God would do to David on Saul's death (1 Sam. 25:30 s.w.). David was influenced by his wife's perceptive words. And as he realizes he had been shown such grace by being made king, he wished to reflect that grace to others, even his political enemies; a principle for us to live by.

2Sa 2:7 Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant-
"Valiant" definitely refers to soldiers; it could be that David was inviting the men of Jabesh to join his army. This would have seemed a politically dangerous move, to invite his enemies to infiltrate his own military. But he acted according to his persuasion of grace and his desire to honour what he had promised to both Saul and Jonathan; and finally he was blessed for it.

For Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them-
Jabesh was in Gilead not in Judah, but on the basis of grace, David invites these people to as it were become Jews, and come under his rulership. The Lord Jesus, whom David looked forward to, operates likewise. But David's grace was not pure; it had an agenda. He hoped the men of Jabesh would join him, "be valiant" by joining his army, and hold the land of Gilead against the Philistines. But instead Gilead became the base for Ishbosheth, so his grace at this time wasn't as it were successful.

2Sa 2:8 Now Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's army, had taken Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim-
This was about twenty miles east of Jordan, and hardly the most central place from

which to try to rule Israel. We get the impression that Abner was using Ishbosheth for his own ends. Mahanaim means "two camps". It was a nudge at Abner's conscience, that by trying to continue Saul's dynasty, he was effectively dividing Israel into two camps. And he appears to genuinely repent of this when he considers becoming king and starts to move towards it.

2Sa 2:9 and he made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, over Benjamin and over all Israel-
From Mahanaim, east of Jordan, Ishbosheth could not reign in practice "over all Israel", so we conclude that this was what Abner proclaimed him as, even if it had little meaning in practice.

2Sa 2:10 Ishbosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David-
If Saul reigned 40 years (Acts 13:21), Ishbosheth was born at the start of his reign. His name is elsewhere Ish Baal, but here that has been played upon, making a word meaning literally 'man of shame'. This would suggest that Saul was a Baal worshipper at the start of his reign. He had never met Samuel nor attended his sacrifices to Yahweh. It had been God's intention to turn around the heart of this secular Israelite to Himself, through the gift of His Spirit making him "another man" and giving him "another heart". He was clearly not chosen because of any spirituality, but in the hope he would become a parade example of God's transforming grace.

2Sa 2:11 The time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months-
Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as "thirty cubits", although it was ten cubits broad. Taking 'pi' to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, "thirty".

2Sa 2:12 Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon-
Gibeon was exactly half way between Hebron, David's capital, and Mahanaim, the

capital of Abner and his puppet Ishbosheth. It's about 26 miles from Gibeon to both the capitals. That Abner "went out" towards the territory of Judah (Gibeon is only six miles from Jerusalem) shows that he felt strong enough to try to engage David's side in conflict.

2Sa 2:13 Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met them by the pool of Gibeon; and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool-
The 'going out' as in :12 was to battle. The pool of Gibeon has been located, and it is in a valley. The two armies would have seen each other from the opposite sides of the valley, hence the suggestion to fight at the pool in the valley. Gibeon had a sanctuary of Yahweh, for it was here that Yahweh appeared to Solomon. Gibeon was where some kind of more permanent tabernacle was (1 Chron. 21:29; 2 Chron. 1:3). There was a "great stone" there, possibly an altar (2 Sam. 20:8). Possibly the pool or [Heb. 'fountain'] was for sanctification, a kind of laver before that altar. Perhaps the idea was that this battle was in God's presence and He would give victory to His side. But He is never present in this kind of division between His people.

2Sa 2:14 Abner said to Joab, Please let the young men arise and play before us! Joab said, Let them arise!-
We get the impression from this that Abner really didn't want to see bloodshed within Israel as a result of the civil war he was now initiating; he therefore suggested that as with the battle against Goliath, the issue was resolved by a symbolic number of young men fighting each other in full view of both armies. See on :21.

2Sa 2:15 Then they arose and went over by number: twelve for Benjamin, and for Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David-
The choice of twelve could suggest that both sides saw themselves as the true Israel, and that all Israel, all 12 tribes, should be subservient to them. Abner's 12 men were chosen for their loyalty to their tribe; whereas David's 12 men were simply his servants, their loyalty was to him and not to any tribe. They are therefore described as his servants, rather than men of Judah. See on :17.

David isn't mentioned here at the duel, nor in the battle that ensues. He remains at Hebron and Joab goes there after the battle to inform David what happened. I suspect this was because he knew that human force and conflict was not the way to become the promised king of all Israel. He kept out of it because he trusted in the fulfilment of God's word of promise at His time in His way. The duel involved seizing the head or *rosh* of the other. David knew he was set to be the head or *rosh* but this would not happen by human strength. He believed the words of Hannah, that by strength shall no man

prevail. We recall how the heads of David's opponents were all removed by God's hand: Goliath (1 Sam. 17), Saul (1 Sam. 31) and Ishbosheth (2 Sam. 4).

2Sa 2:16 They each caught his opponent by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together-
This is proof for all time that conflict between brethren is only ever a lose-lose situation. 'Falling down together' is the language of Divine judgment (Is. 31:3; Jer. 6:21; 46:12). The conflict between brethren was not blessed by God and was His way of judging them all.

Therefore that place was called Helkath Hazzurim, which is in Gibeon-
"The field of the sharp knives".

2Sa 2:17 The battle was very severe that day: and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David-
As noted on :15, Abner's men are described in terms of their loyalty to their tribal grouping; whereas David's soldiers were simply his servants, their loyalty was to him and not to any tribe. They are therefore described as his servants, rather than men of Judah. And this is the effect which personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus should have upon us. All human labels fade beneath that reality. See on :31.

2Sa 2:18 The three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai and Asahel: and Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle-
This family were from Bethlehem (:32), and would have known David well, as it was but a small village. We can imagine Asahel playing with David as a child. They would soon have been aware that David had been anointed in Bethlehem, and were supportive of him for almost a lifetime.

2Sa 2:19 Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he didn't turn to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner-
We get the impression that Asahel was enraged and obsessed in slaying Abner.

2Sa 2:20 Then Abner looked behind him and said, Is it you, Asahel? He answered, It is I-
The question was because he didn't want to slay Asahel. As noted on :21, Abner is presented as wanting to minimize bloodshed in that he didn't want to kill Asahel.

2Sa 2:21 Abner said to him, Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and grab one of the young men, and take his armour. But Asahel would not turn aside from following him-

This was an invitation to a duel, with armour; presumably they were running past young men with armour and not running unobserved by others. But Asahel didn't want a fair fight, he wanted to use his advantage of speed to somehow kill Abner by a blow to his back. Abner comes over as far more ethical in the conflict. He didn't want the bloodshed of civil war and instead suggested a duel to resolve it (:14), and he now does the same to Asahel.

2Sa 2:22 Abner said again to Asahel, Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then should I hold up my face to Joab your brother?-
Again, Abner really doesn't want to kill Asahel. He is warning him, effectively, that he can just stop dead in his tracks and let Asahel run into his spear he is holding, with its point facing towards Asahel. The manner of death was really Asahel running into his own death rather than Abner consciously slaying him. Abner knows that Joab will then want to revenge Asahel's blood, and the city of refuge system was clearly not operative. And it seems Abner and Joab knew each other, and Abner wanted to forge a new relationship, face to face, with Joab; for this is how 'seeing the face' is used in 2 Sam. 3:13. Abner accepted defeat, and wanted to now move on in relationship. But Asahel was obsessed with settling some old scores.

2Sa 2:23 However he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner with the back end of the spear struck him in the body, so that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place. It happened, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still-
Abner has just warned Asahel in :22 that he can just stop dead in his tracks and let Asahel run into his spear he is holding, with its point facing towards Asahel. This was how close Asahel was to Abner, and was about to strike him to death with a blow to the back. The manner of death was really Asahel running into his own death rather than Abner consciously slaying him. He "refused to turn aside", implying his death was largely his own fault.

We note that Asahel "pursued" Abner and then after Asahel was killed, all the people "stood still", Heb. "stopped". This is repeated in :28. The people pursued but then "stopped". We get the impression that those who were stopped in their tracks by the wallowing body of Asahel, a young man in his prime now in his death throes, were like the people as a whole. There was a desire to stop on all sides. This is seen in many wars and human divisions. The path of peace and unity is what man subconsciously wants. Just as eternity has been set in our hearts. Man has a sense intuitively and subconsciously of what is right and it is the call of the Gospel to actuate that. We note the parallels between the two sides in :29,32- the leaders and their men both marched all night until they came to their home base. Man is in parallel with his warring brother.

Unity seeks what is common- and membership of Israel, the people of God, is the obvious reason to end all conflict within the body of Christ. "Aren't we all brethren in the same body?" ought to end every division.

Asahel was struck "under the fifth rib" (AV, "in the body" NEV); so was Abner (2 Sam. 3:27 AV) and so was Ishbosheth (2 Sam. 4:6 AV). These murders, of which David had no responsibility, are all clearly connected. The connection is that the possible contenders for the throne [Abner and Ishbosheth] were all killed in a similar way. It was by God's overarching providence, rather than David's use of force and human strength. And the murder of Asahel by Abner was likewise of God, in that it marked Abner out for a revenge killing by Joab. Somehow impossible situations work out, by doing as David did and biding our time and reigning in our desire to use our human strength... and trusting in the fulfilment of His words of promise.

2Sa 2:24 But Joab and Abishai pursued after Abner: and the sun went down when they had come to the hill of Ammah, that lies before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon-
The detail given is very detailed. There must have been some significance in it which is not apparent to us today; a reminder that the Biblical record was primarily written for its first audience and not for us. This means that there will be parts of it which appear hard to understand, or of less relevance to us than to the primary audience. Ammah and Giah mean “aqueduct” and “spring”, perhaps leading us back to how all this started in :13-17 where the two sides began fighting at a pool.

2Sa 2:25 The children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner and became one band, and stood on the top of a hill-
This could have been an invitation to come and fight them. They were prepared to make one last stand on the hill top. I suggest Abner did this because he sensed Joab would not take up the challenge, and it corroborates the impression we have that he wanted the least bloodshed as possible. By offering to make a last stand, and fight to the death with no way of escape [as they were on a hilltop], he was really forcing Joab to either accept peace or more bloodshed.

2Sa 2:26 Then Abner called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour forever? Don’t you know that it will be bitterness in the latter end? How long shall it be then, before you ask the people to return from following their brothers?-
Again, Abner comes over as urging as little bloodshed as possible, and reminds Joab that they are brothers. "Return" is the word usually used for repentance. Although Abner had initiated the conflict, he seems genuinely regretful of the bloodshed it had caused.

2Sa 2:27 Joab said, As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely then in the morning the people would have gone away, rather than each following after his brother-
Joab agrees that brother fighting brother is wrong. He agrees, but seems to want to save face by saying that he would have called an end to the bloodshed the next morning. Again, to save face, he may also be implying that if they had continued fighting, he would have slain all Abner's men by the next morning. Both sides agree that they are brethren and that fighting brethren is wrong (:26 "return from following their brothers" = :27 "each following after his brother"). Joab swears by God that he too was about to call a halt to the battle. We see here how unity is a question of both sides being honest about their deepest heart commitment to the same higher Divine principles. It is rarely achieved amongst God's people, but by the end of 2 Sam. 3 we have a rare example of where it seems genuine unity was achieved.

2Sa 2:28 So Joab blew the trumpet; and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more-
That is, at that time (cp. 2 Sam. 3:1). In reading the Bible we must be aware that Semitic writing presents things as they are true at the immediate time, rather than in terms of what is true globally or in the future.

2Sa 2:29 Abner and his men went all that night through the Arabah; and they passed over the Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and came to Mahanaim-
Abner and his men walked all night along the Jordan valley, northwards towards Mahanaim; because they obviously distrusted the peace deal with Joab, and feared he would again attack them. All the way through, Abner is presented as having more integrity than Joab, leading up to the tragedy of Joab murdering Abner by dishonest means.

We note that much later, David fled to Mahanaim from Absalom's rebellion. It was seen as a pro-David place. Yet at this point it was the base for Abner and the pro-Saul, anti-David faction. So it does seem that David's extended grace towards Saul and his supporters did win them over to him.

2Sa 2:30 Joab returned from following Abner: and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel-
We note the continued reference to David's soldiers as his personal servants, rather than "men of Judah"; see on :17,31.

2Sa 2:31 But the servants of David had struck of Benjamin, and of Abner's men, so that three hundred and sixty men died-

Again we note the contrast between "Benjamin", who were loyal to their tribe, and "the servants of David", who did not consider tribal labels as important as being servants of their king. See on :15,17. The 360 men may be a general figure, as it was the number of days in a Hebrew year.

2Sa 2:32 They took up Asahel, and buried him in the tomb of his father, which was in Bethlehem-
Zeruiah was a woman; the father is not named. She is mentioned so often that we assume she had a large part to play in forming the rather unpleasant characters of her sons.

Joab and his men went all night, and the day broke on them at Hebron-
The two sides are presented as both marching all night back to their respective capitals. They were brethren, living in parallel lives, but fighting each other. And this is true of all the divisions amongst God's people.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 3

2Sa 3:1 Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: and David grew stronger and stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker-
The inspired commentator presents the civil war as it was, a feud between two families, who came from opposite sides of Jerusalem, only about 20 km. from each other. As discussed on chapter 2, David was waiting for God's word to come through for him and was not using his own strength. Yet he was made stronger and stronger, in contrast to how Abner makes himself strong, in his own strength, for the Saulides (:6).

2Sa 3:2 To David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess-
We must recognize that there will be anomalies in the lives of our brethren- just as there are in the lives of us all (if only we would examine ourselves ruthlessly enough to see them). And in some ways at some times, God goes along with them. Thus He gave Saul's wives to David (2 Sam. 12:8), which would've involved David being married to both a mother and daughter- for he had married Saul's daughters. And this giving of Saul's wives to David may not have occurred simply after Saul's death. For David's eldest son, Amnon, was borne by Ahinoam (2 Sam. 3:2), who was initially Saul's wife (1 Sam. 14:50). Now this is not to justify sin. Adultery, taking another's wife or husband, is all wrong. Let there be no mistake. But God at times sees the bigger, or longer, perspective, and tolerates things which we may quite rightly find intolerable. And if He loves us despite of our sin and failure- are we surprised that we are invited to show love

to others in the face of their sin and failure toward us? A black and white insistence upon God's standards being upheld in the lives of others, demanding their repentance for having hurt us, is what has caused so much division between believers. Whilst God alone will apportion the guilt for this, in the final, unalterable, ultimately just algorithm of Divine judgment, it's worth observing that the fault for division isn't always with the sinners, the wider thinkers, the freewheelers; but with the inflexible intolerance of those in power.

"Amnon" means 'faithful' and we might have expected him to be David's logical successor. But one great theme of David's personal life was his disappointment in his children and wives.

2Sa 3:3 his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite-
We would rather have expected Chileab as the son of David's most spiritual wife to be his successor. But 'restrained by his father' might mean that David initially thought so too, and was so restrictive of Chileab that he didn't work out that way at all.

The third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur-
Solomon wished to imitate his father David in every sense; his own real personality only really came out in the Ecclesiastes years, when he took to drink, materialism, women and idolatry. It took the influence of his parents many years to wear off.
David had weaknesses for horses (2 Sam. 8:4) and many wives; and
Solomon followed in these steps too. Note that David had six sons in seven years by six different women, including Gentiles (1 Chron. 3:3). For Geshur was one of the tribes the Israelites ought to have driven out of the land (Josh. 13:13), and Talmai was sufficiently against David to provide refuge for Absalom (2 Sam. 13:37). "Geshur" means "joining" and such a joining in marriage to these people is another example of David's unwisdom with women.

And in addition to these, David had children by "the concubines" (1 Chron. 3:9).
Doubtless Solomon reasoned,
albeit deep within his psyche, that such behaviour was
legitimate because David his father had done it. David seems to have over interpreted the promises made to him about Solomon and the temple, and assumed
that his interpretation was certainly correct. And Solomon did exactly the same. The weaknesses of the parents all too easily are repeated by the children to an even greater extent.

This marriage with a Gentile was contrary to the spirit of the law (Ex. 34:16; Dt. 7:3; Josh. 23:12). It wasn't blessed, as his rebel son Absalom later took refuge in Geshur. The marriage was surely for political reasons, wanting an ally in the area of Ishbosheth's capital. For Talmai's kingdom was right next to Mahanaim (2 Sam. 15:8; Dt. 3:14). David

had attacked, murdered and pillaged the people of Geshur (1 Sam. 27:8,9: "David and his men went and made a raid on the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites... David attacked the land and saved neither man nor woman alive; he took away the sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels and the clothing"). As with his living in Gath and serving Achish, we see how facile and shallow are human political alliances.

2Sa 3:4 the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital-
The contrast of this section seems to be intentional with the note in 2 Sam. 2:2, that David arrived in Hebron from Ziklag with only two wives. We could get the impression that David's spiritual life was in some areas in steady decline from the time he slew Goliath in his youth. And yet he died in faith.

2Sa 3:5 the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron-
The birth of six sons, although these were not all his sons, is perhaps presented as a point of continuity with faithful Hannah who also had six sons, the firstborn of which had been David's mentor Samuel. Critics have raised the complaint that Eglah means "cow" and is an unusual Hebrew name for a king's wife. We wonder if this is a name that David gave her after a failed marriage or rejecting her as his wife. It's possible it is a name he gave Michal, who is otherwise unmentioned here. Although David's polygamy was less than ideal, his having children by his wives is contrasted favorably in this section with Abner's sleeping with one of Saul's concubines.

2Sa 3:6 It happened that while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner made himself strong on behalf of the house of Saul-
The idea may be that Abner exalted himself to be the effective leader of the house of Saul, with a view to becoming their leader in place of Ishbosheth. He was after all Saul's cousin. But the narrative continues to show that having recognized he was losing militarily (:1), he wanted to seek peace with David. And he uses the argument about Rizpah as an excuse.

2Sa 3:7 Now Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?-
This could have been seen as an intentional challenge to Ishbosheth, for sleeping with a king's concubine was an effective statement of having taken the throne. This is what Absalom did to David during his rebellion. Abner was Ishbosheth's uncle and Saul's cousin (1 Sam. 14:50) and was the logical one to be king if Ishbosheth was incompetent. He is presented as sleeping at noon and generally weak, so Abner maybe thought he was doing the right thing for Saul's side by taking over as king. It seems he did indeed plan to take over the throne from Ishbosheth... but he re-thought and

decided on loyalty to David, to God's word about David and the unity of Israel. And David accepted that, suspicious as it would've looked.

2Sa 3:8 Then was Abner very angry for the words of Ishbosheth, and said, Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show kindness to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and yet you charge me this day with a fault concerning this woman!-
See on :11. David had made it very clear that he would not slay any of the house of Saul. He had promised this to Saul and Jonathan, and was very careful to show absolute grace to them. But God worked so that despite keeping this oath, God all the same removed from the house of Saul all serious contenders for the throne. So Ishbosheth was not at any real risk of losing his life if Abner handed him over to David. It all seems to me as if Abner was orchestrating this falling out in order to provide himself with a face saving excuse to achieve unity with David, and as it were surrender power on good terms. It is not even clear if he did indeed sleep with Rizpah.

2Sa 3:9 God do so to Abner, and more also, if, as Yahweh has sworn to David, I don't do even so to him-
Abner was aware of the promises to David. I have elsewhere suggested that the essence of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 had been made to him at a far earlier stage. See on 1 Sam. 25:28, where Abigail uses the terms of 2 Sam. 7 ["a sure / established house"] well before they are recorded as being given. Abner realizes that God's promises require a man to be in step with them, and in a sense, to be the human channel of their fulfilment. And he is saying that he is willing to be that channel for their fulfilment. Abner consistently comes over, as noted often on 2 Sam. 2, as indeed seeking the throne for himself, but not wanting excessive bloodshed, and realizing that it would be better for all concerned if he resigned any pretensions to power. And here he demonstrates, despite his aggressive exterior, that he appreciates the promises to David and is not going to be like Saul and fight in vain to stop God's word coming true.

It's possible that Abner is referring to the same unrecorded prophetic word mentioned by David's men in 1 Sam. 24:4,5- that David would have the kingdom instead of Saul. We note Abner was with Saul at that time in the wilderness. And yet as with David's men, we wonder whether Abner just imagined this word. Because if he indeed knew it, then why had he been disobedient to it by fighting against David for the kingdom not to be transferred from Saul to David? Of course it could be also that this is all a statement of repentance by Abner- that seeing God had said this, he was now going to be obedient to it. His defeats had made him realize that he was fighting against the fulfilment of God's word.

2Sa 3:10 to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba-
It was because David's heart was 'turned away' from sin, that God 'turned away' the kingdom from Saul to David (s.w. Ps. 119:37). As noted on :9, Abner realizes this and seeks to now work for and not against God's purpose for Saul. For God had promised to set up / establish the throne of David, and Abner is now effectively repenting of fighting to stop that happening.

2Sa 3:11 He could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him-
I suggest Abner was loud mouthed and crudely spoken (:8), but beneath that rough exterior there was a genuine repentance, and always a desire to avoid excessive bloodshed between brethren, as noted throughout 2 Sam. 2. We too need to see through the surface level appearance of some brethren to their spiritual essence.

2Sa 3:12 Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf saying, Whose is the land? Make your alliance with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you, to bring all Israel around to you-
Although Abner controlled more land of Israel than David, the answer to his question, according to the law of Moses, was: "Yahweh" (Lev. 25:23 etc.). The land was God's. So they should not be fighting over who ruled it. It's similar to how the two sides in the battle of 2 Sam. 2 both realized at least subconsciously that brethren should not be fighting each other. Unity arguments are accepted in the hearts of all members of God's people, but it's a question of recognizing this in humility.

The idea seems to be 'The land is yours'. But he feared the consequences of his surrender, and wants there to be an agreement or alliance granting him personal safety. Saul had slain the priests of Nob because their hand was with David (s.w. 1 Sam. 22:17); perhaps Abner wishes to say that now, he too was with David and disassociated himself from Saul's actions. He saw that Yahweh's hand was with David in order to make him king over all Israel, and Abner now wanted to be working with that hand, with his hand in God's; and to cease resisting it.

2Sa 3:13 He said, Good; I will make a treaty with you; but one thing I require of you. That is, you shall not see my face, unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face-
We are left, intentionally, wondering what exactly were David's motives here. He may have considered that Saul's daughter's marriage was going to mean that her husband Paltiel was a potential contender for the throne, and he wanted to remove that potential threat by breaking up their marriage. But that would have reflected a lack of faith in the

promises that he would surely become king of Israel. Rather I suspect this was done from motives of personal bitterness. He had killed men in order to get Michal as wife, even though he ought to have been given her freely in return for slaying Goliath. That she had married another man was an intolerable insult for any Hebrew man, and it seems in weakness David acted like a secular person rather than a spiritual one.

2Sa 3:14 David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, whom I pledged to be married to me for one hundred foreskins of the Philistines-

David was very astute and this nuances all his apparent grace to Saul's family. And yet the fact he was so sharply astute means that grace, which is so illogical, would have not come naturally to him. The desire to have Saul's daughter again as his wife was surely politically motivated. He was seeking to win over Saul's supporters, so resuming his marriage with Saul's daughter was going to help that. But David paid no attention to the pain he would cause her husband. Again we see his apparent grace to the house of Saul was nuanced by his undoubted political agenda. David may also have been looking for assurance that Abner really did have power in Benjamin and over the other tribes. If he could indeed bring Michal to David in relationship, then he would demonstrate that he had the power to bring all Israel to David. And knowing David's mixed motives, it's not to much to think that he wanted to hurt and punish both Michal and Paltiel. For to know your wife was sleeping with another man would've been hard for David to respond to in grace. David was clearly angry that he hadn't been given Michal as promised when he slew Goliath, and that even when he paid the required dowry and married Michal, Saul had given her to another man when Michal didn't go out to join her husband in the wilderness [cp. Abigail]. Paltiel's obvious love and affection for Michal is set up in contrast with David's heartless treatment of her, and him. We note that Michal loved David in 1 Sam. 18:20 but there is never any reference to David loving Michal. So it seems as David took Michal so Abner took Rizpah, likewise for political reasons. So although in 2 Sam. 2 David faithfully trusts in Yahweh and not his own strength, he now seems to fail and resorts to human tactics. It's typical of human faith that we can't seem to maintain it for long on a high level but always revert, at least temporarily, to the strength of our flesh.

As discussed on :13, it seems David felt bitterly the betrayal. He had actually paid 200 foreskins for her, and anyway Saul should have given her to him for slaying Goliath. Despite having many wives and children, he could not bear the thought that she was married to another man. And so he broke up an apparently loving marriage (:16) for the sake of his own pride and need for control. And he was to do the same with the marriage of Uriah and Bathsheba.

We note in 2 Sam. 3:1-16 David's bad treatment of Michal's husband, who follows his wife with tears in a most unmasculine but genuine response to David taking her from

him. Paltiel walks behind her, when a woman in those days was supposed to walk behind a man [cp. Russian 'zamuzhem', behind a husband, to describe a married woman]. Paltiel was publically shamed; the way Abner abruptly tells him to stop following his wife and go home is as if Abner treats Paltiel as a dog. He did this when he already had at least six wives; the information about his wives and children precedes the narrative about him breaking up Michal and Paltiel's marriage. Although David calls Michal his "wife" [Heb. isshi], the record calls Paltiel her husband [Heb. 'ish]. This failure is then repeated by David when he takes Bathsheba and slays Uriah, breaking up a good marriage even though he had many "sheep". He was wrong in how he treated Paltiel. But his conscience didn't kick in. And so one sin led him to another sin, against Uriah, in essence the same but of far greater magnitude. We reflect how his taking of Abigail in 1 Sam. 25 also involved the displacement of her husband, Nabal- but by the hand of providence. It's as if David intentionally misread this as meaning that he had the right to remove the husbands of women he wanted. The progression is all so psychologically credible. David wanted to test Ishbosheth and Abner's loyalty [as Abner had formerly been Saul's general], and so he asked them to get Michal back to him as his wife. He clearly didn't love Michal; it was all for the sake of politics. We must be aware that sexual rights over a woman, especially the wife of another, were seen as a sign of political dominance and control; David lived in a culture where the politics of power were sexualized. We think of Absalom sleeping with David's wives publically. And we wonder whether his taking of Abigail was similarly motivated. This usage of women rather than loving them is what led him to the failure with Bathsheba. David is recorded as being loved by many people- Jonathan, Michal, Saul's servants, all Israel etc. But he is never recorded as loving anyone himself. Nathan's parable presents David as a man with many animals, representing his women- possibly suggesting this was how he saw his wives.

2Sa 3:15 Ishbosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Paltiel the son of Laish-

"Her husband" reflects God's view that Paltiel and Michal were married. David's argument that Michal was his wife originally wasn't really accepted by God, because He accepts second marriages.

The request was made from Ishbosheth, who was technically the king of Israel, in order to prove David's authority over him. And it could be that Michal and Paltiel had fled from David to Mahanaim. But David's resumed marriage with Michal wasn't blessed; it all seems a very personal and political thing.

Prov. 18:22 LXX may allude to Michal: "He that puts away a good wife, puts away a good thing, and he that keeps an adulteress is foolish and ungodly". This reading would then be a justification of how Solomon's father David had put away his wife Michal, Saul's

daughter, who had then married Phaltiel, a relationship Solomon liked to see as adultery. Constantly Solomon uses his knowledge of Divine truths to justify himself and his father, just as God's truth can likewise be abused today.

2Sa 3:16 Her husband went with her, weeping as he went, and followed her to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, Go! Return! And he returned-
Bahurim was about 20 miles from Mahanaim, near Jerusalem. We have the tragic image of the loving husband walking behind her weeping as she is led away from him. This was not only a breach of Mosaic law, but displayed a sad elevation of politics above others' relationships and marriages. It may be significant that her renewed marriage with David wasn't blessed with any children (2 Sam. 6:23). The record elicits our sympathy for Paltiel, and leaves us with the impression that David was heartless and callous when it came to others' relationships.

2Sa 3:17 Abner had communication with the elders of Israel saying, In times past, you wished for David to be king over you-
The northern tribes had been supportive of David, as all Israel had been after the victory over Goliath. But Abner seems to admit that it was he who had persuaded them otherwise. He is now showing the fruits of repentance by undoing the division he had created.

2Sa 3:18 Now then do it; for Yahweh has spoken of David saying, 'By the hand of My servant David, I will save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies'-
This was the Divine intention for Saul (1 Sam. 9:16), but Abner recognizes that now it had all been transferred to David. The interests of the nation as a whole, who had recently been defeated by the Philistines at Gilboa, were better served by David than Abner. For David had God's prophetic word on his side, and could bring deliverance. Abner had a number of options open to him; he could have fled to a neighbouring country, or sought some other way of resolving things with David. But he comes over as genuinely repentant, and honestly doing what he can, no matter at what loss of face, to bring Israel completely under David's control. See on :22.

2Sa 3:19 Abner also spoke in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and to the whole house of Benjamin-
As noted on :18, Abner's repentance was genuine. Having persuaded the northern tribes to accept his 'unity with David' plan, he then worked on Benjamin, Saul's own tribe, his own tribesmen. He spoke in their ears, and it "seemed good" to Benjamin as well as the

other tribes to accept David as king. There would have been hawks within Benjamin, who were not persuaded; and some of them emerge in later history in rebellion against David. But Abner must be credited with bringing about a remarkably quick agreement that in practice paved the way for David to rule all Israel. And it was only he, as the effective leader and army general, who could have achieved this. "All that seemed good" may be alluded to in the description of another unity process between brethren in Acts 15:25,28.

2Sa 3:20 So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. David made Abner and the men who were with him a feast-
The feast was surely a sign of acceptance and reconciliation, an idea which is continued in the feast of the Lord's supper which we experience in our days. The twenty men would have been the escort for both Abner and Michal.

2Sa 3:21 Abner said to David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your soul desires. David sent Abner away; and he went in peace-
Abner had already secured the general agreement of the other tribes (:19), and now he wanted them to send representatives to make a covenant with David. This would have been a guarantee of their safety, and finally was achieved in 2 Sam. 5:1. The name "Abner" is stressed many times in :17-21, because this whole unity process depended solely upon him. His assassination was therefore all the more shameful.

2Sa 3:22 Behold, the servants of David and Joab came from an engagement, and brought in a great spoil with them-
"An engagement" is literally "a raid" and connects with how the men who would assassinate Ishbosheth were also "captains of raiders" (2 Sam. 4:2). There is some thread of similarity being drawn by the record between these men and Joab. The point was that they were all used by God in order to one by one remove the contenders for the throne [i.e. Abner and Ishbosheth]; and so to providentially leave the way open for David to take the throne over all Israel. In this lies the significance of this otherwise irrelevant detail about Joab having just lead a raid.

Abner had rightly argued that God's promise to deliver Israel from the Philistines was to now be fulfilled through David (:18). We presume this victory of Joab had been against the Philistines. We recently read of how David divided the spoil from the fight with the Amalekites amongst Judah in order to demonstrate in hard terms his ability to save them from their neighbours, and we wonder if he did likewise.

But Abner was not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace-
Here we have the hand of providence; for if Joab had been in Hebron when Abner was there, he would have surely murdered him and the whole peace process would have been majorly derailed, likely leading to more bitter civil war. We can note from this that unity between brethren is God's will and He will work, within the confines provided by human freewill, to enable it.

2Sa 3:23 When Joab and all the army who was with him had come, they told Joab saying, Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has sent him away, and he is gone in peace-
The "they" were presumably those who like Joab considered that David was again being naive towards the house of Saul, and should have murdered Abner instead of making peace with him. Constantly we see David's belief in grace and unity leading him to do things which harder minded individuals found more than annoying; they reacted against it in the harshest of terms. Three times we read that David sent Abner away in "peace" (:21,22,23). This strong emphasis suggests the "peace" was of forgiveness. Abner had repented and David had forgiven him. But this kind of grace was unheard of for the likes of Joab and society of those days. In their eyes, treason against a king was a capital offence, and grace didn't come into it.

2Sa 3:24 Then Joab came to the king and said, What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, and he is quite gone?-
The implication is that David should have murdered him, and not let him go away in peace, with a guarantee of safe passage. We see the internal harmony of the record in that Joab's reaction here to Abner's being sent away in peace is in spirit so similar to his frustration with David over the death of Absalom (2 Sam. 19:6). We note the internal consistency in the record of Joab's character; another reason to believe these records are absolutely credible and inspired by God. See on 2 Sam. 20:10.

2Sa 3:25 You know Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you, and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you do-
Throughout the preceding verses, I have sought to demonstrate Abner's sincere repentance and genuine desire for unity under David. But Joab speaks as if he knows for sure that Abner is fake, and that David knows this too. Hatred of brethren leads to conspiracy theories about them being entertained, in the face of all evidence to the contrary. And then those theories become perceived as not only absolute fact in the mind of those who have nursed them, but they reflect their positions on to others, claiming that others in their hearts know them to be true. These ancient histories speak directly to the situations we encounter in relationships today.

2Sa 3:26 When Joab had come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah; but David didn't know it-
Joab's desire to personally murder Abner was premeditated, and he bears complete responsibility for it. He would have been given life in prison for this kind of behaviour today. But he was not demoted or disciplined much by David, because David himself, whilst strongly disagreeing with Joab's actions, failed to perceive the value of human life as he ought to have done. This is cited as a reason why he couldn't build the temple. And because of this, Joab went on to commit another such murder in 2 Sam. 20:10.

2Sa 3:27 When Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him quietly, and struck him there in the body, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother-
The language of striking in the body recalls how Abner had struck Joab's brother Asahel in the body (see note on 2 Sam. 2:23), although as noted there, Abner did not wish to do this. The manner of death was really Asahel running into his own death at the spear point, despite Abner warning him about it, rather than Abner consciously slaying him. Joab is therefore presented as far less ethical than Abner. As Asahel had intended to kill Abner by a blow to his back as he fled from him, so his brother Joab slew Abner from behind. And Joab didn't learn from this; he does the same to Amasa (2 Sam. 20:10). See on 2 Sam. 4:6.

We surely have here the excuse Joab gave ["for the blood of Asahel"]. Abner had done all he could that Asahel not die and probably only intended to wound him with the blunt end of his spear. Joab's clear concern was that Abner would replace him as general and second in command. Joab's later murder of Amasa was from similar fears.

The other contenders for the throne all died "in the midst" of somewhere- Saul "in the midst of the battle" (2 Sam. 1:25), Abner killed in the midst of the gate, and Ishbosheth killed in the midst of his house (2 Sam. 4:6). The idea is that there was some common Divine hand in the removal of these men, all by His providence rather than David's own strength.

2Sa 3:28 Afterwards, when David heard it, he said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before Yahweh forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner-
I have sought to demonstrate so far that Abner consistently comes over as indeed having sought the throne for himself, but not wanting excessive bloodshed, and finally repenting. He realized that it would be better for all concerned if he resigned any pretensions to power. He demonstrates, despite his aggressive exterior, that he appreciates the promises to David and is not going to be like Saul and fight in vain to

stop God's word coming true. I therefore consider David's grief for his murder as not at all theatrical, but genuine. And all Israel also realized this.

2Sa 3:29 Let it fall on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house. Let there not fail from the house of Joab one who has an issue, or who is a leper, or who leans on a staff, or who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread-
This was a stinging curse for one who had been so loyal to David, effectively wishing his exclusion from God's people (Lev. 13:46). And it was an age when curses were believed to have real power. But we note that David doesn't dissociate from Joab; he remains in power throughout David's life. And this lack of real discipline means that he does the same to Amasa (2 Sam. 20:10). Disciplining others wasn't David's strong point, and he paid for it. Like all of us, he was a mixture of softness and hardness.

2Sa 3:30 So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle-
This was indeed the motivation, but additionally I suggest that Joab wanted to be seen as the king maker, and disliked the way that Abner was going to go down as the architect of Israel's unity because of his own repentance, humility and resignation of his own aspirations to power. "In the battle" is perhaps added to show that any attempt by Joab to appeal to the laws of avenging blood was totally inappropriate and out of context.

2Sa 3:31 David said to Joab, and to all the people who were with him, Tear your clothes, and clothe yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. King David followed the bier-
The fact David had to tell Joab to do this shows that Joab was not the least bit repentant.

2Sa 3:32 They buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept-
This continues the frequent theme of David and his people being at one, sharing the same feelings. It looks ahead to the unity of the Lord Jesus with His people (see on 2 Sam. 5:1).

2Sa 3:33 The king lamented for Abner and said, Should Abner have died as a fool dies?-
We have here a lament song, composed and sung by David the musician, as he did over Saul and Jonathan. He sees Abner as a "fool" in that he had failed to perceive just how bad was Joab. Although Joab might have appealed to the laws about revenging slain blood, David clearly considered that they did not apply. For effectively, Abner had slain Asahel against his will and in self defence against a man literally aiming to stab him in

the back. We could also translate "Should Abner die as Nabal died?". He insists Abner is not the type who had to be slain by Divine stroke.

2Sa 3:34 Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put into fetters. As a man falls before the children of iniquity, so you fell. All the people wept again over him-
His hands were free to fight and his feet free to run away; so he was killed by deceit.

The sons of Zeruiah, Joab and Abishai [who was also party to the murder, :30] are called not sons of Zeruiah but sons of iniquity. It is the phrase used for the Gentiles outside of covenant with God (2 Sam. 7:10); another hint that David had been given many of those promises before the time when Nathan is recorded as presenting them to him. See on 1 Sam. 25:28. David laments that Abner was deceived into his death, assuming others had the same desire for peace which he had. He had been free to fight or run, but did not because he was deceived. Or David may mean that Abner had done nothing to deserve even prison; because David had forgiven him, and Abner had genuinely repented.

2Sa 3:35 All the people came to cause David to eat bread while it was yet day. David swore saying, God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or anything else, until the sun goes down-
David strangely binds himself under the same curse as Saul had enforced upon the people in 1 Sam. 14:24. We wonder why this was. Perhaps it was simply that he truly loved Saul, and had him in mind at this time of hatred against the house of Saul; and so subconsciously he alludes to the words of Saul, although out of context. This again adds veracity to the record; this is typical of language usage at times like this.

2Sa 3:36 All the people took notice of it, and it pleased them; as whatever the king did pleased all the people-
This means that the people also were persuaded that Abner was genuine in his repentance, and had been honestly trying to do his best to undo the division his power seeking had caused. Otherwise they would not have agreed with David.

2Sa 3:37 So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to kill Abner the son of Ner-
In days of limited communication and the inevitable miscommunications this resulted in, it was quite an achievement to persuade all Israel that Abner's murder had not been orchestrated by David. The depth of David's convictions about Abner's sincerity was so great that somehow it spread throughout the land.

Politically, the murder of Abner was a stroke of good fortune for David. Saul's son was weak, and now the only other leader of the opposition had been murdered. Had David proactively tried to kill Abner, the followers of Saul would not have naturally come under his control. And then an internal feud, apparently about money or wealth, leads to Ishbosheth the Saulide "king" being murdered by his own men (2 Sam. 4). This chain of events set David up to be king over all Israel. But David waited on God to fulfil the promise that he would be king of all Israel, even if it took seven years after Saul's death. Despite David's political astuteness, his trust in God's word is indeed admiral. With Abner's death and Israel's acceptance that David had no part in it, David was now the natural king of all Israel. David's attitude contrasts with that of Absalom and the others who later tried to grasp the Kingdom from David. David waited in trusting faith for the Kingdom and he received it, in good measure. The others tried to grasp it in their own strength and by their own device; and failed. Likewise the promise to David that his dynasty would continue to reign (2 Sam. 7) was given to him by grace and in love, and David accepted it in total humility. The very opposite to the grasping spirit of those who later tried to take his throne. David is likewise to be commended for not just grabbing Abigail from Nabal, but waiting for Nabal to die by God's hand. This highlights his later failure with Bathsheba.

2Sa 3:38 The king said to his servants, Don't you know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?-
"Prince" suggests that David may well have considered elevating Abner to some position of senior rulership in the united kingdom. As captain of Saul's army, it may have been David's intention to replace Joab [who was captain of David's army] with Abner. This would have been another reason why Joab wanted to murder him. But the man's greatness was in his humility and desire for unity, built around the fruits of his very genuine repentance and hatred of bloodshed between brethren.

2Sa 3:39 I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me. May Yahweh reward the evildoer according to his wickedness-
This was the language and exact situation David had experienced when on the run from Saul. He was anointed king, but weak, and he had to leave Yahweh to reward Saul for his wickedness. But he now transfers all those feelings about Saul onto Joab. This was how strongly David viewed the hatred of Joab for Abner. "Weak" translates a word meaning humble or tender and which therefore has connections with Messianic prophecies- the same word is in Zech. 9:9, "Your king comes, meek...". David could be implying here that he is the Messianic king- the meek and "anointed king". Whereas the sons of Zeruiah didn't fit that description because they were not humble. They were "hard" just as Nabal had been "hard" (1 Sam. 25:3) but as noted on :33, they wrongly treated Abner as Nabal. When they were in fact the Nabal who deserved judgment.

Or we can read this as David saying that now Joab had made it so much harder to achieve unity in Israel. How now could they all be coaxed under David's kingship, seeing David's man and nephew Joab had just killed Saul's cousin Abner? We are indeed weaker without all our brethren.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 4

2Sa 4:1 When Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands became feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled-
I suggest on :7 that this fear was because they assumed David had killed Abner, and now would be coming to kill Ishbosheth and all his household. They totally failed to perceive David's huge grace towards the house of Saul, even though they surely knew about it. Their fears of possible human judgment were stronger than their faith in grace, and that is the theme of this chapter; and it is such a typically human failure. The language here echoes that of Saul when told of his inevitable death the night before he dies (1 Sam. 28:21). They perceive that God's word about David will come inevitably true.

2Sa 4:2 Saul's son had two men who were captains of bands: the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin (for Beeroth also is reckoned to Benjamin-
The point is being made that although these men may not have been ethnic Benjamites, they were counted as Benjamites, and thus there arose the shame of Ishbosheth being slain by men of his own tribe. We note that one of David's mighty men was a Beerothite (2 Sam. 23:37). One wonders whether although David claims non involvement in Ishbosheth's murder, these men from Beeroth were in fact acting in David's interests. They play a similar role to the Amalekite servant who claims to have slain Saul, and in any case brought Saul's crown to David. In all these incidents [the death of Abner too], David protests his genuine non-involvement. But clearly these things played into his hand politically. We are left to conclude that his trust in the prophetic word, that he would be king of [all] Israel, was repaid by God providentially arranging all the politics. David is to be commended for not getting involved in the politics. And church politics today can never be a game played by those who think this will enable them to do God's work.

"Captains of bands" is literally "captains of raiders". Joab had just returned from a "raid" when he slew Abner (2 Sam. 3:22). There is some thread of similarity being drawn by the record between these men and Joab. The point was that they were all used by God in

order to one by one remove the contenders for the throne [i.e. Abner and Ishbosheth]; and so to providentially leave the way open for David to take the throne over all Israel.

2Sa 4:3 and the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and have lived as foreigners there until this day)-
Beeroth was one of the Gibeonite cities which made peace with Joshua (Josh. 9:17) and was then included within Benjamin (Josh. 18:25). But they had been persecuted by Saul (2 Sam. 21:1,2). The murderers of Ishbosheth were therefore counted as Benjamites, but they would have had an abiding bitterness toward Saul. Their murder of Ishbosheth was therefore from mixed motives, one of which may have simply been revenge. And this would fit the context of 2 Sam. 3, where Abner was murdered by Joab from the same wrong motive. The impression is given of the destruction caused when men refuse to reign in their desire for revenge.

Gittaim is the plural of Gath, and reflects Philistine influence in that area (1 Sam. 31:7). Again we see internal corroboration within the records, so detailed and constant that the entire history simply cannot be a forgery of men, but the inspired word of God.

2Sa 4:4 Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son who was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the news came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel; and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame-
We wonder why this is mentioned at this point, as the narrative is about the murder of Ishbosheth. Perhaps the idea is that now that Ishbosheth is to be killed, the only other potential king in Saul's line was a 12 year old boy who was a cripple, who had suffered that fate as an indirect result of the defeat of Saul due to his apostasy. In the hand of providence, all credible alternatives to David as king had now been removed, although not by his hand.

The explanation of Mephibosheth's lameness is given in 2 Sam. 4:4 as being that "his nurse took him up, and fled: and it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame". But as with the language of demon possession in the New Testament, we may have here an example of where an as then undiagnosed illness is blamed upon something that is mythical, or an imagined narrative. For there are reasons to think that Mephibosheth's lameness would have been a case of what we now know as poliomyelitis. To cause a five year old to have such spinal damage that both his legs were useless would require dropping the child from a great height. Casual dropping of a child of five years old is unlikely to cause this damage. And polio is often contracted by children around five years old.

His name was Mephibosheth-
Merib-baal (1 Chron. 8:34; 9:40). It could mean 'the shame of Baal', but there is

evidence that Saul's daughter Michal had an idol and it is likely that even Jonathan was not free of idolatry. Idolatry has always been a besetting weakness amongst even the best of God's people.

2Sa 4:5 The sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, as he took his rest at noon-
This might imply that he was physically weak, perhaps handicapped as was Mephibosheth (:4). As noted on :4, the impression is given that there were now no credible alternatives to David as king, although this was not by his hand.

2Sa 4:6 They came there into the middle of the house, as if they would have fetched wheat; and they struck him in the body: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped-
This striking in the body connects with what Abner did to Asahel, and what Joab did to Abner (2 Sam. 2:23; 3:27). We see the connection too with how Joab killed Abner in the middle of the gates of Hebron, between the outer and inner gates (2 Sam. 3:27). Although all these actions were the freewill choices of men, there was clearly a higher hand working through them all, in the same style. The apparent repetition of :5 is avoided by the LXX, which blames their entrance on a sleeping servant woman, as if Ishbosheth's power was so weak that his only guard was a sleeping woman: "And behold the portress of the house was cleaning wheat, and she slumbered and slept; and the brothers Rechab and Baanah came unobserved into the house. Now Ish-bosheth was sleeping on the bed in his chamber: and they smote him". In this case the negligence of the servant girl in :4, resulting in Mephibosheth being unable to be king and continue Saul's dynasty, matches with the negligence of another servant girl leading to Ishbosheth's death. There are a number of such parallels, all showing that the resistance to David's rule was removed by the same higher Divine hand, rather than his own use of force.

"In the body" is Heb. "under the fifth rib"; see on 2 Sam. 2:23.

2Sa 4:7 Now when they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him, and killed him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and went by the way of the Arabah all night-
They did this presumably because they didn't believe or understand the huge grace which David was eager to show towards the house of Saul. They assumed Abner had been slain by David, and that he was now going to slay Ishbosheth. And so they thought they could protect their own heads by doing this for David, thinking they would ingratiate themselves to him. And this is the reason for so many murders and acts of unkindness; a mistaken belief in the likely actions of others.

"Bed" is the same word as bier in 2 Sam. 3:31. The parallel deaths of these men reflects the hand if Providence, God's higher hand bringing about David's kingship over all Israel by removing all other contenders.

2Sa 4:8 They brought the head of Ishbosheth to David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold, the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy-
The Philistines in 1 Sam. 29:4 recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

Who sought your life!-
Saul "sought" David, implying a great level of mental effort (1 Sam. 19:10; 23:14,15,25; 24:2; 25:26,29; 26:2,20; 27:1,4; 2 Sam. 4:8). In the type of Christ, the Jews sought to kill the Lord (Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; 12:12; 14:1,11,55; Lk. 19:47; 20:19; 22:2,6; Jn.5:16,18; 7:1,11,25,30; 8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56; 18:4,7,8). In the Psalms, David frequently imprecates judgment upon those who sought his life (s.w. Ps. 35:4; 38:12; 40:14; 54:3; 63:9; 70:2; 71:13; 86:14). He loved Saul, the life of Saul was precious in David's sight, indeed the historical records seem to emphasize David's patient love of Saul; and yet in the Psalms he gives vent before God to his anger with Saul and desire to see Saul punished and judged by God. This is absolutely true to human experience; we may act with great patience and apparent love toward those who abuse us, and yet within we fume about it. The lesson of David is that we are to pour out those feelings to God in prayer, leaving Him to judge.

Yahweh has avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed-
They wrongly assumed that they could do Yahweh's work of vengeance, whereas the whole theme of David's thinking was that it is not for man to avenge.

2Sa 4:9 David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said to them, As Yahweh lives, who has redeemed my soul out of all adversity-
Compare Gen. 48:16 with 2 Sam. 4:9. What Jacob only learnt at the *end* of his life, David learnt and applied during his life. And we should likewise not be experiential learners, but learn instead from Jacob. David stresses that Yahweh had redeemed him, and he

had not needed to take vengeance himself. He repeats this in 1 Kings 1:29; he was deeply aware of Yahweh's redemption of him by grace right to his last days.

David makes a similar oath in 1 Kings 1:29. He means that seeing he was under God's protection, he had no need to commit such murder and assassination in order to redeem his own soul. And yet David lied and murdered during his time in Gath. As in the Psalms, he is far too quick to proclaim his total innocence. Not even the Bathsheba confession seems to have totally healed him of that tendency.

2Sa 4:10 when someone told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead', thinking to have brought good news, I took hold of him, and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news-
Surely the murderers knew of David's great grace toward Saul. The point is that their fears of possible judgment for them were greater than their belief in the abundant evidence of David's gr*ace*. And this remains a tragic feature of many people to this day.

2Sa 4:11 How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house on his bed-
Saul and his family were hardly righteous, except Jonathan. But David imputes righteousness to them, by grace; and this was later to be his experience from God after his seen concerning Bathsheba.

Shall I not now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?-
David alludes to himself as the avenger of blood, as if he was the close relative of Ishbosheth, so closely did he feel towards Saul's family (Num. 35:33; Dt. 19:13,19). Again we marvel at his love and grace. But presenting himself as one with Saul's family was at the same time a political move, to win them over to him. We note that David slays men who killed a righteous man, Ishbosheth. But he doesn't kill Joab for killing Abner, whom he also considers a righteous man. Clearly he was not acting on pure principle, but with at least some political agenda.

2Sa 4:12 David commanded his young men, and they killed them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up beside the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ishbosheth, and buried it in the grave of Abner in Hebron-
It seems to me that David's killing of the Amalekite in 2 Sam. 1:15 was an over the top reaction, and yet again betrays a lack of value and meaning attached to the human person. There was no attempt to convert the frightened young man to grace, to the God of Israel. The summary slaying of Rechab and Baanah has some similarities. We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

The way he buries Ishbosheth where he was then living is proof enough of his further desire to publically identify with the house of Saul. It was not mere theatricism, nor politically savvy behaviour; but a reflection of his genuine grace and love for them.

Yet always David's motives are mixed- genuine grace, but mixed with political agenda and expediency. As we noted concerning the analogous death of the Amalekite servant who claimed to kill Saul, David's murder of these men seems uncalled for. They were on his side or at least not against him, but he seems to feel the need to make a point to all Israel- that he was innocent of the murder of Ishbosheth. And so he murders others to make that point. This seems to reflect a lack of value of the human person, made as he is in God's image.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 5

2Sa 5:1 Then came all the tribes of Israel to David to Hebron-
This was to enter the covenant which Abner had persuaded them to make (see on 2 Sam. 3:21). We noted earlier that God had told David to go up to Hebron and it seems that is where God intended David to be king from. But it was David who preferred Jerusalem and possibly transferred that desire onto God.

And spoke saying, Behold, we are your bone and your flesh-
Eph. 5:30 makes the amazing statement that even now, "We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones". In a very detailed study of this language, Henricus Renckens concluded: "In Israel, in order to say that someone was a blood relation, one said: "He is my flesh and my bones" (Gen. 29:14; Jud. 9:2; cp. Gen. 37:27; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13 ff.; Is. 58:7)". This is how close we are to the Lord Jesus- blood relatives. This language could in no way be justified if Jesus were God Himself in person.

2Sa 5:2 In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. Yahweh said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of My people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel'-
The mutuality between God and David is often brought out. Yahweh was his shepherd (Ps. 23:1), and he was to shepherd Israel). All Israel recognized that David had always been Israel's saviour, and Saul generally had failed to experience the Divine potential for him to be this. The people may possibly be alluding to Gen. 49:10 "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs. To him will the obedience of the peoples be". And so the people gathered to David, the king chosen from Judah, the shepherd who had a staff. Although for them it now seemed so logical that a shepherd man from Judah should be their king, God's choice of Saul of Benjamin shows that He sees His purpose as capable of multiple

different paths of outworking. This is why the interpretation of prophecy can never be conducted dogmatically, because there are various possible outcomes- depending upon human freewill response.

2Sa 5:3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a covenant with them in Hebron before Yahweh; and they anointed David king over Israel-
This is the covenant which Abner had engineered in 2 Sam. 3:21, aimed at providing total amnesty and assurance to all those who had once supported Saul. David had already been anointed by Samuel, but this was stating that all Israel approved of that and wanted to work with God's plan rather than against it. It was a covenant of amnesty and forgiveness, the past was to be the past. And this looks forward to the situation when the Lord is finally enthroned king at His return.

2Sa 5:4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years-
If Saul reigned 40 years (Acts 13:21), this creates various chronological problems. Solomon, David and Saul are all stated to have reigned 40 years, and it may be a non literal number. Paul's argument in Acts 13:21 seems to be seeking to draw a parallel between Israel's 40 years in the desert and Saul's reign. Numbers are simply not used in Semitic literature in the literalistic way that they are in the writings of other cultures. To this day an Arab may describe a hot day as being 100 degrees C, when it is not that literally. But the Arab is not lying nor deceiving; it's a case of using numbers within a different context of language usage. Beginning his reign at 30 may be intended to recall how the Levites began serving at 30 (Num. 4:3), because David was set up to be the priest-king who would replace the high priesthood according to Hannah's song. And at times he clearly did act like this, although his failures meant that the potential was reapplied and reframed to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

2Sa 5:5 In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah-
Hebron was a priestly city and Jerusalem the kingly city, so maybe this is intended to present David as a king-priest, beginning his kingship at the same age as the priests began their service (:4). But I have suggested that Yahweh's command in 2 Sam. 2 was for David to be king in Hebron, but he chose Jerusalem [partly in Judah, partly in Benjamin] for political purposes and God went along with that.

2Sa 5:6 The king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David saying, Unless you take away the blind and the lame, you shall not come in here; thinking, David can't come in here-
A person who feels they are somehow a nice guy and worthy of invitation will be the one

who tends to consider others as unworthy of invitation to the Kingdom. He or she who perceives their own desperation will eagerly invite even those they consider to be in the very pits of human society. The lame, blind etc. were not allowed to serve God under the law (Lev. 21:18), nor be offered as sacrifices (Dt. 15:21), nor come within the holy city (2 Sam. 5:6-8). The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind (Mt. 15:30), and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace.

Defining the Jebusites as "the inhabitants of the land" may be another mark left by the inspired editing of these records for the exiles. Such explanatory notes would have been unnecessary for the primary readership. The encouragement to them was that restoration of Israel's fortunes was indeed possible, under a new David.

"Thinking, David can't come in here" continues a theme in the Samuel records- that human thoughts are so significant to God. This is what they thought, and therefore from the abundance of their hearts, their mouths spoke.

2Sa 5:7 Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion; the same is the city of David- As often in the Hebrew Bible, we have a summary statement and then an explanation of how it came about. The contrast is with how Saul's tribe of Benjamin had failed to drive out the Jebusites (Jud. 1:21). Jerusalem was originally in Benjamin, but David's capture of the city made it "the city of David" and therefore in Judah. We see here how different potential futures could have worked out. If Benjamin had taken and inherited their possession and Saul had 'worked out' as he could have done, then Jerusalem would have been in Benjamin. We see here how God's plans are flexible, reflective of His great respect of human freewill and initiative. The "city of David" was not a city, it is defined here as a stronghold, and elsewhere the term is used specifically of the burial places of the Davidic kings. It was a hill southeast of Jerusalem. In the wilderness Psalms, David so often talks of Yahweh as his stronghold, his fortified tower. And we think of 2 Sam. 22:1-3: "David spoke to Yahweh the words of this song in the day that Yahweh delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: and he said, Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, even mine; God, my rock, in Him I will take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge. My saviour, You save me". But once he settles in Jerusalem, we repeatedly read of the city / stronghold of David, the area he built a fortification around, the "milo". Again we see his spiritual decline once he settled down and we must beware of this. He himself and his fortified home fortress was his own stronghold rather than Yahweh.

It can be inferred that the Jebusites surrendered when the blind and lame were so cruelly slain. There is no mention of any battle; and Araunah the Jebusite is living and owning part of the future temple mount nearby at the time of 2 Sam. 24.

2Sa 5:8 David said on that day, Whoever strikes the Jebusites, let him get up to the watercourse, and strike the lame and the blind, who are hated by David's soul. Therefore they say, The blind and the lame can't come into the house-
See on :6. The Hebrew is difficult but seems to allude to how the Jebusites mocked the Hebrews, thinking that their high elevation was such that the bind and lame could repel any attackers. If David was indeed Jonathan's armourbearer in 1 Sam. 14, he would have seen how God had punished the pride of the Philistines when they thought likewise. For Jonathan had shinned up an almost vertical cliff, with the Philistines mocking him- and slew them. This inspired David with the possibility that someone of similar faith and bravery could climb up the sewer line into Zion and do the same. Jonathan's example, from some decades earlier, inspired faith in this later situation. And so will all Godly examples. The fact it was Joab who rose up to this example (see 1 Chron.) means that he must surely have had some faith as well as bravery, despite his rather unspiritual ways.

But the Hebrew of David's words here read like a kind of song, which could be translated:

Whosoever smites the Jebusite,
let him hurl down the precipice
both the lame and the blind,
hated of David's soul.

We sense here a bitterness and lack of respect of the human person, which maybe resulted in his not being allowed to build the temple later. To murder the handicapped was unethical, but David's bitterness and desire for power led him to command it. Hence LXX "Whosoever smiteth the Jebusite, let him slay with the sword both the lame and the blind who hate David's soul".

There are echoes of Saul's offer at the time of the fight with Goliath. Chronicles records: "Whosoever smites the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain". And thus Joab was restored to being chief of the army.

We note that the exclusion of blind and lame in Lev. 21:18-20 only applied to "the seed of Aaron" not being able to officiate with sacrifices. And lame and blind sacrifices weren't to be offered (Dt. 15:21). But this is being twisted by David's extremism and anger issues into a general prohibition of lame and blind people coming into sacred space. The Jebusites were making typical pre-battle taunts- and David falls deeply for it. The words lodged in him and he got furiously angry. But Lev. 21:21,22 was clear that

disabled priests were allowed to eat the holy things although not to offer them: "he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. He *shall* eat the food of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy". That holy food was to be eaten in the holy place, beside the altar (Lev. 6:16,26; 7:6; 10:12,13; 24:9- all very different from the attitudes of other religions at the time which stigmatized disability and wouldn't have allowed any disabled priests). So David was quite wrong to demand that no disabled person come into the temple. The Lord healed the blind and lame and allowed them to enter the temple, as if undoing this whole law and principle (Mt. 21:14 "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them"). Jacob was lame but Yahweh is so often stated to be his God. There is no grace in David's position, nor in those who upheld it. The reason is given that the lame and blind were hated of David's soul. Hardly a great basis morally. And yet, as ever, David's feelings are nuanced- because he shows huge grace to the lame Mephibosheth and has him live within his house and eat at his table (2 Sam. 9:13). We all have these contradictory feelings and positions, where anger struggles against grace. We think of his expressed hatred for Saul in the Psalms, and yet his love and grace to him in practice. This is not the same as hypocrisy, it is what it is to be a spiritually flawed human. And the promise of the new covenant is that specifically the blind and lame are those who will come to Zion: “I will bring them in from the northland, gather them from the ends of the earth—the blind and the lame among them, those with child together with those in labour—in a vast throng they shall return here” (Jer. 31:7). Indeed the law of Moses taught respect for the disabled- the deaf were not to be reviled, and no stumbling hazard placed where blind people were (Lev. 19:14), because "I am Yahweh". David's attitude is completely opposite to this; he is presented as plain wrong right from the get go of his establishment in Zion. But soon after he receives the amazing grace of the promises of 2 Sam. 7. Rather like directly after Abraham and Isaac are weak in faith regarding their wives- they receive the promises and material blessings.

2Sa 5:9 David lived in the stronghold, and called it the city of David. David built around from Millo and inward-
Jerusalem was particularly loved by David. He thereby moved the city into Judah's possession from Benjamin's; see on :7. Chronicles adds: “And Joab repaired the rest of the city".

2Sa 5:10 David grew greater and greater; for Yahweh, the God of Armies, was with him-
This is the same phrase as used in David's protestation of humility in Ps. 131:1: "Nor do I concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me". 'To go' ["concern myself"] with 'great things' is the phrase used of David here in 2 Sam. 5:10; he "went on [s.w. "concern myself"] and grew great" [s.w. "with great matters"]. So the idea of Ps. 131:1 may be that David didn't pay attention to these things so as not to become proud.

And yet this humility was mixed with the bitterness noted on :8. We are all strange mixtures of spiritual strength and weakness.

2Sa 5:11 Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, carpenters and masons; and they built David a house-
The way Solomon also used him, or probably another Hiram, for the same trees reflects again how Solomon sought to live out his father. But he had no real spirituality, and over time he revealed that he had no personal faith, turning away to idols in his old age and coming to the nihilism of Ecclesiastes.

Psalm 30 was written at the dedication of a house by David, and we assume it was this house. But that Psalm reveals David had been very ill. He seems not to have had robust health although he was physically strong and lived a long life. There is ample evidence for a breakdown of his health after the sin with Bathsheba.

2Sa 5:12 David perceived that Yahweh had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake-
He realized that the promises of Samuel so long ago had finally come true, despite all the times when it had seemed they could not come true (see on 1 Sam. 27:1). But this sense of fulfilment led him to take yet more wives (:13), which is surely to be read negatively in spiritual terms. Yet he realized that his establishment was located in a wider context than just for himself; it was for the sake of His people Israel.

2Sa 5:13 David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he had come from Hebron; and there were more sons and daughters born to David-
See on :12. This is hard to read in a positive light spiritually; for Israel's king was not to multiply wives (Dt. 17:17). He seemed to feel the need to prove himself established by having more wives and children, but this was itself a failure to appreciate that Yahweh had established him (:12). He did perceive this, but only on one level. David in Ps. 119 says that he studied God's law day and night. But he like us can miss the totally obvious and filter out the direct personal relevance. David was acting as monarchs did- having children by women from his chosen capital city, to establish his dynasty and establish himself as king there. Yet by doing this, David is breaking Divine principle by marrying multiple wives, for the sake of his political agenda rather than love marriage. And if the women were from Jerusalem, they were likely Gentiles / Jebusites as Jerusalem had not been in Israel's hands in recent times.

This is all the backdrop to God's statement to David in 2 Sam. 7 that He is going to establish David's dynasty eternally. Kings typically built a temple to their patron god and David also wanted to do this. But Yahweh wants none of that. He doesn't turn away from David over his human efforts to establish himself, but rather by grace He gives David

amazing promises to show that *He* will establish David and his dynasty and kingdom ("Yahweh Himself will establish your house / family", 2 Sam. 7:11; "I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations", Ps. 89:4.). And it will be God's Kingdom, not simply David's. We too face many temptations to legitimate and establish ourselves, to prove ourselves in society, especially with regard to family life and inheritances. People give their whole lives to establishing a 'successful' family, to own property, to prove yourself and show you have done something 'permanent' as you passed briefly through this world. Men name their lands and homes after themselves. But it is God who legitimates man, and He does so eternally and not through visible achievement in this life. Be it owning a property, or as in David's case, having wives and children from Jerusalem. Yahweh stresses *He* will make David's name great- not David nor any man making their own name great (2 Sam. 7:9). Man in his youth wants to legitimate himself by leaving the parental home, having his own property and family, carving out his own career and life path. And in later life, he seeks to create a family brand, and leave an inheritance to his well set up children. David was the same and he tried to do so on a large scale, involving being less than moral in his actions. The promises to him about God's legitimization of him and establishment of his "house" addressed all of this- he was to understand that God would legitimate him and establish him, not his own strength and wit. And like the promises to Abraham, which include the same things, they were given to David unconditionally without conditions nor any comment as to his worthiness to receive them. They came to him from out of left field. If his seed failed, the seed would be punished but the covenant would not be broken- love, *chesed*, the love and bond of the covenant, would not be withdrawn: "When / if he commits iniquity, I will punish him with the rod of humans, with floggings inflicted by people. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you" (2 Sam. 7:14-16). Likewise Ps. 89:31–34: "If they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with scourges; but I will not remove from him my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips". The love would "never" [2 Sam. 7], not ever, be removed- and therefore the covenant was for ever eternal: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). This is indeed amazing grace; an eternal unconditional commitment to David and his seed. David's seed were going to be a non negotiable part of God's purpose for ever. All this was way more than establishing David's family in the short term, as David had spent so much effort to do. We who all struggle to legitimate ourselves in this world are likewise hugely challenged by the same covenant grace. The language of the Davidic covenant mirrors by contrast the situation with Saul- who was given the covenant but it and the Spirit were withdrawn from him. Saul's sins led to the end of covenant relationship, but David's sins didn't. David realizes on one level that Yahweh alone by grace has established his kingdom (:12)- just as do those who pay lip service to God's

grace and establishment of them. And yet at the very same time, he goes helter skelter to establish his kingdom in his own strength.

2Sa 5:14 These are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon-

These were the sons of Bathsheba. We note that they had a son called Nathan, perhaps in respect of the prophet of that name who had rebuked David for his sin with Bathsheba. And it was through him that the Lord Jesus was descended back to David (Lk. 3:31). Birth "in Jerusalem" was seen as legitimizing a great man in his home city; we think of the similar comment in 2 Sam. 21:22 "These four were born to the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David".

The account of bringing the ark to Zion is prefaced by this record of David's sons who were born in Jerusalem. But we read nothing further about them. This could all be read as part of David's attempt to establish his own dynasty in Zion, which God responded to in 2 Sam. 7 by saying that He would establish David's Kingdom in His own way, through David's seed, the Lord Jesus. Ps. 87:5 expresses David's misunderstanding that physical birth in Zion meant Yahweh's establishment: "Yes, of Zion it will be said, This one and that one was born in her; the Most High Himself will establish her". Likewise in Ps. 132:17 David puts words in God's mouth: "There [in Zion / Jerusalem] will I make the horn of David to bud". But the budding of David's horn was fulfilled by God in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the great "son of David", rather than in David having many sons in Jerusalem. The promises of Divine establishment of David's dynasty through the Lord Jesus were therefore a corrective to David's thinking about establishing his dynasty in his own strength.

2Sa 5:15 Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia-

We know nothing of these sons, nor indeed or most of David's children. This would indicate perhaps that David was not a very good spiritual father to his children. And that, as noted above, his attempts at self-legitimization in Jerusalem were not at all spiritually blessed.

2Sa 5:16 Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet-

The lists in 1 Chron. 3:5-8; 14:4-7 also mention two more sons, Eliphalet or Elpalet and Nogah. Perhaps they are omitted here because they died in infancy, and that the second Eliphalet was named after his dead brother.

2Sa 5:17 When the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the

stronghold-
They must have felt bitterly betrayed by David. He had lived with them in Ziklag and Gath for some time and claimed he was on their side against Judah. His lack of integrity would have deeply riled them, and was a poor advertisement for the God of Israel.

The stronghold in view may have been the cave of Adullam (2 Sam. 23:13,14), where God had previously delivered David from Saul. Perhaps he went there to pray. It was at this time that he wished to drink of the water from the well in Bethlehem, and his men broke risked their lives to get it for him. We see the extent of their dominance, in that they had overrun Bethlehem, David's home village, and placed a garrison in it (2 Sam. 23:14).

2Sa 5:18 Now the Philistines had come and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim-
The record of David's battle with the Philistines in 2 Sam.5:17-24 has certain similarities with the exploits of 1 Sam. 14:8-11; as if, years later, David replicated Jonathan's early adventure of faith. This would be understandable if he had been Jonathan's armourbearer in that incident. Situations repeat in our lives; what we learn in youth becomes tested later on in life.

They perhaps chose the valley of the giants as the battleground because they still recalled his victory over Goliath, and wanted to reverse it.

2Sa 5:19 David inquired of Yahweh saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand? Yahweh said to David, Go up; for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into your hand-
This recalls how he asked Yahweh when Saul died whether he should go into Judah, and to which city there. A man of lesser humility and closeness to God would have just gone ahead with assumptions he was right. His questions also recall the questions he asked [and answers received] about the situation in Keilah (1 Sam. 23:11,12). He retained this desire for guidance, and showed he had learned from his previous experiences. "Teach me Your way" was definitely David's credo and reflects humility. For so often we read of David asking for guidance (1 Sam. 23:2; 2 Sam. 2:1).

2Sa 5:20 David came to Baal Perazim, and David struck them there; and he said, Yahweh has broken my enemies before me, like the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal Perazim-
Perhaps there was a literal flash flood sent by God. This means the place of breaches. What happened has been explained as follows: "It was the rocky height on the north of the valley of Rephaim. David must, therefore, have stolen round the army of the Philistines, creeping, probably by night, up to this ridge of Ben-Hinnom, and thence at the dawn of day have rushed down upon the camp. And his onset was sudden and

irresistible, like the rush of the waters of some mountain lake when, swollen with rains, it bursts through the opposing dam, and carries hasty destruction to everything that lies in its way". This means that just like the second attack, David circled around and came at the Philistines from behind (:23). But this is exactly how a dog attacks. David in his low moments had felt himself as a desert dog (1 Sam. 17:44 LXX; 24:14). When we are weak, then we are strong. Perhaps God played along with David's low feelings by saying that if he indeed felt as a dog, then He would use him to achieve victory as a dog does. This is not to justify David's view of himself, but to show rather how God interacts with man in a mutual way.

2Sa 5:21 They left their images there; and David and his men took them away-
They should have destroyed them, according to the law of Moses which David professed such love for in Ps. 119. Perhaps they justified it by saying they were doing to the Philistines as they had done to the ark; for the Philistines took the ark as a sign they had triumphed over Israel's God. But Yahweh clearly punished them for that, and David's men might have boasted that the Philistine gods didn't do that to them. Such is the quasi spiritual reasoning of our flesh. 1 Chron. 14:12 however explains that finally, they were burnt.

2Sa 5:22 The Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim-
This was soon afterwards, implying David's men hadn't slain that many of the Philistines.

2Sa 5:23 When David inquired of Yahweh, He said, You shall not go up. Circle around behind them, and attack them opposite the mulberry trees-
The Father and Son are constantly seeking to lead us in “new*ness* of life”. David didn’t get victory by the mulberry trees the same way each time (2 Sam. 5:23,24). God changed the method. But as noted on :20, David was still to circle around and attack from behind, like a dog. "Mulberry" is Hebrew *baca*, and could refer to the valley of Baca, or weeping, of Ps. 84:6. Hence RV "valley of weeping". Perhaps David was in depression at this time, and was being comforted that his weeping was to be his strength. For God loves to use the weak to achieve His victories.

2Sa 5:24 It shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then you shall stir yourself up-
This sound was the marching of the Angels. They are called Yahweh's hosts or armies, and the idea was that David's army was a reflection on earth of the heavenly armies

above him. This was necessary to teach that Israel were not winning these victories in their own strength, but by following the Angelic hosts above them.

"Stir up" is Heb. 'follow after'. The idea of 'following after' a man is a Hebrew figure for men following their leader / general into battle. There are many examples: Josh. 3:3; Jud. 3:28; 4:14; 6:34,35; 9:4,49; 1 Sam. 17:13,14; 30:21; 2 Sam. 5:24 etc. In those early days, a general wasn't a smart guy with a degree who directed the battlefield from his laptop; he was the one who went over the top first with his men behind him, knowing full well he was the one whom his enemies would go for above all others. It was his bravery which inspired the followers to go after him, and which, over the battles and wars, solidified their trust in him and willingness to give their lives behind him. And this figure of speech was well understood by the Lord when He bid us follow Him. Around Him were false prophets and rabbinic teachers, asking young men to follow them, adopt their interpretations of Torah, study the traditions, and get hyped up enough to take weapons in their hands and go forth to fight the infidel. The Lord was fully aware of this, and He frames His calling of men in the same terms. Indeed, when He speaks of leaving all and following after Him (Lk. 14:33), He surely had in mind the well known story of Mattathias, who began the Maccabean revolt by saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the Law and supports the covenant *follow after me*... and they *left their possessions behind* in the town" (1 Macc. 2:27).

For then Yahweh has gone out before you to strike the army of the Philistines-
The people wanted a king to "go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20), but they were disappointed in Saul ultimately. For it was effectively David who went out before the people to fight their battles (s.w. 1 Sam. 18:13,16). And David was only successful because he recognized that it was Yahweh who 'went out before' to fight his battles (s.w. 2 Sam. 5:24), rather than any human king or leader.

2Sa 5:25 David did so, as Yahweh commanded him, and struck the Philistines from Geba until you come to Gezer-
"Geba" is Gibeon (1 Chron. 14:16), which is directly on the road from the valley of Rephaim to Gaza. The continual consistency of the geographical references in the record is yet another reflection of the utter credibility of it as Divinely inspired. Any group of human writers would have made mistakes in this area, given the lack of detailed maps and geographical knowledge.

The significance of Gibeon [Geba] is that David had avoided having any part in the duel there between his men and the men of Saul. But he does fight there against Yahweh's enemies and wins. In the very place where divided brethren slew each other, David slays the Philistines. We note that Gibeon was in Benjamin, who had initially been on Saul's side during the civil war and against David. Whilst Gibeon was in their hands at the time

of the duel, it seems it fell into Philistine hands soon afterwards- for David now drives the Philistines out of Gibeon. This is the fruit of divided brethren- the world comes in.

We wonder why there was this victory over the Philistines inserted into David's experience here. He has established himself as king, and will build his own house and desire to build God a house in the next chapter. One reason may be that God is preparing David to receive the promises and covenant of 2 Sam. 7 which includes victory over enemies (2 Sam. 7:11 "I will cause you to rest from all your enemies"). God works progressively with His people, teaching them by experience [in this case, a carefully Divinely controlled victory over enemies] what He then tells them in words. For we are in the end empirical learners, and God knows this.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 6

2Sa 6:1 David again gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand-
"Thousand" may refer to families or squadrons. They were "chosen" or 'shown as tested / approved'. It was a reunion gathering of all those who had been faithful to David over the years. This was a huge number of people to gather together, given the problem of providing food and lodging for them. This was why battles were fought swiftly in those days, for the men were needed on their farms, and the supply of food was difficult to arrange over longer periods. So this huge effort reflects the importance David attached to bringing up the ark.

This figure of 30,000 contrasts intentionally with how 30,000 Israelites had been slain at the beginning of the Samuel story (1 Sam. 4:10), and the ark had been lost. Now 30,000 come to witness the return of the ark, to Zion.

2Sa 6:2 David arose, and went with all the people who were with him, from Baale Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name, even the name of Yahweh of Armies who sits above the cherubim-
Baalah, or Kirjath-Baal, "the city of Baal" was the old Canaanite name of Kirjath-jearim (Josh. 15:9,60). David's bringing up / going up / ascending of the ark (2 Sam. 6:2) recalls how the ark did not go up into Canaan in Num. 14:44 (s.w.); for the land was not to be given to Israel. But when the time came, the ark was brought up into Canaan (Josh. 4:16,18 s.w.). And so now, the land was being given to them again. David felt as if he was as Joshua reconquering Canaan in fulfilment of the promises. This may explain why Paul in Acts 13:21 parallels the 40 years wandering of Israel with the 40 year reign of Saul; and he may speak of Saul reigning 40 years because of this, even if it was not literally true. It creates big chronological problems if we read that 40 year reign of Saul literally. Solomon imitated David's bringing up of the ark to Zion in 1 Kings 8:1,4. He lived out his

father's faith and devotion, but only on an external level. He in due course was to turn away from Yahweh to idols, and descend into the nihilism of Ecclesiastes.

I have discussed on 1 Sam. 4:3 how there was always a tendency to use the ark as a talisman; and God was against that. The religious eclipsed the spiritual as regards the ark, several times in Israel's history. And I suggest David was not immune to this. He brings the ark to Zion without any Divine command to do so and without consultation with Him [David earlier asks God for guidance about his decisions in 2 Sam. 5, but not in the context of the ark]; and there was the disaster with Uzzah the first time he attempted it. This is to be compared to Israel's defeat when they took the ark with them into battle against the Philistines in the time of Eli. David clearly also veered towards seeing the ark as a talisman. It was almost as if he wanted to underwrite his own enthronement in Jerusalem by having Yahweh enthroned there also over the ark. Likewise David's desire to permanently locate the ark in a physical temple in Jerusalem can be seen as a desire to legitimate the enthronement of his dynasty in that city. But on the other hand, David often 'gets it' about the lack of need for the ark's physical presence. His psalms speak of how he lived permanently beneath the shadow of the cherubic wings, as if he lived on the mercy seat, on the sprinkled blood. In 2 Sam. 15:24-29 he flees from Absalom, and refuses the suggestion he take the ark with him. But, so true to real spiritual life, he also had tendencies towards needing the physical and religious when it came to the ark. Just as we pine for the religious at times, whilst also rejoicing in God's presence in our hearts quite regardless of religious context.

David wrote at least two Psalms about bringing the ark to Zion, Ps. 68 and Ps. 132. Ps. 68 clearly expects God to bring victory to Israel because of the ark's presence in Zion, and Ps. 132 seems to reason that once the ark is in Zion it will be there forever. This wasn't to be the case. But we see in David's reasoning that he still considered the ark as some kind of physical guarantee of God's presence, and the legitimization of his own enthronement in Jerusalem- and that of his dynasty after him, as he imagined. He was proven wrong- the ark disappeared, his dynasty was cut off, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. But God's spiritual presence in human hearts continued and became the stronger after these things. We marvel at how God works through human weakness to achieve His wider purposes. The Chronicles record hints at political reasons for David's wanting the ark when we read David saying "let us lead the ark of our God back to *us*" (1 Chron. 13:3). David wanted it firmly under his control and his motive for bringing the ark to Zion was clearly to centralize religious as well as political power in his chosen capital city.

2Sa 6:3 They set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in the hill: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart-

There were very specific laws about the transportation of the ark. It was to be carried on poles on the shoulders of not just Levites but specifically the sons of Kohath (Num. 4:15); and Abinadab's family were not the right people to carry it. David claims in Ps. 119 to have studied God's law all the day whilst on the run from Saul, reciting it to himself. Perhaps he forgot these details. But I suggest because he came to see that God wanted the spirit and not letter of the law to be followed, he came to totally place himself above Divine law. We face the same temptation. And it was this which led David into his sin with Bathsheba. Shaving off bits and pieces of God's laws and principles, on the basis that we are above His law, leads to the final catastrophe of David's sin with Bathsheba. Instead of following God's laws about the transportation of the ark, it seems David instead followed the pattern of the Philistines, who also transported the captured ark on a cart (s.w. 1 Sam. 6:10,11). And considered that having built a new cart, never used before, he was in his own way showing respect to it. He was influenced by others' behaviour and treatment of the ark rather than God's word; he failed to learn from history. David here reflects his religious approach to the ark rather than a spiritual one. During the wilderness years, he felt that he was as it were dwelling on the mercy seat, between the cherubim, covered by the blood of atonement. But he has slipped down from that spiritual peak, now hankering for the physical ark, sliding back from the spiritual to the merely religious. In Saul's time, the ark was not enquired of ("let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul", 1 Chron. 13:3). Ps. 132:6 likewise hints at its obscurity: "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood" (Baale-Judah, the woods of Judah). David is now looking to be religious, when he had been driven to personal spirituality by his exclusion from formal religion whilst on the run from Saul.

2Sa 6:4 They brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was in the hill, with the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark-
Uzzah walked at the side, whilst Ahio went before the oxen to guide them. The Divine cameraman is zoomed in close upon the scene.

2Sa 6:5 David and all the house of Israel played before Yahweh with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with harps, stringed instruments, tambourines, castanets and cymbals-
The actual fact of making music and praise to God doesn't necessarily mean our acceptability before Him; the very experience of music and its effect can lead us to think that our participation means our acceptability before God. But all this praise was made whilst God was extremely angry with them for how they were treating the ark.

Many of the brief Psalms exhorting all kinds of music to be used in praising Yahweh were probably composed at this time. This description is very similar to those of how holy objects / idols were brought on beds by the state treasurer to Sargon II of Assyria.

Offerings and music were made in front of the objects in order to placate and please the god thought to be in the object. But of course the ark was not a god in itself; David and his people have veered towards the religious rather than the spiritual. Just as most kings once established built a temple to their patron deity, and David also wants to do this to Yahweh. Perhaps the huge punishment on Uzzah reflected God's anger at the religious dominating the spiritual, as if the ark as a box was being worshipped rather than Him. The scene is also similar to that of Assurbanipal's return of Marduk's statue from Assur to Babylon: "Just as Assurbanipal's army participated in the return of Marduk to his new sanctuary, so David's army participated in the return of the ark of Yahweh. Just as Marduk's journey was accompanied by music and rejoicing, so was the ark's. Moreover, just as the Assyrians offered sacrifices every double mile from the quay of Assur to the quay of Babylon, so David offered an ox and a fatling after every six steps" (Miller & Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel, JHNES* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977)).

The death of Uzzah is one of a number of incidents studded throughout the Biblical record which remind us that sin is serious and a felt offence by God, and provokes His wrath and the necessary death penalty. Whilst otherwise He appears to tolerate sin, this doesn't mean that every sin isn't felt by Him. His feelings are those of Hosea regarding Gomer's continued unfaithfulness.

2Sa 6:6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon-
1 Chron. 13:9 has "the threshing floor of Chidon" and 2 Sam. 6:6 has "of Nacon". I suggest Nacon was the name of the owner, and Chidon was the location. A threshing floor has associations with Divine judgment, and this is what happened.

Uzzah reached for the ark of God and took hold of it-
We wonder if Paul has this in mind when he praises the Lord Jesus for not trying to grasp hold of equality with God (Phil. 2:6). In this case, Uzzah is being accused of playing God by what he did. And yet this appears to be a very harsh reading of motives into a quite simple and natural, well meaning reaction. But this is the point; we cannot judge or know human motivations or thoughts. Who knows what was really in Uzzah's mind. For all we know he was cussing the ark as it wobbled on the cart. He did what was instinctive to do- but doing what is naturally instinctive can lead to Divine condemnation. Here we see for all time that human action is not OK just because it seems and feels right, instinctive, obvious and logical to the human mind at the time. Only God knows, and we should respect His judgment and our own inability to judge. The other possible issue which arises from this is that we are to accept that there are huge implications to our apparently harmless, surface level sins. Only God can judge them. But He does extrapolate the implications of human thoughts and actions. The whole incident is a test of our humility before God, a test David initially failed.

For the cattle stumbled-
"Stumbled" is s.w. "threw down" (2 Kings 9:33; Ps. 141:6). It seems the ark itself was thrown down onto the ground, despite Uzzah trying to stop it.

2Sa 6:7 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God-
See on :6. Yahweh had likewise struck down (s.w.) those who had earlier failed to respect the ark (1 Sam. 5:6,9; 6:19). And they had imitated the transport of the ark upon a new cart. The failure of man to learn from Biblical history is one of the greatest tragedies. We may consider this incident as parallel with the sin of Adam and Eve in Eden, whereby an apparently small failure lead to huge consequences. But these incidents are placed in Biblical history to help us humble ourselves before God, and not to fall into the assumption that God is not serious about His principles. Yahweh's anger being kindled is a phrase used multiple times about His anger with Israel for breaking the covenant. The sin of Uzzah personified all that was wrong with Israel. They had assumed that they could serve Yahweh on their terms and not His, and that this was just a mere surface level failure which He should overlook. All this is so challenging for us, who are tempted to think in just the same way.

Samuel appears to have slept next to the ark, and in 1 Sam. 5:1 the Philistines manhandled it on a long journey of 60 km. Uzzah was slain but they weren't. Again we see how boundaries of holiness are relative, and God looks at the heart; something clearly was very wrong in Uzzah's heart, in a way it was not wrong in the hearts of the child Samuel or these Philistines. Attitude and heart are paramount in God's judgment of men.

Uzzah was a son or grandson of Abinadab (:3), in whose house the ark had been kept for some years (perhaps from 1 Sam. 7:1, where the ark is taken to the house of Abinadab, to 2 Sam. 6:3, where the ark is taken from Abinadab's house). Perhaps he felt he knew the ark well and had probably touched it before. But he was slain for the sin of familiarity with God leading to contempt. Perhaps he cursed the ark box as it fell. Or perhaps "he reached out his hand to the ark" [Heb.] or as in 1 Chron. 13:10 "he put his hand to the ark" was in fact part of a prearranged plan to grab the ark and make a sanctuary for it there at the threshing floor. Clearly there was far more going on that a simple breaking of Divine law.

2Sa 6:8 David was displeased, because Yahweh had broken forth on Uzzah; and he called that place Perez Uzzah, to this day-
David was “displeased” with God because He had slain a man who was trying to assist David’s pet project of bringing the ark to Zion (2 Sam. 6:8,9). Do we not again see the anger and irrational emotion of David flaring up? For the Hebrew for "displeased" really

means "anger", and is the same word used of Yahweh's anger in :7. God was fiercely angry, and David was likewise fiercely angry with God for being angry. Whilst on one level this is a terrible example of human pride, David's response could be argued to reflect a closeness with God which enabled him to feel like this. The exiles were warned that all who are "incensed" against God must be humbled and ashamed before the ark could, as it were, come to Zion and Israel be restored (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:24). The exiles, who were also angry with God for His anger with them, were to go through the humbling process David went through over the next three months.

However we could read this another way. David was angry, but he was afraid of Yahweh (:9). Possibly his anger was therefore with himself.

We note David's surprise at judgment for touching the ark, as with the men of Bethshemesh earlier when they opened the ark. Perhaps this was because the ark had been regularly touched earlier. For example, surely they manhandled the ark onto the wagon without incident; and how did Obededom handle it without being struck down? And now, it seemed, God was suddenly deciding to apply an applicable law which usually He seemed to disregard. David presents as the child who is shocked and hurt when for once, he isn't allowed to get away with regularly breaking a requirement or law. The law in Num. 4:15-20 was clear; the Kohathites were to deal with the ark and even they must handle it properly "that they may live, and not die, when they approach to the most holy things". The Chronicles record labours how the second attempt to bring the ark to Zion 'worked' because David was careful to follow the Mosaic precepts about handling the ark. And this perhaps is the point: All sin merits death and Divine wrath, but only occasionally is this truth revealed by God in practice. His grace operates in shielding man from His wrath, but this doesn't mean His wrath and sense of sin and infringement of His holiness isn't there. God's feelings about sin were reflected in Hosea's raging anger against Gomer, mellowed by his amazing love and grace for her. Or it could be that Uzzah cursed the ark as it fell, or had some hidden heart position about it which led to God's wrath. And the lesson in that case would be that the innermost private thoughts of man are seen and judged by God and provoke His wrath as well as His pleasure.

2Sa 6:9 David was afraid of Yahweh that day; and he said, How can the ark of Yahweh come to me?-

There is a similarity, surely intentional, with the situation in 1 Sam. 6:20: "The men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God?". These were now David's feelings when Uzzah was slain for also not being respectful to the ark. Circumstances repeated, and David failed to learn the lesson. We wonder if indeed David consciously repeated the words of the men of Beth Shemesh. I suspect he didn't, but rather his words are recorded in a similar way, to show to us readers the similarity.

We are intended to learn from history, even though so few do. This is why so much of the Bible is history.

"How can I bring the ark to *me*?" surely reflects poor motivation. David wanted the ark to come to himself. He has no concept of going up to Yahweh at the ark. It was starting to get all about him. He clearly saw the ark as something he personally could possess ("to *me*... to *us*") and which centralized political power in him.

2Sa 6:10 So David would not move the ark of Yahweh to be with him in the city of David; but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite-
This was a huge showdown, for David had assembled a huge number of people to this ceremony; see on :1. And now he was revealed as a man who had not paid due attention to the requirements of the God whom he had invited all Israel to come to worship. It was very humbling for him. We note he "carried it aside", having it carried on poles as the law required and not on a cart.

2Sa 6:11 The ark of Yahweh remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months: and Yahweh blessed Obed-Edom, and all his house-
As it took David some months to realize his sin with Bathsheba, so here it took David three months to humble himself before God, and to perceive that His blessing is related to obedience and respect of Him, and not assuming we can serve Him on our terms and ride roughshod over His principles. David and his house had also been promised blessings, but he was being taught that these blessings were related to obedience and respect of God. And the fact a Philistine from Gath, perhaps an Edomite, indeed an Edomite servant [for so his name means] received these blessings... was to teach him that his pedigree counted for nothing compared to humble respect of Israel's God.

The care of the ark was given over to the Levites. But Obed-Edom wasn't a Levite nor was he a Hebrew, he was a Philistine or Edomite servant from Gath. And he was blessed for caring for the ark. This contrasts sharply with the striking of Uzzah. It serves to point up the fact that Uzzah was not necessarily slain because he wasn't a Levite, nor specifically one of the sons of Kohath who were to carry the ark. That breach of Divine law wasn't the issue; likewise David acts as a priest with an ephod when he too wasn't a Levite. Rather it was a matter of the heart and attitude, which is a persistent theme in the record. For David and Saul sinned in parallel ways, but David's heart attitude was different. 1 Chron. 15:18,24 lists Obededom amongst the Levites who were porters and "doorkeepers for the ark". But he wasn't a Levite. Just as David wasn't. But they could act as Levites because of their attitude of heart.

2Sa 6:12 It was told king David saying, Yahweh has blessed the house of Obed-Edom

and all that pertains to him, because of the ark of God. David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom into the city of David with joy-
True joy can only come from repentance and humbling ourselves before God. A prouder man would have just given up with this apparently over sensitive, hard to please God of Israel. But Yahweh is not really like that; but He rightly requires our humility to Him and His principles. It was the Edomite servant, Obed Edom, who taught David this. The record in 1 Chron. 15:11-15 stresses that this second time, David pays more attention to the Mosaic commands about the ark ["because you didn't carry it at first, Yahweh our God broke out against us, because we didn't seek Him according to the ordinance. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of Yahweh, the God of Israel. The children of the Levites bore the ark of God with its poles on their shoulders, as Moses commanded according to the word of Yahweh"]. He insists afterwards that only the right Levites minister with the ark. And yet in 2 Sam. 8:18 he appoints his own sons as priests, when they weren't Levites ["David's sons were chief priests", RV]! David's self proclaimed love of Yahweh's law was nuanced by his own political agenda.

2Sa 6:13 It was so, that when those who bore the ark of Yahweh had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened calf-
David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (2 Sam. 6:13-20; and 2 Sam. 19:21 = Ex. 22:28), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David's sons, although not Levites, were "priests" (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not. David had just been severely humiliated and punished for assuming he could put aside the letter of God's law regarding the transport of the ark. That David should now act as a Levite when he was not one, again following the spirit and not the letter of the law, would therefore not have been done by him quickly. It would have required sustained reflection on the situation. His actions should therefore never be taken as a quick justification for disregarding Divine laws and principles. For in the context of what had happened three months previously, he would have considered this matter very seriously.

If sacrifices were offered every six paces from the house of Obed Edom to Zion, the road to Zion would have been a stream of sacrificial blood, looking ahead to the way to Golgotha. I suggest on :17 that these were sin offerings. It demonstrated the deep sense of sin and need for atonement which David felt. It was this true repentance which was the basis for his ecstatic joy. LXX "And seven choruses accompanied him, bearing the ark, and a calf and lambs as a sacrifice". One explanation of why "every six paces" is that there are six resting places of the ark in the Samuel record: Shiloh, Eben Ezer, Beth

Shemesh, Kiriath Jearim, the house of Obed Edom, and now Zion. David perhaps saw the seventh rest for the ark, like the seventh day of creation, as being in the temple he envisaged building for it. In Ps. 132 he invites the ark and Yahweh to enter into the place of their rest in Zion. But he fails to perceive that in fact Yahweh's rest is in the Messianic kingdom, not David's immediate kingdom; the ark would come to nothing, Jerusalem would fall and Zion would be ploughed. The crown would be removed... until "He come whose right it is", the Lord Jesus.

Bulls and oxen were usually sacrificed as burnt and peace offerings (Lev. 1:4-6; 4:10; 9:4,18). And he made these two offerings when the ark arrived (:17,18). But usually they are preceded by the sin offering. Sin is dealt with, then the burnt offering of promised dedication to God, and then celebrating peace with God. But David makes no sin offering. He clearly felt he had nothing to repent of nor to be forgiven of; he considered Yahweh's striking of Uzzah to be wrong and that he had done no real wrong himself. Although the second time he does obey the required laws about handling the ark [the Chronicles record stresses this], he clearly has no real sense of failure. For all his spiritual insight, he still felt he was above God's law, despite his much proclaimed familiarity with it and love of it [see Ps. 119]. And this sets him up for his failure with Bathsheba. And so it is for all of us who realize we are saved without God's law and by grace, and who see to the essence and spirit of the law rather than the letter. This can lead us to the same failures as David through presumption, assumption and over familiarity with a holy God.

2Sa 6:14 David danced before Yahweh with all his might-
I suggested on :13 that the massive number of sacrifices personally offered by David reflected his sense of repentance and need for atonement for his sin three months previously. It was this which was the basis for his ecstatic joy at his forgiveness. Although note the comments on :13 that the reverse situation might be the case. "Might" is very similar to the Hebrew word for "Uzzah" who was slain for irreverence towards the ark. But David with his 'Uzzah' danced before Yahweh clothed as a priest when he wasn't a priest. Perhaps the purpose of the word play is to teach us that it was Uzzah's internal attitude that was wrong. David too infringed Yahweh's law but his 'Uzzah' was different because of the state of his heart, and he was saved and accepted. The Hebrew words for dancing with all the might are similar to the title of Ps. 88, *mahaloth leannoth,* which seems to actually apply to Ps. 87, which would then reflect David's feelings at the time of bringing the ark to Zion.

And David was clothed in a linen ephod-
As we go through the life of David, it is evident he went along roads few others have travelled. For example, who else would offer his sacrifice upon the altar and then start strumming his harp in praise as he watched the animal burn (Ps. 43:4 Heb.)? This was a

new paradigm in Israelite worship. Like Job, David had no precedents in past spiritual history from which he could take comfort (Job 5:1). David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (2 Sam. 6:13-20; and 2 Sam. 19:21 = Ex.22:28), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David's sons, although not Levites, were "priests" (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not. He knew that the ideal standard for married life was one man: one woman, and yet he was somehow able to flout this and still be a man after God's own heart. He broke explicit Mosaic commandment by marrying Saul's wives and also his daughter, he airily waived the Mosaic law concerning blood guiltiness (consider the implications of 2 Sam. 14:4-11), and the need to stone rapists (2 Sam. 13:21). When others tried to do these kind of things, they were severely punished by a God who insisted upon serious obedience to His Law. Consider how Saul was condemned for offering sacrifice instead of a priest (1 Sam. 13:10-13); and Uzziah likewise (2 Chron. 26:16-19). When the woman of Tekoah basically suggested that the Mosaic laws about the rights of the revenger of blood be repealed, David seems to have agreed. When Amnon seeks to rape his sister Tamar, she suggests that he ask David to allow them to marry- and surely, she says, he will agree. Yet this too would have been counter to the spirit of the Law about marriages to close relatives. Yet David went beyond the Law so often; and it is this which perhaps led him to commit the sin of presumption in his behaviour with Bathsheba. Right afterwards he comments about the man who stole his neighbour's sheep, that it must be restored fourfold; whereas the Law only stipulated double, David felt he so knew the spirit of the Law that he could break the letter of it- in any context. And this was his [temporary] downfall.

2Sa 6:15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of Yahweh with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet-
David is portrayed as in religious ecstasy before the God whom three months before he had been furiously angry with (see on :8). This indeed reflects the almost bi-polar nature of David. But it also shows the power of true repentance and seeking to put things right with God (see on :13), and the joy of good conscience resulting from that.

We can too easily be blinded by the fact David was acting as a king-priest and was thereby a type of the Lord Jesus. The fact is, by presenting himself as a king-priest, David was cementing both religious and political power in himself and in his chosen capital city. Just as many other kings did at the time. And he was bringing the ark to a tent he had pitched for it in his own back garden [Solomon brought the ark from the city or personal citadel of David to the temple]. When the ark had not been enquired of in Saul's time (1 Chron. 13:3) and he had to "find" it (Ps. 132). The visible symbols of

religion suddenly became significant for him. On the other hand, on a spiritual level, he had become so in tune with the spirit of the law of Moses that he could break it by acting as priest, when others were condemned for doing so. The difference was that his heart was right with God. And yet beyond any doubt, his motives were mixed and he had other, political, human agendas.

2Sa 6:16 It was so, as the ark of Yahweh came into the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out at the window and saw king David leaping and dancing before Yahweh; and she despised him in her heart-
As Goliath despised David (1 Sam. 17:42), so did Michal. The same word is used (2 Sam. 6:16). God reads the heart and what He finds there is so significant to Him. That woman's silent thoughts have been recorded for millennia in the record, and they are still in God's memory. We have a parade example here of the huge significance God attaches to our thoughts. Despising others for their spirituality is especially abhorrent to Him. We recall that Michal had an idol in her home soon after her marriage to David, and we wonder if it was Yahweh whom she also despised. And all this made her no better than Goliath.

Michal's complaint about David's parading his nakedness and possibly his genitals was valid. But as ever in the David record, it is all a matter of the heart. She despised him in her heart, whereas at this time it was in David's heart to make a temple for Yahweh. Although inappropriate, his heart was on better things: "It was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And the LORD said to David my father, 'Inasmuch as it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you have done well, for it was in your heart" (1 Kings 8:17,18). Ps. 132 speaks of how he had vowed to not sleep until he had found a home for the ark and brought it to Zion.

2Sa 6:17 They brought in the ark of Yahweh, and set it in its place, in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before Yahweh-
The usual pattern for the offerings was sin offering, burnt offering [dedication to God on the basis of being reconciled from sin] and then peace offerings, celebrating the resultant peace with God. I suggested on :13 that the mass of animals sacrificed on the road to Zion were sin offerings. Although it could also be that he omitted offering the sin offering, hence there is no mention of it, because he was not deeply convicted of any personal wrongdoing over bringing the ark to Zion the first time.

The reference is not to the tabernacle tent, which was at Gibeon at this time. David pitched a tent in the back yard garden of his own house in Zion. And there he placed the ark. Whatever his spiritual motives, he was clearly concentrating both religious and political power in his own hands and in his own house.

2Sa 6:18 When David had made an end of offering the burnt offering and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh of Armies-
As noted and discussed on :14, this was again David acting as high priest, blessing the people in Yahweh's Name.

2Sa 6:19 He distributed to all the people, even throughout the whole multitude of Israel, both to men and women, to each one a portion of bread, dates and raisins. So all the people departed each one to his house-
We see here an ancient anticipation of the bread and wine [raisins] of the breaking of bread meeting. That meeting is essentially a peace offering, a celebration of the peace with God achieved through the Lord's sin offering, our promise of dedication to Him in the burnt offering, and then the celebration of the resultant peace with God. See on :17.

There are various Psalms which probably had their origin in the bringing of the ark to Zion. The calls in many Psalms for shouting and joyful singing "before Yahweh" were all probably originally used at this time. Psalm 24 clearly speaks of the ark being brought to Zion after David's establishment as Israel's king. But he really labours the point that the great triumphant king is not him, but Yahweh enthroned between the cherubim: "Open wide the gates, open the ancient doors, and the great king will come in. Who is this great king? He is the LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, victorious in battle. Fling wide the gates, open the ancient doors, and the great king will come in. Who is this great king? The triumphant LORD— he is the great king" (Ps. 24:7-10 GNB).

Psalm 68 is another psalm about the bringing of the ark to Zion and again David makes the point that Yahweh is the true king of Israel, not him: "O God, Your march of triumph is seen by all, the procession of God, my king, into His sanctuary. The singers are in front, the musicians are behind, in between are the young women beating the tambourines" (Ps. 68:24,25). Ps. 68:12 LXX has David, which means 'beloved', claiming Yahweh as his king: "The king of the forces of the beloved, of the beloved".

We note from Ps. 68:27 that David carefully puts Benjamin, Saul's tribe, first in the procession and his own tribe afterwards: " First comes Benjamin, the smallest tribe, then the leaders of Judah with their group". David is to be commended for his spirituality at this time, but political motives were always lurking there. And David now sees God as actually present over the ark, hankering for the visible and thus localizing God: "How awesome is God as He comes from His sanctuary—the God of Israel! He gives strength and power to his people. Praise God!" (Ps. 68:35). And David is seeking to force God to get on board with his own dream for Zion. Zion means dry hill, and so David announces that God will change that: "O God, thou wilt grant to thine inheritance a gracious rain; for it was weary, but thou didst refresh it" (Ps. 68:9 LXX).

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

2Sa 6:20 Then David returned to bless his household-
David is to be commended for not simply blessing Israel, but turning his attention privately to his own private household, and wanting to hold a private ceremony with them. But it was this which elicited the angry retort of Michal, whom I suggested on :16 may still have been an idolater and despised not only David but also Yahweh.

Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious the king of Israel was today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!-
See on 1 Sam. 31:6. Perhaps she really loved her second husband Phaltiel as he loved her, and was bitter that David had broken up their marriage for political reasons. She disliked the way that David had put aside his royal robes to dance naked. She felt he ought to have always retained his royal dignity rather than apparently resign it before Yahweh as king. This would be why David responds that he is indeed the chosen king (:21). "Uncovered" does mean literally to make naked. We note the careful legislation about not revealing nakedness before Yahweh (s.w. Ex. 20:26). But David disobeyed the letter of this law to keep the spirit of it; and he did it at a time when three months before, he and Israel had been strongly punished for breaking the letter of the Divine law. His "uncovered" presence before Yahweh (2 Sam. 6:21) was not therefore done in the heat of the moment, but he would have carefully thought this through before doing it.

There is ample evidence that kings in victory processions or enthronement carnivals did literally expose their private parts, as a sign that they intended their dynasty to continue. David is on one hand spiritually motivated, but on another, he is trying to establish his dynasty exactly as kings did in those days. Michal's accusation is specific- that David had exposed himself to other women, like an erotic dancer, to 'get himself glory'. David doesn't deny the allegation. Instead he justifies himself by saying it was all before Yahweh and he was very humble in his own eyes. Although Michal's accusation was apparently true, the record ends with Michal being barren. Again we are left to reflect on David's behaviour, intention and motivation. He acted as other kings did to establish their dynasty and flaunt their own power. But the Psalms relevant to the ark coming to Zion reflect David's humility and deep sense that it was Yahweh who was the true king to be glorified. We can only conclude that again we have a snapshot into a mind divided

between flesh and Spirit. And in the final analysis, God accepted the presence of the Spirit in David and saved him.

Saul had removed his royal robes and finally had them removed when he died. And thus had the kingship removed from him. David was aware of all the dramas involving Saul's kingly robe and perhaps is showing that he gladly would resign the kingship in order to simply serve God. And Michal despised such humility.

2Sa 6:21 David said to Michal, It was in the eyes of Yahweh, who chose me before your father and before all his house, to appoint me prince over the people of Yahweh, over Israel-
See on :20. Here is a good example of "before" meaning 'before' in importance rather than time. David tells his wife: "The Lord chose me *before* your father [Saul]". Actually, in terms of *time*, God chose Saul well before He chose David. But God chose David *above* Saul in terms of importance and honour. This helps us understand the Lord Jesus being "before" Abraham, in importance not in time (Jn. 8:58).

Michal was worried about what David looked like in the eyes of the young women; but David was totally focused upon his being in the eyes of Yahweh. Worry about what others think of us and all concerns about image evaporate before this sense- that we are in the eyes of Yahweh.

Therefore will I celebrate in the eyes of Yahweh-
When David danced "before / in the eyes of the Lord", his wife mocked him, because he had embarrassed himself "before / in the eyes of Israel". David's response is that he had done this "in my *own* eyes" (2 Sam. 6:20-22). This play on the phrase "before / in the eyes of" is significant. David is highly perceptive here. He's saying that if this is how he feels in his *own* eyes, then this is how he is before the eyes of God, and therefore this is how he will be before the eyes of Israel and the general public. David is saying: 'Who I am, my real self, is the one God sees, and I'm not going to hide it from the world; let them see me how I see myself and how God sees me'. In this incident, there was no gap between the 'real self' of David and the image he projected to the world. There was complete congruence between how he felt about himself, how God saw him, and how the watching world saw him. And this incident ought to be programmatic for our entire lives.

2Sa 6:22 I will be yet more vile than this, and will be base in my own eyes. But of the handmaids of whom you have spoken, they shall honour me-
See on :21. This was true on one level, but it was a cruel thing for a husband to say to his middle aged wife; for it was to the effect that 'the attractive young women will think I'm wonderful and will give me the honour and respect a man craves from his woman,

which you my wife don't give me'. Again we sense a harsher and quite unpleasant side in David, despite his softness and amazing grace. Such contradictions are sadly within us all.

David may mean that his servants would respect him for his humility, whereas Michal despised him for his humility. But we wonder whether this isn't David being proud of his humility...

2Sa 6:23 Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death-

God had prophesied that David's dynasty would last, and Saul's would die out. If Michal and David had had children together, then both dynasties would have arguably continued. Her punishment was therefore an appropriate way of ending Saul's dynasty. Again we see how God works through human sin and the judgment of it, and even through David's rather unreasonable attitude to her, for His greater purpose.

This may not have been judgment solely upon Michal. Once King, David decides to get back his ex-wife Michal, who was by now married to Phaltiel, who evidently loved her. Yet David takes her from Phaltiel, and we have the tragic image of the loving husband walking behind her weeping as she is led away from him (2 Sam. 3:15,16). This was not only a breach of Mosaic law, but displayed a sad elevation of politics above others' relationships and marriages. It may be significant that her renewed marriage with David wasn't blessed with any children (2 Sam. 6:23).

The statement that Michal loved David in 1 Sam. 18:20 is about the only example of love marriage in the Old Testament or a statement that a woman fancied a man. We note how by 2 Sam. 6:18 she watches David out of her window and "despising him in her heart". And she is punished for that by barrenness. She let him out of a window in loyalty to him (1 Sam. 19:12) but in 2 Sam. 6 she watches him from a window and despises him. The other women who watched from windows in the Bible are both bad- the bad woman of Proverbs 7 who watches a man from her window and goes out to seduce him; Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30-37) and Sisera's mother (Jud. 5:28,29). Infatuated love turned to hatred, and so again we see how psychologically credible are the Biblical histories. Her possession of teraphim and falsely telling her father that David had threatened to kill her... all suggest an unspirituality. We could assume that although her father was now dead by the time of 2 Sam. 6, Michal had moved from love of David to the love of her father Saul and what he stood for. Therefore in 2 Sam. 6:16 as she looks out from her window, Michal is described as being "Michal daughter of Saul". In the previous window scene she is called "David's wife Michal" (1 Sam. 19:11). And again we see this so often- one partner with a mission becomes hated by the other partner when they no longer support the mission, and return to the loyalties of their youth. Both Michal and her brother Jonathan are described as loving David with the same Hebrew word *ahab*. But

her love didn't abide the test of time; Jonathan's did. David may well have this in mind when he laments at Jonathan's death that Jonathan’s love was more wonderful to him than the love of women (2 Sam. 1:26).

Michal has many similarities to Rachel in the book of Genesis. They each had an older sister who was set up to be their husband's wife. The fathers were both obsessive and unpleasant, and both fathers pursued after their husbands. Both women present as not very spiritual in that they had teraphim [household idols], which they both use to deceive their fathers to save their own skin, and to help their husbands save their lives from the murderous intent of their fathers. They both lie to their fathers. In the teraphim incident, Rachel claims to be sick and Michal claims David is sick. Both have husbands who work for their father, who deceives their husbands. Both had to choose their husbands over their fathers. Both had an older sister, Leah cp. Merab. The fathers of both women made an agreement with the sons in law [David and Jacob] to give them their daughters in marriage for a dowry [years of labour, killing Goliath], but deceived them. David effectively paid two dowries in order to marry Michal- slaying Goliath, and then 100 Philistine foreskins. Jacob also pays two dowries, each of seven years labour. Each woman had a time of infertility. In Michal's case this is recorded in 2 Sam. 6:23 "Michal, daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death". That could imply she had a child the die she died- she died in childbirth. Which would be another parallel with Rachel. This verse however stands in tension with 2 Sam. 21:8 "the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel" (NEV). The translations squirm around this by translating "bore" as "brought up for", or by appealing to a changed text which read "Merab" for Michal. But the Hebrew is simply as NEV- that Michal had five children by the man whom her older sister was married off to rather than David, and then she marries David. All spaghetti junction in terms of relationships, and all reminiscent of the Jacob-Rachel-Leah mess. All so mixed up and intertwining it's hard to get any mental map of it. Apparently both Michal and Merab were at one point married to the same man, Adriel. By the intrigue of their father. Just as with Laban and his daughters Rachel and Leah.

Clearly the triangle of Jacob, Laban and Rachel is reflected in that of David, Saul and Michal. All these connections cannot be mere coincidence. We naturally enquire why such similarities constantly occur between the lives of God's people. We see the same thing today, the deeper we engage with other believers and get to know them. The repeated circumstances occur over time [between us and earlier believers we meet in the Bible] and also horizontally between us and present believers whom we know. We see the same Divine hallmark and way of operating in our lives, as comfort that indeed man is not alone- not least because our apparently unique situations aren't in fact so unique.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 7

2Sa 7:1 It happened, when the king lived in his house, and Yahweh had given him rest from all his enemies all around-
All his adult life, David had hardly slept more than a few nights in the same place. And he had always been surrounded by enemies who gave him no rest. Now finally he was living a stable life in his own house, with rest from his enemies. Instead of slumping into the mire of mediocrity in his spirituality, as many would have done, he reflects that he apparently has more than God, as it were. He has a nice house, whilst God's house was a tent. This desire to use a stable existence in God's service is a stellar example to God's children of all ages.

The account here may not be chronological, because we read of more wars in 2 Sam. 8. I suggest this is included after the account of bringing the ark to Zion in order to continue the theme of David's work for the ark. Or 2 Sam. 8 may be a summary of how David had been given rest. But to be 'given rest' is the language of inheritance of the Kingdom (Heb. 4:1-11); the idea may be that a Messianic Kingdom could have been established at this point, had David accepted it. But instead, he laboured to build a physical temple rather than allowing God to effect this.

David had lived a wandering life, but now was settled down- permanently, as he imagined. And he wants the same for God. This is a fascinating psychological insight- that man tends to assume that God is like him, creating God in man's image, rather than accepting that God created man in His image. And God's response here is effectively trying to tell David that the wandering life is actually, in essence, how He intends it for His people. And that is how He is, not tied down to one place nor tradition, but ever on the move. And man's tendency is to strive towards stability and static being- but this isn't the way of God's Spirit. God rebukes David for his desire to settle God down to one time and place, to one form and tradition; just as Uriah does indirectly, when he reminds David that God's ark dwells in tents, and so do His true people, in comparison to David's settled down life in Jerusalem with all the moral declension that went with it (2 Sam. 11:11).

It seems on one hand David wanted to make God into His own image, by reasoning that because he was settled and secure in one place, so now should God be. David appears to allude to but misinterpret Dt. 12:9-11: "For you have not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that Yahweh your God is giving you. But you will cross the Jordan and live in the land that Yahweh your God is giving you to inherit, He will give you rest from all your enemies around, and you will live in safety. Then to the place that Yahweh your God will choose to make His name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices". But David misinterprets this as meaning that

there will be one place which Yahweh would choose geographically to make His permanent home base. God replies that He has always kept on the move, never choosing any geographical spot before, and thus He would prefer to continue. Yet David and Solomon simply forge ahead with the idea of a temple in Zion and David even retrojects his own choosing of Zion onto God, as witnessed in several of his Psalms which put this idea in God's mouth. In any case, 2 Sam. 8 goes on to describe more war, as does 2 Sam. 10. David and Israel are not in fact at rest at all. David is jumping ahead in his assumptions, because building a temple has become an obsession with him- he was likely on the autism spectrum. And yet we note that later in his life, during Absalom's rebellion, he was again separated from the ark and the sanctuary; and again he writes Psalms, or edits previous wilderness Psalms, which glorify his experience of Yahweh's presence without the ark or sanctuary.

2Sa 7:2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains-
Yahweh was seen as enthroned upon the ark, dwelling between the cherubim, and so David wanted to bring the ark to his back yard, "Zion", his citadel, and now build a house for it as he had built for himself. But Yahweh corrects this, or tries to. He doesn't dwell in a fixed physical location. He accepts David's desire to have his throne as the throne of Yahweh, even though David is acting politically on one hand, wanting to concentrate both religious and political power in himself as a person and in his physical location. God looks to David's better side of motivations, and says that indeed David's throne shall be His throne, but that shall work out through His purpose in His Son. David accepts that with grace, but goes on trying to 'establish / prepare' his own throne in a temple / physical house and location. And God graciously goes along with this by 'dwelling' in Solomon's temple.

Any disparity between our own life situation and that of the things of God... ought to concern us. David didn't stop living in a house and instead live in a tent. Instead he did what he could to ensure that his abundance was not kept to himself. His motives were admirable throughout, and God saw that, but God was to use David's desires to teach that He doesn't need works, but just wants to share the abundance of His grace with others.

The reference to "curtains" doesn't mean that David was concerned that God's ark was under a tent, whilst he lived in a house. Rather is the reference to the ten curtains which comprised the tabernacle (Ex. 26:1). Although the tabernacle was at Gibeon and the ark in Zion, David had apparently made another tabernacle for the ark in Zion. David was assuming that he could change the Mosaic commandments about the tabernacle, and move God's purpose forward to something more permanent. We see here how he didn't consider the laws of Moses [of which the commands about the tabernacle were part] to be static. He saw them as open to interpretation and development. This was not a

position he came to lightly, seeing he had been terribly punished for thinking he could flout the legislation about how the ark was to be transported.

Many of the commands within the "law of Moses" were clearly only intended for the wilderness generation, indeed they could only have been obeyed by them then; and David wondered whether the entire commands about the tabernacle were in that category. He was open to the idea of God moving on in His purpose and desires for men. Those today who claim that Mosaic legislation is eternally binding need to give this due weight. It's not just that the Mosaic law was abrogated by the Lord's death; but the whole nature of that law was that it was never intended to all be literally applied to every subsequent generation. And that meant that it was the spirit of it which was to be discerned and followed.

2Sa 7:3 Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in your heart; for Yahweh is with you-
Nathan wrongly assumed that Yahweh would naturally agree to David's proposition to move on from the Mosaic idea of a tabernacle. David didn't actually state what he intended to do (:2), but Nathan assumes he knows David's intentions, and assumes he knows God will agree. Such assumptions are typical of human beings, and further adds psychological verisimilitude to the record. Nathan of course should have had the humility to first ask of God rather than assuming he knows God's will. The assumption we know God's will is a common problem amongst God's people; effectively we are elevating our gut feeling to the level of God's word.

2Sa 7:4 It happened the same night, that the word of Yahweh came to Nathan saying-
David's plan to build a great house was met with the word of the Lord coming unto him "the same night", telling him not to do this. There seems to be some allusion to this by the Lord Jesus when He spoke of the rich fool who wanted to build a greater barn being told the Lord's word "that same night". It could be that the Lord Jesus saw something material and very human in David's desire to build a house for the Lord. See on :7.

2Sa 7:5 Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says Yahweh, Shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in?-
Perhaps there was a pause after this statement. The emphasis was upon the words "you" and "Me". David had not given due thought to the magnitude and inappropriacy of what was in his mind; that he as a mere man could build a house for Yahweh to live in. He had failed to perceive the greatness of his God. Any idea of confining God within four walls was bizarre. The Chronicles record is clearer: "You shall not build Me a house". The way David insisted upon doing so reflects a refusal to accept, in the long term, the huge grace offered to him here. We see the typical human tendency to want to do works for God, and to be justified thereby- rather than to accept *His* work for us.

2Sa 7:6 For I have not lived in a house since the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have moved around in a tent and in a tabernacle- Although this may primarily refer to the Angel, the point is that the God of the cosmos had intensely manifested Himself in the ark and the tabernacle / tent which enclosed it. This of itself revealed His humility. The idea is "I have walked continually"; like David up until this point (see on :1), He had been a wanderer. David had now ceased his years of wandering (:1), and was assuming that God was like himself, preferring a stable and sedentary life. But this assumption that God is like us at this moment and point of our lives is incorrect, and David later criticizes it (Ps. 50:21). He is who He is, and not a god made in our image, as we are at this moment; rather are we made in His image, and not the other way around. It is for us to hear His voice in His word and accept Him as He is, rather than assuming He will think how we do at this point in our development. David earlier had appreciated the idea of God being a wanderer when he was a wanderer, as his wilderness Psalms indicate. But now he was settled, he assumed that this was how God would like to be.

2Sa 7:7 In all places in which I have walked with all the children of Israel, did I say a word to any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to be shepherd of My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?''-

The mention of "tribes" may be a rebuke of David for wanting to concentrate religious power in his tribe by building a temple and locating the ark in his territory. God had been careful not to do this in the past but had kept the tabernacle moving around.

David desired to build God a physical house. 2 Sam. 7:7-11 records God's response in clear enough language: God did not want a physical house because

1. It was not really possible for man to build God a house ("Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?" is surely rhetorical)

2. God had never asked Israel to build Him such a house before; indeed, it had been His expressed will that He should dwell among Israel in the temporary form of the tabernacle. God wanted a temporary abode to point forward to the fact that the reality was in Christ; thus the Law of Moses had features built into it which were intrinsically temporal, to point men forward to the stability and finality of Messiah. By building a permanent temple, Solomon reflects his lack of focus on the Messiah to come.

3. He would only have a permanent physical house when His people were permanently settled, never to be moved again (2 Sam. 7:10), i.e. in the Kingdom. Yet Solomon perceived that his kingdom was in fact the final Kingdom of God. David made this mistake, in assuming in Ps. 72 that Solomon's Kingdom would undoubtedly be the Messianic one...and Solomon repeated the error, yet to a more tragic extent.

4. God plays on the confusion between 'house' in the sense of household, and 'house' in the sense of a physical building. He says: '*You* want to build *me* a physical house. But *I* am going to build *you* a *household* which will be my Kingdom'. The implication is that David's desire for a physical house was altogether too human, and that there is an opposition between what man thinks he can physically do for God, and the fact that God wishes to do things for men. Yet Solomon went ahead with his works rather than grappling with the reality of sheer grace. He so wanted to *do* something. He betrays this when he writes in Ecc. 9:7: "God now accepteth thy works". The Hebrew translated "accepteth" means literally to satisfy a debt, and is elsewhere translated 'to reconcile self'. He saw works as reconciling man's debt to God, rather than perceiving that grace is paramount. He keeps on about David his father; and yet there was a crucial difference. David perceived the need for grace as the basis of man's reconciliation with God; whereas Solomon thought it was works. David wrote that God wants a broken heart and not thousands of sacrifices; yet Solomon offered the thousands of sacrifices, but didn't have the contrite heart of his father.

5. To desire a physical house for God is to overlook the promised Messiah- that was surely the implication of the promise of the Lord Jesus following right on from the statement that a physical house was not required. Is. 57:15 and Is. 66:2 explain why this is- because God does not live in what man builds, but will fully dwell in one man to whom He will look, one who would have a humble spirit towards Him. And this man was of course the Lord Jesus. Solomon's obsession with the temple therefore reflected his deeper problem- of not being focused upon the Christ to come.

So it ought to be clear from all this that God's response to the request to build a temple was negative; He did not want a physical temple. None of the four reasons for this listed above were just temporary considerations; they were reasons which were valid for all time. There can be no doubt that God's response here is at the basis of Is. 66:1,2: "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made... but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" . God is saying that it simply isn't possible to build Him a house; instead, He seeks to dwell in the hearts of men. Yet Solomon wasn't interested in the personal spiritual mindedness which enables this to happen. This is the same spirit as God's response to David: 'You can't build me a physical house, I will build my own household of believers'.

These words of Is. 66 are twice quoted in the New Testament. "God that made the world and all things therein, *seeing that* He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands... as though He needed any thing" (Acts 17:24,25). The reason for God not dwelling in temples is that He is Lord of heaven and earth. This

reason does not change with time; He was Lord of heaven and earth at David's time just as much as He is now.

2Sa 7:8 Now therefore you shall tell My servant David this, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies, I took you from the sheep pen, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over My people, over Israel-

"Sheep pen" translates the word usually rendered "habitation". The idea is that Yahweh had taken David from his home and made him a wanderer in the desert, just as He had done to Israel in Egypt. This was to bring David and Israel to identify with Yahweh as their God seeing He too was ever mobile and had no geographical home. And David in his new stability was forgetting this and seeking to make God into his own current image.

David was asked to reflect that his wandering around as a shepherd as a child and teenager had been to prepare him for leading Israel. But leading a people likewise involves an element of mobility, and God as the ultimate leader of Israel was likewise moving on and never static. Hebrew shepherds usually lead their sheep, but here David is described as being moved from following sheep, to going ahead as a leader. Here we have an example of where language and imagery is used in a way we might consider opportunistic; but this is the nature of Semitic writing and reasoning. A failure to appreciate the Hebrew nature of the Bible has led to so many misinterpretations of it.

2Sa 7:9 I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you-

David's continual wandering up until the point of :1 had always been with God's presence "with you wherever". This connects with God's own statement that He Himself had "walked continually" (:6). Those years had been in order to get David to appreciate God's own constant journeying. This is to be a feature of every believer's life. Even if we live and die in the house we were born in and never move 20 km. from our home village, life with God is a constant journey. And all within us will seek to turn it into the stability of mere religion, as David was seeking to do.

The next chapter details yet more victories over enemies, as if this showed David that the covenant was really in operation for him.

God encourages David to see himself as representative of Israel by saying this; they are words replete with reference to Israel in the wilderness and their establishment in the land. As David so loved his people and was their representative, for all they did to him, so with the Lord Jesus and His people. When God asked David "choose thee one of" three possible judgments, each of them involved the whole nation- e.g. "Shall seven years of famine come unto *thee*" (singular). David was their representative even in their time of failure.

I will make you a great name, like the name of the great ones who are in the earth-
This is now developed by God into saying that He will make David a house / family. That family was to bear David's great name, but the "great name", the greatest in the earth [reading "great ones" as an intensive plural for a singular great name] was that of Yahweh. And this Name was to be carried by David's house and particularly by the Messianic seed who was now to be promised. AV "I have made thee a great name" would refer to how God was to do this through David's military victories (2 Sam. 8:13), indicating that 2 Sam. 7 is actually referring to events after 2 Sam. 8 and is not in chronological sequence.

2Sa 7:10 I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as at the first-
This can be translated "I will establish a place for My people Israel, and I will plant him, then he will dwell beneath it and will not tremble any more". The same Hebrew is found in Ez. 17:23 "every bird will dwell
beneath it". The allusion is to David's previous perception [as reflected in his wilderness Psalms] that the faithful dwell under the shadow of the cherubic wings, as it were on the mercy seat, covered by the blood of atonement (Ps 17:8; 36:8; 57:2; 73:8). David had been so eager to bring the physical ark to Zion and now to build a house / temple for it. But Yahweh's response is that He will bring all Israel to live permanently in His presence over the ark. And for ever. This is a picture of man's final salvation, through the promised Son of David, the Lord Jesus; and herein lies the significance of the promise of "presence" in the Comforter passages. The gift of the Spirit in the heart obviates all arks and temples. The presence of the physical ark or temple were irrelevant to this promise, and quite unnecessary. And that is perhaps why the ark vanishes out of the Biblical history without a trace or even a goodbye. These things were foreseen in Ex. 15:17 "You shall bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance, the place, Yahweh, which You have made for yourself to dwell in; the sanctuary, Lord, which Your hands have established". "The place" where Israel were to dwell was where Yahweh dwells. And in essence, that place is the human heart. It is not over an ark, in a temple, nor even in a geographical area. But David has slipped back to the religious rather than the spiritual. For in Ps. 132:5 we read of his desire to bring the literal ark to physical Zion, and thus to find "a place for Yahweh, a dwelling-place for the God of Jacob". The promises to David are correcting him, pointing out that Yahweh will find a "place" for Himself and His people, and that "place" ultimately is within the human heart, enabled and mediated by the Spirit of His Son. David bought "the place" from Ornan: "Give me the [sacred] place of the threshing floor so that I may build an altar to Yahweh on it... David gave Ornan 600 shekels of silver for the place" (1 Chron. 21:22,25). Whilst God was willing to place His Name and presence in Zion, the accent of the promises to

David is that essentially God will seek out and find a place to dwell with His people. And later scripture explains that this will be through His Spirit in His Son.

As the promise stands in the standard translations, it never came true. Israel never dwelt securely for long, and were always soon afflicted by the children of wickedness.

This connects with how David had planted the ark in its "place" in Zion (2 Sam. 6:17). God is saying that His grace is such that He will do exceeding far above what we ever ask or think to do for Him. He would plant and place Israel in an eternal Kingdom, just as David had planted and placed the ark in Zion. As David personally had been given rest from his enemies (:1), so would Israel be granted rest.

These words would have been comforting to the exiles; ultimately they would not be afflicted as they had been by the Babylonians, and would return to their land permanently (2 Sam. 7:10 s.w. for "afflict" in Zech. 10:2; Zeph. 3:19; Lam. 3:33; 5:11). The word used in 1 Chron. 17:9, 'to waste', is also used of the Babylonian wasting of Judah (Lam. 3:4).

2Sa 7:11 and as from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel. I will cause you to rest from all your enemies-
The constant affliction Israel experienced at the time of the judges was because of their sins; they had no rest from their enemies because of their continual unfaithfulness to Yahweh. These promises are therefore tantamount to saying that God would somehow permanently establish His people, in a way not conditional upon their faithfulness because He would somehow make them faithful. This is the language of the new covenant offered to the exiles, and is achieved today through the work of the Holy Spirit keeping us from falling from the covenant. The "blessing" promised to Abraham is therefore interpreted in Acts 3:25,26 as the power of God turning away His people's hearts from sin. And the same is implied in these promises to David. I will note on :15 that God likewise promised to remain faithful to David's seed even if he sinned. This is grace upon grace.

The promises to David included the prospect of being given rest from his enemies (2 Sam. 7:11). We note however that in 2 Sam. 10-12 we will read of David's war with Ammon. He didn't have rest from his enemies. As with the promise that immediately follows, that he would have an eternal house / family, this was to be realized after David's death, in the time of his Messianic Son. The war with Ammon would have been intended by God to nudge David to realize that the promises were not about here and now. But he tries hard to make them about him; and the curse on him for the sin with Bathsheba was that enemies would arise from his own house, and the rest of his life was lived in anything but "rest" from enemies. In the bigger picture, this was to remind him that the promises to him were most definitely not being fulfilled in this life. He was

intended to focus instead upon the future rest of God's Kingdom, at a point when his Messianic Son was set up / resurrected along with himself.

Moreover Yahweh tells you that Yahweh will make you a house-
To what was God referring to when He told David that David's son would build him a house? Firstly, we must bear in mind that in hundreds of places, the Hebrew word for "house" means 'household'. The eternal house promised to David is paralleled with the Kingdom; and a Kingdom is comprised of people. This is what is in view, not the building of any literal temple at the Lord's return. The Kingdom is the house of Jacob (Lk. 1:33). That the house of David is the Kingdom is evident from 2 Sam. 7:13,16; 1 Chron. 17:14 (cp. Lk. 11:17). The Kingdom was taken from the house of Saul and given to the house of David (2 Sam. 3:10), but later the Kingdom was taken from the house of David because of Solomon's apostacy (1 Kings 14:8). This is proof enough that at best the promises to David had only a tiny fulfilment in Solomon's Kingdom.

The New Testament is very insistent that the true temple of God is the body of Christian believers (1 Cor. 9:13; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 10:21; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 3:12; 11:1,2; 1 Tim.3:15). This string of passages is quite some emphasis. Yet Christ was the temple; he spoke of the temple of his body (Jn. 2:19-21; Rev. 21:22). For this reason, the Gospels seem to stress the connection between Christ and the temple (Mk.11:11,15,16,27; 12:35; 13:1,3; 14:49; Lk. 2:46; 21:38). Christ's body was the temple of God. By being in Christ, we too are the temple (1 Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:21), *our* body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). Yet Solomon was not Christ centered; he didn't want to see this connection. And we too can have an over-physical view of the Kingdom, centered around a literal temple in Jerusalem etc., rather than perceiving that the Kingdom / reign of God is, in its essence, over the hearts of men and women like us. The future political Kingdom will be the concrete articulation of the essence of the Kingdom principles which are now being lived out in the hearts of the people who are under the Lord's present kingship.

In the person of Jesus, the essence of the Kingdom came nigh to men (Mt. 10:7; 11:4; 12:28)- and this was why one of His titles is "the Kingdom". The Kingdom of God is about joy, peace and righteousness more than the physicalities of eating and drinking. In this sense the Kingdom was "among" first century Israel. The Kingdom of God is not merely a carrot held out to us for good behaviour. It is a reality right now, in so far as God truly becomes our king. Even in the Old Testament, the word "temple" does not normally refer to the physical temple outside the records of Solomon's building of the temple. It is often stated that the house David's seed was to build would be for the Name of Yahweh. His Name refers to His mental attributes. A physical house is inappropriate to express these.

If the house refers to a household of righteous believers, all becomes plain. This explains why 2 Sam. 7:13,26 parallels God's eternal name with the eternal house and Kingdom which was promised to David. Building a house was a common Hebrew idiom

for developing a household (Ruth 4:11; Dt. 25:9). God's promise to David about building him an eternal household was anticipated in His words to Eli: "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind (i.e. David, 1 Sam. 13:14): and I will build him a *sure house*", in contrast to God's destruction of Eli's household (1 Sam. 2:35). 1 Kings 11:38 clinches the idea that this refers to David: "I will be with thee, and build thee a *sure house* as I built for David". In passing, note that these words to Solomon remind him that God will build *him* a house, in opposition to the way in which Solomon so frequently speaks about building God a house.

2Sa 7:12 When your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers-
There is a strong sense that God has determined a number of "days" for our mortal life (Ps. 23:6; 2 Sam. 7:12), and David like all of us wished to know how many those days were for him, in order that he might live an appropriately humble life in response to realizing his frailty (Ps. 39:4). But that predetermined number of days can be cut short (Ps. 102:4,23,24) or extended (1 Kings 3:14; Prov. 9:11). Hezekiah would be the parade example of this; his days were cut short (Is. 38:10), and then lengthened in response to prayer (2 Kings 20:6). God is open to dialogue, His timetable in our personal lives is flexible according to our prayers; and He is also responsive to human behaviour. Like Job we should perceive our life as "my days" (he uses this term multiple times), so that we might use each of them for Him.

I will set up your seed after you, who shall proceed out of your body- "Set up" has a similar meaning to "establish". It is tempting to note that the Hebrew word is often translated "arise", and to wonder if there is here a hint that this seed will experience a bodily resurrection. The possible fulfilment in David's family was precluded by his sin with Bathsheba and the resultant effects upon his "house"; the same word for "set up" is in 2 Sam. 12:11 of how God would "raise / set up evil out of your own house". His house "was not so with God", as he concluded at the end of his life; and so he with us look for a fulfilment in his Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus, and the house of people being built up / established in Him.

The promise to David concerning Christ precludes his physical existence at the time the promise was made: “I *will* set up your descendant [singular] *after* you, which *shall* proceed out of your body… I *will be* his father, and he *shall be* my son” (2 Sam. 7:12,14). Notice the future tense used here. Seeing that God *would be* Christ’s Father, it is impossible that the Son of God could have already existed at that point in time when the promise was made. That this seed “*shall proceed out of your body”* shows that he was to be a literal, physical descendant of David. “The Lord has sworn in truth unto David… Of the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne” (Ps. 132:11). Solomon was the primary fulfilment of the promise, but as he was already physically in existence at the time of this promise (2 Sam. 5:14), the main fulfilment of this promise about David

having a physical descendant who would be God's son, must refer to Christ (Lk. 1:31-33).

The Hebrew for "body" here is usually translated womb / belly [AV "bowels"]. David is likened to the female and Yahweh to the male. This is incredibly intimate language to use. This was how close Yahweh felt to David, despite David being such a mix of flesh and Spirit. The promise came true in that Yahweh Himself made Mary [a descendant of David] literally pregnant, and the offspring was therefore His only begotten Son.

And I will establish his kingdom-
"Prepared" or "established" is a major theme in the promises of the eternal establishment of David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12,13,16 etc.), and Solomon wrongly assumed that the conditional nature of the promises concerning the seed were just irrelevant to him as he had wisdom. Therefore he uses the word of how his kingdom has been "established" (1 Kings 2:24 s.w.). Solomon's contenders for the throne were all stopped by God, they tried to prepare or establish themselves but it never worked out (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5); and so surely Solomon has the idea in mind that he has been established as the promised Messianic seed of David with an eternally "established" throne and kingdom. This leads him to the conclusion that the outcome of wisdom and folly is in this life, and he has no perspective of a final day of judgment and eternal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. This is why the simplistic dichotomies he presents in Proverbs between the blessed and wise, and the cursed and foolish, are not always true to observed experiences in this life. For it is the future Kingdom which puts them in ultimate perspective.

2Sa 7:13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever-
Ultimately, as shown above, this refers to the building up of the house of believers to be the throne of the seed's eternal kingdom. The Lord Jesus will reign upon us, "whose house are we" (Heb. 3:6); we are His throne, the basis of His Kingdom. And that house and throne are being built up now, although it will only be more materially and physically articulated at His second coming and the establishment of His literal Kingdom upon earth. This process of building up is achieved by the colossal work of the Lord Jesus through His Spirit, calling, converting and transforming His people to be His house. This is how the New Testament alludes to these ideas of building and establishing (Acts 20:32; Rom 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3; 1 Pet. 5:10). Ps. 89:4 says that this building up of the throne goes on in "all generations". The idea is that the house and throne of the seed is built up from people of all generations. The light never went out for God's Truth and true people. In every generation there were some. This has big implications for those who consider that a very specific theology, especially one based

upon 19th century revelations of truth, is required for salvation and membership of God's people.

The fact is that God *did* dwell, temporarily, in Solomon's temple. His glory entered it, and later left it in Ezekiel's time. This is the classic example of the way in which God will go along with men in their mistaken enthusiasm, working with them, even though this is contrary to His preferred way of doing things. A similar example is found in the way God forbad Israel to have a human king, because to do so would be a denial of His superiority and of their covenant relationship with Him. And yet Israel had a king. God did not turn a blind eye to this. Instead He worked through this system of human kingship. Or take marriage out of the faith. This is clearly contrary to God's ideal wishes. And yet in some cases He is prepared to work through this, in order to being about His purpose. There is even the possible suggestion in Acts 15:10 that God was 'tempted' to re-instate the law of Moses, or parts of it, in the first century, seeing that this was what so many of the early Christians desired to keep. That God is so eager to work with us should in itself be a great encouragement. Yet we must not come to presume upon God's patience, assuming that He will go along with us.

In any case, 2 Chron. 7:12 says that God accepted the temple only as a place of sacrifice, i.e. a glorified altar (cp. 2 Sam. 24:17,18). And yet- God didn't really want sacrifice (Ps. 40:6; Heb. 10:5). "Now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever" (2 Chron. 7:16) is a conditional promise, followed by five verses of conditions concerning Solomon's spirituality which he overlooked. Like Solomon, we too can fix upon promises without considering their conditionality. There is good reason to think that communally and individually we are increasingly shutting our eyes to the possibility of our spiritual failure and disaster. God constantly warned Solomon about the conditionality of the promises, before the building started (2 Sam. 7:14), during it (1 Kings 6:11-13) and immediately after completing it (1 Kings 9:2-9). Note, too, that Solomon had the idea that if sinful Israel prayed towards the temple, they would somehow be forgiven because of this. God's response was that if they sought *Him* wherever they were and repented, then He would hear them- the temple was not to be seen as the instrument or mediatrix of forgiveness which Solomon envisaged. Likewise, Solomon's implication that prayer offered in the temple would be especially acceptable was not upheld by God's reply to him about this (2 Chron. 6:24-26 cp. God's response in 2 Chron. 7:12,13).

David's desire to build a physical house is responded to by God, in that His Son would build a house for His Name. His Name is His characteristics. The Lord Jesus is building a house of persons who reflect the characteristics of the Yahweh Name (Ex. 34:4-6). This is achieved through His Spirit working in human hearts and not any physical building. For in what physical sense can a Name dwell in a physical house? The presence of

Yahweh over the ark is to be realized in human hearts where the Spirit dwells, as per the promise of the Comforter. And as David experienced in the wilderness.

God's promise to eternally establish David's "house" and Kingdom were because of His Son, who would also be David's son. There are many inscriptions from Babylon and Assyria that reference the belief of the new king that his house and kingdom would last eternally. Thus Nabopolassar stated his belief that his god Marduk would make his house and dynasty last eternally. David clearly had the same hope. But God is correcting and adjusting his vision, in explaining that indeed this would happen- but through the Messiah and not through building any temple to Him. Ps. 110:2-4 connects the eternal rule from Zion with this seed being a king-priest who would reign forever: "Yahweh will send forth the rod of your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies!... Yahweh has sworn, and will not change His mind: You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek". The promise to David is here interpretted as being fulfilled in the Son of David reigning eternally as a king-priest from Zion. This was not predicated upon any temple there. Nor is the fulfilment seen in terms of an unbroken line of Davidic kings "forever".

The eternal nature of the Kingdom and dynasty of David was to be through the eternity of his great son and seed, Messiah. Is. 9:7 is clear about this interpretation: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it, with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even For ever". Jer. 33:15-17 is likewise clear that the eternal dimension of David's promised seed and kingdom is realized only through the Lord Jesus, the branch from David: "I will cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up to David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name by which it shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness. For thus says Yahweh: David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel". Jer. 23:5,6 says the same: "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch... and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness'". The various complaints that Yahweh had failed to keep the covenant to David (e.g. Ps. 89) are all therefore a misunderstanding of the covenant as meaning there would be an unbroken line of kings from David. Even if that was a possibility in God's mind, His intention was that the eternity of David's "throne" would be through the eternal rulership of the Messianic son of David. Indeed David and his seed would be so closely identified that Ez. 37:24,25 could prophesy "David my servant will be their prince for ever". But like David and Solomon, people wanted to see the fulfilment in their times and in visible literal physical terms.

But David's thanksgiving for the promises to him seems to focus on how his house or dynasty would be preserved eternally, and it seems he misunderstood this as meaning there would be an unbroken line of kings from him. But that isn't what is promised. As

many today, David chose to misunderstand God's word because of his own desire for things to be as he ideally imagined they would and could be. Yet on another hand, David did understand the promises as God intended, i.e. as concerning the singular seed, Messiah. For Peter tells us (Act 2:30) concerning David "that being a prophet, and Knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ".

Verse 13 promises that the throne and kingdom of the seed would be established forever. Verse 16 promises that thereby David's throne and kingdom would be established forever. The eternity of the promise was therefore to be realised in the seed, not in an eternal line of royal descendants. David appears to misunderstand these things when he says that these promises meant that God had established Israel as His eternal people (:24). But God was to later disown them and tell them "You are not My people". Those in the seed would alone be the eternal people. Solomon likewise too quickly assumed that he was that eternal promised seed (1 Kings 2:24) as did David (1 Kings 2:45). And David reverts from the promises by seeking to establish / prepare (s.w.) for a physical temple (1 Chron. 22:3,5,14; 28:2; 29:2,3,16,19) and 'preparing' a place for the temple at Araunah's threshing floor (2 Chron. 3:1). All this reflects a refusal to accept the promise that Yahweh was preparing his Kingdom.

David three times used the word for "established" in bringing the ark to the place had prepared / established for it (1 Chron. 15:1,3,12). God's response is that He will establish David's kingdom and "house".

2Sa 7:14 I will be his father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men-
This clearly applies to the Lord Jesus, born of a woman in the direct line of David and yet with God as His Father. But the words are quoted also about all believers in 2 Cor. 6:18: "And I will be to you as a father, and you will be to me as sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty". Every man and woman in the seed becomes as the Lord Jesus. The unconditional promises are in that sense made to us. The context of the 2 Cor. 6 quotation is of being holy and acting appropriately as the temple / house of God: "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16). To be "in Christ" means we are to consciously try to act as Him, so that we may be that eternal house promised to David by God. This explains why "I will be his father, and he shall be My son" is reflected in the terms of the new covenant: "I will be their God and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:33).

It seems that if the Lord had sinned God's love would not have been withdrawn from Him and after punishment He would still have reigned eternally in some form. He would

have been punished as a man is punished by a father ["rod of men... stripes of the children of men"], although Son of God (Prov. 23:13). In this case, our salvation would have been disabled. But a loving Father God would not have rejected His beloved Son on the basis of a 'One strike and you're out' attitude. Knowing this would've made it so easy for the Lord to have given in, knowing His own eternity was ultimately assured. His endurance against sin to the end was therefore motivated by His love for us and desire for our salvation through His perfect sacrifice. This argument is powerful, and disproves the theology that the Lord's sacrifice was for His own eternal salvation as well as for ours.

Often the promises about the seed in the singular (the Lord Jesus) are applied to us in the plural (e.g. 2 Sam. 7:14 cp. Ps. 89:30-35). Those seminal promises to Abraham hinged around what would be realized *in*, not "by", his seed. All that is true of the Lord Jesus is now true of us, in that we are in Him. Baptism is not an initiation into a church. It isn't something which just *seems* the right thing to do. And even if because of our environment and conscience, it was easier to get baptized than not- *now* this mustn't be the case. We really are *in* Christ, we are born again; now we exist, spiritually! And moreover, we have risen with Him, His resurrection life, His life and living that will eternally be, is now manifest in us, and will be articulated physically at the resurrection.

There are connections between the promises to David about Jesus, and the later commentary upon them in Psalm 89 and Isaiah 53, with reference to the crucifixion.

2 Sam. 7 If he [Jesus] commit iniquity = Psalm 89 If his children [us] forsake my law = Isaiah 53 The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all

2 Sam. 7 I will chasten *him* with the rod of men = Ps. 89 Then will I visit *their* transgression with the rod = Is. 53 For the transgression of *my people* was *he* stricken

2 Sam. 7 And with the stripes of the children of men = Ps. 89 And *their* iniquity with stripes = Is. 53 With *his* stripes *we* are healed.

The point of all this is to show how our sins were somehow carried by the Lord Jesus, to the extent that He suffered for them. But *how* was this actually achieved? It is one thing to say it, but we must put meaning into the words. I suggest it was in that the Lord so identified with us, His heart so bled for us, that He *felt* a sinner even though He of course never sinned. The final cry “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” clearly refers back to all the many passages which speak of God forsaking the wicked, but never forsaking the righteous. The Lord, it seems to me, *felt* a sinner, although He was not one, and thus entered into this sense of crisis and fear He had sinned. He *so* identified with us. In the bearing of His cross, we likewise must identify with others, with their needs and with the desperation of their human condition... and this is what will convert them, as the Lord’s identification with *us* saved *us*.

It is unthinkable that God has any possibility of sinning. The seed of David promised in 2 Sam. 7:12-16 was definitely Christ. Verse 14 speaks of Christ's possibility of sinning: "*If* he commit iniquity, I will chasten him". Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin.

"Chasten" is the word used by Solomon when he speaks of the need to accept "reproof" in Prov. 15:12: "A scoffer doesn't love to be reproved; he will not go to the wise". David had spoken of the house of Saul as scoffing at him (s.w. Ps. 119:51). And the line of David had been chosen to replace Saul because he had refused Samuel's reproof. David had accepted reproof and was open to it, notably from Nathan the prophet (Ps. 38:1; 141:5); and so again Solomon's Proverbs are true, but he harnesses them to the justification of himself and his father. But Solomon was only to remain the prophetic son of David if he accepted reproof (s.w. 2 Sam. 7:14); and he didn't. He refused to personalize his own wisdom, as we can.

2 Sam. 7:14 had warned the son of David that if he sinned, he would be punished "with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men". I take this as meaning that he would be punished like ordinary men are punished- and the implication could be that Solomon would have a tendency to think that he was more than human, somehow above the possibility of failing and being punished as an ordinary man, because he might think that he was somehow 'God', or at least, that what happens to all humanity would somehow not happen to him. This tendency to assume that we are somehow different to the rest of humanity, that we can sin in a certain way but they can't, that somehow for us it will all be OK... is as alive in us as it was in Solomon.

The promise to David himself is unconditional. Subsequent kings could be punished for their disobedience, but God would not remove His grace (:15). The dynasty of David wouldn't be rejected as that of Saul was (:15). This was to come true through the "Son of David" reigning eternally on David's throne- not a literal chair or seat, but reigning as David, literally in Zion / Jerusalem. After 400 years or so, David's dynasty was overturned and the crown removed- "until he come whose right it is", the Son of David, the Lord Jesus. This is how the eternal promise was to be fulfilled. But David hankered to interpret it as meaning that a line of kings from his body would literally be eternal. His warning to Solomon implies this misunderstanding: "Then the Lord will fulfill the promise that He made concerning me: If your descendants are scrupulous in their conduct, and walk before Me faithfully, with all their heart and soul, your line on the

throne of Israel shall never end!" (1 Kings 2:4). David here makes the unconditional conditional. Be balked at the grace of the covenant and returned to salvation by works, just as so many do. God explained to Solomon that if indeed he was obedient, then he could be the Messianic king and this become the fulfilment of these words about eternal kingship. He failed, but the Lord Jesus didn't: "As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked before Me, wholeheartedly and with uprightness, doing all that I have commanded you [and] keeping My laws and My rules, then I will establish your throne of kingship over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, 'Your line on the throne of Israel shall never end'" (1 Kings 9:4,5). Whenever the Davidic covenant is quote or interpreted as conditional, it is in the context of a king having the conditional, potential possibility to become the eternal king through perfect obedience. But they all failed- until the Lord Jesus. This is why some of the kings felt upset that the covenant had as it were been broken with them: "Yet You have rejected, spurned, and become enraged at Your anointed. You have repudiated the covenant with Your servant; You have dragged his dignity in the dust. You have breached all his defenses, shattered his strongholds" (Ps. 89:39–41). The covenant itself was not broken because it was intended to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. But for those who felt it was to be fulfilled in them, it appeared broken. Even after David's ruling dynasty had come to an end with the Babylonian exile, God was insistent that despite that, the covenant to David would not be broken. He had in view how it would be fulfilled through the Lord Jesus and those in Him: "If you could break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that day and night should not come at their proper time, only then could My covenant with My servant David be broken – so that he would not have a descendant reigning upon his throne... Like the host of heaven which cannot be counted, and the sand of the sea which cannot be measured, so will I multiply the offspring of My servant David, and of the Levites who minister to Me" (Jer. 33:20-22). In this way, Jacob's words also come true: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet; so that tribute shall come to him and the homage of peoples be his" (Gen. 49:10). This doesn't refer to an unbroken line of kings from Judah; it means that one from Judah, i.e. the Lord Jesus, would reign eternally.

2Sa 7:15 but My loving kindness shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you-

It was God's Spirit which departed from Saul and came upon David. Yet that Spirit is here called God's grace or loving kindness, and the New Testament makes the same connection between the grace / gift of God and the Holy Spirit. The formation of the seed, both collectively and individually in the Lord Jesus, was through the work of the Spirit. And that Spirit would abide fully and eternally upon the Lord Jesus (Jn. 3:34).

The clear message here is that God would as it were almost force through His promised program with David's seed. Even if the special seed sinned, he would be chastened, but

God's gracious mercy would not depart from him (:14). This connects with the observation on :11 that God would as it were make Israel obedient, He would give them the blessings of obedience [not wandering any longer but being established], simply because that is what He was promising. These are the "sure mercies of David" available to all who will 'come to Him' (Is. 55:3). These things lead us to respect the Lord's achievement all the more, as the seed of David; if in fact He would personally have been accepted by God even if He had failed in some point. His perfection and endurance therefore achieved what Paul calls "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3). The Greek implies there were qualities of salvation attainable; and the Lord obtained for us the highest possible level. And how can we neglect that...

2Sa 7:16 Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you-
The translations tend to add "in your presence", implying David's resurrection to behold it. But the grammar is indeterminate. It could as well mean in God's presence, and this is how David interprets it in Ps. 61:7. The parallel in 1 Chron. 17:14 says "I will confirm him in My house". We assume God said both these things, and thus paralleled "Your house... My house". David's house / kingdom was to be eternal because it was to become God's house / Kingdom; the promised Son of David was also to be Son of God.

Solomon came to overlook the conditionality of the promises because his father had done the same. David on his deathbed speaks of how “God has given one to sit on my throne this day, my eyes even seeing it” (1 Kings 1:48). He forgot how those promises more essentially spoke of his house “for a great while to come”, and how only after “you shall sleep with your fathers” would David see “your house and your kingdom established for ever *before you*” (2 Sam. 7:12,16), thus implying David’s resurrection. He lost this focus in his enthusiasm for Solomon, and it seems that Solomon followed suite. David focused upon some words of God but out of context. Just as we call can.

Your throne shall be established forever’-
Abigail quotes the promise of a priest being raised up with a "sure house" (1 Sam. 2:35), imagining that David was to become a Messianic king-priest; and to have blood on his hands would preclude that. Abigail's phrase "a sure / established house" (1 Sam. 25:28) is used in the promises to David (2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Kings 11:38). It's as if she was so in tune with God's ways that she had some premonition of His intentions with David, although she saw these as conditional upon David not shedding the innocent blood of her family. Or perhaps the promise of 1 Sam. 2:35 about a priest with a "sure house" had already been developed by Samuel in relation with David, and Abigail was aware of that. The promises to David which mention a sure house for him would therefore only be confirming what had already been promised.

I suggested on :13 that this establishment of the throne was a process of building up and establishing God's people over the generations, coming to full term in the

establishment of the Lord Jesus on David's revived throne in Jerusalem at His second coming. Ps. 89:4 says that this building up of the throne goes on in "all generations". The idea is that the house and throne of the seed is built up from people of all generations. The light never went out for God's Truth and true people.

"Established" is literally "shall be made sure". This is alluded to in Is. 55:3, “the sure mercies of David”. The sure mercies of David are offered to all men (Is. 55:2,3). We too can have this eternal assurance of a sure, established Kingdom. If we are in the seed, the Son of David.

The promise that David's eternal kingdom would be "before you" meant in his presence (:16). He would be resurrected to see this eternal reign of his seed upon his throne. But on thanking God for this, David changes this to thanks that it would be established for ever "before You" (:29). He didn't grasp the implications for himself because he preferred to interpret God's words according to his own preconceived narrative of wanting his descendants to be kings in an eternal unbroken line of succession. This didn't happen neither was it God's offer here. Those who later lamented the end of the Davidic line of kings likewise failed to listen carefully to what God was saying here. Likewise in :24 David wrongly reads the promise that his house would be eternal as meaning that Israel as a nation would continue or 'be established 'for ever. This is David's take on the promise to eternally "establish" his house, kingdom and throne in :12,13,16. But Israel didn't continue eternally, for this promise of eternity was for David's house which would be the house of his Divine seed, "which house are we", Paul says to the Hebrew Christians, ethnic Jews, if we hold fast in Christ. David makes the same mistake in Ps. 102:28 "The children of Your servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before You" (likewise God's words are reported this way in Ps. 89:4). The eternal establishment was to be before or in the presence of a resurrected David, and it was the Kingdom of his singular seed which would be established. No unbroken line of descendants was promised, but because this was what David was hoping and fantasizing about, he interpreted God's promise like that. And again, David likes to think that Zion, his personal citadel, would be established for ever ("The Highest Himself shall establish her", Ps. 87:5). But Zion was ploughed as a field, and many of Jeremiah's lamentations and consternation about this would've been unnecessary had David and others listened to God's promises and not conflated them with their own fantasies about an eternal Zion, temple and blood line of Davidic kings. The temple and kingdom of David will only be established eternally at Christ's return "in the last days" (s.w. Is. 2:2; 16:5; 9:6 s.w. "to order it… For ever"). The only alternative seems to be that if this was God's intention, then He changed it because of their behaviour. But this would contradict the unconditional nature of the promises to David about his seed. For the assurance was that even human failure by the seed would not stop the seed eternally reigning at some point.

2Sa 7:17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David-

Nathan faithfully relayed the vision he received in these words to David. This is in contrast to how he had over hastily assumed to know God's word and will in the matter the day before.

2Sa 7:18 Then David the king went in and sat before Yahweh; and he said, Who am I, Lord Yahweh-

The promises to David are described as the mercy of God (Is. 55:3; Ps. 89:33,34). God having a son is the sign of His love for us, and this must elicit a response in us. David himself marvelled that such mercy had been shown to him: "Who am I... and what is my house... You know Your servant" (2 Sam. 7:18-20). And yet in the very next chapters, we read of how David made a renewed attempt to show mercy to the house of Saul. Mephibosheth says that he is "thy servant... what is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such... as I am?" (2 Sam. 9:8 AV). Mephibosheth is using the very words which David used to God; David is showing mercy to Mephibosheth in the very way in which the promises of God to him were the "mercies" shown to David. Appreciating that the promises concern us personally, and that they reveal such loving grace from the Father, can only lead to a similar response in showing love and grace through entering into the lives and destinies of others.

And what is my house, that You have brought me thus far?-

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

2Sa 7:19 This was yet a small thing in Your eyes, Lord Yahweh; but You have spoken also of Your servant's house for a great while to come; this is not the way of men, Lord Yahweh!-

Such is the wonder of God's promise to us that we really have no excuse to sin. Every sin is in a sense a denial of His promises. God told David that he had no excuse for what he did with Uriah and Bathsheba, because he had given him so much, "and if that had been too little, I would have added unto you..." (2 Sam. 12:8). "Too little" sends the mind back to 2 Sam. 7:19, where the promises to David are described as a "little thing"; the

promises were so wonderful that David should not have allowed himself to fall into such sin. And us likewise.

2Sa 7:20 What more can David say to You?-
In view of all God had said to David, he had nothing to say to God, and the implication is that he would now not say to God his plans of building a house for God. His later desire and insistence upon doing so would suggest he lost this intensity of understanding and awareness.

For You know Your servant, Lord Yahweh-
See on :18. David is expressing what we often do to God; that we cannot express our gratitude enough in words or praise, we can only ask God to know us, and know how we feel.

2Sa 7:21 For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have worked all this greatness, to make Your servant know it-
David spoke of how God's word and "own heart" are parallel (2 Sam. 7:21); God's mind / spirit is expressed in His word, although David may here more understand the "word" as referring to God's purpose (as in Jn. 1:1) rather than the scriptures. David was sure the promises would come true; he speaks in the past tense of how God had worked already these great things.

2Sa 7:22 Therefore You are great-
LXX continues from :21: "that he may magnify You". The purpose of God's expression of grace through the promises is so that we who receive them might magnify Him. The Psalms which praise Yahweh's greatness were therefore manifestations of this sense of gratitude for the promises (Ps. 35:27; 40:16; 48:1).

Yahweh God. For there is none like You, neither is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears-
What characterizes Yahweh as the one and only God is His grace, which David has just experienced poured out. Divine grace is the defining feature of the one true faith; no other god, idol or religious system comes close to it.

2Sa 7:23 What one nation in the earth is like Your people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem to Himself for a people, and to make Himself a name, and to do great things for You, and awesome things for Your land, before Your people, whom You redeemed to yourself out of Egypt, from the nations and their gods?-
Israel had been redeemed from the gods of Egypt. Yet they took those gods with them through the Red Sea, and carried the tabernacle of Moloch and Remphan through the

wilderness along with that of Yahweh (Acts 7:43). The LXX here brings out this point: "so that thou shouldest cast out nations and their tabernacles from the presence of thy people, whom thou didst redeem for thyself out of Egypt". That Israel carried these tabernacles and gods with them suggests that this was a redemption refused. And David, having experienced the grace which can only come from Yahweh, is resolved to only serve Him and root out all such idolatry.

2Sa 7:24 You established for Yourself Your people Israel to be a people to You for ever; and You, Yahweh, became their God-
God had promised to establish David's seed, God's true people, as His throne and people for ever. David recognizes that what had been promised to him had already been offered to Israel; although as noted on :23, they had refused this through their idolatry and failure to be God's exclusive kingdom / people, rejecting Him as their God. It was similar to God's thought of rejecting His people and working instead through Moses and his seed. God had been persuaded against that, but now David perceives that God is going to work not through Israel as a whole but through him and his seed. The allusion is to Dt. 32:6 where Israel act as the most foolish nation in rejecting the God who established them as a nation.

2Sa 7:25 Now, Yahweh God, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant, and concerning his house, confirm it for ever, and do as You have spoken-
David seems to feel the need to show his agreement with God's plan (also in :29). This may be because he perceived the similarity with Moses, who was also offered to have God working not with Israel but with him and his seed. And Moses hadn't agreed. But David agrees.

2Sa 7:26 Let Your name be magnified for ever, saying, 'Yahweh of Armies is God over Israel; and the house of Your servant David shall be established before You'-
David invites the faithful to join him in praising God for His plan of salvation revealed in these promises; and the Psalms which magnify Yahweh's Name are therefore motivated by these promises.

2Sa 7:27 For You, Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, have revealed to Your servant saying, 'I will build you a house'. Therefore Your servant has found in his heart to pray this prayer to You-
The idea of the Hebrew is that David speaks of being bold in his prayer of praise for the promises made to him ("Therefore hath thy servant been bold to pray this prayer", RVmg.). Yet Heb. 4:16 encourages *us* to be bold in prayer. He was our pattern in prayer.

Literally, "found his heart". To find the heart maybe means that he found his true self, he was in touch with his very heart, and he knew that truly he believed these things and was thankful for the grace expressed, beyond words.

2Sa 7:28 Now, O Lord Yahweh, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant-
The idea is "You are the one and only God". The context is Israel's idolatry, and how God is now working through David and his seed as His Kingdom, rather than through an Israel who rejected Him as the only true God.

2Sa 7:29 Now therefore let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue for ever before You; for You, Lord Yahweh, have spoken it. Let the house of Your servant be blessed for ever with Your blessing-
David describes the promises as "blessing" (2 Sam. 7:28,29), a word normally used in the context of forgiveness. So David was aware of the grossness of sin, of the need for self-examination, to ensure that his technical breaches of the Law of Moses were truly a reflection of his friendship with God rather than an indication of spiritual weakness. For David's house to become God's eternal Kingdom would require their blessing with forgiveness in order to be immortalized.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 8

2Sa 8:1 After this it happened that David struck the Philistines and subdued them: and David took the bridle of the mother city out of the hand of the Philistines-
"After this" may not be strictly chronological, because 2 Sam. 7:1 was at a time when David had rest from his enemies. 2 Sam. 7 is included where it is to continue the theme of the ark and Zion which began in 2 Sam. 6. The promised king of Israel would save Israel from the Philistines and their other enemies; Saul had failed in this, but David succeeded as the truly intended king. LXX implies that until this time, Israel were still paying tribute to the Philistines: "David took the tribute from out of the hand of the Philistines".

But the parallel 1 Chron. 18:1 says that “David took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines”. Gath would be the ‘mother-city’, and the word translated “towns” literally means daughters. We note that David had earlier lived in Gath under the protection of Achish and had lied to the people how many Israelites he had slain in his apparent hatred of Saul. They would have considered him a hypocrite. David had on two occasions gone to Gath for refuge from Saul and 'made up' with them, promising them his loyalty. Each time he had been lying through his teeth. And yet he proclaims his utter

integrity and truthfulness so often in his psalms. Although he had a heart after God's, refusal to accept his sinfulness was a major feature of his character. This is one outcome of having endured false accusation. His stellar sin with Bathsheba was perhaps used by God in the bigger picture to help with correct this, and yet such psalms continue at the time of Absalom's rebellion.

The victory over Gath was not very long lasting because in Solomon's time there was an independent king there (1 Kings 2:39). The conquest of Edom (:14) was after a great defeat and only by God's grace, as explained in Psalm 60. And Edom was soon back independent of David. Psalm 60 speaks of this campaign- there was a great defeat of Israel because they had broken the covenant, and then a victory once they turned to God pleading His [mercy and] truth as their battle banner, i.e. the covenant. The extent of the initial defeat may be hinted at in 1 Kings 11:15,16: "When David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the army was gone up to bury the slain, and had struck every male in Edom (for Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom)". This seems to say that Joab went to bury the slain of Israel, and at that slain in a great defeat, and at that time he remained six months subduing the Edomites with the victory which Psalm 60 later celebrates. Much of Psalm 60 is repeated in Psalm 108 as a victory song. Likewise in Psalm 44. The war with Edom clearly had a far larger dimension than the simple note in 2 Samuel 8 that David defeated Edom. He did, but after a stunning defeat, and an amazing victory by God's grace alone, for which David gave ample thanks in at least three Psalms, 44,60 and 108.

But that is all rather overlooked here; the record is giving an impression of positive victory everywhere for David. In all these conquests of David there was a hollowness to them, for all the subdued nations very quickly broke free from Israelite rule. And the victory over Syria was hardly permanent because the history of the subsequent kings is full of multiple wars with Syria. We get the impression that David is seeking to set himself up as his own promised son with a Messianic kingdom, but it was all so hollow and temporary. He made himself a name rather than believing God would make His Name great in a living temple of people. On one level, David's conquests can just be read as a type of Christ's future Kingdom. But I suggest in reality he was making a hollow attempt to have that kingdom now with himself as king. But that perhaps was on the level of deep inner psychology and he still had a heart for God.

2Sa 8:2 He struck Moab, and measured them with the line, making them to lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive. The Moabites became servants to David, and brought tribute-
David made the captives lay down in three lines. He arbitrarily chose one line to keep alive, and killed the other two lines. This can't be justified as some careful obedience to

some Mosaic law. It reads like something out of the Holocaust, an arbitrary slaying of some in order to exercise the whim of one's own power. No wonder David was barred from building the temple because of his attitude to bloodshed. Yet those words are possibly David's reported speech to Solomon; he refused to accept God's reasons for not wanting a temple, and goes ahead with the plan, imagining in his own mind that his blood shedding was the reason. And he repeated that narrative until he believed it, and thought it was indeed God's narrative. But he did clearly have a conscience about his needless blood shedding, and this would have been an example of him doing so. And this was the worse because his parents had been given refuge there (1 Sam. 22:3,4) ; again we get the sense of David using people with no conscience. And his ancestor Ruth was a Moabitess who had come to dwell under the protective shadow of the wings of Israel's God. We wonder whether despite having received the promises about his Messianic son in 2 Sam. 7, David somehow wanted to be the center of them. And so he smites Moab because this is what the Messiah is prophesied as doing in Num. 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel, and shall strike through the corners of Moab". In this case he would be rather like Nebuchadnezzar, who initially humbly accepts the dream of Dan. 2 with himself as the head of gold who is to be replaced by others. But then in Dan. 3 he builds an entire statue of gold, as if wanting himself to be the permanent center of God's purpose. Perhaps the incident of 2 Sam. 23:20 occurred at this time of 2 Sam. 8:2.

Likewise when Rabbah is captured, David proudly puts the crown of the king on his head, grabs their spoil for himself (not following Abraham's example), "and he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon" (2 Sam. 12:31). Now all that is torture. Today it would be classified as a war crime. It's one thing to obey Divine commands about slaying enemies; it's another to willfully torture them, Auschwitz-style. These incidents reveal David at his worst. And again- did he really have to ensure that every male in Edom was murdered (1 Kings 11:15,16)- was that really necessary? What about the mums, wives, sisters left weeping, and the fatherless daughters, left to grow up in the dysfunction of a leaderless Middle Eastern home? Those men were all somebody's sons, brothers, fathers, grandfathers. Was David really obeying some Divine command here, or was this the dictate of his own anger and dysfunctional bloodlust? We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8). We think likewise of his breaking up of Michal's marriage and the weeping husband walking behind her, and his genocide of the villages around Gath lest anyone tell the Philistines that in fact David was not attacking villages in Judah as he had falsely claimed.

2Sa 8:3 David struck also Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah-

Hadadezer = 'helped by Hadad', the sun god. 2 Chron. 8 shows how Solomon sought to replicate what his father David did here. It describes the actions of Solomon in the very language which is used earlier about David.

2 Chron. 8:3 “Solomon went to Hamath Zobah” = 2 Sam. 8:3 “David smote also Hadadezer the son of Rehob king of Zobah”; 2 Chron. 8:3 "and *prevailed*" = same word 1 Sam. 17:30; 2 Chron. 8:8 Those “whom the children of Israel consumed not, did Solomon make to pay tribute” = 2 Sam. 8:6 “David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts”; 2 Chron. 8:14 “He appointed according to the ordinance of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges... for so had David commanded” = 1 Chron. 24:1; 2 Chron. 9:15,16 = 2 Sam.8:7 “David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem”.

1 Kings 11:4,6 clearly states God's opinion that Solomon was not like David: "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father... (he) went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father". This double stress, bearing in mind inspiration's economic use of words, is really making a point. Yet the records of Solomon seem to be framed to show that externally, Solomon was indeed following David; he was obsessed with living out parental expectation, and perhaps the expectation of his society, rather than forging his own relationship with God.

As he went to recover his dominion at the River- Grammatically, the subject of the sentence is Hadadezer, and the reference is to the battle of 2 Sam. 10:15-19. Again we see that the records are not chronologically but thematically arranged.

2Sa 8:4 David took from him one thousand seven hundred horsemen and twenty thousand footmen: and David hamstrung all the chariot horses, but reserved of them for one hundred chariots-
See on :3. Notice how both David and Solomon dealt with the matter of chariots and horses. Solomon’s weakness for horses was perhaps traceable to David’s. Solomon unashamedly amassed horses and chariots, in direct disobedience to Divine command (Dt. 17:16). When David his father had captured 1000 chariots and horses, he hamstrung 900 of them and retained 100 of them (2 Sam. 8:4). He had a conscience about the matter, but thought that 90% obedience wasn’t bad. And the hamstrung horses were likely used for agricultural work and especially for breeding- breeding yet more chariot horses. David’s 90% obedience lead to his son’s 100% disobedience in this matter of chariot horses.

Solomon wished to imitate his father David in every sense; his own real personality only really came out in the Ecclesiastes years, when he took to drink, materialism, women and idolatry. It took the influence of his parents many years

to wear off. David had weaknesses for horses (2 Sam. 8:4) and many wives; and Solomon followed in these steps too. Note that David had six sons in seven years by six different women, including Gentiles (1 Chron. 3:3). And in addition to these, David had children by "the concubines" (1 Chron. 3:9). Doubtless Solomon reasoned, albeit deep within his psyche, that such behaviour was legitimate because David his father had done it. David seems to have over interpreted the promises made to him about Solomon and the temple, and assumed that his interpretation was certainly correct. And Solomon did exactly the same. The weaknesses of the parents all too easily are repeated by the children to an even greater extent.

There are apparently different numbers given in 2 Sam. 8:4; 10:18 and 1 Chron. 19:18. I see no real problem here once we appreciate that the Hebrew word "thousand" used when giving numbers like this rarely means 1,000 as a number. It is also translated regiment, brigade, family, squadron etc. And to Israelites looking at the Syrian army, it could be described in various ways. There many regiments, families, groups, squadrons, but these subdivisions of an ancient army are all called a "thousand". Depending how one looks at the army and its subdivisions. A modern army would be subdivided into two to four corps, a corps has at least two divisions or legions, a division has two four brigades or regiments, a brigade has two or more regiments, a regiment has two or more battalions, a battalion has a number of companies, a company has a number of platoons, a platoon has a number of squads or fire teams. The problem is that the Hebrew Bible uses the same word for all such military subdivisions, and it is translated "thousand" in many Bibles. Hence the apparently contradictory numbers.

2Sa 8:5 When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck of the Syrians twenty two thousand men-
Again we must note that "thousand" refers to regiments / families and is not necessarily to be taken as literally 1,000.

2Sa 8:6 Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought tribute. Yahweh gave victory to David wherever he went-
This was short-lived, because Solomon's adversary Rezon established himself at Damascus (1 Kings 11:23-25).

2Sa 8:7 David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem-
"Hadad" was the god of the sun, "Hadadezer" had not been 'helped by Hadad' as his name means, and so David brought these golden imitations of the sun to Yahweh's temple. It is perhaps questionable whether David should have brought idols into Jerusalem; we note that later Judah worshipped sun gods. David's actions here were not

blessed, for the LXX adds “And Susakim [i.e. Shishak] king of Egypt took them, when he went up to Jerusalem in the days of Roboam the son of Solomon”. Likewise 1 Kings 14:26 LXX mentions that David took golden spears from Hadadezer: “And the golden spears which David took from the hand of the servants of Adraazar king of Soba and carried to Jerusalem, he took them all”. These would not have been used as real spears, but were part of the worship of the golden sun which was the main religion in Syria at the time. He would have been better destroying them, rather than bringing idol paraphernalia into Jerusalem. For it later contributed towards the freedom Judah felt to worship sun gods.

Verse 11 suggests that these were dedicated to the future temple. But Song 4:4 speaks of "David's tower... whereon a thousand shields hang". So what David dedicated to the temple ended up being used for "David's tower". The king of Israel was not to multiply silver and gold "to himself" (Dt. 17:17), and David presumably got around that by arguing that he was dedicating this wealth to some future project for Yahweh. But in fact he ended up keeping the gold for himself, for his very own tower, and so in fact his apparent dedication of his wealth to God was once again a case of very mixed motives. And of course this can be so relevant to us all- seeking wealth under the self persuasion that this some day will be 'for the Lord's work' when in fact it effectively is for ourselves.

2Sa 8:8 From Betah-
LXX Tebah, a son of Nahor the Syrian (Gen. 22:24).

And from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, king David took exceeding much brass-
As discussed on :7, these were likely brass [better, 'copper'] idols or idol paraphernalia which he would have been better destroying. LXX adds "Therewith Solomon made the brazen sea, and the pillars, and the lavers, and all the vessels", confirming what is stated in 1 Chron. 18:8, "wherewith Solomon made the brazen sea, and the pillars, and the layers, and all the vessels". So right after the grace of God in declining David's offer of building a temple, David gets right on with planning for it and amassing materials for it. The wonder of pure grace in Messiah, the future Christ, soon wore off- as it does for so many, and they too revert to legalism and salvation by works and wanting to see it all in this life.

2Sa 8:9 When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had struck all the army of Hadadezer-
Hamath came under tribute to David (:10), and Solomon, ever seeking to re-live the work of his father David, made a point of building forts there (1 Kings 4:24; 2 Chron. 8:4). But this external imitation of the faith and works of his father wasn't the same as real spirituality; and this is a warning to all those raised as believers. For when he finally individuated as his own man, Solomon had no faith in Yahweh and turned to idols.

2Sa 8:10 then Toi sent Joram his son to king David, to greet him, and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and struck him: for Hadadezer had wars with Toi. Joram brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass-
These vessels were devoted to God's service by David and then Solomon dedicated them to the temple (1 Kings 7:51). The same phrase "of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass" is used of the vessels taken from Egypt and dedicated to the tabernacle (Ex. 11:2; 12:35; Josh. 6:19; 2 Sam. 8:10; 1 Kings 7:51). The generosity of others in Biblical history, their right perspective on the wealth taken from this world, was to inspire other believers in later history. And this is how the body of Christ should function today, with members inspiring others to spirituality.

2Sa 8:11 King David also dedicated these to Yahweh, with the silver and gold that he dedicated of all the nations which he subdued-
See on :10. David "subdued" the nations, using the word often used of the command to subdue the nations of Canaan (Num. 32:22,29; Josh. 18:1). He is presented as a second Joshua, subduing the land as it ought to have been subdued, and therefore becoming what Adam ought to have been in Eden (Gen. 1:28 s.w.). This is another indication that the garden of Eden was effectively the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham.

Dt. 17:17 warns Israel's king not to multiply gold and silver "to himself". On one hand, we could argue that David obeyed this by dedicating his multiplied gold and silver to Yahweh's work. But on the other hand, this gold and silver was dedicated to David's own obsession- that his son Solomon should use it to build a magnificent temple. When Yahweh had said he didn't want this. So again it would seem David's motives were mixed.

As discussed on :8, the LXX for :8 specifically says that the dedicated materials were used for building the temple. So again we see an element of poor thinking in David at this time. He has just been told not to build a physical temple, and to quietly trust that Yahweh will build him an eternal "house" through the work of the Messianic Son of David. But he immediately sets about gathering materials for the physical house which he had been told not to build.

2Sa 8:12 of Syria, Moab, the children of Ammon, the Philistines and of Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah-
There is no record of David fighting Amalek again, so the spoil in view may be that taken in 1 Sam. 30:16.

2Sa 8:13 David made himself a name when he returned from smiting the Syrians in the Valley of Salt, even eighteen thousand men-

This demonstrates that a "name" in Hebrew thought is not just a lexical item. David made his name; it involves personal history, character, reputation etc. These are all what the Yahweh Name is all about. This is the reference of 2 Sam. 7:9, indicating that 2 Sam. 7 is actually referring to events after 2 Sam. 8 and is not in chronological sequence. Chronicles has "And Abishai the son of Zeruiah smote Edom in the valley of salt, (to the number of) eighteen thousand men". Perhaps Edom and Syria were confederate; or we should read with LXX, which had "Edom" here rather than "the Syrians". We note that :14 goes on to talk about Edom.

Or we can read this comment that David made himself a name as a criticism of him for not accepting the promises of 2 Sam. 7. Yahweh would make David and Israel a name (2 Sam. 7:23), and that name was to be part of Yahweh's Name; Yahweh would make a house of people where that Name would dwell. But David relapses to the physical, visible and religious rather than the spiritual, as seen in his continued efforts to establish / prepare a physical house for God. Rather than accepting Yahweh was going to establish / prepare that house in spiritual terms through Messiah, as a house of persons manifesting His Name. In contrast, David makes himself a name rather than being devoted to manifesting Yahweh's Name. This may well be reflected in the style of the narrative- for the word "David" occurs 21 times in the 18 verses of 2 Samuel 8. It was all about his name. The same phrase is used of the Babel builders who said "let us make us a name" (Gen. 11:4). Soon after that we read that in contrast, Yahweh would make Abraham's name great (Gen. 12:2 s.w.).

2Sa 8:14 He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all the Edomites became servants to David. Yahweh gave victory to David wherever he went-
This is framed in such terms as to show that Esau / Edom was indeed now subject to Jacob as predicted in (Gen. 27:37-40), and Balaam's prophecy (Num. 24:17,18).

See on :1.

2Sa 8:15 David reigned over all Israel; and David executed justice and righteousness to all his people-
David was motivated in doing this by realizing that this is how Yahweh reigns (Ps. 33:5), and that by doing so he would help live out the spirit of the promises to him, that his throne would be eternally established; for that throne was all about justice and righteousness (Ps. 89:14). And so David's throne or way of rulership becomes the basis for how his seed, the Lord Jesus, eternally reigns (Is. 9:7; 32:1; Jer. 23:5,6).

2Sa 8:16 Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder-

The men who had been faithful to David during his long wilderness years, when he seemed a lost cause with Saul certain to win against him (1 Sam. 27:1), were the very ones who were the rulers in his kingdom. Despite the very evident weaknesses of men like Joab. And in the type this looks ahead to we who shall be king-priests in the Lord's eternal kingdom (Rev. 5:10), having been loyal to Him and His cause in these apparently hopeless wilderness years.

2Sa 8:17 and Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, were priests; and Seraiah was scribe-
We notice that no high priest is nominated. David effectively acted as the high priest; see on :18. The "scribe" or historian was a senior advisor in the Hebrew court (2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 2 Chron. 34:8) because of the huge value attached to history in the Hebrew mind, and as reflected in the Bible being largely history. Advice on how to act was to be based upon historical, or as we would now say, "Biblical", precedent.

The question of there being two High Priests is probably because Zadok served at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39) and Abiathar at Jerusalem. This again suggests that David was playing fast and loose with Divine law. He wanted to cement religious and political power in his own backyard, quite literally, in his citadel at Zion. So he brought the ark there, made tents for it and appointed a High Priest for it. But the actual tabernacle remained at Gibeon. This assumption that he could act as he wanted with God's law sets the scene for his failure with Bathsheba.

2Sa 8:18 and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers-
David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (:17; 2 Sam. 6:13-20; and 2 Sam. 19:21 = Ex.22:28), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David's sons, although not Levites, were "priests" (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not. As ever, David presents as mixed in his motives. On one hand, he loved God's law and understood the spirit of it to the point that he could break it technically. Although the Uzzah incident was to reign him in about this. However on the other hand, he was doing what monarchs did at the time- concentrating both religious and political power in his own hands. This is also shown by his taking the ark to his own back yard in his citadel of Zion, rather than to the tabernacle in Gibeon, and seeking to build a temple for it there- on his own property. His setting up his sons as priests [Heb. kohen] likewise- and we note that nothing more is ever heard about this, because clearly they were spiritual failures. This contributes to

the overall impression of this chapter- that David's apparent achievements were hollow. This is not to say he had no spirituality, for we see him showing grace to Mephibosheth, but after he was given the amazing promises, we see nothing but a downward spiral in his life overall.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 9

2Sa 9:1 David said, Is there yet any who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?-
These words may have been said in David's heart, or perhaps as a nationwide announcement. David sought to show all grace to the house of Saul, in response to the grace he had received from God. And he didn't let the opportunities to show grace just meet him along life's way, but rather proactively sought them out. And this is a pattern to us. The fulfilment of God's promises is His showing kindness to us (s.w. Gen. 24:12,14); to show kindness is to respond to grace or something done for us (s.w. Gen. 40:14 "remember me when it will be well with you, and please show kindness to me, and make mention of me to Pharaoh"; Josh. 2:12 "since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's house"; Jud. 1:24; 8:35; Ruth 1:8; 2 Sam. 10:2). Nothing good had been done to David by the house of Saul; but God had done David so much good. And he reflected that by showing grace to those who had not shown it to him. See on 2 Sam. 10:1. Indeed 2 Sam. 3:1 specifically states that there had been "long war between the house of Saul and the house of David". But David wanted to show grace to that "house of Saul"; that "house" which God had condemned as guilty of blood shedding: "Saul, and his bloody house" (2 Sam. 21:1). And that "house" had been destroyed by God's judgment: "Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together" (1 Chron. 10:6). But to the bloody, the condemned, the enemy... David wants to show God's grace. We will read likewise in 2 Sam. 10:2 of David's desire to show grace to the Ammonites who likewise were under Divine condemnation. David's response to grace is perhaps reported here as a kind of foil to the upcoming record of the shameful behaviour with Bathsheba and Uriah in 2 Sam. 11.

2Sa 9:2 There was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David; and the king said to him, Are you Ziba? He said, Your servant is he-
As noted on :1, this is an example of proactively seeking out opportunities to show grace. David was apparently unaware of Jonathan's lame son (:3) or else he would have shown this grace earlier. Perhaps Ziba and Mephibosheth didn't quite believe David could show so much grace to the house of Saul after what they had done to him. We

take from this the principle that it is always hard to believe real grace. On the other hand, it is a fair question as to why only now David was seeking to show such grace. And seeing he had undertaken to his best friend Jonathan to be faithful to Jonathan's family, we wonder whether it really could be the case that David was ignorant of Mephibosheth's existence. He was five when Jonathan died and David became king, and now Mephibosheth is old enough to have had a child himself. So we wonder why David hadn't shown any interest in Mephibosheth for at least 10 years. And thus begins our suspicion that David's apparently amazing grace was in fact not as amazing as it seems. God's grace is pure, and our response to it should be to show pure grace. But our grace is often compromised and far less than pure.

Ziba had been "a servant" of the house of Saul; but he now presents himself as David's servant [LXX "I am your servant"]; and again in :11. But David and the record repeatedly stress that Saul was still his "master" and he was therefore in his heart a servant of Saul (:9,10). Later, at the time of Absalom's rebellion, Ziba would turn against David and seek to get the kingdom back into the hands of the house of Saul. So David is correct to be cynical of Ziba. David's awareness of the current of support for a revived Saulide kingdom means that his grace to Mephibosheth may have not been so pure, but also politically motivated- see discussion on :13.

2Sa 9:3 The king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him? Ziba said to the king, Jonathan has yet a son, who is lame of his feet-

See on Ps. 35:14. David wept for Saul as if he was his friend or brother (Ps. 35:14). Who was David's friend and brother? Surely Jonathan his brother-in-law. But he wept for Saul, David says, as he wept for Jonathan. This is testified to historically by David's lament of 2 Sam. 1. And still David sought out the house of Saul, “that I may shew the kindness of God” unto them. It was the experience of Divine kindness that motivated David.

The allusion is to Jonathan's request that David "show the kindness [*hesed*, grace] of Yahweh" to him even after his death (1 Sam. 20:14). But David goes beyond the letter of the law, the strict terms of his agreement with Jonathan, to enquire if he could show God's kindness to any of the whole family of Saul. David's mercy to the "house" of his enemy reflects God's promised grace to David's "house" in 2 Sam. 7, just as we likewise should reflect our personal experience of God's grace to others. The same phrase is used by David of Saul when he says that Saul had not remembered to "show mercy / kindness" (Ps. 109:16). But all the same David shows grace to him. So David's response to God showing him grace was to show grace to those who didn't show grace. Our response should be likewise. In 2 Sam. 22:51 David reflects that in those promises, Yahweh "showed mercy / kindness to David and to his seed for ever more". The same

phrase for 'showing kindness' is found also in 2 Sam. 10:2, where it seems David again wanted to just reflect God's grace / kindness to others even outside the family of Saul. But we ponder whether David is remembering how the men of Jabesh 'showed kindness' to Saul and therefore were shown kindness by Yahweh (2 Sam. 2:5,6). We ponder whether David was motivated by wanting blessing in a transactional sense if he showed such kindness to Saul's house. Sadly Solomon considered that God had only 'shown kindness / grace' to David because he had been obedient to God's laws (1 Kings 3:6). By saying this Solomon showed his complete lack of understanding that grace is grace, undeserved, and not given as a reward for works.

We reflect on how "the blind and the lame" were "hated of David's soul" in 2 Sam. 5:6 and it seems he had them thrown down the water shute of Zion once the stronghold was captured. I noted there that this was inappropriate anger and blood lust by David, so perhaps here we have some kind of repentance. Or we can simply look at it as David, true to all men, having an inconsistency in approach. He could be very angry against the lame and then very gracious towards one of them.

The explanation of Mephibosheth's lameness is given in 2 Sam. 4:4 as being that "his nurse took him up, and fled: and it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame". But as with the language of demon possession in the New Testament, we may have here an example of where an as then undiagnosed illness is blamed upon something that is mythical, or an imagined narrative. For there are reasons to think that Mephibosheth's lameness would have been a case of what we now know as poliomyelitis. To cause a five year old to have such spinal damage that both his legs were useless would require dropping the child from a great height. Casual dropping of a child of five years old is unlikely to cause this damage. And polio is often contracted by children around five years old.

Be that as it may, lameness was typically seen as a punishment for sin, and so David's grace to the man reflects his own desire to show grace to a sinner. He indeed showed "the kindness of God" to him.

2Sa 9:4 The king said to him, Where is he? Ziba said to the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar-
"Lo Debar" is literally 'place of no pasture'; we can assume it was therefore an impoverished area. Machir supported David at the time of Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. 17:27) and so it could be that David's amazing grace paid off, and former supporters of his enemies came around to his side.

2Sa 9:5 Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo Debar-

It could be that David personally did this, hence LXX "David went, and took him out of the house of Machir". He was so eager to personally do the hard work of showing grace.

2Sa 9:6 Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David-
"Mephibosheth" is apparently a name which would have arisen from changing his original name, Meribbaal 'man of Baal' (1 Chron. 8:34), to something which means 'the dispeller of shame'. i.e. Baal. The suffix 'baal' could suggest that even Jonathan was closer to idolatry than we would like, and at least he didn't use the 'Yah' suffix in the name of his children. But Mephibosheth had perhaps repented of this, renouncing Baal as shameful, and yet still struggled to believe in the extent of Yahweh's grace to him through David.

And fell on his face, and showed respect. David said, Mephibosheth. He answered, Behold, your servant!-
The record gives us the tragic picture of a fearful (:7) lame man now fallen flat on his face before the powerful king David. And David shows him every grace. Falling on the face is usually associated with begging for mercy. Mephibosheth assumed he had been summoned in order to be executed but instead found an amazing grace. He represents us all, who sit at the Lord's table. "Behold your servant" suggests something in the spirit of "Behold the man...". 'Look at me, useless and hopeless as I am. Maybe just have pity on me rather than slay me'.

2Sa 9:7 David said to him, Don’t be afraid; for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father’s sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your father. You shall eat bread at my table continually-

David is offering to give Mephibosheth land that belonged to Saul, his grandfather, in honour of the covenant David had made with Jonathan. He is using law not as a leash or chain, but as a springboard to greater grace, as Boaz did with the laws about allowing gleaners and raising up seed to a dead brother.

The Lord surely had this incident in mind when He seems to apply this situation to each of us, no better than Mephibosheth: "That you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Lk. 22:30). Mephibosheth's fear reflects the difficulty we all have in accepting grace. Indeed faith in the gospel is effectively a climbing of this mountain, to believe in grace. See on 2 Sam. 1:23; Ps. 35:14. As he hoped for fellowship at the Messianic King’s table in the future, so David delighted in inviting his former enemies to partake of his table, now *he* was king (2 Sam. 9:7,11,13). And if we hope to share the Lord’s table in the Kingdom, we must share it with our weaker brethren now. I see in all this such a triumph for David, that a man should reflect the love of God to such an extent, to love in the face of such hatred, to not just love those who loved him. The deep sorrow of the Lord Jesus

for Judas and all those who turn away is surely typified here. Right at the bitter end, the Lord still referred to him as his friend (Mt. 26:50), even though a few hours before he had been speaking of how the faithful few were his friends, and how he would give his life for his friends (Jn. 15:13-15).

2Sa 9:8 He bowed down, and said, What is your servant, that you should look on such a dead dog as I am?-
This was how David had felt about himself (1 Sam. 17:17 LXX; 24:14 cp. 2 Sam. 9:8; 16:9). As he, the dead dog, had been shown grace, so he was determined to show it to other dead dogs. And this is how we should feel towards apparently hopeless cases; for there but for God's grace went I. The image of a dog is that of loyalty; but Mephibosheth felt his loyalty was useless, yet still he was willing to offer it.

The promises to David are described as the mercy of God (Is. 55:3; Ps. 89:33,34). God having a son is the sign of His love for us, and this must elicit a response in us. David himself marvelled that such mercy had been shown to him: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house... You know Your servant" (2 Sam. 7:18-20). And yet in the very next chapters, we read of how David made a renewed attempt to show mercy to the house of Saul. Mephibosheth says that he is "Your servant... what is your servant, that you should look upon such... as I am?" (2 Sam. 9:8). Mephibosheth is using the very words which David used to God; David is showing mercy to Mephibosheth in the very way in which the promises of God to him were the "mercies" shown to David. Appreciating that the promises concern us personally, and that they reveal such loving grace from the Father, can only lead to a similar response in showing love and grace through entering into the lives and destinies of others.

2Sa 9:9 Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, All that pertained to Saul and to all his house have I given to your master's son-
It's not clear whether the "master" of Ziba refers to Jonathan, or whether his master was Mephibosheth and Ziba being told that the inheritance is going to go to Mephibosheth's son Mica (:12). We get the impression that Ziba had abused Mephibosheth's handicap and somehow manipulated to get the land of Saul and Jonathan given to him and his family as an inheritance. It is impressive that David had apparently not taken over Saul's land for himself, as most victors would have done. Perhaps he recognized the Mosaic principle that inheritance should not move between the tribes. David could also have argued that seeing Saul's sons were dead, his inheritance passed to his daughter Michal and thus to David as she was his wife (Num. 27:8); and in any case there is the comment that all Saul's house had been given to David by God (2 Sam. 12:8). But David was willing to give this back to Mephibosheth. This is all definitely a "plus" for David.

2Sa 9:10 You shall till the land for him, you, and your sons, and your servants; and you shall bring in the harvest, that your master's son may have bread to eat: but Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread always at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants-

The LXX brings out the contradiction: "Thou shalt bring in bread to the son of thy lord, and he shall eat bread: and Mephibosheth the son of thy lord shall eat bread continually at my table". Ziba was to bring all the bread from the lands of Saul to Mephibosheth, but David was going to give Mephibosheth "bread" from his own table. Here we get suspicious that all this apparent grace was to make Mephibosheth a kind of "prisoner of the court". The "bread" from Saul's lands was not to be given for the economic benefit of anyone apart from Mephibosheth; but it was to be brought to him to Jerusalem and thus effectively come under David's control. See the discussion on David's motives on :13. We likewise note that soon we will be reading of someone else getting food from David's table and being urged to eat it- Uriah, to whom David sent food from his own table (2 Sam. 11:8) and who ate and drank with David at his table ("David had called him, he ate and drink before him" 2 Sam. 11:13). Again we are invited to ponder the sincerity of David's invitation to men to eat at his table. For the only other person given this honour [Uriah] was not given it sincerely.

David had done likewise to Saul's daughter Michal; he took her from her second husband and kept her in his court but apparently didn't kill her. But she was under his control. He does the same later with Absalom, bringing him to Jerusalem but for some time refusing to meet him. Solomon does the same to Shimei, possibly following David's advice. He told Shimei: "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem, and dwell there, and don't go out anywhere from there. For on the day you go out, and pass over the brook Kidron, know for certain that you shall surely die" (1 Kings 2:36,37). Shimei was effectively a prisoner of the court. Possibly there was something similar going on here in 2 Sam. 9 in the control of Mephibosheth Saul's grandson, the Saulide heir to the throne.

There could be here the implication that Ziba had used Saul's land for his own enrichment, and not always given Mephibosheth enough to eat. Mephibosheth is called Saul's son (2 Sam. 9:7,10; 19:24), although he was actually Jonathan's son. This suggests that the son was brought up in Saul's house. This certainly does not give the impression that Jonathan separated himself from his father's house, even though he strongly disagreed with Saul. There was no fear of guilt by association with Bible characters, but rather a standing up for Godly principle in whatever situation they were in.

The invitation to eat at David's table is emphasized (:7,11,13). Likewise after Solomon's ascension, there was judgment and reward; in the form of being able to eat at his table (1 Kings 2:7 "show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those who eat at your table" cp. 2 Sam. 9: 7,10; 19:28). After Christ's return, the reward

is to break bread with Him (Lk. 14:15; 22:30). Breaking bread with Him now is a sign of joyful fellowship with Him in anticipation of that; it shouldn't therefore be a scary, worrying experience.

2Sa 9:11 Then Ziba said to the king, According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your shall servant do. So Mephibosheth ate at the king's table, like one of the king's sons-
This eating at table with David is stressed three times (:7,11,13). Whom you shared your table with was significant; and the handicapped were often kept out of public view. David's grace is shown by how he opened his table to the otherwise hopeless and obscure. The Lord Jesus did the same, and so should we.

2Sa 9:12 Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica-
See on :9 for the significance of this mention. Mephibosheth was quite young- he had been five when David became king (2 Sam. 4:4). David was taking a risk by showing such grace to Saul's direct descendants; for living in the palace, the thought of restoring Saul's kingdom would have been suggested to their minds. The chances of this happening would've been far less if David left them living in poverty and obscurity far from Jerusalem. But grace does indeed take such risks.

All that lived in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth-
The idea is perhaps that Ziba had abused Mephibosheth's handicap, and had become wealthy as a result; for he had many sons and servants (:10). But now that is all changed around, in the spirit of grace. Now the crippled Mephibosheth is made the master and Ziba and his family become Mephibosheth's servants.

2Sa 9:13 So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem; for he ate continually at the king's table. He was lame in both his feet-
It was common in those days for the handicapped to be isolated from society and not placed in public view. But grace inverted all of that. The lameness of Mephibosheth is emphasized, and juxtaposed against the fact he ate always at David's table, as if they were family. His eating at David's table is five times recorded: 2 Sam. 9:7,10,11,13; 19:28. On one hand this was indeed David's grace. But quite possibly he feared the Saul faction still wanting to have a Saulide king. And so he brought the next king in Saul's line to live under his control and observation in Jerusalem, right in his own house. Making an enemy a "prisoner at court" was a known way of dealing with potential opposition. See the discussion on :10 on David's controlling the agricultural output of Saul's lands by using Mephibosheth as a proxy, and the notes on :2 about Ziba's support for the house of Saul. As ever, we are left to ponder whether David's motives in showing grace were

pure, just as we must ponder our own motives for grace and apparent generosity. Or it could be argued that David showed total grace to Mephibosheth, but the providentially arranged result of it was that he ended up having the potential Saulide king under his thumb and constant observation in Jerusalem, rather than far from him in obscure Lodebar in northern Israel.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 10

2Sa 10:1 It happened after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place-
"After this" can signal a change of subject rather than being chronologically significant. The same phrase is used in 2 Sam. 8:1, although the preceding chapter refers to events after and not before that time.

2Sa 10:2 David said, I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me. So David sent by his servants to comfort him concerning his father. David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon-
This continues the theme discussed on 2 Sam. 9:1, where the same phrase is used. David was proactively seeking to show grace to all and sundry. It was as if he was looking for an excuse to show grace by saying that Nahash king of the Ammonites had been kind to David; for Saul and David had had conflict with them (2 Sam. 8:12). But he fails to maintain that intensity; for when his grace is now abused, he reacts very harshly. Whereas when he abused God's grace, e.g. over Bathsheba, God was gentle with him. We note that he likewise shows grace to Shimei, and then finally asks Solomon to ensure that Shimei is slain. It is one thing to show grace or forgiveness in a moment, but to maintain that position long term, or when it is abused and rejected, is far harder. But that is what imitating God's grace is all about it.

Or it could be that Nahash was bitter after Saul's defeat of him, and had been supportive of David on the basis that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'.

2Sa 10:3 But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun their lord, Do you think that David honours your father, in that he has sent comforters to you? Hasn't David sent his servants to you to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?-
Perhaps they were aware of the Mosaic command not to seek the peace of Moab nor Ammon (Dt. 23:6). David's desire to show grace therefore overrode Mosaic legal commands. And yet the princes were not without reason, given how David had just abused the Moabites in 2 Sam. 8:1-3, and David would treat the Ammonites with similar brutality in 2 Sam. 12; and how Saul had slain the king of Ammon in 1 Sam. 11:1. We

note how repeatedly deceptive David had been to the people of Gath. There was no reason to believe he was showing pure grace. His previous apparently amazing grace to Mephibosheth we saw was not in fact so amazing neither was it pure. One wonders, given the back story to David and Israel's relationship with Ammon, whether the sending of comforters was not in fact to provoke a spying accusation and start a war.

Again, as with Mephibosheth's struggle to believe David's grace, these men couldn't believe David's grace, just as struggle to believe that of the Lord Jesus. Their logic is presented here as being exactly that of Joab in his angry, suspicious interpretation of Abner's visit to David (2 Sam. 3:24,25). Joab was wrong in his interpretation, and so were these princes. It is quite a theme of the historical records that kings are badly advised by their courtiers. We think also of Rehoboam's advisers. Perhaps this is to highlight how the only true interpretation of events and advice for action comes from God and not men.

David sent messengers to Nabal meaning well to him, and they were rudely rebuffed, resulting in his anger which only Abigail's grace and wisdom saved him from (1 Sam. 25). And yet the same situation repeated in its essence when he sent messengers to Hanun who were likewise misinterpreted and rebuffed (2 Sam. 10:3). Again, David got angry- but there was no Abigail to restrain him, and he did get into an impossible fight... from which by grace God delivered him. Could it not be that David failed to learn from his previous experience...? Circumstances repeat within our lives and between our lives and those of others in Biblical history; that we might learn the lessons and take comfort from the scriptures, that man is not alone.

2Sa 10:4 So Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away- Having a beard was then seen as a sign of being a free man; to have a half shaved beard was a sign of servanthood. Doing this was a direct provocation and effective declaration of war, claiming the Hebrews were their servants. Garments cut to the buttocks meant they were prisoners of war who had been released, as in Is. 20:4 "the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt... with buttocks uncovered".

We see in all this history how fickle are men. We saw it in Samuel's record of David's relationship with Gath and the Philistines, with both sides willing to live and work together despite having betrayed each other's trust and having sought to murder each other. Here too we reflect how later in 2 Sam. 17:27 "It happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon" came to support and assist him. Hanun's brother Shobi was to come onto David's side. Or perhaps he always was with David, and possibly Hanun himself was at this point overridden by his princes (:3), just as the princes of the Philistines earlier overrode the position of Achish regarding David. We wonder whether David's later refusal to go to the

war against Ammon, just delegating the job to Joab, was perhaps because he realized this was a political issue and had no heart for the fight. Absalom chased David up to the Jabbok river, the border with the Ammonites, suggesting David fled there for refuge (2 Sam. 17:26). We note how later Zedekiah was allied with the Ammonites (Jer. 27), and Solomon married an Ammonitess; for 2 Chron. 12:13 says that the mother of Rehoboam was Naamah the Ammonitess.

The books of Samuel also show how people, especially kings, are led into terrible situations by listening to their advisors. Hanun is an example. David by contrast repeatedly refuses to do what his men urge him to [in killing Saul or Shimei] and listens to good advice [from Abigail and Samuel]. But the other kings are presented as taking bad advice.

2Sa 10:5 When they told it to David, he sent to meet them; for the men were greatly ashamed. The king said, Wait at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return-
We note David's ability to be very sensitive to the situation of others. And yet the same man shed blood abundantly, took no care for the feelings of Michal and Paltiel when he split their marriage up, let alone cared for Uriah... And yet this is the strange mixture of spirituality and unspirituality which we experience in ourselves and in others all the time.

2Sa 10:6 When the children of Ammon saw that they were become odious to David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth Rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, twenty thousand footmen, and the king of Maacah with one thousand men, and the men of Tob with twelve thousand men-
They paid 1000 pieces of silver for the Syrians (1 Chron. 19:6). For "thousand" see on :18. This fearsome confederacy was all part of God's purpose, for the subsequent victories resulted in these smaller kings becoming subservient to David (see on :19). And this is how God uses our worst crises, ultimately towards our blessing. 2 Sam. 23:36 speaks of a Syrian man from Zobah being one of David's loyalest men. Igal would have been a Syrian from Zobah, perhaps one of the soldiers who fought against David (2 Sam. 10:6) and then converted to him. The Gittites who followed David were likewise Philistines from Gath who were once his enemies but converted to his God, and devoted themselves zealously to Him. This is an incredible witness to the power of Yahweh to convert, because such willing defections of individuals to the people and God of their enemies, and being zealously committed to Him, was unheard of in their society.

"Maacah" is LXX "Amalek", and we immediately recall that Yahweh was at war with Amalek from generation to generation.

2Sa 10:7 When David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the army of the mighty men-
We wonder why David didn't go himself, although he does personally lead the army to the even greater battle with the Syrians which this one provoked. Perhaps this is to prepare us for the statement in 2 Sam. 11:1 that David's remaining in Jerusalem led to his sin with Bathsheba. And we wonder whether that relationship had not already started at this time, with Uriah away at the front so much.

2Sa 10:8 The children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entrance of the gate: and the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob, and the men of Tob and Maacah, were by themselves in the field-
"By themselves" could mean that they had planned to combine with the Ammonite forces at Medeba (1 Chron. 19:7), about 20 miles from Rabbah of the Ammonites. It seems Joab marched at top speed to engage with them before the Ammonites and Syrians met up with each other as one large force. The Ammonites assembled their battle lines at the entrance to Rabbah, but it seems they didn't engage with the Israelites. They were waiting for the Syrians to arrive and combine their forces. When Joab makes the Syrians flee, the Ammonites fled back into their city gate.

2Sa 10:9 Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians-
He saw the Syrians as a greater strength than the Ammonites. He placed himself between the two armies before they had time to join up with each other. This meant the Israelites would be sandwiched between them. It was a daring but dangerous move, which could easily have led to the annihilation of the entire Israelite army.

2Sa 10:10 The rest of the people he committed into the hand of Abishai his brother; and he put them in array against the children of Ammon-
That Joab took the most dangerous part of the engagement speaks much of his bravery. But as we will note on :12, bravery and passing mention of God are not the same as faith and true wisdom.

2Sa 10:11 He said-
The idea is, that he planned or thought. The Bible continually stresses that the thought is the word spoken. And the essence of Biblical spirituality is upon the heart, the thinking.

If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the children of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will come and help you-
This is playing on the name "Hadadezer" (:16), which means 'Helped ['ezer'] by Hadad',

the sun god. We might have preferred to see Joab alluding to Yahweh being their help; but instead he thinks of help in terms of human strength.

2Sa 10:12 Be courageous, and let us be strong for our people, and for the cities of our God; and Yahweh do that which seems good to Him-
As explained on :9, this was a very daring maneuver by Joab. We wonder whether he had real faith in Yahweh, or whether his words here express fatalism rather than faith. There is a significant difference, and often what appears to be faith can be mere fatalism. There is so much ambiguity in these records, especially in the upcoming account of David and Bathsheba; and I suggest that is intentional, to provoke our reflection and attempt to enter into these histories.

2Sa 10:13 So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to the battle against the Syrians: and they fled before him-
So often the Israelite victories were humanly speaking achieved by surprise attack from an unexpected angle, using unexpected and unusual tactics. It could be that this was due to Divine guidance, telling them to do what was unusual and against secular wisdom. For this is always God's path to victory, thereby demonstrating that victory and success are of His grace rather than human strength.

2Sa 10:14 When the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians had fled, they likewise fled before Abishai, and entered into the city. Then Joab returned from the children of Ammon, and came to Jerusalem-
We get the impression that Abishai didn't attack the Ammonites; the Syrians fled when Joab attacked them, and the Ammonites withdrew into Rabbah when they saw that. This is all providing context for the Bathsheba incident. 2 Sam. 11:1 speaks of the time when kings go forth to war, so we can conclude that "the city" here is Rabbah, and Joab didn't try to take Rabbah because it was Winter and conditions weren't good for a siege. He returned to Jerusalem to winter and go forth in the spring to attack Rabbah.

2Sa 10:15 When the Syrians saw that they were defeated by Israel, they gathered themselves together-
They were mercenaries, and the fact they had failed to achieve what Ammon hoped for didn't require them to fight again. They did so, it seems, because of wounded pride. And this again (as noted on :13) is a feature of God's amazing victories. The pride of Gentile armies is brought down by smaller armies of Israelites using unusual, unexpected tactics because they were guided by Yahweh. Always pride is presented as the great weakness of man.

2Sa 10:16 Hadadezer sent, and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the River: and they came to Helam, with Shobach the captain of the army of Hadadezer at their head-
To gather soldiers from beyond the river Euphrates was a huge effort; and now the best general, as they thought, was placed over them. And it all arose from hurt pride and the desire by all means to defeat Israel in vengeance for Joab and his small army putting their army to flight previously, when they had been paid money to defeat Israel.

2Sa 10:17 It was told David; and he gathered all Israel together, and passed over the Jordan, and came to Helam. The Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him-
The parallel is drawn between the Syrians coming from the other side of the Euphrates (:16) led by Shobach, and David and his men coming from the other side of the Jordan.

2Sa 10:18 The Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed of the Syrians seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen, and struck Shobach the captain of their army, so that he died there-
There are apparently different numbers given in 2 Sam. 8:4; 10:18 and 1 Chron. 19:18. I see no real problem here once we appreciate that the Hebrew word "thousand" used when giving numbers like this rarely means 1,000 as a number. It is also translated regiment, brigade, family, squadron etc. And to Israelites looking at the Syrian army, it could be described in various ways. There many regiments, families, groups, squadrons, but these subdivisions of an ancient army are all called a "thousand". Depending how one looks at the army and its subdivisions. A modern army would be subdivided into two to four corps, a corps has at least two divisions or legions, a division has two four brigades or regiments, a brigade has two or more regiments, a regiment has two or more battalions, a battalion has a number of companies, a company has a number of platoons, a platoon has a number of squads or fire teams. The problem is that the Hebrew Bible uses the same word for all such military subdivisions, and it is translated "thousand" in many Bibles. Hence the apparently contradictory numbers.

2Sa 10:19 When all the kings who were servants to Hadadezer saw that they were defeated before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more-
This meant that the smaller kings like Tob, Rehob and Maacah now paid tribute to David rather than to Hadadezer.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 11

2Sa 11:1 It happened, at the return of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah-

This is the classic example of the devil finding work for idle hands; in 2 Sam. 10:7 David had already skipped one battle in this campaign. His remaining in Jerusalem was the set up for David's sin with Bathsheba. That he was lying down on his bed in the late afternoon rather than working would exemplify the same thing. He appears to recognize his attitude problem in Ps. 30:6: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be (spiritually) moved". In the lead up to the sin, God had given him victory after victory- leading him to think that he must therefore be spiritually OK because of his many physical blessings (1 Chron. 18:6 RV). His conscience had been blunted. Uriah may have cleverly alluded to this when he comments that the ark was abiding in a *tent*, and therefore he would not go down to his *house* (2 Sam. 11:11). The tension between a tent and a house is surely intended to take David back to his words in 2 Sam. 7:2, where he laments as unacceptable the fact that he lives in a *house* but the ark is in a *tent*. And David was 'tarrying', living in a settled way, in a house in Jerusalem now.

But David stayed at Jerusalem-

Or AV "tarried". This uses a Hebrew word which does not mean to wait, but rather to permanently dwell. It is also translated 'to marry'. The next verse continues "And it came to pass...", indicating that his permanent residence at Jerusalem was connected with his sin. Are we to infer that David remained at Jerusalem because of his relationship with Bathsheba? Even though they had probably got nowhere near consummating it, subconsciously this was behind David's motive in remaining. The word for "tarried" being the same for 'marriage' could imply that David was still actively married to his other wives who were there in Jerusalem.

David "tarried" or lived (:1) in his "house" (:2), just as he was in 2 Sam. 7 when better thoughts came to him about God's house. Now he was thinking of building up his own house- for human behaviour is multi dimensional, and whilst his behaviour was indeed lustful, he also had some political agenda in the Bathsheba "thing". Saul likewise was "sitting" in his house when an evil spirit came upon him and he wanted to kill David (1 Sam. 19:9 s.w.). Again we see Saul and David parallel in their sins. The difference was that David had a heart for God and was repentant. It wasn't that their amounts of sin differed. It was their attitude to them. When he didn't have a stable house, David had correctly focused upon living or tarrying in Yahweh's house for ever (s.w. Ps. 23:6; 27:4). But having his own stable house led him away from that focus.

This not going out to fight is in contrast to the peoples' expectation that their king was to "go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:19). Indeed, David's masculinity is under question here. When kings went to war, David didn't. And we are to read that he

effectively fell in love and was compromised by this, whereas powerful men of the time were supposedly never compromised by their love affairs. David is never recorded as loving anyone, but his evident deep love for Solomon suggests Bathsheba was in fact his favourite woman out of many. Uriah disobeys David's command to go down to his wife and sleep with her- his disobedience to David is categorically stated, and David has lost control of the situation so that he cannot do anything about a disobedient servant. Uriah by contrast presents as the consummate male by being a brave soldier and wanting to fellowship the sufferings of his men rather than taking special privileges.

Possibly David didn't go to the war because he wanted to try to self fulfil the promise about having rest from his enemies. See on 2 Sam. 12:10.

2Sa 11:2 It happened at evening, that David arose from off his bed, and walked on the roof of the king's house-
In the parable, the rich man had his many flocks (i.e. David's wives) with him in the city, of Jerusalem. Walking upon the roof of his house connects with several passages which associate the roof top with a place of idolatry: 2 Kings 23:12; Jer. 19:13; 32:29; Zeph. 1:5. It may be that David regularly worshipped the idol of Bathsheba in his mind, upon the bed which he had on the house top. David's sin with Bathsheba is therefore not such a momentary slip. Significantly, it was in that very place where Absalom later lay with his wives in retribution for what he had done (2 Sam. 16:22). From this we could infer that David lay with Bathsheba in that same place on the roof top. This is significant insofar as it shows how exactly the thought leads to the action. David's thoughts in that spot were translated into that very action, in precisely the same physical location. The roof top is also the place of prayer, and in this we see the schizophrenic nature of David's spirituality; he went to pray, and then stood at the edge of the roof in order to view Bathsheba, with his hands on the railing around the roof which surely he would have erected, in obedience to the Law. And he realized that it was evening, and that in accordance with the Law a menstruating woman had to wash and be unclean until the evening. But now, he reasoned, she's clean, and I can sleep with her. He lay with her "for", just because, she was now purified. In this we see the mixing of flesh and spirit which is at the root of most of our failings.

And from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful to look on-
David rightly perceived that what a man thinks alone on his bed is a litmus indicator of his essential spirituality, and he condemns Saul for plotting sin on his bed (Ps. 4:4; 36:4; 149:5). And yet the same phrase "on his bed" is used for how David plotted the sin with Bathsheba on his bed (2 Sam. 11:2). David was surely taught by his sin that he had been too quick to condemn others for their wicked thoughts upon their beds. Again we see

how in essence Saul and David did the same sins, but David was saved for his heart position and repentance.

Bathsheba was "very beautiful to *look upon*". And David did just that. Our Lord surely had his eye on that passage when he spoke about him that "*looks upon* a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already" (Mt. 5:28). But it is not just in that specific sin that we can share David's experience; James 1:14,15 speaks of the process of temptation and sin, in any matter, as looking lustfully upon a woman, with the inevitable result of actually committing the sin. In this he may be interpreting David's sin as an epitome of all failure. David is our example. Likewise the Lord's list of the 12 evil things that come out of the heart: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness, evil thoughts...all seem to describe the completeness of David's sin with Bathsheba. It incorporated all these things, and was not just a one time, lustful failure of the moment.

David and Bathsheba knew each other well, and would have developed a close spiritual relationship. Having only known Uriah, both as a father and husband (2 Sam. 12:3), Bathsheba would have been strongly attracted to David, yearning for a relationship with someone other than Uriah. David would have been an alternative father figure to her, and also the same age as her husband Uriah . He would have become her physical and spiritual hero. David must have allowed his feelings for her to grow, until the sight of her quiet obedience to the Law, artlessly exposing her beauty against the setting sun, was just too much. With her husband far away, kidding himself there was a spiritual motive, David shrugged off the voice of conscience. What happened to David's family was related to David's sin. The obsessive love of Amnon for Tamar may have similarities with David's for Bathsheba (2 Sam. 13:2).

David viewed Bathsheba from the roof (2 Sam. 11:2), and this was matched by the roof on which Absalom slept with David's wife, and the way the watchman sees the two messengers running with news of Absalom's death (2 Sam. 18:24), and it was on a roof that David lamented his son (2 Sam. 18:33). Uriah is killed by a man from a height above him, thus equating David with the enemy soldier who slew his faithful man, rather than with his men.

We note throughout the similarities with Ahab's coveting of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. David likewise was in the king's house when he covets that which belongs to his neighbour (2 Sam. 11:2). He tries to get Bathsheba by offering Uriah a "present"- "there followed him a present from the king" (2 Sam. 11:8). Uriah's "I will not do this thing" (2 Sam. 11:11) matches Naboth's refusal. David summons Uriah and makes him eat and drink, just as it seems there was some kind of feast when Naboth was set on high amongst the people. David's plan to set up Uriah's death so he could take what was personally Uriah's [his wife] matches the plan of Ahab to get Naboth executed. The report sent to Jezebel that Naboth had died (:14) is recorded in the same manner as the

report to David that Uriah had died (2 Sam. 11:18,24). Ahab takes possession of that which is Naboth's, just as David takes Bathsheba- and then they are both rebuked by a prophet, and both genuinely repent, although the resulting Divine judgment involved the suffering of their sons and family going forward. The similarities are intentional. We see here that the process of sin is as it were standard- whether in the slip of a righteous man [David], or yet another sin in the long catalogue of sins in a sinner like Ahab. God works to some kind of template with man, but it is also so that man passes through the same broad process of temptation and failure.

We note in 2 Sam. 3:1-16 David's bad treatment of Michal's husband, who follows his wife with tears in a most unmasculine but genuine response to David taking her from him. Paltiel walks behind her, when a woman in those days was supposed to walk behind a man [cp. Russian 'zamuzhem', behind a husband, to describe a married woman]. Paltiel was publically shamed; the way Abner abruptly tells him to stop following his wife and go home is as if Abner treats Paltiel as a dog. He did this when he already had at least six wives; the information about his wives and children precedes the narrative about him breaking up Michal and Paltiel's marriage. Although David calls Michal his "wife" [Heb. isshi], the record calls Paltiel her husband [Heb. 'ish]. This failure is then repeated by David when he takes Bathsheba and slays Uriah, breaking up a good marriage even though he had many "sheep". He was wrong in how he treated Paltiel. But his conscience didn't kick in. And so one sin led him to another sin, against Uriah, in essence the same but of far greater magnitude. We reflect how his taking of Abigail in 1 Sam. 25 also involved the displacement of her husband, Nabal- but by the hand of providence. It's as if David intentionally misread this as meaning that he had the right to remove the husbands of women he wanted. The progression is all so psychologically credible. David wanted to test Ishbosheth and Abner's loyalty [as Abner had formerly been Saul's general], and so he asked them to get Michal back to him as his wife. He clearly didn't love Michal; it was all for the sake of politics. We must be aware that sexual rights over a woman, especially the wife of another, were seen as a sign of political dominance and control; David lived in a culture where the politics of power were sexualized. We think of Absalom sleeping with David's wives publically. And we wonder whether his taking of Abigail was similarly motivated. This usage of women rather than loving them is what led him to the failure with Bathsheba. David is recorded as being loved by many people- Jonathan, Michal, Saul's servants, all Israel etc. But he is never recorded as loving anyone himself. Nathan's parable presents David as a man with many animals, representing his women- possibly suggesting this was how he saw his wives.

However we have to note that David saw Bathsheba close up enough to perceive her beauty. Her house was very close to David's. She was clearly well known to him. And again the issue is raised as to why she would bathe in the open air knowing she was in full view of David's roof where he was wont to rest and walk. The close proximity of

Uriah's house to David's betrays the favoured relationship he once enjoyed with David. Five times we read of him 'going down to his house' (:8-13) as if David's house was higher but Uriah's was adjacent. As discussed on :4, this washing may not have been at all related to her period. We wonder about the parallel with Ruth [David's ancestor] in Ruth 3:3, who washes herself, does herself up pretty, and goes to lay with Boaz and thereby manipulate him [quite possibly having sex with him]. We reflect too how David washes himself before having sex with Bathsheba the second time (2 Sam. 12:20,24).

2Sa 11:3 David sent and inquired after the woman-
There can be no doubt that David knew exactly who Bathsheba was. His enquiring after her may therefore have been to summon her to his private audience, with all that this implied in the context of a monarch. We think of Saul asking about who David was- when David already lived at his court as court musician. The question 'Whose son / daughter is this?' was meant as a way of laying claim to the person as yours. And in this we have another parallel between David and Saul. The question, with regard to taking a woman, is that of Boaz regarding Ruth when he enquires 'Who is this?' (Ruth 2:8). The exclamation of the messenger "Is not this Bathsheba...the wife of Uriah?" was therefore tantamount to saying 'Surely you aren't going to? She's the wife of your faithful friend Uriah". When experiencing temptation, the flesh can become extraordinarily blind to reason. The next verse continues: " And David sent (other) messengers, and took her...and he lay with her; *for* she was purified from her uncleanness" . This may imply that David set up an irrelevant spiritual pre-condition for himself: 'If she's unclean, then I must take that as a sign, and not sleep with her, because that would be against the Law'. The Law often stipulated that having washed, the person would be "Unclean until even". David had seen her washing "in an eveningtide" . By the time she came in to him, the sun would have set; she would have been fully purified from her uncleanness. It was *because* of this that David lay with her; he must have reasoned 'Now that she's clean, even the Law says that I'm allowed to sleep with her! That's a sign from God'. As with us, his spiritual judgment did not completely depart in this crisis of temptation; but it became seriously warped to the point that it was no use. It is significant , in the light of this, that the statement that "David... *enquired* after the woman" uses a Hebrew word which is often used about enquiring of God; as if David asked God whether it was right to go ahead or not.

One said, Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?-
"One said" can be translated "he said to himself,". Of course David knew who she was. In his self talk he accepted who she was and cold heartedly went ahead with his lust and possibly other, political agenda. Because she was very well connected politically within David's network of power, just as were some of his other wives. In this case we note that David firstly identifies Bathsheba as daughter of her father, before being

Uriah's wife. Eliam and his father Ahithophel may have been the family David wanted to get in with. For although it was a sin of lust, it seems to me there were also political motivations for both David and Bathsheba. All the same, David rode over red lights of warning into disastrous sin.

Or perhaps some anonymous servant tries to stop David in his tracks, as if to say "You surely can't do this to the wife of your faithful servant who lives in the house next door!". The question 'Who is this?' as asked by Boaz of Ruth (Ruth 2:8) is to be understood as a statement of intended action and not read on face value. The same kind of question is asked by David about Bathsheba, even though he knew who she was because she lived next door to him and was the wife of his close friend. Eliam, son of David's adviser and familiar friend Ahithophel, was one of David's mighty men just as Uriah was (2 Sam. 23:34). David was Bathsheba's hero figure, and she and David knew each other well. Likewise when Saul enquires about who David is after his victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:56), it is not because he doesn't know him. For David had been already at the court of Saul. The question 'Who is this?' means that the questioner wants to do something for the person being enquired after.

The Samuel scroll from the Judean Desert (4Q51, formerly known as 4QSam) adds the detail: "Joab’s armour-bearer". The LXX follows this. In this case, David's usage of Joab to slay Uriah, his own armour bearer, was dragging yet someone else into sin and breaking up yet another relationship.

2Sa 11:4 David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in to him, and he lay with her-

It takes two, and Bathsheba's compliance seems to be recognized by David when he prays: "Against You, You only have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). There is no hint in the psalms of David's regret for having sinned against an innocent Bathsheba. *Her* child had to die; the retribution did not just come upon David. The incident is referred to as "the matter of *Uriah*" (1 Kings 15:5); her name does not figure in those sinned against. "She came in unto him, and he lay with her" (2 Sam. 11:4) is an odd way of putting it; it reverses the usual Biblical reference to intercourse as a man coming in to the woman. The reason for this inversion seems to be to balance the blame. Robert Alter notes that in the Hebrew Bible "When the verb "come to" or "come into" has a masculine subject and "into" is followed by a feminine object, it designates a first act of sexual intercourse. One wonders whether the writer is boldly toying with this double meaning, intimating an element of active participation by Bathsheba in David's sexual summons". Bathsheba offers no resistance nor attempt to persuade David against his intentions, in contrast with Tamar when she faced rape in 2 Sam. 13:12,13: "She answered him, No, my brother, do not force me! For no such thing ought to be done in Israel. Don’t you do this folly. I, to where would I carry my shame? And as for you, you will be as one of the fools

in Israel". "He lay with her" rather than 'he came in to her' could also suggest that the sex act was not at all forced [hardly "power rape"] but consensual.

We note that the same words are used for David 'sending' and 'taking' his ex wife Michal from her second husband, Paltiel (2 Sam. 3:14,15). This was a cruel thing to do as Paltiel so loved her; and David kept her as a ward of court for political reasons, apparently not sleeping with her. Nathan specifically condemned David for "*taking* the wife of Uriah". There was no repentance from David about this and it led to his greater sin at this time. His crude, crass hatred of the blind and lame in 2 Sam. 5 was tacitly repented of in his grace to the lame Mephibosheth in 2 Sam. 9. But there had been no such hint of repentance about his actions towards Michal. And so if sin isn't repented of, it leads to greater failure. We also wonder however if his sending and taking Bathsheba didn't also likewise have a political motive, possibly to remove Uriah as a potential threat to his throne.

And there seems an evident similarity between the way the sin occurred within the city, and the way Dt. 22:24 says that in cases of adultery both parties were to be stoned if the sin occurred within a city and the woman didn't cry out. Bathsheba doesn't seem to have cried out- and so she bears equal blame, it would seem. This makes Bathsheba more of a sinner than a saint. This said, Nathan's parable describes David as killing the sweet lamb (Bathsheba); if she was partly guilty for the actual act, this may suggest a killing of her spirituality by David, at least temporarily. And so we are left with the question of interpretation- Bathsheba: saint or sinner? The record leaves it intentionally open ended, to provoke our reflection upon the text. We learn from Nathan's parable that Uriah was older than her and more of a father figure than a husband. There is no mention of her having had children. It could be that she was trapped in a fruitless relationship with Uriah, a Gentile, and felt she had no chance to make it as a woman in Israel. Her public naked bathing within David's line of vision certainly raises questions- because married women are portrayed in scripture as looking out from behind windows or lattices and such washing would not usually be done in the open air, in a place in full view of the neighbour's roof. So we can never discount the possibility that she was more than complicit in the matter. And this fits with another theme in this whole story- that there is so much ambiguity. Why didn't David go out to war? Why was Bathsheba bathing outside, and in David's line of vision? Why didn't Uriah sleep with his wife? Was Bathsheba purified from her period, or does the text say she purified herself after she had sex with David? Was Bathsheba raped or was she looking for this outcome to become queen? Why the strange expression "she came in to him"? Was this a simple sin of male lust or were there other, political, reasons why David wanted to marry yet another powerful, well connected woman [like Michal, Abigail, Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur, and Ahinoam]? And so many other open questions. Summed up in the comment that "the thing" David did displeased Yahweh. But the exact components of "the thing" aren't listed. Surely the record is written to provoke our

reflection. David clearly bears the blame. But the ambiguities surrounding Bathsheba suggest to me that whilst her blame was far less than his, she was also not completely the innocent victim, especially if she had not had children by Uriah and was more of a daughter to him than a wife, as suggested by Nathan's parable. The ambiguities are intentional, I suggest, because human motivation and actions are so impossibly complex to analyze.

For she was purified from her uncleanness; and she returned to her house- Bathsheba's washing of herself which exposed her nakedness would have been in obedience to the Law. David "lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness" adds weight to this. However, the Law didn't actually state that the woman must wash herself after menstrual uncleanness; but the man who touched her must. So it could be that she had gone beyond the Law in washing herself; such was her spiritual perception, which was a factor in David's attraction to her. The law in Lev. 18:19,20 taught that there could only be sex after a woman was cleansed from menstrual uncleanness, and goes straight on to warn about sleeping with your neighbour's wife- as if speaking directly to David: "You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness, as long as she is impure by her uncleanness. You shall not lie carnally with your neighbour's wife".

David confessed that he had sinned against God (Ps. 51:4), using the very language of faithful Joseph who refused ongoing temptation with these words (Gen. 39:9). Could this not imply that Bathsheba wife of Uriah was similar to Potiphar's wife?

However it's possible to translate: "He lay with her; she purified herself from her uncleanness and returned to her house". This gives no impression of rape but rather of a calm interaction between the two. She doesn't return to her home and wash, she does it at David's home. We again note the interplay between spirituality and sexuality, and the strange relationship between flesh and Spirit. In this case we note she was obedient to the law in washing after intercourse (Lev. 15:18). Possibly David alludes to this when in the penitential Psalms he begs to be washed clean by God; he reflected that washing after this act of sex had not cleansed his heart. This alternative translation avoids the problem that the legislation about women ending their periods in Lev. 15 doesn't actually state that she must wash in water at the end of her period. Throughout Lev. 15 it is commanded no less than 12 times that after certain bodily emissions a person but must bathe in water after their uncleanness. But this is specifically absent when talking about a woman who has come to the end of menstruation. Women were commanded to wash in water after sex, not at the end of their period cycle. I am inclined to conclude that there is [again] a purposeful ambiguity in the text here. Was Bathsheba's washing after her period, going beyond the letter of the law in this case; or after her sex with David? The ambiguity is to provoke us to exercise herself as to whether or to what degree Bathsheba was guilty of anything in this encounter. And the exercise helps us in our own self examinations.

2Sa 11:5 The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, I am with child- It is possible to infer that for all their spiritual closeness, David and Bathsheba experienced a falling out of love immediately after the incident- as with many cases of adultery and fornication. In contrast to their previous close contact, she had to *send* to tell him that she was pregnant. In addition, before David's repentance he appears to have suffered with some kind of serious disease soon after it: "My loins are filled with a loathsome (venereal?) disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh" (Ps.38:7). It is even possible that David became impotent as a result of this; for we get the impression that from this point onwards he took no other wives, and even the fail safe cure for hypothermia didn't seem to mean much to David (1 Kings 1:1-4). Therefore "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore" (Ps. 38:11) must refer to some kind of venereal disease. The Hebrew word translated "lovers" definitely refers to carnal love rather than that of friendship. It may be that an intensive plural is being used here- in which case it means 'my one great lover', i.e. Bathsheba. We have commented earlier how Amnon's obsessive love for Tamar was an echo of David's relationship with Bathsheba. There may be a parallel in the way in which afterwards, "Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he loved her" (2 Sam. 13:15). All this would have been yet another aspect of the emotional trauma which David went through at this time; to fall out of love with the woman for which he had almost thrown away his eternal salvation. And in addition to this, all Israel would have got to know about what had happened- with a fair degree of exaggeration thrown in, we can be sure.

Bathsheba was liable to execution for adultery. So she informs David from various motives, not least to save her own life. Again we have an example of ambiguity in the record, an invitation to reflection... upon with what spirit she informed David of her pregnancy.

2Sa 11:6 David sent to Joab, Send me Uriah the Hittite. Joab sent Uriah to David- The record stresses how much David and Bathsheba relied on sending messages through the servants (2 Sam. 11: 3,4,5,6,19,23,27)- and remember that Bathsheba probably couldn't read, necessitating verbal communication. The palace servants would have gossiped and chatted about little else. When Uriah "slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord" after an evening with them in the bar, there can be no doubt that he came to know the score. He must have guessed the contents of the message which he took back to Joab; and when the command came for him to go on a suicide mission against Rabbah, he went in conscious loyalty to a master whose every intrigue he knew perfectly. This would explain why he refused to go and sleep with Bathsheba; he knew what David was up to. And David would have known that Uriah almost certainly knew what had happened.

David goes to such lengths to try to cover up Bathsheba's pregnancy by him. This rather factors against the idea that David wanted Bathsheba as his wife and that he had political reasons for taking her, as he did in his taking of previous women. There was definitely an element of lust involved and hot headed action. But again we note the ambiguity of it all; for the evidence that Bathsheba somehow wanted the encounter cannot easily be pushed aside. Why the lack of communication between Uriah and Bathsheba during his return to Jerusalem? Uriah had a "gift" from David in his hand but he apparently never goes a very short distance to his own house. He just kips on the floor in the guardhouse at David's place. Why? Was he somehow angry with Bathsheba? If all was well in the relationship, it would be normal to visit and comfort her and at least ask her the truth of all the gossip. If indeed she had clearly been raped, would he not have wanted to comfort his beloved wife? Was he not angry with her too? Because of... ?

2Sa 11:7 When Uriah had come to him, David asked of him how Joab did, and how the people fared, and how the war prospered-
For an individual soldier to have been recalled from the front for a personal interview with David was highly unusual. And on the way back, Uriah surely suspected what had happened or would happen, more or less. David's apparent interest in the war and his troops is presented here as so hypocritical.

2Sa 11:8 David said to Uriah, Go down to your house, and wash your feet-
Their houses were next to each other, perhaps "go down" referred to a path between the two properties. "Feet" are used as a euphemism; the idea clearly was "And have sex with your wife" (Is. 6:2; Ez. 16:25).

Uriah departed out of the king's house, and a gift from the king was sent after him-
It was now clear to Uriah what had happened. David was trying to buy his silence, and to get him to sleep with his wife so that it would appear any resulting child would be his and not David's.

2Sa 11:9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and didn't go down to his house-
Uriah realized clearly what had happened, and was angry. He would rather sleep with the servants than sleep with his wife. He didn't go to see his wife because he was apparently angry with her too- suggesting he suspected she was a willing party to the affair. The servants would have been aware of what had happened; see on :6. And that evening as he purposefully slept with them and they chatted as men do, he would have been confirmed in his guesses. The "gift" sent after him (:8) would have been still in his hand as he slept the night with the servants. They all knew what had happened.

2Sa 11:10 When they had told David, saying, Uriah didn't go down to his house, David said to Uriah, Haven't you come from a journey? Why didn't you go down to your house?- The degree to which David acted in a coolly thought out way is brought out by a few hints in 2 Sam. 11:10-12. His comment to Uriah surely implied 'You've been away a long time- and you don't want to have sex with your wife? Well, you must have been unfaithful then, like most of you soldier boys'. Remember that this was David talking to a man who had risked his life for him during the wilderness years. How sin totally ruins loving fellowship! See on :12.

2Sa 11:11 Uriah said to David, The ark, Israel, and Judah, are staying in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open field. Shall I then go into my house to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing!-
See on 2 Sam. 7:1. It could be argued that soldiers on duty had to be sexually abstinent, as any personal emission of semen made them unclean (Dt. 23:10) and we note David's claim that his warriors had not touched women in 1 Sam. 21:5. So although not at the battle front, Uriah felt he was still on duty and therefore would not lie with his wife. Uriah lets David know that he knows what's going on; for he uses no euphemisms nor indirect hints, but states plainly he will not be sleeping with his wife. He was clearly very angry with David.

Uriah doesn't swear as Yahweh lives, as is commonly found in the Bible, but by David's own life. Perhaps he felt that Yahweh was no authority to David to make an oath by. We note that this way of swearing by the life of the person being spoken to [rather than by Yahweh] is used of men to Saul (1 Sam. 17:55), by Uriah to David when he knew David had slept with his wife (2 Sam. 11:11) and by Hannah to Eli (1 Sam. 1:26). In every case the implication is that the speaker didn't think that the person being addressed really feared Yahweh.

We can discern in Ps. 132:3 an allusion to the words of David's faithful friend Uriah whom he effectively murdered: "Surely I will not come under the roof of my house, nor go up into my bed...". He refused to go up to his bed nor come under the roof of his own house because he preferred identity with God's suffering people, His "house". If indeed Ps. 132 was written later, then David later remembered these words, and alludes to them when he thinks of arranging the building of the temple. The words of Uriah haunted him, and he commendably vows to follow his noble example. In this we see David's humility and repentance.

But there is another take on the connection with Ps. 132. We note that Uriah mentions that the ark, along with David's troops, is in a tent and not in a house, and so Uriah will

not go down to his house. Uriah will not sleep in his house whilst the ark of God isn't in a house; he is alluding to David's similar oath which David hadn't kept. For this is clearly to be connected with David's vow that "I will not enter my house or get into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids' until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty one of Jacob" (Ps. 132:3-5). The ark was still in a tent; and David was in his house, he had got into his bed- whilst the ark was still in a tent. Uriah's mention of the ark surely alludes to this situation. This is Uriah criticizing David and asserting his own greater fidelity to Divine things. We note too his point blank refusal to be obedient to David's command to go down to his house.

So David's sin gives the lie to his apparent passion for the ark. God had responded to his "vow" by telling David that God didn't want this. Instead, God would build him an eternal family through his Messianic Son, and he would [by implication] be resurrected to witness this. But instead of rejoicing in that, instead David was just involving himself in opportunistic sex and thus showing no regard for the great promises made about his family. For David was hardly paying any attention to his family and seed by casually sleeping with another man's wife and getting her pregnant. In this we see the progression of theme in 2 Samuel. David's refusal to accept God's grace in the covenant made with him led him to still want to build a temple, and this lack of focus upon the grace to be shown to his own "house" or family led him to the sin with Bathsheba.

2Sa 11:12 David said to Uriah, Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart. So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day, and the next day-
"Depart" uses a word translated 'to put away' in Mal. 2:16. divorce was only possible for adultery. The implication was 'Tomorrow you can divorce her and there'll be no problem- and I bet you've been unfaithful yourself while away on duty!'. The man after God's own heart had truly fallen from Heaven to earth- knowing what he was doing.

2Sa 11:13 When David had called him, he ate and drink before him; and he made him drunk. At evening, he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but didn't go down to his house-
That David could see into the back yard of Bathsheba's house shows that they were almost next door neighbours in Jerusalem. Nathan's parable emphasized this: "There were two men (David and Nathan) in one city (Jerusalem)" (2 Sam. 12:1). That Uriah "didn't go down to his house" after meeting David in Jerusalem could imply that it was just at the end of David's back garden. Even when drunk, he retained his deep inner sense of purpose. To be made drunk is also a figure for being extremely angry (Is. 63:6). Those who make others drunk are cursed in Hab. 2:15.

2Sa 11:14 It happened in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the

hand of Uriah-
Was David literate? Probably not. We think of how Jeremiah in Jer. 36:1,4 is told to "take yourself a scroll and write" but in fact he calls Baruch to write it. David may well have learned to write in order to produce his Psalms, but now he puts that skill to an evil use. Or maybe he got someone else to write it, which again meant that the story would have continued to seep out to the public. To give Uriah the letter would suggest Uriah travelled alone. He surely guessed what it said. He could have destroyed it, but just as he refused to lay with his wife, so he goes along with David's evil plan. He preferred to die than lose his integrity. We likewise wonder whether Joab was literate, and in this case, why did David write a letter? Presumably to avoid giving the message to a messenger who would travel with Uriah back to the battle front. Again we see David's maximum efforts to keep the "thing" secret, when in fact, everyone knew- including Uriah himself.

2Sa 11:15 He wrote in the letter saying, Send Uriah to the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck, and die-
As noted on :18, David wrote a letter in order to avoid giving a message to a servant to deliver verbally. But literacy levels in ancient Israel were very low, especially for village boys like David and Joab, both from Bethlehem rather than anywhere bigger. David's attempt to cover what he had done would have probably required Joab to get someone to read the letter to him anyway. All attempts to cover the sin led to it becoming ever more well known.

2Sa 11:16 It happened, when Joab kept watch on the city, that he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew that valiant men were-
Joab's part in all this should not be overlooked. He had argued back against David over Abner and had himself gone and killed him, and he would later remonstrate with David over Absalom. He could likewise have refused to be a part in all this. It was likely his spiritual jealousy of David which led him to be such an eager participant in the scheme, wanting to bring David down spiritually to his own level. We see here the same articulations of human nature which are in our own lives.

2Sa 11:17 The men of the city went out, and fought with Joab. Some of the people fell, even of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also-
David was therefore guilty of more than one murder in all this, and as a soldier himself ought to have known how wrong it was. True soldiers never abandon their wounded, let alone betray their own side to death. David's actions were going to infuriate just about everybody in Israel.

2Sa 11:18 Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war-
"The things concerning the war" appears to be a technical term for a standard military report (:19). It was apparently delivered verbally rather than in writing, so David's letter to Joab was a vain attempt to not risk telling a messenger what to say verbally. But it is doubtful whether Joab could read well, and so Joab was in any case unlikely to have been the only person to know David's command about Uriah.

2Sa 11:19 and he commanded the messenger saying, When you have finished telling all the things concerning the war to the king-
This continues the theme noted on :6, that the extensive use of messengers and exposing them to the intrigues was sure to mean that what had happened would become well known. Hence the significance of Uriah refusing to go to his home but sleeping and hanging out with the servants. The more men seek to cover sin themselves, the more it is made apparent. That is the lesson for us all. David appears desperate and foolish in trying to cover his sin by getting Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba and then getting Uriah killed, even requiring other men to be killed in order to make Uriah's death appear nothing specific. And yet the record stresses how many messengers were involved in the whole "thing". All attempts to cover sin will ultimately come to nothing in that the day of judgment will reveal all "the secrets of men" to all. David clearly has the belief that what he has done is secret when in fact it obviously isn't; and that is the mentality of all sinners. And that is exactly God's point in 2 Sam. 12:12 "For you did it [so David thought] secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel".

2Sa 11:20 it shall be that, if the king's wrath arise, and he asks you, 'Why did you go so near to the city to fight? Didn't you know that they would shoot from the wall?-
David was known for how his emotions flared up. Despite his undoubted physique stamina, David was a broken man, even quite early in his life, prone to fits of introspection; dramatic mood-swings (cp. 1 Sam. 24:14 with 25:6,22,34;), sometimes appearing a real 'softie' but hard as nails at others (consider Ps.75:10 and the whole of Ps.101); easily getting carried away: be it with excessive emotional enthusiasm for bringing the ark back, in his harsh response to Hanun humbling his servants, his over-hasty and emotional decision to let Amnon go to Absalom's feast when it was obvious what might well transpire, his anger "flaring up" because of incompetency (2 Sam.11:20 NIV), or in his ridiculous softness for Absalom.

We note how there are three accounts of the engagement in which Uriah was killed. The actual account; Joab's account of it which he told the messenger to tell David; and then what the messenger actually tells David. We see how covering sin leads to dishonesty and catches up so many others in the web of dishonesty. The transparent life before God involves humility and the associated immediate confession and repentance, and thus avoids all this. And all this lying stands in hard contrast to the David of the Psalms,

who so loves to protest his integrity and honesty compared to others. One function of the sin with Bathsheba was to lead David to self knowledge and recognition that he failed to rightly perceive his own sinfulness.

2Sa 11:21 who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Didn't a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also'-
Joab warned the messenger to quickly explain to David why the soldiers approached so near the wall of Rabbah, *because* he knew that David would *immediately* quote an example from the history of Israel, to prove that such an approach was unwise. David's familiarity with the spiritual records of Israel's history was therefore well known, and it presumably did not depart from him during the nine months. Psalm 38 speaks of how the guilt of his sin weighed so heavily upon him (Ps. 38:4 NIV), whereas Ps. 32:5 describes how the guilt of sin has now been lifted from him- implying that he wrote Ps. 38 some time after the sin, but before repenting properly. The point is, he didn't crash completely, he didn't turn away from God in totality- he was still writing Psalms at the time!

The fact Joab told the servant to say this is proof enough that he too knew what had happened. It is to his shame that he went along with the evil plan. It was almost as if he wanted it to happen, remembering how David had said Joab was "too hard for me", the spiritual man. And Joab almost wants David's planned sin to happen so he can get equal with David. For in all this David was indeed being "hard" himself, very hard.

2Sa 11:22 So the messenger went, and came and showed David all that Joab had sent him for-
The obedience of David's servants is emphasized. His sin was therefore the worse because he abused loyalty. No wonder he lost so much loyalty because of what he did.

2Sa 11:23 The messenger said to David, The men prevailed against us, and came out to us into the field, and we were on them even to the entrance of the gate-
David uses the same word when he reflects that his sins had "prevailed against me" (Ps. 65:3), showing that finally he did finely appreciate the nature and many dimensions of his sin. For Israel to flee before their enemies who were stronger [s.w. "prevailed"] than them is the language of the curse for breaking the covenant. And this was what David had done and was leading Israel into. His spiritual perception was totally subdued beneath his desire to cover his sins in the eyes of men, although the record continually shows that the more he tried to, the more evident his sins became.

2Sa 11:24 The shooters shot at your servants from off the wall; and some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also-
The servant also knew all that was going on. So he doesn't wait (as advised) for David to rant about the loss of men near the city wall, he tells David immediately that Uriah was dead. He knew that was the bottom line David wanted to know. We note that in this evil plan, other men died along with Uriah, perhaps to give the murder some semblance of bad luck.

The scene in 2 Sam. 18:33 is of David sitting between the gates and going up over the gate to get news of Absalom and weeping there for his death. It was from a wall above a gate that the archers shot from and killed Uriah (2 Sam. 11:23,24).

We note that Uriah was killed by archers; David's son Absalom was also killed by three arrows fired into his chest (2 Sam. 18:14). This was to help David see the pain he had caused to Uriah's loved ones. Saul too was hit by archers before he ended his own life. It could be that Joab was resented the murder of his armour bearer Uriah [according to LXX and Josephus], and so he in turn murdered David's son Absalom with arrows.

2Sa 11:25 Then David said to the messenger, Thus you shall tell Joab, 'Don't let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another. Make your battle stronger against the city, and overthrow it'. Encourage him-
"Let not this thing displease you" were David's words to Joab. But those very Hebrew words are used again in :27: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord". It displeased God spiritually; and it is therefore reasonable to think that David was saying to Joab 'Now don't think that there's anything really spiritually wrong with what I've done'. Doubtless David tried even harder to persuade himself of this than he did Joab.

2Sa 11:26 When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she made lamentation for her husband-
The record leaves us invited to imagine how sincere was her lamentation. Was it a mere formality, as :27 suggests, or from the heart? If from the heart, she would likely have been angry with David and hardly the wife he wished for. The record doesn't make any mention of Bathsheba's mourning being anything personal; compare it with Jacob's mourning for Joseph, which mentions how Jacob refused to be comforted by anyone. Or Paltiel's mourning at the loss of Michal.

2Sa 11:27 When the mourning was past, David sent and took her home to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son-
The record is purposefully vague about her feelings. We are left to speculate.

But the thing that David had done displeased Yahweh-
God's apparent silence doesn't mean that judgment won't come. David himself perceives this in Ps. 50:21, either having learned from his experience, or having only taught the theory in that Psalm, which he now was to personalize. The phrase used here is only found in 1 Sam. 8:6 about the displeasure concerning "the thing" of Israel wanting a king. The entire sentence is copied word for word in Hebrew. We are left to wonder what the parallels were between these apparently quite different sins. The point is that although human failure may be markedly different (wanting a human king as opposed to arranging murder and adultery), the essence was the same. There was an assumption by both David and the people that they could act as they wished, despite knowing God's revealed will. They despised His word and acted according to their immediate desires, justifying themselves. And here we see the worrying similarities with our own sins, in essence. Perhaps the connection with God's displeasure about the "thing" of wanting a human king was because David was effectively rejecting God's kingship. He wanted to be king and have his kingdom in the here and now, rather than believe the promises about his Messianic son having his true and eternal kingdom.

We note how the word "Yahweh" hasn't occurred in the narrative until now, reflecting how God was far from David's thoughts in all this. What David did was evil [Heb.] in His sight; whereas David had declared to Joab that this "thing" was not to be "evil" in Joab's eyes (:25). The chapter opens with David 'seeing' Bathsheba [:2] and concludes with a comment as to how Yahweh 'saw' things.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 12

2Sa 12:1 Yahweh sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, There were two men in one city-
God's sending of Nathan matches David's frenetic sending of messages in an attempt to cover his sin. We enquire why God waited until the child was born to challenge David. I suggest He does give grace periods of silence from Him, during which time we are to repent without further painful nudging. And we must ask Him whether we are in such a period, in some aspect of our lives...

That David could see into the back yard of Bathsheba's house shows that they were almost next door neighbours in Jerusalem. Nathan's parable emphasized this: "There were two men (David and Nathan) in one city (Jerusalem)". That Uriah "went not down to his house" after meeting David in Jerusalem could imply that it was just at the end of David's back garden (2 Sam. 11:13 etc.).

The one rich, and the other poor-
Reflection on the record enables us to enter a little into the nature and tragedy of

David's sorrow; remembering always that David is our example. His love for Abigail, with marriage to her so wondrously arranged, would have been cruelly mocked by his falling for Bathsheba. His abuse of Uriah's loyalty (when almost certainly Uriah knew exactly what David was playing at) would have created a sadness that can only be described as ineffable. David in his early years described himself as a "poor man", indicating his humility; yet the very same word is used by Nathan in the parable about Uriah, as if to bring home to David that he had slain a man who had the humble loyalty which he had had in those early, spiritually formative years (1 Sam. 18:23 cp. 2 Sam. 12:1,3,4).

Nathan had likened Uriah to a "poor man" abused by David. But David later asks God to eternally condemn those who persecuted the "poor" (see on Ps. 109:9,16). And it seems Ps. 109 was used by David not only about his persecution at the time of Saul, but also of his sufferings at the time of Absalom's rebellion, after the time of his sin. So it seems David didn't maintain his sense of humility before Nathan.

2Sa 12:2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds-
Presumably the idea is that David had many wives and concubines. He had no sexual need for Bathsheba. To take her was selfishness and narcissism in the extreme. And yet he was the man after God's own heart, the only man to be told in mid life that his salvation was assured [2 Sam. 7].

2Sa 12:3 but the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and raised. It grew up together with him, and with his children. It ate of his own food, drank of his own cup, lay in his bosom, and was to him like a daughter-
David himself had once been a poor man (1 Sam. 18:23), his family only had a "few sheep" (1 Sam. 17:28). So his abuse of the poor man with only one sheep now he was rich... was therefore the more culpable.

David and Uriah knew each other very well; they had spent David's long wilderness years together. All that time, Bathsheba had been brought up by Uriah (2 Sam.12:3). She was the daughter of Eliam, who had been another of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 11:3; 23:34). Presumably he had been killed and Uriah adopted her, bringing her up from babyhood, mothering her by feeding her from his bowl and letting her sleep in his bosom. This may imply that his own wife died early, and that he brought her and his own children up alone, and then married her when she was older. A very special spiritual and emotional bond must have been forged between those who stuck with David as a down and out, and who later on shared in the glory of his kingdom. That Uriah had such easy access to David would have been unthinkable for an ordinary soldier whom David hardly knew. Nathan criticizes David for having "no pity" on Uriah, implying that David well knew the relationship between Uriah and Bathsheba. Moreover, David would have been

a larger than life figure for his followers, and Bathsheba would have grown up with this image of David as the saving hero.

1 Chron. 3:5 could imply that she had no other children before those she had by David. This means that she may have been barren until that point; her conception was certainly brought about by God. Was it that they would both have been aware of the unlikelihood of her bearing children, and therefore perhaps more inclined to take a chance? Or was the problem Uriah's side and David was seeking again [wrongly] to build up his own house through Bathsheba? But the cruelty of David is stressed- Bathsheba "lay in [Uriah's] bosom" as a lamb, but then David "lay with her". To lay in the bosom clearly means intimacy, and God says that David's wives had been given into his bosom. He enjoyed intimacy with them- and so he had no need to take Bathsheba. He was not a man lacking in intimate relationships. David in the parable is wealthy, and Uriah poor. Yet Uriah had a house next to the king and was his close associate, and his wife was the well connected granddaughter of Ahithophel, David's chief advisor and "familiar friend". His poverty, therefore, was in terms of relationships. All he had was Bathsheba. And that was what was so wrong with David's theft of Bathsheba from him. This is the focus of the condemnation- not so much the sin of sensuality and sex outside of marriage, but more the theft from Uriah. We note however that Uriah had the far younger Bathsheba "lay" with him as a cute lamb; whereas David "lay" with her as a woman. There may possibly be a hint here of why she was apparently not resistant to David's advances and may even have encouraged them by bathing in his line of vision. Even if the connection with 'laying with' is deemed over interpretation, it would seem to me that indeed Bathsheba and Uriah likely had this issue in their relationship.

2 Sam. 11:13 has used the same three verbs eat, drink and lie with respect to Uriah doing so.

2Sa 12:4 A traveller came to the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man who had come to him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man who had come to him-
The parable described David's lust as a "traveller" which came to him, implying that this was not his usual frame of mind (and does the 'traveller' needing sustenance of Lk. 11:6 also refer to our sinful tendencies?). The rich man is presented as mean. He has only an appearance of hospitality and generosity towards his guest, for he will not give of his own animals, but takes the poor man's lamb. Whilst David was not typically like this, his behaviour in this matter was indeed callous and mean, beneath a veneer of respectability.

The rich man "spared to take" his own animal from his own flocks; just as Saul spared flocks and herds (1 Sam. 15:9,15 s.w.). Again we see how David and Saul are paralleled in their sins. But David was saved because of his heart attitude.

The rich man "took" the poor man's lamb because he assumed that there was effectively no chance of a law suit, the law would not be applied to him; and even if it were, he could easily pay the penalty. This reflects David's attitude to God's law, and his failure in respecting God's law earlier when bringing the ark to Zion had led to the death of Uzzah. He was to be brought to understand that God's law cannot just be waived by man, and man cannot pay the penalty. And we all have that same sense at times, that Divine law and principle doesn't apply to me or can be somehow gotten around. The idea that all men, president or peasant, are 'equal before the law' is a relatively new concept for human societies. It has been engrained in human thought for most of human history that leaders are somehow above the law. We note how the parable focuses upon David's callousness and selfishness, his disregard for others, rather than the sin of unbridled lust and sensuality of itself. The focalization is on the lack of pity rather than sensuality, quick sex or whatever else. It was the pain caused to Uriah whilst he was alive, during that journey back to the battle front and in whatever time he spent alive there, which was the focus of the parable. For after his death he had no sense of loss regarding anything. It was in this that David's lack of pity was so wrong; and out of all the aspects of David's failure, it was this lack of pity which God focused on most. And David correctly realized that in his interpretation of the parable. He was intended to come to just that point of identifying 'lack of pity', and the parable worked perfectly. Lack of pity or empathy is therefore of huge moment to God. And He and His Son show it hugely. God has pity on us the work of His hands. And it was the Lord's being moved with compassion / pity that led Him to the cross. Whilst we may not commit murder nor adultery, lack of compassion to the weaker than us… is an everyday struggle. And God sees it so seriously. We have to love the way the Lord loved the rich youth who told Him that He had been obedient to God since his "youth". The contradiction is obvious, but the Lord was moved with pity and love for him. Whereas we are irritated by what we perceive as hypocrisy, unreality, pride and laziness.

But the lust of David is presented as a traveller visiting- as if this was an unusual occurrence and not David's way of thought and living. We also note the element of unreality in the story. Rich men didn't usually give food to beggars nor did they entertain wayfaring men of the road in their homes, let alone kill a lamb for them. We note the travelling man comes alone, with no entourage, suggesting he is a low class travelling man. “The more prestigious the guest the more precious the animal” slain. Yet here is the unreality in the parable. The rich man slays a lamb for the poor visitor; possibly the hint is that the traveller is a Gentile, suggesting a parallel with Uriah who was a Hittite. He is very generous and kind to him. But not at his own cost. The father only slew an animal when his lost son came home. This rich man was generous to the poor. But he stole the poor man's lamb in order to be generous. Here we see a clever depiction of David's complex and divided character. He was generous, he had a good heart- but also callousness in order to achieve that, or, callousness and narcissism at one and the

same time as being large hearted. The traveller enters the rich man's house- and David's house is a big theme here. God had promised to establish David's house but he was trying to establish it himself. And part of his attraction to having a child by Bathsheba was related to that. But he had allowed lust, the traveller, into his house, and so evil arose from within the house.

There is further grace revealed in the parable- in that adultery and consequent murder are not really in the same league at all as stealing a lamb from a poor man to feed a guest. It's not that God hereby somehow writes down the force of David's sins. Rather we see His gentleness with sinners and desire to always find a way forward in relationship with them.

Another line of interpretation is that the traveller who "comes" to David represents Bathsheba with the news she is pregnant. The traveller 'comes' to David, the rich man, just as Bathsheba came to him and slept with him. David responds to this by slaying the lamb, who would then represent Uriah. The lamb ate, drank and lay [in the bosom], and these are the very words used of Uriah in 1 Sam. 11:11 “How can I go home and eat, and drink, and lay with my wife?”. Those three Hebrew words occur together only in these two places. This path of interpretation however has some issues; the poor man is then Bathsheba as Uriah's wife, and the traveller is Bathsheba as David's pregnant lover. runs in

2Sa 12:5 David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, As Yahweh lives, the man who has done this is worthy to die!-
As noted on :6, this demand for the death penalty was far beyond what the law required for the theft of an animal. David's outrage shows that he was not without moral conscience. But morality can be applied in one part of a man's life but not in others; to one person but not another; to sinners but not to himself. David speaks as God in Eden: "... shall surely die" (AV). This was his problem; he was playing God.

The law required four fold restitution of stolen sheep (Ex. 22:1) but David demands a harsher punishment, of death. He was guilty of death but was spared by grace. Thus God's grace is powerfully contrasted with David's lack of grace. As seen often in the Psalms, his conscience was keenly aware of others' sins but not of his own. He did pay four fold restoration in that four of his sons died: his first child by Bathsheba, Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah. In the bigger picture, this was to help him see that his focus on building up his own immediate house or family was wrong. Instead he should have just trusted in the promise that his house would be built up through his future Messianic son. This is why the evil of his judgment was to arise from his own house (:11). In 1 Sam. 26:16 David had likewise demanded the death penalty for not keeping Saul, even though a sleep from Yahweh had made it impossible to do so. And the slaughter of more Philistines than necessary to pay his dowry. He who had been so eager to slay men is

now saved from his own judicial death by pure grace. Freud demonstrated that exaggerated responses to moral questions concerning others is a reflection of the person defending themselves, against their own self recognition. David's exaggerated response, demanding the death penalty as well as restoration, is therefore psychologically credible for a man refusing to face himself. We see this clearly in many who obsess about some cases of morality and justice... but it is potentially true for us all.

2Sa 12:6 He shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!-
Ex. 22:1 stipulated that stolen lambs should be restored fourfold. The fourfold judgment could be seen as coming upon David in the deaths of Bathsheba's child, then Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah. But David is so used to living beyond the letter of the law, that he assumes he can get this person also put to death. But that was not stipulated in the law. In many ways David had rightly seen beyond the letter of the law, to the spirit of it. This he could act at times as High Priest. But this led him where it can lead us too- to an attitude that he was personally beyond Divine principles. And this led him to the sins related to Bathsheba.

LXX has seven fold. This could refer to the two periods of seven years of judgment which the rest of the book give us: 2 Sam 13-14: 2 years (13:23) +3 (13:38) +2 (14:28)l then 2 Sam 15:1 - 21: 14: 4 years (15:7) +3 (21:1).

Another possible interpretation is that David understands it as a parable and not as an actual legal case. But David perhaps considers Joab as the one guilty of Uriah's death, and uses it as an opportunity to get Joab condemned to death.

2Sa 12:7 Nathan said to David, You are the man-
It is difficult to read Rom. 2:1 without seeing an allusion to David's condemnation of the man who killed his neighbour's only sheep: "You are inexcusable, O man, *whoever you are* that judges: for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself". Surely Paul is saying that David's massive self-deception and hypocrisy over Bathsheba can all too easily be replicated in our experience.

This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul-
David ought to have been moved by God's grace to him historically, to be sexually self controlled. And there we have an abiding principle.

2Sa 12:8 I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom- David loved Saul, his daughters and his son Jonathan; and later David was to marry Saul's wives. These wives were given into David's bosom; in other words, they were really close in their relationship; so close, 2 Sam. 12:8 implies, that David had no real emotional need to take Bathsheba. Even while Saul was alive there was probably some attraction chemistry going on between David and those women. This may well be reflected in Saul's fury with Jonathan: "You son of the perverse rebellious woman... you have chosen the son of Jesse to... the confusion of your mother's nakedness" (1 Sam. 20:30). This hints at least two things: firstly, Saul had a bad relationship with his wife; and secondly, he suspected some kind of unfaithfulness in her, perhaps only on a mental level. David had married Saul's wives (2 Sam. 12:8)- including the mother of Jonathan and Michal. So now we can reconstruct the complex spiritual and emotional situation.

God had given David the harem of Saul, despite the prohibition of polygamy for Israel's king (Dt. 17:17). Kings of the time all had harems and aimed to produce the maximum number of sons to keep their dynasty going. But God's intention was to work through just one later King, His begotten Son. But by allowing and giving David a harem, God had made a concession to David's sexual needs and his desire for a visible large kingly family. But He has given the amazing promise that David's "house" would be eternal through His Messianic seed. But God had also given David a considerable "house" in this life. But He takes away David's harem as punishment through Absalom. This was to make David focus on the promises about his true "house" through his greater Son.

And gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that would have been too little- Such is the wonder of God's promise to us that we really have no excuse to sin. He knows our levels and knew that David was not as it were forced inevitably to sin with Bathsheba. Every sin is in a sense a denial of His promises. God told David that he had no excuse for what he did with Uriah and Bathsheba, because he had given him so much, "and if that had been too little, I would have added unto you..." (2 Sam. 12:8). "Too little" sends the mind back to 2 Sam. 7:19, where the promises to David are described as a "little thing"; the promises were so wonderful that David should not have allowed himself to fall into such sin. And us likewise. But David was still focused upon building up his "house" in this life rather than trusting and rejoicing that this would be eternally done for him. And so his harem and finally his "house" were taken from him, tacitly recognized by him in his rueful comment that "my house is not so with God"- to focus him on the future and eternal house being built for him. And our own houses, physical and family wise, may not come to much in this life- for exactly the same reason.

I would have added to you many more such things-
When David sinned with Bathsheba, God didn't read him the act about adultery, lust, murder. He reminded David instead how He had delivered David by grace from his enemies, and how He had by grace given him many wives- when this was hardly God's ideal standard. God made concessions to David's weakness- and even gave him the wives of Saul. Seeing David was married to Saul's daughter, this was actually contrary to the spirit of God's own law. But God had showed David great grace in this. And it was *exactly this* which God reminded David of- it was this amazing grace against which David had sinned (2 Sam. 12:7,8). And perhaps David appreciated this when he commented: "I have sinned against the Lord", rather than saying 'Yes, I've broken commandments'. This is the awfulness of sin- any sin. That we who have known such grace could so ignore it and act like we never knew.

We must recognize that there will be anomalies in the lives of our brethren- just as there are in the lives of us all (if only we would examine ourselves ruthlessly enough to see them). And in some ways at some times, God goes along with them. Thus He gave Saul's wives to David (2 Sam. 12:8), which would've involved David being married to both a mother and daughter- for he had married Saul's daughters. And this giving of Saul's wives to David may not have occurred simply after Saul's death. For David's eldest son, Amnon, was borne by Ahinoam (2 Sam. 3:2), who was initially Saul's wife (1 Sam. 14:50). Now this is not to justify sin. Adultery, taking another's wife or husband, is all wrong. Let there be no mistake. But God at times sees the bigger, or longer, perspective, and tolerates things which we may quite rightly find intolerable. And if He loves us despite of our sin and failure- are we surprised that we are invited to show love to others in the face of their sin and failure toward us? A black and white insistence upon God's standards being upheld in the lives of others, demanding their repentance for having hurt us, is what has caused so much division between believers. Whilst God alone will apportion the guilt for this, in the final, unalterable, ultimately just algorithm of Divine judgment, it's worth observing that the fault for division isn't always with the sinners, the wider thinkers, the freewheelers; but with the inflexible intolerance of those in power. See on 1 Sam. 18:20; 20:30.

2Sa 12:9 Why have you despised the word of Yahweh, to do that which is evil in His sight?-
Saul also rejected God's word (1 Sam. 15:26); we have here another example of how Saul and David committed the same sins but David has a heart for God and was repentant. Both men say they had sinned (:13; 1 Sam. 15:30). But David's heart was in those words whereas Saul's wasn't.

David "despised the commandment (word) of the Lord... you despised Me" (2 Sam. 12:9,10). David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the

word of God, in that sense, was and is God. By *our* words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too 'are' our words. When Samuel told Eli of the prophetic vision which he had received, Eli commented: "It is the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:18). He meant 'It is the word of the Lord'; but he saw God as effectively His word. "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. Our attitude to God's word is our attitude to Him.

The fact that he is condemned for having "despised the commandment of the Lord" in David's sin with Bathsheba indicates that He knew all along what God's will really was. The fact that the flesh took over does not in any way mitigate his responsibility in this. This is a direct quote from the Law's definition of the sin of presumption: "The soul that doeth ought presumptuously...because he hath despised the word of the Lord... that soul shall utterly be cut off" (Num. 15:30,31). Knowing David's emotional nature and also the fact that he did not completely turn away from God afterwards, we would have expected a quicker repentance if it had been a passing sin of passion. It would therefore seem reasonable to assume that the sin was of presumption rather than passion. In his prosperity he had said "I shall never be moved" and he was determined that he couldn't be (Ps. 30:6). Hearing those words from Nathan must have struck real fear into David- he was being incriminated for the supreme sin of presumption, for which there was no provision of sacrifice or repentance. It is a mark of his faith and knowledge of God as the God of love, that He is willing to go on to confess his sin, in the hope of forgiveness. "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it" (Ps. 51:16) was spoken by David more concerning this sin of presumption for which there was no sacrifice prescribed, rather than about the actual sin of adultery. However, we must not get the impression that David was a hard, callous man. Everything we know about him points to him be a big hearted, warm softie. David's sin with Bathsheba was in that sense out of character. Yet such is the stranglehold of sin that even he was forced to act with such uncharacteristic callousness and indifference to both God and man in order to try to cover his sin.

You have struck Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon-
God saw David as if *he* had killed Uriah with *his* sword; even though David's command to Joab to retire from Uriah and let the Ammonites kill him was carefully calculated not to break the letter of the law.

2Sa 12:10 Now therefore the sword will never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife'-
The judgments for David's sin reflect on the nature of his sin in this "matter of Uriah". The dramas that would unfold in his family revolved around callous, conscience less murder, reckless passion and unbridled lust. Despite being a man after God's own heart, David had these elements strongly within him and gave way to them. The

judgment was against David's house, the sword would not depart from it (:10). Again the point is being made that he had been wrong to focus upon his own house rather than trusting God's promise to make a great and eternal house from his later Messianic son, after his death and not before it. The promises to David included the prospect of being given rest from his enemies (2 Sam. 7:11). We note however that in 2 Sam. 10-12 we will read of David's war with Ammon. He didn't have rest from his enemies. Possibly David didn't go to the war because he wanted to try to self fulfil the promise about having rest from his enemies. As with the promise that immediately follows, that he would have an eternal house / family, this was to be realized after David's death, in the time of his Messianic Son. The war with Ammon would have been intended by God to nudge David to realize that the promises were not about here and now. But he tries hard to make them about him; and the curse on him for the sin with Bathsheba was that enemies would arise from his own house, and the rest of his life was lived in anything but "rest" from enemies. In the bigger picture, this was to remind him that the promises to him were most definitely not being fulfilled in this life. He was intended to focus instead upon the future rest of God's Kingdom, at a point when his Messianic Son was set up / resurrected along with himself.

Ps. 69:33 had a historical basis in David appreciating that although he had despised God in his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah (s.w. 2 Sam. 12:10), God by grace had not despised him: "Yahweh doesn't despise His people". Just as the actual murder of Uriah involved the death of other soldiers, so the bloodshed within David's family was going to be his fault.

It should be noted that the sin of adultery is not highlighted in Nathan's rebuke of David, but rather that David had "killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife". This is twice emphasized in 12:9,10. This is not to say that the sin of weakness, of the moment, was irrelevant in God's sight. But the emphasis on how he had taken Bathsheba as his wife hints that this had been his long term intention, further suggesting that his sin with her was the end result of much prior meditation. This further illuminates the way in which David speaks of his sin with Bathsheba as if it comprised a whole multitude of other sins: "I acknowledged my sin (singular) unto thee... I said, I will confess my transgressions (plural)" (Ps. 32:5 cp. 38:3,4,18). Ps. 25:7 also occurs in a Bathsheba context: "Remember not the sins of my youth..."; as if facing up to his sin with Bathsheba made David face up to sins of years ago, possibly also in a sexual context. Indeed, David went so far down this road of self-examination that the sin with Bathsheba made him realize that it was probably associated with many others which he did not even realize: "Who can understand his own errors? cleanse (s.w. Ps. 51:1,2 re. the Bathsheba affair) thou me from secret faults" (Ps. 19:12). If our own self-examination and repentance is after the pattern of David's, we will appreciate how that each of our sins is associated with so many others. We will be aware how that each spiritual event in our life makes us either weaker or stronger in facing the next one, how

that each temptation is intertwined with others, so that in reality we do not commit (say) three or four sins per day. We are constantly failing and winning, and therefore we live in God's mercy; we do not just experience it for the few seconds in which we pray to Him for forgiveness to be granted. David's sin with Bathsheba is a process we each go through in one way or another.

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. God is His word. The word "is" God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4). He learnt this, perhaps, through the experience of his sin with Bathsheba. For in that matter, David "despised the commandment (word) of the Lord... you despised Me" (2 Sam. 12:9,10). David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is God. By *our* words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too 'are' our words.

2Sa 12:11 This is what Yahweh says: 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house-

David in the Psalms records how he hated those who 'rose up' against him, and that includes Absalom. Saul 'rose up' against David (s.w. 1 Sam. 25:29; 26:2), and then evil men 'rose up' against David out of his own family (2 Sam. 12:11 s.w.), especially Absalom who rose up against his father (2 Sam. 18:31,32 s.w.). But David has a tendency to assume that all who rose up against him were arising against God. It's not always so that our enemy is God's enemy. Relationships and the hand of God in human affairs and relationships is more complex than that. And David in Ps. 139:21,22 goes further, to assume that his hatred of people is justified, because they must, he assumes, hate God because they are against him. So we have here yet more evidence that David's repentance and acceptance of his punishment was not of an abiding nature. Yet still God accepted him. Solomon seems to make the same mistake when he alludes to such 'risings up' in Prov. 28:28. We must note that "all in Asia" turned away from Paul personally (2 Tim. 1:15), and yet according to the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Rev. 2,3, there were many faithful individuals amongst them.

And I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun-

Uriah had been David's neighbour. David's neighbour Absalom was to sleep with his wives; perhaps at this time Absalom also had a house next to David's. David was described as Saul's "neighbour"; Saul had abused his neighbour David, and now David was acting no better than Saul. He was only treated differently because his repentance was more genuine. "I will take away... and give... to your neighbour" is the language of how God had removed the kingdom from Saul and given it to David. However, it is David's harem which is to be taken from him. Quite possibly David had still not retained

enough faith in the promises to him about his Messianic seed. Instead he was seeking to build up a large multitudinous "house" by having many wives; and quite possibly his taking of Bathsheba was partly motivated by that desire. In an attempt to refocus David upon the multitudinous seed being through Messiah, in the future and not now in David's lifetime, David's harem was taken away from him and apart from Solomon, his many children apparently came to nothing and the rest of the family were stained with shame by their actions.

In wrath, God remembers mercy. And we see that in His judgments upon David. They were mixed with so much grace- forgiving David rather than enforcing the death penalty; accepting David's marriage with Bathsheba, and blessing the marriage with Solomon; straight away giving victory against the Ammonites, when David 'deserved' to lose at that point. Even in the judgments through the rebellions of Absalom, Sheba etc., God remembered mercy- for He saved David out of those judgments.

2Sa 12:12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun'-
"Under the sun" is Solomon's favourite phrase in Ecclesiastes, as he describes what he considers as the fallen position of himself, his kingdom, and humanity generally. The only other Biblical usage of the phrase outside of Ecclesiastes is in 2 Sam. 12:12, where the consequences of David's sin with Solomon's mother were to be worked out openly and publically "under the sun". It could be that despite trying to whitewash David and his sin in Proverbs, Solomon at the end of his life feels he is for ever living with the consequence of that sin of his parents; and thus he blames everything he sees as wrong with his life upon that. This would be a typical thing for a man to do, in psychological terms. And I have noted throughout Proverbs how often Solomon is having a dig at Absalom and others who played their part in the outworking of the consequences of the sin.

David appears desperate and foolish in trying to cover his sin by getting Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba and then getting Uriah killed, even requiring other men to be killed in order to make Uriah's death appear nothing specific. And yet the record stresses how many messengers were involved in the whole "thing". All attempts to cover sin will ultimately come to nothing in that the day of judgment will reveal all "the secrets of men" to all. David clearly has the belief that what he has done is secret when in fact it obviously isn't; and that is the mentality of all sinners. And that is exactly God's point in 2 Sam. 12:12 "For you did it [so David thought] secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel".

In Ps. 10, David had bitterly criticized the wicked who think they can sin 'secretly' and get away with it; "his eyes are secretly set... he says in his heart, God has forgotten. He hides His face. He will never see it" (Ps. 10:6,11). And yet knowing that theory, he himself acts like that. Rather like Jonah's awareness of Ps. 139, that he can never flee God's presence, even at the bottom of the ocean or at the end of the Gentile world. And yet Jonah tried to. We too, as all men, have this tendency to apprehend on an intellectual level, but divorce this knowledge from our felt reality.

As noted on 2 Sam. 11:27, what David was displeasing in Yahweh's eyes, and His judgments here make that clear. But He speaks of "My servant David... who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My eyes" (1 Kings 14:8). This surely must mean that David lived "to" do what was right in God's eyes, towards that, despite all this massive maze of wrong thinking within him. Yahweh saw the essential direction of his heart, despite David's callous behaviour and sharp oscillations of emotion, angry with his sons and then soppily emotional over them...

2Sa 12:13 David said to Nathan, I have sinned against Yahweh-
It is amazing how sudden David's proper repentance seems to have come. There is no reason to be unduly afraid of a sudden, emotional confession of sin, prompted by a certain circumstance, as David's was by Nathan's parable. Psalm 51 may well have been prayed but moments after Nathan finished his parable. And Psalm 32, describing the joy of David's repentance, would have followed soon after. "Purge *me*... and I shall be clean... create in me a clean heart" (Ps. 51:7,10) shows that David understood the 'me' which needed cleansing as being his own mind. This was clearly a result of the great level of self-examination which brought forth his real repentance. "Against thee, thee *only* have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4) was a conclusion wrung out of so much reflection about what he had done; as is his recognition that his "sin" had involved many "transgressions" (Ps. 51:3).

There are an interesting set of allusions to David's sin with Bathsheba in Micah 7, almost leading us to wonder whether Micah too had a *femme fatale* in his life- whom he speaks of in Mic. 7:10 as "she that is mine enemy... shame shall cover her". He says that "I have sinned against the Lord" (Mic. 7:9), using the very same words as David does in 2 Sam. 12:13; and he marvels how God 'passes by' transgression (Mic. 7:18), using the very same Hebrew word as is found in 2 Sam. 12:13 to describe how God "put away" David's sin. And there are many references throughout Micah 7 to David's Psalms of penitence. Could it be that David's sin and repentance served as a personal inspiration to Micah, as well as being held up as the inspiration to all God's people to repent and experience the sure mercies which David did?

A New Testament allusion to David's penitence may be found in 2 Cor.7:7-11: "Ye were made sorry... ye sorrowed to repentance... ye were made sorry after a *Godly* manner (cp. "every one that is *Godly*...", Ps. 32:6)... for *Godly* sorrow worketh repentance to

salvation... ye sorrowed after a *Godly* sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation (cp. David's in 2 Sam. 12:5)... what zeal... your mourning, your fervent mind" . Allusion after allusion to David is being piled up here. The eight references to their "sorrow" in four verses is surely a signpost back to David's intense sorrow for his sin with Bathsheba: "My sin is ever before me (Ps. 51:3)...my sorrow is continually before me... I will be sorry for my sin...many sorrows shall be to the wicked" who, unlike David, refused to repent (Ps. 38:17,18; 32:10). This association between sin and sorrow is a common one (Job 9:28; 1 Tim. 6:10; Ex. 4:31; Is. 35:10. The last two references show how Israel's sorrowing in Egypt was on account of their sinfulness). We must pause to ask whether our consciousness of sin leads us to a like sorrowing, whether our repentance features a similar depth of remorse.

It would appear that Paul is likening Corinth to David. They too were guilty of sexual "uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness" (2 Cor. 12:21). We have seen that in the same way as David's repentance was made in a "day of salvation", so in 2 Cor. 6:2 Paul told Corinth that they were in a similar position to him; they too had the chance of repentance. Those who had heeded this call earlier had experienced the zeal and clear conscience which David did on his repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-11). In this case, Paul would be likening himself to Nathan the prophet. This zeal which was seen in both David and Corinth is a sure sign of clear conscience and a joyful openness with God. Again, we ask how much of our zeal is motivated by this, or is it just a continuation of a level of service which we set ourselves in more spiritual days, which we now struggle to maintain for appearances sake?

The account of Joseph's resistance of adultery is consciously reflected in the account of king David's adultery. And we see this in life- for all life is ultimately structured by God. It's not just that one life reflects another, with similarities and so forth. But one life may be an inverse of another's life, a reflection which is inverse. Because the lessons of history were not learnt. Only by fellowship with each other, engaging with each others' paths rather than mere surface level connection, can we come to discern this. So both Joseph and David are presented as young shepherd boys ["shepherding the flock" of their father is a phrase which occurs only in Gen. 37:2 and 1 Sam. 16:11; 17:34]. They were both sent by their father to enquire of the *shalom* / "peace" of their brothers, and they were both despised by their brothers when they arrived to do so. In both cases, the brothers / Saul didn't want their hand to be upon Joseph / David but tried to make others destroy their victim (Gen. 37:27; 1 Sam. 18:17). They both are "prudent" and chosen to serve a king because of it (Gen. 41:33,39 s.w. 1 Sam. 16:18). It was noted about both of them that Yahweh was with them (Gen. 39:2,3,21-23 cp. 1 Sam. 16:18; 18:12) and they were "wise and discerning" (Gen. 41:33; 1 Sam. 16:18). Both are described as being young men of "beautiful appearance" (s.w. only Gen. 39:6; 1 Sam. 17:42). Both began their ruling at 30 years of age. Both were victims of others deciding it were better to kill

them by others' hands (the Ishmaelites, Gen. 37:27, and the Philistines in David's case, 1 Sam. 18:17).

So this sets us up to consider the differences between Joseph and David when it comes to the adultery issue. Just as men may lead parallel lives, so close that clearly the hand of God was in the parallels- but then one fails to decide correctly when faced by temptation, and fails to take the lead from the earlier, or perhaps Biblical, character. But only by getting to know each other, or thinking ourselves into the Biblical characters, can we perceive this. Someone older than you maybe had a very similar life path, but, let's say, at age 40 encountered major temptation- which they overcame. You as the younger person are to learn from that and decide rightly as they did. Or, if they failed at that point, you are to learn that lesson.

So with David and Bathsheba and Joseph and Potiphar's wife, there was an imbalance of power. She like David could just demand sex. In both cases they were "alone in the house". Bathsheba was very beautiful, just as Joseph is described. Ms. Potiphar asked Joseph to lie with her, just as David asked Bathsheba. Uriah and Joseph are both presented as very faithful to "my lord". Potiphar's wife has Joseph thrown into prison; David has Uriah sent to his death. Likewise Bathsheba's "I am pregnant... by you, David" matches the message of Tamar to Judah- another reflection of a story. Joseph was given his lord's house to rule over, just as David was given his lord Saul's house ("I have given you the house of your lord", 2 Sam. 12:8). But David saw eventually the similarities with Joseph when he finally admits "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13), whereas Joseph refuses to sin against God (Gen. 39:9). And so David is presented as Potiphar's wife. God gave Joseph everything except Potiphar's wife; God gave David everything likewise. The language is so similar. Uriah's "I will not do this thing" (2 Sam. 11:11) is Joseph's "How can I do this thing..." (Gen. 39:9).

Nathan said to David, Yahweh also has put away your sin. You will not die-
The Spirit changes Ps. 32:1 ("Blessed is *he* whose transgression is forgiven") to "Blessed are *they*" (Rom. 4:7) to make the same point. "Blessed is the man (e.g. David, or any sinner- David is our example) unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity" (Ps. 32:2) is alluded to in 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ... not imputing (the world's) trespasses unto them". Through being justified, any repentant sinner will then have the characteristics of Christ, in God's sight. In Christ there was no guile (1 Pet. 2:22), as there was not in David (or any other believer) after the justification of forgiveness (Ps. 32:2). "Blessed is the man... in whose spirit is no guile" (Ps. 32:2) is picked up in Rev.14:5: "In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God". The picture of forgiven David in Ps. 32 is what we will each be like after acceptance "before the throne of God". Yet David's experience can also be ours here and now; in those moments of true contrition, we surely are experiencing salvation in prospect.

There is another connection with Romans in Ps. 51:4, where David recognizes "Against thee…have I sinned…that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest". He recognized that God works through our sinfulness- he is effectively saying 'I sinned so that You might be justified…'. These words are quoted in Rom. 3:4,5 in the context of Paul's exultation that "*our* unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God" - in just the same way as David's did! Because God displays His righteousness every time He justifies a repentant sinner, He is in a sense making Himself yet more righteous. We must see things from God's perspective, from the standpoint of giving glory to God's righteous attributes. If we do this, then we can see through the ugliness of sin, and come to terms with our transgressions the more effectively. And Paul quotes David's sin with Bathsheba as our supreme example in this. We along with all the righteous ought to “shout for joy” that David really was forgiven (Ps. 32:11)- for there is such hope for us now. David is our example. And yet the intensity of David’s repentance must be ours. He hung his head as one in whose mouth there were no more arguments, hoping only in the Lord’s grace (Ps. 38:14 RVmg.). Notice too how Ps. 51:1 “Have mercy on me, O God…” is quoted by the publican in Lk. 18:13. He felt that David’s prayer and situation was to be his. And he is held up as the example for each of us.

2Sa 12:14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to Yahweh’s enemies to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die-
We may enquire how the death of a newborn baby would stop people blaspheming. Perhaps the idea is that somehow David was punished with the death penalty, through his representative son dying. There should therefore be no complaint about God's justice. But this seems to me to raise a host of other ethical issues. The child did indeed die because of David's sin; one dimension of sin is the effect it has upon others. It could be argued that this extra punishment was because David's sin had caused others to blaspheme. Yahweh's "enemies" were the Gentiles within the land (s.w. Num. 14:42; 32:21; Dt. 1:42; 12:10 and often). They would learn what had happened and mock Yahweh for having such a king over His people. But David's wife Abigail had referred to Saul and his supporters as Yahweh's enemies (1 Sam. 25:26,29). Perhaps the idea is that the remnants of the house of Saul, who were still against David, would blaspheme Yahweh's choice of David over Saul now that Saul had behaved in the same way as Saul in abusing his "neighbour". We learn from this that whatever causes others to stumble from Yahweh is particularly abhorrent to Him.

The moral question naturally occurs: Why should a child die because of a man's sin? Shouldn't the sinner be the one who dies? And so we start to wonder whether in some way David's death penalty was commuted to his son. In this case, the child dies as some kind of sacrificial atonement for David's sin. This is perhaps hinted at in the Hebrew of :13 "Yahweh also has put away your sin". The Hebrew for "put away" can

mean to transfer, to commute. Onto the child, as the guilt offering after the pattern of the Lord, also an innocent child. Perhaps this is why David doesn't mourn the death of the child at all, and he is noted for this. His lack of mourning may suggest he is selfishly relieved that the child has died in his place and therefore he will not have to die as judgment for his sin. David eats right after the child dies, whereas mourning involved specifically not eating [we think of the record of Jacob's mourning for Joseph]. This lack of mourning is in sharp contrast to how David strongly mourns for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17-27), Abner (3:31-39), Amnon (13:31-36), and Absalom (19:1-5). Instead he appears at peace and all back to normal and has sex with Bathsheba again. Verse 20 states he went to his house, ate and drank and lay with his wife Bathsheba. This is an exact echo of what Uriah had said to David- "shall I then come to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?" (1 Sam. 11:11). It's as if the moment the child dies, David feels somehow that Bathsheba is now totally and freely his wife. That behaviour may reflect his belief that the child's death had somehow dealt with his sin. And in this we are led to the cross; for God's totally innocent son died for our sins. And according to Paul's connections in Romans, we have all in essence done what David did.

2Sa 12:15 Nathan departed to his house. Yahweh struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it was very sick-

We wonder why there was a period of sickness before the child died. It was perhaps for David's benefit, to elicit his repentance, to help him see the extent of the damage he had caused. Or perhaps as noted on :16, this was the gap in which David could pray for a change of the judgment pronounced. But in this case, we have to assume that David's fasting and prayer was not intense enough.

2Sa 12:16 David therefore begged God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night on the earth-

God had clearly stated that the child would die (:15). But David understood that there is a gap between God's statements of judgment, and His fulfilment of them. And in that gap, in which we also stand, there is a window of opportunity for repentance and changing God's intended judgment. Nineveh's judgment was changed because of this as Moses had changed God's judgments pronounced upon Israel. David knew God well enough to believe that such a change was possible. The fact it wasn't could perhaps be because his prayer and repentance wasn't to the extent God required for this abrogation of judgment to happen.

We can note that David's many prayers were all answered, both in the Psalms and in the historical record. We think of his prayers about Saul and his enemies, for mercy on the people during the plague, his prayers about Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:31; 17:7-14) etc. This is the only one of his many prayers that wasn't answered. This was perhaps as a foil

against any impression he may have thereby gotten that God would answer literally any of his prayers. God is not about 'name it and claim it', on a kind of automatic level. For prayer is not some magical incantation, it is about relationship, and every answer from God to man is a statement of His grace. And so even within David's highly positive experience of answered prayer, there had to be this unanswered one.

David had been told the child must die as a result of his sin. But he had repented and he believed God's forgiveness- and that trust in this amazing Divine pardon led him to think that possibly even the consequence of his sin could be removed. So we can understand David's prayer as reflective of the depth of his repentance and belief in his forgiveness. However it could also reflect a refusal to accept the consequence for his sins because in fact his repentance wasn't that deep- and his later words [not least his later Psalms protesting his innocence] and actions do at times suggest that at best, the intensity of his repentance didn't last long. The death of the child, and David's desperate desire it not die and his seven days of intercession, were a corrective to his attitude towards Uriah and the men of Israel whom he had caused to die: "the sword devours one just like another" (1 Sam. 11:25). That may be one explanation as to why the child was sick for seven days and didn't die immediately. He didn't want that one human life to just be taken... and it would have made him reflect upon his attitude to the death of Uriah.

2Sa 12:17 The elders of his house arose beside him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them-
The scene recalls that of Saul, likewise laying prostrate upon the earth the fateful night before his Divine judgment, refusing to eat when encouraged to do so by his servants. David in essence was no better than Saul. But fortunately he had shown Saul the utmost grace, and God showed the same now to David.

2Sa 12:18 It happened on the seventh day, that the child died. The servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he didn’t listen to our voice. How will he then harm himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?-
The servants fear that David will as it were shoot the messenger if they tell him bad news. Joab and the messenger who reported Uriah's death were likewise aware that David tended to do this. So the presentation of David's character is consistent. David was characterized by fits of anger and knee jerk reactions of anger, as we see again in his outburst at the story David told him. And yet despite this, he was the man after God's own heart who alone was given the assurance of future salvation whilst still in mid life [2 Sam. 7].

David’s depression may even have extended to suicidal tendencies. His servants, who knew him well, feared he would take his own life if Bathsheba's baby died: "How will he

then do hurt to himself...?" (2 Sam. 12:18; the same word is used in Num. 20:15 concerning Egypt's 'hurting' of Israel). One gets a sense that David had another such fit of self-hate in his reaction to the news that many in Israel would have to die because of his numbering of the people (even though their punishment was just, seeing they had refused to pay the census money required by the Law). It is quite possible that the Lord knew these tendencies well; was He not tempted to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple, to take the Kingdom immediately, in other words to short cut through this life? Indeed, any man driven to the mental lengths of David and Jesus has known these feelings.

2Sa 12:19 But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; and David said to his servants, Is the child dead? They said, He is dead-
These were perhaps the same servants with whom Uriah would have slept and hung out, and perhaps had carried the many messengers associated with the sin. They would have indeed realized that the wages of sin is death, and David's awful sin now led to another death.

2Sa 12:20 Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his clothing; and he came into the house of Yahweh, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he ate-
See on :13. This may be the reference of Ps. 30:11, a Psalm with clear reference to the Bathsheba incident: "You have turned my mourning into dancing for me. You have removed my sackcloth, and clothed me with gladness". David removed his sackcloth when his child died (2 Sam. 12:20-22). It was perhaps at this point that he realized that he had been truly forgiven; hence the strange and much observed paradox of David's relative rejoicing at a time when he was supposed to be mourning for his child's death.

2Sa 12:21 Then his servants said to him, What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child was dead, you rose up and ate bread-
David intentionally doesn't go through the traditional customs associated with mourning for the dead. The traditional mourning period for the dead was seven days; but the child had been sick for seven days before dying. It's as if the striking of the child was now seen by David as the death of the child. This strange change could be attributable simply to David's mood swings. But I suggested on :20 another reason.

2Sa 12:22 He said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether Yahweh will not be gracious to me, that the child may live?'-

David is explaining that his fasting and weeping during the sickness of the child was for God to change His judgments decreed. It was not the weeping of sorrow.

David entertains the possibility that Yahweh will be gracious or pitiful to him. He has just accepted that he is the man who showed no grace / pity (:6). But he asks God to show grace to him the ungracious. On one hand he thereby showed his grasp of God's grace and his ambition to trust in it. On the other, this could reflect his assumption that God's words of judgment could relatively easily be negated; the word of the Lord could again be despised.

2Sa 12:23 But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me-
David would go to the child in that he too would die. But he had no hope for the child's resurrection. There may even be a hint of anger with God here. David had not succeeded in changing God's stated purpose. He knew that God could bring to the grave and bring up again, as Hannah's song had said. But God had not and apparently would not do this; and "I", David, could not save a child from death nor resurrect it. Only God could, and He chose not to. We note the contrast between David's serenity over the loss of his son here, and his uncontrollable emotion later when Absalom dies. We could well conclude that this reflects a downward movement for David spiritually.

2Sa 12:24 David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her, and lay with her. She bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Yahweh loved him-
We notice the contrast with :15 “the Lord smote the child which Uriah’s wife bore to David”. Now Bathsheba is called David's wife and instead of smiting their child which she "bore", God has a special love for him. Again David lays with Bathsheba as he did the fateful evening on the roof. We see here God's acceptance of second marriage, even if that position was arrived at by very wrong behaviours in the past. And how the story now progresses, expressed in these terms here in :24, rather sinks the idea that this had just been a passing 'power rape' of Bathsheba by David. The victims of rape usually disappear from the rapist's life afterwards, but Bathsheba becomes his favourite wife and her son is David's favourite and chosen to continue the kingly line. Indeed both the Lord's genealogies trace Him back through sons of Bathsheba, Solomon and Nathan. We would probably have traced the Lord's line through a son of David and Abigail, whom he married after rightly waiting for her husband's death. But God goes out of His way to bless David and Bathsheba's marriage; to demonstrate that His forgiveness really does put sin behind us, and His 'play on' really does mean that.

Solomon being the one Yahweh loved led him to abuse that love, because he alludes to this in Prov. 3:12; 15:9. As noted there, he assumes that he is therefore righteous and

God's supreme delight, because Yahweh loved him. But he failed to perceive that God's love is by grace, and not a reward for our righteousness.

That David's sin is indeed an epitome of all our sins is proved by the way in which the record of it is framed in the language of the fall. Adam is presented as David. Gen. 2:8,17 = 2 Sam. 12:5; Gen. 2:17 = 2 Sam. 12:9; Gen. 6:2 = 2 Sam. 12:9; Gen. 3:17 = 2 Sam. 12:10; Gen. 3:7 = 2 Sam. 12:11; Gen. 3:8 = 2 Sam. 11:24; 12:12; Gen. 3:21 = 2 Sam. 12:13; Gen. 3:17 = 2 Sam. 16:11; Gen. 3:19 = 2 Sam. 16:13. It should also be noted that David/Bathsheba language is used to describe Israel's spiritually fallen state (e.g. Ps. 38:7=Is. 1:6; Ps. 51:7=Is. 1:18; Ps. 65:2=Is. 40:15). David recognized this in Ps. 51:17, where he likens his own state to that of Zion, which also needed to be revived by God's mercy. As David's sin is likened to the killing of a lamb (2 Sam. 12:4), so the Jews killed Jesus. The troubles which therefore came upon his kingdom have certain similarities with the events of AD67-70. They were also repeated in the Nazi Holocaust, and will yet be. Israel are yet to fully repent after the pattern of David.

2Sa 12:25 and He sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he named him Jedidiah, for Yahweh's sake-

The words of Ps. 110:1 are applied by the NT to Jesus, but there is no reason to think that they were not primarily spoke by David with his eye on Solomon, whom he addresses as his Lord, such was his obsession: "The Lord saith unto my Lord..." (RV), and the rest of the Psalm goes on in the language of Ps. 72 to describe David's hopes for Solomon's Kingdom. 'Solomon' was actually called 'Jedidiah' by God through Nathan (2 Sam. 12:25). The 'beloved of God' was surely prophetic of God's beloved Son. When God said "This is my beloved Son", He was surely saying 'Now *this* is the Jedidiah, whom I wanted Solomon to typify'. But David calls him Solomon, the man who would bring peace. I suggest that David was so eager to see in Solomon the actual Messiah, that he chose not to use the name which God wanted- which made Solomon a type of a future Son of God / Messiah. And this led to Solomon himself being obsessed with being a Messiah figure and losing sight of the future Messiah.

Jedidiah is a form of the word David, the David or beloved of Yah. We wonder why David gave Solomon another name. Perhaps he was shy of this amazing grace to him, letting him play on, and then this statement that his son would be named 'Yah loves David'. It was an amazing reassurance of Divine love.

2Sa 12:26 Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city-

How the citadel fell is explained in :27. I suggest that 2 Samuel is thematic rather than chronological. This really picks up from 2 Sam. 10, where Syrian support for Rabbah had

been cut off, and Rabbah was besieged by Joab. It is unlikely that the siege could have been maintained for a year or so. I suggest therefore that what we read of here happened some time after the sin with Bathsheba, and before David's repentance. The harsh treatment of the captives and proud taking of the crown David hadn't fought for... is all the kind of behaviour to be associated with a man in bad conscience before God.

This may be alluded to in Prov. 16:32: "One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; one who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city". This may refer to the hot headed anger of Joab and the "sons of Zeruiah", who had opposed Solomon and sought the throne for themselves towards the end of David's life. It was Joab who had taken the citadel of Zion and also the city of Rabbah, but this is dismissed by Solomon as cancelled out, as it were, by his hot headed lack of mental self control.

2Sa 12:27 Joab sent messengers to David and said, I have fought against Rabbah. Yes, I have taken the city of waters-
We see here Joab's strong loyalty to David. "The city of waters" was the settlement on the Jabbok which provided water for the citadel of Rabbah. Once that was taken, it was only a matter of time before Rabbah had to fall, without water. And Joab wanted David to be there to have the glory of entering Rabbah.

2Sa 12:28 Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city and take it; lest I take the city, and it be called after my name-
Whatever carried the name of a person was seen as his property. If a city was conquered, it bore the name of the conqueror (2 Sam. 12:28) and this is common today, we think of Constantinople, Pavlograd, Petrograd, Peterburg. The names of owners were on their property (Ps. 49:12); and in this context, God's Name is over His people (Dt. 28:10). So to bear God's Name is to recognize His complete ownership and even conquest of us. And yet there's a significant twist to all this in Is. 43:1: "I have called you by your name, because you are mine". It seems like a slip- we expect God to say that He has called us by His Name, because we are His. But no- He wishes us to bear both His Name and our own name, He doesn't wish to subsume us beneath His ownership and manifestation to the point that we are not significant as persons.

2Sa 12:29 David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and took it-
Soon after the sin with Bathsheba, but before David's repentance (see on :26), David went to join Joab in the battle for Rabbah- perhaps to give an impression of zeal to Bathsheba and the rest of his people. 'If brave Uriah died there, why, I'm not afraid to be with the boys on the front line either'. After the victory, David proudly placed the crown of Rabbah's king on his own head, pillaging the spoil of the city rather than burning it,

and then cruelly tortured the Ammonites; "he (David personally) brought out the people... and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes" (2 Chron.20:2,3). How true it is that one sin leads to another. David's own bad conscience with God led him into this fit of bitterness, in which he so needlessly tortured people who at the most only warranted a quick death. One is left to imagine him making a great deal of how he was doing this in vengeance for the death of Uriah. Whenever we detect unreasonable behaviour, pride, materialism or bitterness within our own lives, we need to ask to what degree this is related to our own lack of good conscience with God.

2Sa 12:30 He took the crown of their king from off his head; and its weight was a talent of gold, and in it were precious stones; and it was set on David's head. He brought out the spoil of the city, exceeding much-

"Their king" is literally "Milcom", the name of their god. Later God's people worshipped this god (Zeph. 1:5; Jer. 49:1); again we see that David set up subsequent generations for failure by doing this. The extent of David's fall at this time may be indicated by the way he crowns himself in 2 Sam. 12:30 with the 70 pound gold crown of the Ammonite state god Milcom. Whilst retaining his allegiance to Yahweh, this personal association with a pagan god seems inappropriate. See on :26.

As explained on Ps. 20:1; 21:1, Psalms 20 and 21 appear to be David's prayers before going into battle against Ammon, and Psalm 21 is his thanksgiving for the victory. The setting of the gold crown upon his head is specifically referenced in Ps. 21:3. This however was straight after his sin with Bathsheba. So David's joy in God's salvation expressed in those Psalms was due to his sense that God had given him this victory by grace when he himself was a sinner. His thanks for giving him eternal life when he put the crown upon him (Ps. 21:4) was therefore in the sense that he believed that despite his sin, he would be eternally saved, and he saw the victory against Ammon as a foretaste of that.

2Sa 12:31 He brought out the people who were therein, and put them under saws, and under iron picks, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and he did so to all the cities of the children of Ammon. David and all the people returned to Jerusalem-

See on :26. This harsh torture and judgment of others is of the same nature as his harsh judgment of the person in Nabal's parable, demanding the death sentence for a man whom the law of Moses didn't punish with death for what he did. This is a classic case of transference. David is subconsciously transferring his sin and guilt onto others, and then punishing them heavily. This kind of psychological credibility of the narrative encourages us in our faith that it is indeed the inspired word of God. His behaviour to

the Ammonites suggests to me that his much praised repentance was either not very deep, or if it was, it didn't last long.

It's one thing to obey Divine commands about slaying enemies; it's another to willfully torture them, Auschwitz-style. It was the same cruelty he showed in 2 Sam. 8:2. These incidents reveal David at his worst. And again- did he really have to ensure that every male in Edom was murdered (1 Kings 11:15,16)- was that really necessary? What about the mums, wives, sisters left weeping, and the fatherless daughters, left to grow up in the dysfunction of a leaderless Middle Eastern home? Those men were all somebody's sons, brothers, fathers, grandfathers. Was David really obeying some Divine command here, or was this the dictate of his own anger and dysfunctional bloodlust? We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

Making them pass through fire in a brick kiln was alluding to how the Ammonites made their children do this to their god Milcom or Moloch; "making their children pass through the fire" in honour of Moloch (2 Kings 23:10). And yet David has just crowned himself with the crown of Milcom. The Ammonites were known for their cruelty (1 Sam. 11:2; Am. 1:13). David was paying them back, like for like. There is no grace here at all. Again we sense he was not very deeply repentant, or if he was, not for very long. And yet God accepted his repentant heart and appears to contrast it with Saul's impenitent heart when he committed in essence the same sins as David, despising God's word etc.

The record concludes with David returning victorious to Jerusalem. The war with Ammon forms an inclusio around the story of his sin with Bathsheba. We would fully expect that the war ends in defeat and humiliation for David. But it ends in victory and glory. Military victory was a sign of covenant relationship with God; and rest from enemies was one of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:11. So this victory, totally undeserved as it was, made the point that David remained in covenant relationship with God. He had been restored.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 13

2Sa 13:1 It happened after this, that Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her-
"After this..." opens the tragic story of the consequences for David's sins. Had he resigned as king and just focused upon his family, living in awe of the promises made in 2 Sam. 7, much of the tragic suffering in his family would likely not have happened. All the scenes of failure that we will now read have various connections back to the "this" referenced here- the sins of David.

The romantic love between the two would not have happened if David had had one wife. There would have been no half sister to fall in love with.

Tamar was about fifteen, Amnon twenty-two , David about fifty three and Absalom was twenty.

2Sa 13:2 Amnon was so troubled that he fell sick because of his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and it seemed hard to Amnon to do anything to her-
The obsessive love of Amnon for Tamar may have similarities with David's for Bathsheba.

2Sa 13:3 But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother; and Jonadab was a very subtle man-
Truly evil arose for David from his own house, for Jonadab was his nephew. "Subtle" suggests he was going to act like the serpent in Eden, suggesting temptation on the basis of appealing to the human sense of entitlement, regardless of what moral boundaries were crossed.

2Sa 13:4 He said to him, Why, son of the king, are you so sad from day to day? Won't you tell me? Amnon said to him, I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister-
David's brothers had originally not been that supportive of him, as we recall from their attitude when David arrived to fight Goliath. They would never have quite gotten over Samuel's visit to the family when one by one, they were all rejected and David was chosen as the man after God's own heart, which they were not. And now David had morally disgraced himself. Shimeah had likely passed on his feelings about David to his son Jonadab. This is how jealousy complexes pass on through the generations, with an associated desire to bring down a man to ones' own level. Jonadab likely at this stage realized the reason for Amnon's depression. Amnon was the firstborn and the logical successor to the throne; as firstborn son of the king, he ought to be able to have anything he wanted, according to Jonadab. And that included crossing any moral boundaries. We see Amnon's sin as a result of a chronic sense of entitlement to anything, whatever moral boundaries that might involve crossing. And this problem of sense of entitlement because of position… remains a problem for many.

"Son of the king" not only suggests that a king and his family are entitled to anything [the parallel is clear with Naboth's vineyard being taken by Ahab at Jezebel's encouragement, again featuring a sulking royal getting up from his bed of depression and taking what was forbidden]. Jonadab surely guessed or knew Amnon's desire. His idea was that seeing the king had expressed unbridled sexual desire and gotten away with it, why shouldn't his son? We know David's brothers were estranged from him, so Jonadab as a son of David's brother was perhaps doing this to get at David and depose

him from being king. Had David resigned from being king, the Jonadab factor may never have been. He could have focused upon his music ministry, upon teaching Israel not to sin as he did, and focused his 'kingship' hopes on his future Messianic son, rather than focusing upon himself and his immediate descendants as king.

2Sa 13:5 Jonadab said to him, Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be sick. When your father comes to see you, tell him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and give me bread to eat, and dress the food in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it from her hand'-
Jonadab really was the "subtle" (:3) serpent, suggesting the sin in an indirect way without stating it, and operating on the subliminal level. And this is the essence of all our temptations. What goes on in our heart is played before us in external terms in this story. As with the serpent, the temptation and sin functions through eating. The many temptations and falls into sin which the Bible records are really the essential pattern of every man's sin. It all begins with the subliminal images and unarticulated suggestions. See on :20. This theme of subliminal suggestion is continued in 2 Sam. 14:1.

2Sa 13:6 So Amnon lay down and faked being sick. When the king came to see him-
This corroborates with how David visited and prayed for Saul and his family when they were sick (s.w. Ps. 35:13). The Biblical records pain absolutely imaginable and credible character portraits. The uninspired writings are typically unrealistic and inconsistent in their presentations of characters.

Amnon said to the king, Please let my sister Tamar come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand-
Tamar was under the immediate control of her elder brother Absalom. But David as the father and king overrode that. The language of baking cakes and eating from her hand repeats in :5,6,10 to create the impression that Amnon did exactly according to Jonadab's suggestion.

"The cakes" are so stressed in the narrative. The same word translated 'make cakes' is rendered 'to ravish the heart', also in the context of a sister: "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse" (Song 4:9). The "cakes" may have been understood as a kind of aphrodisiac, or at least, sexually suggestive. Literally, "heart cakes". The 'love heart' was not then in vogue, but a woman's breasts are above her heart and so there is an erotic undertone here. The connection is not explicit, but probably the implicit nature of the connection would not have been lost upon Tamar. David likewise surely wondered at these "heart cakes" and yet as with letting Amnon go to Absalom's feast despite misgivings, he allows Amnon to ask Tamar to bring these 'heart cakes' to him in bed.

Amnon uses food in order to rape Tamar (2 Sam. 13:6); Absalom uses food at a feast in order to kill Amnon (2 Sam. 13:28). This was all a reflection of how David gave Uriah food and wine in his deception of Uriah.

2Sa 13:7 Then David sent home to Tamar saying, Go now to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him-
David comes over as involved in the tragedy and would have later felt guilty for letting the plan go ahead; it was all as judgment for his sin of obsessive "love" for Bathsheba. David ought to have perceived that Amnon was wrongly attracted to Tamar. But he gives Amnon the permission to go to her house; even though the 'making of cakes' had hints at eroticism (see on :6). He fails to pick up the hints, and if he does, he just gives in to the request. We will see just the same when he is asked by Absalom to let Amnon attend his feast; clearly David suspected there would be some revenge planned against Amnon by Absalom, but he still lets it go ahead. His behaviour is similar both times. His lack of discipline towards his sons is the theme both times. David so wanted to see his own 'house' established rather than focus upon the future house to be made by his Messianic future descendant. But he apparently made no effort to raise nor lead them in a spiritual way.

2Sa 13:8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was laid down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes-
The cameraman is zoomed in close on her taking the dough, kneading it, pouring it out (:9) etc. We are invited to play Bible television with the whole scene.

2Sa 13:9 She took the pan, and poured them out before him; but he refused to eat. Amnon said, Have all men leave me. Every man went out from him-
He is quoting the words of Joseph in Gen. 45:1, also in the context of food, and the comment "Every man went out from him" confirms this connection. But his spirituality is all out of context, doing as many do today- quoting bits of the Bible way out of context, to justify their own wrong actions and beliefs. See on :14.

2Sa 13:10 Amnon said to Tamar, Bring the food into the inner room, that I may eat from your hand. Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought them into the inner room to Amnon her brother-
The narrative is well written. The details enable us to imagine the scene, and we are prepared for the calamity which is now about to happen. Tamar surely suspected what Amnon was planning. But she is obedient to him despite guessing what would follow, and that obedience is emphasized- the pan, the cakes etc. are all noted in detail. This was exactly in the spirit of Uriah's loyalty to commands, knowing surely what was going

to happen. Again and again we see elements of David's failure now repeated. The sinful, bad actors in the stories all did so from their own volition. But we sense that God worked through it all, confirming them in sin, in order to bring David to see his actions from outside himself. His being made to view his actions being performed by others was likely because he had not repented in a very adequate sense. Yet still he was forgiven. All spirituality, be it repentance, faith, love, joy, forgiveness, is not just black and white. We believe but ask our unbelief to be dealt with. There is a degree and quality to these things, reflected in the degrees of reward in God's Kingdom. We trust in God's acceptance of our low level of repentance, or failure to retain an intensity of repentance. And we are likewise to forgive others, even when the quality of their repentance is very poor. The Lord taught this when teaching that if a person asks us to forgive them for the same sin which they commit 70 x 7 / day, we are to do so- not predicating forgiveness upon perceived quality of repentance.

2Sa 13:11 When she had brought them near to him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, Come, lie with me, my sister!-

These are the words of Potiphar's wife to Joseph. See on :9,14 for how the Joseph story is alluded to and used wrongly, way out of context, by Amnon. It was a desperate attempt to justify the unjustifiable. It was the reflection of how David lay with Bathsheba "because she was cleansed from her impurity". That was an irrelevant, out of context spiritual precondition he laid down. And it was reflected in how Anon was to reason in raping Tamar.

2Sa 13:12 She answered him, No, my brother, do not force me! For no such thing ought to be done in Israel. Don't you do this folly-

Sexual sin is likewise termed "folly" (Gen. 34:7). Amnon would be known by all as a "fool" (:13), an empty vain person (Jud. 9:4). Sin is therefore associated with being empty and vain; and our world and its "entertainment" is so full of emptiness, vanity and folly. This is the quintessence of sin.

2Sa 13:13 I, to where would I carry my shame? And as for you, you will be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you-

Such marriages were forbidden (Lev. 18:9; Dt. 27:22), although Abraham had done so. We get the impression that David would have yet again considered himself above the law, and allowed this marriage. He had apparently not learned from his sin with Bathsheba; which I suggested arose from his impression that following the spirit rather than the letter of the law allowed him to actually break basic moral principles. The way Tamar reasons, we might conclude that she was not against marrying Amnon. Perhaps

she even liked or loved him; and thus again we see the utter folly of his actions, destroying what could have been a positive marriage just because he wanted immediate gratification of lust. And that of course is a folly played out so often in human life.

Lev. 20:17 is clear that sex with even a half sibling was punishable by death. Yet David apparently was willing to waive this and allow them to marry. Again we see David playing above the law of God. He failed to see that even though this had been the case with Abraham and Sarah, it was not for him to presume upon God's grace. David too had been spared the Mosaic death penalty, but convicted of his sin and his repentance was elicited and required. But he makes no such effort with Amnon. He doesn't apply the death penalty of Lev. 20:17. Nor does he apply the Mosaic laws applicable in a case of rape. The rapist was to marry the victim for life (Dt. 22:28–30), or if the father of the victim disallowed the marriage, he had to pay the bride price anyway (Ex. 22:16,17). But David doesn't apply any of this; he just gets angry, probably from shame and disappointment, but doesn't dispense justice.

2Sa 13:14 However he would not listen to her voice; but being stronger than she, he forced her, and lay with her-

There are various out of context connections with the Joseph story. Amnon has used the words of Joseph (out of context) in :9. He forces her and lays with her, and then her distinctive garment of many colours (cp. Joseph's) is torn. It is all jumbled, because Amnon was jumbling up the references to the Joseph story to wrongly justify himself. He wishes to give the impression that she had acted as Potiphar's wife, hence he throws her out of the house and has the door bolted behind her, as if she is a crazy, sexually obsessed woman who has tried to lay with him. False justification of fleshly actions with quasi Biblical reasoning is a major failure of so many.

2Sa 13:15 Then Amnon hated her with exceeding great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her-

We are clearly intended to understand that "the love with which he loved her" was not love but lust. And when gratified, it turned to hatred. Amnon's obsessive love for Tamar was an echo of David's relationship with Bathsheba. All this would have been yet another aspect of the emotional trauma which David went through at this time; to fall out of love with the woman for which he had almost thrown away his eternal salvation. And in addition to this, all Israel would have got to know about what had happened- with a fair degree of exaggeration thrown in, we can be sure. Amnon surely hated himself for what he had done once he realized he had done it; but he transferred that anger onto Tamara. It's a classic case of transference of anger with self onto another person. Again, the Biblical record is show to be absolutely psychologically credible.

Amnon said to her, Arise, be gone!-
This, and bolting the door after her, could be read as him implying that she had sexually assaulted him and not the other way around.

A raped woman would not generally be able to marry nor have children, but just live in a relative's house for the rest of her life. For a 15 year old like Tamar, this was equivalent to social death. The way she rips her virginal garment and puts ashes on her head is a way of mourning her own death. This 'death' is understood by God when Dt. 22:26 compares rape to murder: "As when a man rises up against his neighbour and kills him, even so is this matter". Nathan's parable compares David's sleeping with Bathsheba with killing another man's lamb. Again, David is brought to see that what he had done with Bathsheba was effectively murder- even though in her case he married her afterwards.

2Sa 13:16 She said to him, Not so, because this great wrong in sending me away is worse than the other that you did to me! But he would not listen to her-
Her high morals are reflected by her deep sense of hurt at being sent away falsely accused. A woman of lower morals would have been more hurt by the rape, and then shrugged and moved on. Amnon did "wrong" to Tamar David's daughter (2 Sam. 13:16). "Wrong" here is the same word translated "evil" in the punishment upon David in 2 Sam. 12:10 "I will raise up evil against you from within your own house / family". The "evil" of Amnon was therefore indeed his own error and sin, but it was used by God and 'raised up' in that God confirmed Amnon in his evil in order to punish David. At the time of Absalom's rebellion, Shimei comments that "Evil [s.w.] has overtaken you [David] because you are a man of blood" (2 Sam. 16:8). But David proactively sought to avoid that "evil": "Get up! Let us flee [from Absalom]... or he will soon... bring evil [s.w.] upon us" (2 Sam. 15:14). We see here the complexities of God's workings. The "evil" was indeed to come upon David, yet he took steps to avoid some of it and God confirmed him in that and delivered him from Absalom. And so 2 Sam. 17.14 "For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring ruin [evil] on Absalom" (NRSV). The complexities and ebb and flow of all this working are beyond any final human analysis; and this explains why there appear various things in our lives which clearly feel to be of Divine intervention, but whose meaning is beyond our analysis.

Amnon's sin had two aspects to it. There was the sin of sexual lust, but this was compounded by what he did with the results of the sin. This matches David's sin of lust with Bathsheba being then compounded by his shameful behaviour in murdering Uriah.

2Sa 13:17 Then he called his servant who ministered to him and said, Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her-
As suggested on :15, the bolting of the door suggested she was a crazy woman filled

with sexual lust who had to be excluded forcibly from a man's bedroom, and this she found more hurtful than the rape itself (:16).

2Sa 13:18 She had a garment of various colours on her; for with such robes were the king's daughters who were virgins dressed. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her-
Again we note the stress upon the door being bolted, which was done because she presumably wanted to return to talk with Amnon. And he wished to give the impression she had sexually thrown herself at him and was crazy.

2Sa 13:19 Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore her garment of various colours that was on her; and she laid her hand on her head, and went her way, crying aloud as she went-
A woman of lesser morality would perhaps have kept wearing the symbol of her virginity. But she tore it to show she had lost her virginity, indeed it had been torn from her, and she was in mourning for herself seeing nobody else was. We note the internal credibility of the account in that she had just been cooking, and so there were "ashes" readily available to her, which she threw onto her head.

2Sa 13:20 Absalom her brother said to her, Has Amnon your brother been with you?-
This continues the theme noted on :5, of specifics not being stated but implied. "Been with you" meant 'raped you', and Absalom's comment that she need not worry too much about it is tantamount to saying 'I will restore your honour by killing him'. We are left to reflect how it is that which is left unspoken, not specifically articulated, which is so often the sin.

But now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart. So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house-
See on :33. These words too were apparently suggested to him by Jonadab. He maybe advised Absalom "Tell her not to worry about it, because...". The subliminal suggestion was "Because you are going to regain her honour by killing Amnon". There are Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. Recall how the Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Even if I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it" (2 Cor. 7:8). He would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her.

2Sa 13:21 But when king David heard of all these things, he was very angry-
The internal credibility of the character portrayal in the record is shown again. For this is just how he reacted to Nathan's parable about the man who had taken a poor man's lamb.

As we go through the life of David, it is evident he went along roads few others have travelled. For example, who else would offer his sacrifice upon the altar and then start strumming his harp in praise as he watched the animal burn (Ps. 43:4 Heb.)? This was a new paradigm in Israelite worship. Like Job, David had no precedents in past spiritual history from which he could take comfort (Job 5:1). David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (2 Sam. 6:13-20; and 2 Sam. 19:21 = Ex.22:28), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David's sons, although not Levites, were "priests" (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not. He knew that the ideal standard for married life was one man: one woman, and yet he was somehow able to flout this and still be a man after God's own heart. He broke explicit Mosaic commandment by marrying Saul's wives and also his daughter, he airily waived the Mosaic law concerning bloodguiltiness (consider the implications of 2 Sam. 14:4-11), and the need to stone rapists (2 Sam. 13:21). When others tried to do these kind of things, they were severely punished by a God who insisted upon serious obedience to His Law. Consider how Saul was condemned for offering sacrifice instead of a priest (1 Sam. 13:10-13); and Uzziah likewise (2 Chron. 26:16-19). When the woman of Tekoah basically suggested that the Mosaic laws about the rights of the revenger of blood be repealed, David seems to have agreed. When Amnon seeks to rape his sister Tamar, she suggests that he ask David to allow them to marry- and surely, she says, he will agree. Yet this too would have been counter to the spirit of the Law about marriages to close relatives. Yet David went beyond the Law so often; and it is this which perhaps led him to commit the sin of presumption in his behaviour with Bathsheba. Right afterwards he comments about the man who stole his neighbour's sheep, that it must be restored fourfold; whereas the Law only stipulated double, David felt he so knew the spirit of the Law that he could break the letter of it- in any context. And this was his [temporary] downfall.

In the case of Amnon, the law of Moses offered two possible outcomes: death (Lev. 18:11; 20:17), or, to marry Tamar (Dr. 22:28,29). We see from this how God's law often gave different options for the result of sin- the options after adultery being a parade example. This was to teach engagement with the sinner and choosing the most loving outcome for that sin. But David choses neither of those options, despite claiming to love God's law. He simply gets angry. We note how David is "angry" with Absalom too

and he has to flee David's wrath (:37), and David refuses to see him for two years (2 Sam. 14:24). And yet he clearly loved his children despite that anger with them.

We note that David is "angry" with Amnon but doesn't discipline him. The contrast is clear with how he pronounced the death penalty upon the rich man who had selfishly stolen the poor man's only lamb. And in the Psalms he is quick enough to call for Divine death blows upon his enemies. But he says nothing at all about Amnon. We could argue on one hand that he had been humbled by his own salvation by grace, and therefore would not condemn others. And yet it could also be posited that he simply continued to not apply Divine law to his own life nor that of his family. If he was the king of Israel, he was to rule justly and govern. But his lack of disciplinary action or public condemnation shows a lack of both justice and government. This is in sharp contrast to how he earlier condemned the murder of Abner and would later condemn the murder of Amasa (2 Sam. 20). But he makes no public statement about Amnon's behaviour. And the same goes for his lack of public statement or outrage against Absalom's murder of Amnon (:36).

The NEB, LXX and the Qumran texts add: "And king David heard of all these things, and was very angry; but he did not grieve the spirit of his son Amnon, because be loved him, for he was his first-born". This sounds like his refusal to ever discipline Adonijah in 1 Kings 1:6; as he says in Ps. 38, he was left as a man in his mouth are no rebukes. Absalom later tells the men of Israel that David is incapable of giving them justice- as if this inability of David, his lack of attention to justice, was well known. This must be compared with how David in the Psalms so often condemns his enemies for their lack of justice, presenting himself as the just man of integrity. If he had really experienced total repentance, he would have appealed to others to live a Godly life, not lost his moral compass and continued to dispense justice; he promises he will do this in Psalms 32 and 51. A true sense of justice comes from passing through the process of sin, true repentance, being awed by the grace of forgiveness. But David doesn't pass through this process for very long, or at least, not very intensely. And so he loses justice and moral compass. For he distinctly failed to do justice and discipline with his own sons.

Amnon was David's firstborn, and the heir to the throne. David's hope was that his kingly line would continue through Amnon. If he had been more awed by the promises to him in 2 Sam. 7, he would have accepted that the line from him would not always be on the throne. But at some future point, the Messianic Son of God, son of David, would reign eternally and build up an eternal 'house' of God glorifying people. But David's focus was upon building up his own family, and that is perhaps a factor in why he didn't discipline Amnon and was so furious when Absalom killed him. David's hope would not have been for Absalom, because he was the son of a Gentile woman.

2Sa 13:22 Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar-
David's anger with Amnon (:21) is contrasted with Absalom's silence about the matter, whilst nursing hatred in his heart which was to come to fruition in the murder of his brother. David's passion, as discussed on :21, is therefore presented as more acceptable than Absalom's secret hatred which came to full term in murder.

Not good nor bad / evil means nothing at all. Adam's choice in Eden was that of everyman in every sin; it was a choice between a total "yes" or a total "no" to God. The desire was to know "good and evil"; and this term is used as an idiom for "everything" (Gen. 24:50; 2 Sam. 14:17,20), the whole area in between good and evil is in this sense "everything" (cp. Gen. 31:24; 2 Sam. 13:22). Adam and Eve were attracted by the possibility of experiencing everything, of having the total knowledge, the omniscience, which is with God alone. Their failure was more than simply eating a fruit; it involved rebellion and pride, a desire to be equal with God-

2Sa 13:23 It happened after two full years, that Absalom had sheep shearers in Baal Hazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons-
We note that David did not enforce the death penalty for Amnon, even though the law of Moses required this (Lev. 20:17). We compare this with how he ordered the death penalty for the man in the parable who had stolen the poor man's lamb, even though this was beyond the law's requirements. David had been spared the death penalty and so he reflected that grace to his son; and yet we sense there was also parental bias in the case. By not punishing Amnon with death, nor later Absalom, he allowed a situation to develop which would cause yet more bloodshed.

Absalom's hospitality was fake- he had an agenda. Just as David's was to Uriah when he gave him food and wine. We recall Nathan's parable to David- David had as it were provided a feast for another, but stole the lamb of Bathsheba as the meat. Again and again, there are echoes of David's behaviour in the disastrous actions of his sons- some strong echoes, some weaker. Some comparisons are direct [like Amnon's sexual lust reflecting David's], others like this one are more indirect.

2Sa 13:24 Absalom came to the king and said, See now, your servant has sheep shearers. Please let the king and his servants go with your servant-
Absalom comes over as hypocritical as describing himself as his father's servant, when he was planning to murder his father's son.

2Sa 13:25 The king said to Absalom, No, my son, let us not all go, lest we be burdensome to you. He pressed him; however he would not go, but blessed him-

The blessing probably involved a gift (1 Sam. 25:27). David surely guessed that there would be some plan by Absalom to slay Amnon, hence his weak argument that they all didn't need to go as it would be expensive for Absalom to entertain them all.

2Sa 13:26 Then Absalom said, If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us. The king said to him, Why should he go with you?-
Clearly David guessed what was going to happen, and in that lies the pain for David.

2Sa 13:27 But Absalom pressed him, and he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him-
We sense David's weakness, giving in to pressure, quite unlike in his days before his sin with Bathsheba. And of courses he had no specific reason to deny Amnon's presence, apart from his premonition that Absalom was planning to kill Amnon.

LXX adds that Absalom: "made a banquet like the banquet of the king". Clearly Absalom had his mind on becoming king and deposing his father. But David is duped by Absalom, even although he has premonitions about what is happening. Exactly the same is done to David by Amnon asking for permission to have Tamar visit him; and likewise Joab tricks David in 2 Sam. 14, even though David suspects what is going on ("Is not the hand of Joab with you in all this?"). In these, and other, incidents, we see David being treated as he had treated Uriah- he was deceived by David, although he surely had a strong premonition about what was really going on.

2Sa 13:28 Absalom commanded his servants saying, Mark now, when Amnon's heart is merry with wine; and when I tell you, 'Strike Amnon', then kill him. Don't be afraid. Haven't I commanded you? Be courageous, and be valiant!-
That Amnon was made drunk by Absalom recalls how David had made Uriah drunk. Every aspect of David's sins was now being repeated in the behaviour of his sons. Absalom's minimizing of the sin and urging the men to be valiant sounds like David's words to Joab after the murder of Uriah. David's usage of his servants is reflected in how Absalom uses servants to do his dirty work of murder. We note that Joab also used a servant to murder Absalom later. "Haven't I commanded you?" is a way of assuring the servants that he takes complete moral responsibility for the murder he is asking them to commit. Absalom's motives may not have simply been a desire for revenge against Amnon for raping his sister. It wasn't a case of blood revenge, avenging the blood of a slain relative. At best it was revenge for hurt pride. But more like it was using the rape as an excuse to eliminate Amnon as he was the firstborn and thereby heir to the throne. Had David resigned the kingship and taught his sons the wonder of the promises of 2 Sam. 7 about the future Lord Jesus, then this obsession with being king may not have been so strong in the sons.

2Sa 13:29 The servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man got up on his mule, and fled-
This is the first mention of mules in the Bible. They were cross bred in disobedience to Lev. 19:19. We get the impression that a generally slack attitude to what might have been considered minor matters of the law was associated with the major sin of murder. This is the problem when we start to think that some parts of God's laws can just be ignored. David was fond of them, having his own mule (1 Kings 1:33), and Solomon was willing to receive them as tribute (1 Kings 10:25).

2Sa 13:30 It happened, while they were in the way, that the news came to David, saying, Absalom has slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left!-
As to why this happened, see on :31. That such a gossip should arise is not surprising, once we realize that Absalom coveted the throne. He would not be against slaying all possible competitors for it, not least the firstborn son Amnon. This was clearly part of his motivation for the murder, and not simply vengeance for Tamar's rape.

Why did David initially believe that all his sons had died? I suggest it was to make him reflect on the promise of 2 Sam. 7, that from one of his descendants would come the Messianic seed who would build his true house. For Solomon was alive at this point so the promises could have come true through him. So David was being nudged towards concluding that a descendant of Solomon would eventually, after he "slept with his fathers", be the Messianic seed. David however had been so focused on his natural and immediate house as the fulfilment of the promises. And so he was given to understand that they had all perished, to attempt to refocus him upon the promises of a Messianic seed and house through Solomon [from where the Lord Jesus did indeed come]. But it is doubtful that this refocus in David's thinking was achieved, at least at this time. And so it is that through failure of our earthly family dreams that we too are intended to refocus upon the Lord Jesus and our ultimate sense of fulfilment solely through Him and the things of His house and Kingdom.

2Sa 13:31 Then the king arose, and tore his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn-
We wonder why David was given this false news to start with. It was perhaps to make him consider the possibility that all the promises about his "seed" had now been abrogated, seeing all his seed had been cut off. Those promises would have been in his mind as he lay on the earth. That posture however is associated with prayer. Perhaps he was praying that through his disgraced daughter Tamar, there would somehow come the promised Messianic seed. Through this trauma he was therefore driven closer to his

longing for the Christ, just as we may be, e.g., through a false alarm due to a cancer scare.

2Sa 13:32 Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother, answered, Don't let my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead; for by the appointment of Absalom this has been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar-
Jonadab is not specifically stated as having given the idea of this murder to Absalom, but given his behaviour from :5, suggesting sin in a subliminal way, we can assume that he had done the same. "Why not invite Amnon to a feast on your property, you can all get drunk together..." was the subliminal way of suggesting "And you can get him murdered there, away from the court scene in Jerusalem".

Jonadab tells David not to be too upset because only one of his sons is dead. Absalom likewise heartlessly tells Tamar not to be too upset about her rape. This all reflects David telling Joab not to be too upset about the death of Uriah and the other soldiers. This surely is the lesson we are to take, for otherwise the record of Jonadab's words here appears to be without function in the narrative. Jonadab's 'rubbing it in' was surely part of his support of his family in a possible plan to depose David from being king. Had David just humbly resigned, Jonadab would have had no role.

2Sa 13:33 Now therefore don't let my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead; for Amnon only is dead-
This idea of 'don't take it to heart' is exactly what Absalom said to Tamar (see on :20), and we are therefore led to believe that Absalom's words to Tamar were also put in his mind by Jonadab's suggestion. Jonadab knew exactly what was going to happen, even though he was not present; because it was all of his subliminal suggestion to Absalom. He was really a very evil man, but the world around us bombards us with such subliminal suggestion.

2Sa 13:34 But Absalom fled. The young man who kept the watch lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, many people were coming by the way of the hillside behind him-
This situation is going to be repeated when David later anxiously waits for news of the battle between his supporters and Absalom. He is going to again be waiting anxiously for the news from a messenger and weeping bitterly at the news of Absalom's death (2 Sam. 18:33). Situations repeat in our lives, and even if we cannot attach meaning to event at the time, we at least have the comfort that they bear the same hallmark of Divine involvement in our lives, according to some plan- even if we may not discern it.

2Sa 13:35 Jonadab said to the king, Behold, the king's sons are coming! It is as your servant said-
We sense his smugness. All this was of Jonadab's suggestion, living out the jealousy complex of his father against his brother David. As Jonadab's father had been jealous of his brother David, so now it was all repeating. For Absalom's desire to remove Amnon was not simply in order to avenge his sister, but because Amnon was in line for the throne which he coveted.

2Sa 13:36 It happened, as soon as he had finished speaking, that behold, the king's sons came, and lifted up their voice, and wept. The king also and all his servants wept bitterly-
Perhaps the bitterness of David's grief was because "Amnon" is a form of the word used in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:16, that his seed would be "established". He likely imagined that his firstborn son would perhaps be that promised seed. But now Amnon lay dead in shame, slain by his own brother, for having raped his own half sister. David's disappointment in his own family life ["my house is not so with God"] was intended to drive him more strongly towards faith in his future "son", the Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus.

2Sa 13:37 But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai the son of Ammihur, king of Geshur. David mourned for his son every day-
Talmai was Absalom's grandfather (2 Sam. 3:3). Had the Israelites driven out Geshur as they should have done (Josh. 13:13) and David not married a Gentile, then this situation might not have arisen. Absalom would have been left with no supportive place to run. "Geshur" means "joining" and such a joining in marriage to these people is another example of David's unwisdom with women.

David mourns now for Amnon but he had not mourned for the death of his son by Bathsheba, and his omission to do so had been noticed. Under God's guiding hand, all these sins and results of sin were used to educate David.

2Sa 13:38 So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years-
"Absalom fled" is stressed three times. Or this may also be because a longer account has been abridged, under inspiration. This would also account for the fragmentary style of the narrative at this point. "Three years" may be a summary period and not necessarily to be taken literally.

2Sa 13:39 King David longed to go forth to Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, since he was dead-

The sense of the Hebrew is that the king's wrath ceased to go forth against Absalom, he stopped persecuting him. For David could have recalled Absalom at any time, and even when he did, he refused to meet him for some time. The sense may be that he ceased trying to kill Absalom. But again there was no discipline. David had been saved from death by God's grace, but that grace didn't remove consequences, and God sought to educate David. David ought to have treated Absalom and Amnon likewise. But he doesn't reprove them nor seek to educate them, and in Absalom's case David just sought to murder him because he was so angry with him. And then got over it. There is no reflection here of the grace shown to him by God. Absalom later tried to kill David ("my own son seeks my life", 2 Sam. 16:11, "You seek the life of only one man... The advice pleased Absalom", 2 Sam. 17:4). Father and son both trying to murder each other shows how far David had fallen from his dream of having an immediate 'house' which would last eternally. His failure, and the failure of his 'house', was to try to focus him upon the promises of an eternal house through his great descendant, the Lord Jesus.

It's possible that David didn't remain feeling like this for Absalom; see on 2 Sam. 14:1,24. David had ineffable sadness in his personal life. He so loved his son Absalom, his very *soul* was *consumed* for that strapping young man (2 Sam. 13:39 AVmg.); but that son bitterly hated David, and coolly plotted to destroy him and his reputation. David loved Abigail and Ahinoam, but those fairy tale romances took a bitter blow when David fell for Bathsheba. David loved his parents, especially caring for their safe keeping in his wilderness years; only to be forsaken by them (the Hebrew means just that), and to be rejected by his brothers and sisters (Ps.27:10; 38:11; 69:8; 88:18). David loved Solomon and gave very special attention to teach him the real spirit of the Truth, taking time out from a hectic public life to do so; only for that beloved son to turn away in later life, to fast women, alcohol, materialism, and the perversions of idolatry. David's disappointment in his own family life ["my house is not so with God"] was intended to drive him more strongly towards faith in his future "son", the Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 14

2Sa 14:1 Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was towards Absalom-

We wonder at Joab's motives. Did he do this because he wanted David to get what he wanted, which was Absalom's return? Or because he wanted Absalom to be king? Men

seek for power. Some want to be the king who is crowned (Absalom would be a parade example). Others like Joab want to be the kingmaker, rejoicing that their power gave power to others. Biblical history is designed to help us realize that all the types of characters we meet have been around before, and we are to learn from how the Bible records their behaviour. But the Biblical record is often purposefully open, inviting us to imagine the possible situations and motivations. Hence the word translated "towards" is intentionally ambiguous. It can also mean "against", as in 2 Sam. 14:13; Dan. 11:28. In which case, Joab is seeking to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem and to manipulate David concerning Absalom. Such are the games people play, to this day; see on :24. If indeed David's heart was yearning for Absalom, we have to ask why Joab needed to persuade David to recall Absalom to Jerusalem. And why, after Absalom returned, did David refuse to meet him for some time? On :7 and :24 I suggest some reasons for this, if we retain the translation that David's heart was "toward" Absalom. However, it is clear that there is now tension between David and Joab. This again is understandable in view of the Uriah debacle, whereby David had used Joab to arrange the murder of Uriah with the deaths of other soldiers to cover it. All because David had stayed behind the battle front and slept with Uriah's wife. In the military fraternity, such behaviour is despicable, and surely Joab despised David from that day forward. David's behaviour left him bereft of his former supporters and condemned to a lonely life- although that too was intended to bring him closer to God and to the hope of his future Messianic Son.

2Sa 14:2 Joab sent to Tekoa and fetched there a wise woman and said to her, Please act like a mourner, and please put on mourning clothing and don't anoint yourself with oil, but be as a woman who has mourned a long time for the dead-

This continues the theme of subliminal suggestion in the previous chapter; see on 2 Sam. 13:6. This chapter is all about that. We get the impression that after the sin with Bathsheba, the once strong man David became the subject of all manner of manipulation. I have suggested before that if he had adequately repented and stayed like that, he would not have lost his moral compass and would not have been reduced to the weak figure he was. David walks right into the woman's deceptive story just as he does into Nathan's parable. The woman was "wise" or crafty, the same word used of Jonadab who likewise manipulated David (2 Sam. 13:3). The record is developing how David is repeatedly deceived and manipulated, as he had done with Uriah.

2Sa 14:3 Go in to the king, and speak like this to him. So Joab put the words in her mouth-

As noted on :2, the situation here recalls how Jonadab manipulated Amnon and put words and ideas in his head. Here Joab manipulates a woman in order to pursue his own agenda regarding Absalom.

2Sa 14:4 When the woman of Tekoa spoke to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, showed respect and said, Help, O king!-
This recalls how David had fallen with his face to the ground begging God somehow for a way forward after he had heard that all his sons had died (2 Sam. 13:31). This is another connection with the events of 2 Sam. 13.

2Sa 14:5 The king said to her, What ails you? She answered, Truly I am a widow, and my husband is dead-
Immediately David would have thought of how he had made Bathsheba a widow by murdering her husband.

2Sa 14:6 Your handmaid had two sons, and they both fought together in the field, and there was no one to part them, but the one struck the other and murdered him-
"Strove / fought" is the word used by Solomon in Prov. 13:10: "Pride only breeds quarrels, but with ones who take advice is wisdom". This is true, but so many of Solomon's Proverbs include some self justification. "Quarrels" is the word used here in the parable about the strivings between David's sons. He is implying that all the quarrels about his being the one to have the throne merely came from pride, and the wise will accept Solomon's kingship. He harnesses Divine truths in order to justify himself, and this is a warning for all who claim to hold Divine truth.

Two brothers fatally fighting in a field recalls Cain and Abel. The similarity is so clear that it must have been purposeful. Joab knows that Cain was not slain for his fratricide. However, Cain was exiled- and David could surely have played on this similarity to keep Absalom exiled. But instead he ends up swearing that nobody will harm the murderer. His spiritual sensitivity is not, it seems, at its best.

2Sa 14:7 Behold, the whole family has risen against your handmaid and they say, 'Deliver him who struck his brother, that we may kill him for the life of his brother whom he murdered, and so destroy the heir also'. Thus they would quench my coal which is left, and would leave to my husband neither name nor remainder on the surface of the earth-
It would appear that the legislation about the cities of refuge wasn't being practiced at this time. The parallel in David's family would suggest that "the whole family" wanted to kill Absalom, although it could be that they felt likewise about Amnon. The woman is arguing that the Mosaic laws about the avenging of blood didn't take into account her feelings as the mother of the brother who had to be slain. And further, the principle of keeping the name of the dead alive would be broken. She correctly argues that principles are in conflict in this case; and this is often the situation when any legal code,

including the Mosaic, is applied. Thus the Lord brings out the point that priests "worked on the Sabbath" to circumcise a child. The reason for these clashes of principle within Divine law was in order to force people to perceive the spirit of the law, and follow that and not the letter. The very structure of the Mosaic law was therefore actually designed to guard against legalistic approaches to it.

"The whole family" suggests all David's family were against Absalom. The emphasis on "the whole family" reflects the situation in David's family, and that includes Bathsheba. David alone was sympathetic to Absalom, just as the woman alone in her family was sympathetic to her son. Perhaps this is one reason for the apparent contradiction [depending upon the translation we choose] between David's heart being with Absalom, and yet keeping him in exile and refusing to meet him when he did return. Likewise we wonder whether Bathsheba was now manipulating David so that her son Solomon would be in line for the throne rather than Absalom. Repeatedly now, David presents as under the influence of others and having very little personal power of decision as king. He would've been far better to resign as king and focus upon the wonderful promise of his future Messianic Son and his own assurance of salvation. We also note that the hearts of Israel were with Absalom. So we see yet a further fracture within Israel, between the people generally and the royal family.

"My coal which is left" is the image of a fire going out apart from one live coal. A man and his descendants are called a light. It is used of David in 2 Sam. 21:17, and specifically of David's descendant in Ps. 132:17. The story is hitting at David's weakest and most essential point, i.e. that he was desperate for a physical descendant to continue his throne. But he ought not to have been so sensitive to this if he trusted in the promise of 2 Sam. 7 that his future descendant, after his death, would be God's Son who would build a house / family for both God and David.

Joab knew that David considered Absalom his only coal on the hearth. His hopes were set on him alone as the heir to his throne. David has other sons including Solomon, but Joab perceived that David considered Absalom his one and only. And so he puts this position in the mouth of the woman. Had David had more faith and focus on the promises of 2 Sam. 7 about his seed, he would not have had these obsessions. This explains his extreme grief when Absalom dies.

"Rose up against" is the same phrase used in 2 Sam. 12:11 of how evil who rise up against David from his own house. He is being set up to see the woman as himself, and he naturally wants to show mercy to her as he wanted it for himself. He wanted the consequence of sin, evil rising up against him from his own house, to be abrogated; and so he is eager to do this for the woman. In Ps. 3:1 David uses the same phrase to complain that many have risen up against him, lamenting the consequences of his sins.

The context there is Absalom's rebellion. He uses the phrase about the wicked rising against him, wishing their judgment, in Ps. 54:3; 86:14; 92:11.

The argument that her husband would be left with no name in the earth, meaning he would lose his inheritance, is tantamount to saying that the woman would be left in the same position as Naomi. David, as a descendant of Ruth and also Naomi, would immediately have sensed the difficulty for the woman and been inclined, given his ancestry, to decide for her. It was indeed a cunningly devised scenario that manipulated him into saying "yes". Just as he had used all his cunning against Bathsheba and Uriah.

2Sa 14:8 The king said to the woman, Go to your house, and I will give a command concerning you-
The slayer of innocent blood was to be slain without pity: "you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you" (Dt. 19:13). But David seems to have stepped up to a higher level when he told the woman of Tekoah that he would protect her son from revenge murder, after he had slain another man. The woman pointed out that if her son was slain, the inheritance would be lost in her husband's name. Here was a case where two principles seemed to be at variance: the need to slay the guilty, and the need to preserve the inheritance. The higher level was to forgive the slayer of innocent blood, even though the Law categorically stated that he should be slain. The Law of Moses is full of such examples of where different levels of response are offered. Thus in the case of adultery, a man could apply the trial of jealousy (Num. 5), kill his wife, divorce her- or, forgive her, as Hosea did. The very existence of these different levels of response is designed, as they are today, to elicit our maximum level of response. For it surely is always a case of "my utmost for His highest", and a minimalist response to His grace is self evidently inappropriate. And yet again we wonder whether as with bringing the ark to Zion and not disciplining Amnon, David was acting above the law in an inappropriate way.

What should David have done? There was Mosaic legislation protecting those being hunted by revengers of blood. Their cases were to be fairly judged, and refuge given in a city of refuge. This woman implies that the family want to kill her son in order to take the and inheritance for themselves; and there was Mosaic legislation to ameliorate that. But David ignores all this, as he does when it comes to responding to Amnon's rape of Tamar. He instead himself gives a 'commandment', again showing himself to be above the law and playing God.

2Sa 14:9 The woman of Tekoa said to the king, My lord O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house; and the king and his throne be guiltless-
"The iniquity" in view would perhaps refer to the disobedience which she was suggesting to the laws about the avenging of blood. She wanted more than what David

had said, she wanted a concrete pronouncement from him as it were abrogating obedience to that law. And she said she would bear the iniquity of doing so. But this is not how guilt for sin or abrogating God's law is to be dealt with. David was being provoked to consider taking upon himself the "sin" of not demanding Absalom's blood be shed, and indeed restoring him.

2Sa 14:10 The king said, Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you any more-
So David is waiving the Mosaic law concerning bloodguiltiness, as he did the need to stone rapists (2 Sam. 13:21). When others tried to do these kind of things, they were severely punished by a God who insisted upon serious obedience to His Law. Consider how Saul was condemned for offering sacrifice instead of a priest (1 Sam. 13:10-13); and Uzziah likewise (2 Chron. 26:16-19). When the woman of Tekoah basically suggested that the Mosaic laws about the rights of the revenger of blood be repealed, David seems to agree. When Amnon seeks to rape his sister Tamar, she suggests that he ask David to allow them to marry- and surely, she says, he will agree. Yet this too would have been counter to the spirit of the Law about marriages to close relatives. Yet David went beyond the Law so often; and it is this which perhaps led him to commit the sin of presumption in his behaviour with Bathsheba. Right afterwards he comments about the man who stole his neighbour's sheep, that it must be restored fourfold; whereas the Law only stipulated double, David felt he so knew the spirit of the Law that he could break the letter of it- in any context. And this was his [temporary] downfall.

As we go through the life of David, it is evident he went along roads few others have travelled. For example, who else would offer his sacrifice upon the altar and then start strumming his harp in praise as he watched the animal burn (Ps. 43:4 Heb.)? This was a new paradigm in Israelite worship. Like Job, David had no precedents in past spiritual history from which he could take comfort (Job 5:1). David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (2 Sam. 6:13-20; and 2 Sam. 19:21 = Ex.22:28), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David's sons, although not Levites, were "priests" (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not. He knew that the ideal standard for married life was one man: one woman, and yet he was somehow able to flout this and still be a man after God's own heart. He broke explicit Mosaic commandment by marrying Saul's wives and also his daughter.

2Sa 14:11 Then she said, Please let the king remember Yahweh your God so that the

avenger of blood destroy not any more, lest they destroy my son. He said, As Yahweh lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the earth-
As explained on :10, this is David waiving parts of God's law, and yet doing so from an understanding of grace and pity. And of course the whole situation was designed to lead him to agree to apply these principles to Absalom. But the parody is that Absalom's famous hairs did fall to the ground and were the cause of his death. David's oath that the murderer's hairs would not fall to the earth was in fact not for him to make; for God ensured this did in fact happen to Absalom. Again David is presented as duped and powerless, just as Uriah and Bathsheba were whom he in turn had abused whilst he had power.

2Sa 14:12 Then the woman said, Please let your handmaid speak a word to my lord the king. He said, Say on-
The woman isn't prepared to leave things at the level of subliminal appeal. Perhaps now she speaks on her own behalf, and no longer following the script Joab had given her. The next verses appear to be her own more spiritual argument, at the end of which she basically admits she has been set up to say the script she just has; but despite that, in spiritual terms, she can see a good case for having Absalom back.

2Sa 14:13 The woman said, Why then have you devised such a thing against the people of God? For in speaking this word the king is as one who is guilty, in that the king does not bring home again his banished one-
The woman understood the implications of the promise in Eden when she tells David that “neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him” (2 Sam. 14:14 AV). Whom did God banish? Adam, and all his children. But God ‘devised means’ through the promises of Gen. 3:15 so that this banishment was not permanent expulsion. The means devised was the death and resurrection of His Son, the seed of the woman. But the woman’s point was that therefore, David ought to restore his sinful son, whom he had banished- for “the king does not fetch home again his banished” (2 Sam. 14:13). Her point was that as God sought to restore His banished sons, through the pain and cost to Him of the blood of His Son, so we ought to likewise be inspired to win back the banished. And so we look to those banished from ecclesial life by disfellowship, church politics, personal animosities of past decades, or simply their own outright sins; or those marginalized by poverty, education, disability, health, geography... these are the banished whom we ought to be winning back. And the power in all this arises from the implications of those promises in Eden. Truly the woman of Tekoah was, as she is described, a “wise woman”.

2Sa 14:14 For we must die, and are as water split on the ground, which can't be gathered up again; neither does God take away life, but devises means that he who is banished not be an outcast from him-
Literally, dying we shall die. But that was indeed the wages of sin defined in Eden. Like David, she struggled with accepting the consequences for sin. But she correctly reasons that despite that curse, God devises means to save us out of that just judgment. And again she is correct that we should reflect that in our judgments and efforts for others' salvation.

Her point was that as God in some sense breaks His own laws, e.g. that sin leads to permanent death, so surely David likewise could have the same spirit of grace and bring about the salvation of someone rightly appointed to death. See on :13. It could be argued that her logic is wrong, for the wages of sin is indeed death and God in that sense does take away life. But perhaps her point is that God indeed told Adam that in the day he sinned he would die; but in His grace, He didn't carry out that sentence immediately. Just as Nineveh wasn't destroyed in 40 days as God had stated. Instead, God gave more time- in the hope that Adam would not have to be outcast, and His purpose was to bring Adam back into Eden. That was why God didn't make Adam die "in the day" that he ate of the fruit. And so, the woman reasons, if God's attitude to death and punishment shows such grace, we surely ought to not insist upon His law of death for sinners being immediately obeyed. We should follow His example of letting His grace and hope for our restoration be stronger than the need to punish sin with death.

"God doth not take away life, but devises devices (lit. thinks thoughts, cp. :13 and Dan. 6:14 "the king [Darius]... set his heart on Daniel to save him; and he struggled until the going down of the sun to save him") to the end that he may not [utterly] banish a banished one". This is an allusion to God's grace in sparing David's life when he had deserved death for despising Yahweh's word, adultery and murder. Despite the law stating that, God 'thought thoughts' to get David out it. We think of the king thinking thoughts all night to try to get Daniel out of the prescribed death sentence. All God's work with man through His Son is in effect the same, a thinking of thoughts to save us from our rightful desert, which is death. And Joab knew this would appeal to David's spiritual mind, and he asks David [through the woman] to do the same for Absalom. We likewise are to reflect God's plan for us in likewise seeking to restore the banished and devising devices to save people from what they deserve. Legalistic judgmental Christianity and church politics is the exact opposite of this.

The argument was that death is final, and so we may as well try to reconcile with each other in this life. David had made it clear that he held out no hope to ever again see his first child by Bathsheba. And now he is taken in by similar reasoning- that he ought to reconcile with Absalom because this life is all we have for relationships. This could

tacitly reflect a lack of faith in resurrection and future judgment; again, a lack of faith in the promises of 2 Sam. 7.

2Sa 14:15 Now therefore seeing that I have come to speak this word to my lord the king, it is because the people have made me afraid: and your handmaid said, 'I will now speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant'-
The woman has now totally departed from the script Joab had given her, contrasting positively with how in the previous chapter, Absalom followed Jonadab's script exactly. She admits she has been put up to what she has done. And she seems to be saying that despite this, she does indeed see the logic in the request. See on :12.

2Sa 14:16 For the king will hear, to deliver his servant out of the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God-
I suggested on :12,15 that she admits she has been set up with her story. So I think here she means "the king *would have* heard me, had I really been in such a case as I presented to him". The woman claims the avengers would destroy both her son and herself. To slay her was definitely outside of the scope of blood revenge. But David doesn't seek to apply God's commandments, he just gives his own commandment above Divine law. In the parallel being created between the woman and David, he likewise feared death at the hands of his own family. Absalom is recorded as seeking his death, but quite possibly other sons wanted it as well, as they all madly scrabbled for the throne. Truly David had enemies from within his own house, from the house of Saul, from about every opportunist.

2Sa 14:17 Then your handmaid said, 'Please let the word of my lord the king bring rest; for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad. May Yahweh your God be with you'-
See on :20. Adam's choice in Eden was that of everyman in every sin; it was a choice between a total "yes" or a total "no" to God. The desire was to know "good and evil"; and this term is used as an idiom for "everything" (Gen. 24:50; 2 Sam. 14:17,20), the whole area in between good and bad / evil is in this sense "everything" (cp. Gen. 31:24; 2 Sam. 13:22). Adam and Eve were attracted by the possibility of experiencing everything, of having the total knowledge, the omniscience, which is with God alone. Their failure was more than simply eating a fruit; it involved rebellion and pride, a desire to be equal with God.

In this context, the woman means that she recognizes David's great sensitivity and wisdom, and knows that he would see through her story as a put up situation. But she truly respects him and wishes Yahweh to be with the king. Indeed it seems David was

well known for his sensitivity and the ability to hide things from him (see on 2 Sam. 18:13). His wide life experience mixed with his spirituality led to this sensitivity.

2Sa 14:18 Then the king answered the woman, Please don't hide anything from me that I ask you. The woman said, Let my lord the king now speak-
David uses the words of Joshua to Achan (Josh. 7:19), possibly implying he thinks she has sinned and needs to repent for her part in this ruse to manipulate him.

2Sa 14:19 The king said, Is the hand of Joab with you in all this? The woman answered, As your soul lives, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has spoken; for your servant Joab, he urged me, and he put all these words in the mouth of your handmaid-
The woman's honesty is commendable, and she contrasts well with Absalom in the parallel situation of the previous chapter, who was manipulated by Jonadab. "Urged" is the usual word "commanded", as if Joab had in some way ordered or even manipulated this women to in turn try to manipulate David.

David is duped by Absalom, even although he has premonitions about what is happening. Exactly the same is done to David by Amnon asking for permission to have Tamar visit him; and likewise Joab tricks David in 2 Sam. 14, even though David suspects what is going on ("Is not the hand of Joab with you in all this?"). In these, and other, incidents, we see David being treated as he had treated Uriah- he was deceived by David, although he surely had a strong premonition about what was really going on.

2Sa 14:20 to change the face of the matter has your servant Joab done this thing-
AV "to bring about this form of speech", in other words, the entire performance from her had been designed to David pronounce that the law about the avenging of blood could be suspended in her case; and thereby set a legal precedent for the return of Absalom.

My lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are on the earth-
David's soul was broken as a result of his own mistakes and his general experience of life. David's depression resulted in him manifesting all the classic characteristics of the highly strung person. But it led him to his great sensitivity and almost telepathic ability to enter into other's problems was legendary throughout Israel, and this was one of the things which endeared him to his people (1 Sam. 22:22; 2 Sam. 14:17,20; 18:13)- and there is a powerful similarity here with our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The woman thought that Angels know everything and therefore David was like an Angel. Angels don't know *everything*. Yet the woman's immature concept isn't corrected. This

is not the style of God's engagement with us through the Bible, and it explains why the wrong ideas about demons aren't corrected specifically in the New Testament.

Yet David has been duped by the woman into swearing to her about her son, and thereby opening himself up to having to let his son Absalom return from exile. He doesn't know everything, yet the woman says he is as an / the Angel who knows all (:17,20). We wonder if she was being ironic. But David had earlier deceived Achish into thinking that he was as an Angel of Yahweh and therefore was telling the truth when he falsely claimed he was fighting and killing his fellow Israelites (1 Sam. 29:9). That was another low point in David's life, for which he apparently had taken no judgment. But now he is again paraded as an Angel of Yahweh- but clearly in an ironic sense, for he has been shown to *not* be like an Angel of Yahweh in that he has been deceived. Again, these things are not mere karma, but God's judgments seeking to educate and humble David towards final salvation.

2Sa 14:21 The king said to Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing. Go therefore, bring the young man Absalom back-
"Bring... back" is the word also used for the return of the exiles. I have suggested that all the historical records were rewritten with the exiles in view. This theme of those who deserved to stay in exile being restored by grace was appropriate to them; although most refused to accept they had done anything wrong, and preferred the life in exile.

2Sa 14:22 Joab fell to the ground on his face, showed respect, and blessed the king. Joab said, Today your servant knows that I have found grace in your sight, my lord O king, in that the king has performed the request of his servant-
Clearly Joab had previously asked David to restore Absalom, so it was obvious the woman had been set up by Joab."Performed the request of his servant" uses the very words of :20 "Your servant Joab has done [s.w. "performed"] this thing [s.w. "request"]". Joab absolutely accepts he had manipulated the woman, and we sense he is ecstatic that he has got his way. There is no record of any contact between him and Absalom at this stage. As discussed on :1, we are still left wondering whether Joab wants this because he wants David to get what he wants; or whether he wants to play the kingmaker in making Absalom king, although he later falls out with Absalom and turns against him.

2Sa 14:23 So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem-
Joab was certainly enthusiastic for Absalom's return, personally going to Geshur to

escort him. It was a round trip of 500 km., a major journey. See on :1 and :22 as to his motives.

2Sa 14:24 The king said, Let him return to his own house, but let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and didn't see the king's face-
If David was indeed still longing to see Absalom as he was in 2 Sam. 13:39, we wonder why he would say this. I discussed on :1 how the word translated "towards" is intentionally ambiguous. It can also mean "against", and we are left guessing whether David's heart is towards or against Absalom; and that affects how we understand Joab's game plan. The narrative creates suspense and has all the elements of a good story, as the readership is left wondering about these things. This was a paradigm in literature far ahead of its time in contemporary writings. David may have changed his feelings about Absalom when he perceived that in fact Absalom wanted the throne from David. Or perhaps the ambiguity in the narrative reflects David's own mixed feelings. Part of him indeed wanted to see Absalom (2 Sam. 13:39), and he shared the argument of the woman of Tekoah about showing him grace. But another part of him recognized that Absalom wanted to kill him as he had Amnon, in order to take the throne for himself.

Allowing Absalom to come to live in Jerusalem but keeping him a captive of the court, unable to meet David, suggests David only half forgave him, because to 'see the face' meant to have all sin or offence forgiven. David thus failed to reflect the total forgiveness he had received, despite his repentance not being very long lasting nor deep. Instead he made an issue with the quality of Absalom's repentance. Had he disciplined and forgiven Absalom, as God had done to him, the rebellion may well not have happened. And he ought to have focused his sons upon the great promises of 2 Sam. 7 concerning the future king, thereby making present kingship meaningless.

According to how we translate, David's heart was for Absalom but he refused to speak with him nor see his face. As discussed on :7, one explanation of that apparent contradiction is that Bathsheba's influence may have been exerted to keep Absalom in disgrace for the sake of Solomon. In this case, the David who once controlled and used Bathsheba is now having the same done to him by Bathsheba. We recall how later, Bathsheba reminds David that he has promised her that her son Solomon will be his heir to the throne. Clearly she had manipulated him to get this out of him.

2Sa 14:25 Now in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him-
Absalom is presented as similar to Saul- externally attractive to Israel, and apparently the man born to be king according to his appearance. "No blemish" is the language of how the High Priest and sacrifices were to be. His "crown" of hair would then be

associated with the High Priest's mitre, imitated by the uncut hair of the Nazirite. All this suggests that potentially he could indeed have been a priest-king. There were many potential ways forward for the promises to David to be fulfilled, and perhaps he was one of them. And yet they all came to nothing, Solomon especially, until they came to full term in the work and person of the Lord Jesus.

2Sa 14:26 When he cut the hair of his head (now it was at every year's end that he cut it; because it was heavy on him, therefore he cut it); he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels, after the king's weight-
Immediately we sense his vanity, cutting his own hair and weighing it. Possibly he was a Nazirite and was making a big show of renewing the vow every year, thus hiding his vanity behind a front of religious piety. LXX "two hundred shekels according to the royal shekel", GNB "about five pounds according to the royal standard of weights" David had apparently standardized the weight of a shekel. This would have been the equivalent to the "shekel of the sanctuary" often mentioned in the law of Moses. The priests were intended to have a standard shekel which was kept in the sanctuary; but it seems David did this priestly work by creating such a shekel. This is yet another example of David acting as priest and spiritual leader of Israel, effectively as High Priest.

2Sa 14:27 To Absalom there were born three sons and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a beautiful appearance-
This woman was named after Absalom's sister whom Amnon had raped. LXX adds "and she became the wife of Roboam the son of Solomon, and bare him Abia" although that contradicts 1 Kings 15:2; 2 Chron. 11:20-22. According to 2 Sam. 18:18, Absalom had no sons. Perhaps his three sons of 2 Sam. 14:27 had died in their youth or childhood. for infant mortality was high in those times. Or maybe he had fallen out with them, and they had disowned each other.

LXX adds: "And there were born to Absalom three sons and one daughter, and her name was Tamar: she was a very beautiful woman, and she becomes the wife of Rehoboam son of Solomon, and she bears to him Abijah". If LXX is correct then this incestuous marriage was used by God in the line of His Son: "Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, Abijah begot Asa" (Mt. 1:7).

2Sa 14:28 Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem; and he didn't see the king's face-
To see a king's face implies acceptance by him. So as discussed above, David's longing to see Absalom in 2 Sam. 13:39 had changed. Something had changed, and I suggest that may have been because he perceived that Absalom wanted him dead because he wanted the throne.

2Sa 14:29 Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king; but he would not come to him: and he sent again a second time, but he would not come-
Joab had clearly promised Absalom that he could get him an audience with the king. But something had changed; perhaps Absalom had made clear his plans to kill his father and become king. Or there had been some personal fallout between Absalom and Job. Or maybe Joab decided that his own pride and power could not or would not be best served by being a kingmaker to Absalom, but would be better served by continued loyalty to David.

2Sa 14:30 Therefore he said to his servants, Behold, Joab's field is near mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire. Absalom's servants set the field on fire-
We note how the ruling classes of Israel had their own forms of livelihood. Saul still retained his farm, Absalom had sheep, Joab grew barley. There was no very developed system of taxation for the ruling classes to live off. Again, the record has absolute internal consistency. Likewise in 2 Sam. 23:11, Shammah defended a field of barley because it was valuable to the Israelites. And in this we have a corroboration of this record with how Absalom had burnt Joab's field of barley. We may wonder why Joab slew Absalom. It could have been that to lose a field of barley was to lose food for many months or even a year. It was therefore a major loss to Joab. As Shammah defended a field of barley with his life, so Joab was so vengeful at the loss of his field of barley that he later slew Absalom.

All these dramas were related to David's sin with Bathsheba. He had a neighbour, Uriah, to whom he did great wrong because of the fire of his own lust. And so here too we see neighbours in similar conflict and David's son Absalom behaving nastily against his own neighbour. We note too how Absalom makes two attempts to get his way and then in frustration, acts foolishly and violently. Likewise David tried twice to manipulate Uriah (2 Sam. 11:8,13) and in frustration plots violence against him after those two frustrations.

2Sa 14:31 Then Joab arose and came to Absalom to his house and said to him, Why have your servants set my field on fire?-
The plan of getting Joab to come to him certainly worked, although it was a desperate one.

2Sa 14:32 Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent to you saying, 'Come here, that I may send you to the king to say, Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still. Now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there is iniquity in me, let him kill me'-

Job had had a change of mind as to how Absalom could best serve his own interests of pride and power, and the result of that was that Absalom was left in limbo. There certainly was iniquity in Absalom because he had slain his brother Amnon. We see here how conscience for sin so easily declines over time, and the passage of the years works a kind of pseudo atonement. But God's dealing with sin is not like this. We may forget about past sins or the wonder of having been forgiven them, but God doesn't (2 Pet. 1:9).

Absalom is asking for David to regard him as either guilty or innocent; to slay him for his sin of murdering Amnon, or forgive him and allow him to live a normal life. Absalom complains that living in this half-forgiveness is an unbearable position. David saw Absalom play out before his eyes the case of a person who was only half forgiven, or who felt that way whilst the one they had offended awaited their fuller penitence. This was exactly how David was. God was waiting for fuller penitence and David like Absalom was miserable until he would reach that point. David was waiting fuller penitence from Absalom, but it seems to me that this was just what God was waiting for from David. Absalom should either be kept in exile, slain- or totally forgiven. But David was operating a policy in between those Biblical options, just as many churches and individuals do today in struggling to accept others. And so providence made such a case play out before David's eyes to bring him to understand that semi penitence is an unbearable position both for the sinner and for God the forgiver.

2Sa 14:33 So Joab came to the king and told him; and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom-
We are not told the content of their discussion or whether David formally extended forgiveness to Absalom. The next we read in 2 Sam. 15 is that Absalom is moving freely in Jerusalem and garnering support for his putsch. The depth of coverage of the record varies; we are given detailed descriptions of Tamar kneading the dough for the cakes she made Amnon, whereas here, when we would love to know what David and Absalom said to each other- there is nothing. Did Absalom repent? Did David forgive? What was the role of Joab? I suggest that this is intentional, because these records are designed to promote our reflection and imagination, so that we might enter deeper into the characters portrayed.

Under the law, Absalom should have died. But David thinks that he can just lift the entire consequence for Absalom's sin; just as he expects God to remove all the consequences of his sin, and chafes at any suffering because of his sins. We recall how he begged God not to slay his first son by Bathsheba, but that request wasn't heard. The hollowness of David's life is shown by how he kisses Absalom yet clearly with misgivings, and then Absalom goes on to use kisses to usurp David (2 Sam. 15:5).

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 15

2Sa 15:1 It happened after this, that Absalom prepared him a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him-

"Prepared" or "established" is a major theme in the promises of the eternal establishment of David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12,13,16 etc.), and Absalom thought he could prepare / establish his own kingdom, himself. Solomon wrongly assumed that the conditional nature of the promises concerning the seed were just irrelevant to him as he had wisdom. Therefore he uses the word of how his kingdom has been "established" (1 Kings 2:24 s.w.). Solomon's contenders for the throne were all stopped by God, they tried to prepare or establish themselves but it never worked out (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5); and so surely Solomon has the idea in mind that he has been established as the promised Messianic seed of David with an eternally "established" throne and kingdom. This leads him to the conclusion that the outcome of wisdom and folly is in this life, and he has no perspective of a final day of judgment and eternal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. This is why the simplistic dichotomies he presents in Proverbs between the blessed and wise, and the cursed and foolish, are not always true to observed experiences in this life. For it is the future Kingdom which puts them in ultimate perspective.

But "prepared" is also the word for 'to get / obtain' and thus connects to the prohibition upon the king of Israel to get chariots and horses (Dt. 17:16). Absalom is therefore presented as the king Israel doesn't need. And yet David had horses and chariots and is positively accepted in the narrative... because his heart condition was acceptable to God.

Having men run before his chariot meant Absalom was having himself proclaimed as king. 1 Sam. 8:11 had warned that the king they desired would be so vain as to have men so this. And yet both Absalom and Adonijah (1 Kings 1:5) did so, reflecting their ignorance of God's word.

2Sa 15:2 Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate. It was so, that whenever any man had a suit which should come to the king for judgement, then Absalom called to him and said, What city are you from? He said, Your servant is of one of the tribes of Israel-

This is the situation which David complains of in Ps. 69:12: "Those who sit in the gate talk against me". *This Psalm contains words which are later applied to the Lord's death; and we will see later that David's sufferings for sin during Absalom's rebellion exactly match the Lord's sufferings when He carried the judgment for sin*. It was David's own

son who stood in the gate talking against his own father (2 Sam. 15:2-6). This was the typical consequence of David's sin with Bathsheba which Nathan had predicted; and yet when it happened, David complains about it, as if still struggling to accept Nathan's words, and not focused enough upon the simple wonder of the fact he had been forgiven and his life preserved by God's amazing grace.

2Sa 15:3 Absalom said to him, Behold, your matters are good and right; but there is no man deputised by the king to hear you-
We note his hypocrisy. He criticizes David for not delegating power because David wants it all for himself; as an excuse for Absalom wanting power. Absalom has no interest in justice, only in his own power. For he tells everyone that their case is good and just- and he will give them what they want if he is the judge. We note that David had centralized judicial power in himself; and yet he was hopelessly compromised as a judge by what he had done with Uriah and Bathsheba.

Heb. 'There is no king to hear you'. David was effectively not functioning as king and not dispensing justice. He should therefore have resigned from the job. David is presented as desperately clinging on to power and being king in name only and not function. He should have focused his life on the promises of his Messianic Son eternally being king instead of him. All clinging on to power likewise reflects a lack of full focus on the Lord and His Kingdom. We can cling on to power in relationships, in business, in church life... No matter how small our power is.

2Sa 15:4 Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that each man who has any suit or cause might come to me, and I would do him justice!-
Absalom told everyone that he would give them justice, even though the people who came to him were probably against each other. He promised whatever people wanted, in return for them giving him power. This is the spirit of politics to this day. David's inability to dispense justice is seen in his lack of discipline of Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah his sons. As discussed before, his lack of moral compass and judgment after the Bathsheba affair cannot be simply ascribed to his feeling that he had not been condemned and so he was not going to condemn others. Rather I suggest does it reflect a lack of abiding penitence and awe at God's personal grace to him. Those who have truly experienced the repentance-forgiveness-peace with God process in a matter are always very clear that what they did was wrong, and are the first to urge similar sinners towards repentance. But despite David's promise to do this in Ps. 32 and elsewhere, there's no evidence he does so in an ongoing sense. There is e.g. no special campaign by David to educate Israel as to the folly of adultery, deception and murder.

"Do justice" is better translated 'to justify'. Absalom was promising every man that he would justify them, count them as right even if they weren't. This is what God had done

to David by forgiving his sins regarding Uriah. But David doesn't do it for others, he didn't reflect the grace shown to him. Simply because he didn't proactively get involved with people. Perhaps after being tricked by the woman from Tekoah, he pulled back from involvement in judging cases.

2Sa 15:5 It was so, that when any man came near to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and took hold of him and kissed him-
This could imply that he didn't let people prostrate themselves before him, but lifted them up and hugged them. This was the style of greeting used by Joab in 2 Sam. 20:9, and we wonder if this continues the theme of the last two chapters- a man influencing another. Maybe we are to get the hint that Joab was influencing Absalom still, although when Absalom finally grabs power, Joab decides to still support David.

Perhaps the focus is on "any man", "all Israel" (:6). He gave every man the impression he thought they were right simply because they came to him. We thereby see the paradox: he offered justice, but actually he was simply pronouncing every man to be in the right. That is not justice. And we see the same today. Solomon alludes to his brother when in Proverbs he condemns the unjust judge who justifies the wicked.

2Sa 15:6 Absalom did this sort of thing to all Israel who came to the king for judgement. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel-
LXX "made his own"; the hearts of Israel were stolen from David to Absalom. Perhaps this was to make David reflect upon how he had stolen the lamb of Uriah, according to Nathan's parable. Solomon's later condemnations of those who steal were true enough (Prov. 6:30; 9:17), but as ever with the Proverbs, Solomon harnesses God's truth to his own justification and the criticism of those whose supporters he deemed were still a threat to his throne.

2Sa 15:7 It happened at the end of forty years that Absalom said to the king, Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to Yahweh, in Hebron-
"Forty years" creates chronological problems. Some texts read "four years". I have elsewhere commented that this is a symbolic period and not to be always read literally; for if the forty year reigns of Saul, David and Solomon are read literally, we again have chronological problems. Absalom's claim to have vowed to Yahweh was again hypocritical. There is no historical record of him having made such a vow, nor of his presence in Hebron, the previous capital of Judah before Jerusalem was taken from the Jebusites. Hebron would have been the second city in Judah after Jerusalem. It was his birthplace, so perhaps that fact was being twisted by him.

Absalom was lying, and not lying very well. Because if the vow related to his return to Jerusalem, why did he ask permission from David to go offer his sacrifice in Hebron?

Absalom had been back from exile for some time, so why now at this point announce he had to pay a vow for returning from exile? David surely picked up on this, as the lie is obvious. Absalom had lied to him previously about the reason for taking Amnon to another town- where he murdered him. So David agreed but with a premonition about what was to happen. Just as he had sent Uriah to his death with Uriah having a strong premonition about the deception.

2Sa 15:8 For your servant vowed a vow while I stayed at Geshur in Syria saying, 'If Yahweh shall indeed bring me again to Jerusalem, then I will serve Yahweh'-
Jacob had vowed: "If God will be with me... then shall Yahweh be my God: and this stone... shall be God's house" (Gen. 28:20-22- words quoted by faithless Absalom in 2 Sam. 15:8). The implication was that Jacob didn't consider Yahweh to be his God at that time. And yet God had promised Abraham that he would be the God of his seed (Gen. 17:7,8); Jacob was aware of these promises, and yet he is showing that he did not accept their personal relevance to him at this time. And Absalom quoted them about himself. This accords with how Amnon likewise quoted words of Joseph out of context to justify his sin against Tamar. Likewise Bible phrases and precedents can be quote right out of context in order t justify what is clearly wrong. Absalom was kidding himself that murdering or deposing his father was going to be 'serving Yahweh', just as all manner of evil is done in the name of doing God service. Perhaps the Lord alludes to this in Jn. 16:2. See on 2 Sam. 17:13.

Absalom alludes to Jacob's vow at Bethel. Which in fact Jacob never kept. So Absalom's allusion to Jacob's vow reflects his surface level spirituality, making vague Biblical allusion to justify his own fleshly agenda. Which we can all be guilty of.

2Sa 15:9 The king said to him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron-
David had enough power to still need to give Absalom his blessing to travel. And he must have guessed what would happen. But he was hopelessly compromised. It had been the same when Absalom had begged the king to allow Amnon to come to his shearing festivity, when David again had surely guessed what would happen. As with allowing Amnon to have Tamar take love cakes to him in his bedroom alone, and allowing Amnon to go to Absalom's party, David surely had a premonition about what was going to happen. Just as Uriah did in David's deception of him. David the deceiver was deceived- but in order to teach and educate him as to the dimensions of his sins, and not as some simplistic experience of karma.

2Sa 15:10 But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel saying, As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron!'-
Hebrew tenses are not exact, so we are to read that Absalom "had sent spies". See on

:36. Hebron was the old capital of Judah. We discern from 2 Sam. 19:11 that Judah was now the least supportive of David.

2Sa 15:11 Two hundred men went with Absalom out of Jerusalem, who were invited and went in their innocence; and they didn't know anything-
These men were presumably leaders of Judah, and were invited to Hebron to celebrate Absalom's devotion to Yahweh's service at the feast he had proclaimed there (:7). They were unaware of his plans. But his idea was that they would fall in behind him, and David would be left in Jerusalem without most of his government. To use a feast of dedication to Yahweh in this way is as bad in our days as manipulating the breaking of bread feast to our own ends.

The role of these men is difficult to understand in that we wonder how they could be totally innocent, knowing nothing of Absalom's plans- when he had prepared a chariot and horses and men to run before him [the proclamation of a king], and had clearly been working towards this usurping of David. Did they really go on this military journey not knowing what was going on? Perhaps we are invited to deduce that on one level they knew nothing, and the Biblical record sometimes records things as they appear rather than as they actually are- but, we are also to conclude that they went surely suspecting what they were being used for. And that is the exact picture of Uriah going back to the battle front under David's manipulation. Again and again, aspects of David's sin are played out before his eyes- so that he would understand the dimensions of his sin and repent.

2Sa 15:12 Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he was offering the sacrifices. The conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom-
Those sacrifices were supposed to represent Absalom's dedication to Yahweh's service (see on :7,11). It was cruel abuse of the things of God.

Ps. 3:1,2 refers to this time. The people considered that God wouldn't now help David (Ps. 3:2); there was a spiritual argument used against David, no matter how wrong it was. We have here a classic example of a collapse mentality, whereby a feeding frenzy begins against an innocent man, and quasi spiritual arguments are brought in to support it. "Many" in Ps. 3:1,2 is the same word used for how the people "increased" with Absalom. "Rise up" in Ps. 3:1 is the word used of Ahithophel wishing to 'rise up" and pursue David (2 Sam. 17:1; 18:31 "*I will arise and pursue after David "*). In response to the rising up of others against him, David asks God to 'rise up' (Ps. 3:7 s.w.). David's prayer in Psalm 3 was answered, and Ahithophel 'rose up' and committed suicide (2 Sam. 17:23).

The person in view in Ps. 41:9; 55:13,14 is clearly Ahithophel, David's counsellor, the "man of my peace" (2 Sam. 15:12). He was Bathsheba's grandfather, so we can imagine how his bitterness with David developed.

This is alluded to by Solomon in Prov. 21:27: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind!". Solomon may have in view Saul's rejection from the kingship for his wrong attitude to sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:21,22). Likewise the attempts of Absalom and Adonijah to take the throne from David and Solomon involved the offering of sacrifices (2 Sam. 15:12; 1 Kings 1:9). What Solomon says in the Proverbs is true on one level, but he harnesses Divine truth to justify himself and his own agendas; just as we can.

Saul felt that David had conspired against him (1 Sam. 22:8,13), and now the same word is used of Absalom's conspiracy against David. Perhaps David was being taught how Saul felt, he was learning the implications of his past actions and how others felt because of them. And that is one window upon the meaning of our experiences.

2Sa 15:13 A messenger came to David saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom-

David surely already perceived that over the years, Absalom had already stolen the hearts of Israel. The repeated stress upon the "men" of Israel may suggest Absalom was particularly attractive as a leader to the men; whereas David had been attractive to the women of Israel.

We wonder why we have this detail that a messenger told David of the general state of the hearts of the Israelites. Surely it was to recall the huge role played by messengers in the Uriah and Bathsheba drama. Constantly David is being reminded of why things were as they were. It was his fault. And yet he seeks to always blame it upon others.

2Sa 15:14 David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for else none of us shall escape from Absalom. Make speed to depart, lest he overtake us quickly and bring evil down upon us and strike the city with the edge of the sword-

David knew that Absalom intended to murder him and his supporters. It was David's servants who had perished along with Uriah (2 Sam. 11:17), and David desperately wanted to learn from this and not again bring death to his servants as a result of his folly. "Overtaken" is the word used of how David was overtaken by his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 40:12 "My iniquities have overtaken me"). The way he was saved from being overtaken by Absalom in judgment for this was perhaps an answer to his prayer of Ps. 40:12. And yet we notice that although David knew his sins had overtaken him, he didn't want judgment for the sins to overtake him. On one hand that is natural, but on

another hand, we see again his struggle in accepting consequences for his sin with Bathsheba.

Amnon did "wrong" to Tamar David's daughter (2 Sam. 13:16). "Wrong" here is the same word translated "evil" in the punishment upon David in 2 Sam. 12:10 "I will raise up evil against you from within your own house / family". The "evil" of Amnon was therefore indeed his own error and sin, but it was used by God and 'raised up' in that God confirmed Amnon in his evil in order to punish David. At the time of Absalom's rebellion, Shimei comments that "Evil [s.w.] has overtaken you [David] because you are a man of blood" (2 Sam. 16:8). But David proactively sought to avoid that "evil": "Get up! Let us flee [from Absalom]... or he will soon... bring evil [s.w.] upon us" (2 Sam. 15:14). We see here the complexities of God's workings. The "evil" was indeed to come upon David, yet he took steps to avoid some of it and God confirmed him in that and delivered him from Absalom. And so 2 Sam. 17.14 "For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring ruin [evil] on Absalom" (NRSV). The complexities and ebb and flow of all this working are beyond any final human analysis; and this explains why there appear various things in our lives which clearly feel to be of Divine intervention, but whose meaning is beyond our analysis.

"The edge of the sword" is literally 'with the mouth of the sword'. The sword is spoken of as a mouth that devours. Yet this was just the image used by David when he excuses the murder of Uriah and the other soldiers: "the sword devours one as well as another" (2 Sam. 11:25). David had airily spoken of the sword devouring, and that was just one of those things. But now he is brought face to face with the sword devouring him and his loved ones- and he is frightened and flees. Again, nothing in this experience was wasted. It was all in order to persuade David of the dimensions of his earlier sin which he had so airily dismissed at the time. We note that God felt it necessary to keep explaining these things to David. God does not willingly afflict repentant sinners. So this all suggests David was not very deeply or permanently repentant. He still failed to realize the depth of what he had done, and as discussed on 1 Kings 1, it seems in the final bedroom scene as he dies God was still trying to teach him the real nature of what he had done in his bedroom.

2Sa 15:15 The king's servants said to the king, Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king chooses-

We are intended to sense their extreme loyalty to David. They had of course realized his failures, but on balance believed that he was the anointed king of Israel and was overall a man of God worthy to be followed. We too at times need to stop ourselves judging a brother or sister in Christ for their out of character failures.

2Sa 15:16 The king went forth, and all his household after him. The king left ten women,

who were concubines, to keep the house-
He would have recalled Nathan's prediction that his wives would be slept with by his usurper. He took his wives with him but left the concubines, surely knowing their fate. He did not seek to stop that prophecy coming true; he humbled himself to accept his sin and the judgment pronounced for it. See on 2 Sam. 16:21.

These concubines were "left behind" when David fled and were slept with by Absalom; just as Bathsheba was left in Jerusalem when Uriah went to Rabbah to fight, in broadly the same direction David had gone at this point.

2Sa 15:17 The king went forth, and all the people after him; and they stayed in Beth Merhak-
The day David fled Jerusalem is recorded in more detail than any day in Biblical history. The tragedy of a good man having to suffer for his sins is thereby underlined to us. "Beth Merhak" is literally 'the last / far house', the last house on the edge of Jerusalem, on the banks of the Kidron. This detail declares David to be an exile; he has left the last house in Israel and will cross the Jordan out of Israel. The lessons learnt in his exile from Saul, when he fled Israel, were now to be drawn on and reinforced, and David's learning of those lessons is going to be tested. The way he decides he doesn't need the ark with him would indicate that spiritually, in his heart, he comes through well. The record of course is designed as encouragement for the later exiles of Judah that they too could return to Zion, even when all seemed impossibly stacked against them ever doing so.

2Sa 15:18 All his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, the Pelethites and all the Gittites, six hundred men who came after him from Gath, passed on before the king-
The figure of 600 may not be literal, and alludes to the 600 men whom David commanded whilst fleeing from Saul in earlier years. They were maybe called "the men of Gath" not because they were Philistines from Gath, but because they had been with David in Gath when he lived there for over a year when fleeing from Saul. Their loyalty had not been ultimately swayed by David's failure with Bathsheba. They recalled David's undoubted faith, spirituality and bravery as a soldier of Yahweh, and didn't allow themselves to be fazed by his temporary failure over Uriah. LXX adds "and halted at the olive tree in the wilderness". The idea may be that the mount of Olives was still as it were with David in the desert, just as God's presence was just as much with him there as in the tabernacle and before the ark in Jerusalem.

2Sa 15:19 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, Why do you also go with us? Return, and stay with the king; for you are a foreigner, and also an exile. Return to your own place-
Naturally David feared that his ranks would be infiltrated by Absalom's agents. Ittai was

a Philistine who had only recently joined David's ranks (:20); all the indications were that he was an agent for Absalom. David refers to Absalom as "the king", accepting that he was no longer king. But David's scepticism of Ittai was proven wrong. He turned out a loyal follower of David and just a few days later, was in command of a third of David's men (2 Sam. 18:2). Again David presents as a man who gets it wrong in his judgments. The Tekoite woman's comment that he is wise as an Angel and knows everything... is again shown to be nonsense and mere ingratiation.

2Sa 15:20 Whereas you came but yesterday, should I this day make you go up and down with us, since I go where I may? Return, and take back your brothers. Mercy and truth be with you-

Although David was sceptical of Ittai, he speaks to him in spiritual terms, wishing this Gentile the "mercy and truth" of covenant relationship with Yahweh. LXX "and the Lord shew thee mercy and truth". This is just how David had spoken to the men of Jabesh (2 Sam. 2:5,6). We are shown how David's past experiences were now repeating in this crisis, and he was demonstrating that he had learned the lessons. Our crises are likewise designed to evoke memories of past experiences, and we are to demonstrate that we have learned the lessons. Likewise "I go where I may" is just how he had felt at the time of Saul's persecution (1 Sam. 23:13 "David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose- again the 600 men are mentioned). He felt circumstances repeating, and perhaps hoped that Yahweh would likewise miraculously preserve him against seemingly overwhelming odds.

2Sa 15:21 Ittai answered the king and said, As Yahweh lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, even there also will your servant be-

By using the term "Yahweh" and swearing by Him, Ittai shows that he has accepted covenant relationship with Yahweh. And his promise of loyalty to David is expressed in terms of the Gentile Ruth's words to Naomi, when also in exile (Ruth 1:16,17).

2Sa 15:22 David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones who were with him-

David accepted Ittai as sincere. And we marvel at the power of God's truth. A Philistine, from Goliath's home town, had accepted covenant relationship with Yahweh and therefore accepts His anointed king, David. Even though David had lied to the men of Gath and later slain them, and had recently disgraced himself again over Bathsheba. The power of God's truth was greater than all the disadvertisments for that truth in Yahweh's chosen representative. And this is a powerful challenge to those who turn away from God because of the bad examples of His representatives.

2Sa 15:23 All the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over towards the way of the wilderness-

Although Absalom is presented as having much support, "the country" is presented as sharing in the tragic grief of this sad procession of David going into exile. The triple emphasis upon "passed over" shows David's unity with his people and theirs with him. The exiles reading this would have seen the similarities with their own exile from Zion. It was also due to the effect of their sins; but they too had hope of restoration, despite much opposition. The crossing over Kidron was to be repeated by the Lord Jesus (Jn. 18:1), suffering as if He were a sinner although He was personally innocent. "The way of the wilderness" was the road to Jericho, used by the Lord Jesus in His parable of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho being beaten [= suffering for his sins, in the parable], and being saved by grace and now law. Surely the Lord had David in mind, and is presenting the long day of his tragic exile as being the experience of everyman.

2Sa 15:24 Behold, Zadok also came, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God; and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people finished passing out of the city-

David had learned from previous history and experience that the ark should not be used as a talisman. He had learned in his wilderness years that God's presence was just as close in a man's heart as if that man were in His presence before the ark. We note too that they "set down" the ark having learned the lesson from David's inappropriate transportation of the ark on a wagon previously. Passing out of the city is parallel with passing over Kidron (:23), because that was the border of the city (see on :17). Again we see internal corroboration and consistency within the records.

The record of crossing a river with the priests and the ark standing by recalls the miraculous crossing of Jordan [the other way] by Joshua. "Until all the people finished passing out / over" is taken from Josh. 4:11. David's exit from God's land is presented in terms of Israel's entry into it. The idea may be that back is in fact forward, in God's bigger purpose.

2Sa 15:25 The king said to Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city. If I find grace in the eyes of Yahweh, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and His dwelling place-

The lesson for the exiles was that restoration from exile was to be by grace and not at all because they deserved it or had been unjustly treated. David has in view Jacob as he fled into exile, also a sinner justly on the run; but he too was eventually to be restored.

David prayed for restoration to the place of the ark (Ps. 43:3), so his words should not be read as mere fatalism.

The temple and ark are sometimes referred to as the heavens (2 Sam. 15:25 cp. 1 Kings 8:30; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20:2,6; 11:4; Heb. 7:26). The church is the new temple, and is therefore at times referred to as the heavenlies in the New Testament.

I have discussed on 1 Sam. 4:3 how the ark was often seen by Israel as a talisman. David had brought the ark to Zion in 2 Sam. 6, but this was without any Divine command to do so and without consultation with Him; and there was the disaster with Uzzah the first time he attempted it. He clearly also veered towards seeing the ark as a talisman. It was almost as if he wanted to underwrite his own enthronement in Jerusalem by having Yahweh enthroned there also over the ark. Likewise David's desire to permanently locate the ark in a physical temple in Jerusalem can be seen as a desire to legitimate the enthronement of his dynasty in that city. But on the other hand, David often 'gets it' about the lack of need for the ark's physical presence. His psalms speak of how he lived permanently beneath the shadow of the cherubic wings, as if he lived on the mercy seat, on the sprinkled blood. In 2 Sam. 15:24-29 he flees from Absalom, and refuses the suggestion he take the ark with him. But, so true to real spiritual life, he also had tendencies towards needing the physical and religious when it came to the ark.

David sending the ark back to Zion appears to be his statement that he recognizes God as king in Zion- but whether or not God wants him as His human agent for kingship, God must decide. Here David gets closest to accepting he may have to give up the kingship. I have often suggested that he ought to have resigned from being king and thus save so much of the suffering that was designed for his learning this fact. The real kingship was to be that of the Lord Jesus, and at some far future point, after David was sleeping with his fathers.

David's sending Zadok, Abiathar and the ark back to Zion can be read as a positive statement that he was content with the presence of God with him and didn't need the physical presence of the ark. He was rejecting the myth that the ark was needed in order to win a military conflict. However as always with David, his motives are mixed- because he wants Zadok and Abiathar back in Jerusalem to act as his spies there.

2Sa 15:26 but if He say thus, 'I have no delight in you;' behold, here am I. Let Him do to me as seems good to Him-

This resignation to God's will matches the Lord's attitude. These words are applied directly to the exiles, when they are assured that at their restoration, Yahweh would delight in them (Is. 62:4), just as finally He did in David (2 Sam. 22:20). David also has in view how the land of the Kingdom was to be given by grace if Yahweh delighted in His people, even though the obstacles to possessing it appeared huge (Num. 14:8). And he

too stood near the Jordan river as they had done. He reasoned from Biblical precedent. David on this long day of exile (see on :17) is David at perhaps his best in spiritual terms.

2Sa 15:27 The king said also to Zadok the priest, Aren't you a seer? Return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar-
The connection between being a seer and needing to therefore return to Jerusalem is unclear. Hence LXX "See! thou shalt return...". But perhaps David is simply making a word play- Zadok was a seer, one who saw and relayed what he had seen. And so he was to do the same in relaying to David what he saw going on in Jerusalem under Absalom.

2Sa 15:28 Behold, I will stay at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me-
"The plain of the wilderness" (AV) is the plain of Jericho (Josh. 5:10; 2 Kings 25:5; 2 Sam. 2:29; 17:16). "The way of the wilderness" in 2 Sam. 15:23 was therefore the road to Jericho, used by the Lord Jesus in His parable of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho being beaten [= suffering for his sins, in the parable], and being saved by grace and now law. Surely the Lord had David in mind, and is presenting the long day of his tragic exile as being the experience of everyman.

2Sa 15:29 Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem; and they stayed there-
David was concerned for the ark. His desire it not accompany him reflected that, and also his willingness to accept that he may be killed by Absalom and the ark destroyed in the fighting. He knew his son had no real respect for Yahweh. And he knew from his earlier experiences that God's presence would be with him whether or not the ark was with him.

2Sa 15:30 David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered, and went barefoot: and all the people who were with him covered each man his head; so they went up, weeping as they went up-
This may be slightly out of chronological sequence. But it is noted that David went there to worship (:32). We note how the Lord Jesus was likewise around the mount of Olives before He crossed the Kidron in Jn. 18:1. His covered head and going barefoot would suggest he recognized it was holy ground, and that he was there as a sinner. He was to likewise cover his head in mourning when Absalom was dead and the rebellion was over (2 Sam. 19:4), just as he did when Absalom came to power (2 Sam. 15:30). We get the impression that it was grief every way for David, whether Absalom lived or died. And this is indeed the take away lesson for us- that the outcome of sin is a lose lose situation.

The point made to David by his covering his head before and after Absalom's death is that despite his best efforts, there was no way for him to avoid the grief caused by his actions with Bathsheba.

2Sa 15:31 Someone told David saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. David said, Yahweh, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness- Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather, and his defection was surely not unexpected to David. But we can imagine the bolt of pain which he experienced as he received the news. This turning of wisdom into foolishness is alluded to be in Is. 44:25. The exiles were being comforted that all the wisdom of Babylon would likewise be turned into foolishness, and they would likewise be restored. David's prayer was considered and answered by a decree passed in the court of Heaven; see on 2 Sam. 17:14 "Yahweh had ordained to defeat [s.w. 'turn to foolishness'] the good counsel of Ahithophel". The answer to David's prayer began immediately- :32 says that having prayed this and worshipped God, despite not having any answers, Hushai appears. The decree to answer David's prayer took immediate effect, although it took time to work out as with Daniel's prayer of Dan. 10. Hushai is going to be the answer and the means of subverting Ahithophel's counsel. The same path is seen in answers to our own prayers. It is surely to this that Ps. 3:4 alludes: "I cry to Yahweh with my voice, and He answers me out of His holy hill". This Psalm is titled "A Psalm by David, when he fled from Absalom his son". The "holy hill" is surely the mount of Olives where David was when he prayed (:30). Psalm 3 appears to be a flow of consciousness psalm, recording David's thoughts at that moment. In this case, he believed his prayer was answered. He believed the decree had gone forth- and that faith was rewarded. Hushai appeared... and a process was set in motion that would save David from Ahithophel's counsel. David seems to have perceived this at the time, even though the outworking of the answer to his prayer wasn't visible. For David fled from Absalom with his head covered (2 Sam. 15:30) but in the Psalm he tells himself that Yahweh will lift up his head (Ps. 3:3).

Surely all this encouraged the Lord, whose final hours were so full of connection with David at this time. He too prayed on the mount of Olives before His arrest (Mt. 26:30). There are many connections between the Lord's death and David's flight from Absalom. He "arises" and leaves Jerusalem as David arose and fled, goes to the mount of Olives, crosses the Kedron with weary followers, is betrayed by his familiar friend [Ahithophel = Judas, "friend why have you come?" cp. Ps. 41:9; 55:13, who did what Ahithophel planned to do, taking a group of men to come upon Jesus by night, focusing solely on taking Jesus], the betrayer then hangs himself, receives assurances of loyalty "even if I must die with you", restrains his followers from smiting with the sword [Peter=Abishai], resigns himself to God's will as David in :26- and dies. David is saved. David's experiences were a judgment for his sins; and so the Lord, who never sinned,

experienced what it feels like to be judged for sin. Thus He identified with us, to the point that He is able to feel how we feel in condemnation for sin; He experienced it, although personally innocent. Thus many of the Psalms predicting the Lord's death are actually initially about David's sufferings at the hands of others [like Absalom] because of his sins.

2Sa 15:32 It happened that when David had come to the top, where God was worshipped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn, and earth on his head-
The mount of Olives was clearly one of the "high places" where Yahweh was legitimately worshipped (1 Sam. 7:17; 9:13); hence David ascends it barefoot as if on holy ground. Such high places were not God's ideal intention, especially as this mount was so near to the sanctuary. But He still accepted worship there, such is His desire by all means to meet with man even on less than ideal terms.

2Sa 15:33 David said to him, If you pass on with me, then you will be a burden to me-
This may have been because of his age. As in 2 Sam. 19:35, it was older men who had known David in earlier years who were faithful to him at this time.

2Sa 15:34 but if you return to the city and tell Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king. As I have been your father's servant in time past, so will I now be your servant; then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel'-
This raises the question as to whether lying is always wrong, necessarily. Rahab's lies and those of the Hebrew midwives at the exodus are rewarded as acts of faith. But this is of course a slippery slope. But such open questions are left for our reflection, underlining that spiritual life cannot be run by laws but by principles.

2Sa 15:35 Don't you have Zadok and Abiathar the priests there with you? Therefore it shall be, that whatever thing you shall hear out of the king's house, you shall tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests-
David's experience of having friends within the court of Saul prepared him for having friends within the court of Absalom, when both those men were hunting him. One experience prepares us for another, years later.

2Sa 15:36 Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son; and by them you shall send to me everything that you shall hear-
We get the impression David is being presented as matching Absalom's "spies

throughout all Israel" (:10) with his own smaller scale espionage system. And his worked, whereas Absalom's much larger system failed. It was David against Goliath all over again.

2Sa 15:37 So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city; and Absalom came into Jerusalem-
Absalom entered Jerusalem the day David fled (2 Sam. 17:1). The day David fled Jerusalem is recorded in more detail than any day in Biblical history. The tragedy of a good man having to suffer for his sins is thereby underlined to us. Ahithophel's advice to attack David immediately was undoubtedly the best advice.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 16

2Sa 16:1 When David was a little past the top, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled, and on them two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred summer fruits and a skin of wine-
As noted on 2 Sam. 15, the circumstances David faced repeated incidents throughout his earlier life, or the essence of them. He had earlier unexpectedly encountered a gift of 200 loaves of bread coming towards him in the wilderness, from Abigail (1 Sam. 25:18). She may well have been with him at this time too. Raisins and wine were also part of the present Abigail had sent him. The situations were clearly controlled by God. David was being comforted, as we are by perceiving these things, that situations never spin totally out of Divine control. Even in our lowest moments there are evidences that somehow God is involved, even if we cannot attach meaning to event.

2Sa 16:2 The king said to Ziba, What do you mean by these? Ziba said, The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as are faint in the wilderness may drink-
We will learn from 2 Sam. 19:26,27 that Ziba had deceived Mephibosheth, who had desperately wanted to come to support David. It could be that Ziba was going over to Absalom's side, and the present was intended for him; whilst he abandonned his master Mephibosheth, who wanted to support David. But encountering David and his sizeable party on the road, Ziba changed his position and claimed the gift was for David, and Mephibosheth was aiming to become king.

Psalm 23:5 "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" refers to this time. Shimei and other "enemies" were aware of his path. The reference is to the feasts prepared for him in the desert by Ziba (2 Sam. 16:2) and Barzillai (2 Sam. 17:27-29). But the phrase "prepare a table" is that used of the preparation of the table of shewbread

(Ex. 40:4), and it is used in a religious sense in Is. 65:11; Ez. 23:41. Perhaps David held some kind of religious ceremony whilst on the run, the equivalent to our breaking of bread meeting. And his experience of the Lord's table strengthened him with great encouragement, as we also can experience.

"What do you mean by these?" and David's reference to Saul as Ziba's master (:3) suggest he was cynical of Ziba's gift. But he is persuaded by it and accepts what Ziba says, that Ziba is faithful to David and Mephibosheth was trying to become king in the line of Saul. And so he gives Ziba what he tacitly wants- the estate of Saul handed over to him from Mephibosheth. But later David will find that Ziba was lying (2 Sam. 19:26). Again we see the deceiver deceived; and he was deceived whilst on one level suspecting what was going on, just as happened to him with Amnon and twice with Absalom; just as happened with Uriah.

2Sa 16:3 The king said, Where is your master's son? Ziba said to the king, Behold, he is staying in Jerusalem; for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore me the kingdom of my father'-
A bit of reflection would have indicated the untruth of this; because clearly Absalom was obsessed with becoming king, and would not want to restore the house of Saul after all they had done to the house of David. Further, Mephibosheth was from Benjamin, and it was the people of Judah, especially those in Hebron, who wanted Absalom to rule over them. It was he and not the reclusive cripple Mephibosheth who had stolen the hearts of Israel. David is told the truth of the matter in 2 Sam. 19:25-30. But the point is that David is again portrayed as being deceived, and an inept judge of where truth lies. His deceit of Uriah yet again is played out before his eyes. In 2 Sam. 14 he likewise failed to discern the true intention of the woman from Tekoah, and was again duped. Absalom's complaint that David was not a fit judge was not therefore untrue. And it was part of being the king of Israel that he should judge, and judge justly. David desperately hung on to being king when he should have realized his own failure as king, resigned, and focused on the wonderful promise of the future eternal king in his line- the Lord Jesus.

2Sa 16:4 Then the king said to Ziba, Behold, all that pertains to Mephibosheth is yours. Ziba said, I do obeisance. Let me find grace in your sight, my lord, O king-
Although the news was fake, David didn't know that at the time. It would have seemed that all the grace he had shown to the house of Saul was in vain, and had not resulted in any loyalty but rather in an ill fated, opportunistic attempt to grab power for himself. This fake news was surely used by God to provoke in David a collapse mentality, which was intended to make him cast himself further upon God's grace alone. But we have here another example of David acting too hastily, as he did to the woman from Tekoa.

2Sa 16:5 When king David came to Bahurim, behold, a man of the family of the house of Saul came out, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera. He came out and cursed continually as he came-
Psalm 7 is relevant to this cursing. Ps. 7:1 describes it as "A meditation by David, which he sang to Yahweh, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite". But Cush may be another name for Shimei; or perhaps "the black one of Benjamin" may be another term for Saul. But much in the Psalm is so appropriate to Shimei's cursing of David as he fled from Absalom. But it could equally refer to some supporter of Saul the Benjamite during David's wilderness years. Most likely it could be that a Psalm composed in the wilderness years was later rewritten by David with reference to Shimei's abuse of him.

Psalm 109:17 also seems to reference Shimei: "Yes, he loved cursing, and it came to him. He didn't delight in blessing, and so it was far from him". This points towards Shimei, whose cursing of David at the time of Absalom's rebellion clearly hurt David very deeply. At the time, David forgave him. But he didn't maintain that intensity of forgiveness, because on his deathbed he asks Solomon to ensure Shimei even as an old man is slain because of it. His statement here that the cursing "came to him" may be a 'future perfect', stating the future as if it has already happened, as a way of stating intention. And David expressed this intention to Solomon to ensure Shimei was cursed with death for his cursing. We too struggle to maintain levels of forgiveness we grant to people, and we perceive how God's "frank" and permanent forgiveness (Lk. 7:42) is of an altogether higher quality and nature than our forgiveness.

Why did the cursing of Shimei happen at Bahurim? It was to here that the weeping husband of David's ex-wife Michal had followed her (2 Sam. 3:16), after David had cruelly commanded that she should be taken from him [despite having had children by him] and live in disgrace at Jerusalem. He never slept with her and she was effectively a prisoner of court. This was a cruel thing to have done, a way of getting back at his ex and establishing his own power. Paltiel her husband followed her until Bahurim, where he was forced to go back. Now David is weeping at Bahurim, having lost all he once held dear. He is being made to understand how Paltiel felt, and the Father was thereby seeking to elicit David's repentance. There is no evidence that David responded to the Divine nudge in this case. We would love to read that he sent word to release Michal and let her return to Paltiel, but there is nothing at all to suggest this. Rather we are told that she remained desolate in David's house until the day of her death.

David's route out of Jerusalem towards Mahanaim was the very route Uriah would have taken to Rabbah. Every step of his miserable path he would have been reminded of the fatal journey he had sent Uriah on. But still he was met by grace on that path, with feasts prepared for him.

2Sa 16:6 He cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David; and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left-
Death by stoning was the punishment for adultery, and it was hard for David to argue that this was inappropriate. He had been saved from that by grace, but now it seemed that God was demanding that the death penalty be carried out. David would have been beating himself up that he had not responded to the grace shown him as he ought to have done.

David was marching through a valley with steep sides, from the top of which Shimei could cast stones. Psalm 23 refers to this march, especially Psalm 23:4 "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death". There was naturally the fear of an ambush, for David's location was thereby clearly known to his enemies. Yet "I will fear no evil, for You are with me". David's sense that 'God is with me' is that of 'Emmanuel', God with us, the great comfort to the exiles in Isaiah's restoration prophecies. He felt the essence of the result of the yet future work of the Lord Jesus.

We have to notice the reversal of David's stoning of Goliath. Now it is he who is surrounded by Philistine soldiers, his only loyal men- and he is being stoned by an Israelite who is not only stoning him but also cursing him by Israel's God. Perhaps this was to correct any possible subsequent pride he had had because of his victory. He was being made to feel how Goliath felt. Possibly that is why he declines Abishai's offer to cut Shimei's head off, which is what David had done to Goliath.

2Sa 16:7 Shimei said when he cursed, Be gone, be gone, you man of blood, and base fellow!-
Shimei called David a "bloodthirsty man" (:7,8 s.w.). And the same words are used by God about David (1 Chron. 28:3). So we can wonder whether David was too quick in Ps. 5:6 to assume that the 'man of blood' who was hated by God and was of course not him. "Base fellow" is "man of Belial" and that is just what Abigail had called Nabal (1 Sam. 25:25). Doubtless David had prided himself on doing the right thing in waiting that Nabal the "man of Belial" to die of natural causes before taking Abigail as wife. But he is being shown that he is no better than Nabal. Indeed later David is to admit that he has "done foolishly" (2 Sam. 24:10), no better than Nabal the fool. So possibly he did learn from this. Again we see that all his sufferings were not mere karma, not Divine anger for the sake of it; but judgments designed to elicit his repentance and appreciation of the dimensions of his actions and their effect upon others. That this continued so long and so repeatedly in his life suggests he overall failed to get most of the lessons most of the time. Likewise with all our experiences.

2Sa 16:8 Yahweh has returned on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place

you have reigned! Yahweh has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son! Behold, you are caught by your own sinfulness, because you are a man of blood!-
It was the blood of Uriah and the soldiers killed alongside him which was being punished. But Shimei says that David had shed the blood of the house of Saul. This was all a cruel mixture of truth and error. David would likely have noted the reference to the house of Saul, and wrongly corroborated it with Ziba's claim that in fact Absalom was planning to be co-regent along with Mephibosheth. Shimei's accusation was false- David was not fleeing from Absalom because of anything he had done to Saul. Indeed he had consistently acted honourably towards Saul and his family, the very opposite of Shimei's false accusation. But the purpose of the obviously false accusation was to elicit humility in David and recognition of his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba; for that was the real reason why he was fleeing from Absalom. And indeed David had been a "bloodthirsty man". David did have blood on his hands, and the experience of false accusation was intended to elicit his recognition of that. The blood he had on his hands was of Uriah and the soldiers of Israel; not the blood of Saul and his family who were slain by God. And that is often the purpose behind our experience of false accusation- to elicit in us an awareness of our actual sins. And it possibly worked, because David accepts that this cursing is from Yahweh. We too need to spiritually respond to false accusation as we are intended to and not get hung up in bitterness upon the injustice of it. And yet despite Shimei's curses being not wrong in essence, David was still so hurt by them that he asked Solomon to slay Shimei. This was surely a case of hurt pride.

Amnon did "wrong" to Tamar David's daughter (2 Sam. 13:16). "Wrong" here is the same word translated "evil" in the punishment upon David in 2 Sam. 12:10 "I will raise up evil against you from within your own house / family". The "evil" of Amnon was therefore indeed his own error and sin, but it was used by God and 'raised up' in that God confirmed Amnon in his evil in order to punish David. At the time of Absalom's rebellion, Shimei comments that "Evil [s.w.] has overtaken you [David] because you are a man of blood" (2 Sam. 16:8). But David proactively sought to avoid that "evil": "Get up! Let us flee [from Absalom]... or he will soon... bring evil [s.w.] upon us" (2 Sam. 15:14). We see here the complexities of God's workings. The "evil" was indeed to come upon David, yet he took steps to avoid some of it and God confirmed him in that and delivered him from Absalom. And so 2 Sam. 17.14 "For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring ruin [evil] on Absalom" (NRSV). The complexities and ebb and flow of all this working are beyond any final human analysis; and this explains why there appear various things in our lives which clearly feel to be of Divine intervention, but whose meaning is beyond our analysis.

We could render "You are in your own evil". This evil was the evil God had said would arise from David's own house, and Shimei is consciously alluding to this- hence David's comment that Yahweh has bidden Shimei curse in this way. But still David seeks to wriggle out of it, hoping that because of this manifestation of the evil, God would bless

him with good (:12). Although he perceives God has raised up Shimei to curse him, he is far from penitent and bitterly resents this consequence- later commanding Solomon to murder him. Again he shoots the messenger, just as he did with the man who told him of Saul's death, as his servants feared he would do to them if they told him his child by Bathsheba had died, and as I suggest Ahimaaz did when he couldn't bring himself to tell David that his son Absalom was dead.

We ponder the truth of "Yahweh has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom". So far in the Hebrew Bible, nobody has ever claimed that they are speaking for Yahweh when in fact they weren't. David understands Shimei as acting on Yahweh's behalf (:10). The language is so similar to Yahweh's judgment of 1 Sam. 15:28 “The Lord has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you [Saul] and has given it to another [David]". For David, this should have made no difference, and it should have honed his focus upon the promise of 2 Sam. 7- that after his death, he would be resurrected to see his Divine seed reigning on his throne eternally. So quite possibly God did take the kingdom away from David and give it to Absalom; but he was vain and therefore slain, and so the kingdom returned to David.

2Sa 16:9 Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?-
This was how David had felt about himself (1 Sam. 24:14 cp. 2 Sam. 9:8; 16:9). So his humility precluded him from having Abishai's attitude.

Please let me go over and take off his head-
The Philistines in 1 Sam. 29:4 recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

It was Abishai who had wanted to kill Saul in 1 Sam. 26:8,9 but was then restrained by David; and David now twice restrains him from killing Shimei, Saul's relative (2 Sam. 16:9; 19:22,23).

2Sa 16:10 The king said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? Because he curses, and because Yahweh has said to him, ‘Curse David’, who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’-

To curse the king was a capital offence under the law (Ex. 22:28). Abishai was acting according to the law- if indeed David was still king. The fact David restrains him could be read as his recognition that he was not in fact the king of Israel at this point. He is at least willing to accept that he may have lost the throne; and this temporary loss of the throne was surely to make him focus more on the promised seed of 2 Sam. 7, who after David's death would reign eternally upon David's throne, in David's resurrected presence.

David *assumes* that "the Lord hath said unto [Shimei], Curse David"; but later he orders Solomon to punish Shimei for doing this. So it seems that David had a way of assuming God had spoken when it was more his own assumption. It is another example of David's tendency to wildly over interpret, which led him to a mistaken obsession about building the temple and assuming Solomon to be his Messianic seed.

Or we could read this as an example of where Yahweh confirms an evil man in his evil way, telling him to do what he wants to do; just as the evil spirit from Yahweh confirmed Saul in his downwards path. And indeed there was some truth in Shimei's cursing of David; for he was guilty of blood and should have been stoned to death. We note with possible interest that another "son of Gera", Ehud, also spoke a word of Yahweh as judgment to a wicked king (Jud. 3:15).

2Sa 16:11 David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, who came forth from my bowels, seeks my life. How much more this Benjamite, now? Leave him alone, and let him curse; for Yahweh has invited him-
David graciously overlooked Shimei's cursing, promising him that he would not die because of it (2 Sam. 16:10,11; 19:23). But he didn't keep up that level of grace to the end: he later asked Solomon to ensure that Shimei was killed for that incident (1 Kings 2:8,9). And one wonders whether it was Shimei's words which so broke David's heart that he later wrote: "Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man...as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so may it be far from him. He clothed himself also with cursing as with a garment..." (Ps. 109:16-18). Again we see in David both grace and less noble feelings at the same time- pride, vindictiveness, unforgiveness...

2Sa 16:12 It may be that Yahweh will look on the wrong done to me, and that Yahweh will repay me good for the cursing of me today-
Hannah's request in 1 Sam. 1:11 that God look upon her affliction and answer it was heard, and she became an inspiration to her descendant David; who often makes the same request, unashamed to be inspired by the example of a woman (s.w. 2 Sam. 16:12; Ps. 9:13; 25:18 and so often in the Psalms).

David still considers that he is unfairly suffering "wrong" ['evil']. Although this was the specific punishment for his great sins in the Bathsheba affair. And yet he has just accepted that Shimei's stoning of him was just and from God, in that he deserved it. We see here what we surely have all experienced- lip service to the idea that we are sinners and justly condemned to suffering and death, and yet chafing at these things being unfair in our personal case. All at the very same time.

I suggest that it is at this exact moment, reflecting upon Shimei's words, that Psalm 3 was composed in David's mind. And without doubt Ps. 109:28 fits in here: "They may curse, but You bless. When they arise, they will be shamed, but Your servant shall rejoice. Let my adversaries be clothed with dishonour, may they cover themselves with their own shame as with a robe". The rest of the Psalm is David's ranting against Shimei and Ahithophel, with some words of it being quoted in the New Testament about Judas. But the logic is concerning. David doesn't accept that the cursing of Shimei is just, even though he admits God has bidden Shimei curse. Even at this time, he begs for judgment upon Shimei. And he likes to imagine that because he was being cursed, therefore God would have pity upon him and bless him. David thereby refuses any idea that there is a connection between his sins and his experience of being cursed. The essential accusations of Shimei were true, even if the details weren't. David's reaction here seems typical- thinking he can as it were bend some good from God out of his sufferings for his sins.

2Sa 16:13 So David and his men went by the way; and Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him, and cursed as he went, threw stones at him, and threw dust-
The language of cursing and dust recalls Gen. 3:19. That David's sin is indeed an epitome of all our sins is proved by the way in which the record of it is framed in the language of the fall. Adam is presented as David. Gen. 2:8,17 = 2 Sam. 12:5; Gen. 2:17 = 2 Sam. 12:9; Gen. 6:2 = 2 Sam. 12:9; Gen. 3:17 = 2 Sam. 12:10; Gen. 3:7 = 2 Sam. 12:11; Gen. 3:8 = 2 Sam. 11:24; 12:12; Gen. 3:21 = 2 Sam. 12:13; Gen. 3:17 = 2 Sam. 16:11; Gen. 3:19 = 2 Sam. 16:13. It should also be noted that David/Bathsheba language is used to describe Israel's spiritually fallen state (e.g. Ps. 38:7=Is. 1:6; Ps. 51:7=Is. 1:18; Ps. 65:2=Is. 40:15). David recognized this in Ps. 51:17, where he likens his own state to that of Zion, which also needed to be revived by God's mercy. As David's sin is likened to the killing of a lamb (2 Sam. 12:4), so the Jews killed Jesus. The troubles which therefore came upon his kingdom have certain similarities with the events of AD67-70. They were also repeated in the Nazi Holocaust, and will yet be. Israel are yet to fully repent after the pattern of David.

Throughout all these experiences, David was composing Psalms. Ps 7:4,5 records David's objections to having his glory rolled in the dust by Shimei, an allusion to Shimei throwing dust at him. He denies that he has done evil to people as accused, and insists

he has done only good. This was true of the house of Saul, but he fails to see that he had been a man of blood to Uriah.

2Sa 16:14 The king, and all the people who were with him, became weary; and he refreshed himself there-
The day David fled Jerusalem is recorded in more detail than any day in Biblical history. The tragedy of a good man having to suffer for his sins is thereby underlined to us.

2Sa 16:15 Absalom, and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him-
Absalom entered Jerusalem the day David fled (2 Sam. 15:37; 17:1). Ahithophel's advice to attack David immediately was undoubtedly the best advice.

2Sa 16:16 It happened, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, had come to Absalom, that Hushai said to Absalom, Long live the king! Long live the king!-
Hushai doesn't define which king he has in mind. This raises the question as to whether lying is always wrong, necessarily. Rahab's lies and those of the Hebrew midwives at the exodus are rewarded as acts of faith. But this is of course a slippery slope. But such open questions are left for our reflection, underlining that spiritual life cannot be run by laws but by principles. See on 2 Sam. 17:20.

2Sa 16:17 Absalom said to Hushai, Is this your kindness to your friend? Why didn't you go with your friend?-
There is a kind of parallel here with David probing Ittai as to whether he wasn't in fact an agent of Absalom (2 Sam. 15:19).

Here we have another example of a man knowing or suspecting that he is being lied to or likely to be deceived, and falling headlong for the deception anyway. This happens several times to David, and I have noted that this was precisely the case with Uriah as he returned to the battlefront with a letter from David, and as he marched to an engagement where he was sure he would be killed. What David did is being played out before his eyes yet again.

2Sa 16:18 Hushai said to Absalom, No; but whoever Yahweh and this people, and all the men of Israel have chosen, his will I be, and with him I will stay-
This again (as noted on :16) is phrased ambiguously; for Hushai believed that Yahweh and the true Israel of God had chosen David and not Absalom. Hushai's double speak is so obvious! We enquire why Absalom didn't see through it. We can only conclude that God's Spirit can work directly on human minds to blind and also reveal.

2Sa 16:19 Again, whom should I serve? Shouldn't I serve in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father's presence, so will I be in your presence-
Hushai accepts that David has indeed lost the throne, for the time being.

2Sa 16:20 Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, Give your counsel what we shall do-
Ahithophel's counsel directly leads to the fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy that a usurper would sleep with David's wives. Perhaps he based his counsel about this upon Nathan's words. But probably those words of Nathan had been privately stated to David and not generally known. So we reflect how Ahithophel's advice and Absalom's acceptance of it was all of their own genuine freewill. And yet it was to fulfil God's word of punishment.

2Sa 16:21 Ahithophel said to Absalom, Go in to your father's concubines, that he has left to keep the house. Then all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong-
Ahithophel assumed that such behaviour would make David hate Absalom. But he had not factored in David's deep spirituality and humility. For this did not make David hate Absalom, and at his death, David was heartbroken, despite having been reestablished as king. Further, I suggested on 2 Sam. 15:16 that David left his concubines in Jerusalem fully aware of what would happen according to Nathan's prophecy. But he did not seek to stop that prophecy coming true; he humbled himself to accept his sin and the judgment pronounced for it.

The record in 2 Sam. 15:16; 16:21 uses a slightly strange word as to how David "left ten women, who were concubines, to keep [specifically, to guard] the house". We of course wonder how the ten women were supposed to guard David's house against Absalom's army. If we stick with just the idea of 'keeping the house', why would David so wish there to be no break in the housekeeping in his absence? I suggest the better translation is that he left the ten women 'in the guard house'. And so again we have the scenes with Uriah played out again before David's eyes. He slept with Uriah's wife, called Uriah back from the front, got him drunk and urged him to go home and sleep with his wife. But Uzziah instead lay down to sleep with David's servants at the gate of David's house- clearly, the guard house: "Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord" (2 Sam. 11:9). Now David used that same guard house to try to hide ten of his women. We may note that the guarded house they were finally kept in (2 Sam. 20:3), the house of guarding / keeping, is described with a related word to that used for 'keeping / guarding' in 2 Sam. 15:16; 16:21.

The reasoning was that some Israelites guessed that David and Absalom might reconcile; and then David would seek revenge upon those who had backed Absalom. So

the idea was to make David so hate Absalom that it was clear to everyone that there would never be any reconciliation between them. To publically lay with David's wives was the ultimate humiliation for David. His lack of response to it shows him to have been truly weak and humiliated.

2Sa 16:22 So they spread Absalom a tent on the top of the house; and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel-
Walking upon the roof of his house connects with several passages which associate the roof top with a place of idolatry: 2 Kings 23:12; Jer. 19:13; 32:29; Zeph. 1:5. It may be that David regularly worshipped the idol of Bathsheba in his mind, upon the bed which he had on the house top. David's sin with Bathsheba is therefore not such a momentary slip. Significantly, it was in that very place where Absalom later lay with his wives in retribution for what he had done (2 Sam. 16:22). From this we could infer that David lay with Bathsheba in that same place on the roof top. This is significant insofar as it shows how exactly the thought leads to the action. David's thoughts in that spot were translated into that very action, in precisely the same physical location.

We recall that David had intentionally left those women behind. Had he really loved them, he would by all means have taken them with him- and so the threatened judgment of 2 Sam. 12:11,12 would not have come true: "I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun". God of course foresaw David's lack of love for those women. Again we note that although people are said to love David, David is never recorded as loving anyone.

These women were likely the concubines / harem of Saul, which had been given to David by Yahweh [Nathan rebuked David about taking Bathsheba because "I gave your master's wives into your bosom"]. Now they were used and claimed by Absalom. Again the incident was designed to recall Nathan's words to David's memory.

2Sa 16:23 The counsel of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if a man inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom-
As noted above, Ahithophel's words about sleeping with the concubines were in fact a repetition of Nathan's inspired, prophetic words to David. Ahithophel was perhaps indeed inspired at times to speak God's words as a prophet. But this didn't mean therefore that all he said was true. The fact Absalom will now prefer Hushai's advice over Ahithophel's shows how Absalom didn't respect God's word. He ignored the words of the man accepted as an inspired prophet, and instead followed advice which was designed to appeal to his pride. And yet Absalom's failure was all in God's purpose. Again we marvel at the intricacy of how God works with men.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 17

2Sa 17:1 Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, Let me now choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David tonight-
Absalom entered Jerusalem the day David fled (2 Sam. 15:37). The day David fled Jerusalem is recorded in more detail than any day in Biblical history. The tragedy of a good man having to suffer for his sins is thereby underlined to us. Ahithophel's advice to attack David immediately was undoubtedly the best advice. Even if we understand a "thousand" as a military grouping rather than a literal figure, this was a considerable number of men to have available. Truly the support for Absalom was not inconsiderable.

Psalm 3 refers to this time. "Many" in Ps. 3:1,2 is the same word used for how the people "increased" with Absalom (2 Sam. 15:12). "Rise up" in Ps. 3:1 is the word used of Ahithophel wishing to 'rise up" and pursue David (2 Sam. 17:1; 18:31). In response to the rising up of others against him, David asks God to 'rise up' (Ps. 3:7 s.w.). David's prayer in Psalm 3 was answered, and Ahithophel 'rose up' and committed suicide (2 Sam. 17:23).

Ahithophel's speech is all about him- "I will... let me". Clearly he is motivated by personal revenge upon David because Bathsheba was his granddaughter. In fact, Ahithophel was so obsessed with this personal revenge that when his plan was rejected by Absalom in favour of Hushai's, he kills himself. Hushai's speech instead focuses upon Absalom and what Absalom could do and what glory he could achieve for himself. This appeal to Absalom's pride was what won Absalom over, although it was all of God's hand in the minds of the men with Absalom. For they all originally thought that Ahithophel's advice was good. But then suddenly changed.

Yet we note that the Psalms relevant to this time have David cursing Ahithophel, bemoaning his lot that his former trusted friend has turned against him. Consider Psalm 41: "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me [quoted about Judas but initially about Ahithophel]. But You, Yahweh... raise me up, that I may repay them... uphold me in my integrity" (Ps. 41:9-12). Or Psalm 55: "It was not an enemy who insulted me, then I could have endured it... But it was you, a man like me, my companion, and my familiar friend. We took sweet fellowship together... Let death come suddenly on them, let them go down alive into Sheol. For wickedness is in their dwelling, in their midst. As for me, I will call on God. Yahweh will save me... He will never allow the righteous to be moved. But You, God, will bring them down into the pit of destruction" (Ps. 55:12-23). But Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather. David's lamenting of the situation and cursing of Ahithophel reflects a total lack of remorse over his sins, and a refusal to accept consequence. And a total

disregard of the huge grace God showed him by not demanding the death penalty. The fact we are all still alive, despite being worthy of death, must be appreciated by us. And it will help us cope with disappointment and injustice at the hands of others, and lower our expectations of what we consider is our "right" in this life.

2Sa 17:2 I will come on him while he is weary and exhausted, and will make him afraid. All the people who are with him shall flee. I will strike the king only-
This was clearly designed to appeal to what Absalom wanted to hear and to happen. He wanted power over the people; he therefore wanted his father dead, believing that this would mean that his father's supporters would give up and come under his power. Ahithophel's advice was to kill one man [David] and let the rest of the men around him flee. This was exactly David's plan for the murder of Uriah- although it happened that Joab allowed other men were killed to make the plan look less obvious. Time and again we see David's past behaviour played out before his eyes.

2Sa 17:3 and I will bring back all the people to you. The man whom you seek is as if all returned; and so all the people shall be in peace-
The LXX reveals deeper the flattery used here. The idea was that the people with David of course really loved Absalom and had been with him in their hearts, but had just temporarily left him to go with David; and they would very easily return to Absalom without the need for bloodshed, if David alone were to be slain: “And I will cause all the people to return unto thee, as the bride returneth to her husband. Only one man’s life dost thou seek, and unto all the people there shall be peace".

2Sa 17:4 The saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel-
As noted on :3, it was indeed excellently expressed advice. It appealed to Absalom's pride, and the elders would commend it as designed to avoid mass bloodshed. The same mentality is employed as in the argument to kill the Lord Jesus- it were better one man died at the hands of Rome than many, so went the argument.

2Sa 17:5 Then Absalom said, Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he says-
"Hear likewise" could suggest that Absalom assumed that such excellent advice would surely likewise be agreed by Hushai also. Seeing they all liked Ahithophel's plan, this request for a second opinion is unusual and clearly God made Absalom do this. He does work directly on human minds, sowing seeds and making men make choices and decisions they may not otherwise have made. The Holy Spirit works in this way in human hearts to this day.

2Sa 17:6 When Hushai had come to Absalom, Absalom spoke to him saying, Ahithophel

has spoken like this. Shall we do what he says? If not, speak up-
The Divine author is as a cameraman zoomed in upon the scene. What might otherwise seem superfluous recording of words is done so that we can enter more fully into the scene, waiting with baited breath, as it were, to see if Ahithophel's smart advice is going to be followed. It was such good advice in the context that it would seem impossible to overturn it. Indeed 2 Sam. 16:23 says that it was from God; so we have an example of where God speaks a word but it is over to man to fulfil it or not.

2Sa 17:7 Hushai said to Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time-
"At this time" could imply that the previous counsel, to sleep with David's concubines, was "good" (2 Sam. 16:21). Hushai was willing to go along with that because he knew that this is what Nathan's prophecy had stated would happen. But there had been no Divine word about David being slain by Absalom.

2Sa 17:8 Hushai said moreover, You know your father and his men, that they are mighty men, and they are bitter in their minds, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field-
Hushai was the last person to have seen David. His description of David as bitter and aggressive as a bear robbed of her cubs was so untrue. David was depressed and weak. There are lies and twists of truth throughout this tragic narrative. Ziba lies, Shimei lies, David lies to Shimei, Absalom has lied, and David's deliverance is worked out through Hushai's deceit.

How to love the unlovely, to live without bitterness, to not be a psychological victim of our past experiences, is absolutely vital for the true child of God. In David and above all the Lord Jesus we see this achieved so supremely. He was at times bitter, as the imprecatory Psalms reveal, and as Hushai commented, David was a man “bitter of soul” (2 Sam. 17:8 RVmg.). But there is also every reason to think that David at this point was not in fact bitter over what he had lost. He accepts he has sinned and is being judged, and throws himself upon God's grace to restore him. But his tendencies to bitterness were well known, and so Hushai's claims about David were absolutely credible to his audience. And he advises therefore not to assume too easily that such a bitter man would give up without there being bloodshed. And avoiding bloodshed was important in order to keep Absalom's demand for loyalty credible.

Your father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people-
The idea of attacking the entire group and hoping to thereby get David... was unrealistic, Hushai argues. He likely would not lodge with the people. He would be like Jacob in his night of crisis, fleeing from Laban and meeting Esau.

2Sa 17:9 Behold, he is now hidden in some pit, or in some other place. It will happen, when some of them have fallen at the first, that whoever hears it will say, 'There is a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom!'-
Hushai imagines that Ahithophel leading a band of men to take David will not be a good idea. For Ahithophel was seen as a prophet, a spiritual man, an advisor- and not a military man. By contrast, David and his men were military men; and had a long track record of winning battles against superior forces. Hushai plays on the deep concerns about not causing bloodshed. The image of David hiding in a "cave" (Heb.) naturally recalls his hiding in a cave and nearly having the mastery over Saul. Hushai wishes to recall these classic images of David and warn against thinking that a quick victory over him was possible.

2Sa 17:10 Even he who is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, will utterly melt; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and those who are with him are valiant men-
The military prowess of David and his close circle was legendary. And everyone wanted to avoid bloodshed and find a way of destroying David alone. Playing on that concern, Hushai started to make huge sense to all present.

2Sa 17:11 But I advise that all Israel be gathered together to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude-
Hushai's doublespeak continues, at least in the Hebrew. For "Gathered together *to* you" can also mean "against you" (as in Gen. 34:30; Mic. 4:11; Zech. 12:3). And yet his doublespeak isn't perceived by Absalom.

We must remember that baptism means that we are *now* the seed of Abraham, and the blessings of forgiveness, of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and God's turning us away from our sins are right now being fulfilled in us (Acts 3:27-29). Israel were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore (2 Sam. 17:11; 1 Kings 4:20), they possessed the gates of their enemies (Dt. 17:2; 18:6)- all in antitype of how Abraham's future seed would also receive the promised blessings in their mortal experience, as well as in the eternal blessedness of the future Kingdom.

And that you go to battle in your own person-
This was an appeal to Absalom's pride. he was not a military man, but being the figurehead of an inevitable victory by sheer force of numbers was going to appeal to him. And the idea was that the force of numbers would mean that only David and his immediate hard core followers would put up a fight; and it was they who needed to be eliminated and not anyone else. This was also an appeal to the concept of kingship in

Israel (1 Sam. 8:20; 18:16)- a king was supposed to lead Israel to victory in battle rather than stay at home and leave it to others, which is what Ahithophel's advice amounted to. And David was in shame exactly because he had not led his men in the Rabbah campaign and had instead remained in Jerusalem and committed adultery (2 Sam. 11:1). Again and again, there are echoes of David's sin with Bathsheba throughout the record. Joab advises David to at least symbolically lead the Israelite army into Rabbah once it falls (2 Sam. 11:27,28) and that's the very advice Hushai is giving to Absalom. Quite possibly at the time Ahithophel had advised David to take Joab's advice.

2Sa 17:12 So shall we come on him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light on him as the dew falls on the ground; and of him and of all the men who are with him we will not leave so much as one-
"As the dew falls on the ground" suggests this would be an easy and effortless victory. This is inviting Absalom to act as Saul, using spies and intelligence to track down David to some hiding place and then suddenly come upon him. The idea was to kill not only David but his immediate band of warriors. These were the very men to whom the kingdom of Israel owed its existence. To agree to slay them all was really treason of the worst sort. But jealousy means that all true qualifications and history of the other people are ignored, in the mad obsession with their destruction. The same thing goes on in church infighting today.

2Sa 17:13 Moreover, if he be gone into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there isn't one small stone found there-
This alludes to the tearing down of a leprous house. There was the quasi religious claim that Absalom's putsch was in fact his devoted service of Yahweh (2 Sam. 15:8); and this is now accompanied by the suggestion that any supporting David were an unclean, leprous city which must be pulled down stone by stone.

2Sa 17:14 Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For Yahweh had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that Yahweh might bring evil on Absalom-
David had prayed for Ahithophel's wisdom to be turned to foolishness (2 Sam. 15:31). In response to this, Yahweh had 'ordained' in the court of Heaven that this was to happen. And He worked upon the psychology of those men and their perceptions, so that Ahithophel's advice was defeated.

Was it really *good* counsel? Not in God's eyes. It was only 'good' for Absalom from a fleshly viewpoint. And yet the record speaks from Absalom's perspective; it speaks of something definitely evil as being "good" within the context in which it was given. Thus the record here refers to men's bad thinking as if it is correct. This explains why there are

no footnotes throughout the Bible, pointing this kind of thing out; and why the wrong understandings of demons aren't specifically corrected in the New Testament.

Amnon did "wrong" to Tamar David's daughter (2 Sam. 13:16). "Wrong" here is the same word translated "evil" in the punishment upon David in 2 Sam. 12:10 "I will raise up evil against you from within your own house / family". The "evil" of Amnon was therefore indeed his own error and sin, but it was used by God and 'raised up' in that God confirmed Amnon in his evil in order to punish David. At the time of Absalom's rebellion, Shimei comments that "Evil [s.w.] has overtaken you [David] because you are a man of blood" (2 Sam. 16:8). But David proactively sought to avoid that "evil": "Get up! Let us flee [from Absalom]... or he will soon... bring evil [s.w.] upon us" (2 Sam. 15:14). We see here the complexities of God's workings. The "evil" was indeed to come upon David, yet he took steps to avoid some of it and God confirmed him in that and delivered him from Absalom. And so 2 Sam. 17.14 "For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring ruin [evil] on Absalom" (NRSV). The complexities and ebb and flow of all this working are beyond any final human analysis; and this explains why there appear various things in our lives which clearly feel to be of Divine intervention, but whose meaning is beyond our analysis.

2Sa 17:15 Then Hushai said to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Ahithophel counselled Absalom and the elders of Israel that way; and I have counselled this way-
Hushai of course was desperately playing for time. He knew that David and his group were not far away, having only left Jerusalem the same day Absalom arrived there. The small group who were loyal to David within the court of Absalom correspond with those within the court of Saul (see on :17). Like all our crises, this one was really intended to allow David to apply all he had learned over the years.

Hushai's messaging David in this way suggests he actually didn't think his suggestion would be accepted by Absalom. The fact it was accepted, when it was not the best advice and the record itself calls Ahithophel's advice "good / better", is all a sign of God's grace and His ability to work on human hearts to accept wrong advice or teaching. Even bad advice is used by Him in His wider purpose. To save His beloved, those with a heart like David.

2Sa 17:16 Now therefore send quickly and tell David saying, 'Don't lodge this night at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people who are with him'-
"The plain of the wilderness" (AV) is the plain of Jericho (Josh. 5:10; 2 Kings 25:5; 2 Sam. 2:29; 17:16). "The way of the wilderness" in 2 Sam. 15:23 was therefore the road to Jericho, used by the Lord Jesus in His parable of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho being beaten [= suffering for his sins, in the parable], and being saved by grace

and now law. Surely the Lord had David in mind, and is presenting the long day of his tragic exile as being the experience of everyman.

2Sa 17:17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying by En Rogel; and a female servant used to go and tell them; and they went and told king David. For they didn't want to be seen to come into the city-
The coming into the city recalls Jonathan being "in the city" whilst David was in exile outside it. We noted on :15 the similarities with the time when a minority in the court of Saul were loyal to David. Jonathan and David could not be seen together and had to communicate very carefully; and so it was here. The female servant, the lowest of the low in society, as both a woman and a slave, was the vital and crucial link between the two young men and the faithful priests in the city. This is typical of how God works.

2Sa 17:18 But a boy saw them, and told Absalom. Then they both went away quickly, and came to the house of a man in Bahurim, who had a well in his court; and they went down there-
There were clearly a number of faithful supporters. The poor servant woman, the wealthy home owner in Bahurim... and yet they are presented as struggling against the "boy" who noticed and reported things, and Absalom's servants (:20). It was really a repeat of the situation with Saul and David.

2Sa 17:19 The woman took and spread the covering over the well's mouth, and spread out bruised grain on it; and nothing was known-
"The woman" could refer to the servant girl of :17, or it could be as GNB "The man's wife".

2Sa 17:20 Absalom's servants came to the woman to the house; and they said, Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan? The woman said to them, They have gone over the brook of water. When they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem-
Literally, 'they are over the water'. And they were over water, because they were hiding in a well just above the water at the bottom of it (:18). Again, as discussed on 2 Sam. 16:16, this raises the question as to whether lying is always wrong, necessarily. Rahab's lies and those of the Hebrew midwives at the exodus are rewarded as acts of faith. But this is of course a slippery slope. But such open questions are left for our reflection, underlining that spiritual life cannot be run by laws but by principles. Indeed the way the woman lies about two men of God by saying they had gone away over a river is so similar to Rahab's situation. It could be that the woman was inspired by Rahab.

2Sa 17:21 It happened, after they had departed, that they came up out of the well, and

went and told king David; and they said to David, Arise and pass quickly over the water; for thus has Ahithophel counselled against you-
The implication was that Absalom was so vain and unstable that he might still change his mind and follow Ahithophel's advice.

2Sa 17:22 Then David arose, and all the people who were with him, and they passed over the Jordan. By the morning light there lacked not one of them who had not gone over the Jordan-
The crossing of Jordan after the lie of a woman definitely recalls the faithfulness of Rahab in lying about another two men of God; see on :20. All the people passing over Jordan uses the very words of Josh. 3:17, as if this retreat was going to turn into a magnificent defeat through their restoration. It also recalls Jacob passing over Jordan, in the direction David was going, and then finally returning in restoration by God's grace (Gen. 32:10). All this was intended as encouragement to the exiles in Babylon as they read these records.

2Sa 17:23 When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey, and arose, and went home, to his city, and set his house in order, and hanged himself; and he died, and was buried in the tomb of his father-

Whatever other reasons there were for Ahithophel's suicide, one was simply his difficulty to live with the fact that the truth he knew was not accepted by others. He spoke as the oracle of God (2 Sam. 16:23) and so he felt sure he had God on his side in giving the advice he did. His advice about Absalom sleeping with David's wife on his roof was a repeat of what Nathan the prophet had said from God. In essence, this is a common problem. We feel we know some truth, we may be sure it is in fact Divine truth; but if it is refused by others, we find it hard to live with. We are not secure in our own personal relationship with God. This misery at not having one's truth accepted by others is commonplace; and explains the miserable lives of so many conspiracy theorists.

"Set his house in order" is literally he ordained / commanded concerning his house. The same word as in :14- Yahweh had ordained / commanded to destroy his counsel. God's anger is clearly against this angry man, and He is 'with' David. But this man's anger was in a way justifiable because of what David had done to his granddaughter Bathsheba. Good people can become so bitter and enraged at others' sin and injustice that they themselves fall into sin and self destruction. Church life is full of this.

His suicide may have been because he knew that if Hushai's counsel was followed, David would defeat Absalom- and surely kill Ahithophel in vengeance. Indeed it is unclear when his suicide happened. It may well have taken him some days to return to

his home, and then on news of Absalom's death he committed suicide. It wasn't simply because of loss of face. The fact he feared David would do this, indeed he was totally certain David would, gives a tacit insight into David's character. He had murdered his wife Bathsheba's husband, and would clearly murder her grandfather. There is again no hint that despite the vast forgiveness and grace shown David, he has any noticeable grace himself. His character has not been apparently transformed. He had murdered Uriah and been forgiven, but would murder Ahithophel for advising to murder him. Shimei merely threw dust at David during Absalom's rebellion- and David on his deathbed commands Solomon to murder Shimei for it. For sure, Ahithophel's fear of David's revenge was not unfounded. Psalm 3, subtitled as referring to the time David fled from Absalom, has David asking God to smash the teeth and destroy the lives of "the wicked", any who were his "enemies". He clearly had a death wish for them all.

Ahithophel's suicide was a kind of answer to David's prayer at this time in Ps. 5:10: "Hold them guilty, God. Let them fall by their own advice; thrust them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against You". Whilst his suicide was completely his decision, it was also an answer to David's prayer at this point.

As believers in the representative nature of the Lord’s sacrifice, we are thereby empowered to break out of the routine of our lives. Life becomes valuable; we number our days with wisdom (Ps. 90:12). We no longer fear failure, for firstly we know there is forgiveness in Christ, and secondly, our focus is upon living the real life of ultimate discovery and adventure, able to live with the fears which this presents to us. Failure is no longer a problem to us; for the aim is ever before us. We will not be like Ahithophel, committing suicide because he ran out of political highway and lost his power to others. Our failures are nothing more than temporary setbacks, as the baby who stretches out her hands to the lamp on the ceiling and cries because she can’t reach it. We take them all, even our sins, in the spirit of the cross- the supreme failure which became the supreme triumph of God and the true person.

2Sa 17:24 Then David came to Mahanaim. Absalom passed over the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him-

Mahanaim had at one time been the capital of the Israelite kingdom under Abner and Ishbosheth, during the seven years when Abner had led the opposition to David's kingdom in Judah. And now David found refuge there. He had shown much grace to the house of Saul at that time, and now, many years later, he was finding grace in the one time capital of his opposition.

2Sa 17:25 Absalom set Amasa over the army instead of Joab. Now Amasa was the son of a man, whose name was Ithra the Israelite, who went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah, Joab's mother-
There is much unclarity over "the Israelite", because that seems obvious, unless the point is that he was not of Judah. The texts read "Jezreelite", and 1 Chron. 2:17 has "Jether the Ishmeelite". In this case the idea is that this man was not an Israelite, and had slept with the daughter of the serpent, Nahash. The patriotic, brave and loyal Joab was followed by someone of poorer qualification, even though his relative had slept with this man.

2Sa 17:26 Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead-
The description of Barzillai as a Gileadite (:27) shows that Absalom did not enjoy universal support from the rest of Israel.

2Sa 17:27 It happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim-
As happens in a crisis, all manner of people came out of the woodwork and showed their respects. David had been friends with Nahash but had fought against his son Hanun, Shobi's brother (2 Sam. 10:2). But a theme of this time of crisis is that Gentiles who had once been David's enemies, and whose families and relatives David had slain in war such as Ittai (see on 2 Sam. 15:19-21), now come out on David's side. They could only have done so because they had been converted to the God of Israel by David, their one time national enemy. Rogelim in Gilead likewise may well have been Gentile territory, and his descendants were unable to prove their genealogies (Ezra 2:61-63), although they wished to serve as priests and support the restored Kingdom, just as their ancestor supported David's restoration. Machir was the man who had allowed Mephibosheth to stay with him (2 Sam. 9:4,5), and would have been deeply impressed by David's huge grace to Mephibosheth and the house of Saul. He thereby realized that David was a man of God despite out of character failings.

2Sa 17:28 brought beds, basins, earthen vessels, wheat, barley, meal, parched grain, beans, lentils, roasted grain-
"Beds" suggests that they stayed there for some time and were fed by their hosts. This would have been a considerable commitment. David "lay" at Mahanaim (2 Sam. 19:32), suggesting he was sick.

2Sa 17:29 honey, butter, sheep, and cheese of the herd, for David, and for the people who were with him, to eat: for they said, The people are hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness-

Psalm 23:5 "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" refers to this time. Shimei and other "enemies" were aware of his path. The reference is to the feasts prepared for him in the desert by Ziba (2 Sam. 16:2) and Barzillai (2 Sam. 17:27-29). But the phrase "prepare a table" is that used of the preparation of the table of shewbread (Ex. 40:4), and it is used in a religious sense in Is. 65:11; Ez. 23:41. Perhaps David held some kind of religious ceremony whilst on the run, the equivalent to our breaking of bread meeting; perhaps Barzillai's feast was turned into a religious experience. And his experience of the Lord's table strengthened him with great encouragement, as we also can experience.

Psalm 42 clearly has reference to David's time at Mahanaim, which could have been months (2 Sam. 17:24; 19:32), whilst fleeing Absalom. David "lay" there for some time (2 Sam. 19:32), as if he was ill at this time. This was the original context of the Psalm, but David sitting by the waters in exile was obviously relevant to the captives sitting by the rivers of Babylon. Hence the title in the Syriac: "A Psalm which David sung when he was an exile and desired to return to Jerusalem"; the Arabic "A Psalm for the backsliding Jews". Psalm 42 is all relevant to this time in David's life:

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants after You, God- The theme of water in this Psalm (:7 too) is appropriate to David being by the waters of the Kidron and then the Jordan as he fled from Absalom. David sitting by the waters in exile was obviously relevant to the captives sitting by the rivers of Babylon.

Psalm 42:2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?- This reveals David's special longing for the sanctuary in Zion, where he 'appeared before God' to keep the Mosaic feasts (Ex. 23:17). But the application to the Lord Jesus is very clear- His was the ultimate, actual appearance before God in Heaven.

Psalm 42:3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually ask me, Where is your God?- This would imply that David's enemies had access to him whilst he lay at Mahanaim in exile from Absalom; we recall how Shimei followed David on the route, cursing him as he went. Or perhaps his own supporters were saying this. The exiles were likewise mocked in Babylon; and the Lord Jesus likewise on the cross.

Psalm 42:4 These things I remember and pour out my soul within me, how I used to go with the crowd, and led them to God's house, with the voice of joy and praise, a multitude keeping a holy day- This is David recalling how he used to lead the people towards the sanctuary on Zion on feast days. "God's house" however suggests the temple, and this was not built in David's time. So this may well have been added under

inspiration when the Psalm was used by the sons of Korah in the Babylonian exile; see on :1.

Psalm 42:5 Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God!- This kind of self-talk should characterize all of God's true people. For this is the very essence of spiritual mindedness. Psalm 42 has many echoes of the cross, although primarily it refers to David's longing for the tabernacle whilst exiled by Absalom. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" (:5 AV) is the same in the Septuagint as Mt. 26:38 "Now is my soul troubled".

For I shall still praise Him for the saving help of His presence- Perhaps applicable to a vision of glory appearing to the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane, transferring some of the glory of His countenance to Jesus as He did to Moses, so that the Lord's arresters initially fell down when they saw Him. David spoke of praising God for the health of His face; and then talks of how God is the source of the health of *his* face (Ps. 42:5,11 RV). It's as if the glory of the invisible God rubbed off upon David, as it did literally for Moses, whose faced became radiant with the glory of the Angel who spoke to him.

Psalm 42:6 Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from the hill Mizar- This may have been the area of Mahanaim, where it seems David remained whilst in exile from Absalom (2 Sam. 17:24). "The heights of Hermon" is literally 'the Hermons', LXX "the Hermonites", perhaps referring to the mountain range which began at Mount Hermon and continued to the Mahanaim area. "Mizar" is unknown, but could be read as "the little hill" (LXX). However, this interpretation of the geography could appear forced, especially with the reference to "cataracts" in :7. Hence Ray Stedman suggested that David was recalling "an experience that he had when he was in the northern part of Israel near Mount Hermon, at the head of the Jordan River, on a little peak of the range where Mount Hermon is located, called Mount Mizar (which, incidentally, means "little mountain"). On that occasion he could hear the waterfalls of that mountainous region, the thundering cataracts. He became aware of how they seemed to be calling to one another, "deep calling unto deep," and it reminded him that the deeps in God call out to the deeps in man".

Psalm 42:7 Deep calls to deep at the noise of Your waterfalls. All Your waves and Your billows have swept over me- Waterfalls" is better "cataracts", perhaps referring to the spot on the Jordan River where he was sitting as he composed this Psalm. See on :6. David like Jonah feels he has drowned and is in a living death.

Psalm 42:8 Yahweh will command His grace in the daytime. In the night His song shall be with me: a prayer to the God of my life- Yahweh's song connects with how the exiles also by the waters (of Babylon) were asked to sing Yahweh's song, the Psalms used in temple worship. David says that he will sing Yahweh's song, the temple liturgy, even though in exile from the temple. For he realizes that God's presence is not limited to the sanctuary. GNB may be correct in suggesting: "May the LORD show his constant love during the day, so that I may have a song at night". "The God of my life" could mean the God who alone could preserve David's life; or the God who was the focus of David's life.

Psalm 42:9 I will ask God, my rock, Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?- The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. Despite these feelings, David was spiritually mature enough to still consider God as his "rock", even though he felt God wasn't coming through for him as he expected. He expresses the same in Ps. 43:2. "Oppression" was what God's later people were to suffer at the hands of their enemies (s.w. Is. 30:20; Dt. 26:7); David's suffering was seen as that of God's later people, and so his Psalms were reused in this context.

Psalm 42:10 As with a sword in my bones, my adversaries reproach me, while they continually ask me, Where is your God?- David was sensitive to words; whilst in exile from Absalom, his enemies clearly had access to him and were communicating with him "continually". And he felt those words as swords. The sword that pierced Christ's soul on the cross was the sword of the abuse which was shouted at Him then (Ps. 42:10); and the piercing of Christ's soul, Simeon had said, was the piercing of Mary's soul too. In other words, they were both really cut, pierced, by this mocking of the virgin birth. Neither of them were hard and indifferent to it. And the fact they both stood together at the cross and faced it together must have drawn them closer, and made their parting all the harder. She alone knew beyond doubt that God was Christ's father, even though the Lord had needed to rebuke her for being so carried away with the humdrum of life that she once referred to Joseph as His father (Lk. 2:33). For everyone else, there must always have been that tendency to doubt.

Psalm 42:11 Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise Him, the saving help of my countenance, and my God- "Despair" is the word used of David's feelings after the sin with Bathsheba (s.w. Ps. 38:6). It is the word for bowing down, for humility. But nobody likes being bowed down in humility, and David likewise wriggles against it. But we see here the kind of self-talk

which is characteristic of all those who are truly spiritually minded. This 'bowing down' was to characterize the sufferings of Judah for their sins (s.w. Is. 2:11; 5:15; 26:5). David was possibly asking himself a rhetorical question- Why was he bowed down? Because God wanted to humble him so that He might restore him. But "help" is the usual word for 'salvation', and "countenance" is the usual word for 'face'. 'Save my face' would be a fair translation. And here again we encounter our concerns as to whether David's repentance was as thorough as it might have been. He did indeed confess his sin and seek forgiveness. But so much of his praying at this time is for God to save him from shame, and to judge and destroy and eternally condemn those at whose hands he was receiving judgment for his sins. And this was the problem with the exiles whom he later came to represent.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 18

2Sa 18:1 David numbered the people who were with him, and set over them captains over thousands and captains over hundreds-
This would imply David had major support. However, "thousands" and "hundreds" are often not to be read literally, but refer rather to regiments or military divisions. The captains of these thousands and hundreds were Joab and Abishai (:2), men of proven low moral character. And yet the reference to captains over thousands and hundreds clearly alludes to the Mosaic commands to set wise, upright men over hundreds and thousands: "You shall provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God: men of truth, hating unjust gain; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds"; "wise men and known... made... heads over you, captains of thousands, captains of hundreds" (Ex. 18:21; Dt. 1:15). Joab was the man who had actually executed David's command to murder Uriah, getting other soldiers to die to cover it; he was hardly a "man of truth". David's conscience was surely touched by appointing Joab to be a "captain" at this time. Time and again we see David's behaviour to be far from obedient to God's law, which he said he loved and studied all the time. Likewise we will note the use of a mule by him, for Solomon to sit on as a sign he was king, and the possibility that Absalom was riding David's mule. But mules as cross breeds were forbidden under the Mosaic law.

2Sa 18:2 David sent forth the people, a third part under the hand of Joab, a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite-
We note how David had come to trust Ittai to lead his troops, having only recently doubted his loyalty (2 Sam. 15:21,22). He was persuaded of his sincerity and not disappointed. We marvel at the power of God's truth. A Philistine, from Goliath's home

town, had accepted covenant relationship with Yahweh and therefore accepts His anointed king, David. Even though David had lied to the men of Gath and later slain them, and had recently disgraced himself again over Bathsheba. The power of God's truth was greater than all the disadvertisments for that truth in Yahweh's chosen representative. And this is a powerful challenge to those who turn away from God because of the bad examples of His representatives. And yet again we note how David has so few solid friends. His own tribe of Judah and people of Israel have gone off after Absalom; so that he has to appoint a Philistine man whose loyalty he doubts as his army commander. Likewise after Absalom's death he appoints Amasa, Absalom's general, as his general. David is thus portrayed as a lonely man whom others only want to use, and his final deathbed scene shows his family treating him likewise. An appropriate end for a man with no love and only narcissism.

The king said to the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also-
The significance of this is that David is harking back to how he had not gone out to war with his armies at the time of 2 Sam. 11:1, and it had led him into the sin with Bathsheba. At every point we find God referring him back to that sin. It seems that after the sin, David insisted on going out with his troops to battle even when he was too old to effectively do so (2 Sam. 21:17). It was the duty of Israel's king to lead Israel in battle; but David had failed to do so at the time of his sin with Bathsheba. And now he is being forcibly reminded that he is in fact incapable of leading Israel in battle, and the same point will be made in 2 Sam. 21:17. It's not that God wanted to keep haunting David with his sin; rather was He earnestly trying to get David to re-live the sin and repent more fully, appreciating more what he had done to others.

2Sa 18:3 But the people said, You shall not go forth; for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us-
They had been informed of the reasoning of Ahithophel and Hushai. They realized that Absalom wanted David personally dead, and they reflect their loyalty to David by reasoning as they do. Hence his forces at this time are called "the servants of David".

But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore now it's better that you are ready to help us from out of the city-
It had became a kind of proverb in Israel that David was worth ten thousand, after the words of the women at the time of David's victory over Goliath in his youth (1 Sam. 18:7); it was said right towards the end of his life, and contributed towards the jealousy felt toward him. People failed to perceive that the whole conflict was about the glory of God and not the human channel through which that was achieved. And yet one theme of the David story is of mixed motives. We wonder whether his soldiers realized that the civil war would end as soon as Absalom was dead, and so they were out to find and kill Absalom as soon as possible- and they knew that if David were present with them in the

battle, this would be impossible. Again, David is deceived by those ostensibly on his side. His deceit towards Uriah keeps being played back to him before his eyes.

2Sa 18:4 The king said to them, I will do what seems best to you. The king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands-
This seems to reflect David's weakness of resolve and personality at this time, and perhaps he was like this for the rest of his life. He was focused only upon Absalom at this point, and agrees to "do what seems best to you". Hundreds and thousands refer to military units rather than literal numbers.

2Sa 18:5 The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. All the people heard when the king commanded all the captains concerning Absalom-
These are terms of endearment. "Young man" is literally 'boy' or 'child', and "deal gently" means to be 'soft', as one would deal with a baby. David comes over as besotted and out of touch with reality to ask that this murderer be treated delicately like a baby. Had David lived in the real world he would have faced his sins and repented of them, but it seems his denial of his sins led him to enter a make believe, Alice in wonderland world of his own making. Or at best, a very distorted version of reality generally.

2Sa 18:6 So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the forest of Ephraim-
Although Absalom was of Judah, his army is described as "Israel", as if David's men were the true Judah. By making this assault it would see that Absalom had not taken Hushai's advice, and had rushed ahead to try and remove David as soon as possible, so as to cement his power. The tragedy for Ahithophel was that his advice was more or less followed; his suicide in protest at Hushai's being thought better was therefore premature and rooted in hurt pride.

2Sa 18:7 The people of Israel were struck there before the servants of David, and there was a great slaughter there that day of twenty thousand men-
"Were struck" could imply there was some Divine involvement and striking down of Absalom's forces, which David's servants followed up on. This could explain the rather strange statement that the forest ate up more of Absalom's men than David's men killed with the sword (:8).

2Sa 18:8 For the battle was there spread over the surface of all the country; and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured-

This is what David had prayed for in the Psalms; that his enemies at the time of Absalom's rebellion would be "consumed" (e.g. Ps. 71:13). David's desire was heard in that the sword and the forest devoured or consumed Absalom and his forces (2 Sam. 18:8). But when the prayer was answered, David wept bitterly for the loss of Absalom. We are thereby warned to be careful what we pray for, lest we receive it- which in some form we will. The forest would have been full of steep gorges leading down to the Jordan. But as suggested on :7, there may be reference here to some supernatural destruction of men. Or the idea may be that more perished whilst being chased in the forest, than in the actual battle.

2Sa 18:9 Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, so that he was taken up between the sky and earth; and the mule that was under him went on-

It is stressed that Absalom had a mule, which was also the animal used by him to escape at the time he slew Abner. It was appropriate that at his death, he was also on a mule. And even more so, because the mule was a crossbred animal, which was against the Mosaic law. All through, Absalom comes over as a man who paid no respect to God's law in matters great or apparently small.

It's unclear whether "Absalom was riding on his mule" refers to his own mule or that of David. Quite possibly he was riding David's mule because this was a sign of being king- Solomon rode on David's mule as a sign that he was the chosen king (1 Kings 1:33,38). The clear picture is of his desire to be king leading him to his death, under God's providence. Absalom was left hanging on a tree- the punishment for treasonous kings in Josh. 8:29; 10:26.

2Sa 18:10 A certain man saw it and informed Joab and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak-

Contrary to pictures in children's Bibles, the idea is not that Absalom was suspended by his long hair. It seems rather that his head hit the forked boughs of the oak tree, and he was stunned and left hanging. His head and not his hair "caught hold of the oak" (:9). That said, it is inevitable that his head catching in the oak involved his hair, because the word "catching" (:9) is more appropriate to hair being entangled than a head being stunned. The woman of Tekoah had misled David into promising that not a hair of the head of her son would be damaged / "fall to the earth" (2 Sam. 14:11), and her son represented Absalom. On the basis of this judgment, David had to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem with David guaranteeing that not a hair of his head would fall to the earth. But Absalom's famous hair did fall to the earth. David is thereby presented as powerless and unwise in his judgment of his people. He was unfit to be king. He was

intended to get the point, to take the nudge, and resign from being king and just focus on his music ministry and rejoice in the amazing assurance of personal salvation he had in 2 Sam. 7. But like so many men, those wonderful things weren't enough for him. He wanted it all visibly now in this life.

2Sa 18:11 Joab said to the man who told him, Behold, you saw it, and why didn't you strike him there to the ground? I would have given you ten pieces of silver, and a belt-
The belt may refer to a military rank; Joab says he would have promoted the man and given him money, unless the "ten pieces of silver" also refers to some kind of badge of office.

2Sa 18:12 The man said to Joab, Though I should receive a thousand pieces of silver in my hand, I still wouldn't put forth my hand against the king's son; for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai saying, 'Beware that none touch the young man Absalom'-
The incident shows the intense loyalty of this anonymous man. David had a way of inspiring such deep loyalty; and this looks ahead to how we should be inspired by the Lord Jesus, refusing all material advantage for the sake of obedience to His word and wish, even if those wishes appear nonsensical to us.

2Sa 18:13 Otherwise if I had dealt falsely against his life (and there is no matter hidden from the king), then you yourself would have set yourself against me-
The soldier is saying that for sure David would have killed him had he killed Absalom. And Joab wouldn't have protected him, Joab wouldn't have stood up to David. We again have an insight into David's vengefulness and lack of hesitation to shed blood, even that of his own soldiers [cp. his murder of Uriah]- justaposed against his obsessive love for his wayward sons. We will later see that this explains the nervousness of Ahimaaz to even tell David that his son was dead, just as the courtiers had feared to tell David his child by Bathsheba was dead. It seems David's character was unchanged by the Bathsheba incident and his experience of amazing grace; and we are to learn from that. David's soul was broken as a result of his own mistakes and his general experience of life. David's depression resulted in him manifesting all the classic characteristics of the highly strung person. But it led him to his great sensitivity and almost telepathic ability to enter into other's problems was legendary throughout Israel, and this was one of the things which endeared him to his people (1 Sam. 22:22; 2 Sam. 14:17,20; 18:13)- and there is a powerful similarity here with our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Hebrew seems to mean that the man knew that had he killed Absalom, then Joab would have been the first in saying that he must be killed for having slain the king's son. Perhaps David had implied there would be the death penalty for doing this. And yet as

with Amnon and Absalom, he refuses to carry out the death penalty against Joab for slaying Absalom. And again, this lead to further problems for him in that finally Joab too would revolt against him. David didn't carry out these death penalties because he realized he must reflect the grace shown to him in not having to die for what he had done to Uriah. And yet reflecting grace is not cheap; for David, in each of these cases, it meant long term suffering. Yet we marvel at God's way; for the promise that David not die but instead would suffer huge grief in his family life was a result of his subsequently responding to the grace shown him. We see here how God's word comes true through the faithful response of His people to His grace.

2Sa 18:14 Then Joab said, I'm not going to wait like this with you. He took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak-

Heb. 'in the heart of the terebinth', possibly implying that this oak was associated with idolatry, and Absalom died caught up in his own idolatry, both literally and in terms of worshipping his own ego and obsession with the throne. The "darts" were likely sharpened sticks, for he grabbed whatever was at hand. "The heart" would refer to the trunk of his body, seeing Joab didn't actually succeed in killing Absalom with them (:15).

2Sa 18:15 Ten young men who bore Joab's armour surrounded and struck Absalom, and killed him-

The only other reference to "ten young men" is to the ten young men of David in 1 Sam. 25:5. We wonder if David had used this group of ten young men in murdering others, and now a similar group were used to slay his beloved son. We noted on 2 Sam. 11:2 that some texts [notably the Qumran Samuel Scroll] add the comment that Uriah had been Joab's armourbearer. Joab clearly despised what David made him do to Uriah, and now uses his replacement armourbearers to slay David's son.

2Sa 18:16 Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel; for Joab held back the people-

"The people" could possibly refer to the followers of Absalom. I say this because the Proverbs are full of allusion to David's history, as David sought to ever glorify his father David and set him up as the parade example of wisdom. And Prov. 24:16 uses the same word for 'holding back' people from destruction. We get the impression that the possible translation "Joab wished to spare the people" may be valid, according to the context. Joab didn't want there to be bloodshed. It recalls the situation in 2 Sam. 2:28 where again Joab had blown a trumpet to restrain civil war. We see the mixture of spirituality and unspirituality in Joab. He genuinely wished to stop the bloodshed, and yet he slew Absalom. Again the record leaves us wondering as to his motives. He had

apparently initially supported Absalom's bid for the throne; was he trying to show for all time that he didn't support Absalom? Was he so loyal to David that he realized Absalom had to be slain, and anyway, Absalom was worthy of death for having slain Amnon? Or was he simply wanting revenge for Absalom burning down his barley field? Surely all these elements featured in his thinking. Human motivation is so complex, and therefore God alone can judge it.

2Sa 18:17 They took Absalom, and cast him into the great pit in the forest, and raised over him a very great heap of stones. Then all Israel fled everyone to his tent-
Josh. 7:26 describes the covering of Achan with a cairn likewise; for he too was the troubler of Israel. Again we see the mixture of thinking in the characters before us; Biblical allusion mixed with disobedience to David. Raising a heap of stones was another way of saying that the people were stoning the dead person; and stoning was the punishment for the disobedient son (Dt. 21:20,21). At the time of Absalom's rebellion, David had prayed that his enemies be cast into a pit and die before their time: "But you, O God, will cast them down into the lowest pit; the bloodthirsty and treacherous shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you" (Ps. 55:23). But when this happens to Absalom (2 Sam. 18:17), David is heartbroken. Clearly his prayers were uttered in a flush of hot blood, and remain a powerful reminder to think about what we are asking for, and be properly motivated in our requests. For in essence, we receive what we ask for. In one sense, God hears *all prayers* (Ps. 139:4, 1 Jn. 5:14,15; 1 Pet. 3:12) although He doesn't always give the answers desired ("You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:3)). But the answers are not as we expect and some answers may only come in the Kingdom age; and it is the essence of the prayer that will be heard, not necessarily the specific request. A request not to die of a particular disease may be technically unanswered; but the essence of the prayer is that we are asking not to die. And we will not, when we are immortalized.

2Sa 18:18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself the pillar, which is in the king's vale; for he said, I have no son to keep my name in memory. He called the pillar after his own name; and it is called Absalom's monument, to this day-
Perhaps his three sons of 2 Sam. 14:27 had died in their youth or childhood. for infant mortality was high in those times. Or maybe he had fallen out with them, and they had disowned each other. His aggressive attitude to his own father may have been triggered by his own experience of this at the hands of his sons. Despite having just slept with his father's wives, who were presumably still fertile (2 Sam. 16:22), Absalom had no hope or patience to hope that he would have sons by them. "The king's vale" is that of Gen. 14:17. Having built the memorial there, Absalom had thereby again hinted at how he considered himself fit to be a king. His vanity was clearly expressed. The pillar to his own glory is contrasted with the heap of stones of :17, which was his true memorial-

casting him in the inglorious role of Achan the troubler of Israel. It was not uncommon for men who had no descendants or whose sons had disowned them [or vice versa] to make a pillar to keep their name in memory. There are examples of this in the surrounding nations. This practice is specifically referred to when Is. 56:5 offers the eunuch "a monument and name that is better than sons and daughters". Had Absalom believed the promises of 2 Sam. 7, he would have rejoiced that Messiah would come in his father's line and have an eternal family. But like David, he wanted it here and now.

2Sa 18:19 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, Let me now run and bear the king news, how that Yahweh has avenged him of his enemies-
David had prayed that God would judge and avenge him of his enemies (Ps. 43:1 and often). But we must be careful what we pray for; because we do receive the answers. Those angry prayers of David were not mixed with grace, and so he now received their answer- when it was not what he wanted.

2Sa 18:20 Joab said to him, You shall not be the bearer of news this day, but you shall bear news another day. But today you shall bear no news, because the king's son is dead-
See on :21,22. There was in Hebrew an association between carrying tidings, and good news. You didn't carry tidings if there was no good news. This is the background for the Greek word *evangelion* translated 'Gospel' which means, strictly, 'good news that is being passed on'; for example, the good news of a victory was passed on by runners to the capital city. Once it had been spread around and everyone knew it, it ceased to be *evangelion*; it was no longer news that needed to be passed on. But in that time when there was a *joyful urgency* to pass it on, it was *evangelion*. Notice, heralding is not the same as lecturing. Our community for far too long equated preaching , good newsing, with lecturing. Lecturing seeks no result; whereas the herald of God has an urgency and breathlessness about his message. There must be a passion and enthusiasm in us for the message of Christ and His Kingdom. More to be feared than over emotionalism is the dry, detached utterance of facts as a droning lecture, which has neither heart nor soul in it. Man's peril, Christ's salvation…these things cannot mean so little to us that we feel no warmth or passion rise within us as we speak about them.

2Sa 18:21 Then Joab said to the Cushite, Go, tell the king what you have seen! The Cushite bowed himself to Joab, and ran-
Bearers of good news were often given presents (:22), and bearers of bad news could be punished. Joab wanted to save Ahimaaz from this, so again we see a level of decency in the mixed character of Joab. Messengers of low rank were often sent with bad news (:27), and so Joab sends a Cushite, an Ethiopian servant, to carry the news.

2Sa 18:22 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said yet again to Joab, But come what may, please let me also run after the Cushite. Joab said, Why do you want to run, my son, since that you will have no reward for the news?-
As discussed on :21, good news was rewarded with a gift. Joab appears to want to save Ahimaaz from the shame of bringing bad news. He already realizes that the victory is going to be bad news for David. Hence LXX “thou hast no good tidings for profit if thou goest” and the Vulgate “thou wilt not be a bearer of good tidings".

2Sa 18:23 But come what may, he said, I will run. He said to him, Run! Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the Plain, and outran the Cushite-
The *kikkar,* or Jordan valley. The battle had been fought on the east of Jordan. Ahimaaz ran up the valley and then turned inland, whereas the Cushite took the more direct route through the forests, which ended up being slower.

2Sa 18:24 Now David was sitting between the two gates-
David was sitting in the space between the inner and outer gates. Over this was a room (:33), and the watchman was over the outer gate. It was in this kind of space that Joab had murdered Abner, and David may have been thereby prepared for news that Joab had committed yet another murder he disapproved of. We marvel at the sensitivity of the record, which can only be Divine, and is quite different to contemporary historical writings which are always grossly exaggerated and pay no attention to such details.

And the watchman went up to the roof of the gate to the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, a man running alone-
The word for "watchman" here is that used in Ps. 5:3, where David says he "will watch expectantly" for the answer to his prayer. We must be careful what we pray for. Because we will likely receive it in some form. If indeed the context of Ps. 5 is that of Absalom's rebellion, then we have to note that this same word for 'watching expectantly' is used repeatedly of the expectant watching for news of the battle with Absalom (2 Sam. 18:24-27); and the news was not what David wanted to hear. Absalom had been slain. But he had asked God to save him from Absalom's rebellion, and promised to "watch expectantly" for the answer. He had been told that evil would arise from within his own house, and by this point he surely should have perceived what that meant. But he is praying desperately that Absalom's life will be saved, instead of accepting God's will and the result of his own actions. We note the reference to the wall, and possibly the connection is with how Uriah was slain by men on a wall, at David's command. Now David's eyes, his watchman, are effectively high on a wall, seeing the death of his son.

2Sa 18:25 The watchman cried, and told the king. The king said, If he is alone, there is

news in his mouth. He came closer and closer-
David's under his breath comments of millennia ago are recorded here, so that we might enter into the stress of the situation. Those comments are absolutely credible as what he would have muttered as the news is about to break for him. The messenger was alone, not accompanied by a host of fleeing people. Being alone might be read as good news. And David was clutching at any straw which might mean good news for him.

2Sa 18:26 The watchman saw another man running; and the watchman called to the porter, and said, Behold, a man running alone! The king said, He also brings news-
"To the porter" is LXX "into the gate"; he was calling to David who was sitting in between the gates. It is obvious that a messenger running was bringing news. But David's muttered comment is noted because of the scale of detail this scene is being recorded at. And such comments are absolutely typical of someone nervously awaiting highly significant news.

2Sa 18:27 The watchman said, I think the running of the first one is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. The king said, He is a good man, and comes with good news-
This kind of throw away comment is typical of people in great anxiety. The record has every reason to be believed. These words were really said, these things truly happened. As noted on :21,22, good news was carried by men of higher standing than those who carried bad news. Therefore David's hopes were raised, thinking that this must mean there was "good news". Although he realized that "good news" to those around him might be bad news for him, i.e. the death of his son.

2Sa 18:28 Ahimaaz called and said to the king, All is well. He bowed himself before the king with his face to the earth and said, Blessed is Yahweh your God, who has delivered up the men who lifted up their hand against my lord the king!-
Ahimaaz could not bring himself to tell David the bad news about Absalom. Surely he knew that he was dead. Like Joab, he knew David would be saddened by this, but focused upon the bigger picture- David's side had won, thanks to Yahweh's help. "Delivered up" is literally 'shut up' (s.w. Ps. 31:8), which could mean they had been conquered and taken captive. The intensity builds, as David clings to the hope that Absalom has been captured and not killed.

2Sa 18:29 The king said, Is it well with the young man Absalom? Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, even me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I don't know what it was-
David knew from 2 Sam. 12:10 that the sword would not depart from his house. He had seen Amnon slain, and he obviously sensed Absalom must also die. But he was quite

naturally praying and hoping against hope that somehow the predicted consequences of his sin with Bathsheba might be limited. Surely he must have asked himself multiple times "Why, why ever did I do that?". The huge consequences of that brief period of sin remain as a warning to us all.

These messenger scenes after Absalom's death are similar to the messenger scenes after Uriah's death. Both times Joab gives the instructions to the messenger, there is the theme of Joab being unhappy with David's actions although only here does he rebuke David; and Joab is aware of the fact the message will not be what David wants to hear. David's servants likewise didn't want to inform him of the death of his child from Bathsheba "lest he will do harm" to the messenger carrying the bad news (2 Sam. 12:18). Why didn't Ahimaaz tell David the news about Absalom? He had run so hard with the news and now he fails to tell David what David wants to know. Everyone knew Absalom was dead. But he loses his nerve and lies to David. And why did the other messenger state it so obliquely? Surely because David hadn't changed from the wrathful man he was at the time of the Bathsheba matter. The pouring out of grace and forgiveness upon him hadn't changed him much. David had arbitrarily slain the man who told him of Saul's death. Even if the man was exaggerating in the hope of getting some reward from David, this was extreme reaction from David. I discussed on 2 Sam. 16:8 that David's later command to slay Shimei was also a shooting of a messenger, because Shimei's cursing of David was consciously repeating the words of Yahweh to David about his sin. And his courtiers clearly knew he was capable of killing the messenger of news about his son's death. We see how David didn't really grow spiritually at all in this area, and many others- despite God's great efforts. And yet he will be saved, by grace. There was no 'expiation by suffering', no learning from suffering even, no being made perfect by suffering. Rather is this an example of failure to respond, pigheadedly holding on to our narratives about ourselves and our own innocence to the very end, going to our grave planks refusing to get it- and still being saved by grace. And that is the point of all this history of David... It's comforting to ourselves personally, and helps us think better of believers who come to the end of their days still wrong and bitter about various issues.

2Sa 18:30 The king said, Turn aside, and stand here. He turned aside, and stood still-
After such a long run, it would have been hard to stand, let alone to stand still. He did so in reflection of his deep respect for David.

2Sa 18:31 Behold, the Cushite came. The Cushite said, News for my lord the king; for Yahweh has avenged you this day of all those who rose up against you-
David in the Psalms records how he hated those who 'rose up' against him, and that includes Absalom. Saul 'rose up' against David (s.w. 1 Sam. 25:29; 26:2), and then evil

men 'rose up' against David out of his own family (2 Sam. 12:11 s.w.), especially Absalom who rose up against his father (2 Sam. 18:31,32 s.w.). But David had prayed too quickly in his Psalms against those who rose up against him; and now he will have his answer. We must be careful what we pray for, for in a sense we will receive it.

2Sa 18:32 The king said to the Cushite, Is it well with the young man Absalom? The Cushite answered, May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you to do you harm, be as that young man is-
See on :31. "Enemies... who rise up against you" is a quotation from Dt. 28:7. This was to be the blessing for obedience to the covenant, and the curse upon those outside of the covenant. The Cushite had likely thought hard about how he was going to express the news, and he chose a Biblical quotation through which to do so- perhaps a good pattern for us in such difficult situations. And indeed he was correct; Absalom had indeed despised the covenant, and David [for all his sins] had been faithful to it. And the Cushite servant perceived that; David's out of character failures didn't mean he had been unfaithful to the covenant. And that is how we too must consider those who fail in out of character ways.

2Sa 18:33 The king was much moved, and went up to the room over the gate, and wept. As he went, he said, My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! I wish I had died for you, Absalom, my son, my son!-
This situation is a repeat of when David had anxiously waited for news of the commotion caused at Absalom's party when he slew Amnon (2 Sam. 13:34). Now again he will weep bitterly for the death of a son. Situations repeat in our lives, and even if we cannot attach meaning to event at the time, we at least have the comfort that they bear the same hallmark of Divine involvement in our lives, according to some plan- even if we may not discern it.

The scene is of David sitting between the gates and going up over the gate to get news of Absalom and weeping there for his death. It was from a wall above a gate that the archers shot from and killed Uriah (2 Sam. 11:23,24). David viewed Bathsheba from the roof (2 Sam. 11:2), and this was matched by the roof on which Absalom slept with David's wife, and the way the watchman sees the two messengers running with news of Absalom's death (2 Sam. 18:24), and it was on a roof that David lamented his son.

I discussed on 2 Sam. 12 that the death of David's son by Bathsheba was in a sense the son taking the death penalty for the father. And David seems to have understood it that way, as he strangely acts with joy and a sense of freedom once the child is dead, rather than mourning. But now he wishes he had died instead of his son Absalom. Yet again we see how the dimensions of what David did are acted out as it were in front of his eyes. He is brought by these circumstances towards self understanding, and comprehension

of the dimensions of what he did in the Bathsheba-Uriah sin. And he is specifically being convicted of his lack of remorse over the death of Bathsheba's child, which was directly his fault. We might also note that David doesn't mourn the death of Uriah and his soldier comrades. He is now being nudged as to his previous lack of remorse and devaluing of human life.

There is possibly here the idea that David felt that he himself deserved the punishment of death. Or we could read this as being said in the spirit of Moses (Ex. 32:32) and Paul (Rom. 9:3), who were willing to have given their lives, had it been possible, to save others. And yet despite that element to David at this point, there is clearly a marked inconsistency in him; for he is very severe in his judgments at times (2 Sam. 12:5,6), slaying the messenger who said he'd slain Saul; and yet huge grace to his sons [Amnon allowed to have Tamar visit him alone and not executing him, not executing Absalom and allowing him back, and now to Absalom]. I suggest David's obsession with his sons was rooted in his refusal to accept the meaning of the promises to him about his future Son, and his effort to make those promises fulful in one of his own sons. This is how he set Solomon up for final failure. And so at this point he has conviction for sin, a selfless desire to die for his son; and yet this wasn't very deep nor did it abide long. Just as happened after his conviction of sin by Nathan.

There is however another possible take on David's extreme mourning for Absalom. Extreme mourning has featured in his life before- after the deaths of Saul, Abner [Saul's general], Ishbosheth [Saul's son] and Amnon [David's firstborn]. In each of those cases, the mourning and extremely public nature of his grief was without doubt politically motivated, seeking to demonstrate his innocence from having slain a rival for power [Amnon as his firstborn could also be seen as a rival]. It would be hard to argue that David simply had a soft streak for his fallen enemies, because his Psalms have hatred for enemies as such a major theme. So whilst it is hard not to discern some element of genuine grief in David as regards Absalom, as ever with him, it seems likely that he had other motives as well. After all, David was seeking to reconcile with the men of Judah, who had generally backed Absalom. His promotion of Amasa their army commander to be the commander of his army is proof enough of his political consciousness and concern about his image with the men of Judah.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 19

2Sa 19:1 It was told Joab, Behold, the king weeps and mourns for Absalom-
Why is this added? Joab was fully aware the king would be upset for the loss of Absalom. Perhaps it is noted here to provoke us to imagine the kinds of feelings and self talk Joab had when he was told this.

2Sa 19:2 The victory that day was turned into mourning to all the people; for the people heard it said that day, The king grieves for his son-
The king's grief became that of the people. They are presented as at one with him. His spirit was theirs. And this looks ahead to the relationship between the Lord Jesus and His people.

2Sa 19:3 The people sneaked into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle-
Truly the victory was turned into a defeat. "The city" is Mahanaim, not Jerusalem.

2Sa 19:4 The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, My son Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son!-
David covered his head in mourning when Absalom was dead and the rebellion was over, just as he did when Absalom came to power (2 Sam. 15:30). We get the impression that it was grief every way for David, whether Absalom lived or died. And this is indeed the take away lesson for us- that the outcome of sin is a lose lose situation.

2Sa 19:5 Joab came into the house to the king and said, You have shamed this day the faces of all your servants, who this day have saved your life, and the lives of your sons and of your daughters, and the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines-
This implies that David's wives and little ones all went with him in the tragic departure from Jerusalem. David's "servants" were specifically his soldiers, who are repeatedly called "David's servants".

2Sa 19:6 in that you love those who hate you, and hate those who love you. For you have declared this day, that princes and servants are nothing to you. For today I perceive that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it would have pleased you well-
The accusation is fair enough- that David had no regard for the lives of his men, because of his unreasonable love obsession, in this case for Absalom. This is a repeat of the situation with Bathsheba, where his obsession with her led him to disregard the lives of his men, both Uriah and the other men of Israel who died to cover his murder. Again and again, what David did is replayed before his eyes; not to haunt him just for the sake of it, but to lead him to deeper understanding of the dimensions of his actions previously. Had Absalom won, he would have killed both David and all his inner circle. And that, Joab concludes, would have been pleasing to David.

We see the internal harmony of the record in that Joab's reaction to Abner's being sent away in peace (2 Sam. 3:24) is in spirit so similar to his frustration here with David over

the death of Absalom. We note the internal consistency in the record of Joab's character; another reason to believe these records are absolutely credible and inspired by God.

The more we look for it, the more we see other examples of where material relevant to David is applied directly to all believers in the New Testament, thus setting him up as our example and realistic pattern. Joab's comment about the way David loved his enemies (2 Sam. 19:6) was thus verbatim picked up by the Lord and set up as the example for each of us. And yet David only came to be so kind and forgiving because of his experience of God's forgiveness to him over the Bathsheba incident.

2Sa 19:7 Now therefore arise, go out, and speak to the heart of your servants; for I swear by Yahweh, if you don't go out, not a man will stay with you this night. That would be worse for you than all the evil that has happened to you from your youth until now-
Joab speaks to David roughly, and not at all as a man should speak to his king. This was partly his style, but it also is a tacit reflection upon David's loss of power. Joab speaks the truth when he implies that David was about to lose all power because of his attitude to Absalom's death; he no longer had a strong power base. We can better understand why Solomon in his Proverbs is always making sideways swipes at his potential competitors for the throne. He did not inherit a strong position and had to establish his hold on power.

At the time of David's sin against Uriah, Joab had told David to come to the battle front and 'take' Rabbah lest someone else take the glory and name it after themselves. His behaviour here is similar, as is David's acquiescence. Again David is being reminded of what happened at Rabbah, to help his re-live the results of his sin and repent.

2Sa 19:8 Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. They told all the people saying, Behold, the king is sitting in the gate. All the people came before the king. Now Israel had fled every man to his tent-
Now "the people" of David are contrasted to "Israel", implying David's supporters are the true people of God. They passed before David in some formal procession in order to receive his thanks.

2Sa 19:9 All the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king delivered us out of the hand of our enemies, and he saved us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he has fled out of the land from Absalom-
The strife, or conflicting opinions / judgments (Heb.), regarded who the should respect as their king. Sadly there was no expressed opinion that they should again accept God

as their king. There were clearly no other credible options as king apart from David, and the people always remembered that David had fulfilled the Divine potential for the king of Israel- that he would save them from their enemies. Absalom and nobody else had done this.

2Sa 19:10 Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why don't you speak a word of bringing the king back?-
Their anointing of Absalom was effectively a disannulling of David's Divine anointing as their king. They therefore felt leaderless unless there was some formal ceremony whereby David was restored as king. LXX adds "And the word of all Israel came to the king". Typically the word of the ruler went out to all Israel, but this is stated the other way around, hinting at David's weakness. The initiative for David's restoration came from the ten tribes, and was only later accepted by Judah (:11). All Israel were to be united by their common acceptance of having betrayed their intended king, and by the experience of his grace. See on :16.

2Sa 19:11 King David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests saying, Speak to the elders of Judah saying, 'Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house? Since the speech of all Israel has come to the king, to return him to his house-
David again seems to misjudge things and act unwisely. He is set to return over the Jordan and thence to Jerusalem and become king again. But there's nobody to meet him and symbolically convey him over Jordan. So he sends Zadok and Abiathar to get his tribe, Judah, to bring him over Jordan. It was this perceived nepotism towards Judah that led to the next rebellion, by Sheba from Benjamin (2 Sam. 20:1). Again we see some point to Absalom's complaint that he couldn't judge-and thereby again, David is shown unfit for kingship. And it was part of being the king of Israel that he should judge, and judge justly. David desperately hung on to being king when he should have realized his own failure as king, resigned, and focused on the wonderful promise of the future eternal king in his line- the Lord Jesus.

See on :10. Judah had been the strongest supporters of Absalom, for he had been declared king in Hebron, the historical capital of Judah (2 Sam. 15:10). Yet it was the ten tribes who proposed the restoration of David as king. Clearly those closest to David [the tribe of Judah and the people of Jerusalem] were the most disgusted and disillusioned by his behaviour with Bathsheba and Uriah.

2Sa 19:12 You are my brothers, you are my bone and my flesh. Why then are you the last to bring back the king?'-
This could be read more as an assurance of forgiveness than a rebuke. The suggestion was that they did want the restoration of David as king, but they should be more vocal

about it; and the message thereby assured them that David was not looking to take any vengeance for their betrayal. See on :13.

2Sa 19:13 Say to Amasa, 'Aren't you my bone and my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if you aren't captain of the army before me continually in place of Joab'-
Eph. 5:30 makes the amazing statement that even now, "We are of members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones". In a very detailed study of this language, Henricus Renckens concluded: "In Israel, in order to say that someone was a blood relation, one said: "He is my flesh and my bones" (Gen. 29:14; Jud. 9:2; cp. Gen. 37:27; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13 ff.; Is. 58:7)". This is how close we are to the Lord Jesus- blood relatives. This language could in no way be justified if Jesus were God Himself in person.

David is repeating the lessons he learned after the death of Saul, where he showed huge grace to his enemies- and it worked. Even though it ran against the grain of all secular sense and wisdom. And so now he does the same, in offering the post of commander-in chief to the general of the rebel army. But it was a huge risk, and the fact Amasa accepted it shows the fickleness of men within the arena of human politics. And this could reflect David's mad descent into unwisdom and inability to control his hatred of Joab for rightly killing Absalom. All this could show that David has little moral compass left. So again we are left to ponder whether this was grace, or desperate politics to get the men of Judah back with him. And quite likely, knowing David, it was a mixture of both. His appeal to Amasa that they were blood relatives is somewhat suspect because the same was true of Joab whom he was replacing. More likely David alludes to the covenant of 2 Sam. 5:1, whereby David was accepted as king because he was of the same "bone and flesh" of his people. But David made and then broke his covenant with Shimei and was overall of low integrity...

2Sa 19:14 He bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as one man; so that they sent to the king, saying, Return, you and all your servants-
We see the fickle nature of human hearts. They had been won by David from Saul, then Absalom had stolen the hearts of the men of Judah, and now David bows those hearts back to him, in a very short space of time; and then those hearts are won by Sheba in 2 Sam. 20:2. We think of how the people who once cried "Hosanna" were soon shouting "crucify Him!", and soon after that were so supportive of the apostles preaching Jesus as Christ that the authorities were scared to touch them.

2Sa 19:15 So the king returned, and came to the Jordan. Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to bring the king over the Jordan-
Judah accepted the implicit assurance of :11 that David was not going to be seeking

vengeance for their betrayal of him.

2Sa 19:16 Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjamite, who was of Bahurim, hurried and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David-
The common experience of David's grace bound together the house of Saul the Benjamite who had persecuted him, along with those of David's betrayers within Judah. Grace is the basis for true unity amongst God's people, rather than any set of agreed theologies. The message for the exiles was that the restoration of the Davidic king was to unite them, along with the ten tribes, as explained on :10.

2Sa 19:17 There were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went through the Jordan in the presence of the king-
"Went through" implies they charged into the river, to demonstrate their zeal to bring the king back- when in fact both Shimei and Ziba had been really on Absalom's side, and had entertained the hope of using the situation to forge a coalition between Absalom and the remnants of the pro-Saul party of Benjamin. "A thousand" may not be a literal number, but can refer to a family or regiment.

2Sa 19:18 A ferry boat went to bring over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, when he had come over the Jordan-
Grammatically, the "he" seems to refer to Shimei. He went over the Jordan and met David on the eastern bank, before David himself had passed over as recorded in :39.

2Sa 19:19 He said to the king, Don't let my lord impute iniquity to me, nor remember that which your servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart-
In the same way as God did not impute iniquity to David (Ps. 32:2), so David did not 'impute iniquity' to Shimei for cursing him, and did not carry out a rightful death sentence against that man (2 Sam. 19:19,21). Note how Shimei uses the very same wording which David used in *his* repentance: "I have sinned" (2 Sam. 19:20). The similarity of language leaves us expecting David to forgive Shimei permanently, and not impute iniquity to him. David does this for a passing moment, but then commands Solomon to ensure Shimei is slain for what he had done. David presents as totally unappreciative of the grace shown him, and totally unreflective of it in his later personal relationships. The David who wrote Psalm 32 about his experience of imputed righteousness by grace... is now asked to impute righteousness and to forgive. But he only does so for a moment, his experience of grace didn't have any permanent effect

upon him. For he will tell Solomon to "not hold him [Shimei] guiltless", i.e. not to impute righteousness to him but to let his guilt stand, even though David accepted that Shimei's cursing of David was from God, in that David deserved death by stoning and had indeed slain innocent blood. And God's grace likewise can trigger no more than a mere moment of deep feeling and reflection as we sit in a church service, after which we revert to the graceless way of the flesh, endlessly recalling others' past failures and wanting to punish them for them. And yet we can read David's grace to Shimei at this point as only apparent grace; it could well have been politically motivated. For David was concerned about the rumours from Ziba that the house of Saul had wanted to take power at the time of Absalom's putsch, and indeed there was always a Saulide element wanting to get power. The fact a Benjamite, Sheba, rebels against David soon afterwards (2 Sam. 20:1) could suggest that David was not wrong to fear the Benjamites and want to placate them. So grace to Shimei rather than killing him immediately was also a way to keep the house of Saul [of whom was Shimei] without any excuse to rebel. As ever with David, even his better sides and actions have political overtones.

David swore to Shimei that "you will not die" (:23), accepting Shimei's grovelling: " “[I am] guilty… did wrong… I have sinned”… do not hold [me accountable]… do not remember… may the king not bear it in mind”. But David did bear it in mind, he did remember, and he did hold Shimei accountable unto death". David's request that Solomon bring Shimei's white hair to the grave with blood on it suggests a deep hatred of Shimei, and a desire to see his skull cracked open so that blood flowed over his white hair. And they were David's final words. And yet he will be saved… he is in the list of saved faithful ones in Hebrews 11, and the promises of 2 Sam. 7 implied his unconditional salvation.

Shimei's request for David not to "take it to his heart" was just the words of David to Joab regarding the death of Uriah and the other soldiers. Jonadab used it to David about the death of Amnon, and Absalom uses it to Tamar about her rape. Again we see David seeing the dimensions of his own words and sins being played out in front of his eyes. Seeing the results of our words and actions on the screen of others' lives is often more powerful than any personal introspection. And this is why we have meetings with the people we do in life.

2Sa 19:20 For your servant knows that I have sinned. Therefore behold, I have come this day the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king-
See on :19. Shimei's claim to sincere repentance is rather mitigated by this exaggerated claim, that he was the "first" representative of Ephraim, an idea which covered all of the ten tribes, to welcome the restored David. But David is full of grace at this time and forgives him, without pointing out the fact he was still telling untruths.

God told Shimei to curse David (2 Sam. 16:10). Afterwards, Shimei repents and acknowledges that by doing so he sinned (2 Sam. 19:20). And although David recognized that God had told Shimei to curse him (2 Sam. 16:10), David tells Solomon not to hold Shimei "guiltless" for how he had cursed him (1 Kings 2:9). As with the evil spirit from Yahweh working upon Saul, a man is encouraged by God to do the sinful act in which he has set his heart.

2Sa 19:21 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, Shall Shimei not be put to death for this, because he cursed Yahweh's anointed?-
To curse God's representative was seen as cursing God (1 Kings 21:10; Ex. 22:28). And so to curse "Yahweh's anointed" was seen as cursing Yahweh (2 Sam. 19:21) and worthy of death. "Yahweh's anointed" was a title for the High Priest (Ex. 22:28), and confirms that David was seen as both King and High Priest. David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (2 Sam. 6:13-20), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David's sons, although not Levites, were "priests" (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not.

2Sa 19:22 David said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be adversaries to me?- The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the Greek word *diabolos* to translate the Hebrew 'Satan'. Hence Devil and Satan are effectively parallel in meaning. Thus we read in the Septuagint of David being an adversary [Heb. *Satan*, Gk. *diabolos*] in 1 Sam. 29:4 ["turns against us"]; the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 19:22), Hadad, Rezon and other opponents to Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25). We face a simple choice- if we believe that every reference to 'Satan' or 'Devil' refers to an evil cosmic being, then we have to assume that these people weren't people at all, and that even good men like David were evil. The far more natural reading of these passages is surely that 'Satan' is simply a word meaning 'adversary', and can be applied to people [good and bad], and even God Himself- it carries no pejorative, sinister meaning as a word.

When reviewing the references to *ha-Satan* ("the adversary") in the Old Testament, it's significant that a number of them occur in the context of the life of David. There was an incident where David behaved deceitfully with the Philistines with whom he once lived, and he is described as being "a Satan" to them (1 Sam. 29:4). That's another example of where the word 'Satan' doesn't necessarily have an evil connotation- a good man can be an adversary, just as Peter was (Mt. 16:21-23) and God Himself can be (2 Sam. 22:4). But we find that David and his dynasty were afflicted with Satans, adversaries, from

then on. The word is used about human beings who were adversarial to them in 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4,18; 11:14-22,25; Ps. 109:6,20 (Heb. "They say, "Appoint a wicked man against him, let an accuser [*Satan*] stand on his right hand"". David's enemies are described by a word related to 'satan' in Ps. 38:20; 71:13; 109:4. Note that it is stated that *God* stirred up men to be 'Satans' to David and Solomon- whatever view we take of 'Satan', clearly it or he is under the direct control of God and not in free opposition to Him.

Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? For don't I know that I am this day king over Israel?-
David is here learning from the spirit of his enemy Saul (1 Sam. 11:13). This shows David's generous sprit, in learning from the good attitudes of a man who in other parts of his life was wrong and abusive to him, and rejected by God. And yet it would seem that David was playing with words when he says that nobody will be put to death "this day". Because later, on a later day, he commands Solomon to slay Shimei. Again we see David apparently showing grace whilst being politically motivated [to give the Benjamites no cause for a rebellion] and deceitful. The fact a Benjamite, Sheba, rebels against David soon afterwards (2 Sam. 20:1) could suggest that David was not wrong to fear the Benjamites and want to placate them.

2Sa 19:23 The king said to Shimei, You shall not die. The king swore to him-
David graciously overlooked Shimei's cursing, promising him that he would not die because of it (2 Sam. 16:10,11; 19:23). But he didn't keep up that level of grace to the end: he later asked Solomon to ensure that Shimei was killed for that incident (1 Kings 2:8,9). And one wonders whether it was Shimei's words which so broke David's heart that he later wrote: "Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man...as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so may it be far from him. He clothed himself also with cursing as with a garment..." (Ps. 109:16-18).

2Sa 19:24 Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king; and he had neither groomed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came home in peace-
See on 2 Sam. 1:23. Mephibosheth is called Saul's son (2 Sam. 9:7,10; 19:24), although he was actually Jonathan's son. This suggests that the son was brought up in Saul's house. This certainly does not give the impression that Jonathan separated himself from his father's house, even though he strongly disagreed with Saul. There was no fear of guilt by association with Bible characters, but rather a standing up for Godly principle in whatever situation they were in.

Mephibosheth's lack of care for himself was part of his sorrow at what had befallen David, and it was proof enough that Ziba had misrepresented him to David as planning

to become king. For in that case he would have shaved and made himself as attractive a candidate as possible. Having not pared his nails or beard was evident proof that he had been in mourning for some time, since David had fled Jerusalem. See on :25.

2Sa 19:25 It happened, when he had come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said to him, Why didn't you go with me, Mephibosheth?-
But David has still not even crossed the Jordan (:39). This is out of chronological sequence, and refers to a future meeting between the two in Jerusalem (:30, in David's own house). It continues the theme of Ziba in :17. Mephibosheth's "coming down" in :24 would therefore mean 'came down from his house in the highlands of Benjamin near Gibeah to Jerusalem,' not 'came down from Jerusalem to the Jordan'.

2Sa 19:26 He answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me. For your servant said, I will saddle me a donkey that I may ride thereon, and go with the king; because your servant is lame-
Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem near David's palace, for he ate at his table every day with him. He had wished to leave Jerusalem along with David's sad group who fled from Absalom, but perhaps he only heard of the crisis too late and anyway Ziba had deceived him so that it was too late to leave. Clearly Ziba intended to manipulate things so that he would forge a coalition between the Saul supporters and Absalom, using Mephibosheth as a pawn in his game. He as the kingmaker would have had the real power in the coalition. This manipulation of others and revelling in being the kingmaker was exactly Joab's weakness, and we see how Abner had failed in this way with Ishbosheth. The repetition of the themes shows how human nature articulates itself in the same way despite the differing situations. And this is the whole purpose of these narratives.

2Sa 19:27 He has slandered your servant to my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God. Do therefore what is good in your eyes-
Mephibosheth's absolute joy at David's restoration means that he is happy to be slandered, misunderstood by David and even lose all his property (:30)- for joy at the restoration. This was a powerful challenge to the exiles in Babylon, many of whom weighed up what the restoration might cost them, and sided with remaining in exile rather than entering into the abandon and joy of the restoration. And the message of the Gospel is for us too a message of the Davidic kingdom being restored. Whether we are slandered or misunderstood should be made irrelevant by the wonder of that reality.
The fact David cannot decide who is telling the truth, therefore telling Ziba and Mephbosheth to divide Saul's land between them, shows that in fact David is not like an angel who knows all things. We saw the same irony with the woman of Tekoah, who makes the same statement to David at the same time as she deceives and manipulates

him. David is thereby presented as a man with a former reputation for wisdom and perception, but who now has no wisdom nor prescience. There are plenty of hints that it is Ziba who is guilty but David shows scant interest in justice. He just wants to get on with the job of being king again, in the same spirit in which he didn't waste time mourning the death of his first child by Bathsheba, but got on with capitalizing on God's grace in not slaying him and getting Bathsheba to push out another baby for him. Dt. 25:1,2 states that if there is a dispute between two men, the innocent man must be acquitted, but the guilty man punished. But David doesn't bother doing this; and again he proves Absalom's point, that he is not giving judgment to Israel as the King of Israel was intended to.

2Sa 19:28 For all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king-
This could refer to how David had not slain the house of Saul, and also possibly to the events of 2 Sam. 21:6-9, which may not be placed in chronological sequence and may have already happened at this time.

Yet you set your servant among those who ate at your own table. What right therefore have I yet that I should cry any more to the king?-
The wonderful honour of sitting at the Lord's table should likewise mean for us that all anger at slander or being disbelieved (:27), or loss of personal wealth (:30), is thereby eclipsed.

2Sa 19:29 The king said to him, Why do you speak any more of your matters? I say, you and Ziba divide the land-
As discussed on :27,28, all argument between brethren and all concern about material things should be made irrelevant by the wonder of the restored Kingdom and our experience of the grace which allows us to be there. David had earlier responded to Ziba's slander that Mephibosheth had betrayed David by giving Ziba all Mephibosheth's land, in faith that he would one day be restored as king. But now he appears to tell the two men to just divide the land. Or he could be saying that they should return to the original 'division' of the land, whereby the land was Mephibosheth's but Ziba farmed it.

2Sa 19:30 Mephibosheth said to the king, Yes, let him take all, because my lord the king has come in peace to his own house-
As discussed above, Mephibosheth was so thrilled with the restoration of the Kingdom that all issues of material things were now seen as irrelevant by him. If he was to continue to sit at David's table (cp. our participation at the memorial feast), then such matters were irrelevant. This is a powerful challenge to us, the weak and lame who sit by grace at the table of the Son of David.

2Sa 19:31 Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim; and he went over the Jordan with the king, to conduct him over the Jordan-
Rogelim in Gilead may well have been Gentile territory, and his descendants were unable to prove their genealogies (Ezra 2:61-63), although they wished to serve as priests and support the restored Kingdom, just as their ancestor supported David's restoration. As noted on 2 Sam. 17:27, some of David's most loyal friends at this time of crisis were Gentiles.

2Sa 19:32 Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even eighty years old: and he had provided the king with sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man-
This would imply that David was there for some while at the time of 2 Sam. 17:29 (see note there), and "while he lay..." sounds as if he was ill at that time.

2Sa 19:33 The king said to Barzillai, Come over with me, and I will sustain you with me in Jerusalem-
As Barzillai had sustained David with a feast in the wilderness, David wanted to have Barzillai at his table in Jerusalem, and to be "sustain" him for the rest of his life. As with Mephibosheth, to eat at David's table was the sign of ultimate acceptance. And this is the wonderful significance of our sitting at His table at His invitation today. We are never to deny others a place at that table.

2Sa 19:34 Barzillai said to the king, How many are the days of the years of my life, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?-
In essence he has the same attitude as Mephibosheth. He is so thrilled at the good news of the restored kingdom of David that he despises all material advantage to himself. And this is our pattern, if we really grasp the good news of the restored Kingdom (Acts 1:6).

2Sa 19:35 I am this day eighty years old. Can I discern between good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be yet a burden to my lord the king?-
Solomon's whole description of old age in Ecc. 12 is based on his father's experience with Barzillai here. Even in the cynicism of Ecclesiastes, written in Solomon's later life, he still uses words and phrases which have their root in his father David- e.g. his description of women as snares in Ecc. 7:26 goes back to how his father dealt with women who were a snare (1 Sam. 18:21). Solomon was living out his father, using the same phrases his father had used, and yet he clearly had no real personal commitment

to Yahweh as he turned away to idols in his old age. The lack of true zeal within our community, after several generations 'in the Truth', may be related to all this too. We each need to seriously examine ourselves in this connection, and know the meaning of personal conversion.

2Sa 19:36 Your servant would but just go over the Jordan with the king. Why should the king repay me with such a reward?-
Again we are awed by this man's selfless response to the restoration of the Davidic kingdom, which good news we receive in the good news of the Kingdom of God. He wasn't interested in personal reward, his focus was upon the glory of God and His appointed "son" David. And we too will not see things so much in terms of our personal "reward" in God's Kingdom when it is finally restored, but will instead be consumed with the joy of the fact that God's Kingdom has been restored.

2Sa 19:37 Please let your servant turn back again, that I may die in my own city, by the grave of my father and my mother. But behold, your servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good to you-
We could infer from the reference to "the habitation of Chimham which is by Bethlehem" (Jer. 41:17) that Chimham was given a piece of land from David's personal inheritance at Bethlehem. This was the depth to which David appreciated loyalty to him at a time when he seemed a hopeless cause. And the same will be seen true in the rewards given by the Lord Jesus to those who have followed Him now, when true Christianity seems a hopeless cause.

2Sa 19:38 The king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good to you. Whatever you require of me, that I will do for you-
Perhaps the grant of land in David's patrimony in Bethlehem (see on :37) was what Barzillai asked for Chimham. He was happy himself to be buried in the inheritance of his parents, but wished something more for Chimham.

2Sa 19:39 All the people went over the Jordan, and the king went over. Then the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned to his own place-
We note the order. The people went over first, followed by the king. He was no longer their charismatic leader, but they were his advance guard. We are left with a lovely impression of Barzillai, but his name means 'hard / iron hearted', and we marvel at how the hard hearted were so transformed by David's grace and the joy of the prospect of the restored Davidic kingdom- a pattern for us all.

2Sa 19:40 So the king went over to Gilgal, and Chimham went over with him. All the people of Judah brought the king over, and also half the people of Israel-
It was the ten tribes who had first proposed the restoration (:9,10). But it seems due to wanting to steal the show for themselves and other tribal jealousy issues, the elders of Judah hadn't invited them to the celebration at Gilgal. Therefore only some of them were present. But during the celebration at Gilgal, which would have lasted some days, the rest of the ten tribes representatives arrived; "all the men of Israel" (:41).

2Sa 19:41 Behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, Why have our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away, and brought the king and his household, over the Jordan, and all David's men with him?-
See on :40. They were seeking for David to rebuke Judah, especially as it appears that David's men were apparently open to this special treatment by the men of Judah. There is no recorded response of David; for the men of Judah butted in with their response first, and this is adequately answered by the men of Israel in :43. Perhaps this reflects David's passivity at the time. Or maybe it is one of those open ended points in the narrative, intentionally left hanging so that we imagine what his gracious response would have been. For at this time he was the master of all grace and unity to all.

2Sa 19:42 All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is a close relative to us. Why then are you angry about this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's cost? Or has he given us any gift?-
Their idea was that they were totally genuine in their desire to see David restored, and it was not because they hoped for any personal benefit from him. Saul had practiced nepotism, aiming to enrich his own tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam. 22:7), but David had not done so to Judah. Again the theme taught by the reactions of Mephibosheth and Barzillai is continued- we should rejoice in the prospect of the restored kingdom of David not because we look for any personal benefit, but because of the wider glory of God.

2Sa 19:43 The men of Israel answered the men of Judah and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more claim to David than you. Why then did you despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? The words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel-
See on :40. Their argument reflects how David had always actively stood for the unity of all Israel, and the ten tribes could therefore argue that he was as it were ten parts theirs. LXX adds: "And I am the firstborn rather than thou". The right of firstborn had been

removed from Reuben and transferred to Joseph, who had a double portion (Dt. 21:17) and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, “the house of Joseph” (2 Sam. 19:20), therefore could rightly claim to be the most significant part of all Israel. Their logic was indeed stronger, but the matter was allowed to pass. The joy of the prospect of the Kingdom should lead us also to pass over all these kinds of slights and weaknesses of our brethren.

"We have ten parts in the king" wasn't said sincerely, because soon afterwards "all the men of Israel" would be saying that they had no part in David (2 Sam. 20:1,2).

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 20

2Sa 20:1 There happened to be there-
That wonderful scene of grace and unity at David's restoration in 2 Sam. 19 was attended by some who were unmoved by it; and sought for their own faction to have power.

A base fellow, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew the trumpet and said, We have no portion in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, Israel!-
True as the Proverbs are which condemn "a worthless / wicked person" (Prov. 6:12; 16:27; 19:28), again we have a subtext of Solomon seeking to justify himself and his father David, and to criticize the various competitors to Solomon's throne. "A worthless person" is the term used for Nabal (1 Sam. 25:17), those in David's camp who were not fully supportive of David (1 Sam. 30:22), Sheba who plotted to overthrow the Davidic line as king (2 Sam. 20:1), and particularly of those who wanted to overthrow Solomon as king (2 Chron. 13:7). We note the speculation that Sheba was the father of Bath-Sheba. In this case we see the same scenario as with Ahithophel- Bathsheba's family were bitter with David because of what he did, and the consequences kept returning upon David. From the Divine viewpoint, this was in hope that he would repent.

"We have no portion in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, Israel!" was to be repeated by those who didn't want David's line reigning over them (1 Kings 12:16). The sentiment of Sheba didn't go away, and it was likely because of the repugnance of David's character and behaviour in so many ways. And yet he was God's man, and the huge amount of Biblical information about him is there to present us with the challenge of an unpleasant man, with so many character and behavioural weaknesses, who had a heart for God and will be saved by grace. He is without doubt the major human figure of the Old Testament; and his ultimate salvation is there to encourage so many of God's children who are so similar to him.

"We have no portion in David" seems to directly, intentionally contradict the statement by the men of Israel that they had ten parts in David (2 Sam. 19:43). We could take this as a call to establish a separate Benjamite-led state independent of the others. The seeds of division were clearly there within Israel well before the division into Israel and Judah at Rehoboam's time. Despite just having stated that they had ten parts in David, "all the men of Israel changed from following David, and followed Sheba" (:2). Their desire for this was strong, as David himself recognized in :6 “Sheba son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom”. They strongly hankered to return to how things were under Saul, when Benjamin rather than Judah dominated- despite the fact Saul practiced nepotism. This was about as bizarre as the Israelites wanting to return to Egypt. But we have here yet another example of how man thinks that "the former days were better". This is a strong part of our native wiring.

We note that Sheba's catch cry was that Israel had no part in David, and :2 states that the men of Israel followed Sheba rather than David. Clearly there was disillusion with David personally- unsurprisingly. The same words are used when the kingdom divides; the majority of Israel wanted no part in "David" (1 Kings 12:16). This is all tacit reflection of how disillusioned the populace was with "David" personally. David's own tribe of Judah rebelled against him in supporting Absalom, and now the other tribes showed their feelings by supporting Sheba under the credo of "we have no part in David". David clearly lacked popular support after the Bathsheba incident and only remained in power because there remained no credible alternative to him.

2Sa 20:2 So all the men of Israel changed from following David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah joined with their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem-

We see the fickle nature of human hearts. They had been won by David from Saul, then Absalom had stolen the hearts of the men of Judah, and in 2 Sam. 19:14 David bows those hearts back to him, in a very short space of time; and then those hearts are won by Sheba in 2 Sam. 20:2. We think of how the people who once cried "Hosanna" were soon shouting "crucify Him!", and soon after that were so supportive of the apostles preaching Jesus as Christ that the authorities were scared to touch them.

But "from Jordan even to Jerusalem" reflects how the argument between Judah and the other tribes began due to the quarrel about bringing David back as king by crossing the Jordan. Basically the other tribes withdrew and Judah alone conducted David from Jordan to Jerusalem and this led to the discontent of the others.

2Sa 20:3 David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in custody, and provided them with sustenance, but didn’t go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their

death, living in widowhood-
These were presumably the concubines with whom Absalom had slept. The implication could be that this was when he first returned from exile in Mahanaim. Which would mean that the revolt of Sheba was almost immediately after he had crossed the Jordan, making a mockery of the 'unity meeting' held at Gilgal in 2 Sam. 19 to officially restore David as king.

Why did David do this when Sheba began his rebellion? Possibly because he feared Sheba may lay with them as Absalom had done. Whatever the reason, David shows no care for the women as persons, for his actions precluded them from personal relationships and left them as prisoners of the court. He had treated others like this not least Michal.

The women were placed in custody, prisoners of the court, until they died. Nor did David sleep with them. This all seems like punishment- for sleeping with Absalom? But this seems a harsh punishment, seeing they had little choice. And this likely was Saul's harem which David had taken over, as Nathan reminded him in 2 Sam. 12. Had David taken these women with him to safety, then the incident need never have occurred. We wonder at how David could be so harsh in judgment given his own sexual and related sins. It was the same punishment he gave to Michal his ex-wife. He appears to still not 'get it' regarding the seriousness of his sin and the greatness of God's grace to him. Another reading is that he made them live in "widowhood" as a kind of permanent mourning for Absalom who David sees as having married them by sleeping with them. But by refusing them sex and children, enforcing this by imprisoning them, we see David having no care about those women as persons. It was all for the symbolism of 'grief for Absalom'.

2Sa 20:4 Then the king said to Amasa, Call me the men of Judah together within three days, and be here present-
David had replaced Joab as head of the army with Amasa (2 Sam. 19:13) who had been the general leading Absalom's soldiers against him. We could read this as a politically inept move by David; or we could see it as an example of being gracious, which is being humanly unwise- and paying the price for being gracious. David was repeating the lessons he learned after the death of Saul, where he showed huge grace to his enemies- and it worked. Even though it ran against the grain of all secular sense and wisdom. And so now he does the same, in offering the post of commander-in chief to the general of the rebel army. Joab was obviously deeply resentful of this and totally didn't understand grace.

2Sa 20:5 So Amasa went to call the men of Judah together; but he stayed longer than the set time which he had appointed him-

The delay in raising an army may have been because many were unwilling to come out and support David. As Samuel tarried longer than the set time Saul expected (1 Sam. 13:8), so Amasa "tarried longer than the set time which [David] had appointed him" (2 Sam. 20:5). Circumstances repeat within our lives and between our lives and those of others in Biblical history; that we might learn the lessons and take comfort from the scriptures, that man is not alone. Amasa's delay and failure to immediately chase after Sheba was interpreted as meaning that he was again being disloyal to David as he had been during Absalom's rebellion. But we do not know why he delayed, although the note on :13 suggests there were genuine reasons and Amasa was loyal to David still. What we do know is that Joab will now deceive him and kill him, clearly motivated by jealousy over the fact he had been replaced by Amasa as the leader of the army. Although he would have justified it by claiming as he did when he murdered Abner, that Amasa was a threat to David. Again we see how Joab's self interest and pride precluded him from understanding grace.

Although we could see the appointment of Amasa as an act of grace, we could also see it again reflecting David's unwisdom as a leader, his lack of good judgment, and thereby his disqualification from being king of Israel. He should have resigned after the Bathsheba affair. The people would naturally have expected that Amasa would he punished. Instead of this, he is asked to raise an army in David's name. And men would hesitate about joining such a leader. Was he really loyal? Would he use them in a new rebellion? And what would Joab do? He would not respond well to the former enemy general taking his place. David ought to have foreseen that appointing Amasa was going to create a whole raft of problems. But he didn't. His unwisdom is so clear.

2Sa 20:6 David said to Abishai-
Amasa had been appointed general, but he was absent. Instead of treating Joab as the second in command, David addressed Joab's brother Abishai as the de facto army general. All this provoked huge resentment in Joab. It seems David had a personality clash with Joab, frustrated at his refusal to understand grace and complaining that Joab was "too hard" for him.

Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom did. Take your lord's servants, and pursue after him, otherwise he will get himself fortified cities, and escape out of our sight-
David is far more proactive and not as mournfully passive as he was during Absalom's rebellion. This reflects how he realized that Absalom's putsch was the fulfilment of Nathan's words to him about the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba. But he clearly didn't see Sheba's power grab in the same light.

David's plan to immediately hunt Sheba without delay and besiege him in a walled city was exactly the advice of Ahithophel to Absalom against David. It could be argued that

David is just doing to others as was done to him, and in this he showed no grace. Or he was again experiencing history being played out before his present experience. He was now feeling like his son Absalom had felt and reasoning like Absalom, the son he both loved and hated [according to the Psalms]. Like Absalom, David wastes time by trying to raise a large army- but then he cuts that short and Joab goes after Sheba personally. Just as Absalom had done.

2Sa 20:7 There went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, the Pelethites and all the mighty men; and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri-

The abiding loyalty of these men to David (2 Sam. 8:18; 15:18) is incredible. Joab's sad end at Solomon's hands in 1 Kings 2:28 is the more tragic. The idea could be that the "him" is Amasa rather than Abishai. Joab's troops were loyal to their new general and went "after" Amasa. Joab calmly murders Amasa and then leads the troops to victory over Sheba, rallying them after him- thus declaring himself the de facto general again. His victory against Sheba and retention of power for David meant it was impossible for David to really sanction Joab for the murder of Amasa.

2Sa 20:8 When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them-

Amasa had presumably been raising an army in Benjamin. Literally, "Amasa went before them". Having raised some forces, by a rapid march he overtook the soldiers of Joab and Abishai at Gibeon, and there assumed the place of commander over them too. And thus demoted Joab and Abishai, whose soldiers were loyal to them and not Amasa whom they had just been fighting. It was a recipe for disaster, reflecting David's unwisdom.

Joab was clothed in his battledress that he had put on, and on it was a sash with a sword fastened on his waist in its sheath-

The only person in David's life whose belt is noted is Joab (2 Sam. 20:8; 1 Kings 2:5). But Ps. 109:8,19 wish curses upon the man who was well known for his belt. See notes there for the extent of David's anger with Joab and his desire for the man's condemnation because of it- even though David was not himself perfect.

And as he went forth it fell out-

It *seemed that* the sword at Joab's side accidentally fell out of its scabbard as he went toward Amasa to greet him (2 Sam. 20:8) – but it was on purpose, of course. The Bible sometimes describes things as they appear, even if that appearance is incorrect. This explains why the wrong understandings of demons aren't specifically corrected in the New Testament.

2Sa 20:9 Joab said to Amasa, Is it well with you, my brother? Joab took Amasa by the

beard with his right hand to kiss him-
Amasa was surely aware of how Joab had slain Abner, but as will be discussed on :10, on another level, he took no cognizance of this. "Well with you" is the word *shalom*, and is referred to in Solomon's comment that Joab shed the blood of war in peace, perhaps meaning 'in the name of peace' (1 Kings 2:5).

2Sa 20:10 But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand. So he struck him with it in the body, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and didn't strike him again; and he died. Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri-
There are many similarities between Joab's murder of Asahel and how Abner, Saul's general, had murdered Joab's brother Asahel (2 Sam. 2:18-23). Both incidents occurred near Gibeon. There was dialogue between the killer and the slain before the killing, which was through piercing the enemy's belly. Both times the soldiers paused because of the killing, but in both cases Joab did not stop but went on pursuing the fleeing enemy, unto victory. I suggest the similarities are to suggest to us that Joab all these years later was still motivated by blood lust. He wanted to do to another as had been done to his brother. And this kind of thing plays out continually in the minds and deeds of men, unless the influence of the Spirit breaks the cycle of psychological inevitability.

Joab had murdered Abner in the same way in 2 Sam. 3:27. We note the internal consistency in the record of Joab's character; another reason to believe these records are absolutely credible and inspired by God. See on 2 Sam. 19:6. The blood of Amasa went all over Joab, even into his sandals (1 Kings 2:5). Joab is being painted as a man who was a man of blood, for whom human life meant little and he slew too quickly. And David protests that Joab and his brothers are too "hard" for him, implying that he is a softy unlike them. But that is not the case. David is also a man of blood, killing easily, by deception and without reason; and Joab is his alter ego rather than his opposite. And David fails to perceive that. We too have alter egos, people who behave similarly to us in other contexts. They are placed in our lives to provoke our introspection, and yet too easily like David we end up condemning them. We think of David's eager condemnation of the man in the parable who had stolen his neighbour's beloved lamb.

We wonder why Amasa "took no heed to the sword...". Drivers can see an accident coming, but not swerve; there is a lack of cognition somewhere in the human psyche. Pilots take off at times knowing that their wings are frozen, and crash. Amasa saw the sword and must have seen the possibility of death, but didn't take cognizance of it. Samson must have known, on one level, what Delilah would do. The human Lord Jesus knew Judas would betray Him, and yet acted on another level as if He didn't. It should have been obvious to the British and French that Germany would start a war in 1938. But mankind is in amnesia, somewhere, somehow, we fail to recognize the obvious. Likewise with the nearness of the Lord's return, with the urgency of our task in witness,

with the evident need to follow God's word- this lack of cognizance so often comes into play. We really ought to pray, earnestly, for open hearts and eyes and obedient lives before our daily reading.

It is part of human nature not to perceive the obvious when we have a subconscious reason not to, or a distraction. Maybe Amasa was more concerned about fighting Sheba, and considered that Joab would of course not touch him because they were soldiers fighting on the same side. Or we can know something on one level, but not on another. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson : Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. In the same way, it was in one sense true that the Jews "knew not whence I come" (Jn. 8:24,14 RV) and yet in another sense they knew perfectly well the Divine origin of Jesus (Jn. 7:28). David likewise must have known Absalom's deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love's sake. "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]... but I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:12,13). One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the telltale signs (Josh. 9:7). Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand... against his better judgment, surely, is another example.

2Sa 20:11 There stood by him one of Joab's young men and said, He who favours Joab, and he who is for David, let him follow Joab!-
We see here the beginnings of Joab's move towards trying to himself seize power at the time of Adonijah's rebellion. He places his name before David's, and asks men to follow him rather than David. We learn how evil actions begin with baby steps towards them.

2Sa 20:12 Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the midst of the highway. When the man saw that all the people stood still, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a garment over him, when he saw that everybody who came by him stood still-
It was a particularly bloody murder (1 Kings 2:5). "The men" were the troops Amasa had raised to be loyal to David; see on :13.

2Sa 20:13 When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri-
"All the people" refers to the troops Amasa had raised to fight on David's side against Sheba; they followed Joab, which would indicate that Amasa's delay in coming was not

due to any disloyalty to David; see on :5. So this delay was used as an excuse by Joab to doubt Amasa's loyalty, and use that as a cover for slaying him- when his motive was really personal jealousy. This covering of the motive of personal jealousy goes on all the time in life.

2Sa 20:14 He went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel, and to Beth Maacah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went also after him-
The location of any place called Berim is unknown, so we may go with LXX "and all the chosen men were gathered together". Abel Beth Maacah (:15) may well have connections with Maacah, mother of Absalom. Quite possibly he went there because there was much discontent with David there.

2Sa 20:15 They came and besieged him in Abel of Beth Maacah, and they cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart; and all the people who were with Joab battered at the wall, in order to throw it down-
"Battered" translates a word meaning 'to undermine' or to dig pits. By all means they were seeking to tear down the wall, yet we will see on :18 that Joab had disobeyed the command of Dt. 20:10 to firstly dialogue before besieging a city. LXX "all the people with Joab proposed to throw down the wall". This was the advice of Hushai, to drag the wall of any city where David was into a river. Again and again, David is being reminded of his previous salvations by grace.

2Sa 20:16 Then a wise woman cried out of the city-
LXX "from the wall". Again we have the murder of a man by a wall, due to betrayal by his own side, recalling that of Uriah. Both Uriah and Sheba perished because of a woman. The Hebrew in :21 is literally "through the wall" s.w. "at" a window in Gen 26:8. The reference is to one of the apertures made for the archers. This was how Uriah was slain, by an archer shooting through such a window on the wall. And it was through such an opening that the woman spoke to Joab and possibly passed Sheba's head to him. Constantly the scenes associated with the Bathsheba and Uriah debacle are replayed to David, with God thereby ever seeking to nudge him towards greater realization and repentance. His confession was that "Against You, You only have I sinned", in contrast with Joseph's appreciation that adultery is a sin against both God and man. David never seems to have grasped this. Despite all the constant oblique reminders.

Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, 'Come near here, that I may speak with you'-
This coming near to a city wall recalls the murder of Uriah, again under Joab's command and with Joab's full complicity. Joab would immediately have thought 'I must be careful not to be killed as Uriah was'. All these rebellions were related to David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, and there are many conscious and unconscious allusions back to it.

2Sa 20:17 He came near to her; and the woman said, Are you Joab? He answered, I am. Then she said to him, Hear the words of your handmaid. He answered, I do hear-
Abigail's plea "Hear the words of your handmaid" (1 Sam. 15:24) was repeated by the woman of 2 Sam. 20:17. But Abigail herself had modelled her behaviour on women like Rebekah (1 Sam. 25:23 = Gen. 24:18,46). This is how functional fellowship occurs between God's people, both over time and in contemporary relationships. We copy that which is Godly and good which we observe in other believers, both those we know and those we meet in the Bible.

2Sa 20:18 Then she spoke saying, They used to say in old times, 'They shall surely ask counsel at Abel'; and so they resolved things-
The text is difficult. The idea may be that as in AVmg. "They plainly spake in the beginning, saying, Surely they will ask of Abel, and so make an end", meaning that Joab ought to have done as in Dt. 20:10 and summoned the city to surrender before besieging it. Joab comes over as over hasty and with no interest in following the Biblical rules of engagement. Hence LXX also hints at this: "It was asked in Abel and in Dan whether the customs have failed which the faithful of Israel ordained".

LXX "Of old time they said thus, Surely one was asked in Abel, and Dan, whether the faithful in Israel failed in what they purposed; they will surely ask in Abel, even in like manner, whether they have failed. I am a peaceable one of the strong ones in Israel; but thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother city in Israel: why dost thou seek to ruin the inheritance of the Lord?".

2Sa 20:19 I am among those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the inheritance of Yahweh?-
Joab was looking to destroy the city for the sake of his mission against Sheba. The woman's argument is that which should be used against all such campaigns which are based around guilt by association. The grammar suggests she speaks of herself as a personification of the city: "I am peaceable faithful ones of Israel". Cities are often called mothers (as 2 Sam. 8:1), and their surrounding villages are called their daughters. And she may be saying that the whole city was faithful to Israel, which calls forth Joab's response that if this were so, why then were they harbouring Sheba. The woman's claim to be faithful in Israel may mean that she was faithful to David as king of Israel. She seems to be saying that Joab ought to have begun with dialogue rather than besieging the city and thus assuming their disloyalty. This would've been in accordance with the law which prescribed that a city should be summoned to surrender before it was besieged (Dt. 20:10).

2Sa 20:20 Joab answered, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy-
Joab may mean 'I am personally not doing this to you, I have a Divine mandate to destroy a false leader called Sheba'. But that doesn't actually answer the woman's wisdom of :19. Joab ought to have asked for the head of Sheba at the start, but he doesn't apologize for his actions and his refusal to seek dialogue first; see on :18.

2Sa 20:21 The matter is not so. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has lifted up his hand against the king, even against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. The woman said to Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall-
The Philistines in 1 Sam. 29:4 recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

2Sa 20:22 Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. They cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. He blew the trumpet, and they were dispersed from the city, each man to his tent. Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king-
Joab has before blown a trumpet to end a civil war and further bloodshed. Although he was a renowned and unjustified murderer, he seems also to have had a genuine concern to limit bloodshed within Israel. This is the kind of contradiction within human characters which is brought out continually in the record; we see it especially in David's character. We reflect upon it, and realize these were not just isolated individuals, but are typical of us all. Solomon later alludes to the wisdom of this woman in this situation (Ecc. 9:13-16), again with the unspoken implication that Joab was a fool. Solomon's writings are true enough but constantly contain attacks upon those with whom he or his father had had conflicts; and Solomon slew Joab as a contender against his power base.

2Sa 20:23 Now Joab was over all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and over the Pelethites-
That is, Joab was restored to be over the army, as David had given that job to Amasa as a sign of grace to his betrayers. Again David is shown to be powerless and manipulated.

Joab asked Amasa's men and also Abishai's men to follow him if they followed David, and they did. Joab therefore effectively declared himself commander of all the army- against David's wishes, but with David unable to stop him because of how the soldiers were loyal to Joab and had all agreed to his leadership in the campaign against Sheba. The powerlessness of David comes to a crescendo on his deathbed, where he is impotent, even with the gorgeous Abishag ministering to him; with Bathsheba on the scene as well. Perhaps this gradual and consistent taking of power away from this once strong and powerful warrior was to humble him, so that he might be saved.

2Sa 20:24 and Adoram was over the men subject to forced labour; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder-
This is a similar list to that in 2 Sam. 8:6-8, but with the addition of the office of Adoram "over the men subject to forced labour". This was exactly what Samuel had predicted Israel's king would do. And it seems David fell into this too, and Solomon took that unwisdom far further, to the point that people complained he was beating and whipping them with his demands.

The list of officers now given is similar to that when David first became king. But there is one difference. Adoram was over the forced labour, and he remained throughout Solomon's reign until he was killed when Rehoboam became king. David began to use forced labour, a kind of equivalent to demanding taxation, paid by labour rather than in cash. This was just what Samuel had warned Israel of regarding a king. Solomon extrapolated from his father's weakness in this, as he did regarding women and horses.

2Sa 20:25 and Sheva was scribe; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests-
We note how those faithful to David in his wilderness years were in office for 40 years (2 Sam. 8:6-8). This is highly unusual in political circles. The impressive long term continuity in David's inner circle reflects a unity which was achieved by genuine respect and loyalty towards David and his specific Divine anointing as king- despite his evident weaknesses and failures. We too are to be loyal to our weaker brethren for the sake of who they are in Christ. Likewise only a truly Christ-centered approach brings true unity amongst God's people and servants.

2Sa 20:26 and also Ira the Jairite was chief minister to David-
The similarity with the list of 2 Sam. 8:6-8 but this office replaces the comment that "David's sons were chief rulers". They had either been killed or were deemed by David unsuitable. We notice that Solomon, the son with whom David came to be besotted after the loss of Absalom, doesn't figure in any of this, perhaps because of his youth. The absence of reference to David's sons is tacit reflection of how David's dreams for his "house" to fulfil the promises of 2 Samuel 7 hadn't worked out. Does this

suggest David had lost relationship with his sons who previously held this office? That would be a hint that he had failed in his efforts to fulfil the promise of 2 Sam. 7 through his immediate family. Everything was nudging him to accept the only fulfilment of his family hopes would be through his future seed, the Lord Jesus. LXX has "priest" for "chief minister".

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 21

2Sa 21:1 There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David sought the face of Yahweh. Yahweh said, There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put to death the Gibeonites-

The record in 2 Samuel is not necessarily chronological but follows themes. This material may be inserted here to follow on from the mention of Gibeon in 2 Sam. 20:8, where Joab had killed Amasa. The seven victims were all young and unmarried, which would suggest a date earlier in the reign of David. And it would be more appropriate that judgment for Saul's misbehaviour came early on in David's reign, rather than as it were being remembered much later. "Three years, year after year", could refer to the three years after Saul's death.

Saul tried to kill all the witches (1 Sam. 28:2) and quite possibly he justified killing Gibeonites on the basis of cleansing the land from the original inhabitants (Ex. 34:11-16; Dt. 7:2); Gibeon was within the tribal area of Saul's tribe Benjamin but they weren't Benjamites. He likely wanted to destroy them and then give their land and city to his own tribe, fulfilling his promise to the Benjamites to give them property of their own. Seizing Gibeon would've been the ideal way to do this without seizing anything from other tribes. And surely he was mindful of how his failure to kill the Amalekites had cost him the kingdom, and so he perhaps thought he could make up for that by killing the Gibeonites. But he overlooked the covenant Joshua had made with the Gibeonites not to destroy them. This is so psychologically credible- that a man in bad conscience with God would transfer his guilt onto others, and punish them for it.

But it could be that this incident is chronological, and follows on from the theme of the previous chapter- that there was a revival of interest in re-enstating a Saulide king from Benjamin, given growing disillusion with David personally. God raises the judgment for what Saul did possibly 22 years after he had done it. A reminder that because judgment isn't executed at the time, it doesn't mean God has somehow abrogated it. We also note the slowness of David to perceive that atonement was needed- the famine went on for three years, despite the promise of the covenant that there would not be famine if Israel were obedient.

The incident of Saul killing or trying to kill the Gibeonites isn't recorded. We would rather have expected there to be some punishment for his slaying of the priests at Nob. Possibly this slaying of the Gibeonites was related to that. But it isn't recorded. The idea may be that God still recalls sin, even some obscure sin, either actually slaying them or seeking to slay them, perhaps "only" killing seven of them as that's how many victims were required in compensation, done decades ago. God said there was blood guilt on Saul's family for what Saul had done. Atonement had not been made at the time and there is such a thing as delayed judgment and community guilt. One dimension of sin is that it affects others.

The word translated "bloodguilt" clearly refers to culpability for committing murder (Ex. 22:2; Num. 35:27; 2 Sam. 16:7; Is. 33:15; Ez. 9:9). It is legitimate for God to bring judgment for a sin upon a later generation, indeed His Son taught that the blood of previous murders would be "required of this generation". In the last day, "The earth will reveal her bloodshed and no longer cover her slain" (Is. 26:21). Likewise the blood guilt of previous generations was required of the generation that experienced the Babylonian invasion (Ez. 9:6-10). Ahab and Hezekiah had judgment brought upon their descendants because of their sins, but not in their days (1 Kings 20:29; 2 Kings 20:6-19). This was “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Ex. 20:5; 34:7); "In the lands of your enemies... because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away" (Lev. 26:40). But all this was negotiable, and David had himself negotiated his own blood guilt by appealing to God's grace.

David in Ps. 51:14,16 had specifically asked God to remove his bloodguilt involving Uriah (and the other soldiers of Israel slain at the time), without sacrificial expiation of the kind the Gibeonites were demanding: "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation... For You don’t delight in sacrifice, or else I would give it". Despite being a man of blood guilt (Ps. 51:14), as Shimei rightly said in cursing him on behalf of Yahweh, David asks God to remove all blood guilty people from his presence as he doesn't want their company (Ps. 59:2; 139:19). Indeed David sees such people as the epitome of wickedness- when he himself had blood guilt and had only been saved from it by grace. He simply refuses to accept his blood guilt in any lasting sense. The same Hebrew term for blood guilt is used in 1 Sam. 25:26, where Yahweh through Abigail "Withheld you [David] from blood guilt"- by the grace of sending Abigail to David in His wisdom and grace. And David recognized at the time that indeed he had been saved from bloodguilt by being stopped from killing Nabal (1 Sam. 25:33 s.w.). David likewise had assured the woman of Tekoah that blood guilt would not be required from her son, and he would by Kingly decree ensure that those who sought to expiate the son's blood guilt by his murder wouldn't be allowed to do so (2 Sam. 14:11). And thus by extension he gave the same guarantee of safety from blood guilt revenge to his son Absalom who had murdered Amnon. But now, despite all this experience with bloodguilt being

removed by grace, David allows bloodguilt to be demanded, without a thought for seeking the Divine grace and wisdom that had saved him from bloodguilt. Why? Perhaps he just couldn't be bothered. Perhaps he knew that the death of the house of Saul, who had only recently risen against him under Sheba, was no bad thing for him politically. Or perhaps he just made a too hasty judgment without having thought through the implications- because he was not as conscious as he should have been of God's great grace to him over bloodguilt.

This graceless attitude to bloodguilt was continued by Solomon, who uses the argument to justify slaying Joab in order to cleanse David's descendants from blood guilt for the murders Joab had committed (1 Kings 2:31-33). Solomon's argument here is weak; because as noted on 2 Sam. 21:1, David had been saved from his own blood guilt by grace, and he ought to have reflected that in turning down the request of the Gibeonites. But Solomon just repeats his father's political usage of blood guilt expiation, and wrongly reasons that he has to slay Joab lest David's family be charged with blood guilt seeing that Joab was David's cousin, of the same blood family. It could be argued that Joab had killed Abner as revenge or expiation for Abner's blood guilt in killing his brother Asahel. But David and Solomon then make Joab have blood guilt for the murder. Clearly David and Solomon were seeking to impute the guilt of blood upon people and use it as an excuse to murder them. Whereas David definitely had blood guilt for Uriah, the soldiers who died with him and likely many other cases. Yet David was saved from it by the grace of imputed rightness. And yet, so ungratefully, he seeks to impute guilt to others and punish them for it.

All this fits the theme of David continuing to suffer so hugely for his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah, likewise committed many years ago, but still noted by God and requiring atonement or at least, repentance. No matter how long ago the sin was committed, or how obscurely, the consequences remain. We at this point in the story are wondering why God doesn't just give David a break, and let the consequences stop. But we are being shown the seriousness of sin and its Divine judgment; and how actual repentance and change are sought from us by God. So perhaps this is why the incident occurred at this time, to nudge David to likewise consider his sins and their ongoing judgment and the need to make amends. The abiding judgment for Sail's sins was to remind him that he was in the same situation. David's statement at the time was that "Against You only have I sinned", as if he discounted any sin against Bathsheba, Uriah and their families. This helps us understand why this matters occurs at this time. I am not saying that textual dislocation and out of chronology events do occur in the Biblical text. But I always seek to more carefully consider the context before coming to that conclusion, and here we have a classic example.

We likewise wonder why this judgment affected all Israel if it were just Saul's sin, and why didn't it come upon Saul in his lifetime. Again the answers were to teach David that

his sin would affect his nation and house after him, and many others suffered because of his sin. And out of Saul's many sins, why pick this one with the Gibeonites? Surely because it involved a willful breaking of covenant with them [the one Joshua had made]- just as David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband. Likewise we ponder why an unrecorded sin of Saul is made so significant in its consequence- and again we see the answer through the material being placed at this point in the narrative. David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah had been done secretly, just as Saul's sin against the Gibeonites had been unrecorded.

We ponder how there was bloodguilt on Saul's descendants. Saul's sins were not to be visited upon his descendants (Ex. 18:2; Dt. 24:16; Jer. 31:29) and Num. 35:33 is clear that Saul personally was responsible: “Blood pollutes the land and the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it". When asked what can make ammends, the Gibeonites naturally ask for the blood of Saul's family. But this is apparently in line with what Yahweh Himself had told David here. It seems rather politically convenient for David that here we have the destruction of the potential claimants to his throne. That is what David humanly would have wanted, but grace and his honouring of his promise to Saul stopped him from killing the descendants of his enemy, the previous king. Usually a new king destroyed the family of the previous dynasty. But God through the incident of the Gibeonites works to ensure that this happens anyway, as some kind of reward for David's attempt to live by grace and integrity in the matter. This is a possible take. But elsewhere in this commentary I have explained that on the other hand, David was wrong not to have appealed for grace and Divine intervention and answered the Gibeonites wrongly by letting them have their demands.

2Sa 21:2 The king called the Gibeonites and said to them (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn to them: and Saul sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah)-

Joshua 9 records how the Gibeonites had been promised security by Joshua, although they were Hivites who were to have been destroyed (Josh. 9:7; Dt. 7:2). Saul's apparent zeal to obey part of God's word whilst ignoring the covenant made by Joshua recalls how he murdered or expelled all witches (1 Sam. 28:9), in almost fanatic obedience to Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:6. Saul's zeal to punish the apostate was really a classic case of psychological transference. He knew, subconsciously, that he was a sinner and deserved punishment for his sins. So he transferred those sins on to others, and punished them, revelling in it. But he was picking up verses from the Bible out of context, and with the witches, he himself used one. It was this attitude which was deeply displeasing to God. And the fact all Israel had known of this and done nothing to

honour the covenant made in their name with the Gibeonites... meant that all Israel had to suffer the results of the famine.

2Sa 21:3 and David said to the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of Yahweh?-
"Atonement" is not used here in a religious sense but simply meaning a covering, which the Gibeonites understand as hinting at a financial payment (:4). For David personally had not sinned against them, and atonement in the religious sense was only appropriate towards God. But the Gibeonites like to use it in a religious sense, playing God by demanding that without the shedding of blood there could be no reconciliation with them.

"Atonement" translates a word which has the idea of expiation. And we will learn in :14 that God was entreated or, as it could be rendered, "appeased". But many questions are left open. To whom was expiation made in :3- to God or the Gibeonites? And :14 says that "After that God responded to the prayer for the land". If "appeased" is the idea, then how is God appeased by *prayer,* specifically, the prayer / blessing of the now appeased Gibeonites? Clearly He was not so much appeased by dead bodies on a tree as by prayer, and the wronged praying for those who wronged them. This clearly touches Him. We note the rains didn't come as soon as the men were slain, but some months afterwards. He clearly was not appeased by the physical slaying and blood of victims. So whilst the images of expiation and appeasement are possible, they seem to me to hang by a slender thread.

However if we go for the idea of expiation and appeasement, we could conclude that indeed Yahweh was appeased by the death of Saul's descendants. But the implication is that David could have thrown the situation upon God's grace and direction, as he did his own blood guilt, and God could have forgiven the guilt some other way. "Wherewith shall I expiate..." was a question David ought to have known the answer to, had he remained aware of God's grace to him earlier. The answer was in an appeal to God, but he fails to do this.

2Sa 21:4 The Gibeonites said to him, It is no matter of silver or gold between us and Saul, or his house; neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel-
The law of Moses forbad the payment of money as compensation for murder (Num. 35:31). That David had apparently hinted at this possibility in :3 would therefore suggest that he was willing to break the letter of the law of Moses, a feature of David's which was largely an outcome of his understanding so well the spirit of the law. And yet it was to lead him into the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. And yet it has to be said that this was a difficult legal situation. God had shown that the sin of Saul needed some atonement,

but Saul was dead. The Gibeonites were asking for blood as atonement, although they accept it is not within their power to execute this.

He said, Whatever you say, that will I do for you-
This was unwise, because David was to be asked to break the law. But he perhaps lacks the humility to pull out of this blanket promise he has now made. We think of Herod offering to do anything for Herodias' daughter. The law of Moses forbad money compensation for murder (Num. 35:31,32) because that would devalue the human life and the seriousness of taking it. But the David who had experienced God's grace in not taking his life for murder and adultery could surely have found a way to not agree with this. And surely David could have argued that killing Saul's descendants wasn't obedience to the principle that the shedder of blood must be slain. And Saul's death in battle could have been accepted as his judgment for all his sins. David's desire to placate the Gibeonites rather suggests he failed to appreciate the grace shown to him when it came to guilt for murder. And this was extreme guilt- making descendants suffer for murder committed by an ancestor. And leaving their bodies exposed for months, in disobedience to the law, all suggests that David judged and spoke far too quickly. And did so without grace. David doesn't throw himself upon God for direction and wisdom, although he does do so in the incident of the numbering of Israel. The same language of God being entreated for the land is in 2 Sam. 24:25; but only after David had placed himself in God's hands and cast himself upon His grace and direction. And that is what he ought to have done here. Perhaps he learnt there from his failure here.

2Sa 21:5 They said to the king, The man who consumed us, and who devised against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the borders of Israel-
This implies Saul's campaign against them had been widespread and systematic. See on :2. The lack of record of it was to match how David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah had been supposedly in secret- but was having a delayed outcome of judgment just as Saul's 'secret' unrecorded sin.

2Sa 21:6 let seven men of his sons be delivered to us, and we will hang them up to Yahweh in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of Yahweh. The king said, I will give them-
One theme of the record is that David simply does what the Gibeonites ask, without any cavil nor attempt to negotiate with them nor with God. The Gibeonites say: “let them be given over to us” and David replies "I will give them over... The king took... The king handed them over” (:6-9).

The Gibeonites' demand that the crucifixion of the victims be done in Gibeah, Saul's home town, shows again their desire for the worst possible judgment against Saul. Their description of Saul as "Yahweh's chosen" is surely ironic and shows again the depth of their hatred.

Their allusion is to Num. 25:4, where the bodies of the leaders in the worship of Baal were hung up to turn away Yahweh's anger (cp. :1). But the seven sons of Saul were not personally responsible for the sin. And David had solemnly vowed before Yahweh to Saul and Jonathan on at least two occasions that he would not destroy their seed. David's acquiescence therefore was wrong, and like Herod and other kings trapped by their own pride to fulfil their promises, so David agrees to the death of Saul's sons. He ought to have said something like "I have vowed a vow not to do this, I believe in grace, and will not allow this to happen. I will throw myself down before Yahweh and beg for this situation to be resolved another way". But pride stops him. Yet David generally was humble in this kind of thing. So as with the sin with Bathsheba, I take this to be an out of character failing of David.

2Sa 21:7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of Yahweh's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul-

As noted on :6, David had made a similar oath before Yahweh to Saul (1 Sam. 24:21,22). But he seems to justify breaking that by arguing that he was honouring a similar oath he had made to Jonathan. I suggested on :6 what his response ought to have been.

2Sa 21:8 But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite-

David chose the sons of his ex wives Merab and Michal as the victims, however we read the text [Michal could have 'brought them up' for her sister as she herself remained childless until the day of her death]. And this reflects his bitterness towards them and desire to cut off any likely contenders for his throne after the Saulide rebellion under Sheba. David comes over as wrong all around in this matter. Michal was his former wife. He had broken up Michal's marriage with Paltiel even though Paltiel wept over it. And now he slays Michal's five sons. If this is the same Barzillai who was later so kind to David at the time of Absalom's rebellion, then we see that man's grace, forgiving David for slaying his five grandchildren. And it contrasts with David's low estimate of the value of human life which we again see.

God sees to the end of a man's history, indeed to the end of all and every human history, He weighs men, and weighs them up in grace. Further, we all likely struggle with the unspirituality of others against us. We ponder how brother X or sister Y can really be a Christian, can have any real relationship with God, because of how we see them act. This struggle over these kinds of issues is, in my experience, the number one reason why people leave Christian communities. The raw anger, hatred and viciousness they see in others disillusions them, and they walk. The pull of materialism, of false doctrine

etc., are actually not significant reasons in the majority of cases I know of where a believer has quit the community of believers. It's nearly always personal disillusion with the evil side of their brethren. All I can say is, Consider David's poorer side. Think of men like the Philistines who became David's most loyal bodyguards and soldiers, Adriel and Phaltiel, women like Rizpah, the mothers of Moab and Edom, who all likely considered David a sadistic maniac- given their experience of him. And, of course, Uriah, who surely knew all along what was going on. They saw the weaker side of David. Thanks to the extent of Biblical revelation about David, we see a wider picture. And even if that wider picture remains invisible to us concerning brother A and sister B, try to imagine that they have a prayer life, read Scripture, are loved by God, and probably in some ways and to some extent do respond to that love... and leave the final analysis of human character to the God who judges, weighs and knows far deeper, more graciously, more hopefully, than we ever can in this life.

David had loved Jonathan's sister Michal, and she loved him; only for her to come to despise David's spirituality, and to be unfaithful to him (2 Sam. 21:8 implies she had even more relationships than just with Paltiel). But then David killed her five sons. She was part of the ineffable sadness of David's personal life.

Michal has many similarities to Rachel in the book of Genesis. They each had an older sister who was set up to be their husband's wife. The fathers were both obsessive and unpleasant, and both fathers pursued after their husbands. Both women present as not very spiritual in that they had teraphim [household idols], which they both use to deceive their fathers to save their own skin, and to help their husbands save their lives from the murderous intent of their fathers. They both lie to their fathers. In the teraphim incident, Rachel claims to be sick and Michal claims David is sick. Both have husbands who work for their father, who deceives their husbands. Both had to chose their husbands over their fathers. Both had an older sister, Leah cp. Merab. The fathers of both women made an agreement with the sons in law [David and Jacob] to give them their daughters in marriage for a dowry [years of labour, killing Goliath], but deceived them. David effectively paid two dowries in order to marry Michal- slaying Goliath, and then 100 Philistine foreskins. Jacob also pays two dowries, each of seven years labour. Each woman had a time of infertility. In Michal's case this is recorded in 2 Sam. 6:23 "Michal, daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death". That could imply she had a child the die she died- she died in childbirth. Which would be another parallel with Rachel. This verse however stands in tension with 2 Sam. 21:8 "the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel" (NEV). The translations squirm around this by translating "bore" as "brought up for", or by appealing to a changed text which read "Merab" for Michal. But the Hebrew is simply as NEV- that Michal had five children by the man whom her older sister was married off to rather than David, and then she marries David. All spaghetti junction in terms of relationships, and all

reminiscent of the Jacob-Rachel-Leah mess. All so mixed up and intertwining it's hard to get any mental map of it. Apparently both Michal and Merab were at one point married to the same man, Adriel. By the intrigue of their father. Just as with Laban and his daughters Rachel and Leah.

Clearly Jacob, Laban and Rachel are reflected in David, Saul and Michal. All these connections cannot be mere coincidence. We naturally enquire why such similarities constantly occur between the lives of God's people. We see the same thing today, the deeper we engage with other believers and get to know them. The repeated circumstances occur over time [between us and earlier believers we meet in the Bible] and also horizontally between us and present believers whom we know. We see the same Divine hallmark and way of operating in our lives, as comfort that indeed man is not alone- not least because our apparently unique situations aren't in fact so unique.

2Sa 21:9 He delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the mountain before Yahweh, and all seven of them fell together. They were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, at the beginning of barley harvest-
That is, at Passover (Dt. 16:9). At the time when David ought to have been celebrating God's deliverance from death by grace, he was putting to death innocent young people, who may have been no more than children. Sacrificing them on the first days of barley harvest suggests they were going along with a pagan ritual- for human sacrifice on the eve of harvest is attested in Canaan. In Hittite and Ugarit myth, Mot was killed by Anat between the barley harvest and autumn rains and Mot's body was believed to have been dismembered and exposed. And so human sacrifice at the time of the harvest rains was practiced in Canaan. Again we get the impression that the Gibeonites were out to humiliate them at all costs. And David ought rather to have refused to go along with such paganism. We keep asking, why does David go along with this? It really does seem that he was politically motivated by allowing the deaths of his potential Saulide rivals. And refusing to show any grace.

2Sa 21:10 Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her on the rock-
To form a tent for her to live in whilst she protected the bodies day and night from wild animals.

From the beginning of harvest until water was poured on them from the sky-
The heavy rains usually came about six months after the beginning of harvest. The rain clearly meant that the famine had ended; God is presented as having been appeased by the deaths and so rain comes.

She allowed neither the birds of the sky to rest on them by day, nor the animals of the field by night-

The idea of blood sacrifice being required to bring rain suggests that the Gibeonites believed in a rain god. Yet when David is asked to give seven men of the family of Saul as a blood sacrifice to appease the rain god who was not sending rain, David agrees. He doesn't make the Biblical argument that rain being withheld indicates the need for repentance before Yahweh, and that sacrificing humans is wrong and won't change anything in this context. He gives in to the false understanding of the Gibeonites, breaking his undertakings to Saul and Jonathan by doing so, and selects seven men to be slain and hung up. We read of the mother of two of them, Rizpah, lovingly watching over the bodies of her sons day and night, with all the distraction of true love (2 Sam. 21:10). David didn't have to do this. But he did. We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8). He doesn't seem to have cared for the mother's feelings, nor for the lives of her sons. And note that David makes up the total of seven men by having the five foster sons of his own estranged wife Michal slain. Was this not David somehow hitting back at Michal, who had mocked him for his style of worship in 2 Sam. 6? And how did Adriel, the father of those five sons, feel? He wasn't of the house of Saul, but because of David's desire to placate someone else, he lost all his sons, just because his wife had died and Saul's daughter had raised them. And yet this same David is recorded as saying soon afterwards: "I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his ordinances were before me; And as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also perfect toward him; And I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, According to my cleanness in his eyesight" (2 Sam. 22:22-25).

To leave the bodies impaled was specifically disobedient to the Mosaic command that respect must be shown even to the executed- their bodies were not to be left hanging and were to be buried on the day of their execution (Dt. 21:22,23). And yet the bodies were left there from barley harvest to the first rains after the Summer (:10), about five months. This was downright humiliation. We can rightly assume that Rizpah dearly wanted to bury the bodies but was not permitted to. Indeed, leaving the bodies hanging was punishment for breaking covenant with Yahweh in Dt. 28:26: "And your corpse shall be food to all the birds of heaven, and to the animals of the earth; and no one shall frighten them away". Rizpah frightening away the "birds of heaven" sounds therefore like her protest at this treatment. She was trying to show that her sons had not broken covenant. One purpose of this narrative may be to highlight the weakness of David. He knew God's law so well, or so he claims in Ps. 119. But he allows it to be flouted, and at best appears impotent to stop the Gibeonites abusing Saul's descendants. If the event is in chronological order, then we would have yet another example of David's impotence, culminating in the picture of his sexual and physical impotence in the closing scene of his life. The once so powerful is being progressively rendered

powerless- not so much in simplistic judgment for the sake of it, but in order to coax and nudge him towards greater self understanding and repentance.

This wasn't the first time David had slain men for bloodguilt and then displayed their bodies. He had done so when Ishbosheth was slain by his own men, and David in turn killed them for their bloodguilt and hung up their bodies: "When wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood [Heb. 'his blood guilt'] of your hand, and take you away from the earth? David commanded his young men, and they killed them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up" (2 Sam. 4:11,12). But David did this for political reasons, to try to prove his own innocence of slaying Saul's son, his rival to the throne. So when it happens again here with David granting the request of the Gibeonites, we likewise suspect David's motives are mixed.

2Sa 21:11 It was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done-
It seems it took David the six months alluded to in :10 to respond. He gathers up the bones of the men or boys, along with those of Saul and Jonathan, and gives them a decent burial.

2Sa 21:12 David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh Gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, in the day that the Philistines killed Saul in Gilboa-
David's burial of the bones of Saul and Jonathan right afterwards seems to me to have been politically motivated. He had allowed Saulide contenders for the throne to be cut off and publicly humiliated but now he seeks to wash his hands of any accusation of being against Saul. If he had trusted the earlier word to him, that he would replace Saul, then he need not have gone along with the Gibeonites' demands.

The last mention of the David : Jonathan relationship is in 2 Sam. 21:12-14, where we read that David personally ("he" cp. they") took and carried the bones of Saul and Jonathan to their final resting place. The love of David for Jonathan is apparent. We are invited to imagine David carrying the bones of his best friend, perhaps just the ashes of them (1 Sam. 31:12,13), cradling them (or the container) in his arms, weeping as he walked. How about this for pathos. The words of David's lament in 2 Sam. 1 would have surely come to his mind. It is almost certain that David memorized them, seeing it was taught as a song of remembrance (2 Sam. 1:18). There would have been the restimulation of so much. So that is how the Spirit concludes the story, David walking off into the sunset with the bones of Jonathan. It should be remembered that this occurred after David's disgrace with Bathsheba. The thought must surely have gone

through his mind: It's a good thing dear Jonathan isn't here to see it. The very name of the prophet Nathan, the exposer of David's sin, would have restimulated David. For 'Jonathan' means 'Yahweh-Nathan'. It is quite likely that in practice David would not have pronounced the 'Yah' prefix; he would have called Jonathan 'Nathan' (how many 'Jonathan's do you know whose name isn't abbreviated by their friends?). The reason why there is so much pathos in the story, so powerfully expressed, is to set us a standard of love and feeling towards Christ; for Jonathan represents us, and the love of David for him really is a reflection of the love of Christ for us. Truly do we sing that "Thou art far above / dearest of human love".

David's rush to publically bury and respect the remains of Saul and Jonathan is laboured in :12-14. Again we sense political thinking and motivation in David. Sheba was from the tribe of Saul and his rebellion had been more dangerous for David than Absalom's. Perhaps having allowed the family of Saul to be so humiliated, he now rushes to show respect to them. This was trying to ingratiate himself to the men of Judah by allowing the abuse of Saul's descendants, and then to the men of Benjamin by honouring the memory of Saul. David's motives as ever were mixed.

2Sa 21:13 and he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son: and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged-
The extreme grief of Rizpah is intentionally contrasted with this symbolic gesture from David in at least giving the sons an honourable burial, although it took David six months to do so. He is presented as callous in the face of very genuine grief caused by his pride and refusal to honour his covenant before Yahweh that he had made with Saul.

2Sa 21:14 They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. After that God responded to the prayer for the land-
David was wrong in killing those seven men or boys. God is not appeased by blood sacrifice in that sense. It was the prayer of the Gibeonites that 'appeased' God and not the murder of those men. After the horror of what he had done was brought to his attention, David buried the bones of Saul as if he felt he should have been more respectful to the house of Saul (2 Sam. 21:12) and only then God responded to the prayer for the famine to be lifted (:14)- as if He sought respect for the house of Saul and not the disrespect of killing seven random relatives of Saul's on the say-so of mere men. If indeed God wanted the sacrifice of those men, we would surely read that immediately after their murder He lifted the famine; but He did so only after David had subsequently shown respect to the house of Saul as a token of regret and repentance for what he had authorized.

2Sa 21:15 The Philistines had war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines. David grew faint-
The material in 2 Samuel isn't chronological. The material we have now at the end of the book appears to be various cameos of the life of David which are for some reason not incorporated into the book as a whole. Perhaps the common theme in them all is that they mention David's weaknesses in various ways. We now read of how David was "faint", physically weak during a battle. It is one of a number of hints that he did not enjoy good health. We think of him laying sick at Mahanaim during Absalom's rebellion, and the copious evidence in the Psalms that he had a breakdown of his health soon after the sin with Bathsheba. These events are located in 1 Chron. 20:4-8 immediately after the capture of Rabbah, which was again not David at his spiritually strongest.

2Sa 21:16 and Ishbibenob, who was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear was three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being armed with a new sword, was about to have slain David
We wonder therefore whether David's faith failed him at this point, or whether he did not have the level of faith he showed when he triumphed over Goliath. David had mocked armour as a source of strength, and yet this suggests David almost perished because of the weaponry of this Philistine. I suggested on :15 that the cameos from the life of David which conclude 2 Samuel all have the common theme of David's weakness.

2Sa 21:17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped him, and struck the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him saying, You shall go no more out with us to battle, that you don't quench the lamp of Israel-
The significance of this is that David is harking back to how he had not gone out to war with his armies at the time of 2 Sam. 11:1, and it had led him into the sin with Bathsheba. At every point we find him repentant and playing along with how God too was referring him back to previous points in his life. It seems that after the sin, David insisted on going out with his troops to battle even when he was too old to effectively do so (2 Sam. 18:2).

2Sa 21:18 It came to pass after this, that there was again war with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, who was of the sons of the giant-
We note that the *Rephaim* had children like other human beings (2 Sam. 21:16,18; Dt. 3:11), inhabiting an area known as the valley of Rephaim (Josh. 15:8). The "giants" of Gen. 6:2-4 were therefore humans and not celestial beings. "Gob" is LXX Gath; see on :20 for the significance.

2Sa 21:19 There was again war with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite's brother, the staff of whose

spear was like a weaver's beam-
Elhanan was from the small village of Bethlehem, and therefore was likely a childhood friend of David's. He like us with the Lord Jesus was inspired by David's victory over Goliath. He saw what was potentially possible for man in faith, just as we are shown through the Lord's victory on the cross what is possible for men apparently saddled with human nature.

2Sa 21:20 There was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, twenty four in number; and he also was born to the giant-
David fought the Philistines at Gath (see on :18), and yet we note that he lived with Achish at Gath for over a year, and some of his most loyal followers were Philistines from Gath like Ittai. His victories over them therefore elicited humility and faith from some of the Philistines there. They realized that David and his men won their victories not in their own strength, but because of Yahweh. And they humbly came into covenant relationship with the God of their enemies, and fellowship with their one time enemies and murderers of their friends and families. It is humility which is the critical requirement in coming to the true God, and no amount of apparently high powered intellectual argument and slick presentation can replace that.

2Sa 21:21 When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, killed him-
Goliath's defiance of Israel is a major theme (1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). Later Philistine defiance is described with the same word (2 Sam. 21:21; 23:9). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross should be to us. Jonathan was brother to the crafty Jonadab, who led Absalom into major sin by his subliminal suggestions. We see how faith and unbelief can exist within the same family.

2Sa 21:22 These four were born to the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants-
David took five stones to kill Goliath but used only one. Was he faithless and doubting that the first one would hit home? Or did he aim to use the other four on Goliath's four giant sons (2 Sam. 21:16-22)? Do those five stones represent the five books of Moses which Ps. 119 tells us was Christ's study all the day, it being through the word that Jesus overcame the mind of sin? If he did aim to use the other four on Goliath's four giant sons, that shows supreme spiritual ambition. In reality those four were killed later by David's closest followers- and they must have their counterparts amongst us.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 22

2Sa 22:1 David spoke to Yahweh the words of this song in the day that Yahweh delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul-
We naturally want to know when this time was, when David was delivered from Saul and all his enemies. Abner's words in 2 Sam. 3:18 seem relevant. He tries to persuade the elders of Israel to have David as king by arguing that "For the Lord promised David, 'By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies'". This may then be the moment at which David sung this. We note how Nathan quotes these words back to David at the time of the Bathsheba failure: "I anointed you king over Israel, and delivered you from the hand of Saul". This would again associate these words of David with his becoming king. However there seems no reason to me to consider 2 Samuel 21-24 as anything but chronological. The day of David's deliverance from his enemies is only logically at the end of his life.

As Abner recalled, God had promised David that He would use him to deliver Israel from their enemies: "For the Lord promised David, 'By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies'" (2 Sam. 3:18). But David adapts this, even twists it, to apply to his personal enemies. Possibly there is here a reflection of David's narcissism, and lack of appreciation that it was not all about him, but about the good he could do for others.

David doesn't see his deliverance from Saul as God saw it. Nathan has used the very words "saved / rescued out of the hand of Saul" in condemning David: "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul". God saw this fact as making David's sin with Bathsheba all the more shameful. David sees this fact as demonstration that he is of pure hands and was delivered because of his own righteousness.

Perhaps in this song David is alluding to things which had not been recorded or perhaps were generally unknown- like a great theophany to him, and Divine rescue of him from certain death at the hands of his enemies. Coming out in older age with such testimonial tributes to God's grace in earlier life is psychologically credible, and what many have done. This would be similar to how the previous chapter talks about a major sin of Saul's, and its consequences, which was unknown to the Biblical record.

We note the similarity between the Hebrew words for Saul and *sheol*, the grave, and indeed David now goes on to thank God for saving him from death on various occasions. And yet the greatest salvation from death he experienced was that from the death penalty for his sins with Uriah and Bathsheba. But he makes no specific reference to this, unless we take his talk of being dramatically saved from some great death by a theophany, God coming down, as referring to that. And even then we wonder why he

had to reference it in such an oblique and disguised manner. After all, he had vowed in Psalm 32 to publically tell the world of his salvation from the death penalty for those sins, and this song at the end of his life would seem the obvious place to do so. But he doesn't, at least not specifically.

This song quite rightly [on one level] celebrates how God had saved David from certain death in various military confrontations, and had given him great victories. But David is sanitizing his past, talking in terms of conflict-deliverance-glorious victory, just as many kings boasted. His references to God as a rock, tower and stronghold seem to have in view his deliverances from Saul; see on :49. Rocks and strongholds feature much in the record (at least ten references- 1 Sam. 22:4,5; 23:14,19,25–28; 24:1,3,23). But that was in his earlier life pre-Bathsheba, and he has little to say about the majority of his kingship after that. And David carefully omits to mention God's salvation of him from his greatest 'death'- the Divine death penalty mandated for his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband and other men to try to cover it. And he makes no more than passing allusion to the huge grace shown him in 2 Sam. 7, where he was promised a pretty well unconditional eternal salvation through resurrection to behold his future descendant reigning eternally on his throne. Like every man, David had a strong tendency to whitewash himself, assuming the passage of time had worked a kind of quasi atonement for his sins. And yet God, as predicted through Nathan at the time, worked constantly to jog and nudge David to realize the dimensions of his sin with Bathsheba and his subsequent sinful behaviour. In the hope he would come to a higher grade of repentance. All these failures in appreciation by David are a relevant challenge to all of us, especially those who have already walked many years in the Lord.

This is largely the material found in Ps. 18. The Psalm concludes with a reference to David as the anointed, so this could be a Psalm composed when Saul was slain and David was finally declared king, and his anointing came to fulfilment. It is a "song" but it has no strophes (unlike most of the Psalms), perhaps because it was intended for use at a procession. But quite possibly what was originally a song of thanks at David's declaration as king over Judah was then edited by him at the end of his life. Because parts of the song allude to the promises made to him in 2 Sam. 7, which was after this accession to the throne. Further 'his enemies and Saul' suggests he had many enemies but the greatest one was Saul. This is a style found elsewhere- e.g. "Nineteen men and Asahel" (2 Sam. 2:30); "Go spy out the land and Jericho" (Josh. 2:1); "King Solomon loved many foreign women and he loved the daughter of Pharaoh" (1 Kings 11:1).

Ps. 18:1 adds "I love You, Yahweh, my strength". This bald statement "I love You" is intentionally startling, and is the only place where we read this; usually we read the word of God's love to man. Here, David simply tells God "I love You"

2Sa 22:2 and he said, Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, even mine-

This is the language of rocky terrain, the type where Saul chased David and God saved him multiple times.

David's description of how the cherubim acted in his life in 2 Sam. 22 is full of Angelic language:
v. 2 "My rock"- an Angel (Gen. 49:24)
v. 3 "My shield"- the Angel who made the promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:1)
v. 3 "My saviour"- as the Holy Spirit Angel was to Israel (Is. 63:8-10)
v. 7 "He did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears"- the language of Angelic limitation regarding the Angel who dwelt in the temple.
v. 9 "fire"- God makes His Angels a flame of fire (Ps. 104:3,4).
v. 10 "came down " - God manifest in the Angels, as at Sodom and Babel.
v. 11 "a cherub. . did fly. . wings of wind". Gabriel could "fly swiftly"; the Angels are made "spirits"- winds.
v. 12 "darkness. . thick clouds"- the Angel dwelt over the darkness of the Most Holy and in the pillar of cloud; cp. the scene during the Angelic manifestation at Sinai.
v. 15 "arrows. . . lightning"- Angel cherubim language
v. 16 "the blast of the breath (spirit) of His nostrils". God's spirit is manifested through Angels.
v. 17 "He sent from above, He took me"- the physical movement of the Angels from Heaven to earth to obey God's word
v. 25 "Before His eyes"- Angels
v. 37 "Thou hast enlarged my steps. . so that my feet did not slip"- the Angel keeping David from sinning?
23:1 "God of Jacob"- an Angel
23:3 "the rock of Israel" (an Angel) inspired David- which is the work of Angels.

2Sa 22:3 God, my rock, in Him I will take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge. My saviour, You save me from violence-

The "city of David" was not a city, it is defined in 2 Sam. 5:7 as a stronghold, and elsewhere the term is used specifically of the burial places of the Davidic kings: "David took the stronghold of Zion; the same is the city of David". It was a hill southeast of Jerusalem. In the wilderness Psalms, David so often talks of Yahweh as his stronghold, his fortified tower. And we think of 2 Sam. 22:1-3: "David spoke to Yahweh the words of this song in the day that Yahweh delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: and he said, Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, even mine; God, my rock, in Him I will take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge. My saviour, You save me". But once he settles in Jerusalem, we repeatedly read of the city / stronghold of David, the area he built a fortification around, the "milo". Again we see his spiritual decline once he settled down

and we must beware of this. He himself and his fortified home fortress was his own stronghold rather than Yahweh.

David sees that Yahweh will be a "high tower" or place of refuge at the day of future judgment (Ps. 9:8,9, quoted about this in Acts 17:31). But David feels God has been like this to him in this life (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 18:2; 46:7; 48:3; 59:9,16,17; 62:2; 94:22; 144:2). He therefore sees a seamless experience in his relationship with God in this life, and at the future day of judgment. God saves us right now and is a refuge for us in countless life situations; and this is the guarantee that He will be likewise at the last day.

Truly David is our example. David was very much involved in Israel his people. He saw himself as their representative. "The God of my rock is *my* shield... he is a shield to *all* them that trust in him" (2 Sam. 22:3,31). "*I* am in a great strait; let *us* fall now into the hand of the Lord" (2 Sam. 24:14) reflects this. When he sung Psalms, he invited them to come and sing along with him (Ps. 105:2; 107:22; 111:1). And many of these Psalms of praise seem to have their origin in his experience of forgiveness regarding Bathsheba.

2Sa 22:4 I will call on Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from my enemies-
We can render "derided, I called to the Lord; I called for help from my enemies", in which case the allusion is to his feigning madness before Achish, calling for help and being delivered (1 Sam. 21:14). As nearly always in this song, the reference is to the events of David's glory days in his 20s and not to the bulk of his life. He is sanitizing his past.

The tenses can be read as 'I kept on calling and kept on being saved'. David's focus of all his praises upon Yahweh was what he wanted his people to follow (Ps. 22:3). The implication of "worthy" could imply a contrast with other gods, as in Ps. 96:4 "He is to be feared / praised above all gods". This would confirm the hints we have that Saul was an idolater (see on Ps. 18:31; Ps. 12:8; 16:4), and that idolatry was prevalent in Israel at the time.

2Sa 22:5 For the waves of death surrounded me. The floods of ungodliness made me afraid-
Ps. 18:4 "the cords of death", alluding to Saul trying to ensnare David in a trap that will lead to his death (1 Sam. 18:21). The allusion is also to Saul calling David a "son of death", certain to die, in 1 Sam. 20:31. Always the allusions are to David's life in his 20s, his dramatic deliverances during his halcyon years. Never to his not so wonderful life post Bathsheba. It could be argued that David is writing or singing these words after he was made king and Saul was dead. But he still had many "enemies" to be saved from (:1), and the placement of this song at this point in the narrative surely suggests it was David doing what most kings of the time did at the end of their lives- recount the glory of their lives and thank their god for all their victories and deliverances. "The day" when

God had delivered David from all his enemies (:1) is surely only the "day" of the end of his life. David felt as if he had been a sacrifice bound to an altar, as man drowning in water, and therefore about to be pulled into the grave (Ps. 18:5). The allusion is to Isaac and his miraculous deliverance from such cords, thanks to the ram in the thicket whom David is later to understand as representative of the future Messianic saviour; for the Lord quotes David's "My God, why have You forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1) as the Aramaic *sabachthani*, "entangled", the word used of the ram entangled in the thicket.

"Ungodliness" is 'ungodly men', 'men of Belial'. We think of Nabal, a man of Belial (1 Sam. 25:17,25). But he was saved from killing Nabal by God's grace to him through Abigail. David makes no reference to this. See on :27. But probably the reference is to large numbers of such men rising against David and almost killing him (:6), which would apply more naturally to the time of Absalom's rebellion. David's fear is not much hinted at in the record, but here he himself admits to it.

2Sa 22:6 The cords of Sheol were around me, the snares of death caught me-
"Cords" is literally the pangs, hence AV "sorrows" (as in Acts 2:24 "having loosened the pangs of death"). David saw even the death which he feared as the birth pangs to a rebirth in resurrection. Just as had been hinted at for him in the promises of 2 Sam. 7. But because he was saved out of imminent death, perhaps his focus on that future resurrection was diminished. See on :5. David felt he had come face to face with death, to the point that his salvation was effectively a resurrection. The response to this near death situation is described here, but it is hard to locate such an incident in the historical records. Perhaps there was a particular salvation from death at Saul's hands which isn't recorded, but David alludes to it here.

*"*Caught me" is Ps. 18:5 *"*Came on me", or literally 'went before me'. The same word is used in Ps. 59:10: "My God will go before me with His grace". David was inside his house surrounded by his enemies (Ps. 59:1), and escaped through a window. As he planned the escape, he believed that God's grace would go before him. At the end of his life he appears to reflect upon this incident, glorying that although he was "compassed about" with the threat of death, seeing the house was surrounded by Saul's men intending to kill him; yet God's grace had somehow gone before David and prepared a way of escape (Ps. 18:5,18 s.w.).

The Ras Shamra texts speak of the insatiable appetite of Mot for dead people- he eats them ceaselessly with both hands. There are frequent parallels drawn between Mot / Mawet, and the grave: 2 Sam. 22:5,6; Is. 28:18; Hos. 13:14; Job 28:22; 30:23; Ps. 6:5; 18:5; 89:48; 116:3; Prov. 2:18; 5:5; 7:27. The point is that Mot / Mawet doesn't exist, it is simply to be understood as the grave. For very often, language used about Mot in the pagan literature is applied to God in order to show Mot's effective non-existence. The significance of this point is that at times, the Bible refers to pagan ideas about 'Satan'

like figures in order to deconstruct them, and show their effective non-existence in the light of the supremacy of the one true God.

2Sa 22:7 In my distress I called on Yahweh. Yes, I called to my God. He heard my voice out of His temple. My cry came into His ears-
The reference to "my distress" could be to how David returned to find that the Amalekites had plundered Ziklag and taken his wives and children captive, and his men turned against him. "David was greatly distressed, for the men spoke of stoning him because they were grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters... David inquired of Yahweh" (1 Sam. 30:6-8). The theophany which is now described could possibly refer to some unrecorded events at the time when David pursued after the Amalekites and recovered the captives. The references to pursuing after a "troop" and overtaking them (:30,38) would then refer to this too. Likewise "You have delivered me from the contentions of my people" (:44) would refer to David regaining control of his mutinous men at this time. Another alternative is that the theophany refers to how David heard the cherubim "marching on the tops of the balsam trees" in 2 Sam. 5:24.

David imagines his prayers as coming into the heavenly throne room, and eliciting a response. His later obsession with building a physical temple for God was a departure from how he had earlier perceived God's temple- as being in Heaven, and accessible by faithful prayer.

2Sa 22:8 Then the earth shook and trembled. The foundations of heaven quaked and were shaken, because He was angry-
It is hard to locate such an incident in the historical records. Perhaps there was a particular salvation from death at Saul's hands which isn't recorded, but David alludes to it here. Or perhaps the language here is that of theophany and God manifestation; it may not literally describe things which happened, but the hand of God in saving David was no less than as if He had appeared as He did at Sinai. For the language of earth shaking and quaking is that of the Sinai theophany and the deliverance from Egypt.

The parallel Ps. 18:7 has "the mountains". David felt that the whole of Heaven was aware of him and his dramas; just as all the Angels rejoice every time one sinner repents. 1 Sam. 2:8; 2 Sam. 22:8 speak as if Heaven / the sky rests on the mountains, from where earth seems to touch the heavens (Is. 13:5), with the stars stretched out in the north (Job 26:7). This reflected the geo-centric view held by people at the time. The point surely was that *however* people understood creation to have happened, God had done it, and in wisdom.

The theophany described in :8-16 clearly alludes to that at Sinai (Ex. 19:16-18; Jud. 5:4,5; and how David understood Sinai's events in Ps. 68:8; 77:16-18). David could be

referring to some unrecorded amazing theophany and deliverance that he experienced; or he could be making the point that God's grace and salvation shown to him personally was as awesome for him as the vast outpouring of God's power, meaning, covenant, love, grace and awe on Sinai. Which is something we can relate to. The unrecorded amazing deliverance of David may be his way of describing his salvation from the Divine death penalties regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. For he makes no mention of this deliverance... which was the greatest deliverance.

2Sa 22:9 Smoke went up out of His nostrils. Fire out of His mouth devoured. Coals were kindled by it-
This sounds like the symbolic language of theophany and God manifestation, rather than describing actually observed events in literal terms. The allusion is clearly to what happened at the exodus and Sinai, which David felt had been repeated for him in essence; as it is for all in covenant relationship with the God who saves.

2Sa 22:10 He bowed the heavens also-
The same phrase used of Moses stretching out his hands toward the heavens, and God responding by delivering His people (Ex. 9:22,23; 10:21).

And came down. Thick darkness was under His feet-
As Yahweh came down at Sinai (Ex. 19:11 s.w.). The idea is that as God had miraculously intervened for the salvation of His people in history, so David felt He had in his life; although there is no historical record of such dramatic scenes as on Sinai and at the Red Sea. We likewise experience His interventions; they aren't as dramatic as in history, but none less dramatic in ultimate reality. This coming down in a saving theophany was what David had in fact prayed for in Ps. 144:5. He asked for a theophany to save him, no less that what happened at Sinai (s.w. Ex. 19:18-20), when again God had as it were made the mountains smoke by His touch. We marvel at David's spiritual ambition, unafraid to ask for a similar theophany to save him. And here he reflects at the end of his life that this prayer was in fact answered. The relevance to the exiles is that Yahweh was prepared to "bow" (s.w. "stretch out") the heavens and "come down" to restore the exiles; but they chose not to make use of that huge potential (s.w. Is. 40:22; 42:5; 64:1).

God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He ‘preaches’ to humanity (e.g. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; 2 Sam. 22:10). In Jer. 39:16, the imprisoned Jeremiah is told to "go, tell Ebed-melech..." a word from the Lord about him. Jeremiah couldn't have literally left prison to do so- but the idea is that a person encountering the Lord's word has as it were experienced the Lord 'going' to him or her. And in this sense the message of the Lord Jesus (in its essence) could 'go' to persons without Him physically going anywhere or even existing consciously at the time (1 Pet. 3:18-21).

2Sa 22:11 He rode on a cherub, and flew. Yes, He was seen on the wings of the wind-
"Wind" and "spirit" are the same words in Hebrew. The cherubim chariot are presented as God's vehicle of manifestation, and this was language the exiles would've been familiar with through the visions of Ezekiel. Yet this is not to say that David also had such a vision. Rather did he perceive God's huge cherubic activity through the various experiences of salvation and grace he had in his life. And this is the same for us. The reference may simply be to God as it were riding on clouds in glory: "He makes the clouds His chariot, He walks on the wings of the wind" (Ps. 104:3).

2Sa 22:12 He made darkness pavilions around Himself: gathering of waters, and thick clouds of the skies-
All the scene at God's manifestation on Sinai. The Old Testament describes Yahweh, the one true God, as riding through the heavens on chariots to the help of His people Israel (Dt. 33:26; 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 104:3; Is. 19:1; Hab. 3:8). But Baal was known as the *rkb 'rpt*, the one who rides upon the clouds; and he is here being deconstructed.

This could also be an allusion to the exodus. Rashi suggests: "He put [a protective] darkness around", alluding to how the pillar of cloud and the darkness separated between the Egyptians and Israelites (Ex. 14:20).

2Sa 22:13 At the brightness before Him, coals of fire were kindled-
The "coals of fire" speak of Divine judgment (Ps. 140:10), and were part of the cherubim vision (Ez. 1:13; 10:2). Hail and thick clouds were the judgment threatened upon the Assyrians in Hezekiah's time (Is. 28:2; 30:30). David's experience becomes developed as relevant to the manifestation of God in salvation in other contexts.

2Sa 22:14 Yahweh thundered from heaven, the Most High uttered His voice-
Ps. 18:13 adds "hailstones and coals of fire", alluding to the destruction of Sodom. And yet there is no recorded incident of God consuming David's enemies like this. But he felt that God had indeed come through for Him in no less powerful a way. And we can feel and experience the same.

2Sa 22:15 He sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and confused them-
This continues the thanksgiving that his prayer of Ps. 144:6 had been answered. He had asked for a saving theophany of the magnitude of what was seen at Sinai. Now at the end of his life, David was thankful that this prayer had in fact been answered. David rejoices that Divine "arrows" were sent to destroy his enemies (Ps. 7:13; 18:14; 45:5; 64:7; 144:6), in fulfilment of God's promise to do so to the sinful within Israel (Dt. 32:23,42). But David had realized that those same arrows had been fired by God into him in judgment for his sin (Ps. 38:2). But David appears unaware that he is rejoicing at

the arrows fired at his enemies, when his sin with Bathsheba also merited Divine arrows to be fired at himself. This realization was perhaps to help David understand that his rejoicing in Divine arrows of judgment being fired at his enemies had not been mature; for he himself had to realize that he was worthy of the same.

"And confused them" is the language of God's enemies being destroyed (Ex. 14:24; Josh. 10:10; Jud. 4:15; 1 Sam. 7:10). Possibly there had been some supernatural intervention by God against Absalom's army, when we read that the forest consumed more of the enemy than did the sword. But there seems no other such example.

2Sa 22:16 Then the channels of the sea were exposed, the foundations of the world were laid bare by the rebuke of Yahweh, by the blast of the breath of His nostrils-
The opening word "then" is significant. As the channels of water were laid bare at the exodus, so God had acted for David. As discussed above, this section sounds like the symbolic language of theophany and God manifestation, rather than describing actually observed events in literal terms. The allusion is clearly to what happened at the exodus and Sinai; the essence of what God did then was experienced by David, just as it can be by us in our crises.

2Sa 22:17 He sent from on high and He took me, He drew me out of many waters-
The allusion is clearly to Moses, drawn out of the waters and thereby saved from death (Ex. 2:10). David is saying that the salvation he had experienced was no less than on the level and significance of what God did for Moses. We can look at His work in our lives likewise, and thereby cease considering that men like Moses had far more dramatic and significant experiences of God than we do.

"Waters" are usually symbolic of armies or nations. David felt he had been surrounded and faced with certain death, but had been as it were airlifted to safety by God. The language here says that God has done this, but it is parallel with David's prayer for this to happen in Ps. 144:7. This triumphant song is therefore praise for the prayer of Ps. 144 being answered. We cannot locate any particular historical incident of fulfilment; perhaps it was too personal and wonderful to be recorded. Just as a Christian man or woman might feel it inappropriate to record God's most dramatic salvation of them when they write their autobiography.

2Sa 22:18 He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me-
That thanksgiving was because he had prayed for salvation from "those who hate me" in Ps. 9:13 (s.w.). We have here a direct example of gratitude for answered prayer. It seems

Saul and his supporters were the initial reference of the "strong enemy" (see on :1). These words are an allusion to his prayer of Ps. 69:14, asking to be delivered from "those who hated me" at the time of Absalom's rebellion. So we can reject the idea that this Song was written early in David's life; it is indeed his end of life reflection. Now at the end of his life David reflects that he has been delivered from those who hated him (s.w.). At the time, he wept bitterly for Absalom's death; but now in maturity he realized that this was in fact an answer to his prayers.

On one level, David's thanksgiving and gratitude is commendable. But his biggest and worst enemy was himself and his failure to recognize that reflects immaturity rather than spiritual maturity. We would far rather see a recognition that he had been his own worst enemy, but by grace he had been saved from himself. But we don't see that.

2Sa 22:19 They came on me in the day of my calamity, but Yahweh was my support-
The phrase "day of calamity" is consistently used of a day of Divine condemnation, especially of Judah at the hand of the Babylonians (Dt. 32:35; Job 21:30; Jer. 18:17; 46:21). Perhaps the Psalm was reworked as comfort for the exiles, that they could be saved even out of the day of their condemnation. And maybe David has the idea that he had been worthy of Divine condemnation, and the judgment was being articulated at the hands of his enemies- but by grace alone, God saved him from it.

"Support" is literally 'my stay', a staff for David. Possibly the reference is to the time of Absalom's rebellion in Ps. 23:4 "Your rod and staff [the rod and staff that is You] comfort me".

2Sa 22:20 He also brought me out into a large place. He delivered me, because He delighted in me-
"Delighted" is the same word as in Ps. 51:6 "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts". This is the word here used by David at the end of his life of how God desired or delighted in him. Perhaps this desire or delight was because of the "truth" in David's heart in recognizing his sins and accepting God's grace. He had left God to decide whether He delighted in him when he fled Absalom (2 Sam. 15:26), and now he triumphs that God had done so, by grace (2 Sam. 15:25). And yet we could equally argue that indeed, God delights in confession of sin when it is the "truth" in the inward parts, But at the point of this song, is this how David still understands it? He seems to reason that God delights in him because of his righteousness. And not because of his inner contrition, as he had earlier understood at the time of Ps. 51.

When the Lord's mockers jeered "If he desireth him" (RV), they were alluding to the LXX of Ps. 18:19 and 91:11. God cannot be tempted, otherwise He would have responded. 'If God *likes* Him', is what they were really implying.

Being brought out or escaping to freedom may be a reference to the night he escaped from his house with Michal's help. Or he may have in mind the time when he was saved from effective captivity in Gath: "You have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy, You have set my feet in a large place'.

At the time of Absalom's rebellion, David's critics mocked "Let Yahweh rescue him, if He delights in him" (Ps. 22:8). David himself considered God's delight in him to be open to question and over to God to prove: "he king said to Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city. If I find grace in the eyes of Yahweh, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and His dwelling place; but if He say thus, 'I have no delight in you;' behold, here am I. Let Him do to me as seems good to Him" (2 Sam. 15:25,26). David seems to now triumphantly consider that Yahweh does delight in him. But he does so on the basis that he considers that Divine delight in him to be a reward for his righteousness and clean hands (:21). Whereas the deliverance from Absalom was because Yahweh by grace alone 'delighted' in David.

2Sa 22:21 Yahweh rewarded me according to my righteousness. He rewarded me according to the cleanness of my hands-
David seems to have in mind 1 Sam. 26:23 "Yahweh will reward every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, because Yahweh delivered you into my hand today and I wouldn't put forth my hand against Yahweh's anointed". Likewise Saul says that David had "rewarded" him good when Saul had "rewarded" David evil (1 Sam. 24:18). He considers that he got saved from Absalom (see on :20) because of his good and gracious action towards Saul years before that. But that is salvation by works. He considers his hands were clean *in relation to Saul* and therefore this, he considers, saved him from the post-Bathsheba judgments. But those judgments were exactly because he did have blood on his hands. And the fact he didn't previously was no atonement or cleansing. Ps. 24:4 may suggest that David perceives 'cleanness of hands' to be a way of saying he hadn't worshipped idols (see on :24), as the ideas are paralleled: "He who has clean hands... who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood".

But from another angle, we recall how it was the wise actions of Abigail which saved David from getting blood on his hands by killing her and her kids, as David had intended to do. He was saved from having blood on his hands by grace, God's grace, working through Abigail (1 Sam. 25:30,31). But there is no mention of that now by David, rather a simplistic persuasion that he had pure guiltless hands and that is why he was preserved and delivered by God.

David was yet to learn that he himself was a sinner and no man apart from the Lord has clean hands or total personal righteousness. Yet David twice repeats this self righteousness. If this were written at the end of his life, then he appears to have lost the intensity of contrition for sin he had at the time of his repentance about Bathsheba. We

too can allow the passage of time to blunt our sense of wonder at God's grace to us, and even reinterpret our sins as nothing major.

Verses 21-25 sound as if David is really commending himself. Possibly he was indeed too self congratulatory at this point. But his words clearly allude to the requirements for Israel's king in Dt. 17:18-20. If, as suggested on :1, he sung these words when he was first made king, he could be reflecting God's position that David was the king whom He had chosen in line with His requirements in Dt. 17:18-20: "When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he must write for himself a copy of this law in a book... It shall be with him and he must read from it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them. Thus his heart will not be raised up above his brothers, and he will not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, so that he may prolong his days in his kingdom".

2Sa 22:22 For I have kept the ways of Yahweh, and have not wickedly departed from my God-

It would be hard to better describe David's sins with Bathsheba and Uriah than 'wickedly departing from God'. If David at the end of his life could say that he was upright and had kept himself from his iniquity (2 Sam. 22:21-24). He could only say this by a clear understanding of the concept of imputed righteousness. Paul's claim to have always lived in a pure conscience must be seen in the same way. And yet it seems to me that David ought to have added what we would all add if saying this- that this is only by grace, and me a sinner being counted righteous.

"Wickedly departed" is the word usually translated "condemn" (e.g. Ps. 37:33). Those who depart from God condemn themselves. This is a major Biblical theme; that the condemned are more self-condemned rather than condemned by God. "We make the answer now". But later David was to realize that he too had wickedly departed from God, and confession of that was vital for salvation (s.w. Ps. 106:6).

David felt preserved by God from Saul and his other enemies (1 Sam. 30:23; 2 Sam. 22:44), because he had preserved or obeyed [s.w.] God's ways (2 Sam. 22:22,24; Ps. 18:21,23); whereas Saul didn't obey / preserve them and was destroyed (1 Sam. 13:13,14; 1 Chron. 10:13). Hence Ps. 145:20: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy". And yet in all this David is without grace, thinking on the basis of human merit soliciting Divine response.

2Sa 22:23 For all His ordinances were before me. As for His statutes, I did not depart from them-

Depart or "Put away" (Ps. 18:22) is the word used for how God departed from Saul because he didn't keep God's statutes (1 Sam. 16:14; 18:12; 28:15). David is therefore

comparing himself favourably with Saul; for this is his triumph song after Saul has been slain (see on :1). And yet in essence, David and Saul did the same sins and David was preserved by grace thanks to his heart for God- and not because he sinned less than Saul. “And his statutes did I not put away from me” (Ps. 18:22). We think about his adultery, murders, lies... And especially in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah, be broke so many Divine statutes. “You shall not murder”, “You shall not commit adultery”, “You shall not steal” (2 Sam. 12:4,7–10) and “You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife”.

2Sa 22:24 I was also perfect towards Him-
A true seed of Abraham, who were to walk with or before Yahweh blameless (s.w. Gen. 17:1). David may be using 'perfect' in the sense of complete, undivided. In which case [as noted on :21] he may be protesting that the fact he didn't worship idols therefore made him somehow "perfect towards" Yahweh. And perhaps his lack of idolatry led to him thinking that lies, adultery, murder and family smashing were all quite legitimate because he didn't worship idols.

I kept myself from my iniquity-
This sounds like a boast in his iron willed self-control. He would never be able to boast like this after the sin with Bathsheba. It is God by His grace who keeps men from sinning (Gen. 20:6), and not the rigid self-discipline of the deeply religious. "My iniquity" could suggest some specific temptation David had. He boasts that he kept himself from it. But yet he did so many other sins... Alternatively David may refer to how "my iniquity" lurks in every man but we are to keep ourselves from it, having recognized it as always being latently there. David surely alludes to his words to Jonathan that there is no "iniquity" in him (1 Sam. 20:1,8). But now at 70 years of age, it is not exactly of integrity to take those earlier words of youth, uttered in a specific context of having done no iniquity to Saul, and use them as explanation of why God had been so good to David throughout his life. God's goodness had been on the basis of grace, and not David's lack of iniquity towards Saul at an earlier point. He broke his promise to Saul not to slay his descendants, and as argued on 2 Sam. 21, this was a sin of David's and was from political reasons. So David would have been wrong to argue that he was totally blameless in his actions toward Saul.

2Sa 22:25 Therefore Yahweh has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in His eyesight-
David was yet to learn that he himself was a sinner and no man apart from the Lord has clean hands or total personal righteousness. Yet David twice repeats this self righteousness. In describing his feelings after the Bathsheba experience, David comments that he was "as a man that hears not [the taunts of others against him], and in whose mouth are no rebukes" (Ps. 38:14). The pre-Bathsheba Psalms present David as a man who was so easily hurt by the taunts of others, and whose mouth was indeed

full of rebuke of others. Ps. 18:23-26 has David describing his own uprightness before God, and how God only shows His grace to the pure and upright. How little did he understand grace! Worse still, he several times bids God judge men according to their sins (Ps. 5:10). It is against this background that we must understand the significance of David's statements that after Bathsheba, after how God did *not* deal with him according to his sin, there were no rebukes of others now in his mouth. Realizing the extent of his personal sin and the depth of God's grace led David to not only be less reproachful of others; but also to be less hurt by their unkindness to him. And in these things we surely have a great lesson to ourselves.

2Sa 22:26 With the merciful You will show Yourself to have bowed the neck; with the perfect man You will show Yourself perfect-
We have here the mixture of spirituality and yet arrogance which we can often detect in ourselves. David recognizes his salvation has been through God's mercy; but he sees himself as having earned this mercy by being "perfect". The same word is used of Job, but he had to be taught that that status was a case of having righteousness imputed to him by grace; and because David was unwilling to really learn this, he had to be taught it through the righteousness imputed to him after his sin with Bathsheba.

David especially recognized the humility of God. In 2 Sam. 22:26 he uses an unusual word to describe how God is "merciful" to His faithful people. The word only occurs elsewhere in Prov. 25:10 concerning 'bowing the neck' in shame or reverence. And this is what the Hebrew means: to bow the neck. This, David recognized in his time of spiritual maturity, was what God does in response to those who shew a truly spiritual attitude to their brethren.

"Merciful" can also be translated "faithful", as in GNB "you are faithful to those who are faithful to you". In this case, David would be alluding to his faithfulness to his covenant with Jonathan. His idea is that God has been faithful to His covenant with David in 2 Sam. 7 because David has been faithful to his covenant with Jonathan. This totally disregards the huge grace behind the covenant with David as commented upon on 2 Sam. 7. David significantly omits to accept he had not been faithful to the oath he made to Saul before Yahweh, not to harm his seed. For we have seen on 2 Sam. 21 that he did do so, and at several points appears to have tacitly ensured Saul's descendants were cut off if they appeared a potential threat to his throne. He was not a faithful covenant keeper, and was hardly faithful to Uriah and many others. David is certainly being selective about his past, and sanitizing himself.

"The perfect man" could refer to David's idea that he has 'perfect' devotion to God in that he worships no idols. And God will match this by a similar focus upon us. Or the Hebrew could be rendered "the upright hero", which raises the ugly vista of David

considering that his heroic victories as a young man made him somehow worthy of God's acceptance in later life.

This verse is at the center of the song. There are 365 Hebrew words in the song, 182 on each side of the word "perfect". The centerpiece of David's argument is his innocence, rather than God's grace. And that says... not much for David's maturity and perception. On one hand, he was indeed made pure from his sin by grace, as he exalts in Psalms 32 and 51. But as ever with David, his spirituality is not pure. On one hand yes, he can rightly reason that God has treated him as justified, counted righteous, and had indeed cast David's sins behind His back. But if any of us were to tell the world of our spotless moral purity, we as convicted sinners would naturally add the rider that this is only by Divine grace through the Lord, seeing we eagerly confess that we of ourselves are sinners. But there is none of that here with David. Psalm 119, composed during his wilderness years on the run from Saul, has many references to his own sins. But that now seems far from him. And the spirit of Psalms 32 and 51, glorying in Divine grace and justification of sinners by grace alone, is likewise now far from him... As with Gideon and so many others, he reached pinnacles of understanding and spirituality which he spent the rest of his life receding from. And yet will still be ultimately saved. David is presented as the very opposite of what we might expect from a spiritual hero- progressively growing in grace until he faces his grave planks in gentle, calm spirituality and closeness to God. His final words recorded to Solomon breathed judgment and hated rather than any grace or personal expectation of future glory at the resurrection.

2Sa 22:27 With the purified You will show Yourself pure, with the crooked You will show Yourself tortuous-
"The pure" connects with David's please for a pure heart to be restored to him after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 51:10). We could argue that he considered that he had been so cleansed of that sin that he was treated as pure. Or it could be that he simply forgot how he had been so impure in what he had done.

David's claim here is that God blessed the righteous and cursed the wicked, confirming each in their way. This may have some truth to it, but his claim is a tacit reflection of his failure to understand the grace shown to him. Theoretically he had grasped it in Ps. 32, staying that God counts as right those who are not right, by grace. But now he reasons as if he has no grasp of the grace concept.

"Tortuous" translates a Hebrew word *pathel* which is very similar to the Hebrew for Ahithophel, David's one time confidante and counsellor, Bathsheba's grandfather, who betrayed him to Absalom. David was saved from Ahithophel's counsel by grace alone and by the loyalty of Hushai. But instead he appears to gloat over how God, as he saw it, had punished Ahithophel and justified himself. He appears to be oblivious to the fact

that Ahithophel had good reason to be against him; and wishes all manner of curses upon him in the Psalms composed at this time.

David sees himself as the pure, and Saul as the crooked. Throughout David's Psalms in Ps. 1-72, he repeatedly asks for torture upon the sinners and blessing upon himself as the righteous. He speaks of how sinners should be "contemned" in the eyes of the righteous (Ps. 15:4), the gatherings of sinners should be "hated" and sinners should not be fellowshipped (Ps. 26:4-6; Ps. 31:6) and how God's uprightness is shown to the upright and His judgment to the judgmental (Ps. 18:25,26; Ps. 33:22). He invites God's judgment upon himself and others according to their and his works (Ps. 28:4). Frequently he alludes to Saul as "the violent man"- even though David committed his share of violence- and asks judgment upon him (Ps. 18:48). Only those with clean hands and pure heart like himself could have fellowship with God (Ps. 24:3,4). Psalm 37 doesn't indicate any desire to convert the sinners but rather an expectation of their judgment and destruction. God and David laugh at the wicked because their day is coming (Ps. 37:13). There's no spirit of grace here at all- perhaps that's why Zech. 12:10 specifically says that the spirit of grace will have to be poured out upon the house of David in the last days. This attitude changed after the sin with Bathsheba, but still something of the old self righteousness and judgmental attitudes are to be found in David in Psalms written after that.

2Sa 22:28 You will save the afflicted people, but Your eyes are on the proud, that You may bring them down-

Again David perceives Saul as proud, and Saul's initial apparent humility must therefore be considered in this context. Perhaps he became proud, or maybe he had always been that way, and only appeared humble. But the word "people" may have been added when the Psalm was used by the exiles, for salvation for "the afflicted people" was the prophetic message to them (s.w. Is. 49:19).

David may be alluding to how he had proclaimed his own humility in God's eyes in dancing before all when the ark came to Zion: "I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased [afflicted / brought down] in my own eyes" (2 Sam. 6:21,22). But humility is hardly something that a man self proclaims...

2Sa 22:29 For You are my lamp, Yahweh. Yahweh will light up my darkness-

The phrase is only used of the lighting of the lamps in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:37; Num. 8:2). I noted on Ps. 17:8 that David sees himself as located on the mercy seat, in the Most Holy place. "You will light my lamp" refers to his Messianic hopes for his family.

2Sa 22:30 For by You, I run against a troop. By my God, I leap over a wall-
Such victories were given to David against the Philistines; the idea is as in GNB "You give me strength to attack my enemies and power to overcome their defenses". "Troop" is the word used of the Amalekites whom David overcame (1 Sam. 30:8,15). The leaping over a wall may refer to the way that Zion was captured (2 Sam. 5:6-8).

2Sa 22:31 As for God, His way is perfect. The word of Yahweh is tested. He is a shield to all those who take refuge in Him-
*"*The word" specifically in view may be the prophetic word that David would be king and thereby overcome all of Saul's machinations (see on Ps. 119:1).

2Sa 22:32 For who is God, besides Yahweh? Who is a rock, besides our God?-
David in his Psalms repeatedly alludes to the song of his ancestor Hannah. He effectively quotes 1 Sam. 2:2 here; although I argue throughout 1 Sam. 2 that Hannah's was apparently lifted up with pride and the vengeance of the underling who has overcome the oppressor. And there is reason to think that David had elements of this weakness too.

David perceives his victory over Saul as the vindication of Yahweh above other gods. This would confirm the hints we have that Saul was an idolater (see on Ps. 12:8; 16:4).

2Sa 22:33 God is my strong fortress. He makes my way perfect-
A reference to his victory over Goliath without human armour, trusting completely in God (see on :34,35).

2Sa 22:34 He makes His feet like hinds' feet, and sets me on my high places-
As in :35, this may be a reference to his victory over Goliath, which he saw as the epitome of all his victories. For he ran swiftly towards Goliath before releasing the stone which slew him. Or as mentioned on :30, getting his high places may allude to the conquest of Zion from the Jebusites.

2Sa 22:35 He teaches my hands to war, so that my arms bend a bow of brass-
Perhaps alluding to how it was David's dexterity of hand as a slinger which gave the victory over Goliath. But he recognizes that this was all of God. He is careful not to exalt as if his strength was his own.

This is another allusion to the song of Hannah (see on :32). Here, it is to "The bows of the mighty men are broken". Seeing children are as arrows (Ps. 127:4,5), the bow may refer

to the womb, in Hannah's mind. And she is now wishing her barrenness upon her enemies who had once mocked her. This is hardly the right attitude, and yet David applies it to himself. And there is reason to think that David had elements of this weakness too. He thought it was acceptable to be like this because Hannah had been. And that is the problem with setting bad examples.

2Sa 22:36 You have also given me the shield of your salvation. Your gentleness has made me great-
God's gentleness, His humility / bowing down (Heb.) has made us great, lifted us up (Ps. 18:35). And we respond to it by humbling *our*selves. Paul's take on "the shield of your salvation" is that it means "the shield of faith" (Eph. 6:16). If we enquire 'Faith in exactly what?', the answer is 'faith in salvation at the end of the day, that God will finally save me'. The Hebrew can mean gentleness but it has the idea of condescension, so the idea may be 'Your answers to my prayers for help'.

2Sa 22:37 You have enlarged my steps under me. My feet have not slipped-
David in his earlier Psalms exalts and boasts to God that his feet have not slipped, indeed he was overly confident that his feet would never slip / "be moved" (Ps. 17:5; 21:7; 55:22; 62:2,6; 125:1). His more mature reflection is that he had wrongly said "I shall never slip [AV "be moved"]" (Ps. 30:6), and his feet had indeed slipped, not least over the Bathsheba incident (Ps. 38:16; 94:18). But now at the end of his life, he considers his feet haven't slipped. But David's feet did slip terribly in relation to the Bathsheba affair. But he looks back on his life and whitewashes himself. Solomon didn't learn this lesson, for he likewise assumed that the righteous would never be moved / slip (Prov. 10:30), although he appears to accept that even a righteous man like his father had indeed slipped (Prov. 25:26). And Solomon himself did so, not learning the lesson from his father's mistaken assumption that the righteous can never slip.

2Sa 22:38 I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them. I didn't turn again until they were consumed-
This is written *after* God had subdued Saul and David's other enemies (:1). He is taking this as a portent of future victory against all other enemies. But I will explain on :40-43 that David did not use all the potential authority and power of judgment which he was given. David pursuing his enemies alludes to David pursuing and overtaking a band of his enemies (1 Sam. 30:8). But again, David is alluding back to heroic deliverances and victories in his twenties. But human life isn't solely the halcyon years of youth. His life post Bathsheba was nothing to write home about. And he makes hardly any reference to it now at age 70 as he looks back on his life. In Ps. 18:37 "overtaken them", alluding to

Ex. 15:9- again, David is saying that God's work for him was as dramatic as His salvation of Israel at the Exodus.

2Sa 22:39 I have consumed them, and struck them through, so that they can't arise. Yes, they have fallen under my feet-
Ps. 18:38 changes the tenses: "I will strike them through, so that they will not be able to rise. They shall fall under my feet". See on :38. This refers to the potential power of judgment David felt he had been given, but this is not to say he would use it.

2Sa 22:40 For You have armed me with strength for the battle. You have subdued under me those who rose up against me-
David reflects how his victory in battle by God's strength meant that all was subdued under him (s.w. Ps. 8:6), a Psalm about the victory over Goliath). The victory in battle which he had in view was supremely that over Goliath, his most major and applauded victory, where he stood over Goliath in triumph. But again, he is harping on about his halcyon days and not taking into account the majority of his adult life post Bathsheba. To a far greater extent, the victory of the Lord Jesus meant not simply the subjugation of Israel beneath Him, but of all creation, including the natural creation.

2Sa 22:41 You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me, so that I might cut off those who hate me-
Those who hated David surely refer to the house of Saul (:1). But David did not cut them off- even though he was given the opportunity of doing so. Literally, "I silenced those who hated me". The reference would then be to the defenders of Jebus / Jerusalem who hated David / were hated by David (2 Sam. 5:8). Perhaps his 'leaping over a wall' (:30) references his capture of the walled city of Jebus.

2Sa 22:42 They looked, but there was none to save; even to Yahweh, but He didn't answer them-
A reference to God refusing to answer Saul just before he died (1 Sam. 28:6). David is enjoying making the point that his enemies had no salvation, Saul's shield was cast away and he died in battle: "the shield of the mighty was shamefully cast away, the shield of Saul was not anointed with oil" (2 Sam. 1:21). David rejoices that in contrast, "you gave to me the shield of Your salvation" (:36). David fails to realize that the historical record actually paints Saul and himself as sinning in parallel. If anything, David sinned worse than Saul. He was saved by Divine grace because he had a heart for God. But instead he here posits that God chose to save him and not Saul because he was somehow more pure and righteous than Saul. He totally misses the grace of God towards him.

The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). We can therefore conclude that His desperate “Why have You forsaken me?” was because He was so intensely identified with our sins that in the crisis of the cross, He indeed felt forsaken because of sin. He did not sin, but felt like a sinner; He thereby knows how sinners feel.

In their extremity even the Gentiles cry for mercy to the “unknown God” of their enemies (as in 1 Sam. 5:12; Jonah 3:7); there are no atheists on a plane going down.

2Sa 22:43 Then I beat them as small as the dust of the earth. I crushed them as the mire of the streets, and spread them abroad-
I noted on :41 that David didn't execute the judgments against the house of Saul which he could have done. The language of being "crushed" or "cast out" and being driven by the wind is that of Divine judgment. It could be that David intends us to understand that although he was given the opportunity of judging them ["that I might cut off...", :41], he didn't- he left it to God's judgment. The 'spreading abroad' may refer to him making Moabite captives lay down and be slain: "he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive" (2 Sam. 8:2). This was hardly David at his best, and surely is an example of how he shed blood indiscriminately. But he rejoices in it as if it were some special reward from God for his piety.

2Sa 22:44 You also have delivered me from the strivings of my people. You have preserved me to be the head of the nations. A people whom I have not known will serve me- David expected in faith that now he was solidly established as Israel's king, the surrounding Gentiles would come to serve him and his God (see on :50). Verses 44-46 should all be past tenses, "served me" etc. We could render "You kept me as head of the nations" in which case the allusion would be to how under Achish the Philistine he was made “keeper of my head” (1 Sam. 28:2). Again, an allusion to his pre Bathsheba life.

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

David felt preserved by God from Saul and his other enemies (1 Sam. 30:23; 2 Sam. 22:44), because he had preserved or obeyed [s.w.] God's ways (2 Sam. 22:22,24; Ps. 18:21,23); whereas Saul didn't obey / preserve them and was destroyed (1 Sam. 13:13,14; 1 Chron. 10:13). Hence Ps. 145:20: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy".

2Sa 22:45 The foreigners will submit themselves to me. As soon as they hear of me, they will obey me-
David's vision was that his kingdom would take the good news of Israel's God to the surrounding Gentiles (see on :50). Some of them would submit to David and his God, whereas others would not (:46). But if we read as past tenses, the reference would be to how at the mere rumour of David's victories, Toi king of Hamath submitted to David (2 Sam. 8:9). But the Hebrew for "submit" is strictly 'to feign obedience'. This is exactly what happened with the Amalekite who lied about killing Saul (2 Sam. 1:2–16), coming kneeling to David; and Baanah and Rechab (2 Sam 4:5–12), who each came to David expecting a reward from him. Again we note these were all incidents pre-Bathsheba.

2Sa 22:46 The foreigners will fade away, and will come trembling out of their hiding places-
This may allude to how Saul's persecutors of David included "foreigners" such as Cush (see on Ps. 7:1) and Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam. 22:22). We should read in the past tense, "faded away", like plants scorched by the burning sun, which is the figure in Ex. 18:18. The idea repeatedly is that as God did for His people at the Exodus, so He had done for David. And so He does for us all.

2Sa 22:47 Yahweh lives! Blessed be my rock! Exalted be God, the rock of my salvation-
David had earlier lamented that Saul "My enemy" (= Saul, 1 Sam. 18:29; 19:17) was "exalted over me" (Ps. 13:2 s.w.). The David who had once triumphed over his enemy Goliath now felt that Saul was triumphing over him. This, in the bigger Divine picture, may have been to keep David from pride at the amazing victory and triumph. And he learned the lesson. David was indeed to triumph / be exalted over Saul (:49), but he saw it is God triumphing / being exalted. His praise Psalms are full of this word and idea- of the exaltation of God (Ps. 57:5,11) and not himself.

2Sa 22:48 even the God who executes vengeance for me, who brings down peoples under me-
An allusion to how David had restrained himself from murdering Saul when he could have done, and instead had trusted in God to execute vengeance. Here David reflects that God had indeed cast down the peoples *under him* (2 Sam. 22:48; Ps. 18:47); by

saying this he considers that his prayer of Ps. 56:7 has been answered: "In anger cast down the peoples, God". Perhaps when he prayed it, he just wanted God's anger to be poured out immediately, the day of judgment to come there and then, when the scales will be adjusted and men and nations cast down or lifted up. But he reflects that in a sense that had happened in his life, in that the peoples were cast down beneath *him*.

This is what Baanah and Rechab told David when they presented him with Ishbosheth's head: "Behold, the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; thus, the Lord has given my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and his descendants" (2 Sam. 4:8). As ever, David is alluding to things in the pre-Bathsheba part of his life. And he is citing his own refusal to personally take vengeance on Saul (1 Sam. 24,26 ,"May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you" (1 Sam 24:13)) as the basis for God giving him the throne over the people, who had [so David claims] been brought down under him. David's response to Baanah and Rechab is to comment that "Yahweh... has redeemed my life from all distress" (2 Sam. 4:9). He alludes to how he had told Saul "so may my life be highly valued in the sight of the Lord, and may He deliver me from all distress (1 Sam. 26:24). Even at that point, he had the idea that his deliverances by Yahweh were because he had not taken vengeance upon Saul. Now apparently at the end of his life, he has the same attitude. Grace to him by God doesn't seem to be in his thinking. David also seems to have forgotten that he had intended taking vengeance on Nabal, but was stopped from this by God's grace through Abigail's wisdom urging David not to avenge himself with his own hand (1 Sam. 25:23–35). It was only because this stopped him taking vengeance that God took vengeance for him. But the grace of it all is lost upon David.

We can read "who brought down the people [peoples could be an intensive plural for the great people, Israel] under me". The reference would be to his overcoming the internal opposition to his rule. But that opposition was because of the great disillusion with David because of his actions over Bathsheba and Uriah and his subsequent politically foolish moves. He ought to have resigned the kingship, but he didn't. Yet here he credits God for keeping him on the throne, leaving us to ponder whether he really appreciated God's undeserved grace in this... And again he is sanitizing how things were. The series of revolts against David in the later years of his reign rather question his claim that the people had been "brought down" beneath him. The cry of Sheba the Benjamite "To your tents O Israel! What portion have we in the son of Jesse?" was to be repeated at the end of Solomon's reign. Even on his deathbed, David had to deal with a rebellion by his son Adonijah, backed by Joab his own general.

2Sa 22:49 who delivers from my enemies. Yes, You lift me up above those who rise up against me. You deliver me from the violent man-

"Deliver" translates the word commonly used in the record of David's escape from Saul when his house was surrounded one night (1 Sam. 19:10,11,12,17,18). Again we see David harking back to his glory days and the deliverances when he was a young man- and glossing over the majority of his kingship. David's enemies were the Philistines and other nations, from whom God had given David "rest" at the time of 2 Sam. 7:11 ("Yahweh has given you rest from all your enemies"). But the term is also used of Absalom and his followers by Ahimaaz and the Cushite (2 Sam. 18:32 "the enemies of my lord the king [are] like the young man" Absalom). But God's deliverance of David from Absalom and his supporters was not at David's hand; he didn't go out to fight in the battle. The victory was because of Joab daring to disobey David's order not to kill Absalom. And Joab rightly mocks David for having more sympathy with his enemies than with his own men. This was hardly David at his most glorious and heroic on the battlefield, but he likes to spin it that way.

See on :47. The violent man was initially Saul (see on :1). The Hebrew word *hamas* [basically meaning 'physical violence arising from wicked plans'] is quite common in Scripture, and the usages speak of how God is provoked by *hamas* to bring judgment upon the enemies of His people (Gen. 6:11-13; Mic. 6:12; Zeph. 1:9) and also to intervene in order to save His people (Ps. 18:49; Ps. 72:14). How amazingly appropriate that an organization actually called *hamas* has arisen in these last days to do violence to Israel! If Biblical history means anything to us, clearly enough God's intervention in appropriate judgment and salvation cannot be far off. Note how Hagar's persecution of Sarah- typical of the Arab-Jew conflict- is described as her *hamas* (Gen. 16:5).

2Sa 22:50 Therefore I will give thanks to You, Yahweh, among the nations. I will sing praises to your name-

David was one of the few in the Old Testament who had a sense of taking the good news of Yahweh's covenant to the Gentiles. And he apparently did so through exporting his musical productions to the surrounding peoples, who may well have been able to understand David's Hebrew.

2Sa 22:51 He gives great deliverance to His king, and shows grace to His anointed, to David and to his seed, for evermore-

"Deliverance" is 'salvation'. This could be a reference to how at the time of Absalom's rebellion people considered that "there is no salvation for him in Yahweh" (Ps. 3:3). It's good to see that David does end with gratitude for grace and that he does mention the eternity of the promises made to him in 2 Sam. 7. David's song is presenting himself as the ideal king of Israel, who loved Yahweh and His word, saved Israel and was eternally

blessed. We as readers know this is a highly sanitized view of himself. But in his "last words" in 2 Sam. 23 David appears to admit that his "house" was "not so with God", and "he that rules over men must be just"- and he had not been that.

The Psalm concludes with a reference to David as the anointed, so this could be a Psalm composed when Saul was slain and David was finally declared king, and his anointing came to fulfilment. But the reference to eternal salvation for "his seed" could suggest it was composed after he had received the promises of 2 Sam. 7.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 23

2Sa 23:1 Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse says, the man who was raised on high says, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel-

The words of David in 2 Sam. 23:1 are not "the last words of David" in that he spoke many other recorded words, both in 1 Kings 1 and in the 1 Chronicles record of his words to Solomon about the temple. But they are called "the last words of David". We conclude that "being a prophet", these are his last prophetic words. Words spoken by direct inspiration from God as revelation from God. Here is the difference between revelation and inspiration. All the Bible is inspired and a true record of what was said or done. But not all is revelation. And so if these are the last prophetic words of David, we can conclude that his words to Solomon about the temple were not by direct revelation from God. God had said He didn't want David to build a temple. But David is reported as saying God had told him to arrange for Solomon to build it. And he made these statements in the fortieth year of his reign, i.e. right at the end of his life (1 Chron. 26:31).

Summing up, we can read this as a dialogue:

David [at the close of his song of self praise in 2 Sam. 22]: "He gives great deliverance to His king, and shows grace to His anointed, to David and to his seed, for evermore" [assuming he and his son were so pleasing to God that they were worthy of an eternal dynasty]
God [forcing David to utter the words through inspiration]: "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God [in contrast to David's rule]. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (AV).
David [struck by his own arrogance and the marvel of God's grace to him, arriving at a moment of truth]: "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure! It is all my salvation and all my

desire, that the wicked should not flourish" (LXX).
God [responding to David's characteristic condemnation of others]: "All of the ungodly shall be as thorns to be thrust away, because they can't be taken with the hand; but the man who touches them must be filled with iron and the staff of a spear. They shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place".

"The man who was raised on high" reflects his self glorifying argument of the previous chapter. David for the latter part of his life was unloved, disrespected, manipulated and hardly 'on top' of Israel, with all the rebellions against him. This was the situation right up to his death bed. He glories in his anointing, but Saul likewise was anointed- of itself, this meant nothing. Indeed God's take on David's anointing was that seeing "I anointed you king over Israel", his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah was the more culpable and reprehensible (2 Sam. 12:7). But David just fixates on the fact he had been anointed and saw that as part of his glory. David's self aggrandisement here is going to be cut short by God now forcing him to say words he wouldn't have wanted to say- that Messiah, God's son rather than his son, was God's King and the true anointed or Christ of God. David was not God's ultimate anointed or Christ. He here introduces himself as the anointed, the Messiah of Israel's God- and God then puts a word in his mouth that corrects this. It is David's great Messianic descendant who will fit this, and it is He who will judge the wicked- not David. We can note a juxtaposition here between David's self designations here, and the word God puts in his mouth seeking to humble and correct him.

If we accept the LXX, David's self congratulation is even worse: "Faithful is David the son of Jesse, and faithful the man whom the Lord raised up to be the anointed of the God of Jacob". He had hardly been "faithful".

His self designation as Israel's psalmist was perhaps akin to claiming to be the most popular pop star in the country. It was self claimed by him. And we note that Solomon wrote 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32; and 5000 according to 1 Kings 4:39 LXX), far more than David. Or we could take "the sweet psalmist of Israel" to mean 'the one Israel considers sweet and sing psalms to', alluding to the women singing songs of praise to him after his murder of Goliath. Indeed ESV gives "the favourite" instead of "sweet", as does the French "favori des chants d'Israel". As noted throughout 2 Sam. 22, this would be a case of him continuing to focus upon isolated incidents from his halcyon glory years, and overlooking the fact that for all his life post Bathsheba he was not respected, indeed he was despised by Israel.

2 Sam. 23:1-5 gives quite some insight into the nature of David's spiritual maturity at the end. He comes over as:

Sure of his salvation

Aware of his own failures and frailty, acknowledging that his family ‘was not so with God’

Deeply aware of God’s grace

Having a clear vision of Jesus the future Messiah, even foreseeing how He would be pierced with a weapon and slain by wicked men- in order to attain our salvation

Aware that his own rulership was pathetically inferior to that of the Lord Jesus

Appreciative that all these wonderful things are rooted in the covenant made to himself, which was all his salvation and desire.

These very same themes we find recurring in the lives of many other servants of God.

2Sa 23:2 The Spirit of Yahweh spoke by me. His word was on my tongue-
This is a classic statement of Divine inspiration, putting His word upon the tongue of the inspired writers and speakers of His word. But the point is, having glorified himself in his self descriptions in :1, he now has God forcibly placing His words and perspectives into David's mouth, as he would now speak forth as a prophet, just as Balaam did. "David the son of Jesse says, and the man... says" matches "Balaam the son of Boer says, and the man... says" (Num. 24:15). I discuss on 2 Sam. 24:1 how there, David is again likened to Balaam. The idea here may be that the previous song of 2 Sam. 22 was David's words, his self perception, the recording of which is inspired but not necessarily the content- a classic case of the difference between inspiration and revelation. But now in these final words we have a direct prophecy from God which is in fact critical of David as king, showing his deficiency compared to God's requirements for kingship and leadership over His people. So 2 Sam. 22 was David's take on himself, and now 2 Sam. 23 is God's take on David. We see something similar in the book of Job, where men give their take on themselves, saying various things which aren't correct, and then God gives His take. The takes of Job on himself, of the satan, the friends and Elihu on Job... All this is in some way criticized and debunked by God in the final speeches. So those human takes on Job are recorded under inspiration, but are not all correct because God debunks them all.

2Sa 23:3 The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, ‘One who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God-
This may have been spoken to David by Samuel when he was first anointed; or by special revelation to David when he first became king. Prov. 29:2 alludes to this, saying that when the righteous rule, the people rejoice (s.w.). The king of Israel was to ever remember that God was the ultimate king; and was to rule therefore in respect of Him.

But it seems to me that this is God's direct comment on the closing line of David's hymn in 2 Sam. 22:51: "He gives great deliverance to His king, and shows grace to His anointed, to David and to his seed, for evermore". God wants to demonstrate that "His king" is not in fact so much David, but the future Lord Jesus. And David's passing reference to the promises to him, right at the end of a hymn glorifying himself, rather missed the point. David was not "His king" in the Messianic sense, and neither would his son Solomon be. And we will see that the verses that follow appear to continue this idea of God and David in dialogue, with interjections from both sides.

David post Bathsheba had not reigned justly over man; Absalom's complaint to the men of Israel that his father didn't give justice, he didn't judge / rule justly, had some currency and men were in agreement with that complaint. That's why they backed Absalom and others who offered an alternative to David. David was not just towards Uriah and Bathsheba; nor was he just in refusing to deal with the sins of his sons Amnon and Absalom, who committed rape and murder without David's direct judgment. He was manipulated by the cunning woman of Tekoah, and as discussed on 2 Sam. 21, he was unjust in allowing the seven descendants of Saul to be murdered when this was avoidable. He was likewise unjust to Michal and her husband Paltiel; and likewise to his concubines whom he forced into being prisoners of court with no possibility of sex, marriage nor children. By agreeing an 'equal guilt', 50/50 judgment between Ziba and Mephibosheth, David hardly judged justly; he was most unwise to initially totally believe Ziba. Likewise he promised Shimei immunity from judgment but then asked Solomon to murder him. He was hardly just or fair to Joab either, whom he clearly personally disliked although he was so dependent upon him. His final words of command to Solomon about murdering such people were hardly judging justly. Joab rightly criticized David for unjustly being obsessed with Absalom and turning the victory for David's people into mourning.

Only David's greater son, Messiah, could be righteous or “just” in the fullest sense of the word, and this characteristic of Him is picked up in later Messianic prophecies (e.g. Jer. 23:5; Is. 11:2,3; Zech. 9:9). These words are repeatedly alluded to in later Messianic prophecies. There are so many allusions that it is as if the Spirit really wants to emphasize that David is here prophesying of s future Messianic figure and not himself nor his immediate children. David's hope was that Solomon would rule like this (Ps. 72:2), but these inspired "last words" appear almost a deconstruction of David's hopes for Solomon as expressed in Psalm 72. There are several connections with David's Psalm for Solomon in Psalm 72, which was his Messianic hopes for Solomon. Ps. 72:6 speaks of Solomon as coming down like rain upon mown grass. But David's insistence Solomon was the Messiah were misplaced and actually disobedient to God's promises to him. Here David is made to prophesy that Messiah would come after the rain, as the dawn after a cloudy and rainy night. The reigns of David and Solomon were that dark night. Not at all as David reasons in Ps. 72.

2Sa 23:4 shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, like the clear shining after rain'-
This suggests that the ruler in view was to be as the sunrise, after the clouds and darkness of the night have dispersed. This was indeed how David's reign appeared after the reign of Saul. But the clouds returned in the course of David's reign, and it looks ahead to the coming of David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus, to arise as the dawn and re-establish David's kingdom as God's eternal Kingdom on earth (s.w. "sun rises" Mal. 4:2). "Clear shining" is the word used for the "brightness" of the cherubim which were to return to Zion along with the exiles to establish eternal brightness there, with a restored Davidic king (Ez. 1:4; 10:4).

The reference would be to a cloudless morning, implying that all that preceded Messiah's reign [including those of David and Solomon] were reigns obscured by clouds. This of course contrasts with David's preceding song of self praise and congratulation about the glories of his reign in 2 Sam. 22. God is making David prophecy about a cloudless morning to come, a light that does not dim. The idea is that unlike David, the lamp or light of Israel that was now going out, the light of His greater Son would be a light that continues growing and increasing.

The morning without clouds contrasts intentionally with David's boast that God had come down to him in thick clouds (s.w. 2 Sam. 22:12). Messiah's Kingdom would feature the direct revelation of God, not in clouds and darkness. Likewise the "brightness" of 2 Sam. 22:13 will be eclipsed by this bright (s.w. clear) shining without clouds. "You are not the man" is the message; the future Lord Jesus was to be the One. Truly it's all about Him and not about me.

2Sa 23:5 Most certainly my house is not so with God-
David is one of the major Old Testament types of the Lord Jesus. The words of David in Ps. 16 are quoted in Acts 2:25,29 concerning Jesus: "I have set the Lord always before me... He is at my right hand... You will not leave my soul in hell, neither will You suffer Your holy one to see corruption". These are words describing David's feelings about his own death and resurrection; and yet so identified was he with the Messiah, that they are quoted as being directly true of Jesus. But Acts 2:29 also quotes these words with a slightly different spin- in that David saw the Lord *Jesus* always before him, and it was this sense that stabilized him. This could only have been true in that David understood all his feelings and present and future experiences [e.g. resurrection, not being suffered to corrupt eternally] as being typical of the Lord Jesus. He so understood himself as a type of the One to come that he saw this person as ever with him. This is the extent of the typology. 1 Chron. 17:17 in Young's Literal has David saying: "Thou hast seen me as

a type of the man on high" [i.e. Messiah]. David describes himself at ease with clearly Messianic titles such as 'the Christ', 'the man raised on high', and then goes on to speak of the Messiah who *is to come* on the "morning without clouds", admitting that "verily *my* house is not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:1-5). This is only really understandable if we accept that David consciously saw himself as a type of the future Messiah.

This seems David's interjection, a "wow" moment when he realizes that indeed his house / family is not so with God. Yet that was foreseen by the promises of 2 Sam. 7. All eventualities were foreseen, even the falling away of the bearers of the covenant of God, so that such an event as this would not annul the covenant.

There is an intended ambiguity in the Hebrew text of 2 Sam. 23:5. The AV has: "Although my house be not so with God...this is all my salvation"; whilst the NIV and other translations suggest the opposite: that because his house *was* in order, therefore this was all his salvation and desire fulfilled. Solomon and David were sure that the house of David was "with God", and yet from God's perspective they weren't, and the fulfilment of the promises would have to be in the future Messiah. We could translate: "Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, will He not indeed make it grow?". In which case, David appears still not to have 'got it'. He sees his house / family as in order and the basis for that house eternally continuing.

Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure, for it is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He doesn't make it grow-
Gods covenant with David was "sure" or, to be kept, the same word David has just been using of how he had kept God's ways (2 Sam. 12:22,24). Even though David had not kept God's ways, God would keep His word to David. That is grace, being faithful to others when they are unfaithful to you.

David's "desire / delight" was in God's law (Ps. 1:2 s.w.) and also in the things of the future Kingdom of God (s.w. 2 Sam. 23:5); our "delight" in those things is reflected in our attitudes to God's word. And we shall be finally judged according to our 'delights', our dominant desires (s.w. Ecc. 3:17 "God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work"; Ecc. 8:6 "For there is a time and procedure for every purpose"). The Lord Jesus was devoted to sharing Yahweh's "delight" (Is. 53:10 "the will of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand"). We shall be judged according to what are our dominant desires.

Is. 26:8,9 parallels "the desire of my soul" with "my spirit"; it is the dominant desire of a man. For David, the salvation promised to him through Christ was "all my desire" (2 Sam. 23:5). The direction of his life was towards that end. Is our salvation all our desire

and will? All who love his appearing will be saved. If salvation is our dominant desire, it will be granted.

Or this could be God's interjection, to the effect that David's salvation was all His good pleasure or will. In this case we have God and David here in dialogue.

The Hebrew is however difficult, and I suggest the idea is as follows:

David [struck by his own arrogance and the marvel of God's grace to him, arriving at a moment of truth]: "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure! It is all my salvation and all my desire, that the wicked should not flourish" (LXX).
God [responding to David's characteristic condemnation of others]: "All of the ungodly shall be as thorns to be thrust away, because they can't be taken with the hand; but the man who touches them must be filled with iron and the staff of a spear. They shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place".

2Sa 23:6 But all of the ungodly shall be as thorns to be thrust away, because they can't be taken with the hand-
David's psalms are full of his relish at judging the wicked, and his preceding song of self glory in 2 Sam. 22 has much to say about them, almost gloating over them. God gives His perspective here. Messiah, and not David, is to be the sole judge and condemner- not David. David has had much to say in his previous song about the judgment of his enemies. Perhaps here we have God's response- that to condemn and judge others, the judge must be morally qualified. And therefore the only final judge will be Messiah and not David. Indeed the fact of His crucifixion, His piercing, would be the supreme qualification. The Lord said the same, that because He is Son of Man, He can therefore have all judgment given Him. "The ungodly" is "the sons of belial", who David has mentioned in 2 Sam. 22. I suggested there that he has Nabal in view. And God's comment is that such sons of Belial are judged by God and not David- and Nabal was a parade example, smitten by God not David.

The ungodly, like thorns, cannot be taken away by human hand. The sensitivity of the Lord Jesus constructed the parable of the wheat and weeds with the aim of showing the thoughtful how deeply inappropriate is their desire to root up the tares. He clearly had in mind the prophecy of Himself in 2 Sam. 23:6,7: "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken by (human) hands: but the man that shall touch them (Christ) must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place (just outside Jerusalem) "where Christ was "fenced with iron". It isn't possible for us to uproot the tares because this can only possibly be done by the one who totally uprooted sin in Himself, dying to it on the cross.

This association between Christ's right to judge and His victorious death is shown by the way the "tares" will be burnt in the same area as He was crucified in. Phil. 2:9-11 reasons along the same lines; because Christ died for us, He *therefore* has the right to have every knee bowing to Him at the judgment. On account of being "the Son of man" and yet also being our perfect Messiah, He has the right therefore to be judge (Jn. 5:27 cp. Dan. 7:13,14). The Lord understood all this; and to the thoughtful, those who would grasp His allusion to 2 Sam. 23, He was saying: 'If you think you can root up the tares, if you think you have that wisdom to identify the tares, you are really insulting the greatness of what I achieved on the cross. It's only on account of that that I have the ability and right to divide wheat from tares, sheep from goats'.

But Adam Clarke understands this simply as "A metaphor taken from hedging; the workman thrusts the thorns aside either with his bill or hand, protected by his impenetrable mitten or glove, till, getting a fair blow at the roots, he cuts them all down. The man is fenced with iron, and the handle of his bill is like the staff of a spear. This is a good representation of the dubbing-bill, with which they slash the thorn hedge on each side before they level the tops by the pruning-shears. The handle is five or six feet long. This is a perfectly natural and intelligible image".

2Sa 23:7 but the man who touches them must be filled with iron and the staff of a spear-
See on :6. David recognizes that he had failed, that his house was “not so with God”, and yet through the future Messiah, “the light of the morning”, who would be pierced by a spear, the promises to him regarding his eternal future would indeed be fulfilled (2 Sam. 23:4,5,7). The idea is that no human hands like David's could harvest and gather the thorns to burn them. It needed a man with a long pole to do so. But this man would be filled or pierced by that same pole / spear. And where he was pierced by it "in the same place", they would be burnt. At Gehenna just outside Jerusalem where the Lord was crucified on a pole. We are not to judge because it wasn't us who died on the cross, perfect and sinless. We will find all joy and peace through believing in this and thereby quitting judgment for all time. We are not to judge because we cannot.

They shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place-
This could mean that in the place where the Messianic seed was to be filled with the iron of a spear, those who did this to Him would be burnt. Perhaps they will be literally resurrected to judgment and burnt in the valley of Hinnom, near the place of the Lord's crucifixion. The burning up of the wicked as thorns or weeds *at the last day by the Lord Jesus* [not by David nor Solomon!] is a major theme (Mt. 3:10; 13:30; Lk. 19:27; Heb. 6:8.). The image of gathering thorns out of a field is applied by the Lord in perfect context. He taught that it is not for imperfect man to gather them out, but He will do at the last day. He alone is qualified to do so, and David's desire to do so was inappropriate. To root them out, or clean the ground of them, men do not lay hold of

them with the bare hand; but only the Man who was killed by the same pole with which He would root out the thorns. Exactly because the Lord was crucified on the pole, as Son of Man, He is ultimately qualified to judge the other sons of men. This explains the many links in John's Gospel between the cross and judgment; "now is the judgment of this world" etc.

2Sa 23:8 These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb Basshebeth a Tahchemonite, chief of the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite, who slew eight hundred at one time-
"Captains" is a form of the word translated "thirty" used in :23, and is evidence that the "thirty" are not to be read as a literal number; in any case, 37 names are given for the "mighty men", not 30. And there are more in the parallel record in Chronicles. Likewise "hundred" need not be taken literally as 100, rather like the term "legion", and can refer to a military group.

2Sa 23:9 After him was Eleazar the son of Dodai the son of an Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines who were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel had fled away-
"Defied" is the word used of how Goliath had defied Israel (1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). Later Philistine defiance is described with the same word (2 Sam. 21:21). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross should be to us.

2Sa 23:10 He arose, and struck the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand froze to the sword; and Yahweh worked a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to take spoil-
We note that Yahweh worked a great victory through David over Goliath (same phrase in 1 Sam. 19:5; see on :12), specifically *without* a sword. But this man was inspired by David and used in the same way, although his faith was perhaps weaker in that he used a sword, unlike David who turned down the offer of Saul's sword.

2Sa 23:11 After him was Shammah the son of Agee a Hararite. The Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils; and the people fled from the Philistines-
The Chronicles record says it was full of barley, so perhaps lentils were grown together with barley. Shammah defended the field of barley because it was valuable to the Israelites. And in this we have a corroboration of the record with how Absalom had burnt Joab's field of barley (2 Sam. 14:30). We may wonder why Joab slew Absalom. It could have been that to lose a field of barley was to lose food for many months or even a year.

It was therefore a major loss to Joab. As Shammah defended a field of barley with his life, so Joab was so vengeful at the loss of his field of barley that he later slew Absalom.

2Sa 23:12 But he stood in the midst of the plot and defended it, and killed the Philistines-
"Defended" or "delivered" is the word used for David's victories (1 Sam. 17:37; 30:8,18,22) which were clearly so inspirational to his men, as the Lord's victory should be to us.

And Yahweh worked a great victory-
The record continually gives the glory to Yahweh for working through His willing workers. They did not achieve these victories in their own strength alone. The very phrase as in :10 of 1 Sam. 19:5 describing how Yahweh gave David the great victory over Goliath. This was clearly inspirational to David's men in their own battles, just as the Lord's victory on the cross should not be seen simply as a historical achievement for us, but an abiding inspiration to us to in essence do likewise.

2Sa 23:13 Three of the thirty chief men went down-
Not literally thirty; see on :23.

And came to David in the harvest time-
1 Chron. 11:15 "to the rock"; see on :14.

To the cave of Adullam; and the troop of the Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim-
The giants of the Philistines were in the valley of the giants. And they even had a garrison in David's home town (:14). They appeared insuperable. This refers to an incident during the campaign of 2 Sam. 5:17.

2Sa 23:14 David was then in the stronghold; and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem-
The hideout of 2 Sam. 5:17. The rock or hill of Adullam was surrounded by valleys fully viewable from the top of the hill, making it a strong position. Yet despite the obvious tactical advantages of the place, David's Psalms repeatedly describe Yahweh as his rock, stronghold and fortress.

2Sa 23:15 David longed and said, Oh that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!-
This has absolute psychological credibility. A leader of partisans sitting with his men in a

cave, bitterly reflecting that the enemy have placed a garrison in his home village... would indeed make such a passing, under his breath comment like this.

2Sa 23:16 The three mighty men broke through the army of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: but he would not drink of it, but poured it out to Yahweh-
We see here the intense personal loyalty to David which is a theme throughout the record. It looks forward to that which there is to be between the Lord Jesus and we who follow Him in these outlaw days of our generation.

2Sa 23:17 He said, Be it far from me, Yahweh, that I should do this! Isn't it the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it. The three mighty men did these things-
Despite the intense personal loyalty which David inspired, he is to be commended for not allowing this to turn into a mere personality cult. He poured out that water to Yahweh, feeling unworthy to drink it. We note that water represented blood. This is a warning against being too literalistic in requirements concerning the elements of the breaking of bread service. David perceived the spirit of the law about drink offerings, and "poured [water] out to Yahweh" (:16) in a cave, not being a Levitical priest, and far from the sanctuary.

2Sa 23:18 Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of the three. He lifted up his spear against three hundred and killed them, and had a name among the three-
"Hundred", like "legion", need not be read literally; it could refer to a group or military subdivision. Again the idea of singularly attaining victory against a multitude is a replication in spirit of David's victory over Goliath.

2Sa 23:19 Wasn't he the most honourable of the three? Therefore he was made their captain: however, he didn't attain to the three-
This apparently means that he was demoted. This happened several times, as David considered that military valour was not the prime qualification for the post of army general, but rather perceiving grace and not shedding the blood of war in peace. Because Joab clearly failed to understand grace, David replaced him with Amasa- whom Joab later murdered out of jealousy.

2Sa 23:20 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done mighty deeds-

Benaiah was one of David's senior military commanders (2 Sam. 8:18; 1 Chron. 27:5), and the Hebrew of 2 Sam. 23:20 can be translated "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest, as head", i.e. of a group of David's mighty men. The Jehoiada in view as his father would therefore be Jehoiada the priest. The idea is that priests were also military leaders within David's army, indeed it seems there were a large group of them as ordinary soldiers in 1 Chron. 12:27. This shows how priesthood was not understood as abstract spirituality, but that spirituality was articulated in practice. And this, along with the hints in the names of the mighty men that some were Levites, is significant in that the Levites were not numbered as they were exempt from military service (Num. 1:47). But these chose to do it. See on 2 Sam. 24:5.

He killed the two sons of Ariel of Moab: he went down also and killed a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow-
Perhaps this incident occurred at this time of the campaign in 2 Sam. 8:2. Although that campaign was not David and his men at their spiritual best; see note there. We see him following the path of David, whose victory over a literal lion gave him courage to fight Goliath. So Benaiah was inspired by David personally to kill a lion, and then kill two lion like men (AV) of Moab. The lion would have been driven by the cold from the forests, and was preyed upon people. Benaiah therefore risked his life for the sake of his people, and slew the lion.

2Sa 23:21 He killed an Egyptian, a goodly man-
Literally, a man to look at. This was because he was five cubits tall (1 Chron. 11:23).

And the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear-
Again this is a repeat of the spirit of David's victory over Goliath, coming to Goliath with a staff and sling, and slaying him with his own weaponry. The point is repeatedly made that like the Lord's victory on the cross, David's over Goliath was programmatic for the inspiration of his followers to be like him.

2Sa 23:22 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada did these things, and had a name among the three mighty men-
As noted on :19, there seems to be the idea that some of these men were demoted. Thus Benaiah was both amongst the three, but didn't attain / remain amongst them (:23). "The three" is likely not to be read too literally, but may be a technical term for a group office, like "the thirty"; see on :23.

2Sa 23:23 He was more honourable than the thirty, but he didn't attain to the three-
The numbers "three" and "thirty" are not necessarily to be taken literally. A form of the word for "thirty" is used of the "captains" in :8, and of Pharaoh's captains (Ex. 14:7;

15:4); in any case, 37 names are given for the "mighty men", not 30. And there are more in the parallel record in Chronicles.

David set him over his guard-
Heb. 'David appointed him to his audience', he was a member of David's inner circle of advisers on the basis of his faith shown in personal life, and not because of any possession of only theoretical wisdom.

2Sa 23:24 Asahel the brother of Joab was one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem-
Elhanan had also replicated David's victory over Goliath; see on 2 Sam. 21:19.

2Sa 23:25 Shammah the Harodite, Elika the Harodite-
This Shammah was "Shammuth the Izrahite" of 1 Chron. 27:8. "Izrahite" there could be "the Zarhite" a man descended from Zerah the son of Judah. But he was from Harod (2 Sam. 23:25), near mount Gilboa in the north. Perhaps he was given this name because he had done something valiant for Saul in the last fateful battle he fought in that area against the Philistines.

2Sa 23:26 Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite-
He is called a man of Ephraim in 1 Chron. 27:10. But Beth-Palet [he was a "Paltite", 2 Sam. 23:26] was a town in the tribe of Judah. We get the impression that many of these men were living outside the territory of their native tribes. That could have been for various reasons, but perhaps we are to conclude that the men who supported David were [as with us and our loyalty to Jesus] those who had had non standard personal lives which left them isolated from their home areas.

2Sa 23:27 Abiezer the Anathothite-
A priestly town in Benjamin. Perhaps he too was a priest; see on 2 Sam. 23:20.

Mebunnai the Hushathite-
Sibbechai of 2 Sam. 21:18. He was a descendant of Zerah of Judah (see also on :25) (1 Chron. 4:4; 27:11).

2Sa 23:28 Zalmon the Ahohite-
Called Ilai in 1 Chron. 11:29. There is only one Hebrew letter different. This would be an example of slight errors in copying which are found in the Hebrew text, although overall it is Divinely inspired.

Maharai the Netophathite-
This was near Jerusalem and the Levitical singers lived there after the exile (Ezra 2:22; Neh. 11:28); so he too may have been a Levite living in Judah. See on :20.

2Sa 23:29 Heleb the son of Baanah the Netophathite-
See on :28.

Ittai the son of Ribai of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin-
He was from Saul's birthplace, and so would have rejected Saul for David, although David was not from his tribe. He did what was counter instinctive and countercultural, as all David's followers did. And as do the followers of his greater Son.

2Sa 23:30 Benaiah a Pirathonite, Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash-
Pirathon was in Ephraim (Jud. 12:15), and there was always antipathy between Judah and Ephraim. So as noted on :29, here again was a man who stepped out from his surrounding cultural expectations in loyalty to David.

2Sa 23:31 Abialbon the Arbathite-
Beth Arabah was a small settlement right out in the desert (Josh. 15:61; 18:22), therefore also called Arabah (Josh. 18:18). From such a poor and obscure place there arose a man who was attracted to David's cause (2 Sam. 23:31), just as the Lord calls all manner of unusual people to Himself today.

Azmaveth the Barhumite-
Coming from Bahurim, he would have been aware of David's shameful behaviour there (see on 2 Sam. 3:16) and yet he still followed David. He would have seen David's actions to Michael and Paltiel as out of character with David generally, and didn't allow his loyalty to be fazed by them.

2Sa 23:32 Eliahba the Shaalbonite, the sons of Jashen, Jonathan-
Eliahba was from Shaalabbin in Dan in the far north, very far from David's origins (2 Sam. 23:32; Josh. 19:42). But somehow he encountered David, and loyally followed him. We marvel at the extent of those who followed David; they were from all over Israel. In those days of limited communication, we wonder how he came to know David well enough to give his life to his cause. But it is the same marvel as we reflect how people are called to the Lord Jesus today.

2Sa 23:33 Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Ararite-
To reconcile this with the record in Chronicles, we may need to read Shammah as one of

the sons of Jonathan of the preceding verse. We could then read this verse along with the last part of :32 as "Jonathan the son of Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite."

2Sa 23:34 Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maacathite-
Beth-Maachah was a town in Naphtali (2 Sam. 20:14), confirming the impression that David's closest supporters were not just local family friends, but men providentially drawn to him from all over Israel.

Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite-
Eliam was the father of Bathsheba, making Ahithophel her grandfather. We can more readily understand why he turned against David after his shameful behaviour with his granddaughter.

2Sa 23:35 Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite-
Arab is in Judah whereas Carmel is in northern Israel. The juxtaposition of the two confirms the impression that David's supporters were from all over Israel. The way they were all united together around this man from Bethlehem is amazing, and points forward to the gathering of the disparate followers of the Lord Jesus around Him today.

2Sa 23:36 Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite-
Chronicles has "Joel the brother of Nathan" but Igal and Joel in Hebrew are very similar. Igal would have been a Syrian from Zobah, perhaps one of the soldiers who fought against David (2 Sam. 10:6) and then converted to him. The Gittites who followed David were likewise Philistines from Gath who were once his enemies but converted to his God, and devoted themselves zealously to Him. This is an incredible witness to the power of Yahweh to convert, because such willing defections of individuals to the people and God of their enemies, and being zealously committed to Him, was unheard of in their society. See on :37.

2Sa 23:37 Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, armour bearers to Joab the son of Zeruiah-
As noted on :36, the one time enemies of David such as Zelek the Ammonite became his most committed followers. Or perhaps his conversion was a result of the one time friendship between David and Ammon, and the support for David by Shobi (2 Sam. 17:27). Likewise Naharai was from Beeroth, which although counted to Benjamin (2 Sam. 4:2) was inhabited by Gentile Gibeonites, whom Saul had persecuted.

2Sa 23:38 Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite-
The faithful Ithrites (2 Sam. 23:38) were from Kirjath Jearim (1 Chron. 2:53), perhaps

converted to a more spiritual outlook by the long presence of the ark amongst them (1 Sam. 7:2).

2Sa 23:39 Uriah the Hittite: thirty-seven in all-
As noted on :20, the number "thirty" need not be read literally, Uriah is mentioned last to draw attention to him. His father in law was also one of the mighty men (:34), so the shame of what David did was felt very strongly in the ranks of his closest followers.

2 SAMUEL CHAPTER 24

2Sa 24:1 Again-
I will suggest on :25 that there are similarities with the cursing of the land at the time of 2 Sam. 21:14. So "again" may mean that this final cameo of Davidic history is another example as that of 2 Sam. 21, of where Yahweh's anger was against the land of Israel and He was then "entreated for the land" by repentance and sacrifice. And in both cases, David was at fault. The "again" further encourages us to view 2 Sam. 21-24 as chronological, following on from 2 Sam. 19 and before the death of David in 1 Kings 1; although 1 Chron. 21-27 describing David's words to Solomon about the temple appear to follow on from 2 Sam. 24. We see David forced to penitence in 2 Sam. 23 for his arrogant end of life speech in 2 Sam. 22; now he sins again in wanting to establish the Kingdom here and now, repents again, but slips back in his words to Solomon and his final deathbed scene in 1 Kings 1.

The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel-
This common phrase is typically used of God's anger with Israel for idolatry, which was clearly a problem amongst them even at David's time. He didn't want to punish them. The census gave them the opportunity to pay a half shekel each for "atonement money" (Ex. 30:12-15), lest they be struck with plague. It seems God worked through David's fear of an invasion or forthcoming battle with a 'satan'' / adversary, so that he took a census and the people had the chance to pay that atonement money in loyalty to Yahweh. But they didn't- and so they were struck with plague. David's feeling of guilt over the matter is understandable, but I will argue on :10 that it was more a case of false guilt.

The anger of Yahweh being again kindled reminds us of the Balaam narrative. And there are so many other similarities- an Angel, called a 'satan' (as in 1 Chron. 21:1), sword in hand, trying to rebuke a man who is pursuing a wrong path (Num. 22:31). I discussed on 2 Sam. 23:2 how the way God put a prophetic word in David's mouth is replete with allusions to Balaam. So it seems the parallel between Balaam and David continues. We naturally enquire, What was David's wrong path? Seeing it was not a sin to take a census. It was something pretty big, given the amount of judgment for it and his deep

contrition. I suggest the wrong path was his desire to gather an army in order to establish his promised kingdom there and then by foreign conquests, and numbering Israel in the wider context of establishing a physical temple system and a workforce for Solomon to use in forcibly establishing some kind of Kingdom of God on earth. Unlike Balaam, David does repent. But it seems not for long, because he goes on to set up Solomon for building the temple and murdering his contenders.

And He moved David against them saying, Go, number Israel and Judah-
This is an example of God's Spirit moving people to do things, operating on their heart through circumstances- in this case, the 'satan' of some opposition which provoked David to take a census of his fighters. Or we can deduce that David's 'satan' (1 Chron. 21:1) was his obsessive desire to see the promises of 2 Sam. 7 fulfilled in himself, his immediate family and a physical temple designed by himself. This was confirmed by God in that He does lead into temptation by confirming man in the way he himself freely chooses. But in the bigger picture, God used this failure of David's to punish Israel for their sinfulness.

But comparing with the Chronicles account, this incident is followed by David's numbering the Levites and assigning certain numbers of Israelites to the various tasks of labour required for building the temple. So his numbering of Israel could be because of his old 'satan'- his internal desire to push ahead with glorifying his own family through his son building a physical house for God. When God had specifically stated that He didn't want that. Perhaps this is why David feels he has sinned, when taking a census was not of itself a sin. He so often is convinced of his sins, as he does as noted on 2 Sam. 23 and as he did after his conviction by Nathan... but slips back from these peaks of contrition and humility. But seeing David was so set upon this, God confirmed David in his misplaced desires and moved him to number Israel in this context. The numbering was therefore possibly not because of a military threat, but from David's desire to arrange the labour required to build and sustain the temple complex he envisaged his son building. This would fit chronologically- so that 2 Sam. 21-24 are not in fact random incidents put together at the end of 2 Samuel, but are strictly chronological. David's numbering of the Levites and making plans for numbers of workers were done in the fortieth year of his reign, i.e. right at the end of his life (1 Chron. 26:31 "In the fortieth year of the reign of David they were sought for, and there were found / numbered among them mighty men of valour at Jazer of Gilead. His brothers, men of valour, were two thousand seven hundred..."). This numbering was "for every matter pertaining to God, and for the affairs of the king".

There is no sin in taking a census just as there is no sin in jotting down how much money you have in various bank accounts or investments, and working out your total net worth. It's the motive for doing so, and your attitude and feeling before and after which can be sinful. And so it was with David here. We recall Moses and Aaron taking the census

without sin (Num. 1:4); indeed there were three censuses conducted in the wilderness, and David had numbered his men in 2 Sam. 18:1, as had Joshua (Josh. 8:10). Perhaps David's bad motives were the 'satan' in view, confirmed by God. We also must factor in that a census of Israel stands in direct contrast to the fact Abraham's seed would not be able to be counted for multitude (Gen. 13:16). The promises to David had spelt out how this would happen- after David's death, he would have a descendant who would be God's Son, who would have a house / family that would last eternally. And David would be resurrected to participate in that eternal age. By numbering Israel, David was ignoring that promise, with all the Divine grace implicit in it- and that was the essence of his sin here. The connections with Balaam continue, in that God also tried to teach Balaam the same in Num. 23:10: "Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel?".

The books of Samuel and Chronicles are parallel accounts of the same incidents, as the four gospels are records of the same events but using different language. 2 Sam. 24:1 records: “Yahweh... moved David against Israel” in order to make him take a census of Israel. The parallel account in 1 Chron. 21:1 says that “Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David” to take the census. In one passage God does the ‘moving’, in the other Satan does it. The only conclusion is that God acted as or through a ‘Satan’ or adversary to David. He did the same to Job by bringing trials into his life, so that Job said about God: “With the strength of Your hand You oppose me” (Job 30:21); ‘You are acting as a Satan against me’, was what Job was basically saying. Or again, speaking of God: “I must appeal for mercy to my accuser (Satan)” (Job 9:15 NRSV). The idea is sometimes used to describe our greatest adversary, i.e. our own sin, and at times for whole systems or empires which stand opposed to the people of God and personify sinfulness and evil. But it seems obvious that it is a bizarre approach to Bible reading to insist that whenever we meet these words 'Satan' and 'Devil', we are to understand them as references to a personal, supernatural being.

Perhaps the satan which moved David to number Israel was a Satan-Angel, as in the case of the righteous Angel involved with Balaam, acting as a satan / adversary, and with Job. The parallel with Balaam is that God sent a Satan-Angel against him because His anger was kindled against Balaam (Num. 22:22, the same phrase as in :1). The Angel may have acted directly on David's heart to bring about a trial for both David and Israel. This is one of the many indications that the numbering of the people was not David's sin. See on :10. But the adversaries to David and Israel were at that point the surrounding nations. Even if an Angel was involved, the immediate 'satan' would have been an approaching enemy army; and David wanted to know how many men he had to fight off that invasion. Or it could have been an extension of the gathering of troops made at the time of 2 Sam. 20:4, when David wanted to know how many soldiers he could really count on after Absalom's rebellion. See on :2.

2Sa 24:2 The king said to Joab the captain of the army, who was with him, Now go back and forth through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number the people, that I may know the sum of the people-
The list of David's mighty men just given in 2 Sam. 23 included men literally from Dan to Beersheba. I suggested on :1 that the occasion of this census may have been when David wanted to know how many soldiers he could really count on after Absalom's rebellion. It's possible that although out of chronological sequence, the catalogue of mighty men in 2 Sam. 23 was the result of this census. This would explain Joab's comment in 1 Chron. 21:3 "Are they not all my Lord's servants?", as if to say 'Loyalty to you is not in question, taking a census won't prove loyalty to you'.

2Sa 24:3 Joab said to the king, Now may Yahweh your God add to the people, however many they may be, one hundred times-
Joab is alluding to Dt. 1:11. For all his unspirituality, he did also have a spiritual side. He was not unaware of the scriptures, and seemed to want to do what was genuinely best for Israel. Men with deeply mixed motives is quite a theme of the Bible's historical records; and that is because they are true to life. For that is how people are.

And may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king delight in this thing?-
"May the eyes..." implies 'May it happen in the king's life-time', an allusion to the promises to David that his eyes would see his seed and house established. But that was to happen after David slept with his father's in death. Joab is surely repeating David's wrong interpretation of the promises to him.

The numbering of Israel was another weak moment for David (note 2 Sam. 24:3,4,10), leading to suffering for others. Yet this same David had written that "there is no king saved by the multitude of an host" (Ps. 33:16). Perhaps this was an expression of repentance after this incident; or, if written before it, an example of David being over confident of his faith. "Why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?" (1 Chron. 21:3) suggests Joab suspected the people would not pay the half shekel required when a census was taken, and so would be led into sin. Although it was their fault, the situation was provoked by God Himself provoking David to take the census, because His anger was kindled against Israel (:1). This would then be an example of God confirming a sinful people in the way they wished to go.

2Sa 24:4 Notwithstanding, the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the army. Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel-
The army captains likewise agreed with Joab that the census was not a good idea. This incident is at a time when David's word prevails against Joab and the generals, and we

get the impression that this would not have happened after his sin with Bathsheba, after which Joab speaks and acts towards David in a belligerent manner. So the incident may be not in chronological order; indeed many argue that none of the cameos of Davidic history at the end of 2 Samuel are in chronological order. But see my arguments to the contrary on :1.

2Sa 24:5 They passed over the Jordan, and encamped in Aroer, on the right side of the city that is in the middle of the valley of Gad, and to Jazer-
The list of cities given in this section is detailed, and if they just describe the itinerary and maximum extent of the route taken by the generals in making the census, we wonder why such detail is given. I suggest that the areas named were those where they found significant numbers of men loyal to David and willing to fight for him. For that was the purpose of the census. Jazer was a priestly city (Josh. 21:39). Yet it was on the very borders of Hebrew territory, suggesting that Israel gave the Levites the remotest and very poorest of their cities, rather than the best. Yet we also see the theme discussed on 2 Sam. 23:20 continued- that the Levites, although exempted from military service by the Law (Num. 1:47), were often to be found amongst David's most loyal soldiers.

2Sa 24:6 then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim Hodshi; and they came to Dan Jaan, and around to Sidon-
"Tahtim Hodshi" is unknown, so we can go with LXX "to the land of the Hittites to Kedesh". Sidon likewise was never really inhabited by the Hebrews (Jud. 1:31) but rather by the Phoenicians, who are therefore called the Zidonians. But the idea may be that in these Gentile areas, David had soldiers he could count on. Because it is a theme of the list of commanders in 2 Sam. 23 that David's most loyal supporters were often Gentiles or from distant, isolated areas. This is often the case with the Lord's supporters in this life.

2Sa 24:7 and came to the stronghold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites; and they went out to the south of Judah, at Beersheba-
This could be simply defining the borders of the areas covered. But there is also the possibility that just as the mighty men of David were from various odd places, there were pockets of loyalty to David in various unusual places such as the city of Tyre- which was never generally inhabited by the Israelites. And likewise, the list of the mighty men in 2 Sam. 23 include Gentiles who had previously been David's enemies. And so it is possible that amongst the Canaanites, there were groups of men loyal to David who could be counted as his loyal soldiers.

2Sa 24:8 So when they had gone back and forth through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days-

The maximum human gestation period may have been thus understood at the time. We can understand the concern of Joab and the generals; they were going to be scattered throughout Israel and this would leave the nation very weak and open to attack. We see the contradiction, the fear was of some 'Satan', some external group of attackers, and yet by the military leadership scattering amongst Israel to take the census, they were left even weaker before the threat. We wonder at what stage David was ever able to allow his army generals nine months to take a census. We get the impression that he was under constant military threat, especially after the sin with Bathsheba. So this incident may have occurred well before that.

2Sa 24:9 Joab delivered the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men-
According to 1 Chron. 21:5, there were 1,100,000 “men that drew sword” in Israel. According to 2 Sam. 24:9, there were 800,000 “valiant men” in Israel, according to the same census. One way to reconcile this is to focus on this distinction between "valiant men" and standard soldiers. The Samuel record is perceiving that there was a higher level of commitment amongst some who were numbered. There were the enthusiasts, and those who merely could draw a sword. They were all living on different levels.

The numbers are also difficult because the Hebrew word for "thousand" need not mean a literal 1,000, but it is at time used to refer to a military subdivision. And it can have different definitions in some areas and at some times and by some writers. That is likely the reason for the difference between the numbers presented in Samuel and Chronicles, rather than textual corruption. If taken literally, the numbers are unrealistic; nearly 2 million soldiers (according to Chronicles) in the combined kingdom would imply a huge total population. Even if there were six million population in the territory they then inhabited (about 11,000 square miles), this would give an average population density of 600 / square mile. It seems really doubtful that the country could have supported this.

The Levites were not numbered as they were exempt from military service (Num. 1:47), indeed Joab didn't number Benjamin or Levi (1 Chron. 21:6) which would further heighten the total population.

"Drew the sword" is the same phrase used in 1 Chron. 21:16 of how the destroying Angel had a drawn sword in his hand. The idea seems to be that God's Angelic power was more than a match for thousands of Israelites with their drawn swords. This would be an argument in favour of the idea that David did indeed sin at this time by trusting in his own swords, although the greater sin appears to have been with the people; see on :10.

2Sa 24:10 David's heart struck him after that he had numbered the people-
This phrase is used three times of David; his heart struck him concerning cutting off Saul's skirt (1 Sam. 24:5- false guilt), about Bathsheba (Ps. 102:4- true guilt) and now about numbering the people (2 Sam. 24:10), which I suggest was a mixture of true and false guilt. Unlike with his sin with Bathsheba, David offers repentance before the judgment for his sin has been given. The grade of his repentance here does appear to be higher, but he still slips back from it in that he goes on to command Solomon to build the temple, prepares for it, and sets Solomon up to slay all potential rivals.

David said to Yahweh, I have sinned greatly in that which I have done-
The response is similar to that to the sin with Bathsheba, again before a prophet. Balaam also said the same words (Num. 22:34), and again we find an Angel 'standing'. Although David did take false guilt, it seems there was some element of real failure.

But now, Yahweh, put away, I beg you, the iniquity of Your servant; for I have done very foolishly-
We are not told specifically what "iniquity" David had in view. For to take a census was not of itself a sin. Possibly David in mind his great iniquity, the specific iniquity, with Bathsheba and Uriah. He had not adequately repented of it, and now he realizes that. Or perhaps "the iniquity" was his general desire to see the promises of 2 Sam. 7 fulfilled in himself and his family immediately, with a physical temple instead of a house of believers in his future Messianic descendant. And I have suggested that it was this fundamental desire which may have been behind his desire to take Bathsheba. And all this is so typical of our experience. Incidents may trigger false guilt over something, but we are led by them to recognize our real guilt over another matter.

The allusion is to the foolishness of Saul (1 Sam. 13:13). He feels he is no better than Saul for his trust in human strength; see on :14. 1 Chron. 21:6,7 says that David's "word" of command of the census was "abominable" to Joab, and also God was "displeased" with "this thing", the same Hebrew translated "word". Unless this refers to His displeasure with Joab for despising David's word. Yahweh had likewise been "displeased" with David in the matter of Uriah (2 Sam. 11:27 s.w.). But although David's lack of faith wasn't good, it seems to me on balance that he was largely taking false guilt. Perhaps we are to read that God was displeased with Israel's lack of response to the word of command about the census, seeing Israel didn't pay the half shekel required at the time. Indeed David's trust in human numbers would not have been pleasing to God, it was a slip backwards. But we wonder whether he took false guilt in this matter. For it was allowable to take a census of Israel, although there was to be a half shekel tax paid at the time, which if not paid would result in plague (Ex. 30:12-15). Joab perhaps guessed that those numbered would not pay this and therefore the census would lead Israel into sin. This is why God chose the punishment of plague; not

upon David, but upon Israel. Yet David perhaps realized all that, but knew that his lack of faith in wanting a census, his lack of consideration for the weakness of others, would lead them into sin and punishment. And therefore he felt guilty. It could be argued that his sacrifice atoned for himself and for the people, but they still suffered for not having paid the required "atonement money". But then we must balance against this the comment that "David had done that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and didn't turn aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). No mention is made of the matter of the census. There is true guilt, the guilt we should take for our actual sins; and false guilt, the guilt put on us by others and the malfunctioning of the human conscience. In this matter of David's guilt about the census, we may have an example of a man taking false guilt. The fact Israel and not David were punished with plague would rather confirm this. It may be impossible for us to sort out within us what is true guilt or false guilt, at least not be any intellectual process. But we can rest assured that all our guilt, of whatever kind, is met in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the ultimate guilt offering.

2Sa 24:11 When David rose up in the morning, the word of Yahweh came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying-
Gad was to write his record of these things (1 Chron. 29:29), so maybe his record has been incorporated here into 2 Samuel.

2Sa 24:12 Go and speak to David, 'Thus says Yahweh, I offer you three things. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you'-
When given a choice, Ahaz declined to choose, and was condemned for it (Is. 7:11). David declines to choose, because he preferred to fall into God's hands of grace than decide himself; and is not condemned. The same actions can be committed with different motives, and therefore only God can judge. But the invitation to "choose one of them" was for David's education, to elicit his reflection as to whether it was appropriate that he were punished, or the people; or he be punished along with the people. God's choice of plague was in accordance with the teaching of Ex. 30:12-15, that if Israel didn't pay the atonement money at the time of a census, they would be punished with plague.

2Sa 24:13 So Gad came to David, and told him, and said to him, Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land?-
LXX "three years", in line with 1 Chron. 21:12. As king, this would not have hurt David personally. He was asked to consider whether this was appropriate.

Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days of plague in your land? Now answer, and consider what answer I shall return to Him who sent me-

Fleeing before his enemies would have declared David not to be the king of Israel. For Israel had demanded a king to lead them to victory against their enemies. This option was tantamount to David accepting that he was not fit to be Israel's king; and indeed it seems to me that he should have resigned the kingship after the Bathsheba affair. We note that David nearly died in a battle and had to be rescued by his men (2 Sam. 21:15-17) and his men had asked him not accompany them into battle with Absalom lest he be slain (2 Sam. 18:3)- all hardly the picture of the invincible warrior leader. We may well ponder why we have in such detail the lists of David's warriors and their heroic deeds in 2 Sam. 21:15-22; 23:8-23. One answer is that the contemporary records of the end of a king's life list solely his heroic deeds; but the Divine record seems to give the honour to David's warriors, as if to say that it was *their* heroic military deeds which saved Israel more than David's.

Famine and plague were punishments for disobedience to the covenant; and David as a supposed man of God and self appointed priest of his people was supposed to be able to intercede with God to end them. All the options reflected his spiritual impotence. And yet God does in fact allow David to intercede and shorten the plague, :15 LXX "from morning until dinner time". It's as if once again, God's heart is touched by David's genuine heart for Him. Even though that was not His initial intention.

Famine, war and plague are the three Divine judgments listed in Ez. 14:21 as coming upon Jerusalem at the time of the exile. David had already experienced war and famine (because of the Gibeonites, 2 Sam. 21). Now he was to experience plague. The lesson to the exiles was that these judgments had indeed come because of sin, but the experience of them could be cut short by intense prayer and repentance after the pattern of David. For Yahweh "relented" of the three days plague because of David's prayer and sacrifice. See on :15. We see here the open ended nature of His purpose.

2Sa 24:14 David said to Gad, I am in distress-
The phrase "sore distressed" in 1 Chron. 21:13 is that used of Saul's great distress on the night of his final condemnation (1 Sam. 28:15). David felt he had been foolish as Saul had been (2 Sam. 24:10 = 1 Sam. 13:13). David had replaced Saul because of Saul's apostacy, but he was being made to realize through this experience (even if it was all false guilt), that he too was a sinner and saved by his acceptance of grace, and not because he was intrinsically better than Saul.

Let us fall now into the hand of Yahweh; for His mercies are great. Let me not fall into the hand of man-

"His mercies are great" is the language of Ps. 51:1 about God's mercy to David at the time of his sin with Bathsheba. This confirms the suggestion that "the iniquity" brought to David's mind was the nexus of sins surrounding the Bathsheba incident and not

merely taking a census. David appealed to God's mercy in the matter of Bathsheba (Ps. 51:1). Perhaps he learned from that, and chose to throw himself upon that same mercy. But the exact timing of this incident isn't clear. Perhaps it was because of learning about God's grace through this incident that he later learned to throw himself upon God's great mercy when he sinned with Bathsheba and against Uriah. David's experience of God's grace stayed with him when he faced up to the results of his errors in the future. From experience, he can ask to fall into the Lord's hand rather than man's, because "His *mercies* are *great*" (2 Sam. 24:14)- using the same two Hebrew words he had used when Nathan came to him in Ps. 51:1: "Have mercy upon me... according unto the *multitude* [Heb. 'greatness'] of thy *tender mercies*". And so the experience of God's gracious mercy over one sin fortifies us to believe in His grace when, sadly, we fall again; although, in passing, I think that in 2 Sam. 24, David himself didn't really do so much wrong. Yet he perceived himself to have sinned, so the point is still established.

David's resignation of the choices seems to reflect genuine contrition at this time. Had he chosen war, his own personal safety was in no danger as he would only flee before his enemies and not be slain. Had he chosen famine, his own wealth would have secured his and his own family's survival. This same point is made if we read all this as meaning that in fact David chose the option of plague. By asking to call into God's hand we can read David as saying that since pestilence comes directly from God, unlike the other options, he therefore chose that option. When this was the option that could affect him personally unlike the other ones.

Truly David is our example. David was very much involved in Israel his people. He saw himself as their representative. "The God of my rock is *my* shield... he is a shield to *all* them that trust in him" (2 Sam. 22:3,31). "*I* am in a great strait; let *us* fall now into the hand of the Lord" (2 Sam. 24:14) reflects this. When he sung Psalms, he invited them to come and sing along with him (Ps. 105:2; 107:22; 111:1). And many of these Psalms of praise seem to have their origin in his experience of forgiveness regarding Bathsheba. The Lord based His parables of the lost sheep and the man finding the treasure of the Gospel in a field on the statements of David (Ps. 119:162,176), as if He saw David as representative of all those who would truly come to Him. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Ps. 32:1), David wrote, after experiencing God's mercy in the matter of Bathsheba. But Paul sees this verse as David describing "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. 4:6). Each of us are in need of a like justification; therefore we find ourselves in David's position.

God is kinder than men. It's better to be punished by Him than by men. This puts paid to the Catholic conception of God as a merciless torturer of wicked men. Clearly the doctrine of eternal torments was invented by men, not God.

2Sa 24:15 So Yahweh sent a plague on Israel from the morning even to the appointed time; and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men-
"The appointed time" could refer to the time of the evening sacrifice, which David was to offer on Araunah's property and not at the sanctuary [Cp. 1 Kings 18:29, 36; Dan. 9:21; Acts 3:1. This is supported by the explanation given in the Targum: “from the time of the slaying of the perpetual sacrifice until it is burned”]. Or the idea may be that there was an "appointed time" of suffering but it was not defined, because it was open ended- the terminus depended upon the intensity of David's prayers and sacrifice. The three day period of plague (:13) was changed because "Yahweh relented" (:16)- because of David's prayer shortening the stipulated time period. This is why there can be no prescriptive chronology of events in the last days, nor date set for the Lord's return. The appointed time is variable, depending upon factors such as human prayer, repentance and taking the Gospel to all the world.

LXX "So David chose for himself the mortality: and they were the days of wheat-harvest; and the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from morning till noon, and the plague began among the people". The death of 70,000 throughout Israel must have turned public opinion yet further against David, as the deaths would have been perceived to be David's fault- the people bearing the judgment for his sins. He died unloved and unlamented, contrary to other great leaders of Israel who were long lamented after their deaths.

2Sa 24:16 When the angel stretched out his hand towards Jerusalem to destroy it-
1 Chron. 21:16 says that the Angel had a "drawn sword" in hand, the same words used of the Angel before Balaam (Num. 22:23,31). His donkey "turned aside", using the same word for "stretched out" here. The sin of Balaam was connected with idolatry, and I suggested on :1 that this was the reason for God's anger being kindled against Israel. The sin of Balaam has connections with that of Israel, but not particularly with that of David. Again we get the impression the judgments were for the sake of the sins of the people, the anger of Yahweh was with them, rather than with David for wanting to take a census.

Yahweh relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who destroyed the people, It is enough. Now stay your hand. The angel of Yahweh was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite-
This could imply that Araunah's area was about to be destroyed. But it seems we have here an example of the summary being made, and then we read how that came about. Perhaps David was in Jerusalem, maybe praying at the sanctuary, and saw the Angel standing over the nearby hill of Jebus or Moriah. His prayer and obedient, urgent sacrifice then stopped the Angel right there. The Angel "stood" by the threshing floor (1

Chron. 21:15), as if the Angel's path of destruction was stopped right there by the sacrifice offered in that place.

The encouragement for the later generation of Jews was that the evil planned upon Jerusalem could be relented from; if there was genuine repentance. God's hand here was "stayed", but the encouragement was that God would not "stay" His hand in His program of redemption; the same word is often translated "fail" in the assurance that God will not fail His people in ultimately restoring them.

This “destroying Angel” (1 Chron. 21:15 RV) is surely “the destroyer” who operated in the wilderness. We see here one Angel having the ability to formulate a purpose and another blindly carrying it out until told not to- a scenario which we see repeated elsewhere (e. g. at the Passover and in Ez. 9). It was only David's prayer which lead to “the destroyer” ceasing. Notice how the Angel repented and then encouraged David to offer a sacrifice so the Angel would be "entreated for the land" (:19,25). Similarly, the Angel repented of punishing Israel and wanted to restore them, and to enable this to happen He encouraged the people through Ezra to be spiritual. Thus Angelic repentance has to be confirmed by human action.

2Sa 24:17 David had spoken to Yahweh when he saw the angel who struck the people, and had said-
1 Chron. 21:17 adds “David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord standing between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. And David and the elders, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces”.

Behold, I have sinned, and I have done perversely; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me, and against my father’s house-
This was effectively asking God to abrogate the promises about his family of 2 Sam 7. I suggested above that David's "iniquity" was not the census but his desire to force a fulfillment of the promises to him in terms of an immediate physical house and the declaration of Solomon as Messiah. Now, for a moment, he sees his failure; and says he recognizes that God's hand ought to be against his "house". But God by grace doesn't take up David's suggestion. Yet soon David has relapsed into his plans for temple building and his machinations for Solomon to be king and slay all possible other contenders for the throne. David takes all the blame upon himself [although :1 is clear the people were also guilty], for his offence had been the immediate cause of the plague, and it is characteristic of true penitence to dwell exclusively on our own sin, without mentioning the complicity of others. So the grade of David's repentance does seem quite genuine, as it was regarding the Bathsheba affair. But again, he slipped away from that intensity. "These sheep..." may imply David saw himself as the shepherd or

king, whose error has caused all this suffering for the sheep. In which case, he is accepting that he is a failure as a king.

Thanks to David building an altar at his own expense and asking God to kill him and his family, God stopped the plague upon Israel (2 Sam. 24:16,17- the stretched out hand of God in destruction was what David asked to be upon him and his family). Israel were suffering the effect of their own sin, in not paying the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16); but in the spirit of Christ, David was willing to die for them. And his dominant desire was counted as if it had been done, and thanks to his self-sacrificial spirit, the people were saved when they personally were unworthy. The wrath of God can be turned away by the actions of those He is angry with (Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 4:4; 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (Ps. 106:23; Jer. 18:20; Job 42:7). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7). Through *our personal* dying to the flesh, the life of Christ is manifest not only in us, but is made available to others: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:10-12). The life that is even now made manifest *in us* is also made available to work in others because death to the flesh has worked in us personally.

2Sa 24:18 Gad came that day to David-
At the direction of the Angel (1 Chron. 21:18).

And said to him, Go up, build an altar to Yahweh on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite-
2 Chron. 3:1 implies David assumed that the spot where the Angel appeared to him in 2 Sam. 24:17,18 was where he should build the temple. It is another example of David's tendency to wildly over interpret, which led him to a mistaken obsession about building the temple and assuming Solomon to be his Messianic seed.

2Sa 24:19 David went up according to the saying of Gad, as Yahweh commanded-
1 Chron. 21:16 says that David went along with the elders of Israel, clothed in sackcloth. David is always presented as totally obedient to the prophets in his life (Samuel, Nathan and Gad), unlike Saul who was consistently disobedient to God's word through Samuel.

2Sa 24:20 Araunah looked out-
From the place in the threshing area where he was threshing wheat, where he and his four sons had hidden from the presence of the Angel (1 Chron. 21:20). The records in

Chronicles and Samuel perfectly fit with each other, although clearly focusing upon different elements of the scene; just like the gospel records.

And saw the king and his servants coming on towards him. Then Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground-
Chronicles has "saw the Angel". 2 Sam. 24:20 "saw the king". This may reflect the confusion between *malak* ["Angel"] and *melek* ["king"], especially as ancient Hebrew didn't add the vowel points and the consonants of the two words are the same, *m-l-k*. Or it could be that Araunah saw David and also at the same time saw the Angel behind him in some form.

2Sa 24:21 Araunah said, Why has my lord the king come to his servant? David said, To buy your threshing floor, to build an altar to Yahweh-
The urgent thing required was sacrifice to God represented by the Angel hovering over the hill where both men were standing, about to slay the people of Jerusalem. We wonder why David firstly asks to buy the threshing floor, as this was a long process which Araunah may have needed to think carefully about as it was his home. Maybe this is a hint that Araunah was not a worshipper of Yahweh and therefore the land must be bought before an offering to another God could be made upon it. There is more evidence for that on :23. Or it may be that David wanted to offer the most genuine sacrifice, which was thought to be offered upon one's own property. He offered to buy the threshing floor "for the full price" (1 Chron. 21:22), the same phrase used of Abraham's purchase of property from the Canaanites in Gen. 23:9. This confirms the impression that Araunah was a Canaanite and not an Israelite.

That the plague may be stopped from afflicting the people-
This is the very phrase of Num. 16:48,50 and Num. 25:8; Ps. 106:30, where the people of Israel suffered from plague because of their idolatry, and Aaron stopped it, standing between the living and the dead. David was in an identical position to Aaron, again acting as the High Priest. And again we have evidence that the essential sin being punished was not David's taking of a census, but Israel's sin (see on :1).

2Sa 24:22 Araunah said to David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Behold, the cattle for the burnt offering, and the threshing instruments and the yokes of the oxen for the wood-
Chronicles adds “and the wheat for the meat offering”. LXX "and the wheels and furniture of the oxen for wood". "The threshing instruments" may have referred to quite a major and expensive piece of equipment. But Araunah totally senses the urgency of the situation and is willing to offer even this as wood.

2Sa 24:23 all this, my king, does Araunah give to the king. Araunah said to the king, May Yahweh your God accept you-

AV "All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king". This could mean that Araunah ['the scarlet one', maybe hinting at royalty] was king of Jebus at the time; or had once been. The way Araunah speaks of "Yahweh *your* God", whereas David speaks of "Yahweh *my* God" (:24) could support the idea that he was a Gentile. But he was genuinely willing to give freely toward the offering of sacrifice to Yahweh. There are three different spellings of Araunah's name in the record, and this might suggest his name was unusual and a Gentile name, which could be legitimately be transcribed in different ways in Hebrew. See on :21.

2Sa 24:24 The king said to Araunah, No; but I will most certainly buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to Yahweh my God which cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver-

I have suggested that the historical records were in places edited and made relevant for the exiles; and given their mean attitude to offerings in Mal. 1:10,13,14, David's example and principle would have been pertinent. And this is an abiding principle; sacrifice is to be costly, we are to be left "minus", rather than being without cost to us.

1 Chron. 21:25 speaks of 600 shekels for "the place", whilst 2 Sam. 24:24 mentions 50 shekels for the threshing floor and oxen. The entire area was later bought, in order to build the temple on that site (1 Chron. 22:1; 2 Chron. 3:1).

2Sa 24:25 David built an altar to Yahweh there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So Yahweh heard the prayer for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel-

LXX "And the Lord hearkened to the land", as if His pity was stirred by the tragedy seen there. The idea is the same as in 2 Sam. 21:14, that the sin had affected the land, but sacrifice meant that the land's suffering stopped once it had been repented of and atoned for. 1 Chron. 21:26 adds that God "answered him from the sky by fire on the altar of burnt offering". This is just the language of God justifying Himself over Baal at the time of Elijah. I have suggested throughout that the plague was essentially punishment for Israel's idolatry; see on :1. The Angel put the sword back into its sheath (1 Chron. 21:27) at Yahweh's command. We have here a visual representation of God's sensitivity to human prayer and repentance. Burnt offerings always precede peace offerings (2 Sam. 24:25), because sacrifice is the principle upon which we can have peace with God. But David remained traumatized by the incident, fearing the sword he had seen (1 Chron. 21:30). This was a similar reaction by him to how he feared association with the ark for some period after the slaying of Uzzah (1 Chron. 13:12,13). The similarity in reaction is

another indication that the record is true and the character portrayals absolutely consistent, as could only be true of a Divinely inspired record.

LXX adds "and Solomon made an addition to the altar afterwards, for it was little at first". The site was purchased for this; see on :24.

We reflect that God heard David's prayer and stopped the punishment. But if, as I have suggested, the sin was David's desire to accomplish the Kingdom by his own efforts... he returned to that sin. And God surely foreknew that. The quality of David's repentance was intense and sincere at the moment, as it was with the sin with Bathsheba. But it didn't remain at that level and he degraded from that level. But still God, at that moment, forgave. We conclude that God forgives, or deals with sin, in various ways. Sincere, lasting repentance is only one of them. He recognizes the sin exists, but can choose to overlook it or deal with it in various ways. As a Jewish writer puts it so well: "Remission can be accomplished in any number of ways: God can carry the sins away (compare the scapegoat ritual) so they are no longer connected to (and no longer have an effect on) the sinner; God can pay them no attention by passing them by; God can moderate God's anger, change God's mind, exercise compassion, and forgive or ameliorate punishment; God can wash away the sins, so they disappear like a laundered stain; God can throw them far away into the water, where they will have no impact. What a wonderful conflation of images for forgiveness, even when deserving of punishment".

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: 1 KINGS

1 KINGS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

1 KINGS CHAPTER 1

1Ki 1:1 Now king David was old and advanced in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he couldn't keep warm-
This is a legitimate translation but "keep warm" is a Hebrew term also used about procreation. There appeared to be some great desire that he should produce yet another child. Even if we understand his condition as simply being cold, losing body heat, we are given the impression of David at the end of his life as cold. He is never recorded as having loved anyone in his life, although many loved him... all Israel, Jonathan, Michal... Now he can no longer seek a lover, the womanizer can no longer pull a woman; this is not the classic parting scene of a hero with his children and admirers from old times around his bedside. Those around his bedside are full of intrigue as to who shall get the throne. There is no love for David apparent from anyone, neither is there any mention of him being mourned. Hypothermia in old age is a result of chronically poor blood circulation, and related to this would therefore have been erectile dysfunction. The picture is of the impotent David at the end, a man whose life had been largely wrecked by his sexual activities, all performed in a culture of sex as power. He ends his days powerless and isolated- in order surely to bring him to God and thoughts of his future seed the Lord Jesus.

1Ki 1:2 Therefore his servants said to him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin. Let her stand before the king, and cherish him; and let her lie on your chest, so that my lord the king may keep warm-

If indeed there were genuine health reasons for this (although see on :1), it seems morally questionable. Despite David's undoubted faith and spirituality, his life leaves many abiding questions about his basic ethics and those of his immediate circle. The idea of a king was that he produced sons and heirs. If he was no longer capable of doing so, then he was not fit to remain on the throne- that was the thinking of the surrounding world. This explains why David's failure to be aroused by Abishag, his being confirmed as impotent, meant that immediately Adonijah started to reach for the throne. We see how David had failed to explain to his family the wonder of the promises to him- that the only seed worth having was the future Son of God, the Lord Jesus.

1Ki 1:3 So they sought for a beautiful young lady throughout all the borders of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king-
"Abishag" is literally father / mother of the erring / astray. The language is so similar to Esther 2:2 that it indeed seems that a wife, of sorts, was being found for David. Some read "Shulamite", the word of Song 6:13 for Solomon's lover, a female version of the name "Solomon". In this case we can see some kind of manipulation going on to try to ensure that David's final wife and possible child were within Solomon and Bathsheba's camp.

1Ki 1:4 The young lady was very beautiful; and she cherished the king, and ministered to him; but the king didn't know her intimately-
This could be read as meaning that she failed to bring him to heat in a sexual sense (see on :1), and so the comment here is to the effect that the plan didn't work. Before David's repentance he appears to have suffered with some kind of serious disease soon after it: "My loins are filled with a loathsome (venereal?) disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh" (Ps. 38:7). It is even possible that David became impotent as a result of this; for we get the impression that from this point onwards he took no other wives, he had no more children, and even the fail safe cure for hypothermia didn't seem to mean much to David (1 Kings 1:1-4). Therefore "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore" (Ps. 38:11) must refer to some kind of venereal disease. The Hebrew word translated "lovers" definitely refers to carnal love rather than that of friendship. It may be that an intensive plural is being used here- in which case it means 'my one great lover', i.e. Bathsheba.

"Cherished" is literally to lay in the bosom, and is used of how Bathsheba lay in the bosom of Uriah (2 Sam. 12). And Bathsheba is present at the bedside scene later. We can read the term as implying there was an attempted sexual relationship, for the idea was that sexual arousal would cure David's hypothermia. But he was unable to achieve it. Adonijah's later request to marry Abishag was seen as a claim to the throne exactly because Abishag was now counted as some kind of wife or woman of David. It is quite likely that there was an agenda to this. It was a test of David's potency. If David was unable to produce children, he was incapable of being king; for a king was supposed to

produce many children, and there is historical evidence for other kings being removed from the throne if in old age they were impotent. It's as if God was giving David another chance to resign the kingship, and to trust that his seed shall indeed be great- but not in his strength, but through God begetting a Son through one of his female descendants. All David was interested in was his male descendants forming an eternal lineage of kings after him. And so his deathbed impotence, demonstrated so publically to all as well as to himself, was to try to refocus him upon the promises to him in Christ. God tries with man right up to the end. David appears to have failed to get it- but still will be saved by grace.

David's words and actions in :28-35 reflect a man who is lucid, aware and rational. This could contrast with his apparently senile, end of life position apparently presented in the opening verses. And chronologically, he will go on to make the plans for the temple and make speeches about Solomon as recorded in 1 Chron. 22-29. I suggest therefore that although he did have bad blood circulation, and probably did suffer from hypothermia related thereto, with the associated erectile dysfunction... this was all rather used by those around him. They wanted to prove that he was impotent and therefore incapable of continuing as king. Even his inner circle wanted him off the throne; whilst Israel were eager for Adonijah to become king. We recall how Jacob is presented as being at the end of his life when he goes on to live some years. Isaac likewise lived many years after his apparent death bed scene when he blesses Esau and Jacob. David goes on living through the maximum of 12 months covered in 1 Chron. 22-29.

1Ki 1:5 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king-
He was the oldest surviving son of David and therefore considered in line for the throne. "I will be king" is a future statement. We could read as him declaring his intention to become king after David's death, which at that point appeared imminent. As the next in line to the throne (see on :7) it could be argued that this was reasonable. In this case, it could be that Nathan and Bathsheba are exaggerating the situation in order to get David to declare Solomon as king. In which case we see a decline in the moral fibre in Nathan along with about everyone else present in these sad scenes.

Then he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him-
"Prepared" or "established" is a major theme in the promises of the eternal establishment of David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12,13,16 etc.), and Solomon wrongly assumed that the conditional nature of the promises concerning the seed were just irrelevant to him as he had wisdom. Therefore he uses the word of how his kingdom has been "established" (1 Kings 2:24 s.w.). Solomon's contenders for the throne were all stopped by God, they tried to prepare or establish themselves but it never worked out (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5); and so surely Solomon has the idea in mind that he has been

established as the promised Messianic seed of David with an eternally "established" throne and kingdom. This leads him to the conclusion that the outcome of wisdom and folly is in this life, and he has no perspective of a final day of judgment and eternal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. This is why the simplistic dichotomies he presents in Proverbs between the blessed and wise, and the cursed and foolish, are not always true to observed experiences in this life. For it is the future Kingdom which puts them in ultimate perspective.

Absalom did the same (2 Sam. 15:1 "After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him"), and the similarities in the rebellions mean that David was intended to learn from them. Having horses and chariots was contrary to the command for the king of Israel not to have horses and chariots (Dt. 17:16). Solomon had even more, and so we are not to think that Adonijah was any worse than Solomon.

1Ki 1:6 His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why have you done so? And he was also a very handsome man; and he was born after Absalom-
We are immediately given the hint that he was of the same character and appearance of Absalom, and also similar to Saul (1 Sam. 9:2). Perhaps we are to understand that David had never disciplined him, unlike Solomon who in his Proverbs reflects upon David's discipline of him. Or maybe the idea is more specifically that David had never forbidden his clear pretensions to the throne, despite his stated desire for Solomon to succeed him.

Possibly David later bitterly resented the rebuke of Nathan. And this was why he refused to rebuke his son Adonijah: "His father had never rebuked him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?' He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom" (1 Kings 1:6). The usual line of interpretation is of course that David felt unable to rebuke anyone because of his sin, and he became willfully naive and deaf to political intrigue against him, and generally uncritical of others: "I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs" (Ps. 38:14). That would be an understandable psychological reaction to his sin and the consequences. But in this case, David's refusal to discipline others because of his having been disciplined by Nathan is a reflection that he had not really repented and experienced total forgiveness. He says he has, in the penitential Psalms. But if this were so in a lasting sense, he would have felt able to discipline his sons.

The parallels with the spoilt, handsome Absalom are clear. As Absalom stole the hearts of Israel, so Adonijah claims "all Israel fully expected me to reign" (1 Kings 2:15), and implies David had once agreed for him to replace him ("You know that the kingdom was mine"). Adonijah had a fair chance of success- he had Joab, the head of the army, and the chief priest on his team- and the support of "all Israel". If indeed "all Israel fully expected me to reign" (1 Kings 2:15), then David would not have at this point declared

Solomon as his successor. I suggest therefore that Bathsheba's rushing in to the king 'reminding' him that Solomon was to be the next king... was manipulation and probably untrue, at least there had been no public announcement to that effect. His repeated statements in 1 Chron. 22-29 that God had chosen Solomon may therefore have been made immediately after this time of Adonijah's rebellion. His claims there that God had specifically chosen Solomon by name are all reported speech, and I suggest in commentary on those chapters that this was merely David's narrative. He makes the claim that God had chosen and named Solomon so many times in the last months of his life. If this was, as he claimed, at the time of 2 Sam. 7, then we enquire why David had not previously stated this. He only makes these claims after Bathsheba's manipulation and claiming David had promised her [and not God promising David] that Solomon would be king. It's clear to me that he is 'protesting too much'. His claim that God had promised this and named Solomon as the seed is repeated so often and so suddenly that we are immediately suspicious as to the veracity of the claim David is making. It sounds like his wife and one time lover had manipulated him and he justifies his agreement by [falsely] claiming God had earlier said this. His last directly prophetic words are in 2 Sam. 23, and the rest of his reported speech is therefore not from God. Although he wrongly claims it is. I suggest that 2 Samuel is entirely chronological. After Adonijah's rebellion and Bathsheba's manipulation of David to pronounce Solomon as the next king, there is then the incident of numbering Israel. This is followed by David's final months spent numbering Israel in other ways, preparing for the temple and falsely claiming God has chosen Solomon by name; all in 1 Chron. 22-29. And then there is the final deathbed scene. A miserable end for David, who presents as weak and manipulated and obsessed with his own narrative about Solomon, egged on by Bathsheba. Who likewise possibly encouraged him to sleep with her at the start of his disastrous adultery with her.

David therefore presents as compromised, weak, manipulated and fickle, having promised Adonijah the throne but also promised it to Bathsheba's son Solomon. We note the continuing dislike of David amongst his people, right to the end, and the lack of lamentation for him when he dies. In both the cases of Adonijah and Solomon, David set up his sons for spiritual failure. As he did all Israel by focusing them upon a physical temple and removing their focus upon God's future Son and onto his own immediate descendants. We note an alternative textual reading [and LXX] of 2 Sam. 13:21, that David would not punish Amnon because he was his beloved firstborn: "he grieved not the spirit of Amnon his son, because he loved him, because he was his firstborn". This is very similar to what we read here about Adonijah. David was a poor father, and he for a moment recognizes this when faced with the prophetic word that Messiah was to be Israel's eternal, glorious king- and not he and his immediate sons. He responds that "[indeed] my house is not so with God". And yet despite being a poor father, he is clearly

obsessed with the idea of his sons forming an eternal dynasty and his "house" being of eternal immediate fame in this life. He actually is typical of many fathers today...

"He was born next after Absalom" (Heb.) suggests Adonijah was next in line as the oldest surviving son of David. Solomon tacitly accepts this when he chides his mother: "Ask for him the kingdom as well! For he is my elder brother..." (1 Kings 2:22). This is acknowledging that Adonijah's status as elder brother gave him right to the throne. 2 Chron. 21:3 says of Jehoshaphat
that "the kingdom he gave to Jehoram, for he was the firstborn". Primogeniture was therefore assumed at the time, although the kingdom of Israel itself was in its infancy.

1Ki 1:7 He conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest: they followed Adonijah and helped him-
That Joab David's cousin, should turn away from David after a lifetime of loyalty is hard to understand. But we sense a personality conflict between the two of them, and indeed it seems that originally Joab had supported Absalom's idea of seizing power, but then fell out with him. David held Joab as too hard a man, not understanding grace; whereas Joab held David to be far too soft, and increasingly lacking strong leadership skills in his old age. The support for Adonijah was perhaps more because of disillusion with David than because Adonijah personally had much to offer.

Joab's backing of Adonijah may have been because like Ahithophel, he feared David would kill him. He had said after David's poor behaviour on Absalom's death that David wasn't really fit to be Israel's military leader, and he himself had been the one who had led Israel to battle- against Abner at Gibeon, against the Syrians, against Edom (Ps. 60:1 Joab killed 12000 Edomites in the valley of Salt), against Absalom, and notably against the Ammonites whilst David sat in Jerusalem having an affair with his soldier Uriah's wife. David's later claim that he couldn't build the temple because he had been fighting Yahweh's battles is a subtle hint that that he saw himself as Israel's military leader, when in reality that had been Joab's role. David simply basked in the victories of his earlier life. As Israel made clear when they first requested a king, Israel's king was to lead them into battle (1 Sam. 8:20). By word and example, Joab had shown David's disqualification for this post Bathsheba. Indeed on the basis of military leadership, Joab and not David was the logical replacement of David. So David's jealousy and fear of Joab as a rival was apparent. David had made clear his dislike of Joab on several occasions ["What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?" 2 Sam. 16:5-10; 19:21,22. Bear in mind Joab was David's nephew. Joab is also missing in the lists of David's mighty men and their exploits, despite promising that whoever took Jebus would "come chief and commander"]. David thus comes to his end ungrateful, disloyal and with a reputation for graceless bloodthirstiness, jealousy, strong dislike of being shown weak and wrong and fear of any possible rival for his throne. Had he believed the promises of

2 Sam. 7, he need not have feared losing his throne in this life. The future promises more than compensated.

Abiathar's father and family had all been slain as a result of loyalty to David, and maybe decades later this remained as a source of bitterness to him. Or perhaps he was simply in a jealousy complex against Zadok, as it is unclear which of them was the high priest.

Abiathar's defection may seem even more surprising than Joab's. Possibly he had grown jealous of Zadok, the other High Priest at the time, and feared being supplanted by him. Fear is repeatedly presented in the record as the reason for otherwise out of character behaviour and that remains the same to this day. Yet faith in many ways is the counterpart to fear.

1Ki 1:8 But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei and the mighty men who belonged to David, were not with Adonijah-
We see here the division between the two priests, Abiathar and Zadok, who had been so united in helping David survive Absalom's putsch. Perhaps there was jealousy between them because Abiathar was the priest in Jerusalem, whilst Zadok cared for the tabernacle at Gibeon, which was "the great high place" (1 Chron. 16:39; 1 Kings 3:4). "The mighty men" are those listed in 2 Sam. 23. If "Shimei" is the Shimei who cursed David, then we see his loyalty to David now; and that David should later order his murder is the more reprehensible.

1Ki 1:9 Adonijah killed sheep and cattle and fatlings by the stone of Zoheleth, which is beside En Rogel; and he called all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants-
This is another similarity with Absalom's revolt (see on :5), who began his revolt with a religious festival. It is alluded to by Solomon in Prov. 21:27: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind!". Solomon may have in view Saul's rejection from the kingship for his wrong attitude to sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:21,22). Likewise the attempts of Absalom and Adonijah to take the throne from David and Solomon involved the offering of sacrifices (2 Sam. 15:12; 1 Kings 1:9). What Solomon says in the Proverbs is true on one level, but he harnesses Divine truth to justify himself and his own agendas; just as we can.

1Ki 1:10 but Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he didn't call-
As with Absalom's rebellion, sympathizers were invited to a religious feast, and this was used to declare the new king.

1Ki 1:11 Then Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon saying, Haven't you heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith reigns, and David our lord doesn't know it?-
"Adonijah" means 'Yah is lord', although clearly he wasn't a spiritual man. Nathan refers to David as their 'Lord'. Perhaps this is intended to be another example of how faithful women like Sarah called their husbands "lord" (1 Pet. 3:6).

1Ki 1:12 Now therefore come, please let me give you advice, that you may save your own life, and the life of your son Solomon-
Nathan is in fact giving Bathsheba his advice, knowing that the usurper would typically slay the family of his rivals. But Nathan frames his approach as asking for her advice. Bathsheba was it seems the favoured queen. We wonder why Abigail had fallen out of favour; although mortality for women being so low in those times, she may well have died by this stage.

1Ki 1:13 Go in to king David and tell him, 'Didn't you, my lord, king, swear to your handmaid saying, Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne? Why then does Adonijah reign?'-
"Didn't you say this...?" can be a way of saying "Will you not do what I suggest". But quite possibly David at some point had made such a verbal promise to Bathsheba. It was God who had sworn to David that his "son" would reign on his throne, and Nathan was the prophet through whom he had been told this. But David seems to have assumed that he had some choice to make in directing God's purpose, and had in turn sworn that Solomon should reign on his throne. The similarity of the wording suggests that he assumed Solomon was going to be the fulfilment of the promises to him of 2 Sam. 7. But this was in fact setting Solomon up for spiritual failure, as do many such parental assumptions. For those promises were conditional. And just as David refused to take full note of that, therefore neither did Solomon. He assumed he was the Messianic son of David and ignored the conditions, leading to his own spiritual shipwreck.

1Ki 1:14 Whilst you are talking there with the king, I also will come in after you, and confirm your words-
Literally, 'fulfil the words'. As discussed on :13, we sense that the words in view are those of the promises to David about his seed, which David had too quickly assumed must refer to Solomon. We note that Nathan too had too quickly assumed he knew God's will and word in 2 Sam. 7:3-5.

1Ki 1:15 Bathsheba went in to the king into the room. The king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite was ministering to the king-

We are naturally reminded of how she had first come in to the king when they committed adultery. And now she enters his bedroom uninvited, and finds a far younger woman trying to sexually arouse him (see on :1). The whole situation is indeed tragic, and the outcome of not going God's way in moral matters.

1Ki 1:16 Bathsheba bowed, and showed respect to the king. The king said, What would you like?-
The single Hebrew word "what?" could suggest he was indeed so frail he could hardly speak beyond single words.

1Ki 1:17 She said to him, My lord, you swore by Yahweh your God to your handmaid, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne'-
See on :13. She obediently repeats verbatim the words Nathan had put in her mouth. This continues the theme of David being manipulated by people and people being used as puppets by others.

1Ki 1:18 Now, look, Adonijah reigns; and you, my lord the king, don't know it-
She calls David "lord" many times. We get the impression of deep and rightful respect for him, despite his failures. Perhaps this is intended to be another example of how faithful women like Sarah called their husbands "lord" (1 Pet. 3:6).

1Ki 1:19 He has killed cattle, fatlings and sheep in abundance, and has called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the army; but he hasn't called Solomon your servant-
David's heart must have slumped as he heard these words. He died with the pain of betrayal by Adonijah, Joab and Abiathar. It would be wrong to imagine him dying a happy man at peace. His life indeed had been full of such traumas ever since his sin of passion with Bathsheba. How bitterly he must have regretted it.

1Ki 1:20 You, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, that you should tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him-
David apparently had not made any public pronouncement about his intentions for Solomon, although he had done so privately to Bathsheba and Nathan, the prophet who had first given him the promises about his "son". The lack of public pronouncement about his successor rather suggests that David had not at all decided Solomon should be king at this point. We therefore circumstantially have to disbelieve his subsequent claims in 1 Chron. 22-29 that God had specifically told him this at the time of the promises to him in 2 Sam. 7.

1Ki 1:21 Otherwise it will happen, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders-
Heb. "sinners". The idea may be that Bathsheba's marriage would be declared void because of David's sin with her, and therefore Solomon pronounced an illegitimate son. David died with this reminder of that sin of passion which would have seemed so long ago, and, to the human mind, dealt with by the passage of time and the grief over Absalom. She fears that her sin with David may be raised against her as a reason why her son should not be king. The narrative is all about fear of possible consequences; Joab's support of the rebellion was likewise because he feared David may well kill him. And fear of possible futures accounts for so many sins.

1Ki 1:22 Behold, while she still talked with the king, Nathan the prophet came in-
Again, without invitation; David would have guessed this had all been set up. David makes no recorded response to Bathsheba's words, possibly because he was so frail (see on :16). But probably more likely because he had not in fact made such a promise at least not on a serious, public level. Which gives the lie to his later claims in 1 Chron. 22-29 that God had told him that Solomon was to succeed him, and had even named Solomon as the promised seed at the time of the promises in 2 Sam. 7.

1Ki 1:23 They told the king, saying, Here is Nathan the prophet! When he had come in before the king, he bowed down before the king with his face to the ground-
Whilst this may have been mere formality, we do have the overall impression of deep respect towards David by his inner circle. They were mature enough to realize he had indeed been a man after God's own heart, despite major failings which they accepted as out of character with him; and they did not focus upon those failures, but upon his overall life and character. And therefore respected him still very deeply. This is a good pattern for us in our attitudes to others. See on :26.

1Ki 1:24 Nathan said, My lord, king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne?'-
Perhaps Adonijah was falsely claiming this, abusing his father's frail state. Or maybe this was a device by Nathan to get the king to mutter some response, to provoke him to mental awareness in his weak state; see on :16,22. Or quite possibly David had said this to Adonijah at some point, just as he apparently had made such a verbal promise to Bathsheba about Solomon. In which case we see his fickle ways, and his lack of integrity even to those nearest to him. And he dies with the consequences of it clearly before him. If only he had resigned as king and focused upon his future Messianic seed, all this argument about immediate succession would have been stillborn.

1Ki 1:25 For he is gone down this day, and has killed cattle and fatlings and sheep in abundance, and has called all the king's sons, and the captains of the army, and Abiathar the priest. Even now they are eating and drinking before him and saying, 'Long live king Adonijah!'-
To eat and drink before a king was a sign of support for him and his acceptance; and there is something of this in the meaning of the breaking of bread service.

1Ki 1:26 But he hasn't called me, even me your servant, nor Zadok the priest, nor Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, nor your servant Solomon-
Nathan's respect of David comes out strongly- "me, even me your servant". See on :23.

1Ki 1:27 Is this thing done by my lord the king, and you haven't shown to your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?-
Again this may be a device by Nathan to provoke the frail minded king to speak forth. Or perhaps indeed he had not openly stated his desire for Solomon to be king. "After him" again alludes to the promises about the "son" which Nathan had given David, and it seems he is again implying that David is to state now who is going to fulfil them. Again, as discussed on :13, their conditional nature is being ignored by everyone. And it led Solomon to do the same. The One who was promised to sit on David's throne "after him" was God's begotten Son, Messiah. But David has ceased perceiving those things about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

This can also be read as a genuine question: "Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not told your servants? Who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?". Surely if David had publically stated that Solomon should reign after him, now would be the time for Nathan to remind him of that. But he doesn't. We can read it as a statement or question that implies David hadn't shown at that point who should sit on his throne. He had not at that point chosen the heir- even on his deathbed. This reflects a lack of real care for his family. Because it was all about him, David.

According to 1 Chron. 22-29, David subsequently claims God told him that Solomon should be the next king, and that God made this clear to him, even naming Solomon, at the time of the promises given in 2 Sam. 7. The record is totally silent about this, and promises a future seed to reign on David's throne at a point after David's death and at his resurrection. If indeed David had declared Solomon as king previously, we would not expect Nathan's question or statement here [depending how we translate]. This is all tacit evidence that David was lying in his subsequent oft repeated claims (in 1 Chron. 22-29) that in fact God had told him that Solomon would be king after him, naming him by name before his birth. Rather is David fabricating God's word in order to go along with

the manipulation of him by Bathsheba, who wanted her son Solomon to be the next king. This is a serious sin. David dies with it on his lips; yet by grace will still be saved.

1Ki 1:28 Then king David answered, Call to me Bathsheba. She came into the king's presence, and stood before the king-
Perhaps Nathan left the room at this point (:32). "Call me Bathsheba" would have inevitably recalled to his mind how he had said those fateful words to his servants decades previously, and now he was still suffering the result of that sin.

1Ki 1:29 The king swore and said, As Yahweh lives, who has redeemed my soul out of all adversity-
Earlier, David in the Psalms had so often asked God to redeem him, e.g. in Ps. 69:18: "Draw near to my soul, and redeem it. Ransom me because of my enemies". God had already forgiven David, ransoming and redeeming him. But he was left to suffer the consequences of those sins, and because of that, in crisis he starts to wonder whether he has indeed been forgiven. And we can do the same so easily. The consequence of sin is death, and we can squirm against this when we or others face it... forgetting the wonder of the fact that we are indeed redeemed and ransomed from the power of the grave, although we must still take the consequences. At the very end of his life, David realized that he had in fact been redeemed (s.w. 1 Kings 1:29). He could give up his spirit to God in death, knowing that He was redeemed from the power of the grave (s.w. Ps. 31:5; 49:15). His sure hope in the resurrection of the body looked ahead to the attitude with which the Lord Jesus died.

These are the words of Jacob in Gen. 48:16 and also of David earlier, at 2 Sam. 4:9. What Jacob only learnt at the *end* of his life, David learnt and applied during his life. And we should likewise not be experiential learners, but learn instead from Jacob. David stresses that Yahweh had redeemed him, and he had not needed to take vengeance himself. He repeats this in now; he was deeply aware of Yahweh's redemption of him by grace right to his last days.

1Ki 1:30 most certainly as I swore to you by Yahweh the God of Israel, saying, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place;' most certainly so will I do this day-
As discussed on :13, he wrongly assumes that he can pronounce Solomon as the fulfilment of the promises made to him. For he speaks in the language of the promises of 2 Sam. 7; and this refusal to accept their conditionality, and fulfilment by grace rather than his pronouncement, was what led Solomon to spiritual disaster in the longer term.

There is a tantalizing unclarity in the Hebrew behind "most certainly as I swore to you". It could as well be translated "If I indeed swore to you [that Solomon shall reign]... then so will I do". David's memory is functional, as he recalls the behaviour of Joab, Shimei etc. Yet David would appear unaware of promising Bathsheba that Solomon would reign. And it is never recorded in the Biblical record. This translation suggests Bathsheba in David's bedroom is manipulating him from her stronger position, just as he had done to her in the same bedroom years before. David dies powerless and being yet again deceived and manipulated, just as he did to Bathsheba and Uriah long ago. He hardly dies a glorious death, loved and adored by his family and people [in fact few of God's children died such a death, we think of Paul]. It was perhaps God's last ditch effort to lead him to fuller repentance even on his death bed. Truly God works with every man right up to his last breath.

1Ki 1:31 Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and showed respect to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live forever!-
To say this to a man on his deathbed is perhaps consciously intended to show the meaningless nature of this common phrase. Bathsheba presents as giving David meaningless respect. Likewise we note how Nathan and others bow to him and call him their "lord" when they were clearly manipulating him. Their respect was only on a surface level.

1Ki 1:32 King David said, Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. They came before the king-
Perhaps Nathan had left the bedroom when Bathsheba was summoned back (:28). Or perhaps this is yet another indication of the very weak mental state of David.

1Ki 1:33 The king said to them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon-
The first mention of mules in the Bible is associated with Absalom's murder of Amnon his brother (2 Sam. 13:29). They were cross bred in disobedience to Lev. 19:19. We get the impression that a generally slack attitude to what might have been considered minor matters of the law was associated with the major sin of murder. This is the problem when we start to think that some parts of God's laws can just be ignored. David was fond of them, having his own mule (1 Kings 1:33), and Solomon was willing to receive them as tribute (1 Kings 10:25). Yet David boasts in Psalm 119 of how he studies God's law all the day and loves obedience to it...

Anointing as king by a spring was in order to declare that the king and his line would reign eternally just as water keeps spouting from a spring. In this we see David's lack of faith and willful misunderstanding of the promises to him. His kingship and line would

only be eternal through the Lord Jesus and not in terms of an eternal line of Kings in unbroken succession from David.

1Ki 1:34 Let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel. Blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live king Solomon!'-
This anointing ought to have been done earlier, as it was with David. We wonder whether David had some slight doubts about Solomon's suitability, hence his lack of public pronouncement about Solomon being his chosen successor. Or perhaps David just wanted to hold on to personal power to the bitter end, and hadn't wanted to appoint anyone in his place through a public proclamation. There had not yet been any anointing or trumpet blowing for Adonijah, so this was in order to upstage that happening.

Saul and David were anointed on God's command. David had Solomon anointed at his own initiative, in a mistaken attempt to make Solomon the Christ. "Long live Solomon" may be an attempt to apply the promise of David's eternal seed to Solomon.

1Ki 1:35 Then you shall come up after him-
Just as men had followed after Adonijah (:7).

And he shall come and sit on my throne; for he shall be king in my place. I have appointed him to be prince over Israel and over Judah-
On one hand we could read the usage of the word "prince" as reflecting how Yahweh was the ultimate king of Israel. Or we could read it as reflecting David's dogged desire, typical of an old man, to hold on to his own kingly power until his last breath. Or we could see it as a Messianic term, as it is in Dan. 9:25, again showing that David thought he could make Solomon the fulfilment of the promises of a Messianic seed just by pronouncing it from his deathbed- ignoring all the conditional clauses which accompanied those promises.

Sitting upon David's throne is another allusion to the promises of 2 Sam. 7 which David is trying to force into a fulfilment in Solomon.

1Ki 1:36 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king and said, Amen. May Yahweh, the God of my lord the king, say so too-
This is a clear example of the meaning of the word "Amen". It is a statement that we believe in faith that God also wills to be so what we have said Amen to. His "Amen" is therefore our "Amen". There is a similar example in Jer. 28:6. Benaiah is effectively asking that God confirm David's attempt to force fulfilment of God's will in terms of Solomon. The way he says "May Yahweh..." suggests perhaps that he is not aware of any Divine word about this, but he wishes that it "may" be so.

1Ki 1:37 As Yahweh has been with my lord the king, even so may He be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David-
Benaiah too is alluding to the promises to David, and stating his belief that they are to be fulfilled through Solomon- again ignoring all the conditional clauses which accompanied those promises. "So may He be" is Heb. "so shall He be". Having a throne greater than David again alludes to the promises of 2 Sam. 7 which Benaiah wanted to see coming true in Solomon.

1Ki 1:38 So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and caused Solomon to ride on king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon-
"Pelethite" is arguably a form of the word "Philistine". There is a theme in David's life of his former enemies, even Gentiles against whom he had fought and slain their families, became his most loyal supporters and servants, right to the end of his days. This loyalty is a reflection not only of their respect of his personal integrity, despite some out of character failures; but especially of their conversion to Yahweh, David's God.

1Ki 1:39 Zadok the priest took the horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. They blew the trumpet; and all the people said, Long live king Solomon!-
The horn of oil refers to the specific horn from which the holy anointing oil was poured upon the priests. Zadok cared for the tabernacle at Gibeon, which was "the great high place" (1 Chron. 16:39; 1 Kings 3:4), and so it is another example of correlation within the inspired records that he had access to that horn and the oil with which to anoint Solomon (1 Kings 1:39). Using this oil to anoint a king would therefore have presented Solomon as a king-priest.

The oil was from the tent of meeting, which was only used to anoint priests. This is an attempt to declare Solomon a king-priest. But this was done totally of human initiative and proved a failure because Solomon turned to idols.

1Ki 1:40 All the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth shook with their sound-
We can assume that there was mass popular support for Solomon, far greater than for Adonijah. And yet Adonijah says that all Israel were looking for him to be king: "the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign" (1 Kings 2:15). We see again the fickleness of the people, reflective of their dissatisfaction with the leadership options before them.

1Ki 1:41 Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished eating. When Joab heard the sound of the trumpet he said, Why is this noise of the city being in an uproar?-
The feast would have taken some days; for the horn of priestly anointing oil had to be fetched from Gibeon (:39).

1Ki 1:42 While he yet spoke, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came: and Adonijah said, Come in; for you are a worthy man, and bring good news-
The record here repeats the coming in of messengers to David earlier in this chapter. Despite his revolt against his father David, he perhaps unconsciously repeats his father's very words as he awaited news of the battle with Absalom. He could not ultimately throw off the ties that bind. We note that Jonathan had earlier run messages for David in the time of Absalom's revolt (2 Sam. 17:17); now he does so for Adonijah, and was perceived as a "worthy man", on Adonijah's side. All these things have the ring of psychological credibility to them. This is how life goes.

1Ki 1:43 Jonathan answered Adonijah, Most certainly our lord king David has made Solomon king-
The hint could be that "most certainly" he did carry good news, that Solomon had been made king. Already even the messenger was seeking to cover himself against the inevitable repercussions of a failed power grab. Hence he calls David "our lord king David".

1Ki 1:44 The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and they have caused him to ride on the king's mule-
Jonathan is careful to report things exactly as they were and as had observed them in Jerusalem. He is bravely giving no intimation of continued loyalty to Adonijah and his own father Abiathar who was his main support.

1Ki 1:45 Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon. They have come up from there rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This is the noise that you have heard-
Again we see that there was mass popular support for David's choice of Solomon, and not so much for Adonijah.

1Ki 1:46 Also, Solomon sits on the throne of the kingdom-
Solomon had literally been sat upon David's throne, and Jonathan had seen it.

1Ki 1:47 Moreover the king's servants came to bless our lord king David saying, 'May your God make the name of Solomon better than your name, and make his throne greater than your throne'; and the king bowed himself on the bed-
Again "our lord king David" shows that Jonathan's loyalties were now with David and Solomon again. The fickleness of human loyalty is a great theme of the records of David's life.

1Ki 1:48 Also thus said the king, 'Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who has given one to sit on my throne this day, my eyes even seeing it'-
These words of David aren't recorded but there is no reason to doubt Jonathan's account of them. Those words are clearly allusive to the promises in 2 Sam. 7 that David's eyes would see his Messianic son / seed enthroned, implying David's resurrection. LXX adds "one of my seed", confirming this. But David instead assumed that they were true in his lifetime, and that Solomon was indeed the Messianic seed promised. David has strayed far from the things of God's Kingdom and the Lord Jesus; he clearly wishes to present Solomon as the fulfilment of the Divine seed, rather than accepting this was to be a Divinely begotten seed who would come after he had slept with his fathers. David became wedded to his own obsessive narrative rather than to what God's word had plainly said. A warning to us all. By this wrong assumption, David was ignoring the conditional aspects to the promises- that Solomon had to prove himself obedient to Yahweh. By doing so, David set Solomon up for spiritual failure, through merely assuming his acceptability to God regardless of his lifestyle; see on :13.

1Ki 1:49 All the guests of Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and each man went his way-
Again we see the fickleness of human loyalty, which is such a great theme of the records of David's life.

1Ki 1:50 Adonijah feared because of Solomon; and he arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar-
He must have somehow smuggled himself into the sanctuary, otherwise he would have been arrested and charged with treason well beforehand. He was treating the altar as a kind of talisman, just as the surrounding religions did. The horns of the altar were smeared with the blood of atonement (Ex. 29:12; 30:10), so he may have been assuming that he would somehow get forgiveness by doing this. The allusion is clearly to Ex. 21:12-14: "One who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death, but not if

it is unintentional, but God allows it to happen: then I will appoint you a place where he shall flee. If a man schemes and comes presumptuously on his neighbour to kill him, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die". Adonijah hadn't killed anyone, although Nathan and Bathsheba claim he was scheming to kill Solomon and Bathsheba (:12,21). To use the horns of the altar in this way was therefore somewhat out of context, almost defying Solomon to desecrate the altar with the blood of a slain man.

However we could read the allusion to Ex. 21:12-14 as Adonijah claiming his innocence, as if he had been falsely accused of murder- and I have suggested that quite possibly Bathsheba and Nathan did this, or at least accused him of intending to murder Solomon and Bathsheba. They did this in order to manipulate David to put Solomon on the throne. He had truly assumed that he would be king as he was next in line (see on :5, he asserts that he will in future be king but doesn't usurp David). There is no record of David ever having told him that he would not succeed to the throne. And I have argued that there had been no Divine word about Solomon being king or at least it had never been publicized. All Israel expected Adonijah to be king. And Solomon tacitly accepts this when he reminds his mother that Adonijah is after all his older brother. This raises the possibility that Nathan, Bathsheba and Zadok, and then David, are being less that fair to Adonijah.

I suggested that Adonijah was not wrong to assume he as the remaining firstborn would be the next king. He fled to the altar because he felt Nathan and Bathsheba had wrongly accused him of intending to murder Solomon and Bathsheba. Joab likewise flees to the altar because he too is persuaded that he has killed nobody in order for Solomon to seek to kill him. *Neither Adonijah nor Joab would have fled to the horns of the altar unless they believed they were innocent and would thereby be saved*. They would have run away far from Solomon. Instead they run to the horns of the altar and remain there, a sitting target for Solomon. I suggest they both only did this because they were convinced of their innocence of murder, and that therefore Bathsheba's claim to David that Adonijah was likely to murder herself and Solomon was just manipulative- she wanted her son Solomon to be king, not Adonijah. It all presents a sad picture of deceit and low moral fibre in all concerned.

1Ki 1:51 It was told Solomon saying, Behold, Adonijah fears king Solomon; for, behold, he has laid hold on the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let king Solomon swear to me first that he will not kill his servant with the sword'-

The idea was that if God had atoned for his sin of rebellion (see on :50), then Solomon should not carry out the death penalty. The whole process of reasoning was very twisted, and are in fact the words of an equally twisted Jacob to Esau in Gen. 25:31,33.

1Ki 1:52 Solomon said, If he shows himself a worthy man, not a hair of him shall fall to

the earth; but if wickedness be found in him, he shall die-
Solomon is intentionally vague. Not a hair falling to the earth could be read as meaning that an intended punishment would not be carried out (1 Sam. 14:45; 2 Sam. 14:11). "But if wickedness be found..." could be read as meaning 'If there is any more of this in future', or 'We will investigate the matter by judgment and the just penalty will be given in future'.

1Ki 1:53 So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. He came and bowed down to king Solomon; and Solomon said to him, Go to your house-
This was not real forgiveness, because Solomon evidently considered it not politic to immediately slay Adonijah, but that was his intention. Perhaps he was reasoning that Adonijah's support base would be encouraged to repent if they saw that they were not going to all be slain. And Solomon probably didn't feel he had the political strength at that point to slay men like Joab and Abiathar. And we must examine our own apparent forgiveness of others, to determine whether it is really just a matter of politics and prudence rather than true forgiveness.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 2

1Ki 2:1 Now the days of David drew near that he should die; and he commanded Solomon his son saying-
According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 7.14,7) the events of 1 Chronicles 28, 29 happened in the interval between the first anointing of Solomon and the death of David. I would argue that the events related in 1 Chron. 22–29 had occurred between 1 Kings 1 and 2. The final events in David's life reveal all concerned to be egocentric, devious, manipulative, and yet also naïve, impulsive, and vulnerable. This is exactly what it is to be human. We have human nature here displayed... in a totally psychologically credible way.

1Ki 2:2 I am going the way of all the earth-
This is quoting the words of Joshua, as do the second part of the verse. David has Joshua in mind because he considers that Solomon is going to now inherit the Kingdom.

Be strong therefore, and show yourself a man-
As noted above, this is the language of Joshua (Dt. 31:7,23; Josh. 1:6,7). See on :3. "Show yourself a man" may refer to the fact Solomon was very young (1 Kings 3:7) and needed to quickly act as an adult.

David seems to have theoretically recognized that the building of the temple was conditional on Solomon's spirituality, but he overlooked this in his enthusiasm for Solomon to be the Messiah, who may be the reference of "a man". He tells Solomon to

show himself a man, and goes on in :4 to speak of how “a man” would eternally reign on his Messianic throne. He was encouraging Solomon to be and act like Messiah. Ps. 127 is "For Solomon" (Ps. 127:2 "beloved" = Heb. Jedidah), and warns him that his labour for the temple will be in vain unless *God* builds it. The Psalm basically says that God will build Solomon a house in the sense of a family centered in the beloved seed who would die [“sleep”] to enable it; and therefore Solomon should not be so sweating himself day and night to build God a house / temple. This is the very message which God had given David earlier. David and Solomon evidently shelved their knowledge of the fact that Heaven is God's dwelling place. It would seem that Solomon particularly was guilty of a false humility; there is a gross contradiction within his words of 2 Chron. 6:2,18: "I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling *for ever*... But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built?". This is one of several hints that Solomon felt that the full fulfilment of the Davidic promises was to be found in him (cp. 2 Chron. 6:10). He failed to look forward to the spirit of Christ, instead becoming obsessed with the achievement of his own works. He was largely encouraged in this by David, who seems to have felt that Solomon was the Messiah figure the promises spoke about. Thus Ps.72 is dedicated to Solomon, and yet it speaks clearly of the messianic Kingdom. In the same way as David came to misquote and misapply the promises God made to him, Solomon did likewise. God told David that He did not want a physical house, because He had never commanded this to be done at any time in the past. Solomon misquotes this in 2 Chron. 6:5,6 to mean that God had never asked for a physical house in the past, but now he had asked David's son to build such a house in Jerusalem.

1Ki 2:3 and keep the instruction of Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do, and wherever you turn yourself-

In Prov. 29:14 “The king that faithfully judges the poor, his throne shall be established for ever”, Solomon is clearly referring to the promises to David, which he assumed were about him. He thought that because he had judged the poor harlots wisely, therefore he would be the promised Messiah. And this was just what David his father had hoped and expected of him. David had even asked Solomon to “do wisely” i.e. to show wisdom, in order that the promises to him about Messiah would be fulfilled (1 Kings 2:3 RVmg.). So *this* was surely one of Solomon’s motives in giving them justice and being ‘wise’; he sought to live out his father’s expectations and to fulfil the requirements of the Messiah figure.

"That you may prosper" is s.w. "to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). David's desire was that Solomon would be "wise" just as David had been "wise / prospered" (1 Sam.

18:5,14,15), and so Solomon asked God for wisdom and wanted to be wise. But his subsequent life showed this was because he wanted to live out parental expectation rather than be personally wise. And so he later turned away from that wisdom in his personal life. The language of prospering continues the Joshua allusions (see on :2; Josh. 1:7,8).

1Ki 2:4 This is so that Yahweh may establish His word which He spoke concerning me saying, 'If your children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you', He said, 'a man on the throne of Israel'-

The "He said..." again shows us that David is reporting God's words, claiming this is what God said. But as discussed earlier, 2 Sam. 24 were the last prophetic words of David by Divine revelation. His various claims as to what God said about Solomon in 1 Chron. 23-29 are all reported by him, claimed by him, and in fact contradict what God actually said in 2 Sam. 7. David wanted Solomon to be that "man" (:2). Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve or observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Another example of Solomon misquoting God is in 2 Chron. 6:6. Solomon claims that God said: "I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there". God had chosen no resting place, although it would have been politically convenient for Solomon if the city of Jerusalem as a city was where God had chosen to dwell. And so he kept thinking that way until he persuaded himself that in fact this was what God had said. David had charged Solomon with the words which he claimed God had spoken to him about Solomon: "If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul" (1 Kings 2:4). But Solomon subtly changes this when he reminds God of how He had supposedly told David: "There shall not fail thee a man to sit on the throne of Israel; so that they children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me" (1 Kings 8:25). Two things become apparent here:

- The conditionality of the promise to David about Solomon is totally overlooked. "*If* thy children..." becomes "so that...", with the implication that David would always have descendants on the throne who would walk obediently before God. The possibility of personal failure had been removed by Solomon from his own perception of God.

- God's desire that Solomon should "walk before me in truth" was changed to "walk before me as thou [David] hast walked before me". This defined walking before God personally as having the relationship with God which your father had. And so often we have made the same mistake. The call to personally follow the Lord has become displaced by a following Him through others.

Notice how Solomon says these words to God Himself. Solomon had persuaded himself that this truly was what God had asked of David and himself, and so he comes out with these words to God.

There was no sense in Solomon that he might have the possibility of failure, of rejection by God. The promises to David were conditional- David pointed this out to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:4: "*If* thy children take heed to their way...". But Solomon misquotes this in 1 Kings 8:25: "Now therefore, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; *so that* thy children take heed to their way to walk before me as thou hast walked before me". Some translations offer paraphrases of the difficult "so that" phrase. But there's no getting around it. Solomon is saying 'Give me what you promised me, without conditions, so that I will fulfil those conditions... it's not possible for anyone to fulfil those conditions unless you first give them what you conditionally promised'. The logic is all upside down, and is very demanding upon God, implying that any failure to "take heed to the way" would be because God hadn't given what He promised. It's a telling insight into Solomon's mind. It was all about him, rather than all about God and glorifying Him.

Note that all this happened at the very start of Solomon's reign; it seems to me that he was always on the wrong track, rather than as it were 'going wrong' later on.

1Ki 2:5 Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me and what he did to the two captains of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner, and to Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war on his sash that was about his waist, and in his shoes that were on his feet-
The only person in David's life whose belt is noted is Joab (2 Sam. 20:8; 1 Kings 2:5). But Ps. 109:8,19 wish curses upon the man who was well known for his belt. See notes there for the extent of David's anger with Joab and his desire for the man's condemnation because of it- even though David was not himself perfect. Solomon's comment that Joab shed the blood of war in peace, perhaps meaning 'in the name of

peace', may allude to how Joab killed Amasa whilst asking him whether "Is all well with you?", using the word *shalom, "*peace".

We see David's narcissism even at this final point in his life. He considers Joab had done evil "to me". Joab had in fact preserved David on his throne multiple times. But all that 'good' was forgotten beneath David's obsession with what he considered was 'evil' done to him. He also overlooks the fact that the murders of Abner and Amasa were [especially in Abner's case] for the good of David. I noted on 1 Kings 1 that it was effectively Joab who had led Israel in battle rather than David; and to lead the people in battle was the definition of what it was to be king of Israel. David dies with unbridled jealousy, leading him in his mind to turn a friend into a foe, to turn good into evil. What "evil" had Joab done David? He had told him the hard home truth that his soppy obsession for his worthless son Absalom would cost him his throne. He had backed Adonijah as future king rather than Solomon. But that was not "evil" to David. Or we can translate: "You know also what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel". David sees Joab's "evil" to him in slaying Abner and Amasa. But Joab was without doubt the best army commander David could have wished for. But as the classic narcissist, David wants to personalize this as if it had been done to him personally. And the irony is that Joab's murders of Abner and Amasa, especially of Abner, likely solidified David's power and despite Joab's personal motives for the murders, he was effectively establishing David in power. But David doesn't want to see that.

We can read 'what Joab did to me' as David believing that the guilt for the blood of Amasa and Abner had been wrongly placed on him by Joab. David thus takes his false narrative about Joab yet further. Solomon bought into this when he tells Benaiah to "fall upon him [Joab] and bury him, and turn aside from me and from my father's house the innocent blood that he has shed" (:31,32). The reasoning was that actually David had been falsely counted guilty of the blood of Amasa and Abner, and that could only be removed by the blood of Joab being shed. This of itself is false spiritual logic, because God would not count Solomon and his descendants guilty for supposed murders by David which David was genuinely innocent of. David overlooks that he was actually guilty of the blood of Uriah and the other soldiers. And that guilt had been removed by grace and not by any blood sacrifice. If that wonderful truth had remained his guiding light, he would not have expanded his false narrative about the "need" for Joab's blood to atone for his supposed guilt. And David ought to have learnt by this point in his life that the only blood guilt worth worrying about is that which God counts against a person. If others thought that David had been behind the murders of Abner and Amasa, that was their problem and the only thing that mattered was whether God counted David as guilty. In all this, David shows how far he has gone from the David of the penitential psalms. In Ps. 51:14 he prays "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God". He realizes he is saved from blood guilt by God's grace alone, and not by sacrifice, let alone

the blood of Joab. But now at his end, he has pretty much cancelled all those lessons he had learnt. Earlier at the time Joab murdered Abner, David publically stated " 'I and my kingdom are forever guiltless ... for the blood [of Abner]" (2 Sam. 3:28). It could be argued that Joab killed Abner as permitted blood revenge for Abner's murder of his brother Asahel. And Abner was likely a threat to David at the time; and likely Amasa too, who strangely delays or fails to gather an army with which to put down Sheba's rebellion. Joab's murders were in support of David. But now he presents his political, ungrateful, faithless scheming to Solomon as "your wisdom" (:6), “you are a wise man; you will know what to do” (:9). It was nothing of the sort, despite David framing it against his command that Solomon be obedient to God's law (:2-4). There is a sharp and intended contrast between David's spiritual appeal in :2-4 and the harsh, unspiritual material which follows in the next verses. Justice was to be the characteristic of Israel's king (Dt. 17:17-20) and yet David shows no justice in his commands about Joab and Shimei, and sets up Solomon to be unjust. It all set Solomon up for spiritual failure. It would require him to perceive that his father's wisdom was not at all wisdom. And that is hard for any son whom his parents have set up in power.

David says that Joab "killed, and shed the blood of war in peace", he killed men who thought they were at peace with him. Yet this is exactly what David had done to Uriah and the other soldiers killed to cover up Uriah's murder. He dies with no sense of conviction for his sin against Uriah, hypocritically judging and condemning others to the death penalty which he himself had been spared from by grace. Earlier David had thanked God for His forgiveness of David, triumphing that God had brought him up from the grave, rather than allowing him to be brought down to it: "Yahweh, You have brought up my soul from Sheol. You have kept me alive, that I should not be brought down to the pit" (Ps. 30:3). But now he wants to bring others down to the grave. We have a powerful warning not to forget grace and forgiveness shown to us, and to live humbled by it literally all our days, and not just for a few days at the time.

David is also arguing that just as Joab had murdered men he was apparently at peace with, so he might murder Solomon. And to just remove that possibility, he commands Solomon to take the initiative and kill Joab. Or he could be saying that as Joab has murdered two previous army commanders, he may also now murder Benaiah, whom Solomon appointed army commander (:35). Again, we see fear of possible consequence leading to murder, as it does so often in homicides today. But faith is the opposite of fear... and David appears to have little of it.

1Ki 2:6 Do therefore according to your wisdom, and don’t let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace-

Solomon alludes to this in Prov. 19:5,9: "A false witness shall not be unpunished; he who utters lies shall perish". See on :5. Solomon is alluding to his father David's parting

commandments to him to destroy all the opposition to him (1 Kings 2:6,9). So whilst what Solomon writes is true, he is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

Joab was David's cousin, who had shown David a lifetime of loyalty. But we sense a personality conflict between the two of them, and indeed it seems that originally Joab had supported Absalom's idea of seizing power, but then fell out with him; and he supported Adonijah's. David held Joab as too hard a man, not understanding grace; whereas Joab held David to be far too soft, and increasingly lacking strong leadership skills in his old age. The support for Adonijah was perhaps more because of disillusion with David than because Adonijah personally had much to offer. Yet to order his death seems to me absolutely lacking in grace.

1Ki 2:7 But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those who eat at your table; for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother-
On balance, over a lifetime, Joab had shown David far more kindness than Barzillai. So it is so sad that David, who had experienced so much grace, at the end of his life was so lacking in it and so short termist in his view. After Solomon's ascension, there was judgment and reward; in the form of being able to eat at his table (1 Kings 2:7 cp. 2 Sam. 9: 7,10; 19:28). After Christ's return, the reward is to break bread with Him (Lk. 14:15; 22:30). Breaking bread with Him now is a sign of joyful fellowship with Him in anticipation of that; it shouldn't therefore be a scary, worrying experience.

We note the inconsistency in David's reasoning. David had been saved from Absalom's revolt by Joab, whom he now commanded to be slain. But now he asks that Barzillai be rewarded for helping him with a nice meal at that time. There is no justice here, and justice was to be the characteristic of Israel's king (Dt. 17:17-20).

1Ki 2:8 Behold, there is with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjamite of Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim; but he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I vowed to him by Yahweh saying, 'I will not put you to death with the sword'-
David had told Shimei "You will not die" (2 Sam. 19:23). But just as he twists God's promises to him, so he now again plays with words by iterating this as "I will not put you to death with the sword". As if his emphasis had been upon the word "I". David would not, but Solomon could. Yet his promise was "You will not die". Again we see David twisting the narrative to his own advantage [as he perceived it] and misquoting and twisting words. We note how David breaks his oath to Shimei, but all so as to keep his supposed [unrecorded] oath to Bathsheba that Solomon should reign. His morality and justice was highly selective.

David earlier forgave Shimei for cursing him. But he tells Solomon to bring down that old man's white hairs to the grave with blood on them- a crude image for the murder of an old man (:9). And he uses the same awful turn of phrase to ask Solomon to do this also to his lifelong friend Joab (1 Kings 2:6,9). Surely grace would've found another way? He was therefore barred from building the temple because of the amount of blood he had shed (1 Chron. 22:8).

David graciously overlooked Shimei's cursing, promising him that he would not die because of it (2 Sam. 16:10,11; 19:23). But he didn't keep up that level of grace to the end: he later asked Solomon to ensure that Shimei was killed for that incident (1 Kings 2:8,9). And one wonders whether it was Shimei's words which so broke David's heart that he later wrote: "Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man...as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so may it be far from him. He clothed himself also with cursing as with a garment..." (Ps. 109:16-18).

1Ki 2:9 Now therefore don't hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man-
This was not at all "wisdom". It was secular, not spiritual wisdom. Possibly Solomon's request to God for true wisdom was so thrilling to God because it reflected a tacit acceptance that his father's "wisdom" was not at all wise. And possibly his request for wisdom might reflect some regret for his murders of Joab and Shimei on his father's say so, cloaked as "wisdom".

It is significant that Solomon's spiritual life has more appearance of spirituality the closer we get back to David's death. David had asked for wisdom (Ps. 119:34), and even Solomon's request for wisdom can be seen as rooted in a desire to live out parental expectation more than purely from his own volition. For David had told him: "You are a wise man" (1 Kings 2:9), and Solomon wanted to live up to that expectation. In other words, David's influence was extremely strong, but it decreased over the years. Yet even at the end, Solomon's wisdom stayed with him in that some aspects of his upbringing stayed with him- he could never escape from it. When he says that he has never found a truly wise woman, but he did know one wise man (Ecc. 7:28) he may well have had David in mind.

And you will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down to Sheol with blood-
Solomon alludes to this in Prov. 21:11: "When the mocker is punished, the simple gains wisdom. When the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge". This seems to be justifying David's command for Solomon to punish the mocker Shimei, who had cursed him at the time of Absalom's rebellion. At the time, David had forgiven Shimei and forbidden his men to kill him. But at the end of his life, David didn't maintain that level of grace, and commanded Solomon to ensure that he brought Shimei's grey hairs down to

the grave with blood. And Solomon justified this collapse of forgiveness and grace by saying that it would give wisdom to others and instruct the wise.

Shimei was a wicked man who hated God's servant David. God told him to curse David (2 Sam. 16:10). Afterwards, Shimei repents and acknowledges that by doing so he sinned (2 Sam. 19:20). And although David recognized that God had told Shimei to curse him (2 Sam. 16:10), David tells Solomon not to hold Shimei "guiltless" for how he had cursed him (1 Kings 2:9). As with the evil spirit from Yahweh working upon Saul, a man is encouraged by God to do the sinful act in which he has set his heart.

Psalm 7:16 had been David's commentary about Shimei: "The trouble he causes shall return upon his own head, his violence shall come down on the crown of his own head". In the context of Shimei, whose cursing was the initial context of this Psalm (see on Ps. 7:1), David sought himself to bring this about. He told Solomon to ensure that Shimei's head and grey hairs should be brought down with blood to the grave by him (1 Kings 2:8,9). This unspiritual attitude of David was rooted in the way that at the earlier point, here in Ps. 7:16, David rejoiced in the thought that Shimei would be condemned by God; and sets about to bring that condemnation about himself. This surely was a case of taking Divine judgment into his own hand in a way he should not have done, and quite overlooking the Divine desire for repentance (Ez. 33:11).

1Ki 2:10 David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David-
This idiom is clear evidence that the distinction in reward between good and evil people is not made at the point of death. Death is unconsciousness, and the eternal outcome of our lives will be at the resurrection and day of judgment.

There is a huge contradiction between the Bible later setting David as the gold standard of spirituality, and the historical record of David post Bathsheba. The contradiction is so laboured, so repeated and so huge that there has to be a point being made. And it surely is that God sees His beloved, His Davids, as wonderful. Because they are His beloved. And if they have a heart for him, despite all their major surface level weakness. It is apparently possible to have a heart for the Lord and yet still fail, in things great and small... And all this has huge meaning for we who are justified in Christ, declared to have His righteousness. David is a worked example of how this looks from God's side. Perhaps this is why in Chronicles we have such a sanitized view of David, omitting mention of his sin with Bathsheba and presenting him so positively- because this is how God saw him. Here are just some of the passages which set David as some gold standard of obedience, spirituality and devotion to Yahweh:
- Abijam: “His heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 15:3).
- Asa: “And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 15:11).

- Amaziah: “And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not like David his father” (2 Kings 14:3).
- Ahaz: “And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done” (2 Kings 16:2).
- Hezekiah: “And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done” (2 Kings 18:3).
- Josiah: “And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (2 Kings 22:2)
- “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father” (1 Kings 3:3). But later: "Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 11:4–6). "And if you will walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days” (1 Kings 3:14). “And as for you, if you will walk before Me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel for ever, as I promised David your father” (1 Kings 9:4,5).
- A similar conditional promise is made to Jeroboam: "If you will hearken to all that I command you, and will walk in My ways, and do what is right in My eyes by keeping My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did, I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David” (1 Kings 11:38). But later God tells Jeroboam: “I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you; and yet you have not been like My servant David, who kept My commandments, and followed Me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in My eyes” (1 Kings 14:8).

1Ki 2:11 The days that David reigned over Israel were forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem-
Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”.

We note there is no mention of any lament over David. Post Bathsheba, he was unpopular- and the many rebellions against his power each gained significant mass support, reflective of the disillusion of the masses with David. He died unloved, manipulated by those closest to him…

1Ki 2:12 Solomon sat on the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was firmly established-

The language continues to allude to that of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7. But the fulfilment of those promises was conditional; so we are being given here the impression which was externally given, and how Solomon himself perceived things. For Solomon and his kingdom were not the ultimate fulfilment of those promises. But God did establish his kingdom, and potentially enabled him to be that Messiah figure. And so his kingdom appears to be a type of that of the Lord Jesus. But in reality I would rather express it as saying that he was given the potential to have the Messianic kingdom, but only achieved a dim image of it.

1Ki 2:13 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. She said, Do you come peaceably? He said, Peaceably-

She feared for her life, using the same term as in 1 Sam. 16:4. We wonder why Adonijah would ask Bathsheba if he could marry Abishag. The fact he goes to her is a tacit reflection of the power Bathsheba had. She was a king maker. I suggested on 1 Kings 1 that she set up the situation between David and Abishag in order to prove David's impotence and thus disqualify him from actively reigning; instead pushing him thereby to make her son king. She presents as a powerful manipulator. And this influences our reading of her in the account of her adultery with David, where I suggested she was far from an innocent victim of power rape.

1Ki 2:14 He said moreover, I have something to tell you. She said, Say on-

He had come not only to ask for the hand of Abishag in marriage, but also to tell her something (:15). We can understand that Solomon therefore interpreted Adonijah's actions as a desire to usurp him.

1Ki 2:15 He said, You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign. However the kingdom is turned around, and has become my brother's; for it was his from Yahweh-

This is a typical mixture of truth and untruth. Indeed the kingdom was Solomon's "from Yahweh" in that David had made that decision and sworn by Yahweh. It is however not so true that "all Israel" wanted him to be king, for when Solomon was pronounced king, there was ecstatic rejoicing amongst the people. And "the kingdom was mine" only in that he was the eldest surviving son of David; but being the eldest son didn't at all mean that the throne was passed on to him, because kings typically chose one of their sons to reign rather than the throne passing automatically to the eldest son. And he quite overlooks the promises to David, which make being the true son of David conditional

upon obedience to Yahweh. Adonijah is presumably quoting David's words "It was [Solomon's] from Yahweh", but I have elsewhere suggested that God didn't say this- this was merely David's claim. Adonijah clearly took it that way, for otherwise he wouldn't have tried to be king.

1Ki 2:16 Now I ask one petition of you. Don't deny me. She said to him, Say on-
This again is manipulative. Perhaps "Say on" was too close to agreeing to grant a petition she had not yet heard; for perhaps from pride she asks Solomon to grant the petition, even though it was highly dubious.

1Ki 2:17 He said, Please speak to Solomon the king (for he will not tell you 'no'), that he give me Abishag the Shunammite as wife-
Again Adonijah is playing with words and logic, arguing that Solomon cannot say no to his mother, and she cannot say no to him, Adonijah. Why did Adonijah want to marry Abishag? He surely knew it looked like a positioning of himself to unseat Solomon, which he had vowed not to do. The only obvious reason was sexual infatuation. Thus he followed his father's failure and lost his life for it. Possibly Bathsheba runs with his request because she foresees how her son Solomon would respond, and thus get rid of another possible competitor against her son.

1Ki 2:18 Bathsheba said, Alright. I will speak for you to the king-
Either she was naive, or she felt bound to ask because of her unwise response to him in :16. But I will later suggest she agrees to ask Solomon because she foresees Solomon's reaction, and wants to see the death of a potential rival to her son.

1Ki 2:19 Bathsheba therefore went to king Solomon, to speak to him for Adonijah. The king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself to her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a throne to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand-
We sense here and in 1 Kings 1 the deep sense of respect for David and Bathsheba. Solomon speaks so highly of his mother in Proverbs, apparently modelling the "virtuous woman" of Prov. 31 upon her. To sit on the right hand means to be second in command of power, so we can assume Bathsheba was a powerful political individual as David's favourite surviving wife and mother of the son he had chosen as king.

1Ki 2:20 Then she said, I ask one small petition of you; don't deny me. The king said to her, Ask on, my mother; for I will not deny you-
He repeats the same error she had made in :16, agreeing to a petition before knowing what it was. This seems a theme the Bible likes to raise, for we think of king Darius with

Daniel, and Herod and the daughter of Herodias. She considers it a "small petition", but it was a very large petition because of its major political ramifications, which Solomon immediately perceived. We wonder therefore whether she was being simply naive rather than feeling railroaded because of her response in :16.

Bathsheba here comes over as manipulative. She makes a request with huge political implications, but passes it off to her son as 'just a small thing'. We wonder whether Abishag was under Bathsheba's control and manipulation. There is ample evidence from surrounding nations that the queen mother controlled the king's harem and it is in my view quite possible that Bathsheba was doing this with Abishag. I suggested on 2 Sam. 11 that Bathsheba may well have been far from an innocent victim in her affair with David. There likely was an element of manipulation in her, and this comes out clearly in her attitude to Abishag and getting her son Solomon declared the next king. Again we get the impression of an impotent David, unloved and surrounded on his death bed by people who were using and manipulating him, developing their own agendas regarding what would happen after his death. That loneliness at the end was surely to propel him towards final trust in God and His promises to David. And lonely final years and emotionally hard deaths are used by the Father to teach men the same lesson to this day.

1Ki 2:21 She said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah your brother as wife-

Perhaps she thought that Adonijah's only motive was his desire to marry a beauty queen. But as suggested on 1 Kings 1:1, Abishag was more than a carer for a man in a geriatric ward. She had had intimate sexual contact with David, although he had not succeeded in achieving intercourse with her. He was therefore to be considered as at least one of his concubines, and whoever married her was thereby strengthening their connection with David's throne. The Hebrew is "Abishag... shall be given to Adonijah"; this and her description of this as a "small" favour (:20) again reveal Bathsheba as manipulative. Quite possibly Bathsheba is doing all this with some irony. She foresees her son's reaction and is in fact setting up Adonijah to be slain. Possibly she actually creates the whole story. It was after all in her interests to have the rightful claimant to the throne murdered, and her son Solomon thereby more firmly established as king.

1Ki 2:22 King Solomon answered his mother, Why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom also; for he is my elder brother; even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah-

Solomon may well have been correct. But there is also the possibility that he wildly extrapolated from the fact Adonijah wanted to marry thus beautiful woman, and refused to give him credit for accepting that Solomon rather than himself was Yahweh's choice for the throne (:15). And from that, Solomon creates a conspiracy theory about Joab and

Abiathar. He had threatened Adonijah that he had as it were a suspended death sentence which would be triggered if he committed any more "wickedness" (1 Kings 1:52). Adonijah's motives are left intentionally unclear in the record, to provoke our reflection. Whatever, it seems to me that Solomon was eager to perceive Adonijah as having broken the conditions of 1 Kings 1:52 so that he could kill him.

We may well ask: "Why does Solomon first promise to grant his mother's request, then attack her for making it, then switch his wrath to Adonijah?". Perhaps it all contributes to the overall impression of fickleness and people acting without principle. And also there is a theme here of people's behaviour being on one hand shrewd and on the other most unwise. Why did Bathsheba agree to Adonijah's request? Why did Adonijah even think of so quickly trying to position himself as Solomon's rival, when he has just been spared from death by Solomon and has sworn loyalty to him? This is all psychologically credible. We are being given the impression of a court family plagued by weakness, instability and unwisdom.

1Ki 2:23 Then king Solomon vowed by Yahweh saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah has not spoken this word against his own life-
If Adonijah realized how Solomon would react, he surely wouldn't have gone ahead as he did in trying to marry Abishag. And as noted on :14-17, his reasoning was less than honest and deceitful, but again, we could put this down to his simple desire to marry the beautiful Abishag. It seems a rather strict interpretation of 1 Kings 1:52 to claim that the request for Abishag was "wickedness". We note that Solomon is going totally on the words of Bathsheba reporting what she says Adonijah said. He makes no effort to hear Adonijah's side of the story, and his murder of Adonijah for this reported request seems totally wrong. Likewise Benaiah was wrong for operationalizing it. Solomon has come out of nowhere in 1 Kings 1, propelled to the throne by Bathsheba, and then his father David falling for that and making all kinds of false claims in 1 Chron. 22-29 about how God had in fact long ago named Solomon as next king. Solomon is set up as a man who was propelled to power in a putsch orchestrated by his mother, taking the throne from Adonijah. And who begins his reign with very poor, unspiritual behaviour. This sets the path; for after the account of his glory and apparent wisdom, we will then learn that he has no heart for God and turns away to idols, in one of the greatest cases of spiritual failure in the pages of Scripture.

1Ki 2:24 Now therefore as Yahweh lives, who has established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who has made me a house, as He promised, surely Adonijah shall be put to death this day-
David's belief that Ps. 72 applied totally to Solomon would have encouraged him Solomon to feel that the fact that he was the great Son of David and had had the

promises made to him justified all his actions. This is an example. For as discussed on :22,23, his desire to murder Adonijah was not on any very Biblical basis from the law of Moses. The seed to be eternally established upon David's throne was one to be born after David slept with his fathers, and would be a Divinely begotten son. Solomon fulfilled neither of these requirements.

"Established" is the word used in the promises of the eternal establishment of David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12,13,16 etc.), and Solomon wrongly assumed that the conditional nature of the promises concerning the seed were just irrelevant to him as he had wisdom. Therefore he uses the word of how his kingdom has been "established" (1 Kings 2:24 s.w.). Solomon's contenders for the throne were all stopped by God, they tried to prepare or establish themselves but it never worked out (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5); and so surely Solomon has the idea in mind that he has been established as the promised Messianic seed of David with an eternally "established" throne and kingdom. This leads him to the conclusion that the outcome of wisdom and folly is in this life, and he has no perspective of a final day of judgment and eternal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. This is why the simplistic dichotomies he presents in Proverbs between the blessed and wise, and the cursed and foolish, are not always true to observed experiences in this life. For it is the future Kingdom which puts them in ultimate perspective.

He felt that God “has made me an house, as he promised” to David. He felt that he was the fulfillment of the promises, and therefore the Kingdom had come; he failed to be awed by the greatness of the Christ to come, and abstracted and reduced His coming Kingdom into an effective nothingness. By doing so, he totally overlooked the highly conditional nature of the promises, and forgot his own proneness to failure, and the weakness of his nature. He failed to meditate upon the promises beyond what they seemed to offer him in the here and now; and the result was that he felt they were *totally* fulfilled in him (1 Kings 8:20,24).

1Ki 2:25 King Solomon sent by Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell on him, so that he died-
Benaiah must now have been an old man, so perhaps he arranged the murder through a proxy.

1Ki 2:26 To Abiathar the priest the king said, Go to Anathoth, to your own fields; for you are worthy of death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you carried the ark of the Lord Yahweh before David my father, and because you were afflicted in all in which my father was afflicted-
One act of kindness to David during Absalom's rebellion, i.e. carrying the ark of Yahweh at that time, is seen as rationale for sparing Abiathar. But Joab had saved David from

Absalom in battle... and that didn't figure at all in Solomon's logic. As discussed on :22,23, there was no specific evidence that Abiathar had done anything worthy of death, nor that he was actually involved in any plot to establish Adonijah as king again. Perhaps it was as simple as Adonijah being in love with a beautiful woman and wanting to marry her. And Adonijah is being dogmatically condemned on the basis of conspiracy theory alone. We note that Abiathar carried the ark at the time of Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. 15:24); but it is hard to prove that he was from the line of Levites who were allowed to do this. David had been taught through the death of Uzzah that the ark must be carried only according to the specific Mosaic legislation. But he apparently was so close to the spirit of the law that he realized even after that, that the letter of that law could be broken.

1Ki 2:27 So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest to Yahweh, that he might fulfil the word of Yahweh, which He spoke concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh-
But we get the impression God didn't want that prophecy to have to come true. All Abiathar's family had been slain by Saul and Doeg for their loyalty to David. But Abiathar had been preserved, presumably because God hoped that somehow He would not have to fulfil that prophecy of destruction. For He hopes against hope, in the gap between the statement of condemnation and fulfilling it, for human repentance and persuasion of Him to change His mind. But Solomon knew none of that, and just wanted Abiathar destroyed because he was potentially disloyal to him. We may well enquire what right Solomon had to thrust out Abiathar from the priesthood; surely only God could ultimately do that. Perhaps Solomon quoted God's words about the house of Eli. But his murder of Abiathar was inappropriate; for on that logic, David should have murdered Abiathar long ago just for who he was, a descendant of Eli. Solomon's spirituality was highly flawed and biased towards his own self justification, right from the beginning of his reign.

However we have to face a hard truth here. This claim is an intentional untruth. Abiathar was a descendant of the priests of Nob, not Eli. Just as David twists God's words to him in 2 Sam. 7, so he does here, falsely using scripture, as it were, to justify his own devious end. He does the same twisting of words as noted on :8.

1Ki 2:28 The news came to Joab; for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he didn't turn after Absalom. Joab fled to the tabernacle of Yahweh, and caught hold on the horns of the altar-
This was a sad end for Joab, who was by now elderly. It seems David had a personality clash with Joab, frustrated at his refusal to understand grace and complaining that Joab was "too hard" for him. But it ended up with David's son Solomon ordering Joab to be slain, despite all his loyalty, and I would consider this as the supreme example of intolerance of intolerance, showing a lack of grace to someone because they had not

understood grace. David in the later part of his life had always refused to carry out legitimate death sentences, e.g. as demanded by the behaviour of Amnon and Absalom. But Solomon lacked that grace, because he failed to perceive his own sins and need for grace himself.

1Ki 2:29 It was told king Solomon, Joab has fled to the tabernacle of Yahweh, and behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada saying, Go, fall on him-

It seems that Solomon didn't really reflect on who his father really was. He had an ideal image of him, choosing to overlook his failures with women. David committed the sin of presumption with Bathsheba, and yet Solomon judges Joab for committing presumptuous sin without mercy (1 Kings 2:29 cp. Ex. 21:14). LXX has Joab adding: "Because I am afraid of you I have fled to the Lord". Like Adonijah, he is using Ex. 21:12-14: "One who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death, but not if it is unintentional, but God allows it to happen: then I will appoint you a place where he shall flee. If a man schemes and comes presumptuously on his neighbour to kill him, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die". This offered salvation at the altar for those falsely accused of murder. I suggested that Adonijah was not wrong to assume he as the remaining firstborn would be the next king. He fled to the altar because he felt Nathan and Bathsheba had wrongly accused him of intending to murder Solomon and Bathsheba. Joab likewise flees to the altar because he too is persuaded that he has killed nobody in order for Solomon to seek to kill him. Neither Adonijah nor Joab would have fled to the horns of the altar unless they believed they were innocent and would thereby be saved. They would have run away far from Solomon. Instead they run to the horns of the altar and remain there, a sitting target for Solomon. I suggest they both only did this because they were convinced of their innocence of murder, and that therefore Bathsheba's claim to David that Adonijah was likely to murder herself and Solomon was just manipulative- she wanted her son Solomon to be king, not Adonijah. It all presents a sad picture of deceit and low moral fibre in all concerned. Solomon murders Joab on the basis that he can't legitimately take refuge at the altar because he has committed other murders. But so had David! And Solomon is willing to desecrate the altar with Joab's blood, a sign he has scant regard for Yahweh's holiness; for Ex. 21 says that the insincere seeker of asylum at the altar must be removed from the altar and only then slain: "thou shalt take him from my altar to put him to death" (Ex. 21:14 LXX). Solomon murders Joab, the army commander, for having murdered two previous army commanders. The hypocrisy is evident, and doesn't bode well for Solomon's long term spiritual path. He of course has been set up in this hypocrisy by David.

1Ki 2:30 Benaiah came to the tabernacle of Yahweh and said to him, Thus says the king, 'Come forth!'. He said, No; but I will die here. Benaiah brought the king word again

saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me-
As discussed on 1 Kings 1, to grab hold of the horns of the altar was done by those under unfair persecution for blood guilt. Joab was utterly persuaded of his innocence and maybe that is why he insisted on dying there by the altar. Perhaps Joab said this to still try to avoid death, reasoning that surely Solomon would have more respect for the tabernacle than to order him to be slain on the altar. Or perhaps Joab's spiritual side was eager to die as a sacrifice upon God's altar. Or maybe he wanted to make Solomon unpopular with the people by ordering him slain on the altar. The narrative is purposefully open ended to provoke our reflections.

1Ki 2:31 The king said to him, Do as he has said, and fall on him, and bury him; that you may take away the blood which Joab shed without cause, from me and from my father's house-
Solomon's reasoning was wrong in so many ways. To murder someone on the horns of the altar showed a lack of respect for Yahweh's holiness. Joab could easily have been removed and executed elsewhere. The blood shed by Joab "without cause" was no reason for his death at this stage; David himself had shed much blood without good cause. The slaying of Shimei and Joab was in fact likewise "without cause". And Joab's guilt did not pass to David and Solomon. And murdering Joab did not somehow cleanse Solomon from some imagined guilt by association with Joab. Solomon wanted Joab dead because his father had told him to eliminate him. And so he was using any quasi spiritual reasoning which came into his head to justify it.

David's graceless attitude to bloodguilt was continued by Solomon, who uses the argument to justify slaying Joab in order to cleanse David's descendants from blood guilt for the murders Joab had committed (1 Kings 2:31-33). Solomon's argument here is weak; because as noted on 2 Sam. 21:1, David had been saved from his own blood guilt by grace, and he ought to have reflected that in turning down the request of the Gibeonites. But Solomon just repeats his father's political usage of blood guilt expiation, and wrongly reasons that he has to slay Joab lest David's family be charged with blood guilt seeing that Joab was David's cousin, of the same blood family.

1Ki 2:32 Yahweh will return his blood on his own head, because he fell on two men more righteous and better than he, and killed them with the sword, and my father David didn't know it: Abner the son of Ner, captain of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the army of Judah-
This may have been true on one level. But David had slain men like Uriah who were more righteous and better than himself. And been forgiven by grace. The reasons given by Solomon are in fact a condemnation of his father rather than a justification of him. We note already an effective distinction between Israel and Judah; the division which was to come was only bringing into the open what had historically been developing for

generations. God confirms men in the divisions they themselves wish to happen, and binds together those who wish to unify. David [in my view, falsely] claimed Yahweh precluded him from building the temple because he had shed much blood, and yet in the next breath he orders the death of Joab for shedding the blood of just two men. David shows here a total lack of remorse for the deaths of Uriah and the other soldiers who died in an attempt to cover that up. He goes to his graveplanks impenitent. Despite an earlier peak of penitence when confronted for his sin. And yet will still be saved by grace alone.

1Ki 2:33 So shall their blood return on the head of Joab, and on the head of his seed forever. But to David, and to his seed, and to his house, and to his throne, there shall be peace forever from Yahweh-
The eternal peace upon David's throne would be achieved only through God's only begotten son bringing eternal peace with God. Solomon here states dogmatically that he is the eternally blessed seed of David, and his house and throne are to be blessed with eternal peace with God. But those promises were conditional upon his obedience, and he ignored those conditions. He was led into this by the assumptions and parental obsessions of his father, but all the same, it was this which led him to make shipwreck of his faith. This assumption that the Davidic promises were fulfilled in him led him to a lack of self examination and no humility arising from a sense of the eternal future he might miss if he turned away. See on :45.

Solomon may be alluding to how "it will go well with you" if the shedder of innocent blood is condemned to death (Dt. 19:13). But he fails to realize that David was in exactly that situation, and had been saved by Divine grace alone. And he ought to have reflected that grace, even if David didn't.

1Ki 2:34 Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and fell on him, and killed him; and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness-
The 'going up' would have been by the steps which led up to the altar; unless the reference is to 'going up' to the mount Zion where the temple was.

1Ki 2:35 The king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his place over the army; and the king put Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar-
Benaiah surely did the wrong thing by slaying Joab, without evidence for his wrongdoing, by the altar. Yet he is rewarded for his conscienceless behaviour by political promotion. All this doesn't sound the stuff of God's Kingdom.

1Ki 2:36 The king sent and called for Shimei and said to him, Build yourself a house in

Jerusalem, and dwell there, and don't go out anywhere from there-
The intention of making him move to Jerusalem from Bahurim (1 Kings 2:8) was surely in order to set him up to be murdered. Solomon reveals a very calculating and callous side, typical of a man who (unlike David) had never been personally spiritually desperate, and had not known grace.

1Ki 2:37 For on the day you go out, and pass over the brook Kidron, know for certain that you shall surely die: your blood shall be on your own head-
The limit of the Kidron was to ensure Shimei didn't return to Benjamite territory in order to stir up a Saulide rebellion against Solomon. Shimei didn't cross the Kidron when he went to Gath. Indeed, Shimei's journey there would've been in the steps of David who fled there from Saul and was saved there only by grace. But Solomon doesn't want to reflect that grace and jumps at the chance to slay Shimei for leaving home. There is no grace in Solomon, only fear and narcissism. Nor is there any perception in him of the grace shown to his father David.

Solomon may well have been present that terrible night when David and his family passed over the brook Kidron, and then encountered Shimei's cursing. And he therefore built this memory in to his punishment of Shimei. The Kidron was the river he would have had to cross were he to return to his home town of Bahurim, from whence he had been summoned to live in Jerusalem (1 Kings 2:8). See on :40. We sense Solomon's playing of God by the manner in which he alludes to the curse in Eden, that "in the day" the brook was crossed, "you shall surely die"; see on :44.

1Ki 2:38 Shimei said to the king, The saying is good. As my lord the king has said, so will your servant do. Shimei lived in Jerusalem many days-
The description of the length of time periods in the Bible is relative; "many days" is three years (:39).

1Ki 2:39 It happened at the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away to Achish, son of Maacah, king of Gath. They told Shimei saying, Behold, your servants are in Gath-
These slaves may have been Philistines who ran back home. David had twice fled to Achish king of Gath (1 Sam. 21:10; 27:2). But Solomon is unmoved by these associations with his father's days of desperation and a life preserved by Divine grace.

1Ki 2:40 Shimei arose, saddled his donkey, and went to Gath to Achish, to seek his servants; and Shimei went, and brought his servants from Gath-
The road to Gath would not have involved crossing the Kidron; it was in the opposite

direction. For Solomon to insist that Shimei had broken the spirit of his commandment about not crossing the Kidron was therefore very legalistic, and not a very solid basis upon which to murder a man whom David had assured of forgiveness.

1Ki 2:41 It was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and had come again-
Shimei surely did this assuming that he was not liable for the death penalty because he had not crossed the Kidron (:37), as Gath was in the opposite direction; and he had kept the spirit of the agreement in that he had returned. Solomon comes over as very much lacking in integrity in now killing him.

1Ki 2:42 The king sent and called for Shimei, and said to him, Didn't I adjure you by Yahweh and warn you, saying, 'Know for certain, that on the day you go out, and walk abroad any where, you shall surely die?'. You said to me, 'The saying that I have heard is good'-
There is no reference in the narrative to any such oath by Yahweh. This is not to say no such reference to Yahweh was made, but it also rather supports the impression we have of Solomon's lack of integrity and willingness to tell untruths; see on :40.

1Ki 2:43 Why then have you not kept the oath of Yahweh, and the commandment that I have instructed you with?-
Solomon is condemned for not keeping the covenant / oath of Yahweh and His commands (s.w. 1 Kings 11:10,11, which implies he was guilty of not doing so from his youth: "he didn't keep that which Yahweh commanded. Therefore Yahweh said to Solomon... you have not kept my covenant and my statutes...). His hypocrisy and lack of grace is so marked.

1Ki 2:44 The king said moreover to Shimei, You know all the wickedness which your heart knows full well, what you did to David my father. Therefore Yahweh shall return your wickedness on your own head-
Again, Solomon is playing God, as we saw him doing on :37. It was not Yahweh who was returning his wickedness upon him, but Solomon doing so. Shimei had apologized for his words of cursing, and David had forgiven him and given him assurances. Solomon's attitude is very wrong, and there was no Mosaic legal justification for the death penalty for cursing a man. And Shimei's stoning of David and calling him a "man of blood" had been justified, in that indeed David was worthy of death by stoning and was indeed a man of blood. To slate this as "wickedness" worthy of the death penalty is very severe judgment. And Solomon is choosing to respect his father's senile words spoken from his deathbed, rather than his father's earlier gracious forgiveness of Shimei.

1Ki 2:45 But king Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before Yahweh forever-
Solomon saw himself as the Messianic Son of David, therefore he felt his kingdom was the Messianic Kingdom; and he here states dogmatically that he is the eternally blessed seed of David. But those promises were conditional upon his obedience, and he ignored those conditions. And in all this, of course, we see our warning. This may explain why he built his own house as a replica of God's house - he felt that in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant his house was God's house. Solomon's attitude to the Kingdom was that it was all here and now, and it was not so much the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of Solomon. In this Solomon may seem far removed from our experience. But with eyes half closed, discerning only the general outline, Solomon is surely in a mind-set analogous to many of us. Solomon was so sure that because of his father's righteousness, therefore God would establish him. "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and he upholdeth his throne by mercy" (Prov. 20:28 RVmg.) says as much- the promises ("mercy and truth" usually refer to God's promises) had been given to David and just because of that, Solomon was sure that *his* throne and kingdom would thereby be upheld.

1Ki 2:46 So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he went out, and fell on him, so that he died. The kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon-
Clearly the kingdom was established in a secular sense, by Solomon's brutal murder of potential contenders for the throne. But this was not the same as the promised eternal establishment of David's kingdom in the hands of his Messianic seed.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 3

1Ki 3:1 Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of Yahweh, and the wall of Jerusalem all around-
The opening account of Solomon's reign is negative about him. We know he will go on to have a vast harem of 1000 women; and in such a harem, the first wife is of huge influence. And that first wife is presented as being none other than a Gentile, and the daughter of Pharaoh, Israel's historical and idolatrous enemy. We note that the temple Solomon built was very similar to Egyptian temples, especially with the emphasis upon gold plating of everything [remembering that the king of Israel was not supposed to love gold, Dt. 17:18]. And his wife's palace was next to it. The first wife in African culture [and Egypt was African] usually chose the husband's subsequent wives- and she chose Gentiles. And Solomon went along with all this. It was a spiritually disastrous relationship. Solomon had a system of forced labour, and had 12 administrative districts [not following the 12 tribes] with 12 officers who each provided the king's food one month / year (1 Kings 4:7-20). All this was exactly how Egypt was organized under Amenhotep III and is surely the influence of having

Pharaoh's daughter for his leading wife. It has been noted that "She is mentioned more than any other wife. She is mentioned more than seven times among his foreign wives (1 Kings 3:1; 9:16,24; 7:8; 11:1; 2 Chron. 8:11; 1 Chron. 4:18). She is the only one that Solomon built a house for (1 Kings 9:24). She is the only one identified with her father, Pharaoh. The rest of the foreign wives are mentioned as Edomites, Ammonites" etc.

Remember that in Ecclesiastes he says that he just had an obsession with all manner of building projects. God's temple was just one of them. Building God's house is therefore mentioned together with all the other building projects.

Solomon's son Rehoboam was the son of Naamah from Ammon (1 Kings 14:31), with LXX adding "the daughter of Ana the son of Nahash". Possibly "Ana" is Hanun- who had been a bitter enemy of David. Solomon's marriage to his daughter may have been from a perverse teenage desire to rebel against his father, or to make peace with Ammon. Possibly the making of affinity with Pharaoh was similar. But it shows Solomon involved with women who were the historical enemies of God's people. Yet Bathsheba his mother, according to the Song of Solomon, crowned him with a crown on the day of his "espousal". Everything militated against Solomon being spiritual; his father projected unreal expectations onto him, requiring him to be the Messiah. And it seems his mother encouraged him in marrying a Gentile. His request for wisdom, when David had told him to murder Joab and Shimei according to "his wisdom", is therefore so pleasing to God. It's as if Solomon wanted to really know what God thought about it all. Yet he slumped back into following mere parental expectation. Solomon's failure with Gentile women therefore began right at the start of his reign. "Made affinity" doesn't have to mean this was because of an alliance, but the phrase can just mean 'became son in law to'. It is the word used in Ezra 9:14 of how such "affinity" with Gentiles provoked God's wrath. Rehoboam's mother was from Ammon, so the Egyptian wife was not his only Gentile woman. However we note that there are no Egyptian gods listed amongst those whom Solomon later worshipped. Perhaps Solomon justified this marriage by a legalistic reading of the verses which condemned marriage with Canaanite women; and Solomon may have argued that Egyptians weren't Canaanites (Ex. 34:16; Dt. 7:3). The fact he only allowed her to live in the city of David for a time could mean that he realized there was something wrong in having a Gentile wife living in David's city. We get the impression that he gingerly committed this sin; but soon became used to it, and went on to marry hundreds of such women. Or the hint could be that after he had built his own house, which took 13 years, he then parted company with her. The Song of Solomon could be about his relationship with this Egyptian woman, and it ends in an unsatisfactory way with the couple splitting up.

1Ki 3:2 At that time the people sacrificed in the high places, because there was no house built for the name of Yahweh-

This surely reflects Solomon's perspective- for God Himself didn't need a built house in which sacrifice could be offered. The temple became such an obsession with Solomon that he came to think that no really acceptable worship could occur outside of the idea which he had so developed in his own mind. It's rather like thinking that one *must* have a physical church building in which to be an ecclesia of the living God- who doesn't dwell in buildings made with hands.

"*Only*" the people sacrificed in high places... and Solomon loved the Lord... *only* he sacrificed... in high places" (1 Kings 3:2,3), highlights the contradiction between Solomon's love for God and his willingness to sacrifice in the "high places"

which God detested - for the Law clearly spelt out that sacrifice could only be offered in the tabernacle, at the place where Yahweh's Name was placed (Dt. 12:5-8; 14:23-25).

1Ki 3:3 Solomon loved Yahweh, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places-

The Divine assessment of Solomon's spirituality makes no reference to his obedience to God's commands; rather "Solomon loved Yahweh (in that he) walked in the statutes of David his father"- rather than God's statutes. This perfectly explains why Solomon blandly disobeyed God's word in the very ways his father David did. Again, there are unpleasant similarities with our own position. Weaknesses which our forefathers and community have accepted without comment for generations are tolerated without a quibble; there are other issues, equally contrary to Divine principles, over which we create great complaint- simply because this is what parentally and communally we have been taught to react against. Yet the Gospel should be making us a new creation, standing independently of tradition and background conditioning. Knowing others who are doing the same should be the basis of our fellowship, rather than just belonging to the same community with the same background.

LXX "And Solomon loved the Lord, so as to walk in the ordinances of David his father". This suggests that Solomon's desire was firstly to walk in the path of his father, and his love of Yahweh was only in order to achieve that. It should have been the other way around, loving his father's way in order to love God. David idolized Solomon and projected unreal spiritual expectations onto him; and Solomon does the same to the image of David. This kind of club of mutual admiration, even between persons now dead, is unhealthy. It is by nature a closed system without God in it.

"Only he sacrificed..." suggests that from the start, Solomon's spirituality was deficient. He followed his father David, but... there was a "but" to that. He also did what God's law forbad, worshipping on the hills, with their association with idol shrines. And we will later learn that it is on the hills / high places around Jerusalem that Solomon will build temples to other gods when he turns away from Yahweh. The point is being made that right from the start, he had begun the slide to that point. This is the repeated style of the record- to describe Solomon's external greatness with little footnotes, as it were, bringing out his fundamental spiritual weakness. Sometimes, as here, this is done explicitly; other times, implicitly. Thus the description of so much gold and silver being amassed and used by Solomon is an implicit contrast with Dt. 17:17, which commands the king of Israel not to hoard gold and silver. Solomon's own wisdom contrasted gold against wisdom (Prov. 3:14; 8:10,19; 16:16). But he sought to have both. Likewise Dt. 17 forbad the king of Israel to multiply horses and wives, but Solomon is recorded as amassing both. There is no explicit comment on this, but we are supposed to read the implicit contrast with the Dt. 17 passage. And so when we come to the condemnation of Solomon for his apostasy in 1 Kings 11, this is not in fact out of step with the overall presentation of Solomon throughout 1 Kings.

1Ki 3:4 The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place.
Zadok cared for the tabernacle at Gibeon, which was "the great high place" (1 Chron. 16:39; 1 Kings 3:4), and so it is another example of correlation within the inspired records that he had access to that horn and the oil with which to anoint Solomon (1 Kings 1:39). Solomon had replaced Abiathar with Zadok as chief priest, so perhaps

his worship to Gibeon rather than Jerusalem [where Abiathar had officiated] was a nod towards Zadok.

Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar-

This was clearly out of step with what David had earlier been taught after his sin with Bathsheba; that God did not want thousands of sacrifices, but rather broken, contrite hearts (Ps. 40:6-8). And Solomon repeats David's failure in this, by again offering such huge numbers of sacrifices. Which, like the temple, God didn't want. Solomon failed to understand that his parents, especially his father, had been saved by grace rather than sacrifice. He had not taken to hear his father's Psalm 51.

1Ki 3:5 In Gibeon Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, Ask what I shall give you-

This is the first and one of the few times that God has ever asked man what he wants. Godly men usually asked or enquired of God on their initiative, as David did (s.w. 1 Sam. 22:10; 23:4; 2 Sam. 5:19). But Solomon had apparently merely offered ritual sacrifices, and had not engaged with God in personal relationship. Now he is encouraged to do so.

I have argued that Ecclesiastes is Solomon's self reflection, a kind of autobiography. It is also a rejection and renunciation of his faith, because he wrote it at the end of his life, when his heart had been turned aside from God (1 Kings 11:3). I suggest it is this dream which is the reference of Ecc. 5:3: "For as a dream comes with a multitude of cares, so a fool's speech with a multitude of words". If we enquire what reference a "dream" may have to Solomon's historical life, we naturally think of this dream at the start of his life when he was offered whatever he wanted, and he chose wisdom. Several times in Ecclesiastes he appears to regret that choice, as he considers there to be no ultimate advantage to wisdom or going God's way because death ends it all, and God, Solomon thinks, cannot resurrect the dead to judgment (Ecc. 3:22). And so in Ecc. 5:3 Solomon seems to be saying that that dream was simply self induced, an outcome of his "multitude of cares", and the "multitude of words" of wisdom he had written in response to it was but "a fool's speech". Like many who have had the direct involvement of God in their lives in youth, he came to rationalize it as nothing at all Divine, considering his dream had just been some Freudian reflection of his own internal "cares". And this kind of rationalizing of the Divine over time is absolutely true to observed experience in those who turn away from God.

1Ki 3:6 Solomon said, You have shown to Your servant David my father great grace, according as he walked before You in truth, righteousness and in uprightness of heart with You. You have kept for him this great grace, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day-

Thus the eternity of God's truth is paralleled with the eternity of His righteousness (as in Ps. 119:142,160). David walked / lived "in truth and righteousness" (s.w. 1 Kings 3:6; Ps. 15:2), because this was how God is. The Messianic seed of David was to have this characteristic, ruling on David's throne in truth and righteousness (s.w. Is. 16:5).

But Solomon has it all the wrong way around in saying that Yahweh had showed grace to David because he had walked before Yahweh in truth. Solomon totally misunderstood grace. It is a pure gift from God, and not at all granted in response to our righteous walk. David himself had seen Solomon's kingship as God's greatest grace to him (1 Kings 1:48). Sadly, both David and Solomon failed to perceive that God's forgiveness of Solomon's parents for their sin was God's greatest mercy to

them. Instead the liked to think that Solomon's kingship was the greatest mercy shown to David.

These words are doubtless an allusion to the mercy God showed David in his relationship with Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. But Solomon makes no mention of David's great faith in God's grace, and his subsequent appreciation that animal sacrifices were meaningless. These were David's real strong points, but Solomon is obsessed with David's public life of obedience ("according as he *walked*").
He evidently saw his father as the epitome of spiritual good, faultless in God's sight. "Mercy" and "truth" both occur in 1 Kings 3:6, and they often refer to the promises. Solomon seems to have seen the promises to David as a reward for David's good life, rather than an expression of God's
unwarranted grace. David's reaction was "Who am I...?" to
receive such an honour. Solomon's feeling was that David deserved them because of his righteousness. So here is a feature of many parent :
child relationships in the Lord. The children love and respect their parents spiritually, but often for the wrong reasons; they actually misunderstand their forefathers' spirituality. This is why their understanding of parental and community expectation is often wrong in the first place.

1Ki 3:7 Now, Yahweh my God-
See on :10.

You have made Your servant king instead of David my father. I am but a little child. I don't know how to go out or come in-
Solomon was not that young. David had exaggerated Solomon's youth when he called him "young and tender" just before his death (1 Chron. 22:5; 29:1). Solomon views himself as his father had done. And he does the same in his false view of himself as the promised Messianic seed of 2 Sam. 7. David's perceptions of his son set that son up for spiritual failure. The only way for Solomon to break out of this would have been for him to see himself as himself, and as God saw him. But he took the easier and more natural path, of living out his father's expectation of him. And it was to his own destruction. Solomon's claim to be "but a little child" needing help is in sharp contrast to the ruthless, murdering, immoral Solomon we have just read of in 1 Kings 2. Yet despite his false humility, God seizes upon the positive- in that Solomon asks for wisdom. And James likewise alludes to this in urging us all to ask for wisdom.

David considered Solomon a "wise man" (1 Kings 2:6,9). By asking for wisdom, Solomon was hereby recognizing that he did not in fact have the wisdom which his father claimed he had. This baby step movement to reject paternal expectation of him was strongly and enthusiastically welcomed by God.

To 'go out and come in' means 'to lead'. It is used of David at the start of his career (1 Sam. 18:13,16); and again we have the impression that David is asking for this ability in order to mimic his father, whose expectations he clearly wanted to live out. But when he matured beyond that stage of life, Solomon was revealed as personally empty in spiritual terms.

This is alluded to in Mt. 18:3,4; become a child so you can rule the Kingdom; Christ was the greatest child as he will be the greatest ruler. This sets Solomon up as our example in this aspect. Notice how Sarah's unspiritual comments "cast out the bondwoman…" and "my Lord being old…"are interpreted positively in the NT.

Ecclesiastes is in many ways Solomon's self-examination; and it was accurate. He indicates that the temple had actually made him stumble, and that his numerous

sacrifices had been the sacrifices of a fool, rather than the wise man he had appeared to be (Ecc. 5:1); and surely he was casting a sideways glance at himself when he spoke of the wise child (cp. Solomon initially, 1 Kings 3:7) being greater than the old and foolish king who would no longer be admonished (Ecc. 4:13; even though Solomon had advisers, 1 Kings 12:6). Yet he chose to do absolutely nothing about this; once again, his accurate spiritual knowledge had no real practical influence upon him.

So very often does Solomon speak of "David my father", and that God had made him king "instead of David my father" (e.g. 1 Kings 3:7). Thus he asks Hiram to deal with him just as he had done with David his father (1 Kings 5:2-7; and cp. 1 Kings 5:1 with 2 Sam. 5:11). The number of times these phrases occur in the records is so large that we simply have to recognize that God is pointing something out to us about the relationship between Solomon and David (1 Kings 2:24,26,32,44; 3:6,7,14; 5:3,5; 6:12; 8:15,17,18,20,24,25,26; 9:4; 11:33; 2 Chron. 1:8,9; 2:3,7,14; 6:4,7,8,10,15,16; 7:17). Solomon was raised a believer, and he lived out parental expectation; but in later life, he himself was revealed as having no real faith at all, and he turned away from Yahweh to idolatry. So often in his prayers to God does Solomon make reference to David; for example: "Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit upon his throne" (1 Kings 3:6).

1Ki 3:8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people, that can't be numbered nor counted for multitude-

Solomon assumes that the promises to Abraham of an innumerable seed had been fulfilled in his kingdom, just as he assumes the promises to David of the seed were fulfilled in him. He has no perspective of the future Kingdom of God, nor does he factor in the conditional nature of those promises.

And so Solomon 'had the truth', he knew so deeply the true principles of Yahweh worship and the promises which formed the basis of the covenant. But like us, he scarcely considered the enormity of the gap between the theory he knew and the practice of it in his own heart and living. We too have a tendency to build up masses of Biblical and spiritual knowledge, and to let the mere acquisition of it stop us from practicing it. He flouted the explicit commandments not to get horses from Egypt, not to marry Gentile women, and not to multiply silver and gold (Dt. 17:17,18 cp. 1 Kings 10:21-29). At the end of his days, he recognized that although he had loved the theory of wisdom, the image of a spiritual life, the wisdom of God had never really impacted his soul: "I said, I will be wise (referring back to his request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3); but it was far from me" (Ecc. 7:23). His request for wisdom had only been so that he could do the job of leading Israel, living out the parental expectation of his father, whom he admits in Proverbs 4 had taught him to ask for wisdom. In Prov. 19:12 he speaks as if his own wisdom was like the dew coming down- as if he felt that the mere possession of wisdom made him the Messiah figure which his father had so hoped for him to be in Ps. 72:6). And he says as much in Prov. 29:3: "Whoso loveth wisdom [exactly what Solomon was commended for doing] rejoiceth his father". He saw his wisdom and knowledge as some sort of a reward in themselves: "the prudent are crowned with knowledge" (Prov. 14:18). This is of course true in a sense, as all the Proverbs are. But Solomon surely had the idea that he, who was so renowned for his knowledge, was somehow

thereby rewarded by having it. This assumption by Solomon was likely behind each of the many references he makes to the value of wisdom and the blessedness of the man who has it. It is rather like feeling that 'we have the truth' because somehow our correct understanding of doctrines is a reward for our righteousness, and mere possession of doctrinal truth means that we are acceptable to God.

1Ki 3:9 Give Your servant therefore an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this Your great people?-
I suggest on Ps. 119:169 that David asked for the word of promise that he would become king to be fulfilled; and in that context he asked for "wisdom / understanding" in how to rule Israel. And this was likewise the prayer of Solomon when he became king; but his motives were less than pure because he was consciously seeking to imitate his father in this request.

Solomon in Proverbs presents wisdom as of great personal benefit, indeed it is "for yourself"; and folly likewise is to your loss. But this presents a somewhat selfish view of wisdom. Solomon had been granted wisdom not for himself, but because he wanted to know how best to rule God's great people. But once he has the wisdom, he becomes exalted by it, and concludes that wisdom is essentially for the personal benefit of those who have it, "you are wise for yourself" (Prov. 9:12). Whatever truths are revealed to us are so that we might use them to the glory of God with others, and not to merely keep them for our own personal benefit.

Solomon's desire to know good and evil is one of several connections back to Adam and Eve in Eden. For he too was given 'dominion' over all in God's land / *eretz*. God's response to giving Solomon this knowledge is to tell him that 'length of days' is still conditional. Just as the tree of life was not available to Adam and Eve after they had eaten the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Again and again, we are invited to see Solomon at his finest, in all his glory, always presented as having something hollow and false to him. It is a challenge to self examination in every man.

Solomon had been set up for failure by his father. David had commanded him to show "wisdom" in slaying Shimei and Joab (1 Kings 2:5,9). This was not true wisdom, and those murders were unnecessary and reflected David's total lack of appreciation of grace. The fact Solomon asks God for *His* wisdom is therefore commendable, and that is why God was so thrilled with this request. It was an attempt to break out of having been set up for failure by the wrong expectations of his parents.

1Ki 3:10 The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing-
David had wrongly told Solomon to 'do according to his wisdom' and slay Shimei and Joab. I have discussed previously how wrong this was, and how wrong Solomon was in the way he did it. Likewise in the way he treated his brother Adonijah. His request for wisdom, implying he didn't then have it, was therefore so pleasing to God. Despite having been set up for spiritual failure by his father, Solomon was genuinely asking for wisdom in order to know how best to lead God's people. God comments that Solomon had "asked for yourself understanding to discern justice". "For yourself" is the point. He was wanting to individuate from the expectations of his father and be independent before God. But he fell away from this, continued living out his father's expectations, and then was revealed for having no personal faith.

See on :11. We may wonder why *adonai* is here used for "Lord", and *elohim* in :11, rather than Yahweh. It could well be that this reflects the fact that Solomon was not really in covenant relationship with Yahweh, from His viewpoint. Although

Solomon certainly speaks of "Yahweh my God" in :7, it could be that this was mere language he had picked up from David. For his subsequent life shows him to have been a man who acted as if he were outside of covenant relationship with Yahweh. But that is not to say that his choice was not deeply pleasing to Yahweh, and He wanted to work further with Solomon to bring him to Himself.

1Ki 3:11 God said to him, Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked for yourself long life, neither have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice-
God may be alluding to how David had asked long life and been given it (Ps. 21:8). This allusion was seeking to show Solomon that he was not to merely live out the image of his father David, but to think independently and forge his own relationship with God. Likewise Solomon had not taken literally the invitation of Ps. 2:8 to Messiah to "ask of Me (s.w. :5) and I will give you the Gentiles". Instead he had asked for wisdom.

1Ki 3:12 therefore I have done according to your word. Behold, I have already given you a wise and an understanding heart; so that there has been none like you before you, neither after you shall any arise like you-
Solomon asked God for a wise heart- but he was told that God had already given him this. The process of educating Solomon in wisdom would have started long before; but it was released, as it were, by Solomon's specific prayer. We likewise are to ask in faith believing that we already have the things we ask for. And Solomon is every man: "If any of you lack wisdom [which we all do], let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally... and it shall be given him" (James 1:5, clearly alluding to Solomon).

1Ki 3:13 I have also given you that which you have not asked-
We are not merely reading history here. God's word is living and engages with us in all generations. We too are given exceeding abundantly above all we ask (Eph. 3:20 alludes here)- if we put first the wisdom of achieving God's glory .

Both riches and honour, so that there shall not be any among the kings like you, all your days-
"Riches" is s.w. Prov. 14:24 "The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly".
It was Solomon who was the king and wore the ultimate crown in his society. And he implies that his fantastic riches were a result of his wisdom, and that his pattern should be followed by others. But he fails to remember that his desire for wisdom was recognized by God in that He gave Solomon riches. Those riches were a gift from God, by grace, and not acquired or generated by his own application of wisdom. He therefore misused his possession of wisdom and experience of grace to justify himself, and present himself as a self made man; when he was not that at all.

Solomon knew and warned that a little folly can destroy the man who is in reputation for wisdom and honour (Ecc. 10:1). Solomon had "honour" [s.w.] to an unprecedented extent (1 Kings 3:13). But in the same book he admits that he, the man famed world-wide for wisdom, gave himself to folly (Ecc. 2:3). He knew so well the error and folly of his ways, but he could only preach the lesson but not heed it. He "saw that wisdom exceedeth folly" (Ecc. 2:13)- but so what...

1Ki 3:14 If you will walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days-

This is added as a foil to the grant of wisdom. Solomon was being reminded that the gift of wisdom didn't necessarily mean that he personally would walk in God's ways. And the wisdom incident comes right after we are introduced to Solomon's reign with the information that he married a Gentile. The narrative is signalling to us that possession of wisdom, and using it for others, isn't the same as personal spirituality. And God repeats this warning to Solomon (1 Kings 6:12,13).

LXX "And if thou wilt walk in my way, to keep my commandments and my ordinances, as David thy father walked, then will I multiply thy days". This contrasts with David's statements in Ps. 72 that Solomon would live for ever. Here length of life is made conditional. God is patiently trying to undo the damage caused by David having set Solomon up with false images of himself.

God counted David as having observed His statutes, even though he laments that he doesn't observe them as he wished (s.w. Ps. 119:5,9). His desire to observe them was counted finally as if he had done so. Solomon was commanded to personally keep or watch over [s.w.] the commandments (1 Kings 3:14 and often); but he seemed to think that possession of intellectual understanding would keep / watch over him and of itself keep him in the way (Prov. 2:11). This is the temptation for all who pride themselves on possession of academic knowledge of Divine truth. God is here warning him against this, and reminding him of the conditional nature of the promises to him.

Like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:27), Solomon could have prolonged his days as king over Israel if he walked in the ways of David (1 Kings 3:14), which we are specifically told he did not. Seeing Solomon reigned 40 years, this promise of prolonged days surely implied supernaturally prolonged life, beyond usual human lifespans. Indeed the term is used of how the Lord Jesus "prolonged his days" eternally (Is. 53:10). Hence Solomon twice uses the word to speak of how wise rulers could prolong their reigns (Prov. 28:2,16). He surely has himself in view; but failed to realize this potential. Indeed he cynically uses the word in Ecc. 7:15; 8:12 in claiming that it is the wicked and not the obedient who have their days prolonged.

1Ki 3:15 Solomon awoke; and behold, it was a dream-

We wonder why this detail is added, when it seems obvious. Perhaps later in the nihilism of Ecclesiastes he would come to think that he had merely had a dream about wisdom. For he reasons as if his wisdom is purely of himself, and acts and reasons as if he has had no relationship with Yahweh. Or maybe it is to highlight the fulfilment of Ps. 127:2: "He gives to His beloved (Jedidiah) in sleep".

Then he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, and offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants-

Solomon had just offered before the sanctuary in Gibeon, and now he does so at Jerusalem, perhaps to indicate that he considered both shrines equally valid.

1Ki 3:16 Then two women who were prostitutes came to the king, and stood before him-

The "then..." suggests that now we have an example of Solomon's wisdom and ability to discern when judging God's people. The whole situation spoke of the kind of shameless prostitution which the Mosaic Law demanded should be punished by death. And yet prostitutes at the time typically worked in the idol shrines, rather than as it were randomly on the street corner. There was thereby even more legal need for them to be put to death. We note the unusual emphasis upon "in the house", mentioned four

times in :18,19, as if this were a specific house, "the" house. Quite possibly an idol "house" is in view rather than a brothel. But the way of Divine wisdom in this case was not to automatically apply Divine law in condemning sinners. Instead, by cutting to the conscience within those women, and appealing to it, they were led to at least the possibility of repentance, transformation, salvation. Solomon's wisdom was given him in order to know how to guide God's great people. The way of wisdom is therefore sometimes not to press a point when someone's in the wrong. We see this in all levels of relationships. There are weak points in relationships, fissure lines, which when pressed or brought under tension will cause earthquakes and destruction. It's best not to press on them; and yet if they are ignored, then the quality of relationship suffers and descends into interacting only over 'safe' matters. So what are we to do? By not raising the obvious issue- you're whores and must be put to death- Solomon showed grace, but he showed it in such a way that those women surely couldn't have felt the same again; rather like the woman taken in adultery. The very fact she was not condemned by the One who could condemn her- meant that she went away indeed vowing to "sin no more".

1Ki 3:17 The one woman said, Oh my lord, I and this woman live in one house. I gave birth with her in the house-

Solomon alludes to himself at this point in Prov. 18:17: "He who pleads his cause first seems right; until another comes and questions him". This is the language of the courtroom, and is advice to judges. But the average Israelite was not a courtroom judge. And so Solomon, as so often, has himself in view as the parade example of what he means. And the implication is that his judgments were perfect and beyond question, apart from by fools.

1Ki 3:18 It happened the third day after I gave birth, that this woman gave birth also. We were together. There was no stranger with us in the house, just us two in the house-

Neither woman had assistance in giving birth. No family were present- they were prostitutes, the very lowest of Hebrew society, cut off from their extended families. See on :16. Presumably the first woman is claiming that she recognized her baby because it was three days older than the other woman's baby. The claim is that the incident occurred on the third day after the first woman gave birth- i.e. the night that the second woman gave birth. Would a woman who has just given birth just go to sleep straight after childbirth and not pay attention to her immediately needy first born? They apparently both say the same. There is immediately a lack of credibility in the stories.

1Ki 3:19 This woman's child died in the night, because she lay on it-

"This woman..." enables us to play Bible television with the record, and imagine it all happening right before our eyes. See on :22. The question arises as to how she knew the cause of death if she was herself asleep.

1Ki 3:20 She arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while your handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom-

The story lacks credibility, although they both apparently repeated it. If the other woman was awake at midnight and saw the guilty woman arising, then why did she allow her to swap over the babies? But the way of wisdom and justice (see on :28) is

not to always point out the glaring inconsistencies within the narrative or beliefs of others. But to act on a higher level. We see this kind of thing so often in the way the Lord responded to questions. Likewise the statement of :19 that the other woman's child died "because she lay on it" is an assumption, seeing the claimant also claims she was asleep at the time. Despite it being night and the woman supposedly being asleep, she claims precise knowledge of the other woman's movements: "she arose at midnight and took my son from my side… and laid him at her breast… and her son who died she laid at my breast". They both say the same- the story is just not credible. "There was no one else (literally "no stranger") except the two of us in the house" is a strange claim to make whilst on the other hand claiming to having been fast asleep. How did she know there was no other party involved? The whole story is an obvious contradiction that any legal team or judge would pick upon. These women present as none too smart, they are both lying about what happened, although indeed the child of one of them did die. And they were lying to the king, the highest court of appeal. They could have been slain for false witness, apart from being prostitutes. But Solomon "executed justice" (:28) and not the women, as legally he was supposed to do. Solomon's wisdom and justice involved not picking on the obvious errors in others' narrative, and 'absolute truth claim' groups need to learn that lesson. Prostitutes were renowned for being liars; this was part of what it was to be labelled a prostitute. The account presents them as true to type; Solomon can have no idea what actually has gone on. But his wisdom is in showing grace rather than trying to establish some agreed version of actual events. And that is to be seen in how we judge with grace. The total inversion of human conceptions of justice, integrity and logic is the essence of God's grace. And we likewise show this when we forgive and in other ways reflect our experience of His grace.

1Ki 3:21 When I rose in the morning to nurse my child, behold, it was dead; but when I had looked at it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, whom I bore-

The first "morning" would be the twilight of dawn, but then when the sun arose she realized it was not her son. As noted on :20, the story line of both women has internal contradictions. But the way of wisdom and justice was not to point these out. For the argument is unrealistic- that she needed the light of day to recognize whether it was her baby or not. The fact they both seem to have said the same makes it clear that whatever had really happened, they were both lying.

1Ki 3:22 The other woman said, No; but the living is my son, and the dead is your son. The other said, No; but the dead is your son, and the living is my son. Thus they spoke before the king-

The repetition of the phrase "the other" invites us to first listen and look at one woman making her case, and then swivel our attention to the other. See on :19.

1Ki 3:23 Then the king said, The one says, 'This is my son who lives, and your son is the dead'; and the other says, 'No; but your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one'-

As noted on :20,21, there were internal contradictions in their stories which a judge would typically have picked up on and explored further, in order to elicit whose story was more credible. The women come over as simple, and it would not have been hard through a series of questions to get closer to the truth. But the way of wisdom and justice (:28) is not like this nor does it treat people in that forensic manner. And it was this which so impressed the observing audience. All this was the primary fulfilment of

Palm 72, David's prayer for Solomon, that he would judge the poorest of the people with wisdom and justice. And yet justice is not served in a technical sense. And that is the true wisdom in all this. It's rather like Paul's argument in Romans, that sinners must die, we are all sinners- but yet with utter integrity and justice, we are counted as righteous as Jesus, our advocate for the defence turns out to be our judge... God's view of "justice" is therefore presented as not being ours. This is what Paul marvels at- that His integrity in counting us righteous, when we are sinners, is a mystery. To be accepted with gratitude, even though it is inexplicable within human paradigms of integrity, logic and justice.

1Ki 3:24 The king said, Get me a sword. They brought a sword before the king-
The phrase for bringing a sword is that used of the punishment for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:26,36). Solomon was aware that his parents' first child had died as a result of judgment upon their immorality, and that God had earlier summoned a sword upon David's family because of it. It is as if he is saying that judgment was appropriate upon these prostitutes. But the way of true wisdom and justice was not to do so. And he had learned that by observing how God's sword of judgment had now been withdrawn from his own family, by grace.

1Ki 3:25 The king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other-
This was not Solomon's intention, as he stresses "in no way kill it" (:27). It was done to elicit the psychological reaction of the women, and this was to be the basis of discerning truth. Likewise truth is arrived at in ways other than forensic examination of evidence and argumentation. This is the way of the Spirit and true wisdom.

1Ki 3:26 Then the woman whose the living child was spoke to the king, for her heart yearned over her son, and she said, Oh my lord, give her the living child, and in no way kill it! But the other said, It shall be neither mine nor yours. Divide it-
The instinctive gut reaction of the true mother said it all and showed her for who she was. It may be that when the one said "Let (the baby) be neither mine nor yours, but divide it", this is the Spirit's description of her inner attitude, rather than the literal words she spoke. But her inner thoughts were counted as her words (careful re-reading and reflection make this seem most likely here). "Heart" is literally 'womb', giving us the impression of deep connection between the woman and the child. The woman who agreed "Divide it" was acting in a psychologically credible way; she had lost her child, and wanted the other woman to also lose her. That is surely why she was willing for the king to kill the child.

1Ki 3:27 Then the king answered, Give her the living child, and in no way kill it. She is its mother-
Solomon repeats verbatim the words of the real mother in :26, thereby identifying with her- even though her story was palpably untrue on some points. Having determined who the real mother was, Solomon could have had the other woman executed for false witness and kidnapping a child. But he doesn't. And the very fact he bothers personally judging between two low life women reflects his primary fulfilment of Psalm 72 describing how the Messianic king will bother judging even the lowest; all are significant to Him. The law's requirement that he whore be put to death is shown to be inappropriate as we imagine the poor infant in the presence of these low life women. To save its life but then execute its mother would have been

wrong. True wisdom and justice (:28) saw far beyond this letter of the law. And this is the pattern for us today.

1Ki 3:28 All Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do justice-
But as noted on :16, that "justice" was not the judgment which the law required for prostitutes. "The wisdom of God was in the midst of him" (1 Kings 3:28 AVmg) looks ahead to the description of the Lord Jesus in Col. 2:3. On one hand Solomon was a type of Christ, but in reality it was rather that he had been potentially empowered to be the Messianic seed, but he failed. And the Lord Jesus fulfilled the potentials of the seed perfectly, leaving Solomon a failed, marred reflection of Him.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 4

1Ki 4:1 King Solomon was king over all Israel-
The unity of Israel is associated with its glory. Israel's maximum point of glory under Solomon was also its historically most united period.

1Ki 4:2 These were the princes whom he had: Azariah the son of Zadok, the priest-
Azariah was therefore a king-priest (cp. Rev. 5:10). The kingdom of Solomon can indeed be viewed as a type of the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus. The twelve deputy rulers (:7) correspond with Mt. 19:28; the provision of food each month (:27) corresponds with Is. 66:23; Ez. 47:12 and Rev. 22:2. But in reality it was rather that Solomon had been potentially empowered to be the Messianic seed with a Messianic kingdom as promised to David, but he failed. And the Lord Jesus fulfilled the potentials of the seed perfectly, leaving Solomon and his kingdom as a failed, marred reflection of Him.

1Ki 4:3 Elihoreph and Ahijah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder-
Shisha was the Shavsha of 1 Chron. 18:16, the Sheva of 2 Sam. 20:25 and the Seraiah of 2 Sam. 8:17. Jehoshaphat would have now been elderly (2 Sam. 8:16; 20:24); see on :4.

1Ki 4:4 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the army; Zadok and Abiathar were priests-
This is only a description of things as they initially were. For Abiathar was soon deposed by Solomon, and Benaiah was by now an old man who would not have lived long into Solomon's reign.

1Ki 4:5 Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers; Zabud the son of Nathan was chief officer, the king's friend-
Solomon alludes to this in Prov. 27:9: "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart; so does earnest counsel from a man's friend". This is true, but Solomon may be using Divine truth to justify himself; for he had appointed the son of Nathan the prophet, loyal to David his father, as "the king's friend".

1Ki 4:6 Ahishar was over the household; and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the men subject to forced labour-
The emphasis upon the forced labour brigades is significant (1 Kings 5:13,14; 12:18),

and it was Solomon's brutal treatment of his people which led to the complaint after his death that he had whipped the people and abused them. This was exactly as Samuel had warned the people would happen if they chose a human king rather than God as their king; for God is kinder than men. We see therefore that Solomon was no better than Saul. All his wisdom failed to make him value the meaning of the human person. It was therefore only held by him in theory not in practice.

1 Sam. 8:11-18 had warned Israel that their king would not be good, and would enslave them and make them serve his whims. The people groaned beneath him, as they told his son Rehoboam. And so exactly was fulfilled the threat: "You will cry out for relief from the king, but Yahweh will not hear' (1 Sam. 8:16,17). The taxes which Samuel warned Israel of are described in 1 Kings 4:7,22,23,27,28. Solomon is being presented as exactly this king. This is to demonstrate that the positive descriptions of his kingdom in :20,25 are just a surface appearance. The point is made within otherwise apparently positive descriptions of his kingdom. This is to create the desired effect of giving the impression that Solomon's apparently wonderful kingdom was underlaid by a very unspiritual, unGodly foundation. As noted on :7 and 1 Kings 3:1, Solomon's wife likely influenced Solomon to use the Egyptian system of forced labour. But that was the very system that had been used to abuse Israel in Egypt. And Solomon uses it for his building projects, just as the Pharaoh of the Exodus did, also building treasure cities etc.

1Ki 4:7 Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household: each man had to make provision for a month in the year-
See on :2. This implies a huge amount of food was required by Solomon to feed his extended family. His 700 wives and 300 concubines would have produced many children who all required feeding. Solomon's indulgence of every sexual whim came at a cost, which he forced his people to meet; and it gave him no family happiness, but rather led him to the cynical reflection of Ecc. 5:11.

Solomon had a system of forced labour, and had 12 administrative districts [not following the 12 tribes] with 12 officers who each provided the king's food one month / year (1 Kings 4:7-20). All this was exactly how Egypt was organized under Amenhotep III and is surely the influence of having Pharaoh's daughter for his leading wife. See on 1 Kings 3:1.

1Ki 4:8 These are their names: Ben Hur, in the hill country of Ephraim-
It could be argued that Solomon's taxation system was effectively taxing the other tribes apart from Judah. Yet the tax from the other tribes paid for Solomon's extensive building projects, which were all in Judah (the temple, the palace, the Millo and wall of Jerusalem, Ezion-Geber, the copper mines, Debir, etc.). This was not so much wisdom but a cunning establishment of the dominance of his own tribe and throne. For the twelve administrative districts exclude Judah:
1. Mount Ephraim
2. Makaz
3. Arubboth
4. Naphath-dor
5. Taanach and Megiddo
6. Ramoth-gilead
7. Mahanaim
8. Naphtali
9. Asher and Zebulun

10. Issachar
11. Benjamin
12. The land of Gad (1 Kings 4: 7-19)

This organization was not strictly according to the tribal divisions but was more geographically based. Thus group 2 was from both Dan and Ephraim; group 3 from both Manasseh and Ephraim. Perhaps this was an intentional attempt to undermine tribalism, which Solomon saw as a potential threat to his power base. If he had been obedient to God, he could have been quietly assured that God and not his cunning would establish and eternally maintain his kingdom. And yet the regional governors imposed by Solomon were largely from Judah or somehow related to David's "old guard". Thus group 9 was ruled by the son of David's advisor Hushai (2 Sam. 15:32-37). Group 8 by Solomon's son in law Ahimaaz (1 Kings 4:15). Group 5 was ruled by a connection with the priest Zadok, and possible by the brother of David, and Solomon's scribe Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 4:3). Abinadab of group 7 was probably the son of Iddo who had been one of David's men (1 Chron. 27:21). Abinadab who ruled Group 4 was Solomon's son in law (I Kings 4:11).

All this was an attempt by Solomon to establish the kingdom in his own strength. The regional governors were not locals, but rather under the direct control of Solomon in Jerusalem and appointed on the basis of loyalty to him. No wonder that after his death, the other tribes wanted to break free from Judah.

We note that the geographical extent of these areas was not that great. It covered central and northern Israel but nothing much further south of Judah; and some areas just over the Jordan river into Moab and Ammon. Clearly enough Solomon was not receiving tax tribute from a very large area. This fact therefore counterbalances the descriptions of his kingdom as stretching from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. That may have technically been the case, but not for long and his control was not strong enough to make them pay tribute to him. Time and again, the apparently glowing descriptions of his kingdom are found to be surface level only. We note too that the tax subdivisions did not generally follow the boundaries of the tribes which God had given. Solomon was trying to break down tribal unity so that the north would be less unified in opposing him. This is not in line with how God wanted Israel organized. The tribal leaders were unimportant; they were effectively replaced by the men of Judah or pro-Solomon men who were over the new tax districts Solomon had created.

1Ki 4:9 Ben Deker, in Makaz, and in Shaalbim, and Beth Shemesh, and Elon Beth Hanan-
These were in Dan (Jud. 1:35). Beth Shemesh was a priestly city (Josh. 21:16), but Solomon still required them to pay taxes to him in Jerusalem, contrary to the spirit of the Mosaic law.

1Ki 4:10 Ben Hesed, in Arubboth (to him belonged Socoh, and all the land of Hepher)-
I suggest this Socoh is the one in Manasseh and not the one in Judah; see on :8.

1Ki 4:11 Ben Abinadab, in all the height of Dor (he had Taphath the daughter of

Solomon as wife)-
- See on :8.

1Ki 4:12 Baana the son of Ahilud, in Taanach and Megiddo, and all Beth Shean which is beside Zarethan, beneath Jezreel, from Beth Shean to Abel Meholah, as far as beyond Jokmeam-
The brother of Jehoshaphat (:3), again reflecting how the rulers of the regions were not local men but part of Solomon's inner circle, or their relatives. See on :8.

1Ki 4:13 Ben Geber, in Ramoth Gilead (to him belonged the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him belonged the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, sixty great cities with walls and bronze bars)-
They had begun as small towns (Num. 32:41) but had grown since then. But they were all to pay their taxes to Jerusalem; see on :8.

1Ki 4:14 Ahinadab the son of Iddo, in Mahanaim-
- See on :8.

1Ki 4:15 Ahimaaz, in Naphtali (he also took Basemath the daughter of Solomon as wife)-
- See on :8. As no father's name is mentioned we could conclude that the well-known son of Zadok the priest is meant, who helped David was fleeing before Absalom (2 Sam. 15:27). A pro house of David loyalist was chosen in order to get the tax sent back to Solomon in Jerusalem, and Solomon was his father in law.

1Ki 4:16 Baana the son of Hushai, in Asher and Bealoth-
- See on :8.

1Ki 4:17 Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar- See on :8.

1Ki 4:18 Shimei the son of Ela, in Benjamin-
Although Judah and Benjamin were always connected, as explained on :8, Solomon expected Benjamin to pay taxes to him in Jerusalem. We note at this point the clear omission of Judah as a taxable area.

1Ki 4:19 Geber the son of Uri, in the land of Gilead, the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and of Og king of Bashan; and he was the only officer who was in the land-
"Only" could mean "the greatest", and "the land" may refer to the territory on the east of Jordan. "Officer" translates a military term; the idea may be that he was the only garrison officer stationed in that area, which had many Gentiles in it.

1Ki 4:20 Judah and Israel were many as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry-
The taxation system just described became heavy for Israel, took men away from food production at home, was biased to make the north provide labour and material resources for Judah, had administrators who were pro Judah, undercut the tribal cantons and made Judah tax free. It set up the complaint of Israel against Rehoboam that Solomon abused them, and led to the division of the kingdom. But the result is apparently that they were all well fed and merry. Apparently, the promises to Abraham of a seed "many as the sand" had been fulfilled. But here again we see how

the statements describing a glorious kingdom are in fact glosses over a much less pleasant reality. And this was the nature of Solomon and his kingdom- a good surface appearance hiding much that was deeply wrong beneath it.

This is alluded to by Solomon in Prov. 14:28 GNB: "A king's greatness depends on how many people he rules; without them he is nothing". Solomon is again justifying himself, for the people at his time are described as very many at his time (1 Kings 4:20). Solomon is harnessing Divine truth to his own agenda of self justification. And we who claim to hold His truths must take warning.

We must remember that baptism means that we are *now* the seed of Abraham, and the blessings of forgiveness, of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and God's turning us away from our sins are right now being fulfilled in us (Acts 3:27-29). Israel were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore (2 Sam. 17:11; 1 Kings 4:20), they possessed the gates of their enemies (Dt. 17:2; 18:6)- all in antitype of how Abraham's future seed would also receive the promised blessings in their mortal experience, as well as in the eternal blessedness of the future Kingdom.

"Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry" combines allusions to two different passages. Clearly there is reference to the fact that the Abrahamic promises had a primary fulfillment at this time. But the final phrase refers back to Israel's idolatry with the golden calf. It is as if the dualism within Solomon at this time - in being the primary fulfillment of the seed, and yet also being apostate - was fulfilled in Israel. We see elsewhere several indications that Solomon and Israel were closely connected (cp. Christ and the church).

1Ki 4:21 Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt: they brought tribute, and served Solomon all the days of his life-

Israel was at its largest extent in Solomon's Kingdom; lost land was restored, and the borders re-established (2 Chron. 9:26; 8:4 cp. Josh. 16:3,5); it was also at its political strongest; nations submitted to Solomon (1 Kings 4:20); Israel was the chief of the nations and the nations brought "presents" (s.w. sacrifices) to him (1 Kings 4:21). All this looked ahead to the Messianic Kingdom; but see on :25. But again we have a surface appearance only. For as discussed above, Solomon only received tax revenue from a very small part of the area mentioned here. The "tribute" mentioned here would have been only at one time. He had no effective 'rule' over the kingdoms or else they would have been brought within the tax administration system described earlier in the chapter. It was only for a brief period, and even then, not very powerful "rule". We note from 1 Kings 9:15-19 that Solomon built fortified military bases around the borders of his territory- and clearly his territory didn't effectively stretch from the Euphrates to Egypt. Otherwise the location of his fortifications would have been different. And if indeed the image of peace were so true, why Solomon's huge number of chariots and war horses? And it is rather overlooked that David had taken Damascus (2 Sam. 8:6), but it was taken over by Solomon's enemy Rezon and never recovered by him (1 Kings 11:23-25).

Further, there is ample evidence within the record that throughout Solomon's reign, there were other kings within the area of the land promised to Abraham. And with some of them Solomon traded, disagreed with, or suffered their rebellions against him: King Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 5:1), Hadad the Edomite (1 Kings 11:14), King Hadadezer of Zobah (1 Kings 11:23), the kings of the Hittites and Aram (1

Kings 10:29), and the kings of Arabia (1 Kings 10:15). These significant areas were not exactly ruled over by Solomon. Indeed Solomon sells the cities of Cabul to Hiram. We therefore have to probe deeper the statement that he ruled so extensively. One possibility is that this is how Solomon perceived things; it was the impression he wanted to give. And the Biblical record presents things as he wanted to see them, yet giving the actual facts of the matter which contradicted Solomon's perception. And thereby shows the fallacy and surface nature of the impression Solomon had and gave. He was convinced he was ruling in the Messianic kingdom according to his father's projections and expectations; when the reality was so far from that. We note that such exaggerated claims of dominion are found in the records of other kings, especially of Egypt, Babylon and Assyria. Indeed the 'glorious kingdom' passages regarding Solomon's kingdom are very similar to the self descriptions of other kings broadly contemporary with Solomon. We therefore lean towards the possibility that the Biblical descriptions are a case of focalization; the focus is upon Solomon and his perception of himself and his kingdom. But the Biblical record gives ample reason to perceive that his perceptions were false or at best, incomplete.

1Ki 4:22 Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and sixty measures of meal-
Solomon in Prov. 23:3 warned not to desire huge meals. But Solomon clearly revelled in his food, and speaks in Ecclesiastes of how he tried to find fulfilment in gluttony. He knew God's truth, but "it was far from me" personally, as he laments in Ecclesiastes. There mere possession of Divine truth can in fact lead a man to think it doesn't apply to him. This is why the word must be made flesh in us, as it was in the Lord.

From the amount of flour used each day, it could be guessed that there were 14,000 people / day being fed. If Solomon had 1000 wives and children by them, this would make sense.

1Ki 4:23 ten head of fat cattle, twenty head of cattle out of the pastures, one hundred sheep, besides harts, gazelles, roebucks and fattened fowl-
"Fattened fowl" has been translated as geese or swans. Not all these animals were clean food, but Solomon (according to Ecclesiastes) wanted to experiment with all human experience.

1Ki 4:24 For he had dominion over all on this side of the River, from Tiphsah even to Gaza, over all the kings on this side of the River: and he had peace on all sides around him-
In the context of this chapter, the "dominion" in view may mean that all had to pay taxes to Solomon.

1Ki 4:25 Judah and Israel lived safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon-
Clearly this language, and the great fertility of the land implied by :22-28, is the language of the Messianic kingdom *(*Mic. 4:4; Ez. 34:28; Is. 35:1,2). But in reality it was rather that Solomon had been potentially empowered to be the Messianic seed with a Messianic kingdom as promised to David, but he failed. And the Lord Jesus fulfilled the potentials of the seed perfectly, leaving Solomon and his kingdom as a failed, marred reflection of Him. I suggested above that this "living safely" and at peace was a facade, as the record continually alludes to how Solomon is breaking the

commands of how a king should be (Dt. 17:17,18). Here in :25 likewise we have the idea of safety, but this was perhaps because of the vast number of chariots and horses Solomon accumulated as mentioned in the next verse. Yet this was brazen disobedience to the command for Israel's king not to have chariots and horses. And trusting in chariots means not trusting in Yahweh's Angel chariots (Ps. 20:7; Is. 2:7,8; 22:18;
31:1; Mic. 5:10). Samuel mentions chariots three times when warning about the corruption of Israel's desired king (1 Sam. 8:11,12).

1Ki 4:26 Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen-
Solomon's enthusiasm for Egyptian horses is clearly chronicled (1 Kings 4:26-28), although this was studied disobedience to Dt. 17:16. There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

1Ki 4:27 Those officers provided food for king Solomon, and for all who came to king Solomon's table, every man in his month-
"He that loves silver (as Solomon did, Ecc. 2:8; 1 Kings 10:21-29) shall not be satisfied with silver (as he wasn't- see Ecc. 2); nor he that loves abundance (s.w. used about the abundance of Solomon's wives, 2 Chron. 11:23) with increase. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them (cp. the large numbers at his table, 1 Kings 4:27)" (Ecc. 5:10,11). The Hebrew word translated "not be satisfied" occurs around 25 times in the Proverbs, with Solomon warning of how the way of the flesh couldn't satisfy. Solomon said all this with an eye on himself. He preached it to others, he felt deeply the truth of it, but he saw no personal way out of it. All he had was the accurate knowledge of his situation, but no real motivation to change- like the alcoholic or drug abuser who knows every aspect of the harm of his habit.

They let nothing be lacking-
Heb. 'they let nothing be missing'. This is in the context of describing the taxation system, whereby taxation was enforced and the taxes were indeed gathered to Solomon.

1Ki 4:28 Barley also and straw for the horses and swift steeds brought they to the place where the officers were, each man according to his duty-
Just as Solomon's abundance of wives led to having a few thousand mouths to feed, and Israel needed to provide for that; so his obsession with thousands of horses meant that there was a need for a huge amount of fodder for them. And all Israel had to provide this- all for the sake of Solomon's obsessive desires. That he reigned for as long as he did was truly a sign of God's grace to him for the sake of his father David, and is a tacit reflection of how much God loved David despite all his failures.

1Ki 4:29 God gave Solomon great wisdom and understanding, and very great perception, according to the sand which is on the seashore-
His wisdom was to guide Israel, but it concerned the natural creation; as if his expositions concerning this were teaching spiritual lessons (1 Kings 4:29,32,33)- as the Lord's parables. The "largeness of heart" (AV) was to be experienced by all Israel, whose largeness of heart was to lead to the Gentiles flowing to them (Is. 60:5). Paul's

appeal to allow the Holy Spirit to enlarge our hearts could be seen as alluding to the gift given Solomon (2 Cor. 6:11,13).

The description of the "largeness" of heart in 1 Kings 4:29 uses the same word used about the largeness of the land of Israel in Ex. 3:8; Neh. 9:35; his wisdom was "as the sand that is on the sea shore", as Israel were described in Gen. 22:17. He wanted wisdom, but so as to teach it to others, not to personalize it.
Even in his spiritual collapse at the time of Ecclesiastes, Solomon still taught Israel true wisdom, and organized his wisdom into more accessible books (Ecc. 12:9-12), giving himself the title *koheleth* ('the preacher'). And yet he himself tried alcohol, wealth, women, indeed every addiction, in order to "see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven" (Ecc. 2:3). And yet he knew from childhood the conclusion of the matter- man's duty is to fear God and be obedient (Ecc. 12:13). He who had been given wisdom started out in a search for it… showing clearly enough that what he knew was so much theory, but never touched his own heart. Solomon taught wisdom to the youngsters, but he gave himself over to search for some kind of vague philosophical truth outside of God.

1Ki 4:30 Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt-
If this is simply God's comment, then it would be axiomatic that Solomon's Divinely given wisdom was better than that of the Gentiles. So we should rather read this as stating how his wisdom was perceived amongst the Gentiles. Despite having greater wisdom than "all the wisdom of Egypt", Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter. And yet Egypt gave sanctuary to his rival Jeroboam and also let Jeroboam marry into the royal family. About five years after his death, Egypt invaded Judah in the reign of his son Rehoboam. So the point is made that despite possessing far more wisdom than them, he allowed them to morally corrupt him. He likely thought [wrongly] that the mere possession of such superior truth would preserve him from such personal failure.

1Ki 4:31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman-
Ethan and Heman are mentioned together in 1 Kings 4:31 as men whom Solomon's wisdom exceeded; and in 1 Chron. 15:19 they are both singers whom David appointed. We can assume that they were famed for their wisdom; but Solomon's wisdom exceeded theirs.

Calcol, Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all the nations all around-
Calcol and the other names mentioned in 1 Kings 4:31 as wise men are all mentioned in 1 Chron. 2:6 as sons of Zerah, men of Judah. The idea of 1 Kings 4:30,31 is that Solomon's wisdom exceeded that of famous Gentile wise men, and also of the wise men of Judah.

1Ki 4:32 He spoke three thousand proverbs; and his songs were one thousand and five-
LXX says 5000 songs. David was famed as Israel's psalmist, and his songs were distributed to the surrounding nations, appealing for them to turn to Israel's God. Solomon's obsession with writing songs can be seen as an attempt to live out his father's image.

1Ki 4:33 He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, birds, creeping things and fish-

We note that the things mentioned here refer more to knowledge and science, than to the wisdom required to judge God's people with grace and justice.

The greatest of trees in Palestine, the cedar, is contrasted with the smallest, the hyssop; the idea being that Solomon spoke of the entire range of plant life. But later Solomon sadly reflects in Ecc. 1:8 LXX that "a man will not be able to speak of them". And yet Solomon had spoken of all things by the wisdom given him (1 Kings 4:32,33), but now he says that the vanity of all human experience is beyond speaking of. Whilst Solomon retained his wisdom, he felt that it was not the full answer to the mystery of life; and the answer was, so far as he could see it, that all things are vain and wearisome. Life is not therefore particularly worth living. This is the attitude which arises when we fail to personalize wisdom, and refuse to accept that this life is not God's Kingdom; that is yet to come. This wisdom about plants and animals was given Solomon for the sake of God's people Israel. It was intended to boost their agriculture. See on 1 Kings 5:6.

1Ki 4:34 There came of all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom-

The repetition of the two phrases gives the impression that they heard of his wisdom, and so they came to hear his wisdom. As exemplified by the visit of the Queen of Sheba, it is one thing to hear wisdom; but there is a natural desire to hear the word made flesh. This principle is so true for our witness today. The presentation of God's truth as words on a screen is far less persuasive than hearing them as a word made flesh, from a live person. And that is why God did not leave His word as it was, but made it flesh in the Lord Jesus; so that He speaks to us "in His Son".

1 KINGS CHAPTER 5

1Ki 5:1 Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the place of his father: for Hiram had always admired David-

So very often does Solomon speak of "David my father", and that God had made him king "instead of David my father" (e.g. 1 Kings 3:7). Thus he asks Hiram to deal with him just as he had done with David his father (1 Kings 5:2-7; and cp. 1 Kings 5:1 with 2 Sam. 5:11). The number of times these phrases occur in the records is so large that we simply have to recognize that God is pointing something out to us about the relationship between Solomon and David (1 Kings 2:24,26,32,44; 3:6,7,14; 5:3,5; 6:12; 8:15,17,18,20,24,25,26; 9:4; 11:33; 2 Chron. 1:8,9; 2:3,7,14; 6:4,7,8,10,15,16; 7:17). Solomon was raised a believer, and he lived out parental expectation; but in later life, he himself was revealed as having no real faith at all, and he turned away from Yahweh to idolatry. So often in his prayers to God does Solomon make reference to David; for example: "Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit upon his throne" (1 Kings 3:6).

1Ki 5:2 Solomon sent to Hiram saying-

As noted on :1, Solomon was obsessed with living out the image of his father. As Hiram had sent messengers to David (2 Sam. 5:11), so Solomon sends to Hiram.

1Ki 5:3 You know how that David my father could not build a house for the name of Yahweh his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until Yahweh put his enemies under the soles of his feet-
Solomon had a way of spinning things, even God's word, in his own selfish way. David had insisted that God had told him that he couldn't build the temple because he had shed so much blood in war (1 Chron. 22:8). But Solomon just slightly spins this when he asks Hiram to come and help him build the temple, because, he says, his father David hadn't had the time to get around to the job because of being busy fighting wars (1 Kings 5:3). He says nothing about David shedding blood; the moral aspect of it all is nicely ignored by Solomon.

1Ki 5:4 But now Yahweh my God has given me rest on every side. There is no adversary nor any evil occurrence-
Solomon's argument is that his father David had not been given rest from his enemies, but he had been given rest, therefore it was for him to build the temple. But that is exactly the opposite of what we are told. David had rest from his external enemies (2 Sam. 7:1) and therefore wanted to build a temple. God replied that indeed He had given David rest from His enemies (2 Sam. 7:11), but He didn't want a temple. The same word for "rest" is used throughout.

As is typical of the Solomon record, this lack of adversary was true in Solomon's mind and self-presentation, but not in reality. For 1 Kings 11:14,23,25 list Solomon's adversaries, using the same word. We likewise have to doubt, therefore, the veracity of his claims in :3. Solomon imagines that his kingdom is the promised "rest" of the Messianic kingdom promised to David. But his degree of "rest" was only in his imagination. For he had various adversaries on the borders, Hadad, Rezon and others (1 Kings 11:14,23,25). So again, Solomon is spinning things to fit his narrative.

The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the Greek word *diabolos* to translate the Hebrew 'Satan'. Hence Devil and Satan are effectively parallel in meaning. Thus we read in the Septuagint of David being an adversary [Heb. *Satan*, Gk. *diabolos*] in 1 Sam. 29:4 ["turns against us"]; the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 19:22), Hadad, Rezon and other opponents to Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25). We face a simple choice- if we believe that every reference to 'Satan' or 'Devil' refers to an evil cosmic being, then we have to assume that these people weren't people at all, and that even good men like David were evil. The far more natural reading of these passages is surely that 'Satan' is simply a word meaning 'adversary', and can be applied to people [good and bad], and even God Himself- it carries no pejorative, sinister meaning as a word. See on :18.

1Ki 5:5 Behold, I purpose to build a house for the name of Yahweh my God, as Yahweh spoke to David my father saying, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for My name'-
Again this is a spin; because it was David who had purposed to build the temple, and had prepared for it. And again we see Solomon assuming that the promises of 2 Sam. 7 were totally fulfilled in him; whereas being the Messianic son of David was conditional. And the house to be built was more essentially the house of God's family which God was to build for David rather than any physical temple. But Solomon totally missed all this. We note he speaks of "the" house, not "a house". He saw the promised "house" to be built as solely and exclusively fulfilled in his temple. The idea of Messiah building a house of people for God's Name was far from him. And he was

hardly the promised begotten son of God, to be born *after* David "slept with his fathers".

Jer. 32:31 states that God's anger and fury were against the temple from the day it was built until the day He destroyed it, it was a provocation of His anger. Just as He gave Israel a king in His anger and took him away in His wrath. But He patiently and even desperately tried to work with Israel through both the temple and the kingship. His glory entering the temple was therefore a concession to their weakness. Solomon was provoking God to wrath by building the temple and we must bear this in mind as we read the record of his apparently zealous building of it. And remember that in Ecclesiastes he says that he just had an obsession with all manner of building projects. God's temple was just one of them.

2 Chron. 2:4 adds the detail that Solomon said: "The temple that I am going to build will be great, for great is our God beyond all the gods". He is alluding [as always] to the words of his father David in Ps. 135:5: "For I am certain that Yahweh is great and great is our Lord beyond all gods". It is Yahweh who is great. But Solomon turns this into a statement that therefore the temple he builds must be "great" and greater than any temple built to other gods. This explains why the style of the temple is so similar to that of other temples from the time- it's just bigger and more lavish. Solomon reduces the greatness of Yahweh, and His infinite superiority over the other gods, to the simple term of having a greater temple than the other gods. Any purely religious approach to God diminishes His true greatness, which is in His grace. Solomon reduces the unique greatness of Yahweh to the uniqueness of the temple he is going to build Him. A temple Yahweh never wanted anyway. He fails to see Yahweh's greatness as being in terms of His grace and eternal salvation, which He had demonstrated for all time in His salvation of David regarding his affair with Solomon's mother Bathsheba. David made the same mistake in confusing the greatness of his projected temple with the greatness of Yahweh Himself. He says in 1 Chron. 29:11 "To you, Yahweh, belong the utmost greatness, might, distinction, eminence, and splendor- yes all that is in heaven and on earth" but then in 1 Chron. 22:5 "The temple I am about to build for Yahweh must become utterly great, for fame and distinction throughout all lands".

2 Chron. 2:6 fills out what Solomon told Hiram: "But who is able to build Him a house, since heaven and the heaven of heavens can’t contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a house, except just to burn incense before Him?". "Who am I?" is a quotation of David's words about the temple in 1 Chron. 29:14: "But who am I..?". But this in turn had been David's response when God first told him that He didn't want a temple, but rather would build a house for David from his descendants. David totally misrepresented God's response as saying that He did in fact welcome the idea of a grandiose physical temple, and so by repeating his response at the time, he is surely guilty of a false humility. Solomon quotes these words of apparent humility and applies them to himself. But just as we cannot sing words of humility in a Christian song or hymn and thereby be humble, Solomon failed to realize that humility is not a bought or inherited position. It has to come from the heart. And he had no sense of personal sin or possibility of failure, and therefore no humility. Solomon claims that he solely wanted to build a temple in order to offer incense and sacrifice. But the obvious counter to that is that God only asked for an altar roughly made of earth or at best, unhewn stones, in order for man to offer sacrifice. A grandiose temple wasn't required for sacrifice.

2 Chron. 2:9 further fills out Solomon's words to Hiram: ″for the house which I am about to build shall be great and wonderful". The greatness and wonder of the

house was a big theme with David and Solomon. But God's response to David's initial suggestion of a temple was that He is a humble God, and doesn't like grandiose structures; rather does He wish above all for men to allow Him to work according to His grace in building a house for His glory made out of contrite, responsive hearts. Form eclipsed content for Solomon, religion overtook spirituality, as has happened constantly in the history of God's people. "Great and wonderful" is a Hebrew phrase consistently used about what God does for men by His grace; and not what man can do for God (Job 5:9; 9:10; 37:5; Ps. 86:10 "You are great, and do wondrous things"; 136:4 "Him who alone does great wonders; for His grace endures forever"; Jer. 32:17 "by Your great power... there is nothing too wonderful for You, who show loving kindness to thousands" of sinners). In a time of greater humility, David had vowed not to exercise himself in anything great and wonderful apart from to marvel at God's grace (s.w. Ps. 131:1 "nor do I concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me"). But now, Solomon is seeking to build a great and wonderful place for God, rather than allowing God to build that great and wonderful house of humbled human hearts.

1Ki 5:6 Now therefore command that they cut me cedar trees out of Lebanon. My servants shall be with your servants; and I will give you wages for your servants according to all that you shall say. For you know that there is not among us any who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians-
Perhaps this was connected with the Divine wisdom about cedar trees which God had given Solomon (1 Kings 4:33). The irony is that David had told God that he was unhappy living in a house of cedar, and wanted to build God a house; and God had specifically said that He did not want such a house as David had, i.e. of cedar.

1Ki 5:7 It happened, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he was very pleased and said, Blessed is Yahweh this day, who has given to David a wise son over this great people-
Hiram's usage of the Yahweh Name could suggest he had become a proselyte and was therefore eager to assist with building the temple.

1Ki 5:8 Hiram sent to Solomon saying, I have heard the message which you have sent to me. I will do all your desire concerning timber of cedar and concerning timber of fir-
"Fir" is LXX pine wood. This would have created a distinctive and pleasant smell in the temple.

1Ki 5:9 My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon to the sea. I will make them into rafts to go by sea to the place that you shall appoint me, and will cause them to be broken up there, and you shall receive them. You shall accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household-
The appointed place was Joppa (2 Chron. 2:16). Tyre was built on a small island, and so as a maritime trading nation, regular provision of fresh food was greatly sought after by them.

1Ki 5:10 So Hiram gave Solomon timber of cedar and timber of fir according to all his desire-
There is the hint that Solomon's work for the temple was really not so much for God, as a fulfilment of his own desires. He served God only insofar as it was attractive to

him. We note from Ecclesiastes that he was obsessed with building work; and his work for the temple was just part of that. We need to learn the lesson; that service of God is not according to what we want to do, but according to what people need and what will glorify God.

1Ki 5:11 Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food for his household, and twenty measures of pure oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year-
The different figures in 1 Kings 5:11 cp. 2 Chron. 2:10 could be because part of the amount was for Tyre generally, and part for Hiram's personal household. Twenty measure of pure oil appears relatively small; but it is the same word used for the oil of the tabernacle rituals (Ex. 27:20), and as a proselyte Hiram may well have built his own kind of tabernacle system. I suggest on Ez. 28:14 that he indeed did so, but it turned into apostacy.

1Ki 5:12 Yahweh had given Solomon wisdom, as He promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a treaty together-
The implication is that the way of peace is the way of wisdom.

1Ki 5:13 King Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men-
Solomon's lack of sensitivity to God's word led him to be tragically insensitive to people; in short, he showed no love. The way Solomon raised a "levy" or tribute from Israel, whereby the men of Israel had to serve him one month out of three and 'bear burdens', with 3,300 taskmasters over them (1 Kings 5:13-15), who 'bore rule' over (Heb. 'trampled down') the people (1 Kings 5:16)... is all reminiscent of Samuel's warning about the kind of King which Israel would have. And the language also recalls their bondage in Egypt; note that the levy was also in order to build treasure cities for Solomon, just as Pharaoh did (1 Kings 9:19). The Hebrew word for "levy" in 1 Kings 5:13 strictly means 'a burden causing to faint', and is rendered "taskmaster" in the record of Israel's suffering in Egypt (Ex. 1:11). One even wonders if Solomon's father-in-law- who also happened to be a Pharaoh of Egypt- influenced him (consciously or unconsciously) to act like the Exodus Pharaoh. Possibly Solomon justified this abuse of northern labour to build things in Judah through the assumption that northeners were lazy. For he uses the same word in Prov. 12:24 "The hands of the diligent ones [Judah and his family] shall rule, but the slothful shall be under tribute". Or maybe he milfully misinterpreted Gen. 49:15 about Issachar in the north of the land, who would "become a servant under tribute".

1Ki 5:14 He sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses; a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home; and Adoniram was over the men subject to forced labour-
The emphasis upon the forced labour brigades is significant (1 Kings 4:6; 5:13,14; 12:18), and it was Solomon's brutal treatment of his people which led to the complaint after his death that he had whipped the people and abused them. This was exactly as Samuel had warned the people would happen if they chose a human king rather than God as their king; for God is kinder than men. We see therefore that Solomon was no better than Saul. All his wisdom failed to make him value the meaning of the human person. It was therefore only held by him in theory not in practice. Making men work

one month out of three meant that labour would have been lacking in their homes- and that meant reduced food for families.

1Ki 5:15 Solomon had seventy thousand who bore burdens, and eighty thousand who were stone cutters in the mountains-
1 Kings 5:13-16 reveals that Solomon had 153,000 full time and 90,000 part time male servants. Israel's complaint that Solomon had whipped them implies that he treated them like slaves, with himself as the slave-driver. 600,000 adults came out of Egypt (Ex. 12:37), and assuming the population only rose slightly over the next 550 years, we have the picture of an Israel where almost half the males (i.e. probably the majority of the working population) were pressganged into slavery to a despotic King Solomon.

This huge number of men involved in quarrying and transportation of the stones was because of the obsession with building projects which Solomon admits he had in Ecclesiastes. Just as Solomon's abundance of wives led to having a few thousand mouths to feed, and Israel needed to provide for that; so his obsession with thousands of horses meant that there was a need for a huge amount of fodder for them (1 Kings 4:28). And all Israel had to provide this- all for the sake of Solomon's obsessive desires. That he reigned for as long as he did was truly a sign of God's grace to him for the sake of his father David, and is a tacit reflection of how much God loved David despite all his failures.

The huge amount of labour required- 80,000 men hewing stone alone- was nothing more than Solomon acting like Pharaoh, using taskmasters to trample down / rule over the people to achieve his quotas and enable his building fantasies to become reality. The Hebrew word translated "bear rule over' (Heb. 'to trample down') in 1 Kings 5:16 is that which we find in the Law's prohibition of this in Lev. 25:46: "But over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule over one another with rigour". Solomon knew the Law, and he rambles on in Proverbs about the need to read, love and obey that law. And yet he thought that he could give that one a miss, 'because I am doing God's work and building His house'. And how many a believer has ended up missing the entire point of God's law, the very essence of Christianity, because of their obsession with serving God in a form which is effectively merely serving themselves, excusing their fantasies in the name of doing God service. It's the *process* of Solomon's apostacy which is so instructive; for he justified himself by saying that he was doing God's work. He didn't simply quit on God.

1Ki 5:16 besides Solomon's chief officers who were over the work, three thousand three hundred, who bore rule over the people who laboured in the work-
See on :13. This levy was evidently one of the reasons which led the next generation to complain that Solomon had chastised the people with whips (1 Kings 12:11; the happiness of the people which the Queen of Sheba observed in 1 Kings 10:8 was therefore just an impression Solomon arranged for her to receive). Yet "this is the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised: in order to build the house of the Lord, and his own house..." (1 Kings 9:15). Solomon justified his zest for power and control by saying it was in order to do the Lord's work, to build His house... and yet had he listened to God's word more carefully, he would have realized that the true house of Yahweh was in fact people... yet Solomon abused people in order to build a visible house for God. And so very often religious people have gone down the same path- devaluing the meaning and value of persons, because they want to be seen as achieving something visible for God, no matter how many people they abuse on the

way. The ends simply don't justify the means; Solomon told himself that they did, and he ended up as bad as Saul and Pharaoh, who are alluded to in the records of his levy of slaves from Israel. And yet the 1 Kings record gives the impression of all happily working together to create a great temple for God. When we probe deeper, we find this was far from the case.

David had prophesied that his great son would "have dominion from sea to sea" (Ps. 72:8). 'Have dominion' is again the Hebrew word translated 'rule over' in 1 Kings 5:15. David's vision of his Messianic son having a world-wide Kingdom, in which all people blessed him for his grace and beneficence, was abused by Solomon into justifying 'having dominion' over people as his personal slaves; and they certainly didn't bless him for it but rather complained (1 Kings 12:11). It's as if Solomon grabbed the word 'rule over / have dominion', wrenched it out of context, and used it to justify his actions, giving a quasi-Biblical justification to his pure selfishness. This is where knowledge of God's word can be a dangerous thing; leading people into a stronger self-justification than they would otherwise have had if they were guided by self-recognized greed alone.

We note the similarities to Israel's forced labour in Egypt, and so we can read an irony in 1 Kings 6:1, just a few verses later, when Israel's coming out of slavery in Egypt is mentioned as a time marker.

1Ki 5:17 The king commanded, and they cut out great stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation of the house with worked stone-

But 1 Kings 9:15 says that all this labour regarding quarrying was not simply for the temple; but also for his own house, which was far larger than God's house, and took nearly twice as long to build. He justified his own serving of his own desires under the guise of serving God. He justified the temple as being merely a place for sacrifice. But God had asked men to build Him altars of dirt, or unhewn stones. Yet there is huge emphasis upon Solomon's cutting and hewing of stones. He is presented [to the thoughtful, Biblically aware reader] as fake all the way through, justifying his own passions in the name of God... we think of William Golding's novel, *The Spire.* God had promised that He would build a house / family for His Name. The foundation stone of that house would be His begotten Son, to be begotten after David "slept with his fathers". Solomon was focused upon himself and not upon the future Christ. Is. 28:16 clearly states that the foundation of God's house will be a person, not some stones cut by Hiram: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation. He who believes shall not be ashamed". These words are quoted in the New Testament about the Lord Jesus.

1Ki 5:18 Solomon's builders along with Hiram's builders and the Gebalites cut them, and prepared the timber and the stones to build the house-

The idea of Israelites and Gentiles working together to build God's house looks ahead to the greater fulfilment in the things of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. The kingdom of Solomon can indeed be viewed as a type of the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus (see on 1 Kings 4:2). But in reality it was rather that Solomon had been potentially empowered to be the Messianic seed with a Messianic kingdom as promised to David, but he failed. And the Lord Jesus fulfilled the potentials of the seed perfectly, leaving Solomon and his kingdom as a failed, marred reflection of Him.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 6

1Ki 6:1 It happened in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt-

The difficulties in chronology with the 480 years are probably because the periods of the judges involved some overlap between them; and some judges may have judged one part of Israel whilst others judged another at the same time. LXX gives the 440th year. Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). As noted on :38, the temple was built in seven and a half years, but this is summarized as seven years. The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”.

In the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of Yahweh-

The note in the LXX at the end of 1 Kings 5 says that the preparation of the materials took three years. Which would mean that Solomon began the project immediately he came to the throne, wrongly seeing the building of the temple as some kind of proof that he was indeed the Messianic son of David promised in 2 Sam. 7. But :37 makes it clear that the foundations of the temple were only laid in Solomon's fourth year, despite David having prepared everything ahead of time. Why the delay? If we read the entire record into 1 Kings 7, the answer may be that he got distracted with building his own house and his other building projects, seeking to create a huge palace-temple complex where effectively the temple was just the royal chapel which was connected to his own [double the size] palace, by an "ascent" or magnificent ramp which the Queen of Sheba noticed. He didn't make the temple a priority, and it was only part of his own huge palace complex.

1Ki 6:2 The house which king Solomon built for Yahweh, its length was sixty cubits, and its breadth twenty, and its height thirty cubits-

This was twice the size of the tabernacle. The overall size of Solomon's temple was much larger than this 60 x 20 measurement, because of the porch, the chambers and court surrounding it. The actual "house" wasn't that large, only 90 x 30 x 45 feet high.

Psalm 127 is prefaced with the information that it is a Psalm for Solomon- perhaps given by some nameless prophet (Gad? Nathan?) to warn him of where he was going. Verse 1 reminds him that God must be the builder of any house, or else the builders labour in vain. There is good reason to think that Solomon utterly failed to appreciate this. The records stress time and again that *Solomon* built the temple (1 Kings 6:2,14; 9:10,25; 10:4; 1 Chron.6:10,32; 2 Chron. 8:1,12; 9:3; Acts 7:47); yet the house referred to in the Davidic promises was to be built by God, through David's Messianic Son, the Lord Jesus. Zechariah prophesied at the time of the rebuilding of the physical temple. It is significant, in this context, that Zech. 6:12 reminds Israel that the true temple of God will be built by the Branch, the Lord Jesus. Indeed the point is laboured twice: "The man whose name is the Branch... he shall build

Yahweh's temple; even he shall build Yahweh's temple; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne" (Zech. 6:12,13).

1Ki 6:3 The porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was its length, according to the breadth of the house. Ten cubits was its breadth before the house-
The height of the porch was 120 cubits, or 180 feet (2 Chron. 3:4). This is out of proportion to the length and breadth. And it would have dwarfed the actual sanctuary (see on :2). In this case, we can say that form eclipsed content, as always with Solomon. For the sanctuary would have been dwarfed by the massive porch; just as is seen in Egyptian temples, which it seems were what Solomon was imitating. But perhaps what is meant is that the height of each of the four walls has been added together, which would give a height of 30 cubits. This style is to be found in 2 Chron. 3:11, where the length of the wings of the cherubim is given as 20 cubits, but this was a way of saying that each of the four wings was five cubits long. We have another example in the way that the two pillars are said to be 18 cubits high (1 Kings 7:15), but in 2 Chron. 3:15 they are 35 cubits high. What that means is that there were two cubits of 17.5 cubits high each, summarized as 18 cubits high in 1 Kings 7:15.

1Ki 6:4 He made windows of fixed lattice work for the house-
"Windows broad within and narrow without" (AVmg.). They were for ventilation, not for light. There was no natural light in the temple just as there wasn't in the tabernacle. The hope was that it would be lit by the light of God's glory; and likewise there is no natural light in the spiritual temple, only that of God's glory. But we could argue that they were in fact for light; because Solomon was more interested in natural light than in the light provided by God's glory. Yet despite this, God by grace still sent the shekinah glory into this temple to give His light, all the same.

1Ki 6:5 Against the wall of the house he built storeys all around, against the walls of the house all around, both of the temple and of the oracle; and he made side rooms all around-
The idea is that three stories (R.V.) of small chambers were built around two sides and one end of the temple. Josephus says there were 30 of these side rooms / chambers, which were accessed by passing through each room, i.e. there was no corridor. These rooms are alluded to by the Lord in Jn. 14:1-3, where He speaks of how there is a chamber or abiding place for each of us in God's temple which He was enabling to be built by His death. We each will have our own personal existence and place in God's Kingdom; our personality will be preserved, and not subsumed into some kind of nirvana. These are the chambers used for storage and even living in Neh. 13:5; Jer. 36:10,20.

1Ki 6:6 The lowest storey was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad-
This refers to the gap between the wall of the temple and the outer wall of the three stories of chambers described in :5. The temple wall was very thick at the bottom, seeing that at five cubits height there was a kind of ledge of one cubit wide, upon which rested the floor of the middle chambers. Then five cubits above that, there was another such ledge upon which was put the floor of the third story; and finally at a point 15 cubits high there was another ledge to support the roof beams of the top story. The wall of the holy place continued up for another 15 cubits, in which there were the "windows" or, effectively, ventilation slats. Assuming that upper wall was

two cubits thick, the base of the temple wall must have been five cubits thick. Remember that each story of the side chambers was one cubit wider than the one below it.

For on the outside he made offsets in the wall of the house all around, so that the supporting beams should not be inserted into the walls of the house-

The idea is that there was no hole made in the wall of the temple or holy place.

1Ki 6:7 The house, when it was in building, was built of stone prepared at the quarry; and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building-

This was perhaps an attempt to follow the spirit of the law which commanded that no iron tool should be used in the shaping of stones for an altar (Ex. 20:25; Dt. 27:5). But typical of Solomon, it is a getting around of God's law; because all the same, iron tools were used in preparing the stones. The Lord Jesus is presented as the builder of the spiritual temple, in which the stones should fit together without strife (Eph. 2:21 alludes to 1 Kings 6:7). This means that we as the stones are being prepared in this life; every knock and blow we receive is intended to shape us to fit next to other stones, eternally. And the final assembly of the stones at the day of judgment will not be the time for shaping; that is going on now. However in the immediate context, this is likely one of many reasons to think that the building of the temple was in line with pagan myths about temples. For there is evidence from various Ancient Near Eastern literature that it was believed that human noise could repel the divine presence and drive away the deity from the holy space. Therefore there is evidence that the images of the idols were made away from the temple in order to preserve the quiet sanctity of the supposed holy ground. And the Mosaic law was that no iron tool should be used on stones used for an altar; and yet Solomon in mock humility describes the temple as merely an altar. He sidesteps the Divine intention- that God just wants some earth kicked together, or rough stones. For that is the basis of our sacrifice to Him. But Solomon sought to get around that and make a grandiose fancy altar, which God didn't want.

1Ki 6:8 The door for the middle side rooms was in the right side of the house: and they went up by winding stairs into the middle storey, and out of the middle into the third-

LXX has "lowest" instead of "middle", which makes sense because otherwise there is no way of accessing the lowest chambers. "The right side" is Heb. 'shoulder', and refers to the face of the temple building.

1Ki 6:9 So he built the house, and finished it-

This seems to refer to the actual temple building, as the storeys of surrounding chambers of :5 are mentioned separately as being built (:10).

And he covered the house with beams and planks of cedar-

This refers to the roof. No cedar trunk would have yielded wood long enough to cover the required length, and so there would have been supporting beams. The inspired record makes such good sense, and is not open to serious criticism from a practical point of view. This roof would have imitated the covering upon the tabernacle and would probably therefore have been pitched at an angle.

1Ki 6:10 He built the storeys against the whole house, each five cubits high: and they

were attached to the house by cedar beams-
These beams rested on the shoulders or ledges of :6.

1Ki 6:11 The word of Yahweh came to Solomon saying-
As shown in :12, God was concerned that Solomon thought that simply having built the temple meant that he was fulfilling the promises of 2 Sam. 7 and was therefore the promised Messianic seed. God noticed how Solomon was bypassing in his mind the conditional nature of the promises.

1Ki 6:12 Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in My statutes, and execute My ordinances, and keep all My commandments to walk in them; then will I establish My word with you, which I spoke to David your father-
God constantly warned Solomon about the conditionality of the promises, before the building started (2 Sam. 7:14), during it (1 Kings 6:11-13) and immediately after completing it (1 Kings 9:2-9). God stresses that "*you* are building" this house- when His intention was that He would build a house of people through the future Messianic seed. Solomon struggled with the grace of all this and wanted something tangible and physical, the work of his own hands and not God's.

Thanks to Solomon's prayer, and *if* he had been obedient, all Israel would have been blessed and experienced Yahweh dwelling amongst them (1 Kings 6:12,13). Moses prayed for God to forgive Israel; and He responded: "I have pardoned, according to *your* word" (Num. 14:20)- rather than according to their repentance and prayer. Indeed it would seem from Heb. 11:28 that Israel were delivered from the Egyptians due to *Moses'* faith in the Christ whom the sprinkled Passover blood pointed forward to. And so Israel's blessing was dependent on Solomon's obedience (1 Kings 6:12,13); their joy was because of the honour God had given Solomon (2 Chron. 7:10). The blessing of others can be dependent upon a third party (e.g. Mk. 2:5).

1Ki 6:13 I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel-
Yahweh's dwelling amongst Israel is therefore not predicated upon the splendour of the temple, but upon walking in God's ways (:12). He was aware that Solomon misunderstood this.

The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). We can therefore conclude that His desperate "Why have You forsaken me?" was because He was so intensely identified with our sins that in the crisis of the cross, He indeed felt forsaken because of sin. He did not sin, but felt like a sinner; He thereby knows how sinners feel.

God said that He accepted the temple not so much as a place to dwell in (as Solomon assumed it was) but as a place facilitating sacrifice, prayer etc., for the glorification of His Name through these things; He emphasized that He dwelt amongst *His people* (1 Kings 6:13; 2 Chron. 7:12-16). There are several other places where God's response to Solomon's words seems to be corrective rather than affirmatory.

Thus Solomon says that God will hear the prayers of His people because *the temple* is called by God's Name; but God's response is that "My people, which are called by My Name" would pray to Him themselves and be heard, quite apart from the temple (2 Chron. 6:33 cp. 7:14). He sees them as bearing His Name rather than the temple building, as Solomon perceived it. God goes on to parallel the temple and His people in 2 Chron. 7:21,22, saying that if He punishes the temple He will punish the people. Solomon seems to have thought that the temple would still stand favourably in God's eyes even if the people were punished. The record records that the temple was "perfected" whereas Solomon's heart wasn't perfect [s.w.] (1 Kings 11:4 cp. 2 Chron. 8:16).

1Ki 6:14 So Solomon built the house, and finished it-
There appears no particular need for the phrase "Concerning this house which you are in building" in :12- it appears somewhat redundant, until we realize that God is saying 'OK I see you are building this house, thinking you are so obedient to My word; well, get on and keep My word in reality, and *then* the promises to David will apply to you'. Activity supposedly in God's service can lead us to think that of course we are being obedient to His word... when the very obsession of the activity may be blinding us to the fact that we aren't at all. There's no record that Solomon responded positively to God's warning words- 1 Kings 6:14 states that "So Solomon built the house, and finished it". We are expecting to hear Solomon respond to God- but instead, he gets on with building again.

"And finished it" may not mean that all the internal decorations were finished; see on 1 Kings 7:1 where Solomon finished all his house, perhaps implying he didn't finish all the internals of the temple. Because here we have a description of the basic stonework structure in :2-8; then the roof and some basic structural woodwork in :9,10; now the statement that Solomon "finished" the house; and then in :15-38 the descriptions of the internal woodwork and massive scale gold plating of everything, even the floor and walls. This would have required a huge amount of gold and would in any case have not been practicable in daily usage. And we cannot but note the similarities between the language here and the Mesopotamian inscriptions of how monarchs claimed to have built houses and temples with specifications far above what were achieved in practice- with the same rubric / completion formula "built and finished it". Nabonidus left many such examples.

Ps. 89:4 speaks of how Yahweh's promise was to eternally build up David's throne and house, which would be His house. It will become true in the Lord Jesus, whose throne will be eternally built up in that His rulership will eternally expand. That opens up a vista of us eternally extending His rule- in our own hearts, over other beings and dimensions. "Build up" is also translated "to obtain children". It's as if the seed continues to grow eternally, the throne is built up in that more people submit to the king, so His "kingdom", those beneath His dominion, increase eternally. This suggests we will spend eternity bringing other beings beneath that dominion, and we can begin living that spirit now in our witness and bringing others into that dominion. The contrast was with David wanting to "build [up]" a house for God. His response was that He didn't want David spending a few years building up a house for Him; but rather He would spend eternity building up David's house in the sense of his family, who would also be God's family and kingdom (2 Sam. 7:5,7 etc.). Solomon totally missed the point of all this in reasoning that David could not build the house because of his bloodshed, but therefore he [Solomon] was intended to physically build a house

for Yahweh (1 Kings 5:3,5). Perhaps this is why we read several times that Solomon built [up] the house and finished it (1 Kings 6:9,14), he was building the house seven years and then finished it (1 Kings 6:38), which appears to be stating the obvious until we see the intended contrast- Yahweh's building up of David's house, which was also to be His house, would be eternal and never finish. And 1 Kings 8:13 is almost comical in the contrast; Solomon proudly says that "I have surely built [up] for You a house to dwell in, a settled place for You to abide in for ever". But no, Yahweh is about eternally building up a house for David where He will live, in the hearts of an ever and eternally expanding group of people who would be David's true seed. Solomon built a physical house for God's Name... but how can a Name, Yahweh's characteristics, abide in a cold stone building? They can only be found in the hearts of humans made in His image. This is why Ps. 89:2,4 parallel the "building up" of the throne and "Mercy shall be built up for ever". The ever expanding dominion of God in hearts and minds is all of His grace and mercy, and that will continue to grow and be magnified for ever. Although David set Solomon up for failure with his insistence on building up a physical house rather than let Yahweh build up his spiritual house, David does also 'get it' that it is Yahweh who is the builder and not him. He does often admit this in his Psalms: "Do good unto Zion, build Thou the walls of Jerusalem... Yahweh built up His sanctuary... Jerusalem is builded up as a city compacted together... Except Yahweh builds up the house they labour in vain who build... Yahweh builds up Jerusalem... " (Ps. 51:18; 78:69; 122:3; 127:1; 147:2). And this time of building up would not be until the Lord Jesus returned: "When Yahweh shall build up Zion, he shall appear in His glory" (Ps. 102:16). This is the time of the new covenant: "I will build you [up] and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel... I will watch over them to build them up... I will build them [up] as at the first... I Yahweh build up the ruined places / people... in that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David and will build it [up]" (Jer. 31:4,28; 33:7; Ez. 36:36; Am. 9:11).

We note the constant emphasis on Solomon being the builder of the temple (:1,2,14; 1 Kings 7:51). But it was Hiram who was the craftsman and slaves who did the building. I suggest again the record is giving us the self perspective of Solomon, who considered he had built the temple himself and this fulfilled the promises to David.

1Ki 6:15 He built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar: from the floor of the house to the walls of the ceiling, he covered them on the inside with wood; and he covered the floor of the house with boards of fir-

"Fir" is LXX "pine", which along with the huge amount of cedar would all have been brought from Hiram.

1Ki 6:16 He built twenty cubits on the back part of the house with boards of cedar from the floor to the ceiling: he built them for it within, for an inner sanctuary, even for the most holy place-

"The back part", AV "sides", uses a word elsewhere describing inner recesses, e.g. of a cave (1 Sam. 24:4) or forest (Is. 37:24). The reference is to the 'back part' of the temple as one looked into the temple from the entrance- which was the wall at the end of the Most Holy Place. This was separated from the rest of the Holy Place by a door (:31) with "chains of gold" across it (:21) and a veil across it all (2 Chron. 3:14).

1Ki 6:17 In front of the temple sanctuary was forty cubits-

The reference is to the holy place; the preceding verses have just described the most holy place.

1Ki 6:18 There was cedar on the house within, carved with buds and open flowers: all was cedar; there was no stone seen-
"Open flowers" means open flower buds. "Buds" is a guess at translation, for the Hebrew word is very obscure, literally "wild gourds", a poisonous plant (s.w. 2 Kings 4:39). It is unlikely this plant is in view. But there are observable similarities with the decoration of Egyptian holy places. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence. And that was to be a theme of this temple until its destruction. See on :29. No wonder God told Jeremiah that He had been furiously angry with the temple from the day it was built to the day He destroyed it.

1Ki 6:19 He prepared an inner sanctuary in the midst of the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of Yahweh-
"Inner sanctuary" is AV "oracle", and is the Hebrew word usually translated "word". It refers to the most holy place, but perhaps the idea is that God's word is ultimately where we are to find the presence of God represented by the ark.

1Ki 6:20 Within the inner sanctuary was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in its height; and he overlaid it with pure gold: and he covered the altar with cedar-
The idea is that within the inner sanctuary there was a space of 20 cubits length. The altar within the Most Holy was the altar of incense. The altar is described in some manuscripts as "made" with cedar, and this surely must be the case. It was the cedar which was overlaid with pure gold as in Ex. 25:11.

The Outer Court was 30 cubits high, while the Holy of Holies was 20 cubits high, about 4 meters lower. We would have expected the Holy of Holies to be higher. But the likely reason for this was that the design of the temple reflected that of other temples unearthed in and around the land of Israel. They have a forecourt, an outer court, a 'holy of holies' *lower than the outer court*, two large pillars [cp. Jachin and Boaz] and some kind of large water tank [cp. the "molten sea"]; and the king's palace adjacent.

1Ki 6:21 So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he drew chains of gold across before the inner sanctuary; and he overlaid it with gold-
The most holy place, or "inner sanctuary", was separated from the rest of the Holy Place by a door (:31) with "chains of gold" across it and a veil across it all (2 Chron. 3:14).

1Ki 6:22 The whole house he overlaid with gold, until all the house was finished: also the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold-
2 Chron. 3:8 says this was 600 talents of gold. One talent is 26 kilograms (57 pounds). 1 kilogram of gold is currently worth about 40,000 US$ [2020], meaning the value was around 625 million US$ in current terms. But in the poor, subsistence farming economy of those times, this sum was far greater in real terms. But this was not even all the gold which came to Solomon in the course of one year (1 Kings 13:18), so it was not particularly generous.

1Ki 6:23 In the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high-
"Olive" is s.w. "pine", and may also have been brought from Gentile Hiram- to be worked into God's glory.

1Ki 6:24 Five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing to the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits-
This means that the wings of the cherubim touched each other. There was a complete covering over the mercy seat, or top of the ark where the blood of atonement was sprinkled each year, and above that but below the wings of the cherubim the shekinah glory of God was seen. The ark and mercy seat were placed under the cherubic wings (2 Chron. 8:6). It was only a relatively small space, as noted on :26.

In the tabernacle the wings were "spread out on high" (Ex. 25:20; 27:9), but here their wings touch each other. Although Solomon claims he built everything according to Divine revelation, we wonder whether in fact he felt free to liberally reinterpret the tabernacle features. And he changes wings uplifted to God's glory to wings which are closed in upon each other; the mercy seat, or cover of the ark, is no longer exposed to Heaven, as it were, but now closed over.

1Ki 6:25 The other cherub was ten cubits: both the cherubim were of one measure and one form-
This "one form" is significant, as the various Biblical visions of the cherubim seem to present them as having slightly different forms in each vision. Like everything to do with God's glory and manifestation, the form is constantly variable over time but expresses the same Divine glory. They stood upon their own feet in this vision (2 Chron. 3:13).

1Ki 6:26 The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so was it of the other cherub-
See on :24. The ark and mercy seat were placed under the cherubic wings (2 Chron. 8:6). The ark was one and a half cubits high (Ex. 25:10) and the cherubim were ten cubits high. In this relatively small space, the shekinah glory of God was manifest. For God doesn't need much space in which to reveal Himself; which is an abiding principle.

1Ki 6:27 He set the cherubim within the inner house; and the wings of the cherubim were stretched forth, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house-
We note that "the wall" refers to the interior of the wall. If this is likewise how "the walls" are described elsewhere, then the thickness of the walls is not included in the dimensions given.

1Ki 6:28 He overlaid the cherubim with gold-
Considering the construction of the cherubim leads us to reflect that they were not somehow supernatural, they were made of ordinary materials and didn't fall down from Heaven, as claimed by many of the religious cults.

1Ki 6:29 He carved all the walls of the house around with carved figures of cherubim-
The idea was that the glory and presence of God represented by the cherubim was not only in the most holy place, but extended beyond it. David had often perceived this in his Psalms whilst on the run from Saul.

And palm trees and open flowers-
Perhaps the reference was to David's imagery of the righteous flourishing like the palm tree (Ps. 92:12). But Solomon had likened his Egyptian lover to a palm (Song 7:7,8), and the palm and open flowers feature in Egyptian architecture. See on :18. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence, although mixing it with the imagery of the cherubim of Yahweh's manifestation. And that was to be a sad theme of this temple until its destruction.

Inside and outside-
The idea is "within and without", "the inner and outer", and I suggest the reference is to the inner and outer areas just described, i.e. the most holy place ['inner'] and holy place ['outer'].

1Ki 6:30 The floor of the house he overlaid with gold, inside and outside-
David had perceived that "Holiness adorns Your house, Yahweh, forever" (Ps. 93:5). David realized in that Psalm that if God's throne was David's throne, then David's house was to as Yahweh's house, adorned with holiness. Solomon interpreted this in physical terms, adorning the temple with symbols of holiness (the cherubim) and gold; but the real adornment was of personal holiness, which Solomon failed in ultimately because of his obsession with the external and material. This overlaying with gold was typical of Egyptian temples; again we see the influence of his Egyptian wife and probably other such wives. Overlaying a floor with gold was impractical as gold is a soft metal; and likewise the description of an altar overlaid with cedar wood in a place where there was no altar in the tabernacle (:20). We therefore immediately perceive that Solomon's interest was not on practical utility / usage, but rather on external appearance and creating a legend that his temple was paved with gold even on the floor.

1Ki 6:31 For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood-
The most holy place, or "inner sanctuary", was separated from the rest of the Holy Place by a door with "chains of gold" across it (:21) and a veil across it all (2 Chron. 3:14).

The lintel and door posts were a fifth part of the wall-
The wall was 20 cubits high, so the length and breadth of the door posts / lintel were 4 x 4 cubits.

1Ki 6:32 So he made two doors of olive wood; and he carved on them carvings of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread the gold on the cherubim, and on the palm trees-
"Two doors" means two leaves meeting in the middle- just as was the recent rage at the time in Egyptian temples. Likewise the spreading of the gold on the cherubim means that the gold was hammered and nailed over the protruding shapes of the cherubim- again, just as in Egyptian temples.

See on :29 for the significance of the carvings. The floors and walls were covered with gold plating, but the carved work had to be covered with gold spread or beaten onto it. Seeing gold seemed in plentiful supply, we wonder why Solomon didn't make the cherubim of solid gold. Perhaps he was careful to imitate how they had been made in the tabernacle, or perhaps it was Divinely overruled that he didn't make them of solid gold. For the significance of the stress upon overlaying with gold was that God works with very ordinary materials, wood and stone, and turns them into something far more beautiful in response to our faith, which is the real gold.

1Ki 6:33 In the same way he also made for the entrance of the temple door posts of olive wood, out of a fourth part of the wall-
The wall was 20 cubits high, so the length and breadth of the door posts / lintel were 5 x 5 cubits. "The entrance" in view could be that into the holy place from the porch. "Out of a fourth part of the wall" can be rendered simply as meaning there were four doorposts. So I suggest that in the entrance from the Forecourt to the Outer Court there were four doorposts of olive wood (1 Kings 6:33 Heb.). At the entrance between the Outer Court and the Holy of Holies, there were five doorposts of olive wood (1 Kings 6:31 Heb.). What does this signify and why is it recorded? It's hard to say this has any meaning- until we realize that this was typical of other temples. Thus in the elaborate stone building model from Khirbet Qeiyafa there is exactly the same design.

1Ki 6:34 and two doors of fir wood: the two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding-
This means there were four leaves. Two collapsed together on one wall and two on the other. This meant that the opening could be just a quarter of the entire door, or more or less the entire aperture could be opened.

1Ki 6:35 He carved cherubim and palm trees and open flowers; and he overlaid them with gold fitted on the engraved work-
See on :29 for the significance of the carvings. 2 Chron. 3:6 adds that the gold was from Parvaim, and that precious stones were also used. The context is of the doors, so the idea may be that the carvings and embossed parts of the doors were overlaid rather than the entire doors.

1Ki 6:36 He built the inner court with three courses of cut stone, and a course of cedar beams-
This other court would be the "court of the priests" (2 Chron. 4:9), the "higher court" of Jer. 36:10. Perhaps it was made "higher" by the three layers of stone and the cedar decking placed upon it. Perhaps the idea was that the people in the outer court could see what the priests were doing. This building of a temple on a platform of three rows of stone was, again, exactly the style of Egyptian temples.

1Ki 6:37 In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of Yahweh laid, in the month Ziv-
This was the fourth year of Solomon's reign (:1).

1Ki 6:38 In the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which is the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all its parts, and according to all its fashion. Thus he was seven years in building it-

Comparing with :1, the period was seven and a half years. But as noted on :1, the Bible is often not exact about time periods.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 7

1Ki 7:1 Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house-

The record of Solomon's building of his own house is clearly framed to reveal the sad fact that his zeal for God's house was only an outcome of his own natural zeal and passion for building which he comments upon in Ecclesiastes; but that tremendous energy was given far more scope in achieving his own ends. So often apparently active brethren are only so because the Truth is only compounding their own naturally active characters. For example, those who naturally like travelling can seem zealous Gospel missionaries. The style of the record makes this clear of Solomon:

"So was he seven years in building (God's house)...

but Solomon was building his own house thirteen years" (1 Kings 6:38; 7:1).

His own house (cp. our family and mortgage) assumed almost double the importance of God's house. In this we see Solomon's apostacy. The architectural detail given concerning Solomon's house and "the house of the forest of Lebanon" seems to be given in such a format as to compare with that concerning God's house. The question is whether all these building projects happened chronologically, one after another, or whether they in fact were all going on at the same time. If chronologically, we would expect a note to that effect at this point. Instead we are left to conclude that the building of the temple, of his own house, of "the house of the forest of Lebanon" and the "house for Pharaoh's daughter (whom Solomon had taken as wife)" (:8) all happened at the same time. We could conclude that he was distracted from building God's house by his other building projects, and that's why the building of the temple took seven years. This may appear to be contradicted by the statements in 1 Kings 9:10 and 2 Chron. 8:1: "It happened at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of Yahweh and the king's house...". However the context of those verses goes on to state that Solomon had given twenty cities to Hiram in return for his labour and materials for the building of the houses. So we could legitimately read those passages as meaning that at the end of the twenty year period over which the two houses had been built and twenty cities given to Hiram... that Hiram became dissatisfied. The recurrence of the number twenty could hint that he was paid one city a year for twenty years.

He had initially justified building the temple because of the fact that Israel were worshipping in "high places" contrary to God's expressed intention. That however was a fake excuse anyway, because they could have simply assembled wherever the ark was. And if indeed Solomon was so concerned about this matter, he would have made building the temple a priority and not delayed it because of his other building projects. We can also conclude that the list of all his building projects here in 1 Kings 7 is again the record's way of making an implicit criticism of Solomon. His appeal for wholehearted devotion to God in 1 Kings 8:61 is therefore hypocritical. We recall David already had a grand cedar house for himself, so grand he felt guilty about it, which had prompted his desire to build a house for God. But this wasn't enough for Solomon; he spent 13 years building himself an even grander palace. The references to all the windows and openings in the house of the forest of Lebanon were for the air to circulate, suggesting it was a grand summer house. And so we have a scene reminiscent of other eastern monarchs. A grand palace, a house for his chief wife, a

summer house, a judgment hall and throne (:7) and a royal chapel, which in Solomon's case was Yahweh's temple- all within the same palace-temple complex. The queen of Sheba will later be awed at "the ascent" by which Solomon entered the temple- some grandiose entrance ramp from his own house to the temple, which was effectively his royal chapel.

"He finished *all* his house" could hint that he never in fact finished *all* the temple [for what elaborate architectural plans are finished to the end?]; but he did finish his house. We read simply that he built and finished the temple (1 Kings 6:14; I suggest there that this refers only to the basic structure). This might explain why the temple rather fades from view in Solomon's later reign and in the accounts of the kings after him. We wonder how much it was ever used at the time.

1Ki 7:2 For he built the house of the forest of Lebanon; its length was one hundred cubits, and its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits, on four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams on the pillars-

It was called the house of the forest of Lebanon because of the resemblance of the mass of cedar pillars to the Lebanon cedar forest. The length of "a hundred cubits" (150 feet) was nearly twice as long as the entire temple without the porch.

LXX "three rows". This must be correct because the three rows of 15 pillars make the 45 pillars of :3. Building using 45 pillars is exactly what we find in the surrounding nations- the 45 pillar layout is most clearly seen in the palace of Cyrus at Pasargadae.

The Temple was smaller than Solomon's house; he took nearly twice as long to build it. Clearly he spent more effort at housing his own glory than he did housing God's. The comparisons are intended to show this. The following comparisons put the temple first, and then Solomon's house.

Length: 60 cubits, breadth 20, height 30 (1 Kings 6:2) cp.Length: 100 cubits, breadth 50, height 30 (1 Kings 7:2)

Used cedar pillars and beams (1 Kings 6:9,10) cp. 1 Kings 7:2

Inner court built with three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams (1 Kings 6:36 RV) cp. "The great court round about had three rows of hewn stones, and a row of cedar beams, like as the inner court of the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 7:12)

Hiram called in to build it (1 Kings 5:1-5) cp.1 Kings 7:13

The Most Holy within God's house (1 Kings 7:8) cp.The "another court within the porch" in his house seems to have been a replica of the Most Holy within God's house. Here Solomon's wives worshipped their idols.

Built on large foundation stones cp. The record of the foundation stones (7:10) is similar to that of the temple foundations.

The temple had a "porch" (Ez. 8:7,16) cp. The porch of Solomon's house matches that of the temple (Ez. 8:7,16), which in Ezekiel's time was a place of apostacy.

Open flowers design of the temple cp. The two pillars with their pomegranates and lily-work seem to have matched the open flowers of the temple, and they have ominous connections with Absalom's pillar of self-glorification (2 Sam. 18:18).

The way the record of Solomon's house follows straight on from that of God's house (1 Kings 6,7) seems to highlight the similarity between them. The house of Yahweh and Solomon's house are often spoke of together (e.g. 2 Chron. 7:11; 8:1; 9:11) to make us reflect on this. Indeed, the record of Solomon's house in 1 Kings 7:1-12 is a parenthesis out of historical sequence; 5:2-6:38 and 7:13-9:9 are about the temple; 7:1-12 is a clear parenthesis to demonstrate Solomon's weakness.

The size and grandeur of Solomon's house would have dwarfed the temple; when it should have been the other way around. Indeed it could be argued that the temple then appeared as his royal chapel, similar to how many kings in the area built a huge personal palace with a chapel to their god nearby.

1Ki 7:3 It was covered with cedar above over the forty-five beams, that were on the pillars; fifteen in a row-
Is. 2:6-13 condemns Israel for their pride whilst making many allusions to Solomon: "Full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures... full of horses... chariots... idols... the work of their own hands... the cedars of Lebanon" (i.e. Solomon's armoury of 1 Kings 7:2,3; 10:17). The amount of cedar used for Solomon's house as well as the temple would have probably resulted in the deforestation of parts of Lebanon in order to provide this number of mature cedar trees. To cover an area of 100 x 50 cubits with a roof of cedar would have required 5000 square cubits of cedar wood if it were a flat roof, and more if the roof was angled; although it could be that not all the area was covered, i.e. there may have been a courtyard. But if it was, then we can better understand why it was called "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 10:17; Is. 22:8). About a whole forest of Lebanon would have been felled and transported to Jerusalem for all this building work.

1Ki 7:4 There were window frames in three rows, and window was over against window in three ranks-
The words used here are generally different to those in 1 Kings 6:4 and speaks more of windows for light. There was no natural light in the temple just as there wasn't in the tabernacle. The hope was that it would be lit by the light of God's glory; and likewise there is no natural light in the spiritual temple, only that of God's glory. But there were windows admitting natural light in Solomon's own house.

There is the implication here that the building was of three stories, as was the temple (1 Kings 6:6). His house was a conscious imitation of God's house, but on a far grander scale.

1Ki 7:5 All the doors and posts had square frames: and window was opposite window in three tiers-
These windows were for light; AV "light against light". There was no natural light in the temple; but Solomon's house was full of natural light. The difference is significant. For the temple was to be illuminated by God's glory, whereas Solomon's own house was all about his own natural light.

1Ki 7:6 He made the porch of pillars; its length was fifty cubits, and its breadth thirty cubits; and a porch before them; and pillars and a threshold before them-
It's hard to determine which building this porch joined to, but it was a colonnade, and perhaps a separate building; and the point to note is that it was far grander than the porch built for Yahweh's house. It was an Egyptian propylaea, a kind of "pillar hall", and reflects Egyptian influence upon Solomon.

1Ki 7:7 He made the hall of judgment for the throne where he was to judge, even the porch of judgment: and it was covered with cedar from floor to floor-
This was effectively replicating the most holy place of the temple; and Solomon was placing his throne of judgment as the equivalent to the ark in the most holy place. He was playing God, exalting his judgment over that of Yahweh.

1Ki 7:8 His house where he was to dwell had another court within the porch, which was of the same plan. He made also a house for Pharaoh's daughter (whom Solomon had taken as wife), like this porch-
"His house" may differ from the one just described from :1-7, which was called the house of the forest of Lebanon, and was really a glorious law court, with Solomon's throne exalted as the judge of all (see on :7).

The porch of Solomon's house matches that of the temple (Ez. 8:7,16), which in Ezekiel's time was a place of apostacy. Solomon's own house was undeniably larger than God's, although built with the same layout (e.g. 1 Kings 6:2 cp. 7:2; 6:36 cp. 7:12; 5:1-5 cp. 7:13). The "another court within the porch" in his house seems to have been a replica of the Most Holy within God's house (1 Kings 7:8), yet it was here that Solomon's wives worshipped their idols. Likewise the record of the foundation stones (7:10) is similar to that of the temple foundations.

1Ki 7:9 All these were of costly stones, even of cut stone, according to measure, sawn with saws, inside and outside, even from the foundation to the coping, and so on the outside to the great court-
"According to measure" may mean as in AV that the precious stones were cut and used to a similar size as building brick, the cut stone. "Inside and outside" seems to mean that the precious stones were cut or polished on the inside as well, i.e. the side not exposed to view. This opulence and grandeur is far greater than what Solomon invested in the building of God's house.

1Ki 7:10 The foundation was of costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits-
This could mean that precious stones were inserted in even the foundation; see on :9. It seems these stones were smaller than those used in the temple, meaning that more effort was put into Solomon's own house than God's house. And that is the challenge of these specifications to us.

1Ki 7:11 Above were costly stones, cut stone, according to measure, and cedar wood-
That is, above the foundation stones of :10. The stones built upon them were "cut stones", implying they were smoothed. Again as noted on :10, more effort was put into Solomon's own house than God's house. As discussed earlier, the record is implicitly criticizing Solomon all the way through. His building efforts for his own house dwarfed his efforts for God's house, and this was to be the complaint of Haggai centuries later.

1Ki 7:12 The great court around had three courses of cut stone, and a course of cedar beams; like the inner court of the house of Yahweh, and the porch of the house-
Again we see Solomon playing God. His house had two courts [like the temple, 1 Kings 6:36] and was a conscious replica of the temple, the house of Yahweh, but to a grander scale and with far more effort put into it. Again we note that Egyptian and Assyrian palaces always had such an external court, and then one or more inner courts or quadrangles.

1Ki 7:13 King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre-
This contrasts with how Solomon's communications with Hiram regarding the temple had been by messenger. But for the matters of building his own house, he wants him

present in person. Again we see how more effort was put into Solomon's own house than God's house.

However I suggest that the actual Hiram king of Tyre is not necessarily in view, but a man called Huram (2 Chron. 4:11), of similar spelling, who is described as a "father" to Hiram the king (2 Chron. 2:13); in the sense in which Joseph was a father to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), his leading official. Thus we read in 2 Chron. 4:16 that "the vessels thereof did Huram his father make for king Solomon". However the point is established that a leading political figure within Tyre, who was known for his craftsmanship, was summoned personally to work on Solomon's own house, whereas this wasn't done for the work of God's house.

Another possibility is that this craftsman was Hiram's own representative, and is therefore spoken of as being "Hiram".

1Ki 7:14 He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass-

2 Chron. 2:14 says "Hiram" was "son of a woman of the daughters of Dan", whereas 1 King 7:14 says he was "the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali". Dan may refer to the town called Dan or Laish which was in the territory of Naphtali, but inhabited by Danites (Josh. 18:27; 19:47; Jud. 18:7). Here we see how an apparent discrepancy on a surface level reveals a deep evidence of the way the records do not contradict but dovetail perfectly, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired writing. But this is only apparent to those who respectfully search the entire scriptures, rather than bandying around a surface level contradiction with an eagerness which speaks more of their own fears the Bible is inspired than of deep factual persuasion.

And he was filled with wisdom and understanding and skill, to work all works in brass. He came to king Solomon, and performed all his work-

This is similar language as to how Solomon had been filled by God with wisdom. But this man was filled with human wisdom. The contrast is similar to the fact that God's house had no natural light, whereas Solomon's did.

1Ki 7:15 For he fashioned the two pillars of brass, each eighteen cubits high: and a line of twelve cubits encircled both of them around-

"Fashioned" is as AV "cast", and reflects Egyptian influence. The paintings of Thebes show this casting being done in Egypt, and it clearly was copied by Solomon. In connection with his wife being Pharaoh's daughter, he likely visited Egypt several times.

The two pillars with their pomegranates and lily-work seem to have matched the open flowers of the temple, and they have ominous connections with Absalom's pillar of self-glorification (2 Sam. 18:18). Worst of all, Solomon's throne seems to have been built with allusion to Yahweh's enthronement upon the praises of Israel in the Most Holy.

The two pillars are said to be 18 cubits high (1 Kings 7:15), but in 2 Chron. 3:15 they are 35 cubits high. What that means is that there were two cubits of 17.5 cubits high each, summarized as 18 cubits high in 1 Kings 7:15. We have another example of this kind of reckoning in the way that the height of the porch was 120 cubits, or 180 feet (2 Chron. 3:4). This is out of proportion to the length and breadth. Perhaps what is meant is that the height of each of the four walls has been added together, which would give a height of 30 cubits. This style is to be found in 2 Chron. 3:11, where the length of the wings of the cherubim is given as 20 cubits, but this was a way of saying that each of the four wings was five cubits long.

1Ki 7:16 He made two capitals of molten brass, to set on the tops of the pillars: the height of the one capital was five cubits, and the height of the other capital was five cubits-
The capitals were placed on the tops of the pillars. "Tops" is "heads", and the Hebrew for "capitals" suggests "crown". The idea is that everywhere in his house, Solomon was glorifying his own kingship; forgetting that it was by grace, and conditional upon his obedience. These bronze pillars replicated those before the temple (2 Kings 25:17; 2 Chron. 3:15). Solomon was modelling his house upon God's house. Although the height of the crowns in the pillars before his house was five cubits, but only three cubits for the pillars before God's house (2 Kings 25:17).

1Ki 7:17 There were nets of chequer work, and wreaths of chain work, for the capitals which were on the top of the pillars; seven for the one capital, and seven for the other capital-
"This decoration consisted of seven twists arranged as festoons, which were hung round the capitals of the pillars" (Keil). The language is more appropriate for metalwork than stone work.

1Ki 7:18 So he made the pillars; and there were two rows around on the one network, to cover the capitals that were on the top of the pillars: and he did so for the other capital-
LXX reads "pomegranates" for "pillars". I consider that any attempt to find spiritual significance in the pomegranates used in Solomon's building is misplaced, because I don't think he was at all thinking in that way. Rather is this another example of his simply copying what he had seen in Egypt, from where his queen came from. For such pomegranate designs are common in Egyptian architecture of the time, and Egypt was famed for pomegranates (Num. 20:5).

1Ki 7:19 The capitals that were on the top of the pillars in the porch were of carved lilies, four cubits-
Again, this reflects Egyptian influence on Solomon, rather than any great spiritual symbolism. For "the capitals of Egyptian pillars took the form of the lotus", and here he uses carved lilies, although they may effectively be the same as the lotus motif of Egyptian architecture. It seems that this refers to another capital superimposed upon those we have just had described (:20). Again, we see how more effort was put into Solomon's own house than God's house. The lotus or lily was common the river Nile, and it opened every morning and closed every night, just as some of their gods were perceived as doing. We note that the lily / lotus motif is absent in Ezekiel's temple, where we have only cherubim and palm trees as a decorative motif. Even Solomon's use of the winged cherubim as a motif may be intended to imitate the common motif of winged griffins in contemporary Phoenician temples.

1Ki 7:20 There were capitals above also on the two pillars-
This would mean that there were in fact two capitals on each pillar, as noted on :19. There was only one such capital on the pillars erected before God's house. But Solomon was far more painstaking and ornate in building his own house, and it therefore took him nearly twice as long.

Close by the cushion which was beside the network: and the pomegranates were two hundred, in rows around on the other capital-

See on :18 for "pomegranates". There were 100 in each row, but on one row there were 96 facing the courts, meaning the other four were at the corners (Jer. 52:23). The internal corroboration between records written hundreds of years apart is impressive, and reflects Divine inspiration of the entire Old Testament.

1Ki 7:21 He set up the pillars at the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar-

I suggest there were two sets of pillars, one before Solomon's house and another before the temple. Now the focus of the record returns to the temple, as now we will also read of the huge laver Solomon built before the temple. But pillars before a temple was a reflection of pagan influence. "The Phoenicians used isolated metal columns as sacred ornaments, so that Hiram would be familiar with such a mode of ornamentation" (Rawlinson). "Whenever in coins or histories we get a representation of a Phoenician temple, it always has a pillar or pillars standing within or before it" (Stanley). It seems that the contact with Tyre had resulted in their religion coming to influence Solomon's design of the temple. And so it happens when we claim to serve God according to the religious ideas of pagans. This is another reason why I query whether in fact he did receive the designs of the temple from God as he claimed. Indeed it was a common feature of the surrounding temples that the king claimed to have been given the plans by his god, and I suggest Solomon and David were no different.

And called its name Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and called its name Boaz-

"Jachin" means "He will establish", and Boaz "in Him [God] is strength", which is the idea in Is. 45:24. They were a statement that God would establish the line of Solomon, and perhaps Boaz is also a reference to his ancestor of that name. But that establishment of the Kingdom was conditional upon Solomon's obedience, according to the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7. But Solomon liked to think that by building these pillars, he had himself established his dynasty, and shown it to be established. Putting the two names together, we have 'He will establish by strength', and this seems to be deconstructed by the restoration prophecy of Zech. 4:6, given after these two pillars had been removed, never to be restored. "Boaz" may simply be a reference to David's ancestor Boaz. It was his line through David which David believed would be permanently established ['Jachin']. In this case, this would be similar to how Babylonian temple columns were named according to the first word in a sentence, which pronounced eternal dynasty to the king. Jeremiah records the removal of the pillars by the Babylonians, as if to underscore how God did not in fact permanently establish the line of kings from Solomon and David. David's hope was that his "throne shall be established [*yikkon*] forever as the moon" (Ps. 89:38). Ps. 93:2 claims that his throne is *nakhon* ("firmly established"), from the same root as *jakhin*. But it wasn't. The eternal establishment was to be through his greater Son, and not through an unbroken line of kings from him. Yet this is how the pillars were understood, for in 2 Kings 11:14 we read of the king "standing by the pillar, as was the custom" to receive an official position.

The significance of the Jachin and Boaz pillars may however be little more than that like many features of the temple, they correspond closely to the design of other temples in the area. Free standing pillars before temples were common; Cleopatra's Needle in London may be a surviving example of such a free-standing obelisk. Quite possibly these pillars were Hiram's idea, because in Tyre two pillars stood outside the temple of Hercules. Solomon's temple was clearly influenced by his desire to be like

the nations, and possibly reflect the influence of his idolatrous wives who were from those nations.

1Ki 7:22 On the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished-
The lily motif is stressed in the final description of the pillars, and I suggested on :19 that they were pagan lotus symbols.

1Ki 7:23 He made the molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and its height was five cubits; and a line of thirty cubits encircled it-
This gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”. Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). This is not how we are used to history being written; but we are reading the Hebrew genre of history, not our own.

1Ki 7:24 Under its brim around there were buds which encircled it, for ten cubits, encircling the sea: the buds were in two rows, cast when it was cast-
The size of this laver was unrealistic if it were to be useful. The huge size was therefore for show, and not because Solomon really wished there to be cleansing in practice. "Buds" is AV "knops". "Buds" is a guess at translation, for the Hebrew word is very obscure, literally "wild gourds", a poisonous plant (s.w. 2 Kings 4:39). It is unlikely this plant is in view. But there are observable similarities with the decoration of Egyptian holy places. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence. And that was to be a theme of this temple until its destruction.

1Ki 7:25 It stood on twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south and three looking toward the east; and the sea was set on them above, and all their hinder parts were inward-
This massive laver was therefore a political statement, implying the twelve tribes of Israel were only to be cleansed by this huge laver. I discussed on 1 Kings 4 how Solomon sought to bring all Israel under his personal control. He constantly mixes spiritual appearance with his own unspiritual agendas.

1Ki 7:26 It was a handbreadth thick: and its brim was worked like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily: it held two thousand baths-
We several times read of the lily motif in Solomon's building. But the word can as well refer to the lotus. And "the lotus was the religious flower of the Indian and Egyptian religions". So we have a case of Solomon allowing himself to be influenced by the pagan religions of his wives and those he traded with, and importing it into his own version of Yahweh worship.

It was 10 cubits [5 meters] in diameter, 30 cubits in circumference and five cubits high- and placed upon ornamental oxen. This would have been at least 2.5 meters off the ground and probably higher if we count the 24 oxen beneath it. 2 Kings 16:17 describes how they "took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon the pavement of stones". Far too high for priests to have easily cleansed themselves or sacrifices. I have several times commented that some of the temple features were not at all useful in practice. A cedar wood coated altar, gold hinges and a gold floor, the Jachin and Boaz pillars... amongst others. The huge bronze sea or laver is quite likely another example. The huge size made it impractical to wash anything in. There is no mention of steps or ladders, and surely they would have been required. Such water reservoirs were typical of surrounding temples, and I suggest Solomon simply replicated them but on a larger scale. The Egyptian *Book of the Temple* describes a "purification lake" adorned with lotus / lily flowers. Just as with this huge laver. Surely Solomon was copying this. "The lotus held political and religious significance as one of the incarnations of the sun god, Khafre- who rises every morning from the primordial waters in Egypt- and accordingly served as a symbol of Upper Egypt and featured on most of its temples in the New Kingdom period". Ezekiel's Divinely inspired plans for a rebuilt temple carefully omit any equivalent of this "molten sea". Indeed there were similar symbolic water containers in various temples. A similar object was found at Amathus, Cyprus and currently resides at the Louvre Museum in Paris. A similar water vat existed at the Marduk temple in Babylon. No wonder Jeremiah prophesied that God was furious with the temple from the day it was built to the day He destroyed it. He agreed to dwell in it, but the whole thing was idolatrous from the start.

2000 baths here contrasts with the parallel record stating 3000 baths (2 Chron. 4:2-5). It has been suggested that the figure of 2000 refers to liquid, and 3000 to how much it could contain of dry material. A ration of liquid to dry volume of 3:2 is realistic. Given a circumference of 30 cubits, the diameter is $30 \div 2\pi = 4.77$ meters, and therefore the vessel's volume was $4/3\pi*2.3853 = 28{,}400$ liters. A domestic bath tub takes 80 liters to fill. So this is the size of a small swimming pool. This is massive and far more water than necessary. There is also no explanation as to how the water entered the "sea" nor how it drained from it. And how was it changed, if it was defiled and dirty? And open water in such a hot climate would soon evaporate. All this leads me to suspect this was again mere showmanship and without any practical utility. Hence there is no record of it ever being used in practice.

All these pagan connections are too many to just insist this was what God had commanded. The record emphasizes that David merely claimed to have received the design of the temple from God. Clearly he was influenced by Gentile temples. And yet despite all this, God did dwell in the temple, the temple He says He hated from the day it was built (Jer. 32:31). So we conclude that God is so eager to dwell with man and somehow make the relationship work. Consider the background:

- David had misrepresented God's word about Solomon and the temple
- Solomon in turn had spun David's misinterpretations of God's word
- The temple was heavily influenced by paganism
- There was more mere religion than spirituality in the temple
- Pride and lack of awareness of sin was everywhere in it
- The temple was more about exalting the greatness of the man Solomon than God.

This all sounds very much like what passes for Christianity today. And yet God is still

willing to try to dwell in that system and to fellowship with individuals who are within the system, just as He did with those who used Solomon's temple.

1Ki 7:27 He made the ten bases of brass; four cubits was the length of one base, and four cubits its breadth, and three cubits its height-
These bases or pedestals were for the ten smaller lavers which will now be described. The massive laver described above was for show, it was too large to realistically be used for ritual cleansing; in practice, the ten smaller lavers would have to be used.

1Ki 7:28 The work of the bases was like this: they had panels; and there were panels between the ledges-
These "ledges" appear to refer to poles at the four corners of each base, onto which the panels were fixed.

1Ki 7:29 and on the panels that were between the ledges were lions, oxen, and cherubim; and on the ledges there was a pedestal above; and beneath the lions and oxen were wreaths of hanging work-
The pedestal carrying the actual laver was fixed upon the four poles or shafts of :28, meaning that the panels didn't carry any of the weight but were purely decorative.

1Ki 7:30 Every base had four bronze wheels, and axles of brass; and the four feet of it had supports: beneath the basin were the supports molten, with wreaths at the side of each-
The language of wheels and axles recalls the cherubim visions of Ezekiel. The bases were as it were extensions of the cherubim. We note the lions and oxen of :29 were also associated with the cherubim of Ezekiel's visions. The "supports" seem to refer to "shoulders"' (R.V. margin), through which the axles passed through.

1Ki 7:31 The mouth of it within the capital and above was a cubit: and its mouth was round after the work of a pedestal, a cubit and a half; and also on its mouth were engravings, and their panels were foursquare, not round-
The "mouth" appears to refer to a circular opening, into which the laver itself was hooked in.

1Ki 7:32 The four wheels were underneath the panels; and the axles of the wheels were in the base: and the height of a wheel was a cubit and half a cubit-
The axles "were in the base" in that they were cast as art of the base. If this is correct, then the wheels didn't actually turn. They had the impression of movement, but didn't actually move- in contrast to the actual cherubim of Ezekiel's vision, whose wheels moved because of the presence of the Spirit within them. This was lacking from Solomon's creation.

1Ki 7:33 The work of the wheels was like the work of a chariot wheel: their axles, and their rims, and their spokes, and their naves, were all molten-
Again we see the influence of Egypt. Chariots were forbidden for the king of Israel, but Solomon indulged in them. And this was reflected in how he apparently served God. This was a cherubim which couldn't move anywhere in practice but was totally ornamental and lifeless; see on :32.

1Ki 7:34 There were four supports at the four corners of each base: its supports were

of the base itself-
This follows straight on from the description of the wheels in :33, and I suggest it means that the base and the "shoulders" where the axles were (:32) were all cast as part of the same item, and therefore, as discussed on :32,33, the structure couldn't actually move anywhere.

1Ki 7:35 In the top of the base was there a round compass half a cubit high; and on the top of the base its stays and its panels were of the same-
"Of the same" seems to mean they were cast as one piece; see on :32.

1Ki 7:36 On the plates of its stays, and on its panels, he engraved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, according to the space of each, with wreaths all around-
Perhaps the reference was to David's imagery of the righteous flourishing like the palm tree (Ps. 92:12). But Solomon had likened his Egyptian lover to a palm (Song 7:7,8), and the palm and open flowers feature in Egyptian architecture. See on 1 Kings 6:18. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence, although mixing it with the imagery of the cherubim of Yahweh's manifestation. And that was to be a sad theme of this temple until its destruction. Cherubim clearly allude to the garden of Eden, and there are many echoes of Eden in the temple. The use of cedar and palm trees would represent the righteous, as is clear from Ps. 92:13-16 ["The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in Yahweh's house, they will flourish in our God's courts"]. The huge water tank / "molten sea" may allude to water coming out of Eden. But in this case we see Solomon assuming that he had as it were restored Eden. But without dealing with sin and without any Messianic sacrifice of the seed of the woman. The cherubim were to keep man out of Eden, but throughout the temple there is the message that man was now mixing freely with the cherubim.

1Ki 7:37 In this way, he made the ten bases: all of them had one casting, one measure, and one form-
They were all cast from the same one mould. We enquire however why there were ten such smaller lavers and not twelve, for the twelve tribes of Israel. Perhaps Solomon thought that his favoured kingdom, of Judah and Benjamin, didn't require such cleansing.

1Ki 7:38 He made ten basins of brass: one basin contained forty baths; and every basin was four cubits; and on every one of the ten bases one basin-
Forty baths was about 340 gallons, 1287 litres. The measurement of "four cubits" could refer to the height, or to the diameter. The presence of so many lavers implied that Solomon expected huge numbers of animals to be sacrificed at one time, as he himself did. He had not at all picked up the spirit of his father David, who perceived that God was looking for broken hearts and not sacrifices (Ps. 51:17). The tabernacle had only one laver for all Israel.

1Ki 7:39 He set the bases, five on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house-
The right side was the south, the left side was the north.

And he set the sea on the right side of the house eastward, toward the south-
This confirms that the right side was the south. The description is as of a person standing facing the temple from the west side of it. But this was not where the entrance was. Solomon was describing it from his perspective and not that of a worshipper entering the temple from the east.

1Ki 7:40 Hiram made the basins, and the shovels, and the basins. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he worked for king Solomon in the house of Yahweh-
"Basins" is a very similar Hebrew word for "pots" (as in 2 Chron. 4:11). "Pots" is likely the best reading. There is much stress upon all the "work" done (:40,51). Solomon had quite missed the lessons learned by his father David [and his mother Bathsheba], that God wants broken, contrite hearts more than works and sacrifices.

1Ki 7:41 the two pillars, and the two bowls of the capitals that were on the top of the pillars; and the two networks to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the top of the pillars-
The bowls on top of the pillars may have been because there were oil lamps burning there, as if pointing the way into the temple by night. The same word is used in Zech. 4:2,3 for a bowl of oil on top of a golden candlestick. We now have a summary of all the work done, as if Solomon itemized it all and boasted in the inventory. This glorification of human works and achievement revealed so much about his lack of true spiritual perception; see on :40.

1Ki 7:42 and the four hundred pomegranates for the two networks; two rows of pomegranates for each network, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars-
The Hebrew word for "network" is used multiple times in the descriptions of Solomon's work. But it is an unusual word, and is elsewhere translated "snare" (Job 18:8). There is throughout the record the hint that all is not how it should have been spiritually.

1Ki 7:43 and the ten bases, and the ten basins on the bases-
There was only one laver in the tabernacle, made of the brass mirrors of the repentant women of Ex. 38:8. There was to be a common experience of washing and cleansing in using the same laver; and this was rather spoilt by having ten lavers and then one huge laver, so huge nobody could effectively use it.

1Ki 7:44 and the one sea, and the twelve oxen under the sea-
There is no record of this huge laver ever being used in practice. The urgent requirement for true cleansing was turned into mere external ritualism, something which was to be seen and admired rather than personally participated it.

1Ki 7:45 and the pots, and the shovels, and the basins: even all these vessels, which Hiram made for king Solomon, in the house of Yahweh, were of burnished brass-
The idea is of polished copper.

1Ki 7:46 The king cast them in the plain of the Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarethan-
"The king cast them" suggests Solomon's personal involvement with the work. This

reflects how he admits in Ecclesiastes that he followed his obsession with building and architecture to a degree not possible for most men. His zeal was therefore more an expression of his own personality type and personal interests, than true love for God.

Zarethan where Solomon cast the lavers for the temple with their pagan motifs (1 Kings 7:46) is called Zaredathah in 2 Chron. 4:17, which is a form of Zeredah (1 Kings 11:26), the birthplace of Jeroboam son of Nebat. It doesn't therefore have good connections. We wonder if the golden calves were cast there too.

1Ki 7:47 Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because they were exceeding many: the weight of the brass could not be found out-
As noted on :41, Solomon itemized his work and boasted in the inventory. But he gave up weighing all the brass vessels. This glorification of human works and achievement revealed so much about his lack of true spiritual perception; see on :40.

1Ki 7:48 Solomon made all the vessels that were in the house of Yahweh: the golden altar, and the table whereupon the show bread was, of gold-
"The golden altar" is the altar of incense. "That were in the house..." could suggest that this history was written or edited after the exile, when these things were no longer there in the temple.

1Ki 7:49 and the lampstands, five on the right side, and five on the left, before the oracle, of pure gold; and the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs, of gold-
"Oracle" is the Hebrew word usually translated "word". It refers to the most holy place, but perhaps the idea is that God's word is ultimately where we are to find the presence of God represented by the ark.

1Ki 7:50 and the cups, and the snuffers, and the basins, and the spoons, and the fire pans, of pure gold; and the hinges, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, of the temple, of gold-
The inventory here is similar in style to that of the vessels of the tabernacle on Ex. 25-30. It seems Solomon wished to present what he had done in terms of building a new tabernacle, with himself thereby presented as Moses. And yet we have seen hints throughout the record that he built it with pagan influences throughout it. Hinges of gold are impractical as gold is a soft metal. Again as discussed on 1 Kings 6:30, we perceive that Solomon's interest was not on practical utility / usage, but rather on external appearance and creating a legend that his temple even had gold hinges.

1 Kings 7 gives such a detailed inventory of the temple, but the later record describes how all these items, using the same terms, were stripped away. Shishak robbed the treasury (1 Kings 14:26). Ahaz stripped the stands and removed the bulls under the brazen sea (2 Kings 16:17). Hezekiah removed the gold from the doors (2 Kings 18:16). Nebuchadnezzar cut
up the gold vessels that Solomon had made (2 Kings 24:13). The gold and silver were melted down and the bronze items broken up (2 Kings 25:13-17).

1Ki 7:51 Thus all the work that king Solomon worked in the house of Yahweh was finished-
There is much stress upon all the "work" done (:40,51). Solomon had quite missed the lessons learned by his father David [and his mother Bathsheba], that God wants broken, contrite hearts more than works and sacrifices.

Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated, the silver, the gold and the vessels, and put them in the treasuries of the house of Yahweh-
These vessels were those taken in 2 Sam. 8:10. They were devoted to God's service by David and then Solomon dedicated them to the temple. The same phrase "of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass" is used of the vessels taken from Egypt and dedicated to the tabernacle (Ex. 11:2; 12:35; Josh. 6:19; 2 Sam. 8:10; 1 Kings 7:51). The generosity of others in Biblical history, their right perspective on the wealth taken from this world, was to inspire other believers in later history. And this is how the body of Christ should function today, with members inspiring others to spirituality.

Solomon's zealous organization of the temple worship was an exact fulfillment of the order laid down by his father David (1 Kings 7:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; 8:14). Solomon wanted God to bless the temple as a sign of His pleasure with David his father (e.g. 2 Chron. 6:42). Solomon's personal enthusiasm for service to God became subsumed by the huge psychological spiritual dominance of his parents. His zeal for the temple was almost purely a result of living out his father's expectation; he almost admits as much in 1 Kings 8:20: "I am risen up in the room of David my father... and have (therefore, in the context) built an house for the name of the Lord".

The promises God makes involve a solemn commitment by Him to us- the serious, binding nature of His oath to us is easy to forget. God swore to David “by my holiness” (Ps. 89:35). The Hebrew for “holiness” is the very same word translated “dedication”. David’s response to God’s dedication to him was to dedicate [s.w.] all the silver and gold which he had won from this world, to the service of God’s house (1 Kings 7:51; 1 Chron. 26:26; 2 Chron. 5:1). Our response to God’s dedication to us should be a like dedication of what we have to Him. Covenant relationship with God requires much of both Him and us. The case of David is a nice illustration of the meaning of grace. David wanted to *do* something for God- build Him a house, spending his wealth to do so. God replied that no, He wanted to build *David* a house. And He started to, in the promises He gave David. And David’s response to that grace is to still *do* something- to dedicate his wealth to God’s house, as God had dedicated Himself to David’s house. This is just how grace and works should be related in our experience.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 8

1Ki 8:1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the princes of the families of the people of Israel, to king Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh out of the city of David, which is Zion-
Solomon imitated David's bringing up of the ark to Zion (2 Sam. 6:2) in 1 Kings 8:1,4. He lived out his father's faith and devotion, but only on an external level. He in due course was to turn away from Yahweh to idols, and descend into the nihilism of Ecclesiastes. "The city of David which is Zion" refers not to Jerusalem but to David's palace or citadel which was within Jerusalem. The ark had been as it were in David's back yard, and was now brought probably a short distance into the temple. David had earlier claimed that Yahweh had chosen Zion as His dwelling place. But it seems that Solomon now readjusts that, because the ark is now brought from that place into the temple he had built.

1Ki 8:2 All the men of Israel assembled themselves to king Solomon at the feast, in the

month Ethanim, which is the seventh month-
This would have been the feast of tabernacles, which began on the 15th day of the seventh month and lasted seven days (Lev. 23:34). The building finished in the eighth month of Solomon's 11th year of reigning (1 Kings 6:37), so he waited almost a year before this ceremony of dedication. Perhaps for some reason he wanted to combine it specifically with the feast of tabernacles. See on :36. The irony is that the feast of tabernacles alludes to how God dwelt in a tent / tabernacle. David had offered to build God a house, but God's reply had been that He preferred dwelling in a tent to any house built by human hands. Now Solomon has built Him a house- and dedicates it on the feast of tents / tabernacles.

It has been observed: "1 Kings 8 is built around the number seven: Solomon summons the people on the seventh month (8:2), feasts last fourteen days (Heb.: seven days and seven days; 8:65), the “fathers” are mentioned seven times, Solomon calls David his “father” seven times, and Solomon enumerates seven prayer occasions".

Chronicles is more specific, that the feast of tabernacles coincided with the second week of Solomon's two week dedication feast. But the feast of tabernacles was only five days after the day of atonement. It seems Solomon was so obsessed with dedicating the temple that he omitted to celebrate the day of atonement, and this would reflect his general lack of awareness of grace and the problem of sin.

1 Kings 6:37 says that the actual building was finished in the eighth month of the eleventh year. The seventh month must have been in the year following. Indeed the LXX in :1 suggests this dedication took place at the end of the 20 years required to build the entire palace-temple complex. This delay in dedicating the temple again reflects how Solomon was unconcerned with being practically useful to God's people. The hint seems to be in 2 Chron. 7:11 that the dedication of the temple and the completion of Solomon's house was at the same time: "Thus Solomon finished the house of Yahweh, and the king’s house. He successfully completed all that came into Solomon’s heart to make in the house of Yahweh, and in his own house". This was after twenty years. Clearly Solomon saw his temple-palace complex as one building. The fact he waited so long to dedicate the temple shows it was all mere religion from his side, he had no genuine desire for the temple to be used by his people to draw closer to God.

1Ki 8:3 All the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark-
2 Chron. 5:4 says that the Levites took up the ark, whereas 1 Kings 8:3 says that the priests did. Both were true; for Levites weren't allowed into the most holy place (Num. 4:20). So the Levites did carry it, according to the law; but the priests carried it into the most holy place. Here we see how an apparent discrepancy on a surface level reveals a deep evidence of the way the records do not contradict but dovetail perfectly, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired writing. But this is only apparent to those who respectfully search the entire scriptures, rather than bandying around a surface level contradiction with an eagerness which speaks more of their own fears the Bible is inspired than of deep factual persuasion.

1Ki 8:4 They brought up the ark of Yahweh, and the Tent of Meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent; all these the priests and the Levites brought up-
We note the irony- God had clearly stated He preferred to live in a tent and not in a building. And Solomon now arranges for the tent to be taken into the building he had made, contrary to God's wishes. There is no further mention of the tent within the

temple, so we assume this was a purely symbolic act and the tent was destroyed. He thereby went directly against God's statements about His preference for a tent over a temple. The priests took these things on the final part of their journey, into the most holy place; as the Levites were forbidden from doing so (Num. 4:20). But the Levites took them the first part of their journey; see on :3.

1Ki 8:5 King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel who were assembled to him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and cattle, that could not be counted nor numbered for multitude-

He offered huge numbers of sacrifices when the ark was brought into the temple (1 Kings 8:63), just as David had sacrificed as the ark was brought to Zion (2 Sam. 6:13 = 1 Kings 8:5). Yet he failed to feel and know the truth of David's conclusion that God doesn't essentially want sacrifice (Ps. 40:6). David had been forced to learn that lesson through the shame of his sin with Bathsheba- Solomon was so sure of his own righteousness that he never was driven to see the inadequacy of animal sacrifice in itself, and the need in the end for the direct receipt of God's grace. 2 Chron. 7:5 gives some figures: "Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep". 22,000 oxen are 16.5 million pounds of steak, worth about 90 million US dollars in 2024. And 12 million pounds of mutton. These figures are roughly the entire UK consumption of meat per year in 2024. Slaying these animals would have created a literal river of blood.

Solomon offered sacrifices "that could not be told nor numbered for multitude". This is evidently to be connected with the language of the promises to Abraham about the multiplication of the seed of Israel. It could be that Solomon thought that his generosity in giving of his wealth was what had brought about the fulfilment of these promises- he almost forced God to fulfil them, at least in his own mind, by his generosity.

1Ki 8:6 The priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the house, the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim-

The priests took these things on the final part of their journey, into the most holy place; as the Levites were forbidden from doing so (Num. 4:20). But the Levites took them the first part of their journey; see on :3.

1Ki 8:7 For the cherubim spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered the ark and its poles above-

In the tabernacle the wings were "spread out on high" (Ex. 25:20; 27:9), but here their wings touch each other. Although Solomon claims he built everything according to Divine revelation, we wonder whether in fact he felt free to liberally reinterpret the tabernacle features. And he changes wings uplifted to God's glory to wings which are closed in upon each other; the mercy seat, or cover of the ark, is no longer exposed to Heaven, as it were, but now closed over.

1Ki 8:8 The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place before the inner sanctuary; but they were not seen outside-

This may reflect a design fault in the lengths of the staves. Although we are assured that a person looking from the outer sanctuary would not have seen them even when the entrance to the holy place was open. This kind of design fault would not have been present if indeed, as Solomon claimed, the specifications were given by God. I

suggest this was just his claim, and he built the temple according to his own desire to have a go at architecture and building- which he admits in Ecclesiastes had been his passion and obsession, for a time. See on :64 for another possible design fault.

And there they are to this day-

This indicates that this record was written some time before the exile ["to this day"]. But other parts of the history suggest it was written after the exile. This means that some parts were rewritten or edited, under Divine inspiration, but others weren't.

1Ki 8:9 There was nothing in the ark except the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when Yahweh made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt-

Inside the ark was intended to be "the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded" (Heb. 9:4; Ex. 16:34; Num. 17:10). They had apparently been lost; so although they remained with the symbols of the covenant, they were lacking in the things which spoke of new spiritual life and the resurrection.

1Ki 8:10 When the priests had come out of the holy place, the cloud filled the house of Yahweh-

Ex. 40:34,35 uses the same terms for God's acceptance of and dwelling in the tabernacle. For all the pagan undertones in the temple, and Solomon's unspirituality, God was willing to still dwell within this structure; even though it was not what He wanted. Just as He had used the human kingship, when it was deeply offensive to Him. Chronicles adds that fire came down from Heaven and consumed the sacrifices- and yet their huge number was of itself a reflection of Solomon's refusal to accept what his parents had once learnt, that God doesn't want huge numbers of sacrifices but just a broken contrite heart. Yet God still accepts this lower level of spirituality, even misunderstanding of His grace. Just as He works with His people today who likewise forget or misunderstand His grace.

1Ki 8:11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh-

This was as at the erection of the tabernacle. The idea was that Yahweh's glory was far above the mere religion of the temple system. His glory was not just between the cherubim over the ark, but everywhere in His house. This was as if to downplay the importance attached to the ark. The allusion is to Lev. 16:3, where God says that "I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat". But the cloud was now filling the entire house. God came to Moses "in a thick cloud" (Ex. 19:9; 20:21) but now all the people were being treated as if they were Moses. The promise of 2 Samuel 7 was that God's Name would be in a new house of people; and his glory and His Name are closely connected. By doing this, God was seeking to nudge the people away from Solomon's religious approach towards a spiritual one. The record in 2 Chron. 5-7 describes praise, the interruption of the glory filling the temple, and then resumed praise. God as it were interrupted their religious ritual with a powerful reminder of His glory. We marvel that God did miraculously respond to such a prayer, full of misplaced ideals, willful misunderstandings of God's word by Solomon and his repetition and further spinning of David's similar willful misunderstandings, pride, political overtones of centralizing all spiritual power beneath Solomon in his palace-temple complex... and so forth. Just as God sees all this in the hearts, lives, thinking, churches... of His people. Yet still His presence is there, however reluctantly, however much His reservations, anger and displeasure with it all... yet still He so thirsts for relationship

with man. And He as it were ran a risk by accepting the temple and sending His glory into it- the risk that He would appear to be thereby in agreement with Solomon's various misunderstandings and wrong attitudes. Any Divine acceptance of man has to run that risk. But it is only a risk for the superficial; because the Solomon record is clearly written in such a way as to beg comparison with other scriptures. The comparisons indicate so powerfully how wrong he was.

1Ki 8:12 Then Solomon said, Yahweh has said that He would dwell in the thick darkness-
Solomon like David (see on 2 Chron. 3:1; 2 Sam. 16:10) came to assume things about God in order to justify his passion for building a temple. He claims that God "said that He would dwell in the thick darkness", perhaps alluding to the darkness of the most holy place in which there was no natural light; but actually there's no record God ever said that. What He said was that He would dwell in the hearts of men and not in a house. I noted on 1 Kings 6 and 7 that Solomon's temple had plenty of windows allowing natural light, as if to suggest God had now re-thought this dwelling darkness.

What we say to the Lord Jesus in His ear in the bedroom in the darkness, will be openly spoken by Christ at the judgment (Lk. 12:2,3). God dwells in darkness (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12). Speaking in the bedroom in secret with the knowledge we will be openly rewarded is the language of prayer (Mt. 6:6). Our private relationship with the Lord now, praying to Him in our bedroom, meditating about Him there, will then be spoken out loud.

1Ki 8:13 I have surely built You a house, a place for You to dwell in forever-
Solomon totally misses the point of God's response to David's desire to build Him a house; God would build David a house, involving Him dwelling in the "place" of the humble human heart. And "forever" was conditional upon the obedience of David's son / seed. But here Solomon effectively dictates to God that those promises are now fulfilled in him- because he has built a temple for God.

1Ki 8:14 The king turned his face about-
From God to the people. The rest of this chapter is therefore Solomon praying facing the people rather than God. He was effectively praying to himself, praying to be seen of men. The Lord's criticism of such prayers seems to have in mind Solomon's example here. I suggest that here we have another example of the record making implicit criticism of Solomon rather than being specific, at least not until 1 Kings 11. Solomon was praying with his back to the sanctuary, and this is exactly what was condemned later in Ez. 8:16. The record there seems to allude to Solomon's position: "At the inner court of Yahweh's house... there, at the door of Yahweh's temple, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs toward Yahweh's temple, and their faces toward the east".

And blessed all the assembly of Israel: and all the assembly of Israel stood-
This blessing of Israel suggests Solomon was acting as the high priest, although he was not of the tribe of Levi. David had done this kind of thing, but from careful reflection upon the spirit of the law, whose letter he says in Ps. 119 he studied constantly. And David came to this sense through careful reflection upon God's grace to him, and through the experience of Uzzah's death as a result of taking 'living the spirit of the law' too far. Solomon's blessing of the people seems to be in his subsequent statements that the temple would bring them blessing. He ignored the connections between blessing and forgiveness by grace which his father had been

forced to, after his sin with Solomon's mother ["blessed are they whose sins are forgiven... blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity"]. He sees the 'blessing' of external religion rather than internal peace with God by grace.

1Ki 8:15 He said, Blessed is Yahweh, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to David my father, and has with His hand fulfilled it, saying-
As discussed on :13, the promises to David were not at all totally fulfilled at that point, just because Solomon had built a temple. They were conditional upon Solomon's obedience to the law, which from a young man he had not shown. We think of his marriage to Rehoboam's Ammonitess mother, and to Pharaoh's daughter. As we will see on :16, what Solomon claims God said was not what He said; Solomon twists God's words. And that highlights the blasphemy of his claim here that God actually spoke the words Solomon claimed "with His mouth". God did not say those words.

1Ki 8:16 'Since the day that I brought My people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house that My name might be there; but I chose David to be over My people Israel'-
This is a typical misrepresentation of God's word. What God had said through Nathan was that He had not chosen anywhere for a temple to be built, but had lived as it were a mobile life in the tent of the tabernacle. And therefore, God would build David a house in the sense of a family of believers sharing David's faith. They would manifest Yahweh's Name in the sense of His characteristics, the fruit of the Spirit, as the NT would put it. For God's Name in this sense cannot be in a physical building or city.

Solomon frequently references the exodus from Egypt with the implication that the completion of the temple meant that their journeys were over (:16,21,51,53). But there is no Divine word to this effect. When they entered Canaan, there was no special ceremony to celebrate the end of their journeys. There are allusions to the wilderness journeys throughout the Bible, suggesting God sees His people like Abraham, on a journey that will only end in the establishment of His Kingdom on earth at the last day. Solomon claims God spoke of how "I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house that My name might be there". But what He said was that He was always a God on the move. That is why Ex. 20:24 speaks as if God would have various places where He put His Name: "In every place where I record My name I will come down to you and I will bless you".

The implication is that God "chose no city" for a temple apart from Jerusalem. The LXX and some Hebrew manuscripts make this explicit, as does the parallel in 2 Chron. 6:5,6: "From the day that I brought out my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any one tribe of Israel to build a house, so that my name should be there: but I chose Jerusalem that my name should be there, and I chose David to be over my people Israel" (LXX). But this is Solomon's twisting of God's words to David. He stated that He would not need a temple because His manner had always been that He "moved around in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7:6). He would appoint a place not for the ark but for His people- in the future Messianic Kingdom which His begotten Son would establish: "I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place" (2 Sam. 7:10). And the One chosen to be over His 'house' or people would be David's future Messianic son, God's begotten Son, to be born well after David had died.

1Ki 8:17 Now it was with the heart of David my father to build a house for the name

of Yahweh, the God of Israel-
This much was true, but it is sandwiched between various untruths and misrepresentations in :16 and :18-20.

1Ki 8:18 But Yahweh said to David my father, 'Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart-
This is not recorded in the historical account, and given Solomon's tendency to misrepresent God's word we wonder whether this was said by God at all. Because God's response had been that He didn't want a house. He wanted to build a non physical house for David. Those reasons He gave for declining David's offer are not at all in the spirit of what God is now reported to have said.

1Ki 8:19 Nevertheless, you shall not build the house; but your son who shall come forth out of your body, he shall build the house for My name'-
As noted on :18, this would have been contrary to the spirit of the reasons God gave for declining David's offer. He had explained that He had never asked for any permanent sanctuary to be built for Him, and tent life was His style, as He doesn't live in buildings but in hearts. And instead of building a house for Yahweh, David was instead to focus upon the wonderful grace of Yahweh's plan to turn his Messianic seed and all "in him" into an eternal spiritual house for His abode. Yet Solomon presents God as having been in eager agreement with the idea, but simply had some reservations about David doing it, and instead asked Solomon to build it. That would have been a contradiction of the reasoning God gave for saying He didn't want a physical house built for Him.

1Ki 8:20 Yahweh has established His word that He spoke; for I have risen up in the place of David my father, and I sit on the throne of Israel, as Yahweh promised, and have built the house for the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel-
The establishment of the promises to David was to be conditional upon David's son walking in God's ways. But now Solomon wrongly presents the promises to David as having come to total fulfilment in him, just because he had built a temple for God.

Solomon speaks about him being King in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:1,12; Prov. 1:1) as if this was the ultimate fulfilment of the Davidic promises. Consider the implications of 2 Chron. 1:9: "O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth... give me now wisdom, that I may go out and come in before (i.e. lead) this people". Solomon was asking for wisdom because he thought that he was the Messiah, and he saw wisdom as a Messianic characteristic. He failed to realize that the promises to Abraham and David were only being primarily fulfilled in him (e.g. 1 Kings 4:20); he thought that he was the ultimate fulfilment of them (1 Kings 8:20 states this in so many words). His lack of faith and vision of the future Kingdom lead him to this proud and arrogant conclusion (cp. building up our own 'Kingdom' in this life through our lack of vision of the Kingdom of God).

1Ki 8:21 There I have set a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of Yahweh which He made with our fathers when He brought them out of the land of Egypt-
By saying this, Solomon was careful to omit mentioning that the pit of manna and Aaron's rod were now no longer within the ark. See on :9.

Solomon's argument about the ark comes to a climax in 2 Chron. 6 where he bids the ark to enter its place of rest. He reasons as if he has built a place for the ark, which

was as it were homeless. But the ark was designed to be kept in the tabernacle, a tent. There was no need for a temple for it. And the ark didn't remain permanently in the temple; for many years later Josiah commanded "the Levites... Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built" (2 Chron. 35:3). And God emphasizes that in the restoration and the true Messianic kingdom, the ark will no longer be important: "People will no longer talk about my ark. They will no longer think about it or remember it; they will not even need it, nor will they make another one. When that time comes, Jerusalem will be called 'The Throne of the LORD,' and all nations will gather there to worship me" (Jer. 3:16,17). God's plans for a rebuilt temple in Ez. 40-48 make no mention of an ark, nor is the ark listed in the inventory of things taken into captivity in Babylon (2 Kings 25:13-17; Ezra 1:7-11).

"There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb ... the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:9,21). Those tablets, on which were the ten commandments, were the covenant. The old covenant is therefore the ten commandments, including the Sabbath- and this has been replaced by the new covenant, which does not require Sabbath keeping.

1Ki 8:22 Solomon stood before the altar of Yahweh in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven-

This altar appears to be the special bronze scaffold Solomon erected especially for the occasion (2 Chron. 6:13 "for Solomon had made a bronze scaffold, five cubits long, five cubits broad and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and on it he stood, and kneeled down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven"). Solomon was hardly praying in his closet! It seems the Lord was alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6, interpreting what he does here in a very negative light, and a reflection of Solomon's pride rather than his spirituality.

1Ki 8:23 and he said, Yahweh, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above nor on earth beneath; who keeps covenant and grace with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart-

David spoke of *seeking and praising God's grace* with his "whole heart" (Ps. 9:1; 119:58; 138:1). Solomon uses the phrase, but speaks of being *obedient* with the "whole heart" (1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chron. 6:14) and applying the "whole heart" to the intellectual search for God (Ecc. 1:13; 8:9). There is a difference. The idea of whole hearted devotion to God was picked up by Solomon, but instead of giving the whole heart to the praise of God's grace, he instead advocated giving the whole heart to ritualistic obedience and intellectual search for God. This has been the trap fallen into by many Protestant groups whose obsession with "truth" has obscured the wonder of God's grace.

1Ki 8:24 who has kept with Your servant David my father that which You promised him. Yes, You spoke with Your mouth, and have fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day-

Again we note the blasphemy of Solomon claiming God had spoken things with His mouth about Solomon and his temple, which He never said. Solomon misses the conditional nature of God keeping covenant grace with His people; He kept it if they were obedient (Dt. 7:9,12), which David was not. Yet God still kept His word with David. That was by grace, but the grace of it is missed by Solomon. He failed to meditate upon the promises beyond what they seemed to offer him in the here and now; and the result was that he felt they were *totally* fulfilled in him (1 Kings

8:20,24). He dogmatically declared to Shimei: “And King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the Lord for ever” (1 Kings 2:45). And in all this, of course, we see our warning.

1Ki 8:25 Now therefore, may Yahweh, the God of Israel, keep with Your servant David my father that which You have promised him saying, ‘There shall not fail you a man in My sight to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children take heed to their way, to walk before Me as you have walked before Me’-

The promises to David originally focused upon one individual, whom the New Testament interprets as the Lord Jesus. But David here in Ps. 89:30; 132:12 and Solomon in 1 Kings 8:25 chose to understand the "seed" as the Davidic dynasty down the generations. This loss of focus upon the future Lord Jesus was what led David and Solomon to focus instead upon their own dynasty, rather than upon the future individual son of David who would reign eternally upon David's throne. His personal immortality came to be interpreted as the eternal continuance of the Davidic dynasty as kings of Israel throughout future generations.

Another example of Solomon misquoting God is in 2 Chron. 6:6. Solomon claims that God said: “I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name might be there”. God had chosen no resting place, although it would have been politically convenient for Solomon if the city of Jerusalem as a city was where God had chosen to dwell. 2 Chron. 6:41 portrays the temple as God's resting place: "Now therefore arise, Yahweh God, into Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength". And the whole point of God's response to David about the temple was that He is not a God at rest and neither are His people. The people suffered under Solomon's taskmasters building his treasure cities just as they did under Pharaoh; they hardly found rest under his reign let alone through the building of a temple on the backs of their labour and taxation sacrifices. The people were drafted into labour gangs, whereas the building of the tabernacle and resourcing of it was purely voluntary (Ex. 25). And God's Name was to be in a house of people, for a Name / personality / characteristics cannot dwell in a house of stone and cedar and gold. It was this misunderstanding that led the Jews to lament how the destruction of the temple had actually destroyed the dwelling place of God's Name: "They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground, they have profaned the dwelling place of Your Name" (Ps. 74:7). The truth was that God's Name dwelt in the hearts and personalities of His true people. And it was God who destroyed the physical temple to try to get them to realize this (Lam. 2:6,7). But Solomon kept thinking his own way until he persuaded himself that in fact this was what God had said. David had charged Solomon with the words which God had spoken to him about Solomon: “If your children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul” (1 Kings 2:4). But Solomon subtly changes this when he reminds God of how He had supposedly told David: “There shall not fail thee a man to sit on the throne of Israel; so that they children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me” (1 Kings 8:25). Two things become apparent here:

- The conditionality of the promise to David about Solomon is totally overlooked. “*If* your children…” becomes “so that…”, with the implication that David would always have descendants on the throne who would walk obediently before God. The possibility of personal failure had been removed by Solomon from his own perception of God.

- God’s desire that Solomon should “walk before me in truth” was changed to “walk before me as you [David] walked before me”. This defined walking before God

personally as having the relationship with God which your father had. And so often we have made the same mistake. The call to personally follow the Lord has become displaced by a following Him through others.

Notice how Solomon says these words to God Himself. Solomon had persuaded himself that this truly was what God had asked of David and himself, and so he comes out with these words to God.

1Ki 8:26 Now therefore, God of Israel, please let Your word be verified, which You spoke to Your servant David my father-

Solomon keeps saying that his zealous work for the temple was the result of God's promise to David having fulfillment in him (1 Kings 8:24-26), and to some extent this was true. David earnestly prayed for Solomon to be the Messianic King (e.g. Ps. 72), and therefore David asked for Solomon to be given a truly wise heart (1 Chron. 29:19). These prayers were answered in a very limited sense- in that Solomon was given great wisdom, and his Kingdom was one of the greatest types of Christ's future Kingdom. Our prayers for others really can have an effect upon them, otherwise there would be no point in the concept of praying for others. But of course each individual has an element of spiritual freewill; we can't force others to be spiritual by our prayers; yet on the other hand, our prayers can influence their spirituality. David's prayers for Solomon is the classic example of this. Those prayers were heard most definitely, in that God helped Solomon marvellously, giving him every opportunity to develop a superb spirituality; but he failed to have the genuine personal desire to be like this in his heart, in his heart he was back in Egypt, and therefore ultimately David's desire for Solomon to be the wondrous Messianic King of his dreams had to go unfulfilled.

1Ki 8:27 But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain You; how much less this house that I have built!-

It was exactly because of this that God didn't want a physical house built for Him. Yet Solomon has misrepresented God as saying He *did* want such a house. So these words are fake humility from Solomon, seeking to cover his proud obsession with building projects beneath an appearance of humility. This statement of Solomon's is not in fact quite as humble as it may seem- for his argument is that God lives in Heaven, but Heaven cannot contain Him. And so he has built a house for God, but even that cannot contain Him. He totally misses God's redefinition of a "house" as a family of people manifesting His Name, made possible through the work of His future begotten Son.

1Ki 8:28 Yet have respect for the prayer of Your servant, and for his supplication, Yahweh my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You this day-

I noted on :14 that Solomon is praying all this facing the people, to be seen of men. This prayer would have been better said facing toward God. His showmanship is apparent.

1Ki 8:29 that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day toward the place of which You have said, 'My name shall be there;' to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place-

God never said that. It is Solomon's twist of the word of promise to David, that if his son / seed were obedient, then "He shall build an house for My Name". But that house was to be built up from persons, and had no reference to any physical building; indeed, the very opposite. God's eyes are open upon His children wherever they are, as David had learned whilst far from the sanctuary and on the run from Saul. Nehemiah felt God's eyes were open upon him even when the temple was in ruins (Neh. 1:6).

Literally, "pray with the face toward... the house"; Solomon later in the prayer will urge Israel to do this. The hypocrisy was that Solomon was praying facing Israel and with his face away from the temple. But he reasons that prayer must be made facing towards the temple.

God had stated many times in Deuteronomy that in the place wherever He placed His Name, His presence, His special ownership, there His people were to come and worship. But as He explained to David when rejecting the idea of a temple, that place had always changed from time to time, because Yahweh is a God on the move. Solomon twists Yahweh's statements to mean that He was going to name a place where His Name would eternally be, and that place had now been chosen- in Jerusalem at the temple of Solomon. But God had in fact said that wherever, in whatever place He placed His Name, there the people should offer sacrifice. He agreed to place His Name in Jerusalem at the temple, but within the context of His being a God always on the move, a tent dwelling God. He had earlier placed His Name at Shiloh, "My place which was at Shiloh, where I set My name at the first" (Jer. 7:12). The place where He places His Name was variable and it was not a case of Him choosing such a place for His Name and it therefore eternally being there.

God did choose Zion in a sense when He went along with the plan to build the temple there. But this doesn't mean He chose it for all time from then on. Zech. 1:17 says He will again choose Zion, implying that for now He has not chosen it, and as it were unchosen it. Solomon and David liked to assume that God had looked all over the earth and chosen the hill of Zion for an eternal dwelling from their time onwards. But He was to tear down their temple in fury, He was angry with it from the day it was built till the day He tore it down.

1Ki 8:30 Listen to the supplication of Your servant, and of Your people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place. Yes, hear in heaven, Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive-

The temple and ark are sometimes referred to as the heavens (2 Sam. 15:25 cp. 1 Kings 8:30; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20:2,6; 11:4; Heb. 7:26). The church is the new temple, and is therefore at times referred to as the heavenlies in the New Testament. But Solomon was not reasoning on this level at this point. Rather was he claiming that the temple building would somehow make prayer more powerful before God. But that is simply untrue; no physical building can act as some kind of mediator between God and man. This is not to say that the faithful did not later pray toward the temple; for both Daniel and Jonah did. But it was not because they thought the temple somehow gave their prayers more power and standing before God because of its existence. For in Daniel's time, and perhaps Jonah's, the temple was in ruins. Or we can simply see this as Divine accommodation to man. There was no need to pray towards the temple neither did it add anything to the efficacy of prayer. But those men did it and God accepted that. Just as He may accept some who reverence a cross and place it above their bed, even though that may not be God's ideal intention.

1Ki 8:31 If a man sins against his neighbour, and an oath is laid on him to cause him to swear, and he comes and swears before Your altar in this house-
Verses 31-51 contain seven possible cases of sin for which the temple could bring forgiveness; and seven cases of possible Divine judgment. The number seven suggests Solomon saw all sin and all possible judgment as being dealt with through the temple. Whereas his parents ought to have learnt for all time that forgiveness doesn't depend upon ritual but God's grace alone and the contrite hearts of sinners. God's awareness of who was telling the truth was not, however, predicated upon the altar being situated within a physical building. God's presence and omniscience is not somehow from then on conditional upon the temple.

The rabbis interpret this verse as specifically concerning a man who is suspected of sinning against his neighbour through adultery with the man's wife. The male equivalent for the trial of jealousy for a woman suspected of adultery (Num. 5). Solomon is asking God to judge the man if guilty and swearing by the temple was to be some kind of way of forcing truth to come out. Given the background of Solomon's parents, we marvel at how Solomon just didn't "get" the huge grace shown to his father. Who had not been judged according to his just deserts in this matter.

1Ki 8:32 then hear in heaven, and do, and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his own head, and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness-
"Hear in heaven" is repeated throughout these seven possible cases of sin and judgment. Solomon seemed to think that Yahweh would hear in Heaven because of the temple. He thereby introduces a level between God and man- the temple. This is a classic case of religion rather than personal spirituality. In Prov. 24:24 and other Proverbs, Solomon teaches that this is how men should judge, lest they be cursed. He says that God condemns the wicked but justifies the righteous, and so should we. But by having this position, he shows his total lack of appreciation of God's grace to his father David. For David was worthy of condemnation, but by grace, he the wicked was justified, counted righteous, when he was not (Ps. 32:2 cp. Rom. 4:4-6). This lack of appreciation of grace arose from how it seems Solomon totally whitewashed the sin of his father David with his mother Bathsheba. And it resulted in his lack of grace, and failure throughout Proverbs to appreciate that human behaviour is nuanced, and is not simply divided between spotlessly righteous behaviour and terrible sinfulness.

1Ki 8:33 When Your people Israel are struck down before the enemy, because they have sinned against You; if they turn again to You, and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this house-
Again, Solomon devalues the power of prayerful repentance and confession of God's Name; for he implies that this is made somehow more powerful through praying to the God "in this house". But Solomon is as it were bringing God down from heaven to earth by suggesting He is somehow located "in this house". Whereas He is in heaven, as he contradictorily admits in :34. It was because of this mindset that there was such a collapse of faith in Judah when they saw the temple in ruins. It meant, according to Solomon's logic, the death of God.

1Ki 8:34 then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them again to the land which You gave to their fathers-
See on :33. The restoration to their land was to be because they, or those who

remained in the land, would pray to God in the temple (:33). Solomon is hereby assuming that even if Israel sin and go into captivity, the temple will be an eternal house for God which will always be there. He is so very wrong. The temple was not eternal and was destroyed; but the exiles could still pray to God, quite independently of the existence of the temple. The destruction of the temple was for multiple reasons, but perhaps one of them was to rid God's people of these wrong ideas about God's presence in the temple building. And God answers this idea that the temple was to be eternal in 1 Kings 9:7,8.

1Ki 8:35 When the sky is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against You; if they pray toward this place, and confess Your name, and turn from their sin, when You afflict them-

Solomon inserts parts of his father's Bathsheba psalms in his prayers for how all Israel could be forgiven if they "confess thy name... when thou afflictest them... saying, We have sinned... forgive thy people... and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed" (1 Kings 8:35,47,50 = Ps. 32:5 etc.). On the basis of David's pattern, all God's people can find forgiveness, if they make a like confession. Indeed, this has long been recognized by Jewish commentators; and many of the Psalms understood by them as relevant to the Nazi holocaust are Bathsheba Psalms. "Out of the depths" they cried like David; and at the entrance to Bergen-Belsen it stands written: "My sorrow is continually before me" (Ps. 38:17), in recognition of having received punishment for sin [note how these kind of plaques contain no trace of hatred or calling for Divine retribution upon the persecutors].

But Solomon, as ever, is mixing truth with error. Because the turning again to God was not dependent upon praying towards the temple building. It was to be destroyed, and the direction of their prayers was to be towards "the God of heaven" and not some ghost in a ruined temple. This phrase "the God of heaven" or similar is often found in the restoration histories, indicating that God's people had been forced to learn this lesson.

1Ki 8:36 then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, and of Your people Israel, when You teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land, which You have given to Your people for an inheritance-

The reference to rain was appropriate in the immediate context because as explained on :2, Solomon was speaking in the month of Ethanim, literally, the rain month, and likely the latter rains were pouring down at this time as he was speaking. His implication would be that this rain was part of the promised blessing for obedience because of the temple. Perhaps this was why, as noted on :2, Solomon had purposefully arranged the dedication festival at this time.

1Ki 8:37 If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, if there is blight, mildew, locust or caterpillar; if their enemy besieges them in their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is-

These things clearly allude to the curses for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28. But those curses were to be lifted by repentance and renewed faithfulness to the covenant, and their lifting was not predicated upon the existence of the physical temple and praying in it or towards it.

1Ki 8:38 whatever prayer and supplication is made by any man, or by all Your people Israel, who shall each know the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands

toward this house-
As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). She would be "Condemned with the world...". But the phrase 'spread forth hands' is used often in the Bible, but followed by 'to the Lord'. Solomon is praying with hands spread forth towards heaven (:22); but he is confusing prayer towards God with prayer towards the temple. He is drawing an inappropriate parallel between God and the temple.

1Ki 8:39 then hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and render to every man according to all his ways, whose heart You know; (for You, even You only, know the hearts of all the children of men;)-
This reference to God dwelling in heaven makes a nonsense of the idea of building a house for God to inhabit on earth. And this was exactly why God had not wanted David to build the temple. So Solomon is here merely giving lip service to these ideas.

Descriptions of God's dwelling place clearly indicate that He has a personal location: "God is in heaven" (Ecc. 5:2); "He has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth" (Ps. 102:19,20); "Hear in heaven your dwelling place". Yet more specifically than this, we read that God has a "throne" (2 Chron. 9:8; Ps. 11:4; Is. 6:1; 66:1). Such language is hard to apply to an undefined essence which exists somewhere in heavenly realms.

1Ki 8:40 that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers-
This is repeating the idea of Ps. 130:4: "There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared". Solomon reasons that the experience of forgiveness [on behalf of his temple] will make the people fear Yahweh. And that is so; if we realize the awesome nature of forgiveness, we will fear / respect the God who grants it on a scale and of a nature so beyond our forgiveness of others. "All the days that they live in the land" could hint that Solomon wrongly thought that the people would live eternally in the land, because he was the Messianic king and the temple had now been built.

1Ki 8:41 Moreover concerning the foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, when he shall come out of a far country for Your name's sake-
The acceptance of the Gentile within the community of Israel was not simply predicated upon the existence of the temple. Ruth was the classic case of coming out of a Gentile country for the sake of Yahweh's Name. And her acceptance was not at all predicated upon any temple building, because there was none in existence at her time.

1Ki 8:42 (for they shall hear of Your great name, and of Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he shall come and pray toward this house-
There seems implicit in the reasoning here that the fame of Yahweh's temple would spread to the surrounding nations, and some would wish to come and worship in it. But proselytes were not to be attracted to Yahweh because of any physical temple, but because of who He is- the things implicit in His Name. No matter how cool and slick the external presentation, this is not what legitimately converts people to the true God.

1Ki 8:43 hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the

foreigner calls to You for; that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name-
As discussed on :42, God's response to Gentile proselytes, and their turning to Him, is not predicated upon the existence of a physical building. Solomon asks God to answer prayers of Gentiles made toward the temple so that the Gentiles would know that Yahweh's Name was really there- in "this house which I have built". The agenda of Solomon's pride is evident. God had told David that He didn't need a temple for His Name because His intention was that David's descendant, Messiah, would create a house of people who would bear God's Name, His characteristics, the fruits of His Spirit.

1Ki 8:44 If Your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to Yahweh toward the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name-
Solomon is alluding to Dt. 20:1, but Israel were told that when they went out to battle (s.w.), they were to remember that Yahweh was present with them. Solomon has distorted this idea, by suggesting that Yahweh's presence was specifically in the temple, and the people were to pray towards it there. When in reality, His presence was with His people on the battle front and in their hearts.

1Ki 8:45 then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause-
"Maintain their cause" is the same phrase translated "do judgment / justice". But Israel were to do justice (Lev. 18:4 and often, as David did, 2 Sam. 8:15), and in response, Yahweh would do justice for them (Dt. 10:18). But Solomon overlooks this conditional aspect in Israel's relationship with God, as he did in his own life. He thought that merely praying to a temple would somehow obligate God to 'do judgment' for His people. This is the mentality of mere religion, and not of relationship with God. Under the old covenant, victory against enemies was predicated upon obedience to and faith in the covenant; whereas here Solomon suggests that mere prayer to the temple will as it were do the trick. Again and again, we see form eclipsing content, the religious displacing the spiritual.

1Ki 8:46 If they sin against You (for there is no man who doesn't sin), and You are angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near-
Solomon often emphasized the importance of keeping ones' heart (Prov. 2:10-16; 3:5,6; 4:23-5:5; 6:23-26); he had foreseen that the essential sin of God's people was "the plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:46), and he imagined how for this sin God's people would later pray towards the temple. And yet his wives turned away *his* heart, for all this awareness that the heart must be kept. It was as if the more he knew the truth of something, the more he wanted to do the very opposite. And this is exactly true of our natures. Perhaps with Solomon he reasoned that in *his* case, foreign wives wouldn't turn away *his* heart. Just as our flesh thinks 'Yes, but it can't happen to *me*'. Perhaps too he reasoned that if the temple somehow could bring forgiveness for the plague of the heart, his heart was incorruptible because of the temple.

1Ki 8:47 yet if they shall repent in the land where they are carried captive, and turn again, and make supplication to You in the land of those who carried them captive,

saying, 'We have sinned, and have done perversely; we have dealt wickedly'-
Again, Solomon assumes that even if Israel were to go into captivity, the temple would still stand, and prayer toward it would bring the restoration. But the temple was destroyed, so that they would be forced to quit this kind of religious tokenism and turn to God in Heaven with their hearts and souls. Daniel prayed these words (Dan. 9:5), but there was no temple then standing to add efficacy to them. And they were prayed in Ps. 106:6 before any temple stood.

1Ki 8:48 if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to You towards their land, which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your name-
The old covenant clearly taught that all Israel would be exiled from their land if they broke the covenant. Solomon's dedication of the temple seemed to assume that only the wicked would be exiled from the land, and the temple would stand eternally; to express repentance in exile, they just needed to pray towards it. But all Israel were sent into exile, and his temple was razed to the ground. But Solomon's belief that "The upright will dwell in the land; the perfect will eternally remain in it" (Prov. 2:21) meant that he totally refused to accept the extent of judgment predicted in the curses of Dt. 28. All Israel would be exiled from their land. He liked to assume that his Kingdom would eternally endure; because of his lack of faith in the nature of the future Kingdom, and his mistaken imagination that he was the eternal Messianic king. He refused to recognize that his father David in Ps. 72 had wrongly imagined that he would be that eternal king, and disregarded the conditionality of the promises made to him. And God answers this idea that the temple was to be eternal in 1 Kings 9:7,8.

1Ki 8:49 then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven, your dwelling place, and maintain their cause-
When exiled from Absalom, David had prayed toward God's "holy hill" of Zion, and had been regathered there (Ps. 3:4). David had fled Jerusalem and the "holy hill" of the temple mount, which was then under Absalom's control. But he believed Yahweh was still there, present as it were in the temple, and answering his prayer. He perhaps alludes to the promises that if Israel sinned and were exiled, they could always pray to God and hope for regathering to His holy hill (Dt. 30:1-4; Neh. 1:9). Solomon now develops these thoughts further, in teaching that Israel in their dispersion were to pray to God toward Jerusalem, His "holy hill" of Zion (1 Kings 8:48,49). We see therefore how Solomon would have reflected upon his father David's experience; David had prayed towards God's "holy hill" when in exile from it, and had been heard. Solomon may well have been in David's retinue at the time, and would have experienced the wonder of return to Zion because of his father's prayer towards God in Zion.

1Ki 8:50 and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions in which they have transgressed against You; and give them compassion before those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them-
God's giving of compassion to His people depended upon their holiness before Him (s.w. Dt. 13:17). But Solomon implies that it will be predicated upon the temple he had built. Form was replacing content, external religion was trumping true spirituality, physical symbolism was obscuring true repentance. The irony is that when Judah were in exile God gave them this compassion in the eyes of their captors. But they

were not very penitent, nor was there any temple standing for them to pray towards. This fairly obvious observation is surely to highlight the bankruptcy of Solomon's thoughts here. He has no understanding of grace.

1Ki 8:51 (for they are Your people, and Your inheritance, which You brought out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron)-
This is the language of Dt. 4:20, which taught that because God had brought Israel out of the "iron furnace" of Egypt, therefore they should thereby be motivated to quit all idolatry. But here Solomon uses this great deliverance as a way of almost manipulating God to save His sinful people- if they prayed toward or in the temple he had built. He alludes to scripture throughout this prayer, but nearly always out of context and to justify his own narrative- that Israel's forgiveness, blessing and salvation was predicated upon the temple Solomon had built.

1Ki 8:52 that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant-
God's eyes are open upon His children wherever they are, as David had learned whilst far from the sanctuary and on the run from Saul. Nehemiah felt God's eyes were open upon him even when the temple was in ruins (Neh. 1:6).

And to the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they cry to You-
Solomon saw himself as Moses, fully representative of Israel, and thereby their saviour (1 Kings 11:1,5-7 cp. 33; 8:52; and note the ye... thee confusion of 1 Kings 9:4-7); his prayer was their prayer (2 Chron. 6:21); his worship was theirs (2 Chron. 1:3,5).

His prayer of 2 Chron.6:33 speaks as if the heavens where God lived were actually the temple; he bid men pray towards the temple where God lived, rather than to God in Heaven. Yet theoretically he recognized the magnitude of God (2 Chron. 6:18); yet the vastness of God, both in power and Spirituality, meant little to him; it failed to humble him as it should have done. It is a feature of human nature to be able to perceive truth and yet act the very opposite. His enthusiasm for his own works lead him to lose a true relationship with God. The idea of salvation by grace became lost on him, loving response to God's forgiveness was not on his agenda, true humility was unnecessary for him, given his certainty that he was King as God intended. He reasoned that God would hear his prayers because they were uttered in the temple of his own hands, rather than because of any personal faith (1 Kings 8:52). Indeed, Solomon legalistically demands that God maintain [as in a court of law] the legal cause or "right" of His people if they pray towards the temple (1 Kings 8:45,49). Legalism and faith are opposed to each other, and Solomon's usage and conception of the temple was legalistic rather than faith based. When dedicating the temple, Solomon asks God to incline the hearts of Israel to be obedient to His commandments (1 Kings 8:57); and whilst God can and does do this, Solomon's implication seems to be that any disobedience would therefore effectively be God's fault for not making His people obedient. He failed to see the need for personal election to obey God's ways.

1Ki 8:53 For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Moses Your servant, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, Lord Yahweh-
Solomon's argument is that since God had made Israel His people, then they would always be His people and inheritance. All they needed to do if they broke their

relationship with God was to pray before the temple. Solomon saw the temple as the failsafe method of keeping Israel always as God's inheritance and special people, regardless of their sins. But the truth was that God was to disinherit His people, and return them to the nations whose gods they worshipped. And no temple was going to stop that happening. Solomon likewise assumed that he was the chosen seed of David, and his having built the temple meant that sin was no ultimate problem between Yahweh and himself. He thereby overlooked the conditional nature of God's promised relationship with him. And so many have used religious symbolism likewise, to release them from any sense of personal responsibility towards God.

1Ki 8:54 It was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication to Yahweh, he arose from before the altar of Yahweh, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread forth toward heaven-
We get the impression that his prayer was but showmanship, and a parade of a fake humility. See on :14.

1Ki 8:55 He stood, and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice saying-
This public prayer for the sake of appearance, facing men rather than God (see on :14), makes us think that the "loud voice" of prayer and blessing was hypocritical. Solomon uses the very phrase in Prov. 27:14: "He that blesses his friend with a loud voice... it shall be counted a curse to him". But he refused to perceive the personal truth of the Proverbs he spoke. A loud voice (s.w.) doesn't mean God has heard the speaker (Ez. 8:18); the phrase is used of the priests of Baal he mistakenly believed this.

1Ki 8:56 Blessed be Yahweh, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by Moses His servant-
God's words not falling / failing means that they were fulfilled (1 Sam. 3:19). Solomon is making the same mistake as preterism, claiming that all the prophetic word had been fulfilled. He decided this on the mere basis that he had built a temple, which he wished to see as the fulfilment of the promises to David, which he now wished to understand as meaning the promises to Moses had been totally fulfilled as well. It was this lack of any perspective of future fulfilment, of the Messianic Kingdom to come and the resurrection of the dead, which led Solomon to fail to appreciate God's grace. He also therefore had no sense of personal failure and the wonder of acceptance by grace, because he thought he had been given full acceptance right now.

The record is clear that Solomon did not have total "rest". Damascus was taken from him and he never regained it; he was surrounded by 'adversaries', his people were restless and groaning under his abusive taxing of them for labour and harvests... And he is forcing his own interpretation of Dt. 12:10,11 as referring to the temple he had built: "When you go over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which Yahweh your God causes you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you, so that you dwell in safety, then to the place which Yahweh your God shall choose, to cause His name to dwell there, you must bring all that I command you". The Hebrew *maqom* translated 'place' can mean simply a locality, yet Solomon likes to insist that it means a 'place' as in a building. Yet *maqom* in its 400 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible usually refers simply to a locality and not some 'holy place'. And God has used the term in describing the situation which would come about through David's future

son who would be God's begotten son: "I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more. Neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the first" (1 Chron. 17:9). That future appointed "place" was not the temple; for God in this context says He doesn't want a temple, but will instead give His future people a "place" in eternity through the great Son. It is this "place" which the Lord has in view when He says that His death on the cross is "to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14:2,3). "I will appoint a place" is the same Hebrew as in God's 'appointing a place' for the innocent murderer to flee to for refuge (Ex. 21:13), and that "place" was a city of refuge not a temple. And again, that "place" is understood in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus. The place appointed was one where Yahweh's Name would be placed (Dt. 12:21; 14:24 etc.). It is far too literalistic to assume that the letters YHWH would be placed in a physical place. Surely we are to understand the Name as His characteristics, to be placed supremely in the "place" of His Son, through whom a family / house of people would arise bearing that Name. God's response to David's plan to build a temple had been to state that through His Son, He would "plant" Israel never to be moved again, and this language is repeated about the Lord in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Is. 66:1,2 is crystal clear that God's Name can never "rest" in a physical place, but in humbled hearts after the pattern of David after his sin with Bathsheba: "And what place shall be My rest? For all these things has My hand made, and so all these things came to be, says Yahweh: but to this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word". However, there are references to God's Name dwelling in Zion in the Kingdom age. It will be then "the place of the name of Yahweh of Armies, Mount Zion" (Is. 18:7), "for Yahweh dwells in Zion" (Joel 3:21), in that His Name is supremely in the Lord Jesus who will rule from Zion. Isaiah uses the term in his personal speech, perhaps reflecting his own misadjusted perspective that somehow Yahweh was physically dwelling in Zion: "I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Yahweh of Armies, who dwells in Mount Zion" (Is. 8:18).

1Ki 8:57 May Yahweh our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. Let Him not leave us, nor forsake us-

This can be translated not so much as a request but as a joyful statement of present reality. He felt that his prayer and his temple would somehow guarantee the permanent presence of God. God would not leave or forsake Israel because Solomon assumed that the temple had God's presence, and it would be eternal; for he had interpreted God's promise to build an eternal house as fulfilled in his building of the temple.

1Ki 8:58 that He may incline our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes and his ordinances which He commanded our fathers-

We're wrong to think that God passionlessly waits for us to repent or pray to Him, and then He will forgive or act for us. He loves us, simply so; and with all love's manipulation of circumstances, seeks to pour out His love upon us. Thus repentance itself is a gift which God gives and is not totally upon human initiative (Dt. 4:29-31; 30:1-10; 1 Kings 8:58).

As noted on Ps. 119:36; 141:4, David believed that God could act deep within the psychology or heart of man, to incline us toward righteousness and away from evil. This is how the Holy Spirit works today. Solomon believed the same (s.w. 1 Kings

8:58), but only in theory; for his Gentile wives inclined or turned away his heart from God (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). God will not turn our hearts anywhere we ourselves don't want to go. Solomon often appeals for us to incline our hearts to wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 22:17), but he himself was inclined to apostasy (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). All his emphasis is upon the need to incline ourselves, whereas his father David trusted in the work of the Spirit to incline his heart to good and away from evil (Ps. 141:4; 119:36 etc.).

1Ki 8:59 Let these my words, with which I have made supplication before Yahweh, be near to Yahweh our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant, and the cause of His people Israel, as each day shall require-
Just as Solomon considered the existence of the temple as the guarantee that God would ultimately be with His people, so he similarly argues that his prayer was some kind of magic incantation which would mean that God would day by day for ever and eternally maintain the cause of His people. But his whole logic is 'religious' rather than spiritual.

1Ki 8:60 that all the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh, He is God. There is none else-
Solomon had a genuine desire for the surrounding nations to accept Yahweh, just as his father David did. But it was all tied up with his own pride; people coming to admire Solomon's temple and thereby himself. For as mentioned above, he thought that the physical temple would be the basis of their attraction and loyalty to Yahweh.

1Ki 8:61 Let your heart therefore be perfect with Yahweh our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as you do at this day-
Solomon considered that the fulfilment of the promises to Moses and David (which he was mistaken in thinking had fully happened just because he had built a temple) was because Israel "at this day" had a perfect heart with Yahweh. They didn't, but just as he assume his own perfect obedience, so he assumed theirs. Unlike David, he had not been forced by God to engage with the issues of his own sinfulness. And I discussed on 1 Kings 7:1 how even at this point, Solomon himself was far from wholehearted in his devotion to God; 1 Kings 11:4 specifically says he wasn't.

1Ki 8:62 The king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before Yahweh-
We again see the connection between Solomon and "all Israel", whom he considered to be as perfect as he was; see on :61.

1Ki 8:63 Solomon offered for the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered to Yahweh, twenty two thousand head of cattle, and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of Yahweh-
The peace offering was to be eaten the same day it was killed, and nothing of it was to left until the morning (Lev. 7:15). There is no way Solomon could have personally eaten this massive amount of meat, and so again we see his interest being merely in external religion rather than personal spirituality. And a peace offering was a personal statement between the offerer and God, celebrating their peace with God. There is no way Solomon could legitimately do this for the people. The usual pattern of sacrifice was sin offering (obtaining forgiveness), burnt offering (promising complete dedication to God) and then peace offering, celebrating the resultant peace with God then experienced. But Solomon has no sense of personal sin (see on :61), and

considered himself dedicated to Yahweh by reason of being David's son. And so he only offers the peace offerings. The huge numbers of sacrifices were not at all what God wanted. But unlike David, he had not been brought to realize that God wants broken, repentant hearts and not offerings (Ps. 51:16). Mic. 6:7 perhaps references Solomon's huge numbers of offerings, again commenting that God doesn't want them; just as He didn't want a physical temple. And yet God went along with Solomon, as He does with us so often, even on the basis of our misplaced idealism. For His glory appeared within the temple and He in that sense agreed to dwell there, just as He agreed to work through a human kingship, even though it meant a degree of rejection of Him as Israel's king.

1Ki 8:64 The same day the king made the middle of the court holy that was before the house of Yahweh; for there he offered the burnt offering, and the meal offering, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar that was before Yahweh was too little to receive the burnt offering, the meal offering, and the fat of the peace offerings-
The huge numbers of animals required more altars, which were presumably placed in the middle court. Although we wonder on what basis Solomon as a non-Levite had the right to declare the court holy. We also wonder as to whether the huge laver, and the ten smaller lavers, were only built with a view to this opening dedication. For the huge laver was too large for normal usage, and there was surely no need for 10 lavers when the tabernacle had only had one. We wonder whether this sudden erection of more altars was also as it were a design fault, and indicates that what he was doing was not according to God's command, but rather his flawed human initiative. See on :8 for another possible design fault.

1Ki 8:65 So Solomon held the feast at that time, and all Israel with him, a great assembly, from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt, before Yahweh our God, seven days and seven days, even fourteen days-
The dedication coincided with the seven day feast of tabernacles (see on :1), and to that was added this seven day feast of dedication. There were representatives from the very borders of the land promised to Abraham, implying these areas had been settled by Israelites; or perhaps those who attended from those places were Gentile proselytes. However if "the feast" was the latter seven days, then we observe that the day of Atonement wasn't kept, as this was only a few days before the feast of tabernacles. Indeed they ate and drank joyfully on Yom Kippur when they should have been afflicting their souls for their sins. Again we see Solomon assuming that personal confession of sin could be eclipsed by focus upon merely external religion.

1Ki 8:66 On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that Yahweh had shown to David His servant, and to Israel His people-
The people rejoiced that the promises to David had been fulfilled in the temple and in the prosperity of the nation. But they had only uncritically accepted Solomon's narrative. For this was not at all the fulfilment of the promises to David. They "blessed the king" because they assumed it was Solomon who had brought about this fulfilment; and that was exactly what he thought. And they had bought into that false narrative.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 9

1Ki 9:1 It happened, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of Yahweh, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he was pleased to do-
His building of the temple was "all *Solomon's* desire which he was pleased to do" (1 Kings 9:1). There is a semantic connection between the Hebrew words for "desire" and "pleased" - the point of which is to emphasize that Solomon's work for God was only an expression of his own zest for self-fulfilment; he served God in ways which only confirmed his own natural inclinations. Appreciating the spirit and blood of Christ, his own weakness, the grace of God, and the subsequent desire to live a life of self sacrifice, of carrying a cross in ways we wouldn't naturally chose- this was all foreign to Solomon. And is it so foreign to us? Solomon's materialism and self-fulfilment are sure warnings to our age.

1Ki 9:2 that Yahweh appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon-
Clearly God was aware that Solomon was going wrong, refusing to realize the conditional nature of the promises made to David about his son, and not personally applying the wisdom given to him in the first vision. So God's response to Solomon's arrogant, mistaken prayer of 1 Kings 8 was in fact to appear to him and warn him that he needed to be obedient, or else the promises would not in fact apply to him. The clear implication was that Solomon's statements in his prayer that the promises were fulfilled in him... were wrong.

1Ki 9:3 Yahweh said to him, I have heard your prayer and your supplication, that you have made before Me. I have made this house holy, which you have built, to put My name there forever; and My eyes and My heart shall be there constantly-
"I have heard your prayer" means this vision was an answer to the dedication prayer. So if God answered the dedication prayer after 20 years (:1), we can conclude that the dedication occurred at the end of the 20 years building the palace / temple complex. As discussed regarding the features and lack of utility in the temple design, we conclude the temple was showmanship and not motivated by a desire to help people worship God. Otherwise Solomon would have dedicated it much earlier.

"I have heard your prayer and your supplication" responds to Solomon's request that God would hear his personal "prayer and supplication" (1 Kings 8:28). But he several times asks in that prayer for God to hear the "prayer and supplication" of the people who prayed towards or in the temple (1 Kings 8:29,38,45,49,54. But God carefully doesn't respond to this. The parallel record in 2 Chron. 7:14 says that "If My people who are called by My name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin". Solomon had reasoned that because God's Name was on the temple, therefore the people should pray towards it and be heard. God's response is that His Name is upon His people, because His Name / characteristics dwell in persons not in bricks. And the promised seed was to be build a house of such people. We could argue that the people called by God's Name were not all the people of Israel, but only those who had His Name on their hearts, the faithful minority. And indeed at the exile, it was the prayers of this group [Daniel etc.] that led to God's restoration of the people. God says that the people were to "seek / search for My face"- not pray towards Jerusalem or a temple, but go through the struggle of searching for God after sin. They were to seek personal encounter and relationship with God- His face. They

were to "humble themselves", literally 'bow the knee' before Him- not turn their bodies in the direction of Jerusalem. They should "turn from their wicked ways" and not turn their bodies towards the temple.

God is careful to respond that He will forgive them if they pray- and carefully omits reference to the temple, "in this house". Solomon says 'If they do [ABC] and then [DEF] happens and they pray *in / towards this place,* then please do [GHI]'. God responds according to the same rubric, repeating what Solomon says, but carefully omitting the central point- if they pray in / towards the temple. The omission is glaring. And it is tantamount to ignoring what was for Solomon the central object of his prayer- to legitimize the temple as the source of efficacy for prayer. His 'religion' was replaced by God's focus on personal spirituality and His response to that.

Jonah learnt this- in the belly of a great fish, he needed forgiveness. He had no access to the temple and didn't know which direction to pray towards. Rather like a navigation system telling you at night to "head north" when you have no idea of where north is. He says that he prayed towards the temple, following Solomon's words rather than God's correction of them. But the grace of it all is that God heard him anyway.

There soon follows a worked example of this. 2 Chron. 12:6,7 records that Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was attacked by Shishak of Egypt: "Then the princes of Israel and the king *humbled themselves*; and they said, Yahweh is righteous. When Yahweh saw that they *humbled themselves*, the word of Yahweh came to Shemaiah, saying, They have *humbled themselves*. I will not destroy them; but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak". The allusion is to God's words in 2 Chron. 7:14, which is His reply to Solomon's claim that if Israel prayed to the temple, then God would save them in battle. He says simply that if Israel humble themselves in battle [He makes no mention of the temple], then He will save them. And the situation with Shishak was an example of that. We note that even at that stage, God had in mind to destroy the temple and Zion / Jerusalem. Solomon and David's dogmatism that it would last eternally are thus shown to be misplaced right from the start of the temple's 430 year history [the same period of time as Israel were in Egypt, Ex. 12:40,41; Gal. 3:17]. Ezekiel foretold 430 years of judgment upon Israel and Judah (Ez. 4:1-6).

I would translate and paraphrase :3-6 as follows: "I have hallowed this house, which you have built in order that I would put My Name there for ever. My eyes and heart will be there all the days that you walk before Me as David your father walked... [If you serve Me with totally perfect obedience to Me] then I will establish you [as the Messianic son I promised to David]... but if you turn from following Me [which God foreknew Solomon would] then... [I will destroy this place and My Name and presence won't be there any more]". Remember that God said these words furiously angry that Solomon had built the temple; Jeremiah records that God was furiously angry with it from the day it was built until the day He tore it down.

God's Name was there for ever in the sense that naming something with your name means ownership. God agreed to accept Jerusalem as His special place, despite His position that He is a God on the move. 2 Chron. 7 could imply that God was willing to go along with it as part of His plan to lead the people towards His Kingdom in the future, when He would eternally dwell there: "I have chosen and sanctified this house that my name may be there for ever". "That" doesn't mean His Name was there for ever from that point. Because He destroyed the dwelling place of His Name, as later lamented. Or we can allow :7 to explain this. If Solomon turned away from God, then the Name would not dwell there for ever. If he was perfectly obedient, as God's

envisaged future Son would be, then it would. Solomon's response should have been that he could not be perfectly obedient, and his focus should have been on the promised future seed who would have an eternal Kingdom.

Solomon prayed that God's eyes [in Heaven] might be open toward the house; God responds that His eyes and heart are there in the house. The distance Solomon presupposes between earth and heaven is hereby deconstructed by God's reply.

The 2 Chron. 7 record records God saying that He accepted the temple not so much as a place to dwell in (as Solomon assumed it was) but as a place facilitating sacrifice for the glorification of His Name through these things; He emphasized that He dwelt amongst *His people* (1 Kings 6:13; 2 Chron. 7:12-16).

It has been argued that the Hebrew *olahm*, "forever", really means 'a period'. But I am unpersuaded of that argument in every case. Rather I would think that the context in this case requires that we understand God to be saying that He would indeed dwell in the temple "forever", and His particular sensitivity would be found in that place, His eyes and heart. But as He makes clear in :4-7, that was all conditional upon obedience. This highlights the tragedy- that eternity was at stake. So much depends upon human freewill decisions; for that is how much He respects us and our freedom of choice.

Despite the willful misinterpretations of God's word to David about not wanting a temple, God reluctantly [I would say] goes along with the thinking. But He emphasises that the house is that "which you have built". His focus was on building a house of people through His future begotten Son. 2 Chron. 7:12 goes further: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for a house of sacrifice". The thousands of sacrifices were not what God wanted, and yet He accepted them. He wanted an altar made of earth kicked together or of unhewn stones. Solomon's temple and altars were totally the opposite of this ideal, yet still God accepted it all as a "house of sacrifice", with 2 Chron. 7:9 describing the dedication as in fact "the dedication of the altar" (see notes there). He condescends and goes along with man to a huge extent.

1Ki 9:4 As for you, if you will walk before Me, as David your father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and will keep My statutes and My ordinances-

This was a hard act to follow, for David was chosen as being a man after God's own heart. Solomon considered that he was acceptable with God just because of his father, whereas God wanted him to personally attain his father's spirituality. We note in passing God's high estimation of David, despite David's serious but out of character failings.

God constantly warned Solomon about the conditionality of the promises, before the building started (2 Sam. 7:14), during it (1 Kings 6:11-13) and immediately after completing it (1 Kings 9:2-9). Solomon reinterprets this conditional promise in Prov. 20:7: "A righteous man walks in integrity; blessed are his children after him". Solomon has here his own agenda of self justification in view. The man who 'walked in integrity' is without doubt David (s.w. 1 Kings 9:4; Ps. 26:1,11; 101:2). Solomon assumed that because his father had walked in integrity, then he as his child would automatically be blessed. But he was choosing to misunderstand the conditional nature of the promises to him in 1 Kings 9:4; if he walked himself in integrity "as David your father walked", then he would be the prophetically blessed son of David.

1Ki 9:5 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, according

as I promised to David your father saying, 'There shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel'-
This is the same quotation made in Ps. 132:12. But God is picking up on Solomon's claim in 1 Kings 8:24 that God had already fulfilled this ("Who has kept with Your servant David my father that which You promised him. Yes, You spoke with Your mouth, and have fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day"). He is pointing out that this promise was conditional, and Solomon had overlooked that. The promise of "a man" suggests one individual; but Solomon was wrong in assuming this referred to himself. God is saying: 'You want to have an eternal line of kings reigning in your temple-palace complex? If you personally are perfect from now on, OK, the promised seed can be you'. Solomon should have reviewed the commands for total obedience in :4 and fallen to the earth in penitence, saying something like 'No, I'm a sinner, and likely to fail in future as well. How foolish I have been. I will now refocus upon the promised future seed You promised David and His Kingdom, not mine'.

1Ki 9:6 But if you turn away from following Me, you or your children, and don't keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but shall go and serve other gods, and worship them-
This is what Solomon did finally do, and already at this stage he had married Gentile women, whom the law of Moses had warned would lead his heart away from Yahweh to "other gods". But that apparently inevitable process could still be arrested- if Solomon responded in humility to this appeal. We wait with eager ears to hear Solomon's response when the appeal ends in :9. But there is silence; see on :9.

Solomon was fully representative of Israel (1 Kings 11:1,5-7 cp. 33; 8:52; and note the ye... thee confusion of 1 Kings 9:4-7 AV); his prayer was their prayer (2 Chron. 6:21); his worship was theirs (2 Chron. 1:3,5). And his apostacy was also theirs.

1Ki 9:7 then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have made holy for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all peoples-
Solomon had wrongly reasoned in 1 Kings 8 that the grandeur of the temple would attract Gentiles to become proselytes to Yahweh. But God warns him that the very opposite could happen, and the ruined temple would become the biggest possible disadvertisment for Yahweh and His people. Solomon had prayed, and in that prayer taught Israel, that if they sinned even in captivity, then all they had to do was pray towards the temple and they would be forgiven. He saw in that building some kind of atonement for sins. He lost sight of the importance of the blood that made atonement; he replaced the blood of Christ with a work of his own hands. God's response to the dedication of the temple here corrects what Solomon has just said. He says that if Israel sin then He will cast the temple too out of His sight; which is rather different to how Solomon instructed the people to gain forgiveness for the sake of the temple if they were in dispersion. He saw the temple as a talisman- the need for real, meaningful change and repentance and spiritual mindedness to enable the dwelling of God went unperceived. He failed to perceive the real possibility of the eternal potential he and Israel could miss. They really could be cast out of God's sight in condemnation. Jonah recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jon. 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at his time (2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15). Being cast out of God's sight, away from His eyes, is just the opposite of what

Solomon had prayed for, that God's eyes should be eternally open towards the Temple.

1Ki 9:8 Though this house is so high, yet shall everyone who passes by it be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, 'Why has Yahweh done thus to this land, and to this house?'-
This is God's commentary upon the implications in Solomon's prayer that the temple and God's presence within it was to be eternal (see on 1 Kings 8:34,48). Solomon had willfully misinterpreted the promises to David to mean that the temple was the fulfilment of the promise that the seed would build an eternal house. That house David had built was not the house in view, and could easily be destroyed and even become a curse rather than a blessing- if Solomon were disobedient. Clearly Solomon was disobedient, and so the promise that people would "hiss" at the temple would obviously be fulfilled (1 Kings 9:8). Yet Jeremiah laments bitterly that men were 'hissing' at the ruined temple (Lam. 2:15,16) and complains God has been unreasonable. Jeremiah had clearly failed to accept the real extent of Judah's sin, and had shared in David and Solomon's willful misunderstanding that the temple would be eternal. He failed to accept that Divine judgment is just, because he devalued human sin. And that is the root cause for all human complaint about suffering in this world.

1Ki 9:9 and they shall answer, 'Because they forsook Yahweh their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold of other gods, and worshiped them, and served them. Therefore Yahweh has brought all this evil on them'-
We wait with eager ears to hear Solomon's response when the appeal ends; but there is silence. Solomon had blanked out from his perception any idea that he might fail or was less than perfect. His narrative was that he was the son of David, and the promises about David's son were now fulfilled in him. And he refused to allow anything, not even an appeal from God, disturb that internal narrative.

1Ki 9:10 It happened at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of Yahweh and the king's house-
Psalm 127 is prefaced with the information that it is a Psalm for Solomon- perhaps given by some nameless prophet (Gad? Nathan?) to warn him of where he was going. Verse 1 reminds him that God must be the builder of any house, or else the builders labour in vain. There is good reason to think that Solomon utterly failed to appreciate this. The records stress time and again that *Solomon* built the temple (1 Kings 6:2,14; 9:10,25; 10:4; 1 Chron.6:10,32; 2 Chron. 8:1,12; 9:3; Acts 7:47); yet the house referred to in the Davidic promises was to be built by God, through David's Messianic Son, the Lord Jesus. Zechariah prophesied at the time of the rebuilding of the physical temple. It is significant, in this context, that Zech. 6:12 reminds Israel that the true temple of God will be built by the Branch, the Lord Jesus.

The question is whether all these building projects happened chronologically, one after another, or whether they in fact were all going on at the same time. If chronologically, we would expect a note to that effect at this point. Instead we are left to conclude that the building of the temple, of his own house, of "the house of the forest of Lebanon" and the "house for Pharaoh's daughter (whom Solomon had taken as wife)" (:8) all happened at the same time. We could conclude that he was distracted from building God's house by his other building projects, and that's why the building of the temple took seven years. This may appear to be contradicted by the statements in 1 Kings 9:10 and 2 Chron. 8:1: "It happened at the end of twenty years, in which

Solomon had built the two houses, the house of Yahweh and the king's house...". However the context of those verses goes on to state that Solomon had given twenty cities to Hiram in return for his labour and materials for the building of the houses. So we could legitimately read those passages as meaning that at the end of the twenty year period over which the two houses had been built and twenty cities given to Hiram... that Hiram became dissatisfied. The recurrence of the number twenty could hint that he was paid one city a year for twenty years.

1Ki 9:11 (now Hiram the king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees, and with gold, according to all his desire), that then king Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee-

As noted on :1, all this building work was Solomon's "desire" or will, not necessarily God's; and he was really doing what *he* wanted in his fulfilment of his architectural fantasies, as he admits in Ecclesiastes, rather than serving God's will. For God had made it clear to David that a fancy temple with gold and cedar was not at all His will or desire. The gift of Israelite cities to a Gentile was not what a true king of Israel should have done, who valued the promises of Israel's eternal inheritance of the promised land. Solomon had come to see all God's promises as fulfilled in him and his amazing city and temple in Jerusalem. And so he devalued the rest of the promises, especially their future, eternal dimension. And Solomon clearly ignored the principle that the land was Yahweh's; it was not for him to sell it for gold and timber. It would seem that now after twenty years (:10) of extensive building projects, Solomon was broke. And his obsession with building led him to sell parts of Yahweh's land. Again we note that it was the wealth of the north which was extracted and used to build Jerusalem, just as the labour force of the north was used for Solomon's work in Judah. For it was possibly around this time that Jeroboam was put in charge of the forced labour brigades from Ephraim and Manasseh in order to fortify Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:28). And it was around this time, 950 BC, that Shishak came to power in Egypt, quite possibly posing a threat to Solomon to the extent he fortified Jerusalem against it. So much for Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter for political ends [if indeed that was ever a major factor in the marriage]. About five years after his death, Egypt invaded Judah in the reign of his son Rehoboam. Likewise his love affairs with women from Moab and Ammon (1 Kings 11:1,7) and worshipping their gods didn't mean Moab and Ammon would not later attack Israel.

1Ki 9:12 Hiram came out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they didn't please him-

Solomon's sacrifice of principle, as explained on :11, didn't achieve his intended aim of getting Hiram even more onside with him. Sacrifice of principle and the true hope of Israel never works out. These cities were inhabited by Canaanites whom Israel hadn't subdued at the time of this 'gift' (2 Sam. 24:7; 2 Chron. 8:2), and so Solomon was giving to Hiram a bunch of problems. These cities were not really under Solomon's authority anyway, he had not subdued the Canaanites there, so passing them to Hiram was giving him a noose around his neck rather than a true present. As an island state, Tyre needed land to produce food- and this land wasn't fertile, it seems.

1Ki 9:13 He said, What cities are these which you have given me, my brother? He called them the land of Cabul to this day-

"Cabul" can mean 'pawned', and the idea may be that although in some sense they did

belong to Solomon, effectively they didn't because they were inhabited by Canaanites. Hence Hiram returned them to Solomon (2 Chron. 8:2), with all the damage in relationship that goes with returning a rejected gift. 2 Chron. 8:2 says that after this Solomon colonized the cities and sent Israelites to live there. But as will be noted on 1 Kings 9:21, this was not particularly in obedience to the Divine commands to subjugate the Canaanites, but rather than Solomon was desperate for huge amounts of slave labour with which to fulfil his building projects.

1Ki 9:14 Hiram sent to the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold-
The sense is that he "had sent" this money to Solomon. It seems Solomon became so obsessed with his building projects that he borrowed this money to finance them, and then tried to pay off the debt by giving Hiram the worthless cities of Cabul which were not at all any recompense. We see therefore that all was not quite as opulent and prosperous in Solomon's kingdom as may appear. See on :21.

1Ki 9:15 This is the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised, to build the house of Yahweh, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer-
Solomon figuratively chastised the people with whips in the form of the excessive tax he raised in order to build store cities (1 Kings 9:15,19), in which to store all his accumulation. Surely this is behind the Lord's parable of the rich fool, devoid of wisdom in practice, who built ever bigger barns because of his lack of understanding about the future Kingdom. The Hebrew for "*store* cities" (2 Chron. 8:6) is also translated "to heap up", strengthening the connection with the rich fool (Lk. 12:15-28). That parable stresses the self-centeredness of the fool- just circle all the occurrences of the word "I". A similar over-use of personal pronouns in Ecc. 2:4-8 makes the same point. Ecc. 2:26 records how Solomon reflected that the sinner "heaped up" treasures- using the same word as for his "*store* cities". He saw his error, but wasn't bothered to do anything about it.

1Ki 9:16 Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire, and slain the Canaanites who lived in the city, and given it for a present to his daughter, Solomon's wife-
The LXX interprets this as a marriage gift, and the Hebrew for "present" implies this. We know from Jud. 1:15 that it was not unknown for the father of the bride to give a dowry payment to the groom. Gezer was a Philistine city, and it has been suggested that they had sailed to the coast of Egypt and were acting as pirates, also pillaging the Egyptian coastline. Hence Pharaoh's attack upon them.

1Ki 9:17 Solomon built Gezer, and Beth Horon the lower-
Gezer had been a Philistine or Canaanite city (:16), and as with the colonization of the wilderness outpost of Tamar (:18)and the Canaanite held cities in Galilee (2 Chron. 8:2; 1 Kings 9:13), this building of cities in these areas would only have made sense if Israelites were then sent to live there. This would therefore have resulted in a huge forced deportation of Israelites away from their homes and tribal areas to populate remote areas surrounded by recently vanquished Canaanites. This would not have been popular.

1Ki 9:18 and Baalath, and Tamar in the wilderness, in the land-
See on :17. Baalath was in Dan near Gezer (Josh. 19:44), and was built and then

populated by Israelites for defensive reasons. Tadmor (AV) is now an oasis in the Syrian desert, on the caravan route from Damascus to the Euphrates. There was no point in building it as a city unless it was to be inhabited by Israelites. But this would have been unpopular, as it meant uprooting Israelites out of their homes and tribal areas and sending them to live in remote outpost. This would have meant Solomon again despised the tribal allotments, which to God were significant. He did the same in his arrangement of the tax administration of the nation, as explained on 1 Kings 4.

1Ki 9:19 and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen-
The building of store cities by slave labour is exactly what Pharaoh did to the Israelites (Ex. 1:11). The impression is given that he followed Egypt in this way, as well as marrying Pharaoh's daughter and incorporating Egyptian stylism into the temple building, as noted on 1 Kings 8. His love of horses and chariots likewise reflects his love of Egypt, despite it being forbidden for Israel's king in Deuteronomy.

Solomon's lack of sensitivity to God's word led him to be tragically insensitive to people; in short, he showed no love. The way Solomon raised a "levy" or tribute from Israel, whereby the men of Israel had to serve him one month out of three and 'bear burdens', with 3,300 taskmasters over them (1 Kings 5:13-15), who 'bore rule' over (Heb. 'trampled down') the people (1 Kings 5:16)... is all reminiscent of Samuel's warning about the kind of King which Israel would have. And the language also recalls their bondage in Egypt; note that the levy was also in order to build treasure cities for Solomon, just as Pharaoh did. The Hebrew word for "levy" in 1 Kings 5:13 strictly means 'a burden causing to faint', and is rendered "taskmaster" in the record of Israel's suffering in Egypt (Ex. 1:11). One even wonders if Solomon's father-in-law- who also happened to be a Pharaoh of Egypt- influenced him (consciously or unconsciously) to act like the Exodus Pharaoh.

And that which Solomon desired to build for his pleasure in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion-
Solomon *loved* building (Ecc. 2:4-6)- he built cities and buildings because it was “the desire of Solomon which he desired” (1 Kings 9:19 AVmg.), i.e. one of his dominant desires. So when we read that it was the desire of Solomon to build the temple (1 Kings 9:1,11), he was merely serving God in a way that naturally appealed to him anyway. And when he had finished that desire when the temple was completed (9:1), he was in the same position as when in Ecclesiastes he describes how he indulged every desire up to the very end, and then was left with the emptiness of vanity.

The fortification of Lebanon was because of the threat from Rezin in Damascus (1 Kings 11:24).

1Ki 9:20 As for all the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the children of Israel-
Of the seven nations earlier listed as inhabiting Canaan, only these five had apparently survived. Two had been absorbed into the Israelite population or destroyed. They were clearly distinct from the "children of Israel". Instead of trying to absorb them into Israel or destroy them, Solomon was so desperate for workers that he capitalized on that situation and demanded they provide him with slaves for his building works, as opposed to the Israelite labour which was classified as 'servants' (:22).

1Ki 9:21 their children who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel were not able utterly to destroy, of them Solomon raised a levy of bondservants to this day-

This suggests that Solomon made the same mistake as Israel in earlier days- he was a satisficer, he himself married into those tribes, and he wasn't obedient to the clear covenant of the land which was binding upon him. Solomon's motivation for now bringing the Canaanites into servitude was not spiritual. Rather, as with his borrowing of money from Hiram (see on :14), his obsession with his building plans was such that he needed huge amounts of money and resources to carry them through. And so he colonized the Canaanite areas and made them send him slaves to work on his quarrying and building projects; and this was why, as noted on :13 and 2 Chron. 8:2, he was keen to colonize the area of 'Cabul', in order to also provide more dogs body workers for his architectural obsessions.

1Ki 9:22 But of the children of Israel Solomon made no bondservants; but they were the men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots and of his horsemen-

This sounds very much like the fulfilment of Samuel's warning as to how a human king would abuse the Israelites. He made the Canaanites slaves (:21), but he made the Israelites his servants, to the point of whipping them with whips, as they later complained after his death. The difference between being his slaves and his servants was therefore not that significant.

Solomon had obsessive tendencies. We know that he became addicted to finding pleasure in women, and Ecc. 2 shows him racing down the road of obsession with architecture, alcohol, food, gold etc. The historical narratives so often mention his gold and silver (e.g. 2 Chron. 9:13-21,24,27). This repetition reflects Solomon's obsession. The same fact explains the record's repetition of Solomon's enthusiasm for horses (1 Kings 10:25-29; 4:26,28; 9:19,22; 2 Chron. 1:14,16,17; 8:6,9; 9:24,25,28). Yet amassing of gold, silver and horses was explicitly forbidden for the King of Israel (Dt. 17:17). There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

1Ki 9:23 These were the chief officers who were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, who bore rule over the people who laboured in the work-

The number of these overseers varies from 3,300 when the temple was being built (1 Kings 5:16) to 550 in 1 Kings 9:23 and then 250 in the Chronicles record. I suggested on 1 Kings 9:14,21 that all was not well in Solomon's apparently opulent kingdom. His building obsessions had led him to borrow money from Hiram to find it, and to excessively tax both Israel and the Canaanites amongst them to provide workers. And so the decreasing numbers of overseers may reflect his declining human resources, despite making every effort to try to pressgang more labourers he got fewer and fewer on the jobs in practice.

1Ki 9:24 But Pharaoh's daughter came up out of the city of David to her house which Solomon had built for her: then he built Millo-

If this is the woman of the Song of Solomon, then we can deduce they had a stormy relationship. It apparently ends at the end of Song 8 (see notes there), and yet with the

hints of resumption. So perhaps it was not a blessed marriage, and Solomon ended up building her a separate house to live in outside his immediate citadel.

1Ki 9:25 Solomon offered burnt offerings and peace offerings on the altar which he built to Yahweh three times a year, burning incense with them, on the altar that was before Yahweh. So he finished the house-
"Three times a year" surely refers to the three main feasts, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. No longer were the "high places" like Gibeon used, but worship was centralized in Jerusalem. This was indeed as the law of Moses intended, but Solomon appears to have used this as part of his policy of centralization of power in Jerusalem which we discussed on 1 Kings 4. We note that Solomon seems to have officiated as a priest as David did. David had done this kind of thing, but from careful reflection upon the spirit of the law, whose letter he says in Ps. 119 he studied constantly. And David came to this sense through careful reflection upon God's grace to him, and through the experience of Uzzah's death as a result of taking 'living the spirit of the law' too far. But Solomon does it from a wrong assumption that he is the Messianic king-priest.

1Ki 9:26 King Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion Geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom-
The navy appears to have either been owned by Hiram or at least included his ships (2 Chron. 8:18). It is spoken of as Solomon's in the same way as he is spoken of as being the personal builder of the temple, when clearly his subordinates did the actual work. See on :27.

1Ki 9:27 Hiram sent in the navy his servants, sailors who had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon-
Transporting ships overland was relatively common; there are several accounts of Alexander the Great doing so. Perhaps Hiram had transported his ships there overland through Israel, and Solomon decided to have them build ships for him at their port of departure, so that his traders could accompany the men of Tyre. The ships were perhaps "sent" in the form of wooden structures which were then assembled at the port.

1Ki 9:28 They came to Ophir, and fetched from there gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon-
Chronicles says 450, but perhaps the 30 talents difference were paid to Hiram for his transport services, as the navy of :27 appears to have either been owned by Hiram or at least included his ships (2 Chron. 8:18). "Ophir" may have been a generic name for areas to the east, including southern Arabia (famed for gold in Ps. 72:15; Ez. 27:22) and India; Ophir was in Arabia according to Gen. 10:29. Sheba was nearby and was famed for gold, so it was through this trading that the Queen of Sheba heard of the wisdom of Solomon. The next verse (1 Kings 10:1) goes on to speak of her, connecting her with this gold trade with Ophir.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 10

1Ki 10:1 When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of Yahweh, she came to test him with hard questions-
The record so far in 1 Kings has presented Solomon and his kingdom as deeply and

increasingly hypocritical and covered with a mere veneer of spirituality. He was increasingly in debt as a result of his extravagance, to the point of having paid Hiram with 20 Israelite cities. The visit of the Queen of Sheba is likewise recorded in the same vein. A special display of opulence and wisdom is put on for her, and she falls for it. Yet as a result, she comes to believe in the one true God and the Lord taught that she will finally be in God's Kingdom. One function of the story is to tell us the readers how Solomon appeared, we see him through her eyes- although the previous chapters have shown the thoughtful reader that in fact what she saw was fake.

She came to Solomon not because of the magnificence of the temple, but because she had heard of the Name of Yahweh and wanted to know more. This again undercuts Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8. His idea was that the magnificence of the temple would attract Gentiles, and that Yahweh's Name was somehow in the temple. But God had told David that He didn't want a physical house, but rather a house of people who manifested His Name in the sense of His characteristics. The Queen of Sheba is attracted by the Name of Yahweh in this sense. Just as it is the things of Yahweh's Name and not any physical religious structure that will attract the spiritually minded enquirers of any age.

As explained on 1 Kings 9:28, she would have first encountered Solomon's servants when they came to Sheba in search of gold, for which Sheba was famous. "Hard questions" is the word for "riddle". And it seems Solomon answered her riddles using his book of Proverbs. For he uses the word in Prov. 1:5,6 about how his Divinely inspired Proverbs were the answers to such "riddles" of the wise: "These proverbs can even add to the knowledge of the wise and give guidance to the educated, so that they can understand the hidden meanings of proverbs and the problems [s.w. "riddles", "hard questions"] that the wise raise" (GNB). He may have this wise queen of Sheba in mind, as it was her who raised these "riddles" / "problems" with him.

1Ki 10:2 She came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that carried spices, and very much gold and precious stones; and when she had come to Solomon, she talked with him of all that was in her heart-

This woman obviously had genuine questions which were more than mere intellectual tests of Solomon (:1). She presumably accompanied the latest shipment to Solomon of the things Israel traded with Sheba for, although we note she came by land with camels rather than by sea. It seems from the closing verses of 1 Kings 9 that the Israelites usually traded with Sheba by sea. "Great train" is elsewhere translated "great army", as if the wealth of what was being brought was so great that it needed major military escort. The same terms "spices... gold... precious stones" is used of what the queen of Sheba brought to Solomon, and what was brought to Hezekiah after his healing (2 Chron. 32:27). Perhaps the conversion of the queen of Sheba to Israel's God meant that her people continued to be sympathetic to Judah even in Hezekiah's time, and they were the source of these things in his time.

David had prayed that Solomon would be the Messianic king who would receive gold and gifts from the ruler of Sheba (Ps. 72:10,15), and this appeared an exact fulfilment of that. But although :1 implies the visit was of her initiative, we wonder whether Solomon's obsession with living out his father's expectations led him to actually invite her, in order to fulfil the words of Ps. 72 and as it were force a fulfilment in him. For they had been trading partners before this, as 1 Kings 9 makes clear. And yet the majority of Ps. 72 was not fulfilled by Solomon, and will only come true in the Lord Jesus.

1Ki 10:3 Solomon told her all her questions: there was not anything hidden from the king which he didn't tell her-
The idea is as in GNB "there was nothing too difficult for him to explain". "Told her" translates the word used for solving riddles (Jud. 14:13) and interpreting dreams (Gen. 41:24; Dan. 5:12). See on :1.

1Ki 10:4 When the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built-
The next verse suggests the "house" she was amazed at was not so much the temple, as his own house which had taken nearly twice as long to build and was of a grander nature than the temple. Yet he had prayed in 1 Kings 8 that the temple would be the source of wonder for the Gentile world, and would of itself bring about the creation of proselytes for Yahweh. But in reality it was replaced by his own house. We note how she was impressed by 'seeing' his wisdom; she had heard it in theory (:1), but it is the word made flesh which has the power of personal conversion in practice.

1Ki 10:5 and the food of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their clothing, and his cup bearers, and his ascent by which he went up to the house of Yahweh; there was no more spirit in her-
"The sitting of his servants" refers only to those privileged to sit at the king's table. The people generally were enslaved to Solomon and complained of his abuse. This was all a specially arranged demonstration that 'took in' the Queen. "There was no more spirit in her" is the phrase is used in Josh. 5:1 to mean resignation in defeat. Perhaps she imagined herself to be the greatest monarch in the region, but now accepts that Solomon is far greater than her. And thus she becomes representative of all Christian believers as they behind the Lord Jesus, according to how He speaks of her and her final acceptance at the day of judgment.

The way the Queen of Sheba was given a guided tour of Solomon's wealth makes ominous connection with Hezekiah's proud parading of his blessings to the Babylonian ambassadors. I noted another connection with Hezekiah on :2. The "ascent" was the king's personal entry into the temple (2 Kings 16:18) and Hezekiah is also associated with this in that he wrote the songs of degrees after his healing. They allude to how the sun went back on the sundial of Ahaz, which appears to have been a development of these grandiose steps of the king's entrance to the temple into a sundial. It is this very striking "ascent" which is described in :12. These connections with Hezekiah suggest why the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon but apparently rewritten by Hezekiah, as frequently discussed in my commentary on Ecclesiastes.

1Ki 10:6 She said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in my own land of your acts, and of your wisdom-
The actual content of Solomon's wisdom, perhaps in the form of the writings we now have as the book of Proverbs, had already been taken to her. She had heard the words by "report", but "didn't believe the words" (:7) until she actually saw the word made flesh. And this is typical of so many people. It is why God speaks His word to us now "in His Son", and why our witness will be the more effective if we make the word flesh in our lives.

1Ki 10:7 However I didn't believe the words, until I came, and my eyes had seen it. Behold, the half was not told me! Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which

I heard-
As explained on :6, it is hard for people to believe mere words. They have to see the word made flesh. This is why simply distributing propositional truths on various media will not of itself convert many people. The word must be made flesh, and then it is believed. This is why the person of the Lord Jesus, the word made flesh, must be absolutely and utterly paramount in our teaching of the Gospel. And it is why public lecturing about various Gospel truths will never convert as many people as witnessing that word in the flesh. It is encounter with real persons which converts real persons, rather than encounter with words and ideas. That is not to say God's word is not alive and powerful of itself. But people are people, they are weak, and often they have lacked access to God's word in its written form. It is the word made flesh in believers of that word which will be the most powerful witness in practice.

1Ki 10:8 Happy are your men-
It is as if she wishes to see David's words about the blessedness or happiness of the righteous nation and people being fulfilled, or perhaps it was Solomon trying to fulfil those words (Ps. 1:1; 33:12 etc.). But it seems this was all an impression Solomon was giving her, for many things were "rotten in the state of Denmark" as noted throughout 1 Kings 8,9. LXX gives "wives" for "men", as if she was struck by the happiness of the wives in his harem, which was unusual. But surely this too was only an appearance, because Ecclesiastes betrays an unhappy family life in Solomon's experience. Were the 1000 women in his harem happy? Surely this was a staged impression, which the queen fell for.

Happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you, who hear your wisdom-
The next generation were to complain that Solomon had chastised the people with whips (1 Kings 12:11). The happiness of the people which the Queen of Sheba observed was therefore just an impression Solomon arranged for her to receive.

1Ki 10:9 Blessed is Yahweh your God, who delighted in you, to set you on the throne of Israel. Because Yahweh loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness-
The Lord taught that this woman would appear at the day of judgment and be justified. She came to Solomon because of what she had heard about the name of Yahweh (:1). So she was attracted already to Yahweh. We see how God works through insincere people, hypocritical approaches to religion etc. in order to bring people to Himself. And we enquire how much true doctrine she knew and which of her native false doctrines she retained... Those who think that detailed purity of doctrine is required for covenant relationship with God would need to be reading here that she jettisoned her previous beliefs and accepted a course of instruction in Yahweh. But there is a deafening silence regarding that.

These are identical words as in 1 Kings 5:7, of Hiram's response. We are given the impression that they became proselytes because they used the Yahweh Name; although polytheists could take the name of other gods, such as Yahweh, without it meaning they had accepted them as their own gods.

Because of God's enthusiasm for human response to His ways, the exalted language in which He describes believers, even in their weakness, is a further essay in His humility. The way the Father runs to the prodigal and falls on his neck in tears is a superb essay in this (Lk. 15:20). Thus God "delighted" in Solomon (1 Kings 10:9)- translating a Hebrew word meaning literally 'to bend down to'. It's used about men in

love (Gen. 34:19; Dt. 21:14; 25:7), and about Jonathan's deferential attitude to David (1 Sam. 19:2).

1Ki 10:10 She gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold-
This was about one third of his annual income (:14), which could imply she was more wealthy than he was.

And of spices very great store, and precious stones. There came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon-
This note seems to imply that spices were never again imported into Israel, the implication being as Josephus states (*Antiquities,* 8.6.6), "that the cultivation of the balsam in Palestine dates from this visit; the plant having been one of the queen's gifts".

1Ki 10:11 The navy also of Hiram-
Built and operated by him on Solomon's behalf (1 Kings 9:26-28). The ships are called Hiram's because he supplied the wood for building it, and the sailors.

That brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir a great quantity of almug trees and precious stones-
"Almug" appears to refer to sandalwood, "the Hebraized form of the Deccan word for sandal". This points to "Ophir" as being in the east, possibly as far as the Indian coast where these trees grow.

1Ki 10:12 The king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of Yahweh, and for the king's house, harps also and stringed instruments for the singers: there came no such almug trees, nor were seen, to this day-
"Pillars" is "steps" in 2 Chron. 9:11, so the idea is of a magnificent staircase with elaborate banisters. This appears to be the king's "ascent" into the temple which so amazed the queen of Sheba (:5). This verse is referring back before her visit, because the almug trees were brought for the temple and for the king's house, which were already built by the time she visited.

1Ki 10:13 King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned, and went to her own land, she and her servants-
It is unclear whether this was a genuine gift, or whether it was part of a trade deal. For she had brought a huge caravan of gifts, and in return Solomon gave her what she asked for, as well as his own presents ("his royal bounty").

According to Ethiopian tradition, Solomon slept with the queen of Sheba and she bore Solomon a son called Melimelek. It is possible to interpret Ps. 45 as a reference to Solomon's relationship with the Queen of Sheba.

1Ki 10:14 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold-
This number occurs in the description of the mark of the beast in Rev. 13:18. It is one of the biggest hints that in fact Solomon's kingdom was the kingdom of the flesh, and not at all God's Kingdom as had been promised to David. The apostate religious system called "Babylon" in Revelation is evidently presented in the language of Solomon - at the time his kingdom was apparently flourishing, due to his righteousness. 1 Kings 10:14 = Rev. 13:17,18; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev. 18:11,12,15; 1 Kings 11:1,2 = Rev. 17:1,2; 1 Kings 10:22 = Rev. 18:17,19; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev.

18:3,17; 1 Kings 10:21,22 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:11 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:22 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:10,25 = Rev. 18:13; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev. 18:3,9; 1 Kings 10:28 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 9:22 = Rev. 18:13. These allusions of themselves suggest Solomon's spirituality was a mere appearance. The latter day system which his kingdom looked ahead to may therefore be Jewish or Jerusalem based, with elements of apparent obedience to God.

2 Chron. 3:8 says that Solomon used 600 talents of gold on the temple. Seeing he received 666 talents / year, plus the large income from :16, this means that it was not particularly generous. One talent is 26 kilograms (57 pounds). 1 kilogram of gold is currently worth about 80,000 US$ [2024]. Despite Solomon's highly successful trading income, he still brutally taxed his people. He became obsessed with wealth and funding his massive building projects.

Or we could conclude that the figure of 666 talents of gold came to Solomon just in one year. He had 120
talents from Hiram (1 Kings 9:14), 420 talents from Ophir (1 Kings 9:28) and 120 talents from the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10: 10). This makes 660 talents, leaving six talents added by the record. If we enquire why the record states 666, it could be because God wanted to associate this number with Solomon. The number 6 is less than 7, the number of perfection. It is the number of the man who fell short.

1Ki 10:15 besides that which the traders brought, and the traffic of the merchants, and of all the kings of the mixed people, and of the governors of the country-
LXX understand this as tribute, the taxes he charged on trading with his ships or through his territory; and in addition there was the income from the taxation system described in 1 Kings 4.

1Ki 10:16 King Solomon made two hundred bucklers of beaten gold; six hundred shekels of gold went to one buckler-
LXX "spears"; the Hebrew idea is of a large shield. David had taken shields of gold in 2 Sam. 8:7, and it seems Solomon was as ever seeking to imitate his father, at least externally, by making shields of gold. It was this almost pitiable imitation of his father which led to his undoing; for he was never his own man, never personally engaging with God. And when he finally matured in much later life, he had no faith in God at all, and turned to idols.

1Ki 10:17 he made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three minas of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon-
2 Chron. 9:16 says they weighed 300 shekels each, meaning that one mina was 100 shekels; although the definitions seemed to vary over time (Ez. 45:12). There were 60 shekels to one talent. But this hanging of shields on the walls was exactly what was done in Tyre (Ez. 27:11,12), so as noted earlier, it seems Solomon was copying Tyre as well as other Gentiles. Song 4:4 speaks of 1000 shields hanging "on the tower of David". This may be an exaggerated number, or it could be that these shields combined with those David had taken (see on :16) were 1000 in number.

Is. 2:6-13 condemns Israel for their pride whilst making many allusions to Solomon: "Full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures... full of horses... chariots... idols... the work of their own hands... the cedars of Lebanon" (i.e. Solomon's armoury of 1 Kings 7:2,3; 10:17). The amount of cedar used for Solomon's house as well as the temple would have probably resulted in the deforestation of parts

of Lebanon in order to provide this number of mature cedar trees. To cover an area of 100 x 50 cubits (1 Kings 7:2) with a roof of cedar (1 Kings 7:3) would have required 5000 square cubits of cedar wood if it were a flat roof, and more if the roof was angled; although it could be that not all the area was covered, i.e. there may have been a courtyard. But if it was, then we can better understand why it was called "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 10:17; Is. 22:8). About a whole forest of Lebanon would have been felled and transported to Jerusalem for all this building work.

1Ki 10:18 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the finest gold-
"Ivory" is literally "tooth" as in :22. It was likely made of wood overlaid with ivory and then gold, just as the 'house of ivory' (1 Kings 22:39) and 'bed of ivory' (Am. 6:4) were likewise not made of solid ivory. Ivory thrones were typical of the kings of Assyria, and we wonder if again this is evidence of pagan influence upon Solomon. God had promised to establish David's throne for ever, and Solomon wrongly assumed this was fulfilled in him and therefore he glorified his literal throne. This is typical of his total lack of spiritual perspective.

1Ki 10:19 There were six steps to the throne, and the top of the throne was round behind; and there were stays on either side by the place of the seat, and two lions standing beside the stays-
The six steps stressed the elevation of the throne. It is God′s throne which alone is exalted (Is. 6:1). But Solomon justified his self exaltation on the basis that he had been exalted by God, and his throne was God's throne. He repeatedly refused to accept the conditionality of what had been promised to him. The two lions were surely part of the 12 lions of :20. Clearly two of the 12 lions [tribes of Israel] were seen as more exalted. This implies the supremacy of Judah over the ten tribes- and yet this kind of human point scoring was built in to what was supposed to be a replica of God's throne. Solomon was quite unawed by God's glory. For if he had been, he would have realized that before Him, all the tribes were equal.

1Ki 10:20 Twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other on the six steps: there was nothing like it made in any kingdom-
This extraordinary throne received so much attention from Solomon because he was convinced that the promises about David's throne being eternal were fulfilled in him. And so he effectively portrayed it as God's throne, with the 12 lions representing the tribes of Israel ruled over by him. After the division of the kingdom, the throne would have been a sad piece of furniture. But the 12 lions were found on each side of the steps, making 24. This is a number associated with the throne room of God, with 24 elders or division of Angels before it (Rev. 4:4; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4). Perhaps Solomon was aware of this, and so he was making his throne an imitation of God's. The lion was specifically the symbol of Judah (Gen. 49:9); again, Solomon was inserting a subtext of Judah's domination of the rest of Israel. All Israel were to fall under the overall characterization of Judah.

The way Solomon built a huge physical throne, defended by impressive lions of his own creation (1 Kings 10:19,20), rather indicates how he missed the entire point-of ruling on *God's* throne, over a dynasty or 'throne' which God would perpetuate by grace; rather than establishing or creating the throne himself.

1Ki 10:21 All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the

house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold: none were of silver; it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon-
However, Solomon only received 666 talents of gold / year (:13); and Alexander's pillage of Ectabana was estimated at 120,000 talents of gold. So Solomon's wealth was not so great, relatively speaking. But it appeared like that, relative to the earlier poverty of a subsistence farming economy like Israel had been before Solomon.

"He that loves silver (as Solomon did, Ecc. 2:8; 1 Kings 10:21-29) shall not be satisfied with silver (as he wasn't- see Ecc. 2); nor he that loves abundance (s.w. used about the abundance of Solomon's wives, 2 Chron. 11:23) with increase. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them (cp. the large numbers at his table, 1 Kings 4:27)" (Ecc. 5:10,11). The Hebrew word translated "not be satisfied" occurs around 25 times in the Proverbs, with Solomon warning of how the way of the flesh couldn't satisfy. Solomon said all this with an eye on himself. He preached it to others, he felt deeply the truth of it, but he saw no personal way out of it. All he had was the accurate knowledge of his situation, but no real motivation to change- like the alcoholic or drug abuser who knows every aspect of the harm of his habit.

1Ki 10:22 For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram: once every three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks-
The abundance of gold and silver is explained on the basis of the fact that Solomon had a "navy of Tarshish" along with that of Hiram. And along with the gold and silver therefore came ivory, apes and peacocks. The association of these five items together points to trading with areas to the south and east of Israel. There is no way that "Tarshish" can refer to Britain because these items are simply not found there in abundance, and apes and elephants [for the ivory] are hardly natives of Britain. The word for "peacocks" appears to be a Hebraized form of an Indian word. The location of the trading partners is consistently areas to the south and east of Israel, not to the west. "Tarshish" may not in this context refer to a particular location. Rather is it a play on the meaning of the word, 'endurance / long distance', and refers to long distance trading vessels; just as in the 19th century, such vessels were known as "Indiamen", even if they were not bound for India. Likewise minibuses in the USSR were known as "Latvias" but that didn't mean they were located in Latvia nor were going there.

Comparing 2 Chron. 8:18 and 1 Kings 9:26, it seems that the navy of Solomon was initially based around the navy of Hiram. Hiram had transported his ships to the sea overland through Israel, and Solomon decided to have them build ships for him at their port of departure, so that his traders could accompany the men of Tyre. The ships were perhaps "sent" in the form of wooden structures which were then assembled at the port. But then Solomon began to have the men of Tyre build him his own ships, so that his navy was separate to that of Hiram. But they journeyed together, trading up and down the gulf and as far as India; returning every three years to port and transporting their valuable profits overland back to Israel and thence to Tyre. Each visit to a port would have taken some time, and they would have gained the gold, silver etc. through trading rather than thieving. So they would have bought good from one place and sold them at another, and after three years they had accumulated boats full of gold and silver which amounted to their profits.

1Ki 10:23 So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom-

These are the kings of the earth / land promised to Abraham, which is the same reference of :24. These are the kings of :26 LXX "and he ruled over all the kings from the river to the land of the Philistines, and to the borders of Egypt". The river Euphrates and the borders of Egypt were the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

1Ki 10:24 All the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart-
This refers to the earth / land promised to Abraham, the *eretz* of :23. As with the queen of Sheba, we note that they wanted to hear his wisdom from his actual mouth, in his presence; rather than just hear the ideas, which could easily enough have been relayed by word of mouth or even in writing. But for most people, the word has to become flesh to be persuasive. And so it is that God speaks to us in His Son, having earlier spoken solely through His written word. And our preaching of the word is likewise so far more effective through it being made flesh in us, as it was in the Lord, rather than being solely communicated through the written medium.

1Ki 10:25 They brought every man his tribute, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and clothing, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year-
The first mention of mules in the Bible is associated with Absalom's murder of Amnon his brother (2 Sam. 13:29). They were cross bred in disobedience to Lev. 19:19. We get the impression that a generally slack attitude to what might have been considered minor matters of the law was associated with the major sin of murder. This is the problem when we start to think that some parts of God's laws can just be ignored. David was fond of them, having his own mule (1 Kings 1:33), and Solomon was willing to receive them as tribute (1 Kings 10:25).

1Ki 10:26 Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, that he placed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem-
Solomon had obsessive tendencies. We know that he became addicted to finding pleasure in women, and Ecc. 2 shows him racing down the road of obsession with architecture, alcohol, food, gold etc. The historical narratives so often mention his gold and silver (e.g. 2 Chron. 9:13-21,24,27). This repetition reflects Solomon's obsession. The same fact explains the record's repetition of Solomon's enthusiasm for horses (1 Kings 10:25-29; 4:26,28; 9:19,22; 2 Chron. 1:14,16,17; 8:6,9; 9:24,25,28). Yet amassing of gold, silver and horses was explicitly forbidden for the King of Israel (Dt. 17:17). There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

LXX adds: "and he ruled over all the kings from the river to the land of the Philistines, and to the borders of Egypt".

1Ki 10:27 The king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the lowland, for abundance-
This could mean that he planted cedars in Israel, perhaps transplanting them from Lebanon; for his wisdom included being given wisdom about plants. And that wisdom was for the sake of the blessing and wise leadership of God's people Israel.

1Ki 10:28 The horses which Solomon had were brought out of Egypt; and the king's merchants received them in droves, each drove at a price-

Solomon started off as a middleman in the horse trade, buying horses from Egypt and selling them to the Hittite and Syrian kings (2 Chron. 1:16,17; 1 Kings 10:25,29); but he was playing with fire, and he soon came to flout the spirit of the command not to buy horses from Egypt. It's rather like the brother who works in a video store starting to watch the blue movies which he handles daily. Solomon would have justified it initially by saying that the horses were not for himself; just as we saw he justified his Egyptian wife by the thought that Joseph also married an Egyptian girl. It is twice stressed (:28,29) that Solomon had the horses "brought out of Egypt". His men went there to get them. That is the force of "brought out" rather than the horses being 'sent' to him. This is in specific disobedience to the law of the king in Dt. 17:16: "He must not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, so that he may multiply horses, because Yahweh has said to you, You shall not go back that way again". As often noted, this connection is implicit rather than explicitly highlighted. We are to draw the dots and see in Solomon a man who had no personal sense of responsibility to God nor personal obedience. He thought he was above all law. Because of his father and heritage. Just as many small time Christians consider themselves to be.

1Ki 10:29 A chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty; and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, they brought them out by their traders-

The description of Solomon's trading with Egypt is described with an unusual phrase- he brought forth chariots and horses out of Egypt by his hand. But the Hebrew phrase 'to bring forth by the hand' is used so very often to described how God's might hand brought forth His people from Egypt- destroying the horses and chariots of Egypt in the process (Ex. 7:4,5; 13:3,14,16; 14:8; 32:11 and so often). This is such a major theme in Biblical history that the inspired choice of words is surely intentional and allusive in 1 Kings 10:29- for Solomon did the very opposite to what God did for His people. Solomon's hand brought forth and glorified the chariots and horses of Egypt, bringing them all the way from Egypt to Canaan. Solomon is thus being subtly set up as an anti-God figure- although apparently, all was well, the promises of blessing were being fulfilled etc.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 11

1Ki 11:1 Now king Solomon loved many foreign women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites-

Solomon's desire for such a huge number of women, especially foreign women, must be understood in the context of why kings or great men married many wives. They did so in order to build up their own "house", and in Solomon's case he clearly desired to have a huge multi-national house / family to continue his name. He totally and willfully misunderstood the promises to David, and wished to establish himself as the Messianic seed who would build a huge and eternal "house" of people. But that seed was to be God's begotten Son, born after David "slept with his fathers". Solomon's plan failed. We read of only one son of his, Rehoboam. No other sons are mentioned. We read of two sons-in-law. And that's it. That's all we hear of his [possibly] 2000 kids. Each of the 1000 women must have produced at least one child. We note that Rehobam his son had eighteen wives and sixty concubines and fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty

daughters; an average of over one child / wife (2 Chron. 11:21). The amount of food required for the palace per day, listed earlier in the account, is appropriate for a king with 1000 wives and say 2000 children. But this "house" he was building came to nothing. The countries of origin of his wives, especially Egypt, turned against Israel. And his wives turned him away from Yahweh.

We read of how he married women from Egypt and the other surrounding nations; LXX adds Syrian and Amorite wives. But we will go on to read how it was exactly all those nations that supported his adversaries and were a thorn in his side throughout his reign. His marriages didn't succeed politically, and certainly they didn't enable him to establish a multi-ethnic eternal kingdom of God with him as the ruler. His entire attempt to establish such a kingdom is portrayed here as a miserable failure- just as all attempts to get the kingdom now will fail. We are living now for the future Kingdom, not trying to create it through our own houses or achievements. 1 Kings 11:24,25 shows that Solomon was surrounded by enemies, he lost Damascus and Hadad an anti-Solomon king reigned there; "and he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon", which means right from the start of Solomon's reign. So what then are we to make of the descriptions of Solomon as reigning peacefully over the land promised to Abraham? I suggest this is a case of focalization and perspective. We are being told that this was how Solomon made it appear. Just as the function of the Queen of Sheba's visit is to show us how Solomon made things appear. This was all how he wanted to perceive it; but the record leaves us to join the dots and see a quite different picture in reality. And so with all those for whom it seems it all worked out to have a fantastic 'kingdom of God' style life now- they present it as if it did, it might appear to have worked out for them, whilst most admit they wasted their lives trying to attain it. But even for those for whom it appeared to work out- it didn't. Just as it didn't for Solomon. It never does and never can do.

We ponder how it can be stressed that Solomon "loved" his 1000 wives. This is just psychologically impossible. I suggest again this is a case of perspective and focalisation. This is what Solomon liked to think and the appearance he gave.

Yet at the very time he was marrying them, he wrote in his wisdom that the words of wisdom would preserve / keep / defend a Jewish man from being damaged by them (Prov. 2:16; 6:24; 7:5). The connection would seem to suggest that Solomon reasoned that because he had wisdom, because he had 'the truth', he could therefore enjoy these "strange women" without them corrupting *his* heart; because *he* had wisdom. Thus he thought that mere possession of Divine truth was some kind of insurance policy against moral sin being counted to him. And so many have gone down this road; so many who knew more true theology than many have at the same time made an awful mess of their personal lives, just as Solomon did. This is why the higher one goes in the echelons of Christian organizations, the greater the learning and knowledge a person has, the more powerful is the tendency towards gross hypocrisy in moral terms. The point is, of course, that all the knowledge of God which we quite rightly seek after must be *personally applied*. The very possession of it and teaching of it to others can of itself make a man or woman demotivated to personally apply it.

1Ki 11:2 of the nations concerning which Yahweh said to the children of Israel, You shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon joined to these in love-

The implication is that Solomon took those wives thinking 'Well, I know the law says they will surely turn away my heart, but actually they won't, I can handle it'; and he

didn't handle it. Solomon seems to have realized, in the bitterness of Ecclesiastes, that he had made the same mistake as Samson: "I find more bitter than death [i.e. it would be better to be dead than be in this position] the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Ecc. 7:26). The Song of Solomon has Solomon admitting that he has been "taken" by the beauty of that Gentile girl. He utterly refuses to personalize God's truth. These were surely Samson's thoughts in those eyeless weeks in Gaza: better to have died than to have been snared by Gentile women.

Solomon "clave unto these in love", surely alluding to God's definition of marriage as a leaving father and mother and cleaving to a wife. Solomon really loved those women; they weren't just political strings to his bow. They would not have turned away his *heart* if they were only political relationships. 1000 seems a rather exorbitant number of political alliances to have in any case. And Ecc. 2:8 RV says that Solomon sought "the delights of the sons of men, concubines of all sorts". He took sex to its maximum extent- he had every possible type of woman in his harem. Every hair colour, size, type. "Whatsoever mine eyes desired [this is language elsewhere used about sexual desire] I kept not from them" (Ecc. 2:10). And yet still, he never found one… counting one by one, as he put it: "Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found" (Ecc. 7:27,28). If ever there is a warning against immorality, it is here. The more relationships one has- and our world glorifies this- the less ultimate satisfaction there can be. God's way has to be best.

1Ki 11:3 He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart-

"Princesses" means they were all of noble birth. International marriages were nearly always limited to royal families. Solomon married into the nobility of the surrounding nations, and yet he actually "loved" them in that he was also emotionally involved with them. Yet this didn't work out politically, because those nations all attacked Israel soon afterwards. This lack of self examination and confidence that he could not spiritually fail is reflected in 1 Kings 11:2,3, where we are reminded that God had said that foreign wives would "surely... turn away your heart after their gods". How "surely" this would happen was not believed by Solomon. "He had seven hundred wives... and his wives turned away his heart". He started marrying these foreign wives when he was young; presumably he reasoned that they could never turn away *his* heart because he was the Son of David, the Messianic King. In Prov. 6:27 he soberly warns against the strange (i.e. Gentile) woman, observing that a man cannot take this kind of fire into his bosom and not be burned by it. Yet this is exactly what he was doing at the time he wrote that. His public removal of his Egyptian wife from the house of David " because the places are holy" (2 Chron. 8:11) is therefore to be seen as spiritual pride, appearing to do the right thing, when his heart was far from it.

Solomon's heart was "turned away", or 'influenced' by his wives towards idols (1 Kings 11:3). Yet Solomon uses this very idea of the heart being turned or influenced in Prov. 2:2; 22:17 about the need to turn our hearts towards God's word. He taught, but did the very opposite. And perhaps Prov. 21:1 explains why he did this- he says there that Yahweh turns the heart of the King wherever He wishes- and so perhaps he thought that control of our thinking and inclinations is unnecessary, because somehow God will do it for us. And there's a lesson there for us, who may assume at times that

God will somehow control our hearts for us, rather than our making a conscious effort towards mind control.

Many passages make the connection between marriage out of the covenant, and adopting idolatry: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; Jud. 3:6,7; 1 Kings 11:2,3; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14. Dt. 7:4 RV dogmatically predicts that a Gentile man will definitely turn away the heart of his Hebrew son-in-law… So certain is it that marriage to Gentiles leads to accepting their idols that Ezra 9:1,2 reasons that Israel hadn't separated from idols *because* they had married Gentiles. Time and again, those who marry out of the covenant claim that they feel strong enough to cope with it, that marriage is only a human thing, and that their spiritual relationship with God is between them and God, and unaffected by their worldly partner. Yet this is exactly the opposite of what God's word says. It's not true that you can marry into the world and be unaffected in your own spirituality.

1Ki 11:4 For it happened, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God, as was the heart of David his father-

"Turned away" is the word used by Solomon in warning his son about the dangers of bad women: "With persuasive words she led him astray" (Prov. 7:21). "Led him astray" is the very term used of how Solomon's wives turned his heart astray from God (1 Kings 11:4,9). The more Solomon knew Divine truth, the more he seems to have considered himself free to ignore it and in fact do the very opposite. He clearly thought that mere possession of that truth was the basis for his justification, and dismissed any idea of self examination or awareness that he might in fact personally fail in obedience.

God said that He accepted the temple not so much as a place to dwell in (as Solomon assumed it was) but as a place facilitating sacrifice, prayer etc., for the glorification of His Name through these things; He emphasized that He dwelt amongst *His people* (1 Kings 6:13; 2 Chron. 7:12-16). There are several other places where God's response to Solomon's words seems to be corrective rather than affirmatory. Thus Solomon says that God will hear the prayers of His people because *the temple* is called by God's Name; but God's response is that "my people, which are called by my name" would pray to Him themselves and be heard, quite apart from the temple (2 Chron. 6:33 cp. 7:14). He sees them as bearing His Name rather than the temple building, as Solomon perceived it. God goes on to parallel the temple and His people in 2 Chron. 7:21,22, saying that if He punishes the temple He will punish the people. Solomon seems to have thought that the temple would still stand favourably in God's eyes even if the people were punished. The record records that the temple was "perfected" whereas Solomon's heart wasn't perfect [s.w.] (1 Kings 11:4 cp. 2 Chron. 8:16).

There are copious connections between Solomon's writings: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song; and also between then and the historical record of his life. These serve to demonstrate how he clearly contradicted the principles of the Gospel which he taught both to Israel and the world. One of the clearest examples of this is in Prov. 7:16,17, which describes the bed of the strange (i.e. Gentile) woman with which she allures the simple young Israelite: "I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon". Yet these are the very descriptions of the bed Solomon shared with Miss Egypt (Song 3:6-10). The young man's heart was made

to go astray because of her (Prov. 7:25), and her house led him to death (Prov. 7:27). Miss Egypt caused Solomon's heart to go astray (1 Kings 11:1-4), he built her a house, and her house became an idol temple which destroyed Solomon's faith.
Yet Solomon warned the young men of Israel all about this in Prov. 7; and he even pointed out that such a woman would have all
the outward trappings of Yahweh worship; she would claim an
enthusiasm for keeping peace offerings and vows (Prov. 7:14). Solomon was the young man whose picture he was painting. In Ecc. 9:12 he says that he suffered the fate of all men in that soon he would die, he would suddenly be caught like a bird in a snare, although he knew not his time. These are the very ideas of Prov.
7:23 concerning the snaring of the simple young man by the Gentile woman: "As a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life".

1Ki 11:5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites-
Solomon went off to other gods because his heart was not "perfect", not at peace [Heb.- not at *shalom*] with the one true God- so says 1 Kings 11:4,5. We see here the upward spiral of spirituality- knowing we are forgiven, being comfortable and at peace with God, means we will not go after the idols of this world. For there is an endless searching for peace in the human heart. If we don't accept the forgiveness and peace that can from God alone, we will seek peace in false ways. And that's just what Solomon did- for all his wisdom, he didn't personally know peace with God. Head knowledge doesn't give peace- for that is experiential.

"Milcom" is a form of Moloch. Solomon had married all those women in order to build up a huge "house" of children. But now he would have sacrificed some of them as required by Moloch worship. The root of the word Molech is the same as that of the Hebrew word for ‘king'. Solomon's wives chose their god as king instead or Solomon or Yahweh.

1Ki 11:6 Solomon did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and didn’t go fully after Yahweh, as did David his father-
Solomon didn't go "fully" after Yahweh (1 Kings 11:6)- and yet this same Hebrew word is often on his lips in describing how God has "fulfilled" His promises to David through Solomon. Thus he saw the promises of God as some kind of unconditional offer of blessing- rather than grasping that their fulfillments to us actually demand a 'fulfillment' from us. So for all Solomon's references to the promises to David, he didn't see that they required something from him. And we can be so very similar, knowing God's promises and rejoicing in their fulfillment, without perceiving that this of itself requires response from us.

Having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road: "For a good tree brings not forth corrupt fruit; neither does a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Lk. 6:41-43). There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

1Ki 11:7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the mountain that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon-
Solomon could calmly warn others in Prov. 5:8 "don't go near the house of the Gentile

woman". But he built his Gentile woman a house and then a house for her gods. The mount "before Jerusalem" is how the mount of Olives is elsewhere described. Hence it is called "the Mount of Corruption" (2 Kings 23:13). The mount of Olives faces the temple mount, so Solomon was as it were provoking Yahweh by this.

What a contrast with Ps. 125:2 "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds His people from this time forth and forever". The hills around Jerusalem are not huge mountains. They are small hills, and this is the picture of God's protection; not hugely visible, but there. But the mountains around Jerusalem became the "high places" of idolatry (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13; 2 Chron. 21:11); what should have been the symbols of Yahweh's protection became perverted.

1Ki 11:8 So he did for all his foreign wives, who burnt incense and sacrificed to their gods-

I suggest on Ecc. 5:1,2 that we are reading there Solomon's regret that David had taken the oath about building the temple, because he is now rejecting the temple cult. He built "houses" of worship for the gods of his wives, and worshipped them instead of Yahweh (1 Kings 11:4-8), worshipping in those temples rather than in Yahweh's temple. So we can understand his reflections in Ecc. 5 as meaning that he was regretting David had vowed to build the temple, leaving him to fulfil it; and his references there to Yahweh dwelling in the temple are therefore to be read as sarcastic. The Song of Solomon emphasizes how the Egyptian girl smells of incense, incense made moreover from spices not native to Israel- and Solomon loved her smell.

1Ki 11:9 Yahweh was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from Yahweh, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice-

As noted on Ps. 119:36; 141:4, David believed that God could act deep within the psychology or heart of man, to incline us toward righteousness and away from evil. This is how the Holy Spirit works today. Solomon believed the same (s.w. 1 Kings 8:58), but only in theory; for his Gentile wives inclined or turned away his heart from God (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). God will not turn our hearts anywhere we ourselves don't want to go. Solomon often appeals for us to incline our hearts to wisdom (s.w. Prov. 2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 22:17), but he himself was inclined to apostasy (s.w. 1 Kings 11:3,9). All his emphasis is upon the need to incline ourselves, whereas his father David trusted in the work of the Spirit to incline his heart to good and away from evil (Ps. 141:4; 119:36 etc.).

1Ki 11:10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he didn't keep that which Yahweh commanded-

God is clearly stating that Solomon had failed to meet the conditions required for him to be the Messianic son of David according to the promises of 2 Sam. 7. This made all Solomon's reasoning about the nature of the temple null and void. Not keeping that which was commanded by Yahweh is the language of the breaking of the covenant in Dt. 28:45, and therefore "all these curses shall come upon you". But by grace they didn't come upon Solomon, because of God's great respect for his father David. Considering the extent of God's wrath with Solomon (:9), this of itself reflects the high opinion God had of David. His various out of character failures did not ultimately change God's very high and fond opinion of a man who gave his heart to Him.

1Ki 11:11 Therefore Yahweh said to Solomon, Because this is done by you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant-
The same punishment which came upon Saul was to come upon Solomon (s.w. 1 Sam. 15:28). And yet Solomon's Proverbs are full of indirect allusions to Saul, presenting him as the archetypical fool. Now, Solomon is told that he will suffer the same fate as Saul.

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve nor observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Solomon muses in Ecclesiastes as to how he has seen servants as kings, as an example of how futile life is. He surely alludes to this threatened judgment upon him- that much of his own kingdom will be given to his servant. But he shrugs it off, just like people shrug off judgment to come and hide behind 'life is pointless, nothing really matters' in their weak moments, and as is glorified in popular art.

There is a Hebraism whereby something being 'with' someone means they have an intention to do something. Thus "This is done by you" (1 Kings 11:11) is literally "Forasmuch as this is with you". Job 10:13 likewise: "And these things hast thou hid in thine heart, I know that this is with thee" (see too Job 9:35). Likewise in Jn. 1:2, the word was "with" God not literally but in the sense of a plan and intention being "with" a person.

1Ki 11:12 Notwithstanding I will not do it in your days, for David your father's sake; but I will tear it out of the hand of your son-
As observed on :10, this reflects God's abiding high opinion of David. As we try to attach meaning to event in life, we soon perceive that everything is so multi factorial. There are so many factors involved. Solomon's reaping the results of his sins was ameliorated for him in this life, because of his father. Rehoboam his son suffered the effects of his father's sins, whereas Solomon suffered the effects of his father's righteousness. The ultimate equilibrium in each human life is not ultimately discernible; and things are this way in order to humble us and exercise our faith in the simple fact that God is the judge, and He is ultimately just. Even if that justice is not immediately discernible in life. There was a similar postponement of judgment for Ahab (1 Kings 21:29).
The delay was surely because God desperately hoped Solomon would repent, and gave him his whole life to do so.

1Ki 11:13 However I will not tear away all the kingdom; but I will give one tribe to

your son, for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen-
The extent of grace explains countless apparent contradictions and paradoxes throughout God's relationships with men- e.g. God repeatedly said that He would leave David with "one tribe" (1 Kings 11:13). But actually by grace He gave David and Judah two and a half tribes. As discussed on :12, Solomon's reaping the results of his sins was ameliorated for him in this life, because of his father. The 'choosing' of Jerusalem doesn't simply mean God chose it in the sense of selecting it from all the other cities of the earth. For Zech. 1:17; 2:12 speak of God choosing Jerusalem *again* at the restoration, implying His choice of it had somehow been annulled. So we need to understand 'choosing' as meaning 'choosing to manifest His presence there' at some future point eternally. And because of that, God had some fondness for Jerusalem even now.

It's as if Solomon's judgment has two mitigating elements: the postponement of the execution of the sentence until the reign of his son (:12), and a limitation of the territory to be lost (:13). We enquire why this was. There is no indication that there was anything in Solomon's behaviour that called for this. The answer seems to be that the mitigation was because of God's fond memories of David. Yet David himself was very weak spiritually in the later part of his life. We see here God's kindness and the way true love is after the death of the beloved. God doesn't forget His beloved in the way we tend to after their death.

1Ki 11:14 Yahweh raised up an adversary to Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom-
Hadad's and Rezon's opposition belong to the early years of Solomon's reign but we only now read of them. The lack of chronological order is because the record gives us the picture of how glorious Solomon thought his kingdom to be, reigning in peace without opposition over the land promised to Abraham. We see it through his eyes. But now the record shows us how things really were.

The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the Greek word *diabolos* to translate the Hebrew 'Satan'. Hence Devil and Satan are effectively parallel in meaning. Thus we read in the Septuagint of David being an adversary [Heb. *Satan*, Gk. *diabolos*] in 1 Sam. 29:4 ["turns against us"]; the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 19:22), Hadad, Rezon and other opponents to Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25). We face a simple choice- if we believe that every reference to 'Satan' or 'Devil' refers to an evil cosmic being, then we have to assume that these people weren't people at all, and that even good men like David were evil. The far more natural reading of these passages is surely that 'Satan' is simply a word meaning 'adversary', and can be applied to people [good and bad], and even God Himself- it carries no pejorative, sinister meaning as a word. We note too that Yahweh raised up this 'satan'. The 'satan' was not outside God's control; there is no radical evil in the cosmos. For God is almighty.

1Ki 11:15 For it happened, when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the army was gone up to bury the slain, and had struck every male in Edom-
Psalm 60 speaks of this campaign- there was a great defeat of Israel and then a victory once they turned to God. The extent of the initial defeat may be hinted at in 1 Kings 11:15,16: "When David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the army was gone up to bury the slain, and had struck every male in Edom (for Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom)". This seems to say that

Joab went to bury the slain of Israel, and at that slain in a great defeat, and at that time he remained six months subduing the Edomites with the victory which Psalm 60 later celebrates.

1Ki 11:16 (for Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom)-
The cutting off of every male must be understood in the context of :14, which says that Hadad was of the king's seed in Edom. I suggest it means that all the royal family of Edom were cut off, but Hadad was the only one who managed to escape. So "every male", rather like "all Israel", is not to be read as globally "every" and "all".

1Ki 11:17 that Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him, to go into Egypt, Hadad being yet a little child-
"His father's servants" suggests Hadad was the son of the king of Edo m who had been killed by David's men. The flight to Egypt could be seen as looking ahead to the experience of the Lord Jesus, because as explained on :28, Jeroboam was set up as a potential Messianic figure. Had he succeeded as intended, then the flight to Egypt would have become clear in its typical significance. We marvel at the detailed effort God puts in to setting up so much potential which so often comes to nothing.

1Ki 11:18 They arose out of Midian-
This would be better read as "Maon", the area where Nabal was from (1 Sam. 25:2), and is near Paran. Nabal's people were perhaps like him, against David.

And came to Paran; and they took men with them out of Paran, and they came to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house, and appointed him food, and gave him land-
Even in the time of David, when the Edomites were subdued, Pharaoh was very open to supporting the enemies of Israel. This is why Solomon's marriage to his daughter at the start of his reign, not so long after Hadad's establishment in Egypt, was foolhardy. At best it put his wife in an impossibly compromised position of conflicting loyalties, which we sense beginning even during their romance as recorded in the Song of Solomon. For there she so wishes that she and Solomon could live together in Egypt, and decide wholeheartedly for the sake of their romance to be Egyptians and live there in her homeland.

1Ki 11:19 Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him as wife the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen-
Solomon had married Pharaoh's daughter, and so Hadad may have ended up related to Solomon by marriage. This would have put Solomon's wife in an impossible position of conflicted loyalties. That may be one reason Solomon moved her out of the palace area and built her a separate house. See on :18.

1Ki 11:20 The sister of Tahpenes bore him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house; and Genubath was in Pharaoh's house among the sons of Pharaoh-
This was very high honour, meaning that Hadad's son was effectively amongst the contenders for the Egyptian throne as one of the "sons of Pharaoh". None less than the queen Tahpenes had performed the weaning ceremony which was seen as so significant (Gen. 21:8). Solomon was crazy to fall in love with the daughter of Pharaoh, and to hope that this would be a powerful political alliance.

1Ki 11:21 When Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to my own country-
Hadad wanted to return to Edom and revive Edomite nationalism, so as to become king again once he had thrown off the yoke of Israel in that area. He did much "mischief" to Israel and Solomon (:25). And yet it was at this very time around the death of David and Joab that Solomon was marrying Pharaoh's daughter. This was clearly Pharaoh using marriage for political means. And on Solomon's side, it was following his passions for the Egyptian woman, when both spiritually and politically this was not going to be a good move. Hence Pharaoh was supporting the Edomite insurrection against Solomon, because his son was leading it, at the same time as entering relationship with Solomon. And Solomon's unwisdom therefore resulted in the Hadad issue being a problem for him throughout his life.

1Ki 11:22 Then Pharaoh said to him, But what have you lacked with me, that behold, you seek to go to your own country? He answered, Nothing, however please only let me depart-
Pharaoh had just married off his daughter to Solomon and so he was not initially enthusiastic for his adopted son's desire to lead an insurrection against Solomon in Edom. All this complex web is the stuff of human politics and not love marriage.

1Ki 11:23 God raised up an adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah-
The later king of Syria Benhadad was the grandson of Hezion (1 Kings 15:18), a name which uses similar characters to Rezon who led the first attempted revival of Zobah and Damascus (1 Kings 11:23) after David's victories against them in 2 Sam. 8:3-8. Rezon perhaps didn't so much as flee from Hadadezer, but rather fled from the area at the time when David had conquered Hadadezer.

1Ki 11:24 He gathered men to him, and became captain over a troop, when David killed them of Zobah: and they went to Damascus, and lived therein, and reigned in Damascus-
2 Sam. 8:3-8 says that David had subdued both Zobah and Damascus, to the point of placing a garrison in Damascus (2 Sam. 8:6). But for all his worship of his father and attempt to give the impression of a territory totally under his control, Solomon failed to maintain what David had done. For he had clearly lost control of Damascus and the Israelite garrison had had to retreat. The loss of Damascus meant that northern Israel was under threat from the Syrians. But we never read of Solomon fortifying the area much. Instead, all the massive program of fortification and security was done around Jerusalem and Judah. Solomon is never recorded as even trying to recover Damascus. He was solely focused upon himself in Jerusalem; and thus set up the desire of the northern tribes to secede from his rulership.

1Ki 11:25 He was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, besides the mischief of Hadad: and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria-
When reviewing the references to *ha-Satan* ("the adversary") in the Old Testament, it's significant that a number of them occur in the context of the life of David. There was an incident where David behaved deceitfully with the Philistines with whom he once lived, and he is described as being "a Satan" to them (1 Sam. 29:4). That's

another example of where the word 'Satan' doesn't necessarily have an evil connotation- a good man can be an adversary, just as Peter was (Mt. 16:21-23) and God Himself can be (2 Sam. 22:4). But we find that David and his dynasty were afflicted with Satans, adversaries, from then on. The word is used about human beings who were adversarial to them in 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4,18; 11:14-22,25; Ps. 109:6,20 (Heb. "They say, "Appoint a wicked man against him, let an accuser [*Satan*] stand on his right hand"". David's enemies are described by a word related to 'satan' in Ps. 38:20; 71:13; 109:4. Note that it is stated that *God* stirred up men to be 'Satans' to David and Solomon- whatever view we take of 'Satan', clearly it or he is under the direct control of God and not in free opposition to Him.

1Ki 11:26 Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah-
Zarethan where Solomon cast the lavers for the temple with their pagan motifs (1 Kings 7:46) is called Zaredathah in 2 Chron. 4:17, which is a form of Zeredah (1 Kings 11:26), the birthplace of Jeroboam son of Nebat. It doesn't therefore have good connections. We wonder if the golden calves were cast there too.

A servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, he also opposed the king-
Solomon alludes to Jeroboam in Prov. 14:35: "The king's favour is toward a servant who deals wisely, but his wrath is toward one who causes shame". Although what Solomon writes is true and inspired, he clearly has in view his favour and then wrath against his servant Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26). Solomon uses his own feelings against Jeroboam as a basis for a global truth about kings and their servants. His Proverbs were indeed inspired, but there was a human element behind his words, ever seeking to use God's truths in order to justify himself.

Solomon was so confident that he was or would be the Messiah that he seems to have felt that he was beyond the possibility of sinning; real self-examination and the sense of the possibility of failure just didn't exist for him. He says that the land of Israel is "blessed" because her king is the son of a noble, and she will be cursed if her ruler is a servant (Ecc. 10:16,17 RVmg.). Solomon proudly presented himself as the son of King David- and he makes a clear swipe at Jeroboam, the pretender to the throne who was a servant (1 Kings 11:26). By reasoning like this, Solomon sets himself in direct opposition to the spirit of Jesus, who declared that the servant is to be the King of all.

1Ki 11:27 This was the reason why he opposed the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breach of the city of David his father-
Jeroboam may have fallen out with Solomon over these building projects because he saw that the northern tribes were being forced to provide tax and labour which they couldn't afford. He therefore garnered the support of the northern tribes for his position. Yet Rehoboam sent the hated Adoniram, the chief gatherer of these taxes, to try to bring the northern tribes again under him. The whole situation was set up for division. And Solomon was the prime cause of it.

Solomon began repairing the breaches (cp. Jud. 21:15), but this contrasts with how Solomon's later behaviour led to the rending apart of David's kingdom. Perhaps the breaches in the wall David had built had happened during some unrecorded invasion or attack upon Jerusalem. "Millo" means 'rampart' and refers to the fortifications built around the citadel where David's palace was. But "the breach" is singular, and "repair" can be 'to close up'. The reference may be to Solomon building

a wall between the mounts of Zion and Moriah, i.e. across the Tyropean valley, extending David's city walls in order to include the temple within them.

"Opposed" is Heb. 'lifted up his hand against'. It is the same word translated "exalted" when we read that God exalted / lifted up Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:7), so that ultimately he became king of the ten tribes. His opposition or lifting up his hand against Solomon was therefore of God and confirmed by God.

1Ki 11:28 The man Jeroboam was a brave man; and Solomon saw the young man that he was industrious, and he put him in charge of all the labour of the house of Joseph-

That is, the tribe of Ephraim, the largest tribe, who would have been the most resentful and resistant to sending their men to work on the new capital of Judah. And so this largest and most difficult group of workers were put under Jeroboam's control, indicating the senior nature of his role.

The final comment upon Jeroboam is that he was not as God's servant David (1 Kings 14:7-9). And yet he was set up with that potential possibility. Consider:

Jeroboam (1Kings 11) - David
Man of valour v. 28- As David 1 Sam. 16:18 RV;
Young man v. 28 - 1 Sam. 17:58
Ruler over all v. 28 - 1 Sam. 18:5
I will take you and you shall reign over Israel v. 37 - 2 Sam. 7:8
Build a house v. 38 - 2 Sam. 7:11
v. 40 - 1 Sam. 19:2,10

And it works the other way, too. Prophecies of doom can be turned round by our repentance. Nineveh avoiding certain destruction on account of their repentance is a clear example.

1Ki 11:29 It happened at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; now Ahijah had put on a new garment; and they two were alone in the field-

God never essentially recognized that division; for there was one Israel, one body. Indeed, He said that the division was the greatest tragedy to come upon His people (Is. 7:17). The way the new garment of Ahijah was torn up to symbolize the division, reflects the utter waste (1 Kings 11:29). For an outer cloke was a garment a man could wear for life; to have a new one was something significant. Significantly, the road to Jericho which features in the parable of the good Samaritan was the very dividing line between Judah and Ephraim (Josh. 16:1). The significance of this may be in the implication within the parable that Israel fell among thieves, needing the Messianic grace and rescue, as a result of their division into two kingdoms. And so many other spiritual lives have been shipwrecked over the rocks of division. Indeed, the Greek words for "division" and "stumbling block" are related; divisions are a stumbling block to so many, even if they externally remain within their faith communities.

I suggest that the events predicted by Ahijah the Shilonite (the family of David and the tribe of Judah losing kingship over all Israel) are the fulfilment of Gen. 49:10 "The scepter will not depart from Judah" [he will not be banished from his kingdom] "until he comes to Shiloh". When Judah came to Shiloh to crown Rehoboam there, and there the "peoples [of Israel] will gather to him" to crown him, there the kingship or scepter over the ten tribes was lost. Shechem and Shiloh are close to each other and mentioned together twice: "Behold, there is a sacrifice before the Lord in Shiloh... on the east side of the highway that goes up from Beth-El to Shechem" (Jud. 21:19).

Likewise in Jer. 41:5: “from Shechem (and) from Shiloh”. The one who comes to Shiloh, the one from Shiloh, may refer not to Messiah but to Ahijah the Shilonite, the one from Shiloh, who prophesied how the kingship would depart from Judah. Ahijah is called "the Shilonite", the man from Shiloh, five times in the record. Quite some emphasis. If "until Shiloh come" refers to the Lord Jesus, it is hard to understand how the kingship departs from Judah when He comes, seeing He Himself is the lion from Judah. And it is hard to understand why He should be called "Shiloh" and the passage never apparently applied to Him in later scripture. The diadem / sceptre did depart from Judah, as Ezekiel 21:25-27 makes clear- and well before the Lord Jesus came. So to make "Shiloh" simply equal to Messiah just doesn't work.

1Ki 11:30 Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it in twelve pieces-

If we read the "him" as Ahijah [the LXX make this explicit], which seems logical seeing he had dressed himself with that garment (:29), then this gives the impression of mourning. For tearing ones' garment meant mourning. God truly sorrowed at the judgment of Solomon and the division of the kingdom- a division which Solomon had created by taxing the north to fund the south, and thereby causing disillusion with the temple as a place of worship. So the Divine judgment of division was in fact only confirming Solomon in what he had himself done and set up. All Divine judgment and condemnation is really only giving men what they themselves lived out in their lives. This is why 2 Kings 17:21 says that it was Israel who tore away from David, whereas Ahijah gives the perspective that it was God who tore them away: "For Israel [tore] away from the House of David, and they made Jeroboam son of Nebat king”. The same word is used as in 1 Kings 11:30 for the tearing of Ahijah's garment. "Garment" is *shalmah* and "Solomon" is *shlomo*- the same consonants in each word. The rending of the garment / kingdom was a rending of Solomon. It was judgment for what he had done. His huge efforts to create a massive kingdom / house had come to nothing and in fact the kingdom would be torn.

We ask why the robe was torn into twelve rather than into two. Possibly Solomon's twelve taxation districts are alluded to. Or perhaps the twelve sons of Jacob- the family was now to be divided.

The Lord’s robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord’s coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

1Ki 11:31 He said to Jeroboam, Take ten pieces; for thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to you-

The word "tear" is used several times in this chapter, and it is the word used multiple times when describing the rending of garments in grief and distress. The same idea is in view; but whose was the grief, and who as it were rent their garments? It was God. His intense grief was because of the division of His people. This judgment hurt Himself, and was not simply thrown by Him at His people without personal grief. And His grief about the division of His people continues to this day.

Jeroboam is asked to take the ten pieces, to accept the gift of the Kingdom from God. But the prophet Abijah condemns Jeroboam for this: "Jeroboam... rebelled against his master" (2 Chron. 13:6), which was a sin because "the Lord God of Israel gave David kingship over Israel forever—to him and his sons—by a covenant of salt" (2 Chron. 13:5). His kingdom was "the kingdom of the Lord, which is in the charge of the sons of David" (2 Chron. 13:8). We have a window here into the complex way God works. He gave the kingship to David's line "for ever", but conditionally. It was His intention that it would only be an eternal line in that a future descendant of David, God's begotten Son the Lord Jesus, would reign eternally. But David and Solomon liked to interpret this as meaning that their line of kings would endure eternally. God went along with this by telling Solomon that this was conditional upon his perfect obedience and not turning away from Him. Solomon failed in this. So God gave the kingdom to Jeroboam, but Jeroboam also sinned in taking it... And so God works oftentimes with man.

1Ki 11:32 (but he shall have one tribe, for My servant David's sake and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel)-
As noted earlier, by grace, David was given not just one tribe but two and a half tribes. The whole Bible is really the story of God's endless grace in ameliorating the just judgments He has given; perhaps partly because, as explained on :31, they are so painful to Himself.

1Ki 11:33 because they have forsaken Me, and have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon. They have not walked in My ways, to do that which is right in My eyes, and to keep My statutes and My ordinances, as David his father did-
Notice the "they", of Israel, who were effectively guilty of the very same apostacy as Solomon. Solomon was fully representative of Israel (1 Kings 11:1,5-7 cp. 33; 8:52; and note the ye... thee confusion of 1 Kings 9:4-7 AV); his prayer was their prayer (2 Chron. 6:21); his worship was theirs (2 Chron. 1:3,5).

1Ki 11:34 However I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand; but I will make him prince all the days of his life, for David My servant's sake whom I chose, who kept My commandments and My statutes-
"Make him prince" suggests that in God's eyes, Solomon was demoted from king to prince. Solomon of course acted as if he were still king, as if God's appearance to him hadn't really happened; but his status changed in God's sight.

1Ki 11:35 but I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it to you, even ten tribes-
If Rehoboam had listened to the advice of the older men and relaxed Solomon's oppressive taxation system, then Israel would likely have remained loyal to him. But he didn't take that good advice, because it was "of the Lord" to fulfill prophecies like this (1 Kings 12:15). There is a hand greater than our own, a factor beyond our freewill receipt and processing of information, which works to fulfil God's will. And that is why we cannot judge human behaviour, because it reflects such a complex of factors which only God knows.

1Ki 11:36 To his son will I give one tribe, that David My servant may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Me to put My name

there-
"That David may have..." can mean to the effect 'So that potentially David may have...'. This was God's intended purpose, but its fulfilment was precluded by the unfaithfulness of the seed. He did not chose Jerusalem for ever; because it was to be destroyed, and was only to be chosen "again" at the restoration (Zech. 2:12). The lamp in Jerusalem was the budding of the horn of David (Ps. 132:17). And this was to finally come true in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, David's great son. But that lamp could have "always" burned in Jerusalem- potentially. But the various potential fulfillments failed to realize the potential.

1Ki 11:37 I will take you, and you shall reign according to all that your soul desires, and shall be king over Israel-
This seems to be saying that Jeroboam had absolute freewill, he could reign as he wished- but God had set him up with the amazing potential of being the seed through whom He would rule Israel (:38).

1Ki 11:38 It shall be, if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in My ways, and do that which is right in My eyes, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did; that I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you-
This indicates the presence of some basic spirituality within him. In 1 Kings 11:35 God tells Jeroboam that He would take the ten tribes from the house of David, and give them to Jeroboam. This is exactly the language of God speaking about righteous David, who was given the Kingdom which God took away from Saul. So initially, Jeroboam had some of David's characteristics; it seems rather strange for God to take away the ten tribes from one sinner and give them to another sinner. At that time, Jeroboam's potential spirituality was reasonably to the fore. If Jeroboam had continued in God's ways, God would have established Jeroboam as king over His Kingdom (1 Kings 11:38). So Jeroboam was being given a chance to make the right choices. He had the potential to do so. This echoes God saying to Moses 'I will make of you a great nation' because of the apostasy of others. Thus Jeroboam is faintly connected with Moses. However, as noted on 1 Kings 12:27, Jeroboam simply didn't have the faith to believe in this wonderful grace; that he, son of a whore (1 Kings 12:24 LXX) could be empowered by God to be the Divinely chosen king of Israel and the fulfilment of the promises to David.

1Ki 11:39 I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not forever'-
This could imply that Jeroboam would only rule as the king of Israel for the period during which God would afflict David's seed. Or we could take this as meaning that the seed of David would be afflicted "for this", for the sake of Solomon's sin. But in this case we wonder why they are called "the seed of David". I suggest that "the seed of David" therefore refers to Solomon specifically, and that this final prophecy doesn't chronologically follow :38. It could be that God's potential plan was that Solomon was to be afflicted for a period, during which Jeroboam and not Rehoboam was to reign, and then Solomon would repent and be fit to rule. But Solomon refused to respond, as did Jeroboam, and so this potential plan wasn't realized.

1Ki 11:40 Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam-
Solomon's response to the message about the kingdom being rent from him was apparently to cynically comment that there is a time to rend... but he couldn't care less

(Ecc. 3:7). We see here how little Solomon respected God's word. He though that by murdering someone he could stop the fulfilment of the prophecies. He was acting just like Saul, who tried to kill David when told that David was to have the kingdom.

But Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon-

Even politically, his marriages with all those Gentile women didn't seem to achieve him the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn't destroy the idol temples he built for them (2 Kings 23:13).

1Ki 11:41 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, aren't they written in the book of the acts of Solomon?-

This book may have been a compilation from various prophetic writings, for the equivalent in 2 Chron. 9:29 is "the history of Nathan the prophet, the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam".

1Ki 11:42 The time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years-

Saul, David and Solomon are all said to have reigned for "forty years", but the similarity is such that we wonder whether this isn't a symbolic period. For numbers were not used in Semitic literature in the precise way which we are accustomed to. Thus three consecutive kings of Babylon, Saosduchinus, Chiniladanus, and Nabopolassar are each recorded as having reigned 21 years.

1Ki 11:43 Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 12

1Ki 12:1 Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king-

The LXX addition on :24 adds: "And Jeroboam went to Shechem in mount Ephraim, and assembled there the tribes of Israel; and Roboam the son of Solomon went up thither". This would explain why this gathering to instate Rehoboam as king was held in Shechem and not in Jerusalem. And yet although Jeroboam was present with supporters, it appears that "all Israel" favoured the idea of Rehoboam as king. The old men truly advised him that if he would only ease the taxation, all Israel would remain loyal to him (:7). It could even be that the ten tribes had invited Rehoboam from Jerusalem to their great meeting place in Shechem specifically because they wanted him to be king. But this had to change, according to God's judgment upon Solomon- the ten tribes had to be removed from the control of his dynasty.

We enquire why Rehoboam chose Shechem rather than Jerusalem as the place for his coronation, as it was the leading city of Ephraim. I suggest he realized how his father had alienated Ephraim and he wanted to reconcile with them. This points up how his abusive language to the men of Ephraim was indeed "of the Lord", for it goes

against his own intentions. Likewise Jeroboam came with the rest of Israel to Shechem offering to serve him (2 Chron. 10:3), as if Jeroboam at that point had no designs on the throne but was suddenly as it were catapulted onto it- all clearly of God. It was all "of the Lord" (:15). This is how the Spirit works in our lives, over and above our own power and conscious intentions, and yet confirming us in where we really want to go.

1Ki 12:2 It happened, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam therefore lived in Egypt-

It seems this verse and :3 should follow 1 Kings 11:43 as in LXX and some Hebrew manuscripts.

1Ki 12:3 and they sent and called him), that Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam saying-

We note that Jeroboam didn't immediately begin by demanding the throne, but rather led the people in asking Rehoboam to reduce his father's excessive taxation system. But his return from Egypt, and his awareness of the prophecy about him ruling over Israel, surely meant he had in view the possibility of Rehoboam rejecting the request.

In a distorted way, Jeroboam was almost a type of Christ; for as made clear at the end of 1 Kings 11, he could have been the Messianic ruler over Israel had he chosen Yahweh's way. I'd suggest that many wicked Old Testament characters *could* have been types of Christ if they had lived righteously, and the record indirectly indicates this. Jeroboam fled to Egypt because of the persecution of Solomon, as did the Lord. When Solomon died, "they sent and called him", connecting with the record of the Lord Jesus going to Egypt and coming back after Herod's death. Jeroboam came back on the third day (:12) and offered freedom from bondage to Israel, as did Christ on his resurrection. In 1 Kings 13:10 we read of the prophet who came to prophesy about Jeroboam; we are told that he didn't return the way he came, but went back another way. That's an echo of the wise men, who came to see Jesus, and returned another way.

1Ki 12:4 Your father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make the grievous service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, lighter, and we will serve you-

Ephraim had been specifically targetted as a provider of labour and tax revenues (1 Kings 11:28). The influence of Egypt upon Solomon is reflected by the way in which he is described as making the people serve him with "hard bondage" (2 Chron. 10:4; 1 Kings 12:4). This is the very Hebrew phrase used to describe what the Egyptians did to Israel (Ex. 1:14; 6:9; Dt. 26:6). Solomon put his people under a yoke (2 Chron. 10:4), just as Egypt did to them (Lev. 26:13). And so we see the progression. Solomon loved an Egyptian woman, came to serve her gods, traded with Egypt... and the attitude of Egypt to God's people became Solomon's attitude to them. There is something unique about God's people; and yet the closer we come to the world, the more we come to see our own community, God's special family, just as this world sees us. The world's attitude to us can so easily become our attitude to our brethren- no longer seeing them as the specially chosen little children of God, sensitive to them as our very own brothers and sisters. And indeed, the attitude of the world to people must not be ours. For the world is narcissistic, they fail to see the value and meaning of the human person.

The very possession of wisdom and teaching of it to others can of itself make a man or woman demotivated to personally apply it. He foretold that the people would sign when a wicked man ruled them (Prov. 29:2 RV)- and they did "sigh" because of the heavy burdens he placed upon them (1 Kings 12:4). He imposed the "yoke" of tribute upon the people (2 Chron. 10:4), whereas he himself had warned that a king that imposes tribute on his people "overthrows" a country (Prov. 29:4 RV mg.). He saw it all as true- and yet it was far from him personally.

1Ki 12:5 He said to them, Depart for three days, then come back to me. The people departed-

The three days may have been in order to allow the advisers to be summoned from Jerusalem.

1Ki 12:6 King Rehoboam took advice with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What advice do you give me to return answer to this people?-

If Solomon was 41 at this time and the "young men" were those who had grown up with him, these men would have been really quite "old", old enough to have lived through much of David's reign and to have been influenced by his spirituality. Or the word may be used here to simply refer to the elders, whereas Rehoboam had also surrounded himself with his own peer group as advisers.

In this context, we may consider Solomon's frequent proverbs about the wisdom of having advisors, and his words in Prov. 20:18: "Plans are established by advice". Solomon's advice to his son sounds all well and good; but Rehoboam was given two different paths of advice by his advisors. Again, Solomon's words are true, but simplistic. Because as Rehoboam's case shows, the issue is not so much having advisors *per se*, but deciding which advisors to listen to. Solomon too had advisors, but did what he wanted, making this Proverb somewhat hollow when applied to himself.

We note Rehoboam's term "this people" (:6,9). He felt a separation between himself and them; they were not 'his people' nor did he see them as Yahweh's people. They were just an entity that disturbed his kingly enjoyment- exactly his father's attitude. And we see lived out the principle that according to how we perceive people, so we treat them.

1Ki 12:7 They said, If you will be a servant to this people this day, and will serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever-

See on :1. The general will of Israel was for Rehoboam and not Jeroboam, but the taxation issue was crucial.

The paradox of servant leadership is found here- if Rehoboam had been a servant of his people, then he would have ruled over them. In all ways, the Lord is our pattern. He was a servant of all, and so should we be. His servanthood dominated His consciousness. He said that He came not [so much as] to be ministered unto, but so as to minister, with the end that He gave His life for others (Mk. 10:45).

1Ki 12:8 But he ignored the advice of the old men which they had given him, and took advice with the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him-

Rehoboam didn't like the advice of the older men, and so he asked advice from his own peer group. Asking advice is so often just a mask for seeking confirmation in the way we have ourselves already decided. And we also are reminded here of how strong

is our desire to be seen by our peer group as in line with their thinking. The power of God's word is negated by all such psychological games.

It is true that as we go through life, we ought to realize that harsh responses and demands upon others are not really the way to go. These "young men" were perhaps the boys he had grown up with in Solomon's harem, his half brothers. They, like him, would not have been pure Israelites as their mothers were Gentiles, and they didn't have the long term well being of the nation at heart. Rehoboam was 41 at this stage. Perhaps then we can understand this as meaning that he had appointed young men as his advisers, who had been raised near him (the Hebrew *eth* translated "with" is a very wide word). They were young, but the Hebrew doesn't have to mean he had grown up with them. Rather they were young men who had been raised as he had been, in the same harem, which would hardly have been much of a place of wisdom.

1Ki 12:9 He said to them, What advice do you give, that we may return answer to this people, who have spoken to me saying, 'Make the yoke that your father put on us lighter?'-

He had written in his Proverbs that the ruler who lacks wisdom will oppress his people (Prov. 28:16); and although his wisdom remained with him right to the end, in terms of knowledge (Ecc. 2:9; 12:10), yet at the end of his reign Solomon was the ruler who did oppress his people (1 Kings 12:11). And he had gone on in Prov. 28:16 to warn against covetousness in a ruler, even though he went ahead with practicing every conceivable form of it in Ecc. 2. "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh" (Ecc. 11:10) Solomon taught- and yet Solomon in Ecclesiastes is the very picture of such a person. Like the experienced pilot who takes off with frozen wings and then crashes, so Solomon's very wisdom somehow disinclined him to living it out in practice. This is the perversity of our nature- the higher we may rise, the deeper we are inclined to fall.

1Ki 12:10 The young men who had grown up with him spoke to him saying, Thus you shall tell this people who spoke to you saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but make it lighter to us;' you shall say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist-

The Lord appears to allude to this when He invites all those burdened and heavy laden to come to Him because His yoke is easy and the burden light (Mt. 11:28). It could be argued that He is thereby acknowledging that Jeroboam, who offered the easier burden, could have been as Him, a fulfilment of the promise of the Messianic king (1 Kings 11:38). He saw in those people abused by Solomon the religiously abused people who were suffering under the burdens placed upon them by their religious leaders; and He saw those Jews as represented by Solomon, whom He continually reads in a bad light.

1Ki 12:11 Now whereas my father burdened you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions'-

The contrast is not between whips and scorpions, but the idea is rather than he would use a far heavier whip known as a scorpion. The Romans had a whip called a "scorpio", used for punishment.

We have an insight into why Solomon was like this in Prov. 10:13 LXX: "He that brings forth wisdom from his lips smites the fool with a rod". Solomon has himself in view, but now instead of attributing wisdom to Divine inspiration, he starts to consider that it emanated from himself. When he died, the people complained that he

had whipped [Heb. 'beaten'] them unreasonably. It was Solomon's false view of his wisdom which led him to do this. He assumed that he must be right, he was infallible, because of his possession of Divine truths. He justified indulging his natural human tendency to be overly harsh on others because he claimed he was the source of all wisdom. And again we see a parallel in fundamentalist Christian groups; where the more dogmatic are the claimants to possession of absolute truth about everything, the more they tend to abuse others and show no mercy to any who fail to attain to their supposed wisdom. Prov. 26:3 is also relevant, in the LXX "As a whip for a horse, and a goad for an ass, so is a rod for a simple nation". It was this attitude which led Solomon to beat his own people. Like many who hold God's truth, the mere holding of it lifted Solomon up in pride, and he came to despise all others who didn't accept his wisdom.

Despite having such knowledge and wisdom with which to rule Israel (for this was the primary purpose of the gift of wisdom to him), Solomon oppressed his people. With evident reference to himself, he commented: “Because the king’s word has power, who may say unto him, What doest thou?” (Ecc. 8:4 RV). It is only God who cannot be questioned in this way. But Solomon felt that because he possessed God’s wisdom, he could therefore act as God: “I counsel you, Keep the King’s command, and that in regard of the oath of God” (Ecc. 8:2) could suggest that he thought that his commandments were in fact God’s. So the possession of Truth, which we too have, can lead to an incredible arrogance, a lack of openness to others’ comments upon us, and a certainty that *we* are right in all that we do and are beyond criticism. The hardness of a man is changed by true wisdom (Ecc. 8:1 RV), but knowing this, Solomon became hard hearted. He had the wisdom- but as he said, it was far from him personally.

“Surely oppression maketh a wise man foolish” (Ecc. 7:7 RV), he commented at the end of his life- even though *right then* he was chastising the people with whips, oppressing them (1 Kings 12:11). He knew the true wisdom, he saw his reflection so accurately in the mirror, but resigned from its personal implications. He could even write that “I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun [by himself!]: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power [Solomon was king and had set up the tax system in a clever and biased way]; but they had no comforter” (Ecc. 4:1; 5:8). It was a real case of spiritual schizophrenia- he sorrowed for the people he oppressed. All groups who feature absolute truth claims, considering themselves the one true church and their system of theology to be "the truth" and all others to be without God... run the risk of becoming like Solomon. "The truth" eclipses personal moral obligation, and leads to abuse or abusive positions to those inferior to our level of "truth". The meaning and value of the human person becomes forgotten.

1Ki 12:12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king asked, saying, Come to me again the third day-

We the readers are drawn into a sense of expectation; we ourselves know what Rehoboam is going to say, but we are placed in the position of the suffering people, who didn't yet know what Rehoboam was going to answer.

1Ki 12:13 The king answered the people roughly, and forsook the advice of the old men which they had given him-

"Roughly" is the word used of how the Egyptians treated the Israelites in whipping them and giving them heavy burdens to carry (Ex. 1:14). This was how he was behaving. It is the word the people have just used when they complained that Solomon had treated them 'grievously' (:4); and Rehoboam confirms that he is going to do the same. Solomon had frequently warned against forsaking the advice of elders (s.w. Prov. 2:17; 4:2 and especially the warning of Prov. 27:10 not to forsake the advice of your father's friend). But Rehoboam had probably not even read or heard all these Proverbs, as Solomon himself had ignored his own Proverbs and lived quite opposite to them. And so did his son.

1Ki 12:14 and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions-
Solomon has so much to say about 'chastisement' / "correction" / "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

1Ki 12:15 So the king didn't listen to the people; for it was a thing brought about of Yahweh, that He might establish His word which Yahweh spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat-
There are times when God has influenced men not to respond to the evidently wise words of other men, in order to fulfill His purpose (e.g. 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 25:20). There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

1Ki 12:16 When all Israel saw that the king didn't listen to them, the people answered the king saying, What portion have we in David? Neither do we have an inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, Israel! Now see to your own house, David. So Israel departed to their tents-
This was the cry of Sheba in 2 Sam. 20:1. But the promises of 2 Sam. 7 were to David and his seed / house. By resigning from any association with that house, they were walking out of the hope of Israel which was in those promises. This has been done so

many times by those who [understandably] become disillusioned with the family of believers, but their break with them develops into a break with the things of God's Kingdom.

"See to your own house, David" could be a reference to the house in the sense of the temple. Indeed it reads strangely if it simply refers to 'house' as in a family. The idea would then be that the temple was so deeply associated with David and his line that the people were saying they refused to worship in it. They now considered it was to just be for the house of David. And I have suggested earlier that the temple was little more than the king's chapel, attached by an "ascent" to his palace which was far bigger and more glorious than the temple. And so it often happens, that unreasonable behaviour by religious leadership means the flock don't want to attend church, and are left wide open to being led away by totally non Christian ideas.

LXX gives "Now feed your own house", as if the bitterness arose from decades of the other tribes being taxed in order to feed Solomon's huge royal family, arising from his 1000 wives.

1Ki 12:17 But as for the children of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them-

This means that there were people from the ten tribes living in Judah, particularly those who had been transported there by Solomon to live in the various defensive outpost towns he had built in southern Judah. And they remained under Rehoboam. See on :23.

1Ki 12:18 Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the men subject to forced labour; and all Israel stoned him to death with stones. King Rehoboam made speed to get himself up to his chariot, to escape to Jerusalem-

If the forced labour quotas of Solomon were to now be multiplied, life would literally be impossible for the ten tribes. It is no surprise therefore that Adoram was stoned and Rehoboam had to flee for his life back to Jerusalem- reflecting on the folly of his young advisors.

1Ki 12:19 So Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day-

The same phrase used of Edom in 2 Kings 8:22. The word for "rebelled" is also translated "transgressed". Their division from the house of David was a division away from the promises about the eternal establishment of that house, as noted on :16. In this sense it was therefore sinful.

1Ki 12:20 It happened, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none who followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only-

We are given the impression that Jeroboam did not present himself as king nor seek the throne. He was invited to be king by the people. This again suggests that the will was there to continue under Rehoboam; but it was "of the Lord" that Jeroboam became king, almost against his will. At least, without undue effort on his part to claim the throne over Israel.

They presumably made him king by anointing him. "All Israel" may therefore imply that those present at the meeting with Rehoboam in Shechem had largely been more local people. The mention of "Judah only" is a nod to the fulfilment of the promise that Rehoboam would be left with but one tribe; but :21 goes on to say that Benjamin were also given to him, by grace. For Benjamin was the tribe of Saul who

had for many years been bitterly opposed to David and his tribe of Judah. It was the men of Benjamin who had supported previous revolts against Davidic rulership (2 Sam. 19:17; 20:1). Ahijah had torn the garment into 12 strips and given 10 to Jeroboam. There was one strip or tribe for Rehoboam, and the Levites were God's. But by grace, Rehoboam ended up with Benjamin too, and in fact also half the tribe of Manasseh. Again we see how this too was "of the Lord" and grace was ever present even in judgment. Perhaps they were simply influenced by the fact that Jerusalem was technically in their tribal allotment (Josh. 18:28). If they were not with Judah, then they would apparently have to accept Shechem or some other northern city as their capital and effectively abandon Jerusalem, which Solomon had built up to be the most impressive city of the whole Middle East at the time.

1Ki 12:21 When Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, a hundred and eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon-
Benjamin was a small tribe (1 Sam. 9:21; Ps. 68:27). 18 years later, there were 400,000 warriors in Judah (2 Chron. 13:3), so this was a very significant proportion of warriors. But in David's time there had been 470,000 (2 Sam. 24:9). Although "thousand" may refer to a military division rather than 1,000.

1Ki 12:22 But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God saying-
This may be now a quotation from the history written by Shemaiah about Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:15).

1Ki 12:23 Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people saying-
"The rest of the people" presumably refers to those of the ten tribes who lived in Judah and were loyal to Rehoboam (:17). The records dovetail so perfectly, as we would expect of a history written ultimately under Divine inspiration.

1Ki 12:24 'Thus says Yahweh, You shall not go up, nor fight against your brothers, the children of Israel. Everyone return to his house; for this thing is of Me'. So they listened to the word of Yahweh, and returned and went their way, according to the word of Yahweh-
This was significant humility, involving a recognition that what had happened was "of God", in judgment for Solomon's sins. To fight against our brothers can never be justified. 1 Kings 14:30 "There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually" would indicate disobedience to this command to Rehoboam not to fight the ten tribes. The Spirit may lead us against a course of action and we initially accept that, but over time we can revert to our own way again... for the work of the Spirit is not to force a man against his genuine freewill.

At this point, LXX adds to the record: "Roboam his son reigned in his stead in Jerusalem, being sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twelve years... And there was a man of mount Ephraim, a servant to Solomon, and his name was Jeroboam: and the name of his mother was Sarira, a harlot: and Solomon made him head of the levies of the house of Joseph: and he built for Solomon Sarira in mount Ephraim; and he had three hundred chariots of horses: he built the citadel with the levies of the house of Ephraim; he fortified the city of David, and aspired to the kingdom... ".

1Ki 12:25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived in it; and he went out from there, and built Penuel-
Shechem was ideally centrally situated within his territory. Penuel was on the east side of Jordan, and would consolidate his power there, as well as controlling the fords of Jordan. The record mirrors how David had chosen Jerusalem and built it.

1Ki 12:26 Jeroboam said in his heart, Now the kingdom will return to the house of David-
As noted on :1, the ten tribes had initially welcomed Rehoboam as their king. Their only issue was with the taxation system. 'Said in his heart' is a common Biblical phrase (e.g. Gen. 17:17; 1 Sam. 27:1; 1 Kings 12:26; Esther 6:6). There is a huge importance attached to self talk and spiritual mindedness. Further, there are many instances where we read that a person 'said' something; but it's apparent that they said it to themselves, in their heart. Take Gehazi in 2 Kings 5:20: "But Gehazi said, Behold, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the Lord lives, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him". For sure, Gehazi said this to nobody but himself. Or Moses – he's recorded as saying "People have found out what I have done!" – surely he said this within himself (Ex. 2:14 GNB).

1Ki 12:27 If this people goes up to offer sacrifices in the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah-
This reasoning was maybe true enough on a secular level, but it reflects a lack of faith in the promise made to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:38. Jeroboam simply didn't have the faith to believe in this wonderful grace; that he, son of a whore (:24 LXX) could be empowered by God to be the Divinely chosen king of Israel and the fulfilment of the promises to David. Perhaps Jeroboam was forced into this way of thinking by the approach of a feast, probably tabernacles (:32), when his people would usually go up to Jerusalem to worship.

1Ki 12:28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold; and he said to them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Look and see your gods, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!-
It's been suggested that theses calves were false cherubim. There is certainly a connection between the calf and the cherubim. In Ez. 1:10 we read that the living creatures had "the face of an ox on the left side". In Ez. 10:14 we learn that this face was that of a cherub. Jeroboam placed the calves at each end of the land of Israel, as if it was the ark (the ark had the cherubim at each end of it). By doing so, Jeroboam excluded Jerusalem, the temple, from God's presence. He excluded others from the presence of God. The calves were therefore a mixture of true religious symbolism with gross apostasy. In Hosea 8:2,3 we read a prophecy against Jeroboam: "Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. Israel hath cast off the thing that is good... of their silver and their gold have they made them idols... thy calf, O Samaria hath cast thee off... (it) shall be broken in pieces", as they were later by Josiah. So Israel thought that they knew God at this time, they felt in fellowship with Him, when actually the anger of God was deeply against them. Jeroboam was the one on whom the sin of Israel's later idolatry is blamed. But Jeroboam is not called an idolater. He no doubt had an element of good spiritual motivation in him. 2 Kings 3:2,3 implies

that Jeroboam did not actually worship Baal. Jehoram put away the image of Baal, but he cleaved to the sins of Jeroboam. The implication is that Jeroboam was not a Baal worshipper, which is what the majority of the wicked kings were guilty of.

Jeroboam quotes the words of Ex. 32:4 "These be your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt". The connection is conscious and intentional. His argument was presumably that the golden calf was quite legitimate and built by none other than Aaron. What was wrong, so he perhaps reasoned, was that the people had worshipped it as an idol. Whereas Jeroboam was initially arguing that his calves were a legitimate part of Yahweh worship. And Jeroboam is going right against the clear statement that it was Yahweh and not anyone or anything else that brought Israel up from Egypt: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 20:2).

1Ki 12:29 He set the one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan-
These were at the far north and south of his territory. Perhaps if indeed his calves were alluding to the cherubim (:28), his idea was that they were as the cherubim overshadowing the land.

1Ki 12:30 This thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one, even to Dan-
This doesn't have to mean that they only went to Dan. Bethel was a well known sanctuary, but Dan was in a remote northern part of the land. So I would paraphrase this as meaning 'The people went to worship before one or the other of them, yes, they even made the journey all the way up to Dan'. Therefore LXX adds "and they neglected the house of the Lord".

1Ki 12:31 He made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people, who were not of the sons of Levi-
The Levites went to Judah (2 Chron. 11:13,14). The migration of the Levites to Judah may not have been from purely spiritual motives. Probably Jeroboam confiscated the Levitical lands within his dominions for the benefit of the new priestly order (2 Chron. 11:13,14). And they were not very effective, because after three years idolatry became rampant in Judah and the people turned away from Yahweh.

So Jeroboam allowed the ordinary people to be priests; in Ex. 32 we learn that the ordinary people offered the sacrifices to the golden calf, not the priests. Again, it seems that Jeroboam was trying to consciously mimic the golden calf apostasy, perhaps arguing that Israel were a nation of priests. It is no accident that Josiah stamped his calves to powder, just as Moses did to the golden calf. Now *why* did Jeroboam so consciously lead Israel into the same apostasy which brought them as it were within a hairs breadth of national rejection in Ex. 32? Jeroboam wasn't ignorant. Perhaps he had gone down a path of contorted exposition which made out that Israel didn't really sin by worshipping the calf. Or perhaps he got so carried away with the idea that he was like Aaron, the priest, that he thought (like some modern Rabbis) that Aaron couldn't have done anything wrong, and therefore he consciously copied Aaron, as he did David, Solomon, Jacob and Samuel. Again, we see Jeroboam having a familiarity with Scripture, but not pausing to really meditate upon his actions or upon the real spirit of the word. We see him failing to analyze why Aaron acted as he did, failing to see that Aaron acted politically, failing to deeply analyze his own motives. The character of Jeroboam shines through here. Jeroboam named his sons Abijah [Abihu] and Nadab- the very names of Aaron's sons. It seems Jeroboam tried

to model himself upon Aaron, and justify the building of the calves by interpreting what Aaron did as a positive, righteous thing (as some Jewish expositors do today). He politely overlooked the fact that Aaron was condemned for making the calf, and that Nadab and Abihu were slain for unacceptable worship (Lev. 10:1,2). We too can justify outright wrong behaviour in the name of superficial allusion to Scripture, willfully failing to see the similarities between our actions and those of men who were condemned for doing in essence the things which we seek to justify.

1Ki 12:32 Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast that is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; he did so in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made-

Jeroboam was full of works, of activity in fighting the Lord's battles. He was active in the Truth, as we would say. He ordained a feast "*Like* the feast which was in Judah". He ordained a new feast on the 15th day of the 8th month, no doubt copying the feast of tabernacles, on the 15th of the 7th month. See on :27. So Jeroboam lacked an attention to detail, despite an appearance of spirituality. 1 Chron. 5:17 says that in Jeroboam's reign, the genealogies we read in the early chapters of Chronicles were written. So in some ways, he gave great attention to detail- when it suited him.

The feast of tabernacles was on the 15th day of the seventh month, but Jeroboam announced a feast on the 15th day of the eighth month. Perhaps he argued that as harvest came a month later in northern Israel, then this was acceptable. Perhaps he alluded to the way that a second passover could be kept a month after the prescribed date for those impure or otherwise unable to keep it on that date (Num. 9:6-12). So he may have presented this as a feast of tabernacles- *"like* the feast which was in Judah". He was clearly making vague allusions to spiritual reasoning and out of context Biblical precedent- just as so many do today.

Jeroboam's building of an altar for the calves as well as a proclamation of a feast is another similarity with Aaron, who built the golden calf, with an altar for it, and then proclaimed a feast to Yahweh (Ex. 32:5). Jeroboam is so carefully copying a Biblical example- but a bad one. The connection between Aaron and Jeroboam is confirmed by the record describing both as 'making Israel to sin' ["What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" (Ex. 32:21). And the desecration and destruction of their altars, and judgment upon the priests, is again so similar (Ex. 32:20; Dt. 9:21 = 2 Kings 23:15 and 1 Kings 13:2 = 2 Kings 23:16-20). The irony is that it was the Levites who were appointed priests because of their faithfulness at the time of the golden calf apostasy; whereas Jeroboam is careful to do the very opposite, appointing non Levites as priests.

1Ki 12:33 He went up to the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart: and he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and went up to the altar, to burn incense-

He went up to the altar, making himself the priest. It seems that he was copying David and Solomon, who did just this. But he lacked David's motivation and spirituality. Another example of his mixture of truth and error is shown by the way he built an altar at *Bethel*. Now this had many religious associations; Jacob offered there, Samuel held regular gatherings there; and as with trying to be like David and Solomon, it seems that Jeroboam went in for even more self-conscious spiritual exhibitionism and seeking to publicly associate himself with righteous men. In :28 we read that the idea of the calves was a result of taking counsel with others; but the idea of ordaining an

alternative feast of tabernacles, picking a random date near enough to the Mosaic one, was purely "devised of his own heart". We can ask others for advice when really we are intent on following our own narrative of what we anyway want to do. He has to take much personal responsibility, and so "Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin" is the continual judgment of the records upon him personally.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 13

1Ki 13:1 There came a man of God out of Judah by the word of Yahweh to Beth El: and Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense-
This prophet would have been tempted to reason that he need not make this long and dangerous journey; for after all, the ten tribes had chosen to secede from Judah. But we learn here of our responsibility to all our brethren, even if they have separated from us wrongfully. And this prophet was willing to risk death to do so (:4).

1Ki 13:2 He cried against the altar by the word of Yahweh and said, Altar, altar, thus says Yahweh: 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name. On you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and they will burn men's bones on you'-
The fulfillment came 330 years later (2 Kings 23:15,16). This is one of the few prophecies which apparently had no short term fulfilment to validate it; but there was therefore a dramatic sign given at the time (:3).

1Ki 13:3 He gave a sign the same day saying, This is the sign which Yahweh has spoken: Behold, the altar will be split apart, and the ashes that are on it will be poured out-
LXX and Hebrew "fat" instead of "ashes". "Split" is the word used for the 'rending' of the kingdom from Judah to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:13,30,31). But the lesson was that Jeroboam's false religious system would now be rent apart. The potential promised to Jeroboam of becoming king of the 'split / rent' kingdom on God's behalf, experiencing the fulfilment of God's promises to David (1 Kings 11:38) had now in turn been rent.

1Ki 13:4 It happened, when the king heard the saying of the man of God which he cried against the altar in Bethel, that Jeroboam put out his hand from the altar, saying, Seize him! His hand, which he put out against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back again to himself-
Jeroboam's reaction to the prophet was exactly that of Saul to David and Solomon to Jeroboam. They all thought that their action in murdering people could somehow stop the fulfilment of God's word. Jeroboam's action is a typical example of anger with the messenger because of the message. And we experience this often in our preaching of God's word to others.

1Ki 13:5 The altar also was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of Yahweh-
I noted on :2 that the prophecy about Josiah was not to be fulfilled for 330 years. But most prophecies had a short term fulfilment, for according to the Mosaic law, this was how a prophet could be tested and validated. Therefore this dramatic sign was given. An earthquake or earth tremour split the altar, and the ashes or "fat" fell to the ground.

1Ki 13:6 The king answered the man of God, Now entreat the favour of Yahweh your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me again. The man of God entreated Yahweh, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before-
The prayer of the man of God caused Jeroboam's hand to be healed. But he used the words of Pharaoh to Moses: "Pray for me...". The prayers of someone else can affect the fortunes of another in a way which would not happen if they just prayed for themselves. The Corinthians "helped… by prayer for us" (2 Cor. 1:11)- as if Paul's unaided prayers had less power than when the Corinthians were praying for him too. we note Jeroboam refers to "Yahweh *your* God". Despite all his cleverly planned allusions to Yahweh worship in his new religious system, and his awareness of Yahweh's word- Yahweh was not his God. We marvel that a man can experience an absolute miracle- and still not be convicted of Yahweh as his God. This is further evidence against the Pentecostal idea that miracles are necessary in order to elicit faith. The Bible is full of examples of where they do not do so.

1Ki 13:7 The king said to the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward-
"Home" was presumably to Shechem. For they were at Bethel at the time. Jeroboam still saw things in a very materialistic way, reasoning as did Saul (1 Sam. 9:7), and had utterly failed to appreciate the great spiritual potentials offered to him in 1 Kings 11:38. We see internal corroboration of the record in the character presentation of Jeroboam; in 1 Kings 13:7 and also 1 Kings 14:3, Jeroboam thinks that prophets must be paid for their services.

1Ki 13:8 The man of God said to the king, Even if you gave me half of your house, I would not go in with you, neither would I eat bread nor drink water in this place-
The prophet is tempted to break the commandment received not to do so (:9), but he overcomes it. He is then to be tested in a similar way again, and he fails it. God tests us and then repeats the test, that we might learn; or that our apparent obedience may be tested and proven to ourselves as real.

1Ki 13:9 for so was it commanded me by the word of Yahweh saying, 'You shall eat no bread, nor drink water, neither return by the way that you came'-
There was possibly the idea that eating and drinking together with others was a sign of religious fellowship (1 Cor. 5:11). But likely the prophet was being empowered miraculously as Elijah was later, to make a journey in God's strength. And the lack of food and water was to make him closer to God through fasting. Bethel was south of Shechem, so the prophet coming from Judah would not have travelled on this road. Perhaps the command not to return was because God wanted the prophet not to be delayed by people who had seen him coming wanting to congratulate him or otherwise delay him on his return journey. His whole period outside the border of Judah was to be without eating or drinking, so he was being told to make the journey as quickly as possible, and not allow himself to be delayed.

1Ki 13:10 So he went another way, and didn't return by the way that he came to Bethel-
See on :9. However the exact reason for this is unclear. It may have been just a simple

test. The first part of the commandment, not to eat food, he had obeyed. Now he was to be tested regarding the second part of the commandment.

1Ki 13:11 Now there lived an old prophet in Bethel; and one of his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel. They also told their father the words which he had spoken to the king-
The prophet was returning to Judah, so he was moving south of Bethel. To go back to Bethel would require him to return by the way he had come, in spirit, although he may have argued that seeing he was travelling a different road back home (:10), his return to Bethel by that road was not strictly returning by "the way that he came to Bethel". But such legalism leads into sin, as we see here. We wonder why this prophet was still in Bethel and had not joined the Levites in going to live in Judah. Perhaps it was because he was old. Yet his subsequent behaviour makes us wonder whether he was in fact a prophet of Yahweh, or just a "prophet" in a general sense.

1Ki 13:12 Their father said to them, Which way did he go? Now his sons had seen which way the man of God went, who came from Judah-
We note the emphasis upon "the way". He had been told by his sons all the words spoken (:11), so he knew the prophet from Judah was not to eat or drink, nor return by "the way" he had come. Perhaps as discussed on :11 he reasoned that returning to his house would not be returning by the way the prophet had come to Bethel- because he was on a different route. But knowing he had been forbidden to eat and drink, it was surely wrong of him to fake a word from Yahweh commanding him now to eat and drink. Perhaps he reasoned that the command not to eat and drink meant not to do so with Jeroboam. We can see the wrong thinking which his legalism led him to.

1Ki 13:13 He said to his sons, Saddle the donkey for me. So they saddled the donkey for him; and he rode on it-
The focus of the Divine cameraman is zoomed in close up. Sometimes we have scant detail, at others, such as this, we get much detail. We are thereby invited to imagine what the man was thinking as they saddled the donkey and he mounted it, and why he was doing this...

1Ki 13:14 He went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. He said to him, Are you the man of God who came from Judah? He said, I am-
If he had not eaten nor drunken, he was presumably tired. This would militate against my earlier suggestion that he was given miraculous power with which to make the journey without eating or drinking.

1Ki 13:15 Then he said to him, Come home with me, and eat bread-
We naturally ponder the man's motives. He faked a word of Yahweh, and yet is not so dramatically punished as the brave prophet from Judah who had done what he ought to have done, if he were a true prophet of Yahweh. Perhaps on the other hand, he realized this, and desperately wanted to show his respect to this prophet who was braver than he. So desperate that he faked a word from Yahweh. And yet that weakness was used by God to test the prophet from Judah. We marvel at the Divine ecology revealed in all this. The situation gets the less strange the more we think about it. For this kind of mixed motive is quite imaginable.

1Ki 13:16 He said, I may not return with you, nor go in with you; neither will I eat

bread nor drink water with you in this place-
"This place" presumably refers to the ten tribes, although perhaps Bethel and its environs is specifically in view.

1Ki 13:17 For it was said to me by the word of Yahweh, 'You shall eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that you came'-
By taking a different route home, the prophet had fulfilled this. But he rightly interpreted the spirit of it as meaning that he must not return at all by any road he had travelled on.

1Ki 13:18 He said to him, I also am a prophet as you are; and an angel spoke to me by the word of Yahweh, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house, that he may eat bread and drink water'. He lied to him-
The whole incident underlines the importance of personal relationship with God. If we are given a word from the Lord to do something, we are to do it, and not let that be overridden by the words of others, even if they claim to also be reasoning according to God's word. Our personal understanding of God's word is to be utterly paramount. No matter how apparently credible is another argument against it. And we must remember that the man had not eaten nor drunk for some time, and was resting, exhausted, beneath a tree (:14). Perhaps in his weakness he wondered whether this was God's way of sustaining him. But God will not send help to us in any way which so fragrantly breaks His own word to us.

1Ki 13:19 So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water-
LXX "So he turned him back". The problem with what he did was that the prophet of Judah's word to Jeroboam now appeared compromised. For Jeroboam had tried to seize him after his condemnation of the altar, but had been stopped. But now it seemed God had intervened to slay His prophet, and so there was no need to take his word seriously.

1Ki 13:20 It happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of Yahweh came to the prophet who brought him back-
Whether or not this old man was a true prophet of Yahweh, he was used to speak Yahweh's word to the prophet of Judah.

1Ki 13:21 and he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, saying-
"Cried" is s.w. in :2 for how the prophet cried against Jeroboam for his disobedience. For all his bravery, he was no better; at least in this moment of his life. He is condemned to death, not perhaps because he will not be saved, but as a lesson for us as to the importance of very personal obedience to God's word. The old prophet apparently sinned worse, but wasn't immediately slain. That point is so obvious in the story, and we are surely to conclude from it that sometimes men are punished with death for far 'less', apparently, than others sin. We think of Uzzah being slain for touching the ark in an apparently well meaning way, and David preserved after the sin with Uriah. The outcomes of our sins are sometimes so that others may hopefully learn something. Everything in our lives is so multi factorial. See on :24.

Thus says Yahweh, 'Because you have been disobedient to the mouth of Yahweh, and have not kept the commandment which Yahweh your God commanded you-
God's word is His actual word. The prophet heard "the *mouth* of Yahweh". And those words have been recorded. When we read His word, we hear His voice. Jeremiah

spoke "from the mouth of the Lord" (2 Chron. 36:12). His word brings Him that near to us, if we will perceive it for what it is. Jeremiah also was "disobedient to the mouth of Yahweh" (same phrase in Lam. 1:18), but wasn't immediately slain; see commentary on the first half of this verse.

1Ki 13:22 but came back, and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which He said to you, Eat no bread, and drink no water; your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers'-
"The place" was the apostate area of the ten tribes, and Bethel in particular. The old prophet's house is included within that, another indication that he was perhaps not untainted by the apostacy around him. On :30 I will note that the prophet's body didn't come to the tomb of his fathers, but rather to the tomb of the old prophet. But this came about through the old prophet's deep respect for the prophet of Judah.

1Ki 13:23 It happened, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for the prophet whom he had brought back-
His sons had saddled the donkey for their father, but now the old prophet, despite his age, does this menial task for the prophet of Judah, as a sign of respect. We note that the old prophet carries the blame- "he had brought back" the prophet of Judah, resulting in his death.

1Ki 13:24 When he had gone, a lion met him by the way, and killed him. His body was cast in the way, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the body-
I suggested on :21 that the apparently harsh judgment of the prophet was in order to teach others a lesson. And so the manner of his death advertised this. The lion killed him, but didn't eat him. Nor did he touch the donkey. Lions kill to eat, but this lion didn't eat the prophet. And it was all done in such a public manner (:25). Everyone would know that this was a judicial death from Yahweh. And they would have marvelled at His insistence upon personal obedience to Him, and not following anyone even if they falsely claimed to speak in Yahweh's Name. The equivalent of the old prophet was Jeroboam, who was setting up another religion on the basis of falsely representing Yahweh's word.

1Ki 13:25 Behold, men passed by, and saw the body cast in the way, and the lion standing by the body; and they came and told it in the city where the old prophet lived-
See on :24. The public nature of the strange slaying would have been gossiped far and wide, as it was such an unusual scene that was described. For everyone knew that lions kill only to eat.

1Ki 13:26 When the prophet who brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, It is the man of God who was disobedient to the mouth of Yahweh. Therefore Yahweh has delivered him to the lion, which has mauled him and slain him, according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke to him-
The old prophet realized that he had been merely a channel. He doesn't say "the word of Yahweh which I spoke to him", but rather "which He spoke to him". "Mauled" is 'ripped', and the same Hebrew phrase for "mauled / ripped and slain" is used of the death of Eli, also by Divine judgment (1 Sam. 4:18). As the altar had been ripped (:3), showing how the kingdom had been ripped from Jeroboam as it had been from

Solomon, so now the prophet of Judah was ripped or torn by the lion. He is presented as representative of Jeroboam and all disobedient to God's word.

1Ki 13:27 He spoke to his sons saying, Saddle the donkey for me. They saddled it-
The repeated emphasis upon saddling donkeys in this story (:13,23,27) may be to connect with how the false prophet Balaam likewise saddled his ass and disobeyed God's word (Num. 22:21 s.w.).

1Ki 13:28 He went and found his body cast in the way, and the donkey and the lion standing by the body. The lion had not eaten the body, nor mauled the donkey-
There was a fair chance that the old prophet would be killed by the lion, and realizing he too deserved Divine judgment for faking His word, he went there prepared to be slain too. He went therefore out of very deep respect, willing to pay with his life for that respect.

1Ki 13:29 The prophet took up the body of the man of God, and laid it on the donkey, and brought it back. He came to the city of the old prophet to mourn, and to bury him-
The old prophet, despite his age, travelled the road which the prophet of Judah would have travelled had he survived. This was a sign of identity with the prophet of Judah, again indicating that he felt this man had done what he ought to have done.

1Ki 13:30 He laid his body in his own grave; and they mourned over him saying, Alas, my brother!-
It seems that the old prophet kept the body, laid it in the grave prepared for himself, and then went to the old prophet's city to mourn there (:29). This keeping of the body is unusual and may suggest the prophet had no living family. Again we see the Divine economy in how things worked out; for the old prophet's desire to identify himself with the death of the prophet of Judah, placing that man's body where his should have gone, resulted in the fulfilment of God's judgment of :22.

1Ki 13:31 It happened, after he had buried him, that he spoke to his sons saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the tomb in which the man of God is buried. Lay my bones beside his bones-
This was a final act of identity with the prophet of Judah. The old prophet shows himself to be sincere in his devotion to God's word and the cause of the prophet. Despite faking Yahweh's word and bringing that prophet to his death. We see here what we are confronted by in our own lives and those around us- a sincere belief in Yahweh and genuine love of His ways, despite terrible failure at specific points (such as his faking of Yahweh's word and thereby leading a good prophet to his death), as well as general failure to attain our highest potentials (in this case, the old prophet ought to have delivered the message to Jeroboam, since he lived in Bethel. But he didn't). LXX adds "in order that my bones may be preserved along with his bones", suggesting he believed in a resurrection of the body for them both, by grace.

1Ki 13:32 For the saying which he cried by the word of Yahweh against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, will surely happen-
This may imply that the prophet's message was against the other high places as well. The city of Samaria is not in view, but the towns in the region of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). "Will surely happen" was faith indeed, for Josiah didn't fulfil the prophecies

for another 330 years. The old prophet loved the prophet of Judah for what he had done and for his message, and although he lived in Bethel and was likely to be persecuted by Jeroboam for his stance, the death of the prophet from Judah inspired him to speak out as he ought to have done earlier.

1Ki 13:33 After this thing Jeroboam didn't return from his evil way-
The implication may be that he could have done, according to the spiritual potential he had explained on 1 Kings 11:38.

But again made priests of the high places from among all the people. Whoever wanted to, he consecrated him, that there might be priests of the high places-
"Again" doing this suggests the incident with his hand withering and then the subsequent slaying of the prophet were all intended to make him stop and change his policy. But he didn't.

1Ki 13:34 This thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the surface of the earth-
The language here is slightly strange, as if the sin became sin and the sin was intended to destroy them. The idea is that God confirms people in their sins, and sin has its own downward dynamic, leading to destruction.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 14

1Ki 14:1 At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick-
"Abijah" is 'father of Yah' but that effectively means 'worshipper of Yah', and his naming further indicates that Jeroboam was initially aware of Yahweh worship. He had the potential of being the Divinely blessed king of Israel, with the promises to David fulfilled through him (1 Kings 11:38). His twisting of Yahweh worship is therefore the more reprehensible. Abijah is not to be imagined as a little child; see on :13.

We note that Rehoboam also had a son called Abijah, who succeeded him as king (:31). The contrast could hint that God was somewhat more acceptant of Rehoboam in the end, despite his unwisdom and harshness at the start of his reign; but not with Jeroboam. And yet Rehoboam in summary "did that which was evil, because he didn't set his heart to seek Yahweh" (2 Chron. 12:14). Perhaps here we have a case of God being less displeased with one king than He was with another. Just as Jehoshaphat was told "some good is found in you" (2 Chron. 19:3).

1Ki 14:2 Jeroboam said to his wife, Please get up and disguise yourself, that you won't be recognized as the wife of Jeroboam. Go to Shiloh. Behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, who spoke concerning me that I should be king over this people-
This turning to Yahweh in time of need, rather than to other gods, indicates that he had a conscience toward Yahweh and after the healing of his withered hand by the prophet from Judah, he knew that Yahweh was really the only God who could heal. "Ahijah" is 'brother of Yah' but that effectively means 'worshipper of Yah'. It is very similar to "Abijah", and we wonder if Jeroboam initially believed Ahijah's prophecies of 1 Kings 11:38, and named his child after the prophet, as well as making a statement of his commitment to Yahweh worship.

1Ki 14:3 Take with you ten loaves, cakes and a jar of honey, and go to him-
The possible death of the child would confirm the annulling of the promises about

Jeroboam fulfilling the promises about the house of David. That had been made clear by the prophet from Judah in 1 Kings 13, and now at this same time (:1) the message was being confirmed by the death of Jeroboam's son Abijah, who symbolized his weak attempt at fulfilling the potential of the prophecies of Ahijah about him. We see internal corroboration of the record in the character presentation of Jeroboam; in 1 Kings 13:7 and also 1 Kings 14:3, Jeroboam thinks that prophets must be paid for their services.

He will tell you what will become of the child-
Again we sense Jeroboam's recognition of the power and truth of Yahweh and His prophets, although he preferred his own power and kingdom to His.

1Ki 14:4 Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. Now Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age-
"His eyes were set" is the phrase used about Eli (1 Sam. 4:15), and he was also in Shiloh, at the sanctuary. The statistical chance of the phrase and town occurring together is too great to be chance. But as with our own lives, we cannot always attach meaning to event and coincidence. It could simply be that Ahijah was to meditate upon the similarities between himself and Eli and learn the lessons from Eli's failures and final rejection by God. Shiloh was in Ephraim, near Shechem, the capital of Jeroboam. It was a priestly city, but we wonder why Ahijah had not joined the other Levites in migrating to Judah. Perhaps old age had stopped him. We note from here and the prophet of Yahweh in Bethel of 1 Kings 13 that there were faithful prophets still in the ten tribes. Indeed by Elijah's time there were 7000 who were still faithful, and Obadiah hid 100 of Yahweh's prophets in a cave.

1Ki 14:5 Yahweh said to Ahijah, The wife of Jeroboam is coming to inquire of you concerning her son; for he is sick. This is what you shall tell her; for it will be, when she comes in, that she will pretend to be another woman-
Jeroboam knew that Ahijah was likely to condemn him and his wife for the golden calves and other idolatry. We have an insight into human nature here. Jeroboam and his wife believed Ahijah had God's help and power to know the future for their child, and the power to heal him. But they thought they could deceive him, so that his blindness stopped him perceiving that she was not Jeroboam's wife. We may believe in God's knowledge of the future and His power; but yet disbelieve His ability to see us and know us right now for who we really are. This is why the tendency of some to focus upon Bible prophecy, God's knowledge of the future and power in future history, can become an obsession which somehow mutes our awareness of His knowledge of us personally right now.

1Ki 14:6 It was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, you wife of Jeroboam! Why do you pretend to be another? For I am sent to you with heavy news-
The woman came to Ahijah, having been sent by Jeroboam; but Ahijah was "sent" to him. This is part of a wider theme of God's word 'coming' to us, and God 'coming' to us, through His word. God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He 'preaches' to humanity (e.g. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; 2 Sam. 22:10). In Jer. 39:16, the imprisoned Jeremiah is told to "go, tell Ebed-melech..." a word from the Lord about him. Jeremiah couldn't have literally left prison to do so – but the idea is that a person encountering the Lord's word has as it were experienced the Lord 'going' to him or her. And in this sense the message of the Lord Jesus (in its essence)

could ‘go’ to persons without Him physically going anywhere or even existing consciously at the time (1 Pet. 3:19).

1Ki 14:7 Go, tell Jeroboam, ‘Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you prince over My people Israel-
The "Because... therefore" judgment (:10) shows that those who are called to potentials are held responsible for their failure to realize them, and are judged accordingly. And we are all called to various potential good works (Eph. 2:10). Jeroboam had been the son of a prostitute (LXX) whom God exalted very far. But he used it for himself rather than God's service. "Exalted" is the same word used of how Jeroboam "lifted up his hand" against Solomon (1 Kings 11:26,27). But God exalted / lifted up Jeroboam, and ultimately he became king of the ten tribes. His revolt or lifting up his hand against Solomon was therefore of God.

Baasha was intended to learn from the path of Jeroboam, for he too was "exalted" (s.w. 1 Kings 16:2) from nothing to be prince over Israel. But Baasha like Jeroboam made the people sin. We are intended to learn from the life path of others. This is why we have Biblical history, and it is why God controls the encounters of those we meet in life.

1Ki 14:8 and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it you; and yet you have not been as My servant David who kept My commandments, and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My eyes-
The final comment upon Jeroboam is that he was not as God’s servant David (1 Kings 14:7-9). And yet he was set up with that potential possibility. Consider:

Jeroboam (1Kings 11) - David
Man of valour v. 28- As David 1 Sam. 16:18 RV;
Young man v. 28 - 1 Sam. 17:58
Ruler over all v. 28 - 1 Sam. 18:5
I will take you and you shall reign over Israel v. 37 - 2 Sam. 7:8
Build a house v. 38 - 2 Sam. 7:11
v. 40 - 1 Sam. 19:2,10

And it works the other way, too. Prophecies of doom can be turned round by our repentance. Nineveh avoiding certain destruction on account of their repentance is a clear example.

1Ki 14:9 but you have done evil above all who were before you, and have gone and made you other gods and molten images, to provoke Me to anger-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

And have cast Me behind your back-
The same phrase is used in Neh. 9:26 of how Israel cast God's law behind their backs. "The word was God", attitudes to God's word are attitudes to Him.

1Ki 14:10 therefore, behold, I will bring evil on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, he who is shut up and he who is left free in Israel, and will utterly sweep away the house of Jeroboam, as a man sweeps away dung, until it is all gone-

The preceding verses show that the extreme judgment pronounced was because of the great potentials God had enabled for Jeroboam (see 1 Kings 11:38). But he refused to realize them. We live in an age of great potentials. We are generally literate, mobile, with easy access to God's word; and many members of the body of Christ live in relative ease and luxury, free from persecution. The potentials for service are far higher for the average believer today than they were centuries ago. So this issue of judgment according to wasted potentials is so relevant to our age. "He who is shut up and he who is left free" is apparently an idiom referring to children still shut up at home, and those who are free to move about independently. The meaning would then be "young and old".

1Ki 14:11 He who dies of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and he who dies in the field shall the birds of the sky eat: for Yahweh has spoken it'-
The next verse goes on to state that Jeroboam's child "in the city" was to die. But then the judgment that he would be eaten by dogs is not applied to him in :13. To not "come to the grave" (:13) meant being thrown onto the rubbish tip like Gehenna, and eaten by dogs. The Lord's New Testament references to Gehenna are another way of saying 'Those put there will not have a decent burial', which was the greatest fear of the Semitic mind.

1Ki 14:12 Arise therefore, and go to your house. When your feet enter into the city, the child shall die-
See on :11. By returning home, she was bringing about the death of her child. There could have been here an appeal for repentance; if she had not returned to her home in Tirzah, thereby resigning her position as queen of the apostate kingdom, then she might have saved her child's life. See on :17.

1Ki 14:13 All Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him; for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward Yahweh, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam-
In Jeroboam's son "there was found some good thing" toward God. If Jeroboam's son was righteous, it is likely that Jeroboam and / or his wife had a spiritual side to them. But they didn't live up to their potential. See on 1 Kings 11:38. The child was old enough to have some spirituality, and God recognized this. "All Israel" knew of him, so he was presumably not a small child. The word for "child" is used of Solomon when he became king (1 Kings 3:7). He must have been an unusual child to have "some good thing toward Yahweh", because he was surrounded by every possible influence away from the true God. It is stressed that the child died "in the city", as soon as his mother returned there. The judgment of :11 was that those who died in the city would be eaten by dogs, but this is here ameliorated, by grace.

1Ki 14:14 Moreover Yahweh will raise Him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam. This is the day! What? Even now-
What God plans and purposes is effectively done at that moment of planning, so certain is His will and power. Therefore He speaks of those things which do not exist physically as if they do (Rom. 4:17). What will be, is now, from God's perspective. The Angel commented that God's words of future prophecy are "true and faithful… they are come to pass" (Rev. 21:6 RV). They are as good as done as soon as they are uttered, so certain are they of fulfillment. Thus 1 Kings 14:14 AV: "The Lord *shall* raise him up a king… but what? Even now". The future reality could be spoken of as

effectively "even now". This is the way to understand those passages which appear to teach that both Jesus and ourselves existed physically before our birth. God doesn't completely express Himself in our terms and language (although of course to some degree He does).

1Ki 14:15 Yahweh will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will root up Israel out of this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking Yahweh to anger-
As Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). She would be "Condemned with the world...". There is a major Biblical theme that when God's people lose faith, they are described and treated as the world. The uprooting of Israel was because they as a people had broken covenant (Dt. 29:28). But the same word is used in Jer. 18:7; if God says He will uproot a nation, then they can still repent and change the otherwise inevitable outcome. This is why there is a gap between the statement of judgment, and its fulfilment. The statement that God's people would no longer be uprooted (s.w. Am. 9:15) therefore means that the good news of the Kingdom is that God's people will no longer sin and have to be judged.

1Ki 14:16 He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he has sinned, and with which he has made Israel to sin-
The 'giving up' was to captivity, which is the context of :15. Yet the prophets repeatedly appealed for Israel's repentance, so that this outcome would not happen. But Ahijah here says that they were to go into captivity because of Jeroboam's sins. One way to reconcile this is to understand that there is a gap between God's statement of judgment, and His fulfilment of it. In that gap, repentance and prayer can change the execution of what has been stated. We all stand and live in such a gap, and it gives intensity to the need for prayer and repentant living.

1Ki 14:17 Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah. As she came to the threshold of the house, the child died-
We see grace interlaced throughout the judgments. Whoever of Jeroboam's children died in the city was to be eaten by dogs and not buried. But an exception was made for this child. The judgment had been that as soon as she entered the city, the child would die (:12). But God allowed her to walk from the city limits to her house before the child died. We wonder if this delay was a reflection of God's desperate hope for her repentance.

1Ki 14:18 All Israel buried him and mourned for him, according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke by His servant Ahijah the prophet-
This fulfilment of :13 suggests Abijah was not a small child but was known in Israel.

1Ki 14:19 The rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-
This is not necessarily the same as the "book of Chronicles" which we have in the Bible. However, 2 Chron. 13:3-20 describes the wars of Jeroboam with Judah, and how Judah captured cities from Jeroboam.

1Ki 14:20 Jeroboam reigned for twenty two years: and he slept with his fathers, and

Nadab his son reigned in his place-
Jeroboam named his sons Abijah [Abihu] and Nadab- the very names of Aaron's sons. It seems Jeroboam tried to model himself upon Aaron, and justify the building of the calves by interpreting what Aaron did as a positive, righteous thing (as some Jewish expositors do today). He overlooked the fact that Aaron was condemned for making the calf, and that Nadab and Abihu were slain for unacceptable worship (Lev. 10:1,2). We too can justify outright wrong behaviour in the name of superficial allusion to Scripture, willfully failing to see the similarities between our actions and those of men who were condemned for doing in essence the things which we seek to justify. Jeroboam allowed the ordinary people to be priests; in Ex. 32 we learn that the ordinary people offered the sacrifices to the golden calf, not the priests. Again, it seems that Jeroboam was trying to consciously mimic the golden calf apostasy. It is no accident that Josiah stamped his calves to powder, just as Moses did to the golden calf. Now *why* did Jeroboam so consciously lead Israel into the same apostasy which brought them as it were within a hairs breadth of national rejection in Ex. 32? Jeroboam wasn't ignorant. Perhaps he had gone down a path of contorted exposition which made out that Israel didn't really sin by worshipping the calf. Or perhaps he got so carried away with the idea that he was like Aaron, the priest, that he thought (like some modern Rabbis) that Aaron couldn't have done anything wrong, and therefore he consciously copied Aaron, as he did David, Solomon, Jacob and Samuel. Again, we see Jeroboam having a familiarity with Scripture, but not pausing to really meditate upon his actions or upon the real spirit of the word. We see him failing to analyze why Aaron acted as he did, failing to see that Aaron acted politically, failing to deeply analyze his own motives. The character of Jeroboam shines through here.

1Ki 14:21 Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem-
1 Kings 14:21; 2 Chron. 12:13 says Rehoboam was 41 when he became king. But he was "young and tender hearted" (2 Chron. 13:7). The LXX addition at 1 Kings 12:24 says he was 16 when he began to reign. He was surrounded by young men who had grown up with him. I suggest on balance that he was indeed 41 and the "young men" were "young" in comparison to the older men present. The description "young and tender hearted" could simply be a purposeful repetition of the description of his father Solomon when he ascended the throne; or it could mean that he was a rather weak and child like man.

The city which Yahweh had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there: and his mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess-
The criticism of Solomon for marrying Gentile women also applies to his first marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh; *besides* marrying her, he married the others too, and the criticisms which follow are spoken in the context of both these actions. Yet Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter in his early days, before he asked for wisdom. This is another indication that Solomon did not start off well and then go wrong; right from the beginning he had this incredible dualism in his spirituality. The Talmud (*Shabbath F, 56,2*) records that "When Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh she brought to him 1000 kinds of musical instruments, and taught him the chants to the various idols". Even when Solomon was young, he evidently loved wine (Song 1:2,4)- which was later to be something he (temporarily) abandoned himself to. He had a child by an Ammonite girl one year before he became king (1 Kings 14:21)- so his relationships with foreign women cannot be put down to mere political alliances. If the Song of

Solomon is about her rather than the Egyptian woman he married, one can only say that one early error, unrepented of, paved the way for his later disasters with foreign women.

1Ki 14:22 Judah did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, even worse than all that their fathers had done-
Jealousy is a lead feature within Yahweh's personality (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). It speaks specifically of the jealousy of a man concerning the faithfulness of his wife (Num. 5:14). God was the passionate lover and husband of His people, and it is inevitable therefore that the extent of that love would produce jealousy when they spurned Him and went after other men, the idols. At this point they only began to do this evil after Rehoboam had established his kingdom and felt strong (2 Chron. 12:1). Yahweh was no longer apparently needed by them, and so they turned to other gods. Maachah his beloved wife (2 Chron. 11:20-22) was an idolater (2 Chron. 15:16).

1Ki 14:23 For they also built themselves high places, and pillars and Asherim on every high hill, and under every green tree-
Houses of worship were built on the high places as Jeroboam had done (1 Kings 12:31), and these became Jeroboam's answer to centralized worship on one building, the temple, in one place, Jerusalem. But Judah "also" did this, they were influenced by Jeroboam's style of worship.

1Ki 14:24 and there were also sodomites in the land: they did according to all the abominations of the nations which Yahweh drove out before the children of Israel-
These sodomites were associated with the idol shrines (1 Kings 14:23; 1 Kings 15:12). They may well have been Gentiles from Phoenicia, hence they were expelled from the land rather than killed (1 Kings 15:12). They may well have been involved with homosexual practices, but the Hebrew *qadesh* means literally a devoted person.

1Ki 14:25 It happened in the fifth year of king Rehoboam-
This was after Rehoboam was established in his own strength; see on :22.
That Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem-
Shishak had given refuge to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:40), so it could be that he urged Shishak to attack Judah once Rehoboam became established as king of Judah. "A monument of this king, the first of the 22nd dynasty, has been discovered at Karnak in Upper Egypt, recording his conquests and the names of certain towns which he had taken in Palestine". Inscriptions on the wall of the temple at Karnak list many conquered cities, including three of the "cities for defence" which Rehoboam had built, Shoco, Adoraim and Aijalon (2 Chron. 11:7-10). The list also includes many cities within the ten tribes, suggesting that if Jeroboam got Shishak to invade Judah, Shishak then turned against his one time protégé Jeroboam and invaded the ten tribes also.

1Ki 14:26 and he took away the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king's house; he took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made-
LXX mentions that David took golden spears from Hadadezer: "And the golden spears which David took from the hand of the servants of Adraazar king of Soba and

carried to Jerusalem, he took them all". These would not have been used as real spears, but were part of the worship of the golden sun which was the main religion in Syria at the time. David would have been better destroying them, rather than bringing idol paraphernalia into Jerusalem. For it later contributed towards the freedom Judah felt to worship sun gods. These spears would have been taken at the time of 2 Sam. 8:7: "David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem". "Hadad" was the god of the sun, "Hadadezer" had not been 'helped by Hadad' as his name means, and so David brought these golden imitations of the sun to Yahweh's temple. It is perhaps questionable whether David should have brought idols into Jerusalem; we note that later Judah worshipped sun gods. David's actions here were not blessed, for the LXX adds "And Susakim [i.e. Shishak] king of Egypt took them, when he went up to Jerusalem in the days of Roboam the son of Solomon".

2 Chron. 12:5-8 recounts the temporary repentance of Rehoboam as a result of the challenge of the prophet Shemaiah at this time.

1Ki 14:27 King Rehoboam made in their place shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house-
Gold being downgraded to brass reflects the decline of faith in Rehoboam, for gold is a symbol of faith (1 Pet. 1:7).

1Ki 14:28 It was so, that as often as the king went into the house of Yahweh, the guard bore them, and brought them back into the guard room-
This indicates that there was a very low level of security even in the Jerusalem temple. Rehoboam wished by all means to imitate the worship of his father Solomon, but it was on a pathetically lower level. Despite all his idolatry, he still entered the temple for public worship of Yahweh. This was Israel's recurrent problem, to worship both Yahweh and the idols.

1Ki 14:29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
This may not be a reference to the books we know as "Chronicles", but it is noteworthy that the parallel record in Chronicles is far more detailed at this point than what we are reading in Kings.

1Ki 14:30 There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually-
This would indicate disobedience to the command to Rehoboam not to fight the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:24).

1Ki 14:31 Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and his mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess. Abijam his son reigned in his place-
His mother's name is twice stressed (see on :21). The records of the kings so often mention their mothers, in reflection of the huge spiritual influence of a mother upon her children.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 15

1Ki 15:1 Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat began Abijam to reign over Judah-

Abijam means "father of the sea", but 'father of' can mean 'worshipper of', as 'Abijah' means 'father / worshipper of Yah'. The sea god was worshipped, and so we conclude this was reflective of pagan devotions. He is called Abijah in 2 Chronicles, 'worshipper of Yah'. Having both a pagan and Yahwistic name was typical of the times, and Maacah / Michaiah his mother had a similar two names (see on :2). 2 Chron. 11:20-22 shows that Rehoboam had 28 sons. Abijam wasn't the firstborn, but rather the firstborn son of the favoured wife. Abijam had 38 children (2 Chron. 13:21), so he must have been a reasonable age when he came to the throne.

1Ki 15:2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom-
Maachah, Rehoboam's beloved wife (2 Chron. 11:20-22) was an idolater (2 Chron. 15:16). She is called Michaiah in 2 Chron. 13:12, "Who is like Jehovah?", but was known by her more pagan name Maachah, "oppression". She was the granddaughter of Absalom, but "son" and "daughter" are used in Hebrew with wide latitude.

The records of the kings so often mention their mothers, in reflection of the huge spiritual influence of a mother upon her children. The three years is a figure inclusive of parts of years, as he became king in the 18th year of Jeroboam's reign in Israel and died in his 20th year. "Three days / years" is often not a literal figure, and this must be recalled when considering the chronology of the Lord's three days in the tomb.

1Ki 15:3 He walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; and his heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God, as the heart of David his father-
And yet we read of Abijah's apparent devotion in :15 and 2 Chron. 13:10-12. The comment of 1 Kings 15:3 is that his heart wasn't perfect with Yahweh as David's was. David clearly sinned and seems to have suffered a decline in his ethics and spirituality as he got older. But he was judged on the overall dominant desire of his heart, to the point that having a heart perfect with Yahweh seems to effectively mean 'He was wholeheartedly devoted to Yahweh and never worshipped other gods'. Whereas Abijah, despite peaks of spirituality, did not have that total devotion to Yahweh as the dominant position of his heart throughout his life. Whatever peaks of obedience and devotion we may attain at points in our lives, it is the overall core position of our heart which is judged. Men like David may sin terribly at some points, those like Abijah may achieve wonderful levels of devotion at some points. But those high or low points play no major part in the final, unknowable equilibrium of Divine judgment. We need to remember this, as we encounter our brethren and ponder what to make of them, in their pits of sin and heights of devotion. Those points on their graph ought not to unduly weight our overall position on them.

1Ki 15:4 Nevertheless for David's sake, Yahweh his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem-
The way God allowed David's dynasty to continue for nearly 400 years therefore reflects His deeply positive overall impression of David. See on :3. By contrast, there were nine different dynasties in the ten tribe kingdom over 250 years.

1Ki 15:5 because David had done that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and didn't turn aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite-
As noted on :3, David was seen as having had a perfect heart for Yahweh all his days.

The highs and lows of his graph were not unduly significant in that overall judgment. But the matter of Uriah was so awful that it did weigh heavily. I suggest this was because it had many ongoing implications, and I have noted throughout the Psalms that David failed to maintain his intensity of contrition about it, and came to rationalize it as he entered older age.

These words must be given their due weight, as they would appear to imply that David's feeling of guilt and sin over taking the census in 2 Sam. 24:10 was therefore a case of a man taking false guilt. For it was allowable to take a census of Israel, although there was to be a half shekel tax paid at the time, which if not paid would result in plague (Ex. 30:12-15). Joab perhaps guessed that those numbered would not pay this and therefore the census would lead Israel into sin. This is why God chose the punishment of plague; not upon David, but upon Israel. Yet David perhaps realized all that, but knew that his lack of faith in wanting a census, his lack of consideration for the weakness of others, would lead them into sin and punishment. And therefore he felt guilty. It could be argued that his sacrifice atoned for himself and for the people, but they still suffered for not having paid the required "atonement money". But then we must balance against this the comment that "David had done that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and didn't turn aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). No mention is made of the matter of the census. There is true guilt, the guilt we should take for our actual sins; and false guilt, the guilt put on us by others and the malfunctioning of the human conscience. In this matter of David's guilt about the census, we may have an example of a man taking false guilt. The fact Israel and not David were punished with plague would rather confirm this. It may be impossible for us to sort out within us what is true guilt or false guilt, at least not be any intellectual process. But we can rest assured that all our guilt, of whatever kind, is met in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the ultimate guilt offering.

1Ki 15:6 Now there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life-

This would indicate disobedience to the command to Rehoboam not to fight the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:24). The terrible sin and tragedy of fighting ones own brethren is noted twice (also in 1 Kings 14:30).

1Ki 15:7 The rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam-

Again, the sin of fighting ones own brethren is stressed as in :6,16; see on 1 Kings 12:24.

1Ki 15:8 Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his place-

One meaning of "Asa" is "physician", and he ended his days trusting physicians rather than Yahweh. Perhaps he trained as a physician and ended up therefore having more faith in science than in Yahweh.

1Ki 15:9 In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Asa to reign over Judah-

Far more information is given in 2 Chron. 14:1-16, where we learn about the Ethiopian conflict, the prophecies of Azariah and Hanani and his covenant with Syria.

1Ki 15:10 He reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom-
The reference seems to be to his grandmother Maachah, Rehoboam's favourite wife, who seems to have retained her position, perhaps because Asa's mother was dead. The word for "mother" here can specifically mean 'the queen mother', an official title.

1Ki 15:11 Asa did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, as did David his father-
Asa is recorded as serving God just as well as David, when actually this wasn't the case; but God counted him as righteous. The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). Sometimes the purges of idolatry by the kings is described in undoubtedly exaggerated language- such was God's joy that at least something was being done? As discussed on :3, Asa was not perfect, nor was David; but God's overall judgment was that he "did right", despite doing wrong at specific points in his life. Indeed as noted on :23, Asa died at a low point for him spiritually. But the judgment overall was that he "did right".

1Ki 15:12 He put away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made-
These sodomites were associated with the idol shrines (1 Kings 14:23,24). They may well have been Gentiles from Phoenicia, hence they were expelled from the land rather than killed. They may well have been involved with homosexual practices, but the Hebrew *qadesh* means literally a devoted person.

1Ki 15:13 Also Maacah his mother he removed from being queen, because she had made an abominable image for an Asherah; and Asa cut down her image, and burnt it at the brook Kidron-
I suggested on :10 that this may refer to Maachah, Rehoboam's favourite wife, who seems to have retained her position, perhaps because Asa's mother was dead. The word for "mother" here can specifically mean 'the queen mother', an official title. The Lord Jesus may well have recollected the bravery of this act when He crossed the Kidron just before His final sacrifice.

1Ki 15:14 But the high places were not taken away: nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect with Yahweh all his days-
Asa and Jehoshaphat removed the high places, but in a sense they didn't (1 Kings 15:14 cp. 2 Chron. 14:5; 17:6 cp. 20:33). We read of how the land was purged of Baal, Sodomites etc.; but in a very short time, we read of another purge being necessary. Partial cleansing of idolatry amounted to no cleansing. Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah all made major purges within a space of 80 years. Jeremiah therefore condemns the Jews who lived at the time of Josiah's reformation for not *knowing* God in their hearts. See on :18. Many a Western Christian has this very same tendency. We too must ask ourselves whether our spirituality is really just a product of the crowd mentality; as the crowd shouted one day "Hosanna to the Son of David", a few days later they wanted Jesus to be delivered rather than Barabbas, but within minutes they were persuaded to cry for the crucifixion of the Son of God. Church life, Bible studies, the breaking of bread... inevitably, there is a crowd mentality developed here. There is a feeling of devotion which wells up within us as a community, as an audience, as we sit there, as we stand in praise and worship together. But the *real*

spirituality is far deeper than this. We must seriously ask whether our spirituality, our feelings of devotion, our true repentance, are *only* stimulated by these meetings?

As discussed on :3, Asa like David clearly sinned and seems to have suffered a decline in his faith as he got older, as the Chronicles record shows. But he was judged on the overall dominant desire of his heart, to the point that having a heart perfect with Yahweh seems to effectively mean 'He was wholeheartedly devoted to Yahweh and never worshipped other gods'. Despite all the ups and downs, of which his final faith in doctors rather than Yahweh was one of the down points, his overall deepest heart was for Yahweh.

1Ki 15:15 He brought into the house of Yahweh the things that his father had dedicated, and the things that himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels-
We note that Abijah did dedicate things to Yahweh, but as discussed on :3, despite peaks of devotion and generosity, the dominant desire of his heart was not to Yahweh. And it is this dominant desire which is critically important to God.

1Ki 15:16 There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days-
Again, the sin of fighting ones own brethren is stressed as in :6,7; see on 1 Kings 12:24.

1Ki 15:17 Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might not allow anyone to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah-
Ramah was a strategic point on the road which led to Jerusalem from the north. He maybe particularly feared that his people were still attracted to the idea of worship at the Jerusalem temple; for it seems it was access to Jerusalem which he particularly wanted to cut off.

1Ki 15:18 Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants; and king Asa sent them to Ben Hadad son of Tabrimmon son of Hezion, king of Syria, who lived at Damascus, saying-
Benhadad was the grandson of Hezion, a name which uses similar characters to Rezon who led the first attempted revival of Zobah and Damascus (1 Kings 11:23) after David's victories against them in 2 Sam. 8:3-8.

Asa gathered the gold and silver vessels back into the temple- and then went and used them to make a political treaty. He *apparently* treated them as God's riches, but then in reality he used them as his own (1 Kings 15:18, 15). See on :14.

1Ki 15:19 There is a treaty between me and you, between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent to you a present of silver and gold. Go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me-
The intent of the treaty, however, was that Benhadad would attack Baasha (:20). Perhaps this was not stated specifically because Asa wanted to give lip service obedience to the command not to fight with his own brethren in (1 Kings 12:24. So the Lord's money was spent on effectively getting others to fight their own brethren; and in essence the same can happen today in church politics. We also see how fickle are relationships when not governed by Divine principle; Benhadad's treaty with Baasha was broken when money was received from a third party, and he not only trashed the treaty but attacked him.

1Ki 15:20 Ben Hadad listened to king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel, and struck Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maacah and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali-
These cities were in the far north of Israel. It was an invasion of the border area rather than of all Israel.

1Ki 15:21 It happened, when Baasha heard of it, that he left off building Ramah, and lived in Tirzah-
Asa's plan appeared to have worked. Baasha stopped the attempted blockade of Jerusalem. Even though Asa did wrong in how he used the Lord's money / wealth, that isn't commented upon. It all seemed to work out. But we are left, naturally, with the question as to whether this was right or not.

1Ki 15:22 Then king Asa made a proclamation to all Judah; none was exempted: and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and its timber, with which Baasha had built; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah-
We see here the value of stones and timber and the huge amount of labour needed to move them. This corroborates the way that Solomon's huge demand for these things led him into debt financially (see on 1 Kings 9:14) and into abusing his people for labour.

1Ki 15:23 Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
These are the "fortified cities" of 2 Chron. 14:6. See on 1 Kings 16:27.

But in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet-
The record of Asa here is far more positive than that in Chronicles. For in 2 Chron. 16:12 we read that "his disease was exceeding great... yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians". As discussed on :3,11, Asa was not perfect, nor was David; but God's overall judgment was that he "did right in the eyes of Yahweh" (:11), despite doing wrong at specific points in his life. Indeed it seems from 2 Chron. 26:12 that Asa died at a low point for him spiritually. But the judgment overall was that he "did right". This surely affects our thinking about those who die in the low point of suicide. This doesn't necessarily preclude them from God's salvation.

1Ki 15:24 Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place-
2 Chron. 16:14 gives far more information about the funeral: "They buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art, and they made a very great burning for him".

1Ki 15:25 Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah; and he reigned over Israel two years-
"Nadab" means "liberal". "Two years" means parts of two years, rather than 24 months. Because his reign began in the second year of Asa and the next king began reigning in Asa's third year.

1Ki 15:26 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin with which he made Israel to sin-
If the "sin" in view were simply the worship of the golden calves, it is hard to see how all Israel sinned in this; for not all worshipped them. "His sin" may therefore refer to the sin of schism amongst God's people, in which all Israel were involved, and the sin of division in that sense therefore touched all Israel literally, including Judah.

1Ki 15:27 Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha struck him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon-
It appears that the prophet Jehu had apparently sanctioned what Baasha did (1 Kings 14:1,2). But it was tragic that whilst fighting their common enemy the Philistines, tribal jealousies led to God's people being less effective and fighting amongst themselves. Jeroboam's family were from Ephraim (1 Kings 11:26), so perhaps there was a tribal jealousy factor in someone from Issachar now trying to exterminate the whole family of Jeroboam, and thereby found a new dynasty. The infighting amongst the Israelites led to the siege being lifted, because in 1 Kings 16:15 we find the siege resumed, and again a king of Israel is slain during a siege of the same city. We see here how Biblical history intentionally repeats itself. Situations repeat in our lives, so that we may learn from them. And often we fail, as Israel did in this matter. Within a period of 25 years at the most, two kings of Israel (Nadab and Elah) were killed by usurpers whilst the same city was being besieged.

1Ki 15:28 Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha killed him, and reigned in his place-
"Reigned" is literally 'to be made king', perhaps suggesting he was anointed.

1Ki 15:29 As soon as he was king, he struck all the house of Jeroboam: he didn't leave to Jeroboam any who breathed, until he had destroyed him; according to the saying of Yahweh which He spoke by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite-
The fact this had been prophesied didn't mean it was the right thing for him to do. We note the radical difference with David, who expressly sought to show grace to the family of Saul the previous ruler- when the usual thing was to destroy the family of the previous king.

1Ki 15:30 for the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and with which he made Israel to sin, because of his provocation with which he provoked Yahweh the God of Israel, to anger-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

1Ki 15:31 Now the rest of the acts of Nadab and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
These comments suggest that this volume was available to the initial audience. It seems that the school of the prophets in Babylonian exile had access to the Old

Testament scriptures, and I have often suggested that under Divine inspiration, they rewrote and reapplied parts of them with relevance for the exiles.

1Ki 15:32 There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days-
These notes about the conflict between Judah and Israel run as the saddest refrain throughout the historical records; for the division amongst God's people, and their conflicts, were the greatest tragedy for God. The wars were all in defiance of His command not to do this (1 Kings 12:24).

1Ki 15:33 In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha the son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel in Tirzah for twenty-four years-
It seems the capital of the ten tribes moved away from Shechem to Tirzah, a location famed for its beauty (Song 6:4). These 24 years are reckoning as usual that parts of years are whole years (1 Kings 15:33 cp. 1 Kings 16:8).

1Ki 15:34 He did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin with which he made Israel to sin-
The eyes of Yahweh may refer specifically to His Angels (2 Chron. 16:9; Zech. 4:10), who informed Yahweh, as it were, of human actions on earth. Whilst God is omniscient and omnipotent, He always seems to prefer to work through some human or Angelic mechanism.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 16

1Ki 16:1 The word of Yahweh came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying-
The prophet Jehu rebuked Baasha (1 Kings 16:1) and yet he also wrote a history of Jehoshaphat's reign (2 Chron. 20:34), implying that he outlived Jehoshaphat. This means that Jehu must have been a young man at the time of his rebuke of Baasha. It's hard to keep on keeping on in ministry over a long lifetime, and those who do should be deeply respected. His father Hanani had rebuked Asa for his alliance with the Syrians against Baasha (2 Chron. 16:7-10), and now Jehu rebukes Baasha. Having to be constantly critical of people is not a nice ministry.

1Ki 16:2 Because I exalted you out of the dust, and made you prince over My people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and have made My people Israel to sin, to provoke Me to anger with their sins-
Baasha was intended to learn from the path of Jeroboam, who had also been "exalted" (s.w. 1 Kings 14:7) from nothing to be prince over Israel, having been the son of a whore (1 Kings 12:24 LXX). Baasha like Jeroboam made the people sin. We are intended to learn from the life path of others. This is why we have Biblical history, and it is why God controls the encounters of those we meet in life.

We can limit God's plans to save others in the ecclesia by our attitude to them. We can make others stumble from the path to His salvation. Baasha made other people sin and thus provoke God to anger; his own sin and that of the people are described in identical language, to portray how he influenced them (1 Kings 16:2,7).

1Ki 16:3 behold, I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat-

This was the language of Jeroboam's judgment (1 Kings 14:10). Baasha had failed to learn the lessons of Jeroboam and so he was judged in the same way.

1Ki 16:4 The dogs will eat Baasha's descendants who die in the city; and he who dies of his in the field- the birds of the sky will eat-
This repeats the language of Jeroboam's judgment (1 Kings 14:11). As noted on :3, Baasha was really intended to discern the wrong path of Jeroboam. As we may be with people who come into our lives. And he didn't, so he went to the same destination which Jeroboam's "way" led to.

1Ki 16:5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
These comments suggest that this volume was available to the initial audience. It seems that the school of the prophets in Babylonian exile had access to the Old Testament scriptures, and I have often suggested that under Divine inspiration, they rewrote and reapplied parts of them with relevance for the exiles.

1Ki 16:6 Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah; and Elah his son reigned in his place-
The idiom of 'sleeping' for death implies resurrection (Dan. 12:2). We will see these men again, at the day of judgment- and yet presumably they will be condemned to the "second death".

1Ki 16:7 Moreover by the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani came the word of Yahweh against Baasha, and against his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of Yahweh, to provoke Him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. This is a major theme of this chapter (:2,7,13,26,33). He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

And because he struck him-
Yet God had raised up Baasha to strike the house of Jeroboam. Perhaps we have a similar position was in Is. 47:6, where the nations raised up to judge Judah are themselves judged because they did so without showing mercy. There are times when we have to judge, not in the sense of condemning (Mt. 7:1), but in the sense of judging righteous judgment (Jn. 7:24). But we shall be condemned if we do so without the mercy which we ourselves are saved by. And this seems to be the reason for Baasha's condemnation, amongst other things.

1Ki 16:8 In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah the son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah for two years-
"Elah" means "oak", which was associated with idolatry (s.w. Ez. 6:13; Hos. 4:13). This reflects upon Baasha's idolatry.

1Ki 16:9 His servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him. Now he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was over the

household in Tirzah-
"Arza" is 'man of the earth'; "Zimri" means 'musical'. We note the lack of the 'Yah' suffix in the names, and how Elah was drunk when he was killed.

1Ki 16:10 and Zimri went in and struck him and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place-
Elah began to reign in the 26th year of Asa, died in Asa's 27th year, and is counted as having reigned two years (:8). This means that the 'years' are counted as parts of years rather than literally 24 months.

1Ki 16:11 It happened, when he began to reign, as soon as he sat on his throne, that he struck all the house of Baasha: he didn't leave him a single male, neither of his relatives, nor of his friends-
We note the radical difference with David, who expressly sought to show grace to the family of Saul the previous ruler- when the usual thing was to destroy the family of the previous king. David's behaviour was radically counter cultural, as is all displays of grace.

1Ki 16:12 Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet-
As noted on :11, such destruction of the family of the usurped king was typical of secular behaviour at the time, but was not the way of grace. And yet God worked through this failure to fulfil His prophetic word. We learn from this that we may be used by God to do His will, but that doesn't of itself mean that what we are doing is right, nor are we justified by means of having been used to fulfil His will.

1Ki 16:13 for all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, which they sinned, and with which they made Israel to sin, to provoke Yahweh, the God of Israel, to anger with their vanities-
We frequently read of the sins *by which* men sinned (AV "the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin"). How do you 'sin by a sin'? Surely in the sense that sin leads to sin.

1Ki 16:14 Now the rest of the acts of Elah and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
See on :5. This "book" may not be the book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

1Ki 16:15 In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah. Now the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines-
The infighting amongst the Israelites led to the siege being lifted at the time of 1 Kings 15:27, because here in 1 Kings 16:15 we find the siege resumed, and again a king of Israel is slain during a siege of the same city. We see here how Biblical history intentionally repeats itself. Situations repeat in our lives, so that we may learn from them. And often we fail, as Israel did in this matter. Within a period of 25 years at the most, two kings of Israel (Nadab and Elah) were killed by usurpers whilst the same city was being besieged.

1Ki 16:16 The people who were encamped heard say, Zimri has conspired, and has

also struck the king: therefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp-
The captain of the army was effectively second in common politically (2 Kings 9:5, and consider the example of Joab with David). Zimri was an outsider and had slain all Elah's supporters, relatives of whom were likely in the military. So to make Omri king was logical, and the record is absolutely credible.

1Ki 16:17 Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah-
As noted before, the infighting amongst God's people blunted their fulfilment of God's will and the establishment of His Kingdom. Instead of besieging Gibbethon (:15), they left that important work and went to besiege their own brethren.

1Ki 16:18 It happened, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the castle of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over himself with fire, and died-
That palace had doubtless been the object of his envy for a long time. He destroyed himself along with it, for Zimri was identified with his envy. What he coveted was identified with him as a person. His death was his judgment (:"for his sins", :19), but was self inflicted. All judgment is in the end self-judgment.

1Ki 16:19 for his sins which he sinned in doing that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin-
We can make others sin (Ex. 23:33; 1 Sam. 2:24; 1 Kings 16:19). There is an urgent imperative here, to really watch our behaviour; e.g. to not drink alcohol in the presence of a brother whose conscience is weak. Zimri was given just seven days in power, and was judged and condemned for how he behaved during those seven days. Other kings reigned many years. God in His wisdom knows how long to test a person.

1Ki 16:20 Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and his treason that he committed, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
Treason, assassination, short lived leaders and division (:21) were the experience of the ten tribes at this time, and this must be contrasted with the long and stable reign of Asa over Judah at this period. Clearly division and instability amongst God's people is a work of the flesh, but it is used by God to show His displeasure and judgment upon a people. We can note the quick succession of rulers which brought the kingdom of Judah to an end. Division and instability within a church or community is in the end not just the works of the flesh, but a sign of Divine judgment upon them.

1Ki 16:21 Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri-
Again we note the lack of the Divine Name or suffix 'Yah' in these names. "Tibni" means 'man of straw'.

1Ki 16:22 But the people who followed Omri prevailed against the people who followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned-
See on :20. LXX adds that Tibni's brother Joram was also killed at this time. Such infighting and division within a community is a sign of Divine judgment, even if the individual participants are also guilty of wrong behaviour. The struggle between them went on for about four years (1 Kings 16:15 cp. 23).

1Ki 16:23 In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel for twelve years. He reigned six years in Tirzah-
The average length of reign of the ten tribes kings was far less than that of Judah's kings. See on :20. The four years of the civil war (see on :22) are not counted to neither Omri nor Tibni. The simple point is that in conflict between brethren, nobody really wins. See on :29.

1Ki 16:24 He bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver; and he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer the owner of the hill-
AV gives 6000 shekels. Abraham was an alien, and needed approval from the local community council to buy a burial place; and even then, the council had to speak with the owner and as it were do Abraham a favour. Further, the price of 400 shekels for some land with a cave in it to bury the dead was exorbitant (Gen. 23:14). There are records of the sale of whole villages in northern Syria dating from about this time, recorded in the Alalakh Tablets. They were sold for between 100 and 1000 shekels. Jeremiah paid 17 shekels for a field (Jer. 32:9); Omri paid 6000 shekels for the entire site of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24 AV). If ever we feel ripped off by this world, unreasonably treated in this land which is eternally ours, powerless to protest, left without option as Abraham was- then we are following in his steps, and are truly his "seed".

1Ki 16:25 Omri did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and dealt wickedly above all who were before him-
This phrase is common in the records, implying that there was on overall downward slide into apostacy until the people were at such a point that there had to be Divine judgment and intervention.

1Ki 16:26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sins with which he made Israel to sin, to provoke Yahweh, the God of Israel, to anger with their vanities-
Giving our lives to vanity rather than to God provokes Him to great anger. It is a sin. And yet at no other time has God's people faced such strong temptation to give their hearts and time to vanities, thanks to the online world of screens in which we live and move and have our beings.

1Ki 16:27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he showed, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory

and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

1Ki 16:28 So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria; and Ahab his son reigned in his place-
This phrase "slept with his fathers" clearly means he died, and often a clause to the effect "he was buried" follows it. The unconsciousness of death, as a sleep, is a teaching laboured in the Bible so very many times.

1Ki 16:29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and he reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years-
If Omri reigned a total of 12 years starting from the 31st year of Asa (:23), it follows that there was an interregnum of about five years. Perhaps Omri was incapacitated, and during those last five years of his 'reign', his son Ahab reigned.

1Ki 16:30 Ahab the son of Omri did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh above all that were before him-
This statement is found often in the historical record, creating the impression of an overall downward slide to the point of lost relationship with God. We note that God does perceive degrees of sin; Ahab sinned "above" the previous kings. Whether we are to perceive these different degrees of sin in others' behaviour is a different question.

1Ki 16:31 It happened, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel-
Ahab's marriage to a Gentile was far worse than *all* the sins of Jeroboam; the idolatry, the perversion, the making of Israel sin; these were "a light thing" compared to the evil of marriage out of the faith (1 Kings 16:31). That perspective on marriage out of the faith needs to be appreciated. And further, those who married the daughters of Ahab were led astray by them (2 Kings 8:18,27).

The daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him-
Tyre was originally a colony of Sidon; the terms are at times interchangeable. Ethbaal is called "king of Tyre" by Josephus (*Antiquities* 8.3.2), but "king of the Sidonians" in 1 Kings 16:31. Some of Tyre's coins celebrate it as "the metropolis of the Sidonians". The Yahweh worship of Hiram turned into Baal worship, resulting in the blasphemous cherubim idols explained on Ez. 28:14.

1Ki 16:32 He reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria-
The ten tribes' equivalent of Judah's temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem were the high places and two golden calves. But Ahab appears to have now matched Yahweh's temple with a kind of temple to Baal, built in Samaria.

1Ki 16:33 Ahab made the Asherah; and Ahab did yet more to provoke Yahweh, the

God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him-
This is stressed twice (see on :30). That Ahab should finally repent is therefore so significant. He is the parade example of why we should never give up on anyone as 'too far gone'.

1Ki 16:34 In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho: he laid its foundation with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of Yahweh, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun-
To even attempt to rebuilt Jericho meant a studied disregard of God's word, considering Biblical records of Joshua's words to be merely the words of men. Hiel was from Bethel, where the golden calf was. Jericho had been inhabited after Joshua's time (Jud. 3:13; 2 Sam. 10:5). So this was a conscious rebuilding of the walls with gates in defiance of Yahweh's word. And his sons died during the building work, perhaps 'at some time between the beginning, in laying the foundations, and the ending of the project, in hanging the gates'. After Abiram died laying the foundations, we would rather imagine that Hiel might have learned the lesson. But he didn't, such was his desire to defy God's word. And so his youngest son died when the project was almost completed and the gates were being hung. The desire to rebuild the settlement as a walled, gated city could have been because of its strategic position near the crossing of the Jordan river. Jericho was on the border of Ephraim but belonged to Benjamin (Josh. 16:7; 18:21), so it seems Ahab had taken it, and wanted to have the city and fortify it as a boundary against the two tribe kingdom.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 17

1Ki 17:1 Elijah the Tishbite, who was among the foreigners of Gilead, said to Ahab-
This could imply Elijah was a Gentile (s.w. Lev. 25:47), who named himself after Yahweh, 'My God is Yah'.

As Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand-
'Standing before the Lord' refers to prayer- Ps. 106:23; Ezra 9:15; Jer. 15:1; 18:20. To live a life standing before the Lord is to live a life of prayer. Hence David and Paul say that prayer can be continual- in that life becomes a lived out prayer, with the practice of living in the presence of God. And straight away we ask ourselves, in lives just as busy as those of David and Paul, whether our self-talk, our minute by minute inner consciousness, is "before the Lord"...or merely the sheer and utter vapidity of the modern mind.

"Before whom I stand" was perhaps uttered too quickly. At Horeb, Elijah was asked to stand before Yahweh. But he hid terrified in a cleft of the rocks. We too are taught to put meaning into our words. James 5 says that Elijah prayed that there may be no rain. So "before whom I stand" may suggest that he had prayed about what he was going to do, and his whole life was a standing before God in prayer over this matter. He was convinced he was praying according to God's will, and so he confidently states that the answer will come- rain will be withheld, in accordance with the many statements that

rain would stop falling if Israel were idolatrous. This alone is where confidence in prayer can come from. Elijah had faith and is presented as a "righteous man" in James 5, but of our passions- he was righteous but with many weaknesses.

There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word-
Dt. 11:16,17; 28:24 had clearly stated that God would close the skies if Israel were idolatrous. James 5:17 says Elijah prayed earnestly it might not rain. So here we have a case of a man discerning God's will and his prayers therefore being answered. Elijah's word of prayer was effectively God's word. Baal was the storm / rain god, so lack of rain meant Baal had been closed down by the word of Yahweh's prophet. But Jezebel and Ahab desperately didn't want to perceive that. The closure of the skies, and thereby of Baal, was therefore an appeal to Israel to quit the useless Baal and return to Yahweh.

Here is an example of being sure of God's will in what we pray for. If the Lord's words abide in us, then we will ask what *we* will and it will be done; yet John also records that if we ask according to *God's* will, it will be done for us. In Elijah's case, he knew God's will from His word. Our will and that of the Father come to coincide as His word takes an ever deeper lodgment in our consciousness. And this is how close Elijah must have been to knowing the will of God. Elijah alludes to Dt. 28 in saying there would be no rain (and 1 Kings 19:14 forsaken thy covenant= Dt. 32)- therefore he could be so sure of being heard. His request that there be "no dew" was inspired by the prayers of Gideon and David, who had prayed just the same things (Jud. 6:37; 2 Sam.1:21; and 1 Kings 18:33 = Jud. 6:20). Likewise the two witnesses of the last days will be inspired in their turn by Elijah's example to pray that Heaven will be stopped. When it comes to prayer, there clearly is a positive pattern of influence and example both amongst us and from our absorbing the spirit of countless Biblical examples. The righteous man 'decrees a thing in his heart and it is done' through his prayers (Job 22:28). The same Hebrew words for 'according' and 'word' occur in both 1 Kings 17:1 and 24: "There shall not be dew nor rain but according to my word…The word of the Lord in [according to] thy mouth". Elijah's word and will had become parallel with those of the Father. This was taken to the ultimate extent by the Lord, in whom the Father's word was made flesh. But that same word slowly becomes flesh in us too. No longer do we request things that are not the Father's will as through His word we become more attune to Him. Our experience of answered prayer becomes increasingly positive, reinforcing our faith in Him and our attention to prayerfulness. And this dovetails with our increasingly sensitive reading of His word daily. The Lord intended that we should all pray the prayer of command as Elijah did; for He taught that with faith, we should be able to tell a sycamore tree to be rooted up and planted in the sea (Lk. 17:6). He doesn't advise that we pray to the Father that the tree, according to His will, be rooted up and transplanted. He wants us to come

to so know the will of the Father that we can pray the prayer of direct command. And this is quite some challenge.

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

A lack of rain was one of the Law's curses for idol worship (Dt. 11:10-12,17). Elijah's response to Israel's idolatry was to tell them there would be no rain (1 Kings 17:1 cp. 1 Kings 16:32,33). Those reflective upon God's Law would have realized the implied criticism which this carried; the more unspiritual would have just cursed Elijah for bringing about a devastating drought. Elijah had to pray daily for the lack of bread and water in Israel (so 1 Kings 17:1 implies). He suffered himself because of this. He was prepared to forego quite legitimate blessings in order to lead an apostate ecclesia back to God.

1Ki 17:2 The word of Yahweh came to him saying-
There seems to be a contrast between this, and how Elijah dogmatically declares his own word in :1, confident Yahweh would confirm it as his word, rather than giving a "Thus says Yahweh".

1Ki 17:3 Go away from here, turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is before the Jordan-
The whole incident on Horeb was to make Elijah see the supremacy of the still small voice; that it is in humble, quiet service rather than fiery judgment of others that the essence of God and spirituality is to be found. But God had prepared Elijah for this earlier. Elijah had to hide by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3) for three and a half years

(Lk. 4:25,26). Elijah was characterized by wearing a hairy garment like sackcloth (2 Kings 1:8 RV). In Rev. 11:3,6 we meet another Elijah figure- also clothed in sackcloth, with the power to bring fire down from Heaven, who for three and a half years...prophesies / preaches. We would expect Elijah to have been preaching during his time hidden by Cherith- but there is not a word of this in the record, indeed he is told to hide himself away from people. Could it not be that the Father wishes to show us what He was then trying to teach Elijah- that the essential prophetic witness is through us being as we are, the still small voice of witness through example...?

This fleeing eastward from persecution by Ahab , finding refuge with a family, recalls what Moses did after Pharaoh persecuted him. And so begins the many allusions to Moses. Elijah was set up to be the prophet like unto Moses, but failed to perceive Moses' spirit of *love* for Israel, and so he was dismissed.

1Ki 17:4 It shall be, that you shall drink of the brook. I have commanded the ravens to feed you there-
Elijah was being paralleled with an apostate Israel, who were also sustained by food 'commanded' by God (s.w. Neh. 9:21); the brook is described as "dried up", using the same word about the Red Sea drying up. Elijah is being nudged towards identity with Israel. But instead he sees himself as alone with God, he alone is faithful and Israel deserve judgment, and Rom. 9 says that at Horeb he interceded with God *against* Israel. Later the Gentile widow is "commanded" to feed Elijah just as the unclean ravens were. He is being nudged towards accepting that he needs the unclean, and God is quite happy to work through the unclean. Yet Elijah felt himself to be so superior to Israel generally. But God was trying to teach him that in essence, he wasn't. We have shown earlier that God sought to again show Elijah the same lesson when he went into the Sinai wilderness and was fed by an Angel. Perhaps he did learn the lesson when he says that he felt that he was not better than the Jewish fathers? For they walked 40 years as he walked 40 days in the very same place, also fed by Angels. God told Elijah that He had commanded unclean ravens to feed him; and thus He reminded Elijah of a basic fact, that God speaks to even unclean animals (Gen. 1:22; Job)- and they obey him. The ravens not only obeyed Yahweh in going to Elijah, but in not eating the food they were carrying. Elijah likely considered that the fact God spoke to him meant that he must therefore have some automatic superiority over others. But not so. It's the same with us. We can consider that because we have heard God's true voice, we thereby are justified before Him. But He speaks to and uses all, clean and unclean.

1Ki 17:5 So he went and did according to the word of Yahweh; for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, that is before the Jordan-
Elijah is commended for his obedience to Yahweh's word, even though as explained on

:3,4, it was humiliating for him. "Brook" is literally a torrent bed; "Cherith" means a "cut" or ravine. There would only be water in the deep ravine immediately after times of torrential rain. Seeing there was no such rain, it could be that the water in the torrent bed was therefore provided by God miraculously.

We note the repeated language in :15 about the widow woman: "So she went and did according to the saying of Elijah" matches "So he went and did according to the word of Yahweh". And as a result, they both ate and drunk "many days". Elijah was being led to identity with the woman. As will be discussed on :6, God was ever nudging Elijah to identity with the people of God, and those to whom he ministered. He was set up to be the prophet like Moses, but Moses supremely identified with people- whereas Elijah refused to be led toward empathy with people, and merely saw himself as the upholder of God's Truth upon earth. This same lack of empathy is found with so many legalistic believers who are maxed out on the apostacy of others and their own retention of orthodoxy.

1Ki 17:6 The ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook-
As a hyper observant Jew, evening and morning were the times when Elijah ought to have been sacrificing to God. But God's intention was to teach him of His grace. Instead of Elijah offering food to God, God was giving food to him- and food made unclean by contact with unclean ravens. LXX has "loaves" for "bread", which would mean a possible connection with the loaves of the tabernacle rituals.

There is a clear parallel with Israel's experience in the wilderness: "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread" (Ex. 16:12,13). He was being led to identity with Israel; a reminder that he was not separate from them. Moses showed a very clear identity with Israel and refused to separate from them, even when offered the chance of Israel being destroyed and he being made a great nation. Elijah by contrast wanted Israel destroyed, making intercession to God against Israel (Rom. 11:2). But God sought to teach Elijah to truly be as Moses, by giving him their experience in the wilderness. Elijah's life is the story of Divine hints, seeking to educate and spiritually develop him- and of so many of them being ignored. The parallels between Elijah and Moses are so many, that Elijah appears to be the intended prophet to be raised up "like unto" Moses of Dt. 18:18. But he is an example of where Divine potential is not realised; for he is fired from the job because he lacked the spirit and humility of Moses. See on :5.

1Ki 17:7 It happened after a while, that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land-
As noted on :1, Elijah himself suffered the effects of the drought he had called upon

Israel in order to lead them to repentance. Our efforts to help our brethren are often at deep personal cost to ourselves. I suggested on :5 that the water he drunk there was miraculously provided, because "brook" means 'torrent bed' and was a ravine which would only have water after torrential rains. So the translation here may be to the effect that 'The torrent bed had dried up because there had been no rain in the land, and after a while the word of Yahweh came to him...' (:8).

1Ki 17:8 The word of Yahweh came to him saying-
This is as in :2, we get the sense that God meant Elijah to learn in stages. His time at Cherith was to develop him to accept God's grace and realize that ritual purity was not going to save anyone of itself.

1Ki 17:9 Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain you-
God had sought to gently teach Elijah his need for others when He told Elijah to go to the widow woman in Zarephath who would “sustain you"; it worked out that Elijah sustained *her*. And he must have reflected upon this. But perhaps, therefore, God’s intention was that spiritually, Elijah's experience with that woman would sustain him. "Zarephath" means 'place of refinement' and clearly Elijah's time there was intended for his refinement. It is emphasized that Zarephath belonged to Sidon because this was where Jezebel's father reigned (1 Kings 16:32). Even in the heart of apostacy, Elijah was to encounter obedience and commitment to Yahweh's word. But his later insistence that he alone remained faithful was effectively his trashing the woman's faith and commitment as not enough to count as faithfulness to Yahweh.

There is no evidence that the woman was commanded to feed Elijah by some specific revelation to her. Rather, the commandment may refer to the word of potential command which God had given the woman. But it came to her through circumstances.

1Ki 17:10 So he arose and went to Zarephath; and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks: and he called to her and said, Please get me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink-
The woman “gathering sticks” (1 Kings 17:10) would likely have stimulated his Bible-steeped mind to think of the illegal gathering of sticks in Num. 15:32,33. For this is the only other Biblical reference to gathering sticks in the Old Testament.

1Ki 17:11 As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand-
See on :12. On :13 I discuss whether these demands were simply part of God's demand

upon the woman, or whether they also simply reflect Elijah's arrogance and inappropriate sense of entitlement.

1Ki 17:12 She said, As Yahweh your God lives-
Perhaps she had experienced a specific revelation from Yahweh about Elijah (:9). Or maybe Elijah was well known in the area. Or again, perhaps we are only reading a tiny part of their conversation, and the woman may have realized that the drought was because of Elijah's prayer to Yahweh.

I don't have a cake, but a handful of flour in a pitcher, and a little oil in a pitcher. Behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and bake it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die-
1 Kings 17:11 in Hebrew has Elijah asking the woman: 'Bring me a *handful* of bread'- and she replies that she has only a *handful* of flour (1 Kings 17:12). Yet even this is demanded of her. Her handful of flour in a pitcher gives the impression of a handful of meal in a very large container; it's an eloquent picture of her poverty, and how she was down to the last little bit of flour in a large container that was once full. And the Lord through Elijah demanded this of her, that He might save her.

Later, the Angel gave Elijah cake and water (1 Kings 19:6) just as the unclean ravens and Gentile widow woman had done- to teach Elijah that God works through those people.

There were two occasions in which God fed Elijah with a cake when he was hungry. Once when the widow woman baked him one (1 Kings 17:13), and once when the Angel did (1 Kings 19:6). Surely God was trying to show Elijah that He was manifested through that desperately poor, weak, sick, starving widow woman who was at the point of death from starvation. It was the same message- that God wasn't in the earthquake and fire, but in the still small voice.

The widow woman was prepared to die. The tragedy of that gaunt woman touches me deeply. I imagine her tidying the house, and then walking out into the blazing heat to gather sticks. But she gave her last bit to God's man Elijah; not, it seems, with any hope of getting out of her plight. She gave of her very last, her best, her all, not expecting anything back. Another widow, centuries later, threw her two mites into the collection bag of a fabulously rich, doctrinally corrupt, hypocritical ecclesia. The implication is that she died even more pathetically, perhaps tossed onto Gehenna with the starving cats. There seems to have been no happy ending- in this life. And she absolutely understood that.

LXX "sons", which would explain why she and her family ate many days (:15).

The meal she was preparing was not for sustenance, but a funeral meal- a very humble one. [To eat at a funeral is part and parcel of a funeral in many cultures, although not so much in Anglo-Saxon culture. This is the basis of the "breaking of bread" to commemorate the Lord's death]. The closing of the skies and lack of rain had shown the powerlessness of Baal, the rain god. But in Canaanite mythology, Baal was slain by Mot, the god of death. But now, even Mot, supposedly more powerful than Baal, has been shown impotent by Elijah. The woman and her son were absolutely on the point of death- and Elijah had saved them from death, rescued them from the supposed power of Mot.

1Ki 17:13 Elijah said to her, Don't be afraid. Go and do as you have said; but make me of it a little cake first, and bring it out to me, and afterward make some for you and for your son-
Elijah asked the widow woman to *first* feed him, and *after* feed herself and her son when she had given him all the food she had. The Hebrew word translated "after" is that translated "last"- 'put me first and yourself last', Elijah is saying. Wasn't this arrogant? He was so sure he was manifesting God that he could demand that she put him first and herself last. But God *is* demanding, and yes He worked through Elijah. But one does get the sense that Elijah felt *he* should be put first. God can be demanding, but we don't have the same right to be upon others.

The Gentile widow was clearly a believer in Yahweh, as the Lord implies in Lk. 4. Elijah was sent to her because of her faith even though it was incomplete and faltering- for she speaks of "your God" and only after her son is raised does she make a full confession of faith. She presumably recognized Elijah as Yahweh's prophet, and put Yahweh first above her own most desperate and immediate needs. Elijah was being nudged to understand that those whom he considered definitely not God's people- a Gentile female living in the heart of Jezebel territory- in fact were. But he fails to follow where he is led, for he insists he alone remains faithful to Yahweh. And for this he is fired from his potential commission as the prophet like unto Moses.

1Ki 17:14 For thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'The jar of meal shall not empty, neither shall the jar of oil fail, until the day that Yahweh sends rain on the earth'-
See on :16. The food and water of condemned Israel did "fail" (s.w. Ez. 4:17), but that of the revived remnant didn't (s.w. Is. 51:14). Israel faithful to the covenant suffered no lack (Ex. 16:18; Dt. 2:7 s.w. "fail"). This woman was being treated like the faithful in Israel, although she was a Gentile.

1Ki 17:15 She went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, ate many days-

She was responsible for more than just one son; hence :12 LXX says she had "sons", plural. The end result of all this was that she was converted to Yahweh (see on :24). And Lk. 4:26 notes that there was no starving widow in Israel who was so open to conversion as this Gentile woman. The Lord again alludes to her in saying that who ever receives a prophet in the name of a prophet, receives a prophet's reward; even if they give a little one a cup of cold water, just as the woman gave water to Elijah (Mt. 10:41,42). This would equate Elijah with a "little one". His spirituality was as immature as that of the disciples, whom the Lord also called "little ones". Faith is not the same as hope and love, and Elijah's faith was not the same as spirituality.

1Ki 17:16 The jar of meal didn't empty, neither did the jar of oil fail, according to the word of Yahweh, which he spoke by Elijah-
We note that it was not the meal or oil which is described as not finishing, but rather the containers of those products. We see the similarity with how the extent of Elijah's miracle of multiplying the widow's oil depended upon the number of pots borrowed.

1Ki 17:17 It happened after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so severe, that there was no breath left in him-
The idea is, that he died (:18). Perhaps death is described in this way because Elijah was to breath the breath of life back into him.

1Ki 17:18 She said to Elijah, What have I to do with you-
The idiom means 'Go away!' (2 Sam. 16:10; Lk. 5:8). She had hosted Elijah and cared for him, and now she feels his presence has brought about the death of her son. And so she wants him to leave.

You man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to memory, and to kill my son!-
In her desperation, the woman felt that Elijah's presence had attracted God's attention to her, and brought some personal sin to His memory. Perhaps her son had been conceived out of wedlock. Many times we read of God being provoked to remember someone, for good or for evil (Lev. 24:7 LXX "that God may mercifully remember"; Ps. 69:1 LXX; 37:1 LXX; Zech. 6:14; 1 Kings 17:18). We could accept this as mere anthropomorphism. Or we could reflect deeper, and wonder whether this language of limitation suggests that the God who could be omniscient over time, not needing to have anything brought back to His memory, allows Himself to 'forget' so that sin or righteousness again brings things to His remembrance. And it can work positively too. Thus generosity and prayer is a memorial before God in the sense that it brings a person to His memory or attention (Acts 10:4), and He appropriately responds in their lives. When sin gets to a certain point, it causes other sins to be remembered by God, and

thus judgment comes (Rev. 18:5). It has been suggested by Joachim Jeremias that the Lord's command to break bread in remembrance of Him can mean 'that God may remember me'.

We see here the psychological credibility of the Biblical record. Extreme circumstances do elicit awareness of past sin. The art of course is to be humble and allow God's word to elicit that awareness and repentance, rather than having to be brought to fess up through major hammer blows.

1Ki 17:19 He said to her, Give me your son. He took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into the room where he stayed, and laid him on his own bed-
The focus of the Divine cameraman is zoomed in upon the woman holding the dead child to her breast, and Elijah prizing the child away from her. He performs the healing miracle on the bed she had provided for him, in order to demonstrate that in fact the child was not slain because of Elijah's presence in the house; see on :18.

1Ki 17:20 He cried to Yahweh and said, Yahweh my God, have You also brought evil on the widow with whom I stay, by killing her son?-
The force of "also" is that Elijah perhaps considered that the drought that affected Phoenicia was not what he had intended, as he wished the drought to bring Israel to repentance. But he was being taught that God wanted idolatrous Gentiles such as the Sidonians, of whom Jezebel was one, to also repent. And not just be witnessed against for their sins. He struggles to understand how the child of the widow who had cared for him should be slain. He was being given the problem of evil to struggle with, just as we are, in order to humble him. For he needed that. He was being forced to recognize he did not know all about God. There were things he didn't understand. Our inability to immediately attach meaning to event is intended likewise.

Despite his union with the Father, this didn't preclude Elijah questioning God. So in the midst of this tremendously powerful prayer, Elijah remonstrates with God: 'Have You *brought evil*...?'. The Hebrew for 'evil' usually means evil in the sense of sin- 'have You brought the result of sin... on her as well as upon this people?'. This is all part of a passionate, living relationship with a living God.

Elijah clearly considers both he and the widow woman had suffered unjustified "evil" from Yahweh. Moses likewise considered Yahweh's judgment at Kibroth Hattaavah to be "evil" in his eyes (Num. 11:10). "Why have You dealt ill [evil] with Your servant" recalls Moses' words in Ex. 5:22 "Why have You done evil to this people?". Elijah perceived he was the intended prophet like unto Moses, but he abuses this by considering that therefore Moses' weak moments could be replicated by him. He fails to perceive and rise up to the better side of Moses- his self sacrificial love for his people, his

intercession *for* them rather than *against* them, as Elijah is understood as doing by Paul in Romans.

Another approach is that Elijah's apparently caustic words to God are in fact his way of interceding for the widow. Because he is saying to God the essence of what she has said to him in :18, accusing God of being too hard on her for her sins and slaying her son for the sake of her sins. And Romans 8 explains that this is how the Lord Jesus, as "the spirit", intercedes for us- placing the essence of our spirit, our unspoken, unverbalized positions, before God in His own words. The Lord is not merely a translator from one language to another, but places our inner spirit before God. Elijah places his body on the boy's body, doing press ups over the boy (:21)- to ask God to see the boy's dead body as identified with his living body. And this again is how we are saved by the Lord's intercession, we identify with His body and are saved thereby, as His spirit enters us and becomes our spirit, just as happened here physically.

1Ki 17:21 He stretched himself on the child three times, and cried to Yahweh and said, Yahweh my God, please let this child's soul come into him again-
"Soul" would be better rendered 'life'. The soul typically refers to the person. The spirit of life which animates people is that which animates all of creation, and it returns to God, not in the sense of an immortal soul or conscious existence after death. Perhaps the way that the first six prayers of Elijah for rain went unanswered, his need to pray three times for the child to resurrect, were all part of God teaching Elijah that no matter how close we are to Him, we have no right to expect automatic answers to prayer, even if they are according to God's will.

Baal was thought to be the god of fertility, who gave oil, brought fire, lightning, rain and water, and who was thought to be able to heal the sick and revive the dead. The various incidents in the Elijah account all therefore show the preeminence of Yahweh over Baal. Elijah presents as absolutely confident that this was the case, and therefore he does miracles knowing that Yahweh will come through for him. But as Paul explains in 1 Cor. 13, faith alone is not spirituality; for without love, the greatest faith is nothing, even if mountains are actually moved by it. That means that God may respond to faith in Him, even if the believer has no love and is therefore spiritually nothing. Elijah is an essay in this. Elijah was only interested in demonstrating Yahweh's superiority over Baal, but it is questionable whether he made any lasting converts from Baal worship to Yahweh. Because he wasn't interested in people- at least initially. He was removed from his post after his shameful intercession *against* Israel in 1 Kings 19. But we must square this against Malachi's apparently strange comment that Elijah in future will turn the heart of the fathers to the children and vice versa (Mal. 4:6). This makes sense once we understand that Baal worship involved child sacrifice, as the preceding section in 1 Kings 16 makes clear. This created tension and no "heart" between fathers and children,

and vice versa. After his demotion, Elijah carried on believing- and we can assume that he "got it". His future work will therefore involve caring for people, and turning fathers and children towards each other in that they have quit Baal. Elijah will finally learn from his immaturity, and become people focused.

1Ki 17:22 Yahweh listened to the voice of Elijah-
Just as He had done in :1 when it was Elijah's voice which brought forth the drought that slew so many. But his voice likewise had the power of revival. And that is what God wanted to teach Elijah out of all this; not to simply judge for sin, but to ever seek revival

And the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived-
"When Jesus saw the faith *of the friends*, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mk. 2:5). That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer; and thus Heb. 11:35 alludes to this incident by saying that through faith- in this case, the faith of Elijah, a third party- women received their dead raised to life. The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of his faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of his faith (Mk. 5:36). This inspires us to endless effort for the sake of others. Clearly God worked through Elijah giving cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). It was Elijah's breath which entered the child, but it was the source of the child's new life. There is no teaching here about immortal souls returning into bodies. The soul [effectively, the life] came from Elijah's breath / spirit. Which represented God's Spirit reviving the dead.

1Ki 17:23 Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the room into the house, and delivered him to his mother; and Elijah said, Behold, your son lives-
The Lord Jesus quotes Elijah's words "Your son lives" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). He also, however, shows that Elijah's "spirit" wasn't always correct, although it was used by God. For in the context of Elijah, He rebukes the disciples for having the wrong spirit, in seeking to have the spirit of Elijah. The idea of fire from Heaven, which Elijah called down, is found in the Lord's teaching in Lk. 12:49-54, where He associates it with division in the brotherhood. And the Lord went on to say that the Pharisees could interpret a cloud arising in the West as a sign that rain was coming, but they could not forgive their brethren, which was what was essential (Lk. 12:54). This just has to be a reference to Elijah, who saw a cloud arising from the West as a sign of rain. The Lord is, it seems, sadly associating Elijah with the Pharisees. And yet... despite all this, Jesus likens Himself to Elijah. Jesus sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). And the context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be "received up", and "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1). The Lord Jesus quotes Elijah's words

“Your son lives” (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn’t separate Himself from someone who didn’t have His Spirit. He simply wanted His followers to learn better from him.

Jewish tradition claims that the boy became Elijah's servant of whom we will later read, and that he was the prophet Jonah.

1Ki 17:24 The woman said to Elijah, Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is truth-
This means more than 'God's word is true'; it is an expression of faith that Yahweh is the one true God. The way the woman talks about “Yahweh *your* God”, to which Elijah responds by speaking of “Yahweh, the God of Israel”, implies that she did not even believe in Israel’s God (1 Kings 17:12,14). She didn’t even initially believe at that time that Elijah was a man of God (so :24 implies); and so, we can conclude, the daily miracle of the meal and oil not drying up did not deeply touch her, just as the daily provision of manna did not seem to register with most of Israel in the wilderness. She even seems to have been cynical in earlier calling him a “man of God”, because only later did she say that she really believe he was this (1 Kings 17:18, 24). But now she was his first recorded convert. This was all to teach Elijah that God works not only with the clean, and not only with those in covenant with Him. And as noted in :22, Elijah was being taught that he was to make converts and revive people, not merely judge them as sinners.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 18

1Ki 18:1 It happened after many days, that the word of Yahweh came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show yourself to Ahab; and I will send rain on the earth-
Elijah said that there would be no rain "but according to *my* word" (1 Kings 17:1). His faith was undoubtedly based upon being attune to the will of God and His ways of working with His people, to the extent that he knew that because the word abided in him, he could ask what he wanted and it would be heard, because he asked according to God's will. But when the time comes for rain, we read that "the word of Yahweh [not Elijah's word] came to Elijah... saying... I will send rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 18:1). It seems Elijah was more interested in judging the people for their sins, than seeing their repentance. God wanted to send the rain because of His pity, in the spirit of Dt. 32:36 "For Yahweh will judge His people and have compassion / pity on His servants when He sees that their power is gone, that there is none remaining, shut up or left at large". Both Obadiah and the widow of Zarephath feel that Elijah had brought their sins to rememberance, or tried to. And he failed to recognize the repentance when it came. He will later insist that he alone is faithful to Yahweh. He discounted the 7000 who had not bowed to Baal, and the 100 prophets hidden by Obadiah; as well as Obadiah and the widow woman of 1 Kings 17. As well as Micaiah and the various faithful prophets who appear later in the record at this time.

But perhaps all these faithful ones were those who had responded to the three years of drought. Even if Elijah discounted them.

Elijah had reasoned that because God's word said there would be drought if Israel were disobedient, therefore he could pray to God for a drought and be assured of an answer. And so it happened. But he doesn't get God's grace- that in wrath God remembers mercy, whether or not Israel have repented. God tells him that the drought is now over. In his legalistic way, Elijah assumes this must mean that Israel have repented. And so he sets up the contest on Carmel. When he prays for rain to come, this is because he thinks that Israel have repented- whereas 18:1 clearly states that it was God who decided to send rain by grace, without repentance. The fact Ahab is present with Elijah and appears to accept the outcome of the contest encouraged him in this. And therefore, on the basis that he thought Israel had repented, Elijah prays to God for rain. But when Ahab's repentance is shortlived as soon as he returns to Jezebel... Elijah therefore falls into depression. Because he just didn't get it, that God's basic pity and dislike of judgment meant that He had decided to cut short the drought by His sovereign grace.

1Ki 18:2 Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. The famine was severe in Samaria-
This was a risky thing to do, as Ahab and Jezebel had been searching everywhere for Elijah with a view to killing him. But Elijah is to be commended for obeying God's word.

1Ki 18:3 Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared Yahweh greatly-
We naturally wonder how he could have retained his responsible post at the palace of Baal worshippers. He presumably like Naaman must have gone through some motions of Baal worship. But his heart was "greatly" with Yahweh. Elijah will later state that he alone is faithful in Israel. Obadiah's surface level failure was enough for Elijah to write him off completely. And there is strong warning to us here.

Obadiah saved the lives of 100 prophets. Elijah took the lives of 450 prophets and 100 soldiers. When the disciples wanted to imitate Elijah by bringing down fire from Heaven, the Lord rebuked them by saying they didn't know what Spirit they had. We wonder if one function of Obadiah in the narrative is to point out what is a far more effective way of serving Yahweh- humbly living out His principles and secretly doing His work, as opposed to the antics of Elijah on the public stage. Obadiah, as his name means, was a servant of Yahweh. He surely is presented as a kind of foil for Elijah, who speaks of himself as a "*man* of God".

1Ki 18:4 for it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of Yahweh, that Obadiah took one hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water)-
God tried to correct Elijah’s despising of the other prophets of the Lord. Elijah was in a cave, and was also fed bread and water- just as the other prophets were. And yet Elijah didn’t see, or didn’t want to see, that connection- after having been reminded of this experience of the other prophets, he claims that “I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord” (1 Kings 18:22)- he wrongly believed that all other valid prophets had been slain (1 Kings 19:10). In fact the record shows how that during Elijah’s lifetime there were other prophets of Yahweh active in His service (1 Kings 20:13,35). And yet the lesson is that God still works through the conceited, the spiritually superior,

those who despise their brethren. God didn't give up on Elijah because he was like this, and neither should we give up in our relationship with such brethren.

The fact Elijah was hidden by God meant that he was forced into fellowship with the prophets of Yahweh whom Obadiah hid in a cave. Elijah was thus intended to see a link between Obadiah and God, and himself and the other prophets of Yahweh. But Elijah's pride didn't let himself make the connection, just as ours often doesn't. For he continued doubtful of Obadiah's sincerity, and still insisted that he alone remained a faithful prophet of Yahweh- even though Obadiah had hidden one hundred other prophets from Jezebel's persecution. Those one hundred prophets were presumably part of the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

1Ki 18:5 Ahab said to Obadiah, Go through the land, to all the springs of water, and to all the brooks. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, so that we don't lose all the animals-

This reflects the pitiful selfishness of Ahab. He like Solomon was obsessed with his horses, which a true king of Israel ought not to have had (Dt. 17:16,17). For Ahab, the worst thing about the famine was that there was no fodder for his prized herd of horses, and he personally is so concerned about it that he and the master of his household go around Israel searching for grass to feed them with, lest he have to slay them.

Elijah was fed by unclean ravens with unclean food. His conception of the unclean was thereby challenged by a Divine re-education. But Obadiah likewise was an instrument of Divine feeding for God's prophets. Elijah should have learned the lesson, and accepted that Obadiah was likewise clean, and not made unclean by his association with Ahab.

1Ki 18:6 So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself-

As noted on :5, Ahab personally went out in search of fodder for his beloved but unlawful herd of horses, because they meant so very much to him. He was far less concerned about the fate of his people. If Obadiah had been a literalist, he would have challenged Ahab about the matter, citing the words of Dt. 17:16,17 as to how Israel's king shouldn't have horses; and arguing that he should accept the loss of them as a quite legitimate punishment for breaking the covenant. Obadiah didn't do this; instead he assisted in the search for fodder for the illegal horses. Yet he "feared Yahweh greatly"- that is the Divine comment upon him. We do indeed have the example of Daniel in Babylon, not defiling himself with the king's meat, and insisting on publically praying toward Jerusalem when this was forbidden. But the Bible also brings before us the example of Obadiah, who was not like that. And of Elijah, who condemned him as not really genuine, and was himself condemned for judging in that way.

1Ki 18:7 As Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he recognized him and fell on his face and said, Is it you, my lord Elijah?-

Elijah must have been known as a prophet for Obadiah to recognize him. Presumably he had advertised the fact that the drought was because of his word (1 Kings 17:1), and was an invitation for Israel to accept that they were receiving the consequences of breaking the covenant and needed to repent.

1Ki 18:8 He answered him, It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here!'-

Elijah is mocking Obadiah's addressing of him as "my lord" (:7). He is saying that Ahab is Obadiah's lord, and he did not accept Obadiah as one of his servants, nor a

servant of Yahweh. Because Elijah considered himself the sole remaining Yahweh worshipper. "Obadiah" means 'servant of Yahweh', but Elijah is opining that Obadiah is servant of his lord Ahab, not Yahweh. We continually see Elijah presented as arrogant and elitist. If not narcissistic.

1Ki 18:9 He said, Wherein have I sinned, that you would deliver your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?-
Again, Obadiah insists that he is Elijah's servant, and not that of Ahab. See on :8. We note that the widow woman likewise considered that Elijah was treating her as a sinner (1 Kings 17:18). Elijah came over as so spiritually superior that he made people feel bad about themselves. No wonder his ministry was taken away from him.

1Ki 18:10 As Yahweh your God lives-
This is exactly the language of the widow woman in 1 Kings 17:12. Elijah is being made to see the similarity between these two faithful people, who lived in totally different situations. But it seems he considered neither of them to be sincere worshippers of Yahweh; he later says that he alone was left faithful.

There is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. When they said, 'He is not here', he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they didn't find you-
As noted on :7, Elijah was known to be the one who had caused the famine. And Ahab wrongly assumed he had fled Israel so as not to have to endure the famine himself.

This shows the total obscurity of the widow woman. The great search for Elijah didn't think of going to her. But Elijah must have remained secluded in her home for probably three years. This was surely to seek to educate and teach him. But still he refused to accept Obadiah and the other prophets as of Yahweh, insisting that he alone was faithful to Yahweh. Even after those three years of Divine re-education.

1Ki 18:11 Now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, Behold, Elijah is here'-
Elijah evidently didn't have too positive a view of anyone apart from himself- and that included faithful Obadiah. Obadiah repeatedly calls Elijah "my Lord" and describes himself as "your servant"; but Elijah responds to this by calling Obadiah the servant of Ahab- he tells him to go and tell "your Lord", i.e. Ahab (1 Kings 18:7-14). Elijah is insisting that he and Obadiah have nothing in common- Obadiah serves Ahab, and he is nothing to do with Elijah. 'Obadiah' means 'servant of Yahweh'- the name surely reflects very faithful parents to have called him that at the time of the Baal cult. But Elijah insists that Obadiah is really a servant of Ahab, not of Yahweh.

1Ki 18:12 It will happen, as soon as I am gone from you, that the spirit of Yahweh will carry you I don't know where; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he can't find you, he will kill me. But I, your servant, have feared Yahweh from my youth-
It seems it was a common occurrence for Elijah to be snatched away by the Spirit. His snatching away into the sky when Elisha replaces him needs to be read in this context. Which is why after that, the sons of the prophets go out looking for him, assuming he has been dropped down in some remote location. We should not therefore read that incident as meaning that Elisha was snatched up into Heaven. For no man has ascended to Heaven (Jn. 3:13).

Obadiah here assumes that if Elijah's life was in danger, there was only one way for God to save him- by His spirit whisking Elijah away to safety. Obadiah assumes this will happen when Elijah meets Ahab. But it is in these assumptions about God's "options" that we are time and again proven so wrong.

1Ki 18:13 Wasn't it told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of Yahweh, how I hid one hundred men of Yahweh's prophets with fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water?-

Obadiah faithfully hid Yahweh's prophets, at the risk of his life; but when tested again in this matter, he was fearful to appear to Ahab to have been hiding Elijah's location (1 Kings 18:10-12). We can pass the test at one stage in our lives, and yet when the same test repeats later, we may still fail.

Elijah felt he was the only faithful man left in Israel. Yet 1 Kings 18:4 records how he was reminded that Obadiah had fed Yahweh's prophets in a cave with bread and water. Elijah also had been hidden in a cave and fed with bread and water. 1 Kings 17:4,9; 18:4,13 all use the same Hebrew word for feed / fed / sustain. The connection was to try to teach him his linkage with the prophets, whom he felt were still apostate. God tries to teach us things but we often fail to grasp the potential understanding made possible; be aware that He is trying! Elijah was fed by both ravens and a widow, as the prophets were fed by Obadiah. The raven and the Gentile widow woman were both 'commanded' [s.w.] to feed Elijah by God. Both would have been seen by him as unclean. God repeatedly tried to teach Elijah that true spirituality is about doing what is counter-instinctive in terms of personal self-control- rather than about blasting others for their apostacy, hard words when provoked, etc. Hence God begins by making Elijah's very life depend upon being fed by unclean birds bringing him food. Those ravens had to avoid bringing him dead meat- which is their usual food. They had to surrender their food to him, when there was little food around; and they had to come up to a man and give him their food, all of which was counter-instinctive for ravens. And thus Elijah was shown that life itself, especially spiritual life, depends upon counter-instinctive behaviour. And within Elijah's personality type, to criticize and condemn others was instinctive behaviour.

1Ki 18:14 Now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, Behold, Elijah is here!'- and he will kill me-

If Ahab would have killed Obadiah for reporting a false sighting of Elijah, then how much more likely would he have been to have killed Obadiah for hiding the prophets in :13. So Obadiah is volunteering very personal information to Elijah, so desperate was he for Elijah to accept him as sincere. But for all that sacrifice and risk in sharing the information, Elijah would not accept him as genuine. For he considered only himself as genuine.

1Ki 18:15 Elijah said, As Yahweh of Armies lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today-

To stand before Yahweh implied Elijah was a prophet, and he seems to love to emphasize this to Obadiah, considering Obadiah not at all the 'servant of Yahweh' which he claimed to be and which his name meant. Elijah implies that Obadiah was disbelieving the prophetic word by raising the concern he had.

1Ki 18:16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah-

We are invited to imagine what were Ahab's feelings. He had searched high and low for Elijah, seeking to kill him being responsible for the drought. And now he was invited to go and meet him.

1Ki 18:17 It happened that when Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, Is that you, you troubler of Israel?-
LXX "the perverter". Ahab justified his persecution of Elijah by reasoning that Elijah was perverting the true Israelite religion. See on :18.

1Ki 18:18 He answered, I have not troubled Israel; but you, and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of Yahweh, and you have followed the Baals-
One of Elijah's problems was that because he spoke the truth, God confirmed his words; but this didn't mean that Elijah himself was always morally acceptable to God. Thus Ahab accuses Elijah of being the one who troubles Israel, like Achan (Josh. 7:25), for whose sake many of the people suffered. Elijah replies that it is Ahab who is the troubler of Israel, the Achan character. And he lived up to this, for in his days they sought to rebuild Jericho, and the curse associated with Achan came true at that time (1 Kings 16:34). Elijah's words were justified, just as the truth we speak to those around us may be- because it is the truth of God. But this doesn't of itself mean that we are right before God personally, nor does it mean that we can in any way presume to 'play God'.

1Ki 18:19 Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel to Mount Carmel, and four hundred and fifty of the prophets of Baal, and four hundred of the prophets of the Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table-
Although these prophets were to be slain later in this chapter, we read again of Ahab having 400 false prophets later in his reign (1 Kings 22:6). So it seems that he didn't learn his lesson, and raised up another such group. This fits with the common theme of purges and repentances at the time of the kings needing to be repeated. For the purges were only surface level, despite all the evidence for them at the time.

The gathering of all Israel to a mountain recalls Moses gathering all Israel to mount Sinai, likewise placing before them the stark choice between Yahweh and idolatry, and Moses' repetition of the theme in Dt. 30:15-20.

Carmel was chosen because it was renowned for its fertility, and was thought to be the abode of Baal- the god of fertility, who gave rain, lightning and fire in order to produce fertility. It was an extremely brave move by Elijah- for trapped at the top of Carmel, he would have no escape route. The prophets of Baal were armed with spears and swords / knives with which they cut themselves.

1Ki 18:20 So Ahab sent to all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together to Mount Carmel-
Ahab is not recorded as saying anything further. He apparently doesn't accuse Elijah of anything else, and obeys what Elijah asks him to do. We wonder why Ahab and Jezebel allowed this great showdown. Perhaps the plan was to not only kill Elijah, but to destroy his religious credibility before all Israel. Perhaps they were to set up various bogus schemes for creating fire to consume the sacrifices, but they failed at the last minute. The incident shows Ahab on one hand really did believe in Baal and thought Baal would come through for him. But he also saw the need to destroy the credibility of Elijah's God. The deep perceived need to do this was a tacit reflection of

how subconsciously he knew there was a Yahweh... but he wanted to discredit Him. He is the one who hops between two opinions, as Elijah later says of Israel.

1Ki 18:21 Elijah came near to all the people and said, How long will you waver between the two sides? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. The people answered him not a word-

When Elijah asks the people who they will follow they give no "answer" (v. 21), Elijah proposes that the god who "answers" is god (v. 24), the people "answer" (v. 24), the prophets of Baal cry out for an "answer" (v.26), they receive no "answer" (v. 29), and Elijah prays to God asking twice for an "answer" (v. 37). The people didn't answer because their god gave no answer. Yahweh is presented as the God who answers, and whose people are in dialogue with Him. "Dumb idols" says it all. No idol gives living relationship. Only the one true God does.

As with Moses appealing to Pharaoh, the classic example of limping between two opinions was Ahab. He repents several times in the record, but slips back. He has three children who have 'Yah' in their names (Ahaziah, Athaliah, Jehoram), tolerates Obadiah working for him, but he persecuted and slew the prophets of Yah.

When Elijah demands that the people chose which lord they will serve- Baal [='lord'] or Yahweh, he is really getting to the very crux of spirituality- for truly, there can be no halting between the two opinions of serving Baal and serving Yahweh. The Lord Jesus surely based His words of Lk. 16:13 on those of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". So although on one hand the Lord Jesus Himself quotes Elijah's 'truth' approvingly, there is evidence galore that at the very same time, Elijah's attitudes were far from Christ-like, as we will show below. At the very same time, Elijah mocks the Baal worshippers, teasing them to shout louder, because maybe their god has gone 'in a journey'- a Hebraism for 'gone to the toilet' (1 Kings 18:27). This kind of mockery and crudeness is surely not how the Father and Son would have us act. Yet Elijah did this whilst at the same time deeply believing the fire would come down, and bringing it down by his faith. And saying other words which were alluded to with deep approval by the Lord.

Your own example of making clear choices, doing what is right before God rather than what is wise and smart in human eyes, will reveal a sense of clarity about you which will become inspirational to your brethren. Yours will not be one of those many lives that is paralyzed by constantly postponing the choices, by indecision, like Israel on Carmel, hopping backwards and forwards between two opinions (1 Kings 18:21), between your persona and your true person, which is Christ in you. Ultimately, the choice is not one of principles or doctrines or interpretations; it is between Christ and all the other things which would lead us away from Him. The essential choice is always between "Christ in you" and… her mother, your instincts, their self-perception imposed upon you, your self-interest. And in those choices there is no third road; we are at a T-junction, hour after hour. We chose either life or death (Dt. 30:19); we cannot serve two masters (Mt. 6:24). Insofar as you at least live a life that reflects this recognition, you will be a challenge to those around you.

How long will we halt between the two paths, never facing up to the choice? It's an agony to God, as was Laodicea's " neither hot nor cold" attitude. I sometimes wonder if say 90% of our prayer, our Bible reading, our spiritual activities, are all

wasted because we are only half hearted about it. We don't (often) pray the prayer of dominant desire, or (often) read or (often) break bread with that spirit of total, total dedication and concentration. You must have, as I do, those all too fleeting moments of grasping the logic, the wonder, the imperative urgency of the fact there's no third way; that total devotion is the only choice. Cling on to those moments. Organize your life decisions around this spirit.

1Ki 18:22 Then Elijah said to the people, I, even I only, am left a prophet of Yahweh; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men-
Again we sense how arrogant and condemnatory is Elijah. Obadiah had recently reminded him of the 100 faithful prophets, and there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. There were also schools of the prophets operating (2 Kings 2:3,5,7) and various known prophets of Yahweh (1 Kings 22:8). But Elijah seems to be revelling here in standing with his back to the world. There are times when that is necessary, but it seems to have appealed to Elijah's personality type to set up a situation like this. And there are those within the body of believers who take an inappropriate encouragement from Elijah's attitude. Because he did indeed have faith and boldness, this didn't mean he had the hope and love without which even the faith to move mountains is of "no profit". Despite his arrogance, God worked through him. But that did not thereby justify him. You can give your body to be burned at the stake, and still not be saved if you have no love.

135000 Midianites had faced Gideon's 300 men (Jud. 8:10). That works out at precisely 450 of the enemy for every one of Gideon's men. And it cannot be coincidence that Elijah describes himself as facing off as one man of God against 450 prophets of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:22). Despite his arrogance and spiritual weakness, Elijah learned the lesson from Gideon's courageous example. This is how the Bible becomes a living word, the history is not dead but alive, because it has been carefully selected by God to show us that man is not alone, God is with us, no circumstance we face is in essence unique; others have trodden this path before.

1Ki 18:23 Let them therefore give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under it; and I will dress the other bull, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under it-
The bull was offered as a sin offering, as bulls were at several points in the Mosaic legislation. Elijah is still assuming that the promised gift of rain was because they had repented and so a sin offering was required. He still fails to see God just wants to show pity. Elijah's idea was that his sin offering would be accepted by God, and their offering rejected, making them as Cain to his Abel. But because of the acceptance of his sin offering, Israel's sin would be purged and therefore the rain would come. God went along with this plan, indeed all this may have been of His commanding. In which case we see that He was willing to accept sin offering offered by a third party, without the repentance of the people. For they only apparently repented (and even then, not for very long) after He had accepted the sin offering Elijah offered. We see here His prevenient grace, not simply responding to human repentance and spirituality, but taking huge initiatives.

1Ki 18:24 You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The God who answers by fire, let him be God. All the people answered, It is well said-
Elijah almost seems to have revelled in assuming *all* Israel were apostate when he met

them on Carmel. He assumes they will all call on the name of their god Baal, whilst he alone would call on Yahweh. It definitely sounds as if he was setting himself up against them. And thus he asks God to make all Israel know Him (1 Kings 18:37), as if none of them did at that time- except himself. Elijah takes the language of God 'answering by fire' from the account of David's intercession for the plagued, sinful people in 1 Chron. 21:26 (same Hebrew words). Elijah saw himself as David, interceding to gain the forgiveness of impenitent third parties as a result of his sacrifice. And indeed there was an element of that. And in the final synthesis and unknowable equation of salvation, there is still a great role played by third parties in our salvation.

1Ki 18:25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose one bull for yourselves, and dress it first; for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it-

Elijah purposefully set up the contest with the Baal worshippers so that he was alone against so many Baal worshippers; he rejoices almost that "you are many". He didn't invite any other worshippers of Yahweh; he was convinced that it was him against the world / the rest of the ecclesia. When we read Elijah inviting all the prophets of Baal to be gathered to Carmel, we expect him to match this by inviting the prophets of Yahweh- for we have just read that Obadiah hid 100 of them in a cave. But Elijah doesn't. He asks Ahab to call "all Israel" there- he wanted to set himself up as alone against all Israel.

"Call on the name of your god" carefully avoids using the name of Baal, as in :27. He was making the point that Yahweh has a Name, reflecting a personality. Whereas Baal was effectively nameless and without personality and character.

By letting the Baal worshippers go first, Elijah was setting the scene to build to a climax with the maximum psychological impact. He not only believed Yahweh would answer him, but also that there would be no response from Baal. He set up the situation to highlight the deadness of Baal. But by doing so, he showed amazing faith and certainty that he would be answered- despite his arrogance and other weaknesses at this time. Genuine faith does co-exist with human weakness. Belief and unbelief exist together. This comforts us in our weaknesses, although it is no excuse for hypocrisy; and helps us be patient with our immature brethren.

1Ki 18:26 They took the bull which was given to them and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, Baal, hear us! But there was no voice, nor any who answered. They leaped about the altar which was made-

We wonder why Ahab goes along with the contest (he comes over as obedient to Elijah's proposals in :19,20), when he has been earnestly seeking Elijah to kill him for causing the drought, and when he and his wife had slain Yahweh's prophets with impunity. We see here his niggling conscience, just as with Pharaoh. For Moses and Elijah are so similar. Ahab really wanted to show that Baal was god because he feared the attraction of Yahweh worship. When he fails and Yahweh is vindicated, he then repents- for a moment. All this is psychologically credible, and shows the inability of even the most sinful man to ever conclusively remove the niggle of conscience toward God. We need to recognize that, surrender, and wholeheartedly go God's way.

"Leaped" is the word used for the limping of the people between Baal and Yahweh (:21). Even in the apparent passion and absolute devotion of leaping on the altar, they

were in fact limping between Baal and Yahweh. And this is so for many religious people, even at the point of the height of their apparent devotions.

The idea of prophets was well known in the world around ancient Israel. The idea of a prophet was that a person was caught up in some kind of ecstasy, transported into some 'other' world, and leaving behind their humanity. The true prophets were different. Their inspiration was about being attuned to the mind of God, they remained very much in the flesh and in the world, and the subjects of their prophecy related to very real, human things- injustice, a guy building an extension on his house without paying the labourers. Not flashing lights and ethereal coasting through space. The pagan prophets (e.g. the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:26-29) worked themselves into a frenzy in order to reach a state of depersonalization and loss of consciousness, in the hope that then they would be filled with Divine consciousness. True prophets like Amos were absolutely different; the inspiration process required them to be fully in touch with their own consciousness and personality, and it was exactly through their humanity that the personality of God came through in the inspired words they spake and wrote. Amos perceived the Lord's word, and then 'butted in' as it were, in full consciousness: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech Thee! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" (Am. 7:2). This is the very opposite of the pagan prophets losing touch with their human senses and reasoning.

1Ki 18:27 It happened at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Cry louder; for he is a god! Either he is musing, or he has gone aside to the toilet, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he sleeps and must be awakened-

Despite Elijah's crude sarcasm about Baal being in the rest room, God didn't give up working with Elijah, and Elijah still had a relationship with God. And this is how we have to see those brethren whom we perceive as arrogant and so terribly deficient in the spirit of Christ.

1Ki 18:28 They cried aloud, and cut themselves in their way with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them-

In 1 Kings 18:28 the prophets of Baal worshipped "in their way", AV "after their manner"- a Hebrew word normally translated 296 times "judgment"; they judged / condemned themselves, rather than needing Elijah to do so. And the word translated "cut" essentially means 'to gather'. They gathered themselves together to condemnation and poured out their own blood. "Knives and lancets" is a phrase normally translated "swords and spears". They lived out judgment upon themselves rather than Elijah needing to condemn them.

The Lord understood this when He speaks about the spirit of Elijah not being appropriate. His comment that He had "not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Lk. 9:56) must surely be connected with what He said just before that: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose [s.w. "destroy"] it" and vice versa (Lk. 9:24,25). The three words save, life, lose / destroy are all the same. There is surely a connection of thought here. But what is the Lord saying through it? The disciples like Elijah would have had their prayers heard- the fire of destruction could have come. But the Lord says that they don't know the type of spirit they are of. His Spirit is one of saving and not destruction. Men destroy themselves by seeking to save themselves without Him. This is why the Lord could say that He Himself judged / condemned no man- each rejected man will have condemned himself. And so the same point is actually made within the Elijah story too.

The Baal worshippers cut themselves and made their own blood flow out, in anticipation of how they would soon be slain and left to bleed to death. The

connection of thought is to show that they did this to themselves, their idolatry was their own self condemnation and destruction.

We note they had swords and spears. They could so easily have slain Elijah, as the prophets of Baal and Ahab had slain many Yahweh prophets earlier. Elijah;s bravery is intense- for he had no way to escape, being on top of a mountain.

1Ki 18:29 It was so, when midday was past, that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the offering; but there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any who responded-

There was no voice of response from Baal; and the implication may be that there was a voice from Yahweh in His response. But Elijah didn't hear it, for the thrill and noise of the fire coming down and consuming the sacrifice drowned it out. Perhaps this is referred to when Yahweh later tells Elijah that He is not [so much] in the wind and fire, but in the still small voice- which Elijah had not heard. There was no voice from Baal because there was nobody to give answer- there was no answerer. The record seeks to avoid mentioning the name of Baal, because as noted above, there was no 'name' in the sense of character or personality. It was a god of their own creation in their own minds, just as all idols are. Dream homes and holidays likewise exist in the mind of modern man, and have no reality nor personality.

1Ki 18:30 Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me; and all the people came near to him-

Elijah may be alluding to how the people came near to Moses (Ex. 34:32). But he was shown that he was not as Moses; see on 1 Kings 19:9. It may be that they sensed that seeing Baal hadn't answered, and the tricks to make fire appear had failed, then Yahweh was likely to respond. And they were cowering away, fearful of the Divine fire which they sensed was going to appear. See on :34. The similarities between Elijah and Moses are so many that it's tempting to think that he was the intended fulfilment of the "prophet like" Moses who was to be raised up (Dt. 18:18). The similarities and points of contact are such that we can safely conclude that potentially, this promise was intended to have fulfilment in Elijah. But he failed, although he realized the intended similarities between him and Moses. And so the prophecy was rescheduled to its ultimate fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. All the people coming near to Elijah on Carmel recalls all Israel before Moses at Sinai. "And the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of all Israel (Ex. 24:17)", just as devouring fire came down on Sinai. Elijah as Moses is the intermediary between Yahweh and idolatrous Israel.

He repaired the altar of Yahweh that was thrown down-

The triumph on Carmel involved making an offering on an altar of Yahweh which was in one of the “high places”- whereas Israel were repeatedly criticized for offering on these “high places” and not in Jerusalem. Elijah even criticizes Israel for throwing down these “high places” altars of Yahweh (1 Kings 19:10,14). Surely Elijah knew that the use of the high places was not what Yahweh ideally wanted; and yet he was driven to use a high place in this way. And with us, God will work through circumstances to remove from us the crutches of mere religion, to challenge the essence of our faith and relationship with Him. The way Ezekiel had to eat unclean food and defile himself is another such example.

1Ki 18:31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons

of Jacob, to whom the word of Yahweh came, saying, Israel shall be your name-
- see on Gen. 35:2. This seems a conscious imitation of Joshua's building of the altar from 12 stones when entering the land (Josh. 4:5). Perhaps Elijah's hope was for a complete restoration of the kingdom. The allusion to the renaming of Jacob to Israel may also suggest a new beginning by grace. The usage of 12 stones suggests that he hoped for the ending of the division within Israel, as well as recognizing that the two tribe kingdom also needed forgiveness. For I suggested earlier that the bull was a sin offering.

1Ki 18:32 With the stones he built an altar in the name of Yahweh. He made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed-
Elijah's hyper sensitivity to he alone being acceptable before God is perhaps shown in the way he repairs the Lord's altar and then himself builds another one (1 Kings 18:30-32). It was as if he felt some kind of guilt by association- he could only serve Yahweh on the altar of his own making. Perhaps he justified it by suspecting that the first altar has been built contrary to Mosaic law, perhaps an iron tool had been used on it... and so, Elijah had to go his own way. And how often have our brethren done this. Nothing is any good unless we ourselves are doing it; we can't be made guilty by association with the work of others whom we doubt.

This was as Moses built an altar and set up 12 pillars at the time of the theophany on mount Sinai, where again Yahweh was revealed as consuming fire (Ex. 24:4). See on :40. But Elijah's imitations of Moses were form without content.

1Ki 18:33 He put the wood in order, and cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood-
Elijah's mocking attitude of :27 is also shown by the way in which he demands they find him four barrels of water- on the top of a mountain, after a major three and a half year drought. Presumably they took the water from the sea at the bottom of the mountain (although tradition claims there was a fountain at the top of Carmel)- and thus Elijah's sacrifice would be offered with salt. He was strictly obedient to the requirements for sacrifice- yet amidst an abusive, self-justifying mindset. The very possession of truth can take our attention away from our need for self-examination and right attitudes towards others. In this lies one of our most subtle temptations.

1Ki 18:34 He said, Do it a second time; and they did it the second time. He said, Do it a third time; and they did it the third time-
I suggested above that Ahab agreed to this showdown because he planned to discredit Elijah by some bogus appearance of fire. The tricks hadn't worked. Everybody knew they hadn't. And Elijah is at great pains to demonstrate that *he* is not using any tricks. The burnt offering and wood were thrice doused in water, and the trench of water around the altar was of significant size. There was no way Elijah was using fake fire, and he had invited the people to "come near" (:30) so that all was transparent and under close public observation.

1Ki 18:35 The water ran around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water-
As explained on :34, this was to stop any possibility of tricks being used. Various pagan religions construct altars with fire hidden beneath them (Adam Clarke describes several in his commentary). This fire is then exposed by the priests, supposedly by magic or their prayers, and then burns the sacrifice. But Elijah covered

the entire sacrifice and altar with water to demonstrate there was no way this was the case wit him. And the fire came down from Heaven, rather than up from the altar as in these pagan altars.

1Ki 18:36 It happened at the time of the offering of the offering-
This could imply that this was intended as the daily evening offering.

That Elijah the prophet came near and said, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant-
He clearly saw prayer as requiring much effort; and the way he prays at the time of the evening sacrifice on Horeb suggests that he saw prayer as a sacrifice. His language here seems to have been inspired by David (1 Sam. 17:46). May our language likewise be an inspiration to others rather than pulling them downwards spiritually. But despite his immense faith, he seems unable to cease his desire for self justification. He didn't just want Israel to accept Yahweh, but to accept that he was Yahweh's servant. This was the meaning of 'Obadiah', 'servant of Yah', and we noted earlier how Elijah mocked that.

Elijah's 'drawing near' matches that of Moses at Sinai (Ex. 24:2).

And that I have done all these things at Your word-
This is another example of Elijah playing God. There's no record of any such word from the Lord to him. He appears to have set it all up at his initiative- and then assumed that actually God had told him to do so and that God would respond as he expected. We can so very easily do the same.

We become suspicious of Elijah's motives when we read of him asking God to show all Israel "That I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things". "That I…that I…" sounds like there was a large element of self-justification in his spirituality, just as there can be in our, e.g., desiring to prove someone else wrong and ourselves right, to win a debate, to abuse the advantage of our superior Bible knowledge…

God is never recorded as commanding Elijah to do any of these things. He may be saying that he did these things according to God's word [s.w. "word" in :1] that rain was going to come. He therefore assumes God has turned their hearts back in repentance, because Elijah understands that according to His word in Deuteronomy, the drought can only end if Israel repent. So Elijah asks that Israel understand that God has made them repent, and the whole context on Carmel to elicit their repentance was according to God's word that rain was coming. Elijah failed to appreciate that God's grace and basic pity means that at times He acts outside His own word. Hence in the next mountain scene in 1 Kings 19, Elijah was to be shown that actually God was not "in" the fire and wind which feature in 1 Kings 18. He was "in" the silence of the still small voice.

Elijah was perhaps unhappy about offering on a private altar which was not at the sanctuary, let alone one first built [by tradition] by apostate King Saul. So he tells God that he is only doing what God has told him, even though it appears to contradict other principles. Indeed God's legal demands at times do appear to contradict each other, but that is intentional, so that we may discern the spirit of what He wants and realize that the letter of obedience is not what He seeks.

1Ki 18:37 Answer me, Yahweh, answer me, that this people may know that You, Yahweh, are God-
"Answer" is s.w. "hear" in :26. As they had begged Baal to hear them, Elijah asks

Yahweh to hear him. He has all the way through stacked the odds against himself- by giving them longer than himself to get an answer [he allowed them to go on until evening], allowing them to go first, allowing them to choose the animals for sacriifice. In this we see his absolute faith.

See on 1 Kings 19:18. This kind of faith in prayer enables a believer to truly follow the Lord's exhortation to ask for things and believe and feel that we have already received them. Elijah chose the terms of the contest on Carmel to be an answer by fire- for Baal was originally the fire god. Yet Elijah appears utterly certain that God will answer by a bolt of fire, without having asked Him first. He asks God to "answer me" without specifically requesting for fire to be sent down; he brings the situation before God and asks Him to 'answer' that situation. And this is why so many of David's prayers are more a bringing of the situation before God, than a specific request for answers.

And that You have turned their heart back again-

It is our knowledge of God's mercy to us which empowers us to confidently seek to share with others our knowledge, our relationship, our experience with God. Forgiveness inspires the preacher; and yet the offer of forgiveness is what inspires the listener to respond. God appeals for Israel to respond by pointing out that in prospect, He has already forgiven them: "I have [already] blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions... [therefore] return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Is. 44:22). Likewise Elijah wanted Israel to know that God had already in prospect turned their hearts back to Him. We preach the cross of Christ, and that through that forgiveness has been enabled for all men; but they need to respond by repentance in order to access it. Hence the tragedy of human lack of response; so much has been enabled, the world has been reconciled, but all this is in vain if they will not respond.

Elijah was evidently in touch with God and knew His will. At the end, he is described as the charioteer of the cherubim; for his prayers had controlled their direction. This really is how much God is willing to be influenced by our prayers. Elijah had a very developed sense of how God works with us. Thus he asks God to make Israel know how that He "didst turn back their heart" (1 Kings 18:37 RVmg.), he wanted them to know how that potentially, God had made their return to Him possible; Elijah perceived that God may prepare something in prospect that never gets realized in practice because of human weakness [and this should be an endless inspiration to us too].

1Ki 18:38 Then the fire of Yahweh fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood, the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench-

For all Elijah's clearly wrong attitudes, Yahweh still accepted him; and very dramatically. The total consumption of everything indicated that God had totally accepted the sin offering. Israel had been forgiven. Even though they had not repented. This was the power of Elijah's intercessory mediation and sacrifice. And how much more powerful is that of the Lord Jesus.

Elijah states in 2 Kings 1:10 that fire would come from Heaven if he was a man of God. He had faith- and he wanted fire to come down as it had come down when he called fire down at Carmel. But faith is nuanced and is not absolute. Elijah had faith in God, great faith, but he also had faith in himself; he assumed the fire would come, because he was Yahweh's faithful man. Although Yahweh as it were agreed with him in 2 Kings 1, and made fire come down as commanded, the Lord in Lk. 9 says that Elijah had the wrong spirit in doing this. We can believe and God can respond to that

faith, but that doesn't of itself justify us. As Paul says, we can have faith that moves mountains, but without love we are nothing.

1Ki 18:39 When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces. They said, Yahweh, he is God! Yahweh, He is God!-

This is another way of crying out the name 'Elijah'. Elijah had repeatedly asked for his own justification, and perhaps the people responded in this way purposefully.

The events on Mount Carmel have clear similarities with Yahweh's manifestations to Israel and Moses on Mount Sinai, especially after the apostacy with the golden calf. We note that afterwards, Elijah travels to Mount Sinai- the only time anyone is recorded going there apart from Moses. Both Elijah and Moses are called "man of God" (1 Kings 17:24). The people fall to the ground and accept Yahweh, just as they told Moses that they would obey all Yahweh said (Ex. 24:3-7). The apostate Baal worshipping Israelites limping around the altar they had made (1 Kings 18:26 Heb.) recalls Israel dancing around the golden calf altar (Ex. 32:19). The prayer of Elijah recalls that of Moses, and he too asks God to remember Abraham etc. (18:36 = Ex. 32:13). Yahweh's fire burnt up the altar of Baal (:38), just as Moses destroyed the golden calf with fire and scatterd the dust on water (Ex. 32:20). The burning hot anger of Yahweh (Ex. 32:10) matches the fire from Yahweh that falls upon the Baal altar. The death of the Baal priests (:40) by the sword (1 Kings 19:1) connects with the destruction of the apostate Israelites at the golden calf, again by sword (Ex. 32:27-29). All this sets up Yahweh's manifestation to Elijah at Sinai with that to Moses. They each have a 40 day fast beforehand (1 Kings 19:8; Ex. 34:28). Fire, earthquake, thundering and smoke all feature both times. Both hide in a cleft of the rock before Yahweh's glory, hence 1 Kings 19:9 speaks of *"the* cave", i.e. the one Moses cowered in. But Moses pleads with his own eternal life for the salvation of Israel, whereas Elijah pleads for their destruction. Elijah's desire for his own death is selfish, whereas Moses' is self sacrificial. The parallels are so clear that it is as if the record seeks to set up Elijah in a very negative light when compared to Moses. This is especially significant when we consider that Elijah appreciated the similarities, hence he of his own voilition goes into "the cave" of Moses (1 Kings 19:9), and wrapping his face in his mantle may be a conscious copy of Moses subsequently putting a veil [Heb. scarf] over his face. The great contrast however is that Yahweh proclaimed His Name to Moses in a mighty thundering voice. Whereas Elijah heard only the sound of silence and then the still small voice. Yahweh was not "in" the earthquake, wind and fire, whereas His presence was very definitely with Moses, who even saw His back parts. But the whole point was that Moses was being taught that getting a glimpse of God Himself, seeing mighty visible manifestations of Yahweh, was not of the essence. Rather His grace and acceptance of Israel was of the essence. But Elijah was not at all interested in that, rather did he want Israel's judgment. The connections with Moses present him as really not getting it about God's grace and His salvation of Israel despite their apostacy with the golden calf; and so he is effectively fired from his prophetic work. Because to preach is all about saving people and sharing God's grace, not about proving ourselves right.

1Ki 18:40 Elijah said to them, Seize the prophets of Baal! Don't let one of them escape! They seized them. Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there-

It's unclear whether the 400 prophets of Astarte were slain or escaped. But by the time of 1 Kings 22, Ahab has another 400 prophets whom he listens to. This was a heat of

the moment persuasion and response, but of no abiding value in their spiritual growth as a nation. It again demonstrates the limited value of miracle in fundamentally changing people.

The parallels with Moses continue. This time with Moses seeing Yahweh's theophany on the mountain, and then ordering the Levites to murder idolatrous Israel (Ex. 35:25-29).

1Ki 18:41 Elijah said to Ahab, Get up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain-

"Get up" may possibly be an allusion to how after the theophany of the consuming fire on Sinai, the elders of Israel were asked to "go up" the mountain and "eat and drink" (Ex. 24:9). Ahab does so (:42), but as with Israel, it was mere devotion on the cusp of the moment. And yet the fact the rain came could reflect Divine acceptance of his repentance of a moment- even though it was to be undone by his subservience to his evil wife. Hence :45 LXX has "Ahab wept and went to Jezreel", presumably in repentance. Likewise his repentance for his part in killing Naboth [sackloth and rent garments implies repentance] in 1 Kings 21:16 is another example of his tendency to mere momentary repentance, although sincere at the time. But again, Elijah is presented as the prophet like unto Moses.

Elijah told Ahab to arise and eat, a meal of fellowship with God. But Elijah then commits suicide (see on 1 Kings 19:5) after Ahab slips back and listens to Jezebel; and then Elijah is told to arise and eat (1 Kings 19:5). He is being asked to consider that he is no better than Ahab, whom he saw as the incarnation of evil. He too had to be invited to share the meal of fellowship with God by grace, just as he had invited Ahab to. He is being shown that his judgmentalism made him no better than Ahab the idolater, but like Ahab, he too could be saved by grace.

Elijah really is the great example of believing that what we have prayed for, we have already received. He tells Ahab that he hears “the sound of a abundance of rain”, well before the prayer for rain had even begun to be answered. Elijah tells Ahab that there is a “*sound*” of rain coming. The same word has just been used earlier, translated as “voice” (1 Kings 18:29) in the context of there being a voice / answer to prayer. So Elijah is saying that there is an answer speaking of much rain to come. There was no sign of rain coming at the time when he started praying, until the little cloud arose. But he calmly tells Ahab that there is a sound / answer of rain coming. Elijah believed in the answer coming before he prayed; he had a *very* firm faith. And thus ahead of time he told Ahab to eat and drink because of it [had Ahab been fasting? If so, to Yahweh or Baal?]. But all this required quite some passion in prayer.

He heard in the ears of faith the sound of rain, before he even formally prayed for it (1 Kings 18:40-42 cp. James 5:17,18). He saw that the sin offering had been accepted, and was sure that therefore the drought would end because it had produced the required repentance. And yet, reading through the record, there is ample evidence that at the very same time as he showed such faith, he had a hardness and arrogance which was contrary to the spirit of the Lord Jesus. And Paul had the same feature.

1Ki 18:42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he bowed himself down on the earth, and put his face between his knees-

Elijah *cast himself* down in prayer. The word occurs only in 2 Kings 4:34,35, as if it was Elijah’s example which inspired Elisha likewise to cast himself down [AV “stretch”] upon the child. The implication is that Elisha did so in prayer; and in passing, we wonder whether this implies that Elijah’s stretching himself upon another

child, although a different Hebrew word, was also in prayer. Again we see that Elijah's prayerful example inspired another. Our attitude to prayer is so easily influential upon others, and we ourselves are likewise easily influenced. It should be no shame nor embarrassment to us to instantly break into prayer, nor to kneel down to further our intensity in prayer, regardless of the social embarrassment this may involve in some cultures.

1Ki 18:43 He said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. He went up and looked, and said, There is nothing. He said seven times, Go again-
The lack of immediate answer was to humble Elijah after the amazing answer to prayer just received on Carmel. He would have started wondering whether he really understood correctly that rain was to come now that the people had repented and his sin offering had been accepted. He would have started doubting his own faith; as one does after praying six times for something and not getting any answer. All this was to humble him. For his pride seems to have been at a very high point as he stood in triumph before Israel on Carmel, the man with his back to the world had apparently won.

1Ki 18:44 It happened at the seventh time that he said, Behold, a small cloud, like a man's hand, is rising out of the sea. He said, Go up, tell Ahab, 'Get ready and go down, so that the rain doesn't stop you'-
It could be that after the triumph on Carmel, there had been another vision of God's glory in order to humble Elijah. I say this on the basis that the description of the cloud "like a man's hand" recalls "the likeness of a man's hand" under the cherubim in Ezekiel's visions. Clouds and rain are invariably part of theophanies. Elijah spoke of how, by faith, he heard "the feet of rain" (1 Kings 18:41 LXX), as if he believed that the Angels were coming with rain. Perhaps Elijah therefore told Ahab "prepare *your* chariot" and ride with the rain- i.e. 'be part of the vision of glory / cherubim chariots on the ground as it passes overhead'. This was the point of Ezekiel's vision; Israel were to reflect the Cherubim on earth, just As David moved in step with the Spirit / the sound of marching in the mulberry trees. Therefore in 1 Kings 18:42 when in the face of all this, Elijah places his face between knees, he may be doing the same thing as when he hides his face in the mantle. He sensed the glory of God near him but didn't want to face up to it personally. He didn't want to become part of the Cherubic vision of glory, even though he advised Ahab to do so. We must identify ourselves with the vision of God's glory, and face up to the life-changing implications of it. Elijah ultimately did this, although it took him a lifetime- he was caught up in another cherubic vision and threw away his mantle and became part of the vision of glory; and hence he was called "the chariot of Israel and the [great] horseman thereof" [reading "horsemen" as an intensive plural]. The chariots and horsemen of God appeared; and Elisha perceived that Elijah had finally become identified with them. For Elisha sees them and then describes Elijah as being them- the chariot and horseman of Israel (2 Kings 2:11,12). Finally, Elijah became part of God's glory; He merged into it rather than resisting it for the sake of his *own* glory. He was the charioteer of the cherubim; for his prayers had controlled their direction. This identification of ourselves with God's glory, this losing of ourselves and our own insistence upon our rightness, and our focus on others' wrongness... this is the end result of our lives if they are lived out after the pattern of Elijah's.

1Ki 18:45 It happened in a little while, that the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel-
LXX "Ahab wept". This fits the impression we have that he repented; his comments to Jezebel at the beginning of 1 Kings 19 could be understood as meaning that it was 'game over' with Baal worship. He had not protested the mass murder of the 450 priests of Baal.

1Ki 18:46 The hand of Yahweh was on Elijah; and he tucked his cloak into his belt and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel-
Running in front of someone meant to herald them. He was perhaps rejoicing in Ahab's apparent repentance, see on :45. This exhilarating run to Jezreel, in the power of the Spirit, set Elijah up for the devastating news that Jezebel had not repented and Ahab was apparently supporting her, or at least not asserting his kingship against her. And thence he crashed into the depression of 1 Kings 19.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 19

1Ki 19:1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword-
We wonder whether Elijah personally presided over the genocide of 450 priests. Ahab had made no protest, and I suggested on 1 Kings 18:46 that he did in fact repent. The coming of rain in response to Elijah's prayer and the peoples' rejection of Baal surely urged him to accept that it was 'game over' for Baal worship. At least, at that time. There is no mention earlier of Elijah's sword. Perhaps he was seeking to imitate Phinehas and the Levites who slew the apostate idolaters of Israel at the mount, with swords. But as we see regarding Moses, Elijah is copying the externalities without grasping the spirit.

As discussed on 1 Kings 18:1, Elijah had been assuming that the rain had come because Israel had repented. Instead of accepting that the rain came because God said it was going to come, regardless of their repentance. He assumed Ahab had repented; and indeed he probably did, just as he did for a time when confronted about the death of Naboth. Ahab's three sons all had 'Yah' in their names- but his weak spirituality was trumped by Jezebel. Her name may be an allusion to Baal Zebul, the rain god ["zebel" = "zebul"]. Her personal god had been declared dead. And so she wanted to kill Elijah.

1Ki 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I don't make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time!-
Elijah had returned with Ahab to Jezreel. So he was there in the city, apparently hoping that Ahab would stand up to Jezebel, and perhaps she too would realize that Baal worship was now a hopeless cause.

The Moses parallels continue. Ahab and Jezebel in many ways recall Pharaoah, especially with Ahab's momentary repentances. Jezebels' words here clearly recall Pharaoh's: "Take care... the day you see my face you shall die" (Ex. 10:28). But Elijah slides down into depression because he sees he's failed to convert Ahab and Jezebel. By contrast, Moses goes ahead and delivers God's people, accepting he had failed to convert Pharaoah, and you can't win every time. Again and again we see Elijah only externally following Moses, but not grasping his spirit. He makes no begging intercession to save Israel, but rather seeks their condemnation for their idolatry. He sees himself as God's man and having God's positions, rather than seeking to persuade God to act otherwise than He initially planned.

1Ki 19:3 When he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there-
The Elijah who fearlessly came before Ahab and the thousands of idolaters at Carmel... now flees before an angry woman. I suggested on 1 Kings 18:46 that the exhilarating run to Jezreel, in the power of the Spirit, set Elijah up for the devastating news that Jezebel had not repented and Ahab was apparently supporting her, or at least not asserting his kingship against her. And thence he crashed into the depression we now read of. The history here has absolute psychological credibility, even though Elijah's faith should have been more resolute. He fled to the very south of Judah, territory not under Ahab's control.

Beersheba belonged to Judah, so we could see his flight there as effectively walking away from his ministry to Israel. And so he was fired from his ministry seeing that he himself had chosen this. It was therefore only pride that made him so resistant to accepting that. "When he saw..." is LXX "And he feared", suggesting Elijah's motive in going to Beersheba was fear. Hence the rebuke "What are you doing here, Elijah?". He "went / fled for his life"- and yet he wants to end his life. It could be that Jezebel's threats to take his life result in him fleeing to God and asking God to take his life, rather than Jezebel. He was convinced by his fears that he now had to die. This fear puts a deeper dimension on Elijah's apparently fearless challenges to Ahab, and his willingness to face off against Ahab and the Baal worshippers alone on Carmel. His apparent nonchalance was in fact the outcome of faith, as he clearly feared Jezebel who was behind Ahab.

Elijah tells his servant to remain whilst he goes out into the desert alone, intent on committing suicide (1 Kings 19:3). When he is finally snatched away, he tried to get his servant Elisha to likewise remain whilst he went further alone. Again he intended suicide and Elisha likely perceived this. And so God did snatch him away, either to death or to make him end his ministry.

1Ki 19:4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is enough. Now, O Yahweh, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers-
By walking out alone into the desert he was effectively attempting suicide. If Elijah was a Gentile (see on 1 Kings 17:1), he would be feeling that he was no really better than a Gentile idolater (see on :5)- because he had failed to convert or see judgment upon Jezebel. Perhaps he had some particular complex of feelings and histories with her which led him to this manic state once she tried to kill him.

Elijah's depression was because Jezebel had not repented. His dream was that the effective ruler of Israel would be converted by him. He failed to perceive that his conversion of the widow woman was quite enough. He wanted high profile converts like Jezebel and felt a failure when he didn't win them.

And yet the constant similarities with Moses lead us to wonder whether Moses' depressive requests to die are being alluded to here by Elijah. Or it could be that Moses' offer to give his eternal life for Israel is being contrasted with Elijah selfishly wanting to die, just because he felt depressed that his mission had apparently not succeeded.

"Enough" is the same Hebrew word picked up and used by the Angel- "the way is *too great* ['enough'] for you" (1 Kings 19:7), and he does eventually eat and not die, living life now only thanks to the provision of food by Angels, going on a 40 day wilderness journey towards Sinai. Elijah was brought to where we have all been- that this is all just too much for me. But it was all too much because he had set himself dreams and conditions- the repentance of Jezebel and Ahab, and felt all was too much because that dream was now shattered- and because he would not cast himself upon God's grace. "It's all too much for me" is related to human pride. All this of course is replete with reference to Israel's wilderness journey, during which they only survived by eating "Angel's food", the food provided by Angels (Ps. 78:25). And as Elijah well knew, that generation were sinful and worshipped the idols they had smuggled out of Egypt with them. To stay alive, he had to eat that food and go in that miraculously provided strength. And so he was *forced* to see the similarity between himself and rebellious Israel in the wilderness. He was being asked to identify with sinful Israel, and seek to save them through identity with them rather than the dramatic wind and fire of Carmel. Moses by contrast does make the identification with Israel. He doesn't want to be saved if they will not be. Likewise earlier God had fed him through the medium of the unclean raven, and the unclean Gentile woman. But Elijah had had enough of these pointed digs, and he asks God to take his life away- alluding to how Jezebel wanted to do this, as if trying to pressurize God into taking away his life rather than Jezebel (1 Kings 19:4, 10).

1Ki 19:5 He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, an angel touched him,

and said to him, Arise and eat!-
The situation is allusive to the Gentile, spiritually weak Hagar being found at the point of death and preserved by an Angel in the same wilderness (Gen. 16:9; 21:17). Elijah in his rebellion against God's intended ministry for him was no better than her. Perhaps that is what he refers to being no better than his (Gentile) fathers; see on :4. And we will see on :6 that he is taught that the Gentile widow whom he had earlier despised was also on God's side more than he was.

A fair case can be made for 'laying down and sleeping' and then being touched and bidden 'arise' by an Angel refers to death and resurrection. The LXX uses the same term here as used for sleeping in death in 1 Cor. 15:6,18,20. Death as sleep is also an OT idea (Dan. 12:2; Ps. 13:4; Jer. 51:39; Job 3:13). The whole incident recalls Daniel's figurative death and resurrection, with the Angel touching him and bidding him arise and not fear. Eating and drinking (:6) likewise occurs after several resurrection scenes in the NT. The dead girl is bidden "arise and eat" just as Elijah is here. Elijah's comment that Baal is asleep (1 Kings 18:27) is another way of saying he is effectively dead. And the case is pretty much clinched by the context. 1 Kings 19:4 tells us that Elijah has just “prayed that he might die. ‘Enough!’ he cried, ‘Now, O Lord, take my life…”. Elijah then lays himself down in a position where surely he was going to die by dehydration, just as Jonah did, rather than see Nineveh saved by grace.

In this case, Elijah lay down under a bush in the scorching desert as an act of suicide- but was awoken from it in resurrection. We think of how Hagar lay down her son beneath a bush to die in the same desert (Gen. 21:15,16), "in the wilderness of Beersheba" (Gen. 21:14). Jezebel has threatened to take Elijah's life (:2), so he flees for his life (:3), and then asks God to take his life (:4,10). It's as if he wants to die, but he wants to die at God's hand and not Jezebel's.

All this is rather as Jonah's offer to be cast into the sea was an act of suicide- but he was resurrected from it. Jonah was very similar to Elijah in his attitude to Gentiles and God being more merciful than he was. Indeed the similarities are so close that it could be that Jonah justified his desire for suicide [despite having been resurrected from his previous suicide] by thinking that he was copying Elijah. But form had eclipsed content, he was externally following Elijh and not grasping the lesson of Elijah's failure. Just as many misguided zealots appeal to Elijah for justification and inspiration. "Let us disfellowship the weak... in the spirit of the great hero Elijah!".

These men just couldn't cope with God being more gracious than they were, and considering the possibility that He saved those whom they regarded as below the bar of salvation. Likewise today, the wrath of legalists is most acutely aroused over issues of accepting or baptizing those whom they consider Gentiles, not adequately repentant nor groomed in the knowledge of Israel's God. This is the challenge of Divine grace- to accept it not only for ourselves but towards others. But only by accepting our own

sinfulness can we perceive God's grace towards us personally, and this alone will lead us to accept His grace towards others. But like Jonah, even after such a resurrection by grace, Elijah pigheadedly continues in his resistance to grace and self justification. The grace of the situation is heightened when we consider that Jezebel sent a messenger (*malak*) to tell Elijah she was going to murder him (:2). Yahweh sent His Angel [*malak*] to save Elijah. Elijah had told Ahab to arise and eat (1 Kings 18:41), a meal of fellowship with God. But Elijah then commits suicide after Ahab slips back and listens to Jezebel; and now Elijah is told to arise and eat. He is being asked to consider that he is no better than Ahab, whom he saw as the incarnation of evil. He too had to be invited to share the meal of fellowship with God by grace, just as he had invited Ahab to. He is being shown that his judgmentalism made him no better than Ahab the idolater, but like Ahab, he too could be saved by grace.

1Ki 19:6 He looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on the coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again-
The woman “gathering sticks” (1 Kings 17:10) would likely have stimulated his Bible-steeped mind to think of the illegal gathering of sticks in Num. 15:32,33. But she gave him meal cake and water. Later, the Angel gave Elijah cake and water (1 Kings 19:6 LXX "a cake of meal") just as the unclean ravens and Gentile widow woman had done- to teach Elijah that God works through those people. There were two occasions in which God fed Elijah with a cake when he was hungry. Once when the widow woman baked him one (1 Kings 17:13), and once when the Angel did (1 Kings 19:6). Surely God was trying to show Elijah that He was manifested through that desperately poor, weak, sick, starving widow woman who was at the point of death from starvation. It was the same message- that God wasn’t in the earthquake and fire, but in the still small voice. Elijah wanted a high profile female convert like Jezebel, and that hadn't worked out. He was being reminded that the conversion of the desperate Gentile woman was quite enough.

Heb. 'the hot coals' suggests a connection with Is. 6:6 where the Angel seraph likewise had these in order to forgive and cleanse God's prophet. Perhaps Elijah didn't want to perceive that nor accept it, whereas Isaiah did. The idea is that the cake was made in Heaven itself, like the manna is presented as "Angel's food", the bread of heaven.

The gift of bread at night [for he awoke and there was bread] recalls the manna given at night (Num. 11:9 "When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it"). Num. 11:8 also calls the manna a "cake". And the manna was also given by an Angel. Water was likewise given to Israel in the same desert where Elijah was. He is being nudged to identify with Israel. His 40 day journey through the desert to Sinai was clearly intended to connect him with Israel's 40 year journey in the same desert. But he refuses to take the nudges, and goes on, as Paul says, to intercede with God *against* Israel. He sees himself as righteous and them as wicked, rather than identifying with them and

seeking to save the unjust by the love and identity of the just. He failed to get the spirit of Moses.

1Ki 19:7 The angel of Yahweh came again the second time, and touched him and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you-
He had been empowered by the Spirit to run all the way from Carmel to Jezreel, running at the speed of horses (1 Kings 18:46). But now the Spirit had been withdrawn from him. The journey was too great for him in his own strength. God would indeed give him food for the journey, but in a manner reminiscent of the Gentile widow who had earlier sustained him (see on :6). He had not learned the lessons from that, and they had to be repeated here; see on :8.

1Ki 19:8 He arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the Mount of God-
We enquire whether Elijah consciously intended to go to Horeb / Sinai. After the theophany and slaughter of the golden calf worshippers (Ex. 32), Moses goes to Horeb / Sinai for another theophany. And so it seems again we have Elijah externally doing what Moses had done, but without his spirit- for he intercedes *against* Israel rather than for their salvation by grace. Time and again we see this in the individual and collective lives of believers- form eclipses content.

Elijah goes in the strength of a little food just as the widow's flour didn't run out. He is being paralleled with the Gentile widow woman- either to reinforce the lesson taught, or because he had failed to learn the lesson that he truly was no better in essence than a Gentile woman; see on :7. One wonders whether he not only despised Gentiles but women too... hence the way God sought to teach him the parallel between Himself and that woman. His depression was because he hadn't converted Jezebel, but he is being reminded to perceive the value of the conversion of the relatively low profile, obscure Gentile woman [so obscure that in the three year search for Elijah, nobody thought of going to her].

God 'set up' Elijah's experience at Horeb / Sinai to compare *and contrast* with that of Moses. There are so many intended similarities between Elijah's meeting God at Horeb and Moses' meetings with God at Sinai- the same place, it seems. In both records it is called "the mount of God" (Ex. 3:1; 18:5; 24:13); there was a journey through the desert both before and after the meeting; the use of the number forty (Ex. 34:28; Num. 14:34 cp. 1 Kings 19:8); miraculous provision of food by God; an accompanying Angel; a cave, standing on a rock, Yahweh passing by, covering the face (Ex. 33:21-23; 34:5,6), earthquake, wind and fire (Ex. 19). We think too of how they both dried up water and

passed through it (2 Kings 2), both have successors appointed involving their spirit being placed upon Joshua / Elisha etc.

Moses met with God at Horeb, and received the words of God. Elijah was all set up for the same. But it doesn't happen. Yahweh Himself doesn't appear; and instead of words of command, there is a deafening silence- for I understand the "still small voice" to actually be silence, and that silence was in itself a voice / word to Elijah. And then when God finally does say something, it is simply: "What are you doing here, Elijah?". Surely Elijah saw himself as Moses, and was looking forward to being given a covenant, and seeing a special manifestation of Yahweh. But instead, silence. No appearance of God, and finally, the great anticlimax of being asked what exactly he's doing there. The similarities with the Moses history were arranged by God, but surely they played along with Elijah's assumption that he was the next Moses. And indeed he was set up to be "the prophet like unto Moses", but he is being shown that he lacks Moses' humility and spirit of passion for the salvation of Israel. Perhaps he idolized Moses, as men today idolize heroes, e.g. from earlier days of their denomination. Elijah was being taught that actually, he was not Moses; God had no such message or covenant or special revelation to give him. And there is a type of believer who needs this same lesson; that God speaks through silence and insignificance to us. We are to be ourselves, and not to ever seek to replicate the experiences or spiritual path of faithful men who have gone before us. Such desires are really a running away from our personal responsibilities.

The similarities between Elijah and Moses are so many that it's tempting to think that he was the intended fulfilment of the "prophet like" Moses who was to be raised up (Dt. 18:18). The similarities and points of contact are such that we can safely conclude that potentially, this promise was intended to have fulfilment in Elijah. But he failed, although he realized the intended similarities between him and Moses. And so the prophecy was rescheduled to its ultimate fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

1Ki 19:9 He came there to a cave, and lodged there-
Heb. "the cave", referring to the cave Moses entered in Ex. 33:12, from where he viewed the great theophany. Moses too was an upright man. But he had to be humbled, until he cowered in the rock as sinners will do before the excellence of God's glory (Is. 2:21), before he could appreciate Yahweh's glory. And Elijah too had to go through the same experience (1 Kings 19:9-12). Eliphaz likewise recounted how an Angel had passed before him, as the Angel passed before Moses and Elijah, and through this he came to realize the essential truth of man's sinfulness and desperate need for repentance and God's gracious acceptance (Job 4:16).

The theophany must have been frightening. "Though Elijah is commanded to go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, the most he does is to go out and stand at the entrance of the cave". By standing there he was failing to be humbled because of his

sins. He had no awareness of his sins, like many of the harsh religious reformer types, focused solely on the errors of others. Elijah hid in a cave, hid for his life. He was thus being nudged to identify with the prophets of Yahweh whom Obadiah hid in a cave. But his repeated assertion that he alone is faithful to Yahweh is a studied refusal to make that identity- he continued to consider them apostate, despite having been nudged (through the cave experience) to identify with them.

And behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, and he said to him-
This personification of "the word of the Lord" surely refers to an Angel who spoke to Elijah. When we read that the Lord was not in the fire etc., but was in the "still small voice", perhaps the idea is that the Angel was not visible in the fire, earthquake, wind etc.- but He simply stood there at the end in front of Elijah and quietly spoke to him. The Angel, in a magnificent manifestation of the 'humility' of God, was quietly spoken and calm ("still"). The Angel was inviting Elijah to be like Him, to be God manifest by following the pattern of his guardian Angel.

What are you doing here, Elijah?-
Literally the text reads: "Elijah, Elijah, Elijah". The three repeats of his name in the Hebrew text connect with the earthquake, wind and fire, and Elijah's triple repeating of the same prepared statement. In his bitterness, Elijah sought to cut himself off from all consideration of his possibility of being wrong, or sensibly dialoguing with the Father. He just repeats the same words three times, as meaninglessly as the earthquake, wind and fire. Elijah hid his face in his mantle rather than face up to the true glory of God, the true fire from Heaven. The only other time Elijah sees the glory of God he threw away his mantle- as if he finally recognized he had been shielding himself from the real reality of it so that he could seek his own glory? The glory of God is His Name and character. To face up to this, believing it rather than merely knowing it, will bring us to repentance and a real facing up to the reality that we are truly not better than anyone else, in the light of the surpassing excellence of His glory. And Elijah just didn't want to face up to it, just as we can not want to face up to the realities of what we know.

Elijah was in "*the* cave" (Heb.) where Moses had been, and he had rather fancied himself as Moses when he bad the people draw near to him (1 Kings 18:30). Now he was being told that he was not as Moses. For Moses was the meekest man, and Elijah had not allowed himself to be humbled as Moses did.

"What are *you* doing here?" invites Elijah to question whether he is really like Moses, at Sinai to intercede *for* idolatrous Israel. Instead, Elijah refused to respond to the nudges and interceded *against* Israel. Such questions always imply the person questioned was doing wrong. Adam ("Where are you?" Gen. 3:9), Cain'("Why are you angry? Gen. 3:6, and "Where is your
brother Abel?" Gen. 3:9), Balaam ("Who are these men with you?" Num. 22:9) and Jonah ("Is it right for you to be angry about the gourd?" Jon. 4:9).

The idea may also be that Elijah had been commanded to go stand on the mountain, but instead he was too scared to even leave the cave. He simply didn't have the intimacy with God which Moses had had. Or maybe the idea is that he shouldn't have fled from Jezebel; or, he should be back at the ministry of converting Israel, rather than just trying to be a Moses copycat.

1Ki 19:10 He said, I have been very zealous for Yahweh, the God of Armies; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars and slain Your prophets with the sword. I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away- Elijah insists he has been zealous / jealous for Yahweh, alluding to His own stated characteristic of jealousy. Always, Elijah seeks to portray and understand himself as on God's side- but only on the side of some of His characteristics, those concerned with judgment. He fails to perceive that at Sinai, Yahweh revealed Himself as first of all gracious and forgiving. Moses, by contrast, sought to change God's mind. Moses was open to change in perspective, whereas Elijah just stubbornly repeats his narrative three times. This stubborn refusal to change a narrative, about God, about others, about ourselves, repeated time and again within our minds and then out loud... is what stymies spiritual growth, and makes us unfit for God's usage. Clinging on to phrases out of old statements of faiths, to traditions, to perspectives and world views... is very much what religion [as opposed to dynamic spirituality] is all about.

Elijah laments Israel have broken the covenant, but he himself alone is faithful to it. Moses by contrast recognizes that Israel have broken covenant, but urges God to restore it, and to cancel his own salvation if Israel can't be saved- even refusing God's idea of making a new nation out of him. He alludes to Dt. 31:16,17 which predicted that when Israel broke covenant, Yahweh would be angry and hide His face from Israel. This is true- but he fails to have the spirit of Moses, who despite knowing this, sought to turn away God's wrath on the basis that he [Moses] was himself faithful and willing to sacrifice himself for Israel. This is all so foreign to Elijah; like some today, he was just grabbing on to bits of scripture which talk of judgment but not seeing the wider context. Despite all the nudges to see himself as Moses. God's response to Israel breaking covenant at the time of the golden calf was to renew the covenant, because of Moses' intercession. Whereas Elijah struggles with this and just wants God to destroy Israel, in line with His own statements about consequence for breaking covenant. But God Himself doesn't always follow those principles, because of His love and grace, and His bleeding heart for His people. Thus Ez. 16:59,60: "Yes, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath, breaking the covenant; yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant". His response to their breaking covenant was to make a new

one, just as He made another set of tables of the covenant- rather than just punishing them according to the agreed terms for breaking the covenant. Elijah wanted none of this, and wanted to focus only upon the consequences for sin.

Elijah simply identifies himself with God's more judgmental aspects and fails to have any love in him for Israel. It's all about himself. And this can be seen in so many legalistic believers. Visually and literally, God sought to correct Elijah by showing that He was not in the whirlwind, devouring fire and earthquake [all symbols of His judgment, and God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked], but in the still small voice, the "gentle whisper" (NIV), "the hush of a rush". The "sound of silence" is the idea- it is the absence of God's judgment which is in fact the message. We think of the silence as the Lord stands with the adulterous woman in John 8, no word of condemnation to the legally condemned. Or the sound of silence in Heaven in Rev. 8. Elijah interceded with God against Israel, Paul says. His unverbalized thoughts were counted as his prayer. But God's grace and gentleness triumph over His necessary judgment. There is no polemic against paganism as Elijah perhaps expected or hope for. No response to his prayer through some terrible statement of Divine judgment and vengeance against Israel. Just some sense that Yahweh was not "in" the symbols of judgment. His silence was the message. He was "in" that silence.

Sadly, it seems Elijah's failure here led Jonah to copy him, assuming that because Elijah had a legalistic attitude, focusing on God's judgment in isolation, therefore he could do so also. For he too requests to die when his mission ran out of highway, just as Elijah did.

Elijah's focus on Israel's sinfulness may have been tainted with the syndrome of pulling others down to make yourself look taller. He says repeatedly: "I have been very zealous for Yahweh... for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant... and I, even I only, am left". It's as if he felt that his zeal [s.w. "jealous"] was in the fact they were apostate and he wasn't. He did what Paul outlaws- comparing ourselves amongst ourselves. Both Obadiah and the widow of Zarephath felt that Elijah had come to bring their sins to rememberance. He exuded a sense of criticism of others. This is why so many of the religious reformer types, the hard liners of so many denominations and small time churches, have no awareness of their own sinfulness. His zeal for the Lord was, he reasoned, in being the only one left when they had all quit. And this basic mistake has hamstrung us- you are righteous, zealous, a defender of the Faith, if you merely hold on to a certain academic proposition of truth which others are rumoured or assumed to have apostatized from. Zeal for the Lord surely involves infinitely more than this. Elijah prayed his prayer from the cave mouth, protesting his own righteousness as he cowered before the glory of the Lord. Yet the same word occurs in Is. 2:12,13, where apostate Israel will hurl away their idols and then cower in a cleft / cave of the rock before the presence of Yahweh’s glory. The connection perhaps shows that although Elijah was so

proudly not an idolater, yet his pride and arrogance was essentially the same. On one hand Elijah may have gloried in the similarities between his position and that of Moses, when God's glory passed by him in the cleft of the rock; and yet Moses too was effectively being rebuked and humbled for his pride.

God tried to correct Elijah's despising of the other prophets of the Lord. Elijah was in a cave, and was also fed bread and water- just as the other prophets had been by Obadiah (1 Kings 18:4) whom he considered apostate. And yet Elijah didn't see, or didn't want to see, that connection- after having been reminded of this experience of the other prophets, he claims that "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:22)- he wrongly believed that all other valid prophets had been slain. In fact the record shows how that during Elijah's lifetime there were other prophets of Yahweh active in His service (1 Kings 20:13,35), as well as the schools of the prophets mentioned at the time, and the 100 prophets whom Obadiah hid. And yet the lesson is that God still works through the conceited, the spiritually superior, those who despise their brethren. God didn't give up on Elijah because he was like this, and neither should we give up in our relationship with such brethren.

Rom. 11:2,3 interprets this as Elijah actually interceding with God against Israel, asking for Him to destroy them all, apart from himself. This is a feature of many prayers: not to crudely, directly ask for the obvious; but to simply inform the Almighty of the situation, in faith. Examples include: Gen. 19:24; 2 Chron. 14:11; Ps. 3:1-4; 142:1,2; Jn. 11:21,22; Ps. 106:44 cp. Is. 64:3. Elijah's real motives were read, and understood as a prayer to God. And yet his ministry had been intended to reform Israel. But he just wants to see sinner judged. Therefore his ministry was removed from him.

1Ki 19:11 He said, Go out, and stand on the mountain before Yahweh. Behold, Yahweh passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before Yahweh; but Yahweh was not in the wind. After the wind an earthquake; but Yahweh was not in the earthquake-

The Angel tells Elijah to actually go and stand before the Lord and learn what it really meant to stand before the Lord, as he had said he did in 1 Kings 17:1; so he had to literally stand before the Angel as He passed by. Yet Elijah hid his face; he was no longer so happy to be before the Lord once he realized the humility and breaking in pieces of a proud man's spirit that it really implies.

The whole scene, with Yahweh passing by, is so reminiscent of Moses on Sinai. But when Yahweh passed by, Moses saw His back parts- the back parts of God Himself, as I have suggested on Ex. 34. But despite the external dramatics of a theophany, the earthquake, wind and fire- Yahweh was not seen by Elijah. That may be the idea of Yahweh not being "in" those things. He failed to have the spirit of Moses, he prayed against Israel rather than for Israel. Likewise Moses' request to see God was revealed as

inappropriaate- even greater than that, was realizing that the declaration of Yahweh's Name meant that His grace and forgiveness of the golden calf was more awesome than even seeing God physically. And so the parallels suggest that Elijah ascended Sinai of his own volition, wanting to see more of the wind and fire he had brought down on Carmel. But although the wind and fire do come, the point was that he didn't see God. But God's silence, "the hush of a rush", had a "sound" to it. The fact God isn't into showbiz, nor public exhibition of Himself, the very absence of all that... the silence, if you like... is in fact the message of Him. That He is about grace. He sent rain on Israel even though they were impenitent, and despite having said they would have no rain if they were idolatrous. Elijah had totally missed this point. He was asked in the silence to realize this.

When Elijah was told to go and stand upon mount Horeb [i.e. Sinai] before the Lord, this was evidently seeking to invite him to understand how Moses felt (Ex. 24:12; 34:12). Yet as noted on :9, he was being told that because he had not humbled himself as Moses, he could not be Moses. But he had potentially been set up as a new Moses, but he wasted the potential by his own pride. Consider the following parallels:
Confronted Ahab (1 Kings 17:1) - Confronted Pharaoh (Exod. 5:1)
Fled into the wilderness fearing for his life (1 Kings 19:3) - Fled into the wilderness fearing for his life (Exod. 2:15)
Miraculously fed "...bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening..." (1 Kings 17:6)-Miraculously fed "...meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning..." (Exod. 16:8, 12)
Spoke authoritatively for the Lord in his own name (1 Kings 17:1) - Spoke authoritatively for the Lord in his own name (Deut. 5:1)
Gathered all Israel to Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:19) - Gathered all Israel to Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:17)
Combated the prophets of Ba'al (1 Kings 18:20-40) - Combated the magicians of Pharaoh (Exod. 7:8-13, 20-22; 8:1-7)
Successful in his intercession for Israel to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (1 Kings 18:36-39) - Successful in his intercession for Israel to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Exod. 32:11-14)
Elijah took twelve stones at Carmel "...according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob..." (1 Kings 18:30-32) - Moses had twelve pillars set up at Sinai "...corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel..." (Exod. 24:4)
The Lord accepted Elijah's offering by sending fire from heaven and consuming it completely. The people threw themselves down on their faces. (1 Kings 18:36-39)- The Lord accepted Moses and Aaron's offering by sending fire from heaven and consuming it completely. The people threw themselves down on their faces. (Lev. 9:22-24)
By Elijah's authority 3 000 idolatrous prophets were slain (1 Kings 18:40) - By Moses' authority 3 000 idolaters were slain (Exod. 32:25-29)

After killing the prophets of Ba'al Elijah climbed Carmel to pray. (1 Kings 18:42) - After killing the idolaters Moses climbed Sinai to pray (Exod. 32:30)
Went without food for forty days and forty nights (1 Kings 19:8) - Went without food for forty days and forty nights (Exod. 34:38; Deut. 9:9)
Elijah (re)commissioned at Horeb (=Sinai) (1 Kings 19) - Moses commissioned at Sinai (Exod. 3)
Elijah was in "the cave" on Horeb (=Sinai) when the Lord "passed by" (1 Kings 19: 9-11) - Moses was hidden "in the cleft of the rock" when the Lord passed by Sinai. (Exod. 33:21-23)
Elijah saw storm, wind, an earthquake and fire upon Horeb (=Sinai). (1 Kings 19:11-12) - Moses saw storm, wind, an earthquake and fire upon Sinai. (Exod. 19:16-20; 20:18; Deut. 4:11; 5:22-27).
Prayed that he might die. (1 Kings 19:1-4) - Prayed that he might die. (Num. 11:10-15).
The Lord brought down fire from heaven upon his enemies. (2 Kings 1:9-12) - The Lord brought down fire from heaven upon those who rebelled against him. (Num. 16; cf. Lev. 10:1-3)
Elijah parted the waters of the Jordan by striking the waters with his cloak and passed over on dry ground. (2 Kings 2:8) - Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea by stretching out his staff and passed over on dry ground. (Exod. 14:16, 21-22)
His successor was one who had served him and came to resemble him in many ways, parting the waters of the Jordan as he had. (2 Kings 2) - His successor was one who had served him and came to resemble him in many ways, parting the waters of the Jordan as he had the Red Sea. (Josh. 3)
Was taken away in the Transjordan. (2 Kings 2:9-11) - Died in the Transjordan. (Deut. 34:5)
Mysteriously translated (2 Kings 9-18) - Died mysteriously and buried in a valley, but his burial place was unknown. (Deut. 34:6).

The point of these similarities was that the Angel wanted Elijah to be like Moses; to pray for the peoples' salvation, to return to the people and lead them and teach them. Moses had begged for God's mercy for His people; but Elijah was so full of self-justification that he prayed against Israel. And so with us, we are potentially led into situations where we are to discern the similarities between us and Bible characters; we are set up with opportunities to respond in a way that reflects how we have learnt the lessons from them. The way the Lord Jesus perceived this in His wilderness temptations is a great example. In 2 Kings 2:8, at the very end of his public ministry, he smites the waters of Jordan and they open for him to pass over on dry ground, just as Moses did. Perhaps he was trying still to assert himself as Moses; or maybe he had finally arrived at the required humility, and so was permitted to act as Moses. And that is why he is given a role parallel to Moses at the transfiguration.

When the Lord passed by, there was a whirlwind which broke “in pieces the rocks *before the Lord*” (1 Kings 19:11). Yet it was Elijah who described himself as the one who stood before the Lord- and even prided himself on this (1 Kings 17:1). He was the rock being broken in pieces by the display of God’s glory. And insofar as we too meditate upon the glory of His character, the attributes outlined in, e.g., Ex. 34:4-6, we likewise will be broken men and women. The “earthquake” is the same word found in Ez. 3:12,13 about a theophany / passing of the cherubim chariot. That whole display of God’s physical glory was intended to stop Elijah just repeating his prepared statement [he says the same thing 3 times]. Grasping the wonder of who God really and essentially is can and must shake us from the mediocrity of entrenched positions, of forms of expressing and understanding our faith which are mere set formulas... See on 1 Kings 21:29.

1Ki 19:12 After the earthquake a fire passed; but Yahweh was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice-
The way God "was not in" the fire, wind and earthquake make all this an empty theophany. God was very much in the fire and earthquake which accompanied the theophany Moses witnessed in the same place, to the extent Moses even saw His back parts. But just as Elijah was spiritually empty, having faith but no love which made him nothing, so he is being shown that he is not in fact the prophet like Moses. For he has not seen Yahweh's back parts, and Yahweh has not come down personally to him as He did to Moses.

God Almighty spoke to the man Elijah in a still [Heb. whispering] small [s.w. "thin" Lev. 13:30; "beaten small" Lev. 16:12; "dwarf" Lev. 21:20] voice. The awesome God of Sinai spoke in the whispering voice of a dwarf, which compared to Elijah’s loud voice. This is not only an essay in the humility of God. It is an essay in how God so earnestly seeks to persuade His children that He works in the small, humble way. And this is contrasted with the loud, booming voice and personality of Elijah. And it isn’t what God wants. Here there is a lesson for any loud mouthed, self-confident, razzamatazz way of presenting the Gospel; it just isn’t to be done. For this is not how God works.

The word was and is God. Dt. 4:12 [Heb.] says that Israel heard God's voice and saw no similitude *save* a voice. To hear the word is to in that sense see God; for the word was and is God. There are other connections between seeing God and hearing His word in Ex. 20:21 and 1 Kings 19:12-14. Observe the parallelism in 2 Chron. 20:20: "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper". Our attitude to God is our attitude to His word. Because the word is so pure, *therefore* we love it (Ps. 119:140). John Carter rightly observed: "Upon our understanding of what the Bible is, our attitude to it will be determined".

1Ki 19:13 It was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and

went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. Behold, a voice came to him, and said, Why are you still here, Elijah?-
"Still here" suggests Elijah should have repented of his pride, and realized that he was not like Moses, and should not be standing in "*the* cave" where Moses had stood. But Elijah insisted on still standing before Yahweh in his own strength. He wrapped *his face* [s.w. "before" the Lord] in his mantle and "stood" [s.w. 'stand' before the Lord] in the cave mouth before the Angel. In Hebrew, the words for 'face' and 'before' are the same. Too ashamed to really stand before the Lord, Elijah therefore wrapped his face. Earlier, he had been so keen to use this phrase of himself (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15); he had prided himself on the fact that he stood before the Lord. But now he hid his face, a common idiom often used by God for withholding fellowship. The fact we too are God's covenant people can initially be a source of pride to us as we do our theological gladiatorship with others. But the implications are so far deeper; and through Angelic work in our lives, we too are brought to see this.

The word for "mantle" is translated "glory" in Zech. 11:3; Elijah wrapped his presence in his own glory, rather than face up to the implications of God's glory. A desire for our own glory prevents us perceiving God's glory. Perhaps Elijah was being pseudo-humble, misquoting to himself a Biblical precedent in all this, namely that the cherubim wrapped their faces (Is. 6:2). In this case. Elijah was doing a false impersonation of the cherubim, manifesting himself before God's manifestation of Himself. Only at the very end does Elijah cast away his mantle (2 Kings 2:13), his human strength, allowing himself to merge with God's glory. He should have cast away his mantle earlier, when he stood before the still small voice on Horeb.

The question "Why are you still here, Elijah?" may imply that Elijah should have allowed himself to be carried away by the cherubim, he should have surrendered himself to the progress of God's glory, rather than so obsessively insist upon his own personal rightness and the wrongness of others. And this was why God's ultimate response to Elijah's attitude on Horeb was to dismiss him from his prophetic ministry and instate Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:16). Elijah seems to have finally learnt his lesson, for he calls Elisha to the ministry by 'passing by' Elisha as in a theophany, taking off his mantle and throwing it upon Elisha (1 Kings 19:19). He realized that he had hidden behind that mantle, using it to resist participating in the selfless association with God's glory [rather than his own] to which he was called. But he got there in the end; hence the enormous significance of Elijah giving up his mantle when he finally ascends to Heaven in the cherubim chariot (2 Kings 2:13).

The question implies that it was wrong for Elijah to have been still in the cave of Moses on Horeb / Sinai. He ought to have realized he was not Moses now, his pride had precluded it. It seems from 1 Kings 19:8 that he himself chose to go there; dwelling in a

cleft / cave of the rock is reminiscent of Moses in Sinai in Ex. 34. But Moses was praying for Israel, whereas Elijah was interceding against them, Paul tells us (Rom. 11:2,3). Could it even be that Elijah went down there to Sinai with the idea of somehow asking that a new Israel be formed out of him, as God had offered Moses? Whether this be so or not, the clear implication is that God was not pleased with what Elijah was doing there. When asked what he was doing, he just repeats verbatim his prayer of intercession against Israel. So on one hand, he shouldn't have been praying that prayer. On the other, he was heard- for God's response is to tell him to anoint Jehu, Hazael and Elisha to destroy apostate Israel, even though He would preserve the 7,000 remnant. So again we see the same theme with Elijah- his undoubted faith in prayer is recognized; he prays for judgment on Israel in a way that is not altogether wrong, and yet sadly differs from the higher spirit of grace which there is in Christ.

Elijah's wrapping of his face in a mantle may have been to consciously imitate Moses, who covered his face from the glory of Yahweh and also covered or hid his face at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6). But again, Elijah is imitiating Moses only a surface level. He has no sense of relationship with God nor growth in that relationship; he merely repeats his position statements three times before God, rather like reciting a statement of faith to God rather than dialoguing with him.

Elijah clearly assumed he would get a physical view of God as Moses did, but was disappointed. This desire to see God is relevant to the context of his life. For some years previously, Jeroboam had set up the golden calves with their implicit claim that Yahweh was invisible. W. F. Albright explains: “Jeroboam represented Yahweh as an invisible figure standing on a young bull of gold. It is true that the golden calves have been assumed by most scholars to have been direct representations of Yahweh as bull-god, but this gross conception is not only otherwise unparalleled in biblical tradition, but is contrary to all we know of SyroPalestinian iconography in the second and early first millennium B.C. Among the Canaanites, Arameans, and Hittites we find the gods nearly always represented as standing on the back of an animal or as seated on a throne borne by animals—but never as themselves in animal form” (From the Stone Age to Christianity p. 299).

1Ki 19:14 He said, I have been very zealous for Yahweh, the God of Armies; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down your altars and slain Your prophets with the sword. I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away-
He laments that Israel had “thrown down” Yahweh’s altars, perhaps pointing the contrast with the way he threw himself down in prayer to Yahweh. The same word is used in Ex. 23:24 about throwing down pagan altars. Elijah was saying that they treated Yahweh’s altars as if they were pagan. But is there any evidence they ever rejected Yahweh like this? Is not Elijah imputing motives to them? Derelict altars of Yahweh- the

“high places” which they were repeatedly criticized for- Elijah interpreted as thrown down. To throw them down was a good thing if done from the right motives. But Elijah was in a mindset of seeing and imagining the very worst of his brethren.

The triumph on Carmel involved making an offering on an altar of Yahweh which was in one of the “high places” (1 Kings 18:30)- whereas Israel were repeatedly criticized for offering on these “high places” and not in Jerusalem. Elijah even criticizes Israel for throwing down these “high places” altars of Yahweh (1 Kings 19:10,14). Surely Elijah knew that the use of the high places was not what Yahweh ideally wanted; and yet he was driven to use a high place in this way. And with us, God will work through circumstances to remove from us the crutches of mere religion, to challenge the essence of our faith and relationship with Him. The way Ezekiel had to eat unclean food and defile himself is another such example.

1Ki 19:15 Yahweh said to him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria-
God was indeed going to judge Israel, but not by such a judgmental, angry, bitter person like Elijah. And even now, Elijah doesn't actually do what he is told; he doesn't anoint Jehu nor Hazael to destroy Israel (2 Kings 9:3). It's hard to decide whether this was disobedience or rather an awkward realization that he had been praying with too harsh a spirit for something that would have been best left to God. It's such a warning. It is interesting to compare Elijah's attitude with how Elisha weeps tears over Hazael, knowing how much damage he is going to do to Israel in response to Elijah's prayer (2 Kings 8:12).

1Ki 19:16 You shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah to be prophet in your place-
Remember that Elijah considered that he alone was faithful in Israel. If he knew Elisha or Shaphat (and the immediate response of :19 suggests he did), he would likely have wanted to protest 'But he's not sincere, his dad's not a genuine believer, it's all just words with him!', or something similar. But he was being taught that those whom he had written off spiritually, such as Obadiah and the Gentile widow, were in fact just as much God's children as he was. We note that Elijah is not recorded as anointing any of these men.

It appears Elijah never obeyed the command to anoint Elisha as his replacement. It was Elisha and not Elijah who does the job of appointing Hazael king of Syria; it is Elisha's servant who anoints Jehu, not Elijah. And the anointings of Jehu and Hazael were done covertly, not openly, at a time when the ruling monarchs related to those men were weak or sick. Elijah appears to grudgingly accept God's decision by casting his mantle on Elisha, but never anoints him. It's as if he doesn't put the oil of the Spirit on Elisha's

head, but rather thinks that his distinctive personal mantle was enough to put on Elisha's head, thinking that was better than the Spirit. We see here the pride which always doggs conservative religion. A hairy mantle was a sign of being a prophet- hence 2 Kings 1:8 RV, where Elijah is described as "a man with a garment of skin"(Heb.). And we learn from Zech. 13:4 that a hairy mantle was a sign of a prophet. So Elijah didn't use the oil of the Spirit on Elisha but rather his own personal symbol of office. And Elijah only does this when he is forcibly snatched away from his ministry, as if in a begrudging and limited act of obedience to this message to anoint Elisha with oil. He leaves it to the last minute, rather than immediately going and doing as he was told and humbly anointing Elisha.

1Ki 19:17 It shall happen, that he who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and he who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill-
This was largely a prophesy of potentials. There is no record that Elijah anointed Hazael nor Jehu; nor that Elisha killed anyone. It was a potential scenario, perhaps precluded from the start by Elijah's refusal to be obedient to the command to anoint Hazael and Jehu. Perhaps he finally realized that he had been far too judgmental, and didn't want more judgment to flow. And he recognized his unworthiness and failure in his ministry by anointing Elisha to replace him.

1 Kings 21 states that the death of Joram at Jehu's hand was "in accordance with the word of the LORD". Likewise the murder of Ahab's 70 sons is stated to be an explicit fulfilment of Yahweh's word here "through His servant Elijah" (2 Kings 10:10,17 cp. 1 Kings 21:21). But the "through" begs many questions. Elijah maybe repeated these words- but failed to anoint Jehu to do the job as requested. Or maybe the idea is that God's word still finally comes true despite human failure, as we have here on Elijah's part.

So God's word through Elijah was fulfilled, but not through the initially intended mechanism- that Elijah would anoint Jehu. Actually he didn't, Elisha took on the job but got his servant to do it- who nervously ran off after doing it. But still God's word came true- although the path to fulfilment of it varied in accordance with human weakness and, as it were, availability to God. This explains why and how prophecies have varying fulfilments but always somehow come true in the end.

We note too from Hos. 1:4 that God punished Jehu for what he did- presumably because he did it from the wrong motives, i.e. his own blood lust and desire for personal agrandisement: "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu".

1Ki 19:18 Yet will I leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to

Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him-
Elijah, as many an isolated preacher, felt that he alone was faithful. Yet he was reminded that Yahweh had left Himself 7,000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal. It is easy to assume that this means that those 7,000 were out there in Israel but unknown to Elijah. However it is possible to read the Hebrew text as meaning 'I have marked off 7,000 potentially, now Elijah, stop moaning, go out there and find them and convert them'. This would be why Elijah prayed that the people would see that God had already turned their heart back (1 Kings 18:37)- He had potentially enabled their conversion. Something similar may be hinted at in Jn. 1:7, where we read that all of Israel could have believed due to the work of John. It was potentially possible.

The Hebrew for "left" can imply that God had preserved potentially the 7,000- or, that there simply were 7,000 faithful right then in Israel. Faithfulness to Yahweh was itself a gift, just as faith is a gift which not all men have; "all men have not faith… it is the gift of God… not of yourselves". Elijah was being taught that his own faith was in a sense also a gift from God. Hence Rom. 11:4-6 says that the 7000 represent the remnant according to *grace*; they were faithful because of God's grace to them. Yet Elijah clearly discounted them. The more God sought to teach Elijah that he really was not alone, that his view of others was far too dismissive, the more Elijah became almost bitter with God. The conversion of Israel on Carmel turned out, I suggest, a surprise for Elijah. He wasn't expecting them to start chanting "El is Yah", "The Lord, He is the God". They were chanting his name- Elijah. But he turns and runs to Jezreel, and then goes out into the desert and becomes suicidal. Effectively he preferred the life of the lonely spiritual hero, with the people in apostasy; and there are many such examples of brethren who prefer a life of self-imposed exile because of the supposed errors of God's people- no matter what good there is amongst their brethren. And actually, deny it as we may, we all have an element of this deep within us.

There is such a thing as feeling lonely when we needn't. Elijah is an example of this; he felt that he was "left alone" faithful in Israel- even though there were another 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal (Rom. 11:3). The Hebrew in 1 Kings is hard to translate. It could mean that God reserved 7,000 of Elijah's brothers and sisters who potentially would not bow the knee to Baal. Yet Elijah didn't want to see the potential of his brethren. He set himself in a league above them, like the Psalmist, saying in his haste that all men are liars (Ps. 116:11).

The one hundred prophets of 1 Kings 18:4 were presumably part of the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. And maybe they weren't that strong- they are set up as representative of those who will only be saved by grace, not their works (Rom. 11:4-6). But, by implication, Elijah, for all his love of Israel, did not look upon them through the eyes of grace. Elijah insisted that he alone was "left"; yet God says that He has "left"

Himself the 7,000 (1 Kings 19:18). The preservation of the people of God, or 'the truth', can be done, and *is* done, by God Himself; yet the likes of Elijah consider that it is *they* who 'preserve the truth'. Again, Elijah had to learn that we are all saved by grace. God will leave for and to Himself His people, without requiring the help of man. Elijah struggled with this issue of accepting others and not thinking he was the only one who could do the job right up to the end of his ministry; for he ascends to Heaven clutching his mantle, the sign of his prophetic ministry. It seems to me that he took it with him because he felt that not even Elisha was really fit to do the job and take his place; but perhaps in what were possibly the last seconds of his mortal life, he learnt his lesson and let go of it, allowing it to fall to the earth to let another man take it up.

Some manuscripts and LXX say that Elijah was leaving 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal, which would imply that his ministry was being ended because he had not ministered to them. He had considered them apostate and himself as the only true Yahweh worshipper left in the land. This is a powerful warning to the tendency toward spiritual elitism which seems such a common human temptation.

1Ki 19:19 So he departed to there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing, with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed over to him, and threw his mantle on him-
God's rejection of Elijah as prophet was because he didn't recognize his brethren. See on :13. Perhaps the 12 yoke was to keep alive the prophetic hope that Judah and Israel would be united in repentance toward the prophetic message. Elijah had built an altar of 12 stones and offered an acceptable sin offering upon it, speaking of the same prophetic intention. Elijah apparently didn't anoint Hazael and Jehu as commanded; but he did give his ministry over to Elisha to replace him. I take that as humility from him, in the very end, although too late for God to continue to use him in ministry as initially intended.

However, "twelve yoke of oxen" could refer to an area of land known as a twelve yoke, or to 12 parcels of land.

1Ki 19:20 He left the oxen, and ran after Elijah-
Possibly implying that Elijah walked on immediately, as a test as to whether Elisha would respond immediately. Immediate response, "yes straight away", is what God so looks for. We see it in the call of the disciples. However in practice we sense a half hearted desire on Elijah's part for Elisha to follow him. He doesn't want to be replaced as God had commanded. He calls him and just walks away rather than trying to persuade him.

And said, Let me please kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you. He said to him, Go back again; for what have I done to you?-
See on :16. The Lord Jesus makes an allusion here when He says that if anyone wants to follow Him but firstly must go home, then such a person is unworthy of Him (Lk. 9:61,62). He shows by this that He expects more of us than Elijah did; He is a more demanding Lord than Elijah, precisely because He is the more gracious. Elijah allowed him to return home first; "for what have I done to you?" is hard to understand, but it seems to mean to the effect that 'I am not myself being unreasonable; this call is not of me, I have not done this to you, but God has by calling you'. There could be there a possible hint of bitterness at his replacement by Elisha; see on :16. There is no record that Elijah ever anointed Elisha as he was commanded to. We could even interpret these enigmatic words as Elijah telling Elisha to return home and not follow Elijah. LXX "Return, for I have done the work for you" encourages us in thinking that. All this is a studied refusal to do as God has told him, and let Elisha take his place.

1Ki 19:21 He returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, killed them and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave to the people and they ate. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and served him-
We have here an example of servant leadership. He had been given Elijah's mantle already (:19) and presumably Elijah had explained to him the Lord's word about transferring the ministry to Elisha. But Elisha begins by serving Elijah (2 Kings 3:11 implies in quite a menial way). His destruction of so many oxen and their yoke was really burning all his bridges to return home. His family may well have seen it as an unnecessary waste, as that may have represented a large part of their family wealth.

Elijah was told to replace himself with Elisha, but it seems he only called Elisha to be his servant and didn't anoint him as asked. Hence the section finishes with the comment that Elisha served him. That was not at all what God asked of Elijah. His taking up and snatching away was God forcing him to end his ministry; Elisha was told that Yahweh would take away his master from above his head, indicating Elijah was in the role of Elisha's master [and Elisha was his servant] right up to the moment he was carried away in the whirlwind. Taken away from above his head (2 Kings 2:3 "Yahweh will take away your master from your head today") is a strange phrase. Perhaps it indicates that Elijah was forcibly removed from having Elisha as his servant, and the way Elijah refused to relinquish his role was displeasing to God. But we note how in the gap between being fires from his ministry and being forcibly stopped from continuing it, God graciously still used him.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 20

1Ki 20:1 Ben Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his army together; and there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and fought against it-
Josephus and the LXX have chapters 20 and 21 the opposite way around. This could be the same Benhadad who 14 years ago had made a treaty with Asa of Judah and had attacked the ten tribes during Baasha's rule. The 32 kings would have been the rulers of the provinces and areas which were then under the control of Benhadad.

1Ki 20:2 He sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said to him, Thus says Ben Hadad-
An example of the Hebrew word *malak* meaning simply "messengers". It is elsewhere translated "messenger", such as here. The word can therefore be used about human beings, who can sin. But the Angels as in the Divine beings cannot sin as they all have God's nature, and there is no rebellion or division in Heaven.

1Ki 20:3 'Your silver and your gold is mine. Your wives also and your children, even the best, are mine'-
This was an intentional humiliation of Ahab. To agree to give a man your wealth, wives and children was to admit total failure as a man to protect yourself. Many men would have preferred to die fighting rather than agree. The strange sequence of events here can too easily be read as a reflection of Ahab's weak character. But in fact they were designed to humble him For humility is of such value to God, and the whole story of the weak Ahab ends up with him doing the most amazing, bravest thing which most men who have ever lived would have flinched at and failed: Ahab the weak became strong in that he repented, and will, it seems, be saved eternally because of it. That is the end product in view, and must be remembered as we read this chapter with the strange turns of fortune and event.

1Ki 20:4 The king of Israel answered, It is according to your saying, my lord, O king. I am yours, and all that I have-
As noted on :3, this was an incredible reflection of weakness of character. Ahab had not met Benhadad in the field in battle, and now he was surrounded, he refuses to accept what is surely an invitation to come out and fight. For that is what that kind of insulting demand was intended to elicit. But Ahab just agrees.

1Ki 20:5 The messengers came again and said, Ben Hadad says, 'I sent indeed to you, saying, You shall deliver me your silver, and your gold, and your wives, and your children-
Benhadad wanted to provoke Ahab to come out and fight. He did this by making an insulting demand, which in Semitic terms was not intended to be taken literally. But Ahab does take it literally, and he agrees.

1Ki 20:6 but I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house, and the houses of your servants; and it shall be, that whatever is pleasant in your eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away'-
As noted on :3, the whole purpose of this situation was to humble Ahab and force him to grow up and take personal responsibility. The demand to come out and fight is now made again, seeing Ahab had taken literally the insulting demand of :4 and had agreed

to it. So now an even more insulting demand is made. Ahab would take any humiliation rather than fighting and trusting in God to save him. So he had to be humbled yet more.

1Ki 20:7 Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, Please notice how this man seeks mischief; for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, my gold; and I didn't deny him-
Benhadad "sought mischief" by demanding his wealth and family. Ahab makes out that this was a demand he could agree to for the sake of avoiding war. But clearly the insulting demand to take absolutely everything from everybody was tantamount to declaring an invasion of the city.

1Ki 20:8 All the elders and all the people said to him, Don't listen, neither consent-
"Listen and consent" is a phrase used of how Israel were to listen and consent to God, and they would be punished for not doing so (Lev. 26:21; Dt. 13:8; Is. 1:19; 28:12; 30:9 etc.). The phrase must have got Ahab thinking. And that was the intention of these events.

1Ki 20:9 Therefore he said to the messengers of Ben Hadad, Tell my lord the king, 'All that you sent for to your servant at the first I will do; but this thing I cannot do'. The messengers departed, and delivered the message-
The second demand was tantamount to declaring an invasion and sacking of the city. There was no way Ahab could agree. As explained on :3, the whole series of events was to bring him to humility and taking personal responsibility, and it did finally work- for he repented at the end of his life.

1Ki 20:10 Ben Hadad sent to him and said, The gods do so to me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me-
The second demand was indeed tantamount to saying that the city was going to be sacked, and even the dust of it taken away.

1Ki 20:11 The king of Israel answered, Tell him, 'Don't let him who puts on his armour brag like he who takes it off'-
LXX "let not the humpbacked boast as he that is upright". This was a statement of confidence, and we wonder where Ahab got that confidence from, seeing he had just recently agreed to the humiliating demand to surrender his wives, children and wealth. He had no military strength, so we wonder whether, as intended, he was beginning to have a personal faith in Yahweh. For He alone would help in this situation.

1Ki 20:12 It happened, when Ben Hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings, in the pavilions, that he said to his servants, Prepare to attack! They prepared to attack the city-
Benhadad comes over as an overconfident drunkard, leading from the rear. Sometimes God apparently supports the lesser of two sinners because He wishes to judge pride and fleshly confidence more than anything else. But that doesn't thereby justify the lesser sinner, Ahab in this case.

1Ki 20:13 Behold, a prophet came near to Ahab king of Israel and said-
The prophet is not named. If indeed 1 Kings 21 is before this incident (see on :1), it surely would have been noted if it were Elijah. Perhaps the point is that Elijah was so

wrong to arrogantly claim that he was the only prophet of Yahweh left. There were others, such as this anonymous prophet, and the schools of the prophets mentioned in 2 Kings. Not to mention the 100 prophets Obadiah had hidden in a cave.

Thus says Yahweh, 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand this day; and you shall know that I am Yahweh'-

As explained on :3, the intention of this series of events was to bring Ahab to Yahweh. And finally, it worked. It is a parade example of how we should never give up with those who apparently have no interest in the ways of God. The victory was given by God's grace and not because of Ahab's faith or spirituality. And thereby he came to "know Yahweh", for the essence of Yahweh is His grace in giving undeserved favour. For Ahab was indeed ripe for judgment, and Benhadad appeared the logical person to use for that.

1Ki 20:14 Ahab said, By whom? He said, Thus says Yahweh, 'By the young men of the princes of the provinces'. Then he said, Who shall begin the battle? He answered, You-

Part of the purpose of these events was to bring Ahab to greater personal responsibility, rather than living the life of an overgrown pampered adolescent, born into wealth and rulership, with a dominant wife who arranged everything for him. And so he was told that he was to lead off the battle; he who had no military experience and was clearly a coward by nature. The object of all this was that Ahab would "know Yahweh" (:13). So God was showing what He was like in that the victory was to be won by "young men" from the provinces, and by a cowardly king with no military experience.

1Ki 20:15 Then he mustered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty-two. After them, he mustered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand-

"Thousand" may not mean a literal 1000, but rather a division or regiment. But they were not used in the initial conflict. Just 232 young men were the vanguard of the Israelite attack. And they were followed by the army (:19), who only played a role in pursuing the much larger Syrian army once the 232 young men had won the battle and turned them to flight. As explained on :14, the purpose of this was that Ahab would "know Yahweh", the God who saves by the weak, the young, the inexperienced; because grace and humility are foremost in the things He values, and which comprise His Name.

1Ki 20:16 They went out at noon. But Ben Hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty-two kings who helped him-

Battles were usually won by lightning strikes at night or dawn. To attack at noon continues the theme discussed on :15; God was granting this victory by grace, when everything was very weak on the Israelite side, in secular terms. As it happened, noon was no bad time to attack in this case because Benhadad and all the leaders of the Syrian army were drunk.

1Ki 20:17 The young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben Hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, Men are coming out from Samaria-

LXX "sons of the leaders". We get the impression that the leaders of the Syrian army were too drunk and distant to really be leaders, and the leaders of Israel feared to fight themselves, with Ahab their king a weak minded coward.

1Ki 20:18 He said, If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive-
The arrogance of Benhadad is clear. He assumed that his soldiers could easily capture alive 232 young men. As noted on :12, sometimes God apparently supports the lesser of two sinners because He wishes to judge pride and fleshly confidence more than anything else.

1Ki 20:19 So these went out of the city, the young men of the princes of the provinces, and the army which followed them-
As explained on :15, it was the 232 young men who won the battle. The army which followed them played no role in the victory apart from to chase the fleeing Syrians. The idea was that cowardly Ahab, a king with no military experience, should march at the front of those young men. For he was to 'lead forth' the battle (see on :14). There is no record that he did as he was asked; he only "went out" after the young men had won the battle (:21).

1Ki 20:20 They each killed his opponent. The Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them. Ben Hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with horsemen-
As with the duel between David and Goliath, the idea may have been that these young men fought the Syrian young men, as also seen in 2 Sam. 2:14. Each of those young Israelites killed the man they were given to fight.

1Ki 20:21 The king of Israel went out, and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter-
Ahab was to 'lead forth' the battle (see on :14), at the head of the 232 young men. But it seems he didn't; he only "went out" once the battle had been won, to lead the chase. The point of it all was to make him realize that he, the coward, had been given a great victory and had gone down as a king who won a battle against great odds. This was all by the grace of the Yahweh whom he had so resisted. And so through this grace he came to "know Yahweh" (:13). They destroyed very many horses and chariots (:25). Ahab loved horses, for he personally had gone around Israel during the drought seeking for fodder for them. For him, the worst thing about the drought was the damage done to his horses. So we wonder why the horses were "struck" or destroyed (:25). Was it not because he knew that the king of Israel should not have horses and chariots, and he wished to follow Joshua's example in destroying them when he captured them (Josh. 11:6)? We see the beginnings of faith and response, as intended.

1Ki 20:22 The prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, Go, strengthen yourself, and mark, and see what you do; for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against you-
For "the prophet", see on :13. The repeat of the situation was because as discussed on :3, these events were carefully designed to develop Ahab's faith, humility and sense of personal responsibility. "See what *you* do" is a phrase often used about seeing what *God* does or works (Ex. 6:1; 14:31; Num. 14:22; Dt. 4:3; 11:7 and often). Perhaps he was to take the hint that he would only win again if he recognized that God would work through him. Ahab was also being led to self awareness, personal responsibility and forward planning, rather than just leaving it all to Jezebel and living his life as he pleased.

1Ki 20:23 The servants of the king of Syria said to him, Their god is a god of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they-
Their impression was perhaps because of Israel's tendency to worship Yahweh on the "high places", mixing idolatry with Yahweh worship. Again, as noted on :12, there are times when God may apparently give blessing or victory to one side in a conflict because the other side is so blasphemous. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the winning side, Ahab in this case, are right before Him. He even considered sparing Israel from destruction in the desert because of what the nations would say about Him and His people.

1Ki 20:24 Do this thing: take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their place-
This was a tacit recognition that no army can achieve victory if it is led by political rather than military leaders, who get drunk at the rear during a battle.

1Ki 20:25 Muster an army, like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot. We will fight against them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than them. He listened to their voice, and did so-
We see here the great extent of the first Israelite victory, involving destroying many horses and chariots. See on :21 for the significance of this.

1Ki 20:26 It happened at the return of the year, that Ben Hadad mustered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel-
"Aphek" means 'strength', and the Syrians were determined to "be stronger than them" (:25), and Ahab had been told to make himself strong for this battle (:22). It was all about strength, and the purpose of the battle was to make Ahab trust in God's strength; for he was clearly weaker than Benhadad.

1Ki 20:27 The children of Israel were mustered and were provisioned, and went against them. The children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of young goats; but the Syrians filled the country-
The Israelites seemed doomed to destruction. They were outnumbered, and are described as goats and not sheep; for they were condemned before God. So again, the lesson was to be of salvation by grace, when they didn't deserve it; so as to teach Ahab to "know Yahweh" (:28), to see what He was really like, and His grace is His lead characteristic.

1Ki 20:28 A man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, Thus says Yahweh, 'Because the Syrians have said, Yahweh is a god of the hills, but He is not a god of the valleys; therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am Yahweh'-
This "man of God" would appear to be a different one from the prophet who previously came to Ahab. Again the point is being made that Elijah was so wrong in assuming he was the only true prophet of Yahweh. There were others, and he was wrong to consider each of them to be astray on some point or other, and he alone right before Yahweh. The phrase "I will deliver this multitude into your hand" is a quotation from Jud. 4:7, where again a spiritually weak Israel, led by a woman [perceived as weak] were given victory over Sisera. And if Ahab had thought about it,

he would have noticed that this victory was at the river Kishon, the place where Elijah had slain his prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40).

Although unrecorded, it is an inference of :42 that at this time the prophet of Yahweh had told Ahab to destroy Benhadad.

1Ki 20:29 They encamped opposite one another seven days. So it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined; and the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand footmen of the Syrians in one day-

"Thousand" often doesn't mean 1000, but refers instead to regiments or military divisions. The seven day period would have been a time for Ahab to consider how weak Israel were, as nothing before the hugely superior forces of Syria (:27). The camping opposite each other was to recall the situation with David and Goliath. Ahab was being humbled, and made to trust in God's strength (see on :3).

1Ki 20:30 But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and the wall fell on twenty-seven thousand men who were left. Ben Hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner room-

Again, "thousand" may refer to some kind of military division. The battles of Israel often feature some supernatural element behind their total victory, and that was intended to teach them that the victory was of God's grace and not solely their own bravery, tactics or strength. And surely in this case, this again was intended as part of Ahab's spiritual education.

There is a connection between Benhadad going into an inner room to hide when Ahab was given victory against him (1 Kings 20:30), and the false prophet Zedekiah going into an inner room to hide when Ahab was defeated (1 Kings 22:25). The same Hebrew words are used, and the connection becomes more apparent if we accept that 1 Kings 20 and 21 should be placed the other way around, as in LXX. This would mean that the hiding of Benhadad is recorded just a short time before that of Zedekiah. The connection would be to show that the false prophets were in fact bracketed together by God with Israel's enemies; whereas they had claimed that they were nationalists on Israel's side, proclaiming Israel's certain victory against their enemies. God sees not as man sees, and the real spiritual realities are often the very opposite of what appears. See on :31.

1Ki 20:31 His servants said to him-

The very men who had advised and urged Benhadad to go into this battle (:23). The situation repeats in the context of Israel when the false prophet Zedekiah predicts Israel's victory and is proven wrong (1 Kings 22:25).

See now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Please let us put sackcloth on our bodies, and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel. Maybe he will save your life-

None of the kings of Israel are recorded as being particularly spiritual. But they apparently had a reputation for being merciful. Something of God's grace had rubbed off upon them.

1Ki 20:32 So they put sackcloth on their bodies and ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Your servant Ben Hadad says, 'Please let me live'. He said, Is he still alive? He is my brother-

Ahab had still not been humbled as intended; see on :3. For suddenly (and probably unexpectedly) being placed in such a position of power and glory, he acts in pride.

The fawning of a powerful king before him led him to play God, assuming he could give life to those whom God had commanded to be slain. Although unrecorded, it is an inference of :42 that the prophet of Yahweh had told Ahab to destroy Benhadad. And now Ahab repeats the sin of Saul concerning Amalek, and allows him to live.

1Ki 20:33 Now the men observed diligently, and hurried to take this phrase; and they said, Your brother Ben Hadad. Then he said, Go, bring him. Then Ben Hadad came out to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot-
This was indeed merciful and gracious in a secular sense, but it was not the grace of God. We must note that difference, between grace in a secular sense and in a Divine sense. Ahab was condemned for not destroying Benhadad.

1Ki 20:34 Ben Hadad said to him, The cities which my father took from your father I will restore-
If these are the cities of 1 Kings 15:20, then they were taken from Baasha, who was not any relative of Ahab. Perhaps Benhadad uses the term "father" as meaning a previous king.

You shall make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. I, said Ahab, will let you go with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and let him go-
These streets would likely have been dedicated to the gods of Syria, whom the Israelites worshipped. Ahab agrees to the offer. But what names, then, was he to give the streets of Damascus? They were to be named after the gods of Israel. If Ahab named them after the gods Israel worshipped, then the names wouldn't have been changed at all. For Israel worshipped the Syrian gods. So Ahab was forced to assume that he would have to name the streets of Samaria after Yahweh. Israel only had one true God- Yahweh. So as "streets" in the plural were to be named after Israel's gods- what were they to be called, seeing Israel had only one national Deity? These practical questions were designed to bring Ahab to acceptance of Yahweh as Israel's only God.

1Ki 20:35 A certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow by the word of Yahweh, Please strike me! The man refused to strike him-
Again the point is made that Elijah was so wrong in thinking that he was the only prophet of Yahweh. The record shows how that during Elijah’s lifetime there were other prophets of Yahweh active in His service (1 Kings 20:13,35). And yet the lesson is that God still works through the conceited, the spiritually superior, those who despise their brethren. God didn’t give up on Elijah because he was like this, and neither should we give up in our relationship with such brethren.

1Ki 20:36 Then he said to him, Because you have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, behold, as soon as you are departed from me, a lion shall kill you. As soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and killed him-
The message was that God's word must be obeyed, even if it seems utterly counter instinctive to us. We are not to assume that we know better. It is all leading up to how Ahab is to be condemned for refusing to slay Benhadad. The use of a lion to kill him connects with how the prophet of Judah in 1 Kings 13 was slain by a lion for not being strictly obedient to God's word not to eat or return by the way he had come.

1Ki 20:37 Then he found another man, and said, Please strike me. The man struck

him, smiting and wounding him-
Maybe we are intended to infer that the slaying of the first prophet by a lion encouraged this prophet to zealously obey what he was commanded. But Ahab surely knew the story of 1 Kings 13. A man had been slain by a lion for lack of careful obedience to God's word. He should have known from this that he must be carefully obedient.

1Ki 20:38 So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way-
He was the equivalent of the lion meeting the first prophet by the way. The prophetic word of future death was as powerful as death.

And disguised himself with his headband over his eyes-
The idea is of a bandage over his eyes (LXX), which also served to hide his face from Ahab, who apparently would have otherwise recognized him; see on :41.

1Ki 20:39 As the king passed by, he cried to the king; and he said, Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man to me and said, 'Guard this man! If by any means he be missing, then your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver'-
The implication is that Ahab had been told beforehand that he must destroy Ahab, or else lose his life. Although see on :42 for another possibility. We note in this story that the man had to either give his life, or pay a talent of silver. Possibly there is here the hint that Ahab need not die for what he had done, but could somehow be redeemed from it- by repentance. But we simply learn that he went home depressed because of his judgment (:43), with no thought as to repentance.

1Ki 20:40 As your servant was busy here and there, he was gone. The king of Israel said to him, So your judgment shall be; you yourself have decided it-
Ahab's sin was in fact also his own judgment. For he was to meet his death fighting the Syrians in 1 Kings 22. If he had slain Benhadad, this situation would not have occurred. It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, judged by their own words, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips [in this life] shall have destruction" at judgment day (Prov. 13:3).

1Ki 20:41 He hurried, and took the headband away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized that he was of the prophets-
This implies that the prophets were known to Ahab because they risked death at the hands of Jezebel by witnessing to him; as Elijah did. But Elijah obviously considered them all to be somehow insincere and fake, because he proudly considered himself the only prophet of Yahweh.

1Ki 20:42 He said to him, Thus says Yahweh, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people'-

Ahab's sin was in fact his own judgment. For he was to meet his death fighting the Syrians in 1 Kings 22. If he had slain Benhadad, this situation would not have occurred.

Ahab was rebuked for not killing Benhadad, in obedience to God's command (1 Kings 20:35,42). But it could be argued that Ahab is not recorded as ever having been told to do this. What he had been told was that Yahweh would deliver the Syrians into his hand (:28). Presumably, God expected Ahab to infer from this that he should kill Benhadad; and rebuked him for his lack of perception, just as Jesus rebuked the disciples after the resurrection. The New Testament also has examples of our being expected to deduce things which at first glance we might find somewhat demanding. 1 Cor. 14:21 rebukes the Corinthians for speaking to each other in languages which their brethren didn't understand. Paul considered that they were immature in their understanding because they hadn't perceived that Is. 28:11,12 states that it will be the Gentile non-believers who will speak to God's people in a language they don't understand.

1Ki 20:43 The king of Israel went to his house sullen and angry, and came to Samaria-

See on :39. The character portrayal of Ahab is consistent, as we would expect from a Divinely inspired record. There is a clear connection with how he "came into his house sullen and angry" because Naboth would not sell him his vineyard (1 Kings 21:4). We get the impression of an overgrown spoilt child. He sulked over Naboth's vineyard because he wasn't obedient to God's word. And in 1 Kings 20:43 again Ahab "went to his house sullen and angry" because he was condemned for not having obeyed God's word. The LXX puts 1 Kings 20 and 21 the other way around. The experience with Naboth was intended to teach him obedience to God's word. He failed, so he "went to his house sullen and angry". He didn't learn from that lesson. And so he does the same again, when he fails to be obedient on an even more significant level.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 21

1Ki 21:1 It happened after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, right next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria-

Josephus and the LXX have chapters 20 and 21 the opposite way around. It was Ahab's incredibly selfish behaviour over the vineyard which led to the judgment at the hand of the Syrians described in 1 Kings 20. "The Jezreelite... in Jezreel" emphasizes how Naboth was part of the land he lived upon. It was his because he was from Jezreel.

We note throughout the similarities with David's sin against Uriah over Bathsheba in 2 Sam. 11. David likewise was in the king's house when he covets that which belongs to his neighbour (2 Sam. 11:2). He tries to get Bathsheba by offering Uriah a "present"- "there followed him a present from the king" (2 Sam. 11:8). Uriah's "I will not do this thing" (2 Sam. 11:11) matches Naboth's refusal. David summons Uriah and makes him eat and drink, just as it seems there was some kind of feast when Naboth was set on high amongst the people. David's plan to set up Uriah's death so he could take what was personally Uriah's [his wife] matches the plan of Ahab to get Naboth executed. Both David and Ahab [through Jezebel] write letters to bring about the death of the man who is getting in the way of their coveting. Naboth is put at the head of the people, Uriah is put at the battle front. The report sent to Jezebel

that Naboth had died (:14) is recorded in the same manner as the report to David that Uriah had died (2 Sam. 11:18,24). Ahab takes possession of that which is Naboth's, just as David takes Bathsheba- and then they are both rebuked by a prophet, and both genuinely repent, although the resulting Divine judgment involved the suffering of their sons and family going forward. The similarities are intentional. We see here that the process of sin is as it were standard- whether in the slip of a righteous man [David], or yet another sin in the long catalogue of sins in a sinner like Ahab. God works to some kind of template with man, but it is also so that all men pass through the same broad process of temptation and failure.

1Ki 21:2 Ahab spoke to Naboth saying, Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near to my house; and I will give you for it a better vineyard than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money-
"House" is LXX "threshingfloor". Ahab is acting exactly as Samuel predicted the kings of Israel would act, in taking away vineyards and inheritances from God's people (1 Sam. 8:14). "Naboth" means 'fruitful' so he was identified with the fruitfulness of his vineyard. To take it from him was to take him away from who he was as a person. But Ahab didn't care for that. Ahab comes over as the spoilt child who never grew up. We recall how Ahab loved horses, for he personally had gone around Israel during the drought seeking for fodder for them. For him, the worst thing about the drought was the damage done to his horses. And this demand for a vineyard next to his own house seems to reflect the same characteristics. The Divinely inspired record presents his character in an absolutely consistent and realistic way, unheard of in contemporary national histories.

Naboth wanted to turn the vineyard into a "garden of herbs", a vegetable patch, presumably to provide food for his servants in his house. We get the impression that he paid no attention to the fact he was downgrading the work of generations in building up a vineyard. His intention was to uproot the vines and turn it into a vegetable patch. Typical of the flesh, he focused upon an idea and became obsessed with fulfilling it. Again we see the psychological credibility of the Biblical record.

1Ki 21:3 Naboth said to Ahab, May Yahweh forbid me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!-
Naboth was a worshipper of Yahweh, obedient to the relevant parts of the Mosaic law about inheritances. "The inheritance of my fathers" is clearly alluding to the law (Lev. 25:27,28; Num. 36:7,8). This yet again shows how wrong Elijah had been to insist that he was the only true worshipper of Yahweh left. He maybe knew Naboth, for he was told to go to Naboth as if he knew the place and man (:18). But Elijah judged him to be unfaithful to Yahweh, for this or that petty reason. The record brings before us several individuals who were faithful to Yahweh at this time, yet Elijah considered none of them genuine. And yet despite his arrogance and wrong sense of spiritual superiority, God still works through Elijah and seeks to bring him to the humility which is the acme of spiritual maturity.

1Ki 21:4 Ahab came into his house-
Ahab returned to Samaria from his other home in Jezreel. It's clear the vineyard was in Jezreel not Samaria (2 Kings 9:16,26).

Sullen and angry because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers. He laid himself down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread-

The character portrayal of Ahab is consistent, as we would expect from a Divinely inspired record. There is a clear connection with how he "came into his house sullen and angry" because Naboth would not sell him his vineyard (1 Kings 21:4)and how in 1 Kings 20:43 again Ahab "went to his house sullen and angry" because he was condemned for not having obeyed God's word. We get the impression of an overgrown spoilt child. The LXX puts 1 Kings 20 and 21 the other way around. The experience with Naboth was intended to teach him obedience to God's word. He failed, so he "went to his house sullen and angry". He didn't learn from that lesson. And so he does the same again, when he fails to be obedient on an even more significant level.

1Ki 21:5 But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, Why is your spirit so sad, that you eat no bread?-
Ahab comes over as pathetically weak and dominated by his wicked but far stronger wife. Away from her, he appears to have more potential for spirituality. The Divinely inspired record achieves perfect and credible characterization of the individuals. The sad spirit of Ahab is matched by Jezrbel telling him to be of a merry heart in :7. The spirit is the heart, and this interprets what is the work of the Holy spirit.

1Ki 21:6 He said to her, Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it'. He answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard'-
LXX adds "the inheritance of my fathers". Such argument from the law of Moses (see on :3) was of no value to Jezebel, who was a Gentile idolater.

1Ki 21:7 Jezebel his wife said to him, Do you really now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let your heart be merry. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite-
She could have phrased this another way. But the way she puts it, she seeks to put herself above God and to play God. For the whole argument in :3 and :6 LXX was that God had given specific inheritances to His people, and they were not to be sold or traded. But she claims to be able to give Naboth the vineyard. Perhaps too her emphasis is upon the way she had a plan to "give" Naboth the vineyard for free, without him even needing to pay for it. We are left with the question as to what Ahab ought to have done or said at this stage. He surely knew his wife was going to hatch a plan which was wrong. But he says nothing, and is happy to go along with inheriting the vineyard. Jezebel totally doesn't understand that being the king of Israel meant ruling only as representative of God, Israel's true king. She wrongly assumed that the leadership position meant power to have what you wanted.

Jezebel was a Gentile. She was used to the system of Tyre, where [as in Egypt] all land belonged to the king, in that case, her father. She failed to accept that under Yahweh, the land belonged not to the monarch but to Yahweh, and to those to whom He had given it. For it seems that Joshua split up the land between the heads of families, looking forward to how we shall each have our own unique inheritance in God's Kingdom. This likewise is hard for Gentiles to understand- that all land is God's, and He has given it to His people only as temporary possession in this life, and in that sense the concept of freehold ownership is null and void when God is in the equation.

1Ki 21:8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent

the letters to the elders and to the nobles who were in his city, who lived with Naboth-
Presumably at Jezreel, not Samaria. Ahab was deeply upset that he couldn't have the vineyard next to his holiday home in Jezreel; it wasn't even next to his palace in Samaria. That the "elders and nobles" went along with her evil plan shows their fear of her and their deep moral weakness.

1Ki 21:9 She wrote in the letters saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people-
The wicked hypocrisy was that a fast was proclaimed because of the realization of sin (1 Sam. 7:6; Joel 2:12). Naboth was apparently held in high repute, and was to be given a prominent seat at the ceremony for repentance. Some evidence was to be given that things weren't going well in the town, and there needed to be repentance. Naboth was given a place of high honour and prominence because Jezebel knew that when a person in high public visibility is convicted of sin, especially sin which has made others suffer, there is an immediate upsurge of public anger against them. And this would allow Naboth to be killed without undue public protest. Obadiah likewise was in a senior position in Jezebel's corrupt system and yet was faithful to Yahweh. Naboth likewise. They are set in contrast to Elijah who was more public about his faith and yet lacked any care for people. Naboth was perhaps known as a worshipper of Yahweh, and so possibly he, like Elijah, was blamed for the drought. It's quite possible this chapter describes an event during the drought, especially seeing God had fired Elijah from his ministry in 1 Kings 19.

1Ki 21:10 Set two men, base fellows, before him, and let them testify against him saying, 'You cursed God and the king!' Then carry him out, and stone him to death-
To curse God's representative was seen as cursing God (1 Kings 21:10; Ex. 22:28). And so to curse "Yahweh's anointed" was seen as cursing Yahweh (2 Sam. 19:21) and worthy of death. The two witnesses were supposed to be enough to convict someone. In this case, the fact Naboth was known as a Yahweh worshipper and could prove it... was willingly ignored. It was to be a kangaroo court knowingly set up to prove a man guilty of death from the start. We note that Jezebel used scripture and Yahweh worship in order to destroy Naboth, perhaps a tacit reflection of how Yahweh's law was still partially respected; for she alludes to the law that two witnesses were required for capital punishment (Dt. 17:6; 19:15). It recalls the petty obedience to the law during the Lord's condemnation and crucifixion.

We could equally render "You cursed the gods [idols] and Moloch", as if Jezebel was accusing Naboth of unfaithfulness to the Baal cult.

1Ki 21:11 The men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, according as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them-
Their careful obedience to this woman rather than to God is an allusion to Dt. 16:18, where such elders were to "judge just judgment", and they did the very opposite.

1Ki 21:12 They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people-
To "proclaim a fast" is a phrase used specifically for calling a fast and special meeting for repentance. The idea was that someone had sinned and everyone in town was suffering because of it. It is the term used in Is. 58:5 for how God was intensely angry with the proclamation of such fasts for sinful agendas.

1Ki 21:13 The two men, the base fellows, came in and sat before him. The base fellows testified against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people saying, Naboth cursed God and the king! Then they carried him out of the city, and stoned him to death with stones-
There was a semblance of obedience to the Mosaic law, as there was in the condemnation and execution of the Lord Jesus. There were two witnesses (Dt. 17:6; 19:15); and stoning was indeed the punishment for blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), and was conducted outside the city according to the spirit of Lev. 24:14, just as the Lord Jesus died "outside the camp". Naboth's sons were also killed, so that there could be no possibility of any argument in future about the inheritance (2 Kings 9:26). Elijah is never set up as a type of the Lord Jesus, whereas Naboth is- because as the Lord Himself observed, Elijah didn't have His spirit.

1Ki 21:14 Then they sent to Jezebel saying, Naboth has been stoned, and is dead-
Ahab immediately and eagerly took possession of the vineyard, riding to Jezreel along with Jehu and Bidkar (2 Kings 9:25). We should not therefore think that he was merely manipulated by Jezebel, he was willing and eager himself.

1Ki 21:15 It happened, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead-
The taking possession was apparently in the sense of permanently having the vineyard registered in his name. For he could have leased it from Naboth until the next Jubilee year. And possibly renewed the lease after that. But Ahab was so obsessive about what he wanted. He wanted the vineyard as his permanent possession. This was why Naboth had to be killed, along with his sons (2 Kings 9:26) so that they would not have any argument for inheriting it later. Ahab is reasoning in a very long term manner, forgetting his own mortality. He 'just loved the idea' not only of the vineyard, but of adding it to his inheritance. And so Naboth and his sons had to die, and the people and leaders of Jezreel led into major sin. And yet legally it is hard to see how he could have added it to his inheritance, unless he was some relative of Naboth. So all the drama was to obtain a piece of legal documentation that was always going to be questionable as to its validity. Therefore he did this evil "in vain" (:20 LXX, MT "sold yourself to do evil").

1Ki 21:16 It happened, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it-
Ahab "tore his clothes and put on sackcloth, in sorrow for what he had done" (1 Kings 21:16 LXX- omitted in the AV). See on :27. He repented and yet continued in his sin at the same time. This is psychologically credible. Men do this all the time. But in :27 it seems he did come to true repentance. See on 1 Kings 18:41 for another example of his genuine but momentary repentances.

1Ki 21:17 The word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite saying-
"The Tishbite" is perhaps added in accordance with the theme developed here. Naboth is repeatedly called the Jezreelite, and Ahab, we are reminded, was from Samaria (:18). Israel were to abide in the inheritances they had been given, and not do what Ahab had done, and covet those of others.

1Ki 21:18 Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who dwells in Samaria. Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it-

The idea was that Ahab was from Samaria but had taken possession of property in Jezreel. "Go down" may mean Elijah was then in Carmel. Perhaps Elijah was being directed back to Gideon (Jud. 7:9), David (1 Sam. 23:4) and Moses, who were addressed by God with the same words (Dt. 9:12). He would have earlier seen Moses as Judaism does today, the unreachable acme of spirituality and closeness to God. But now he was being taught, as we are, that no Biblical character is a mere Sunday School figure; but rather our real practical inspiration. But as discussed on 1 Kings 19, Elijah was set up with the possibility of being like Moses, but ultimately failed to rise up to his humility.

1Ki 21:19 You shall speak to him saying, 'Thus says Yahweh, Have you killed and also taken possession?'-

The sin of taking possession (see on :15 for what it involved) is seen as separate to the murder. We note that Ahab is held as culpable for the murder. Even if Jezebel was likewise responsible. The guilt for sins like this never rests with just one person. Neither Ahab nor ourselves can wriggle out of responsibility by complaining we were manipulated into it. Otherwise human behaviour becomes of no real value before God, and man is reduced to a mere puppet of others and situations with no real individual personality and election in how we live life.

You shall speak to him saying, 'Thus says Yahweh, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs will lick your blood, even yours'-

According to 1 Kings 22:38 the dogs [LXX "the swine and the dogs"] licked Ahab's blood in the pool of Samaria, just outside the gate of Samaria; not in Jezreel. It could be argued that "the place" refers not to a geographical locality, but rather to the place where the garbage was thrown outside a city gate. The Lord uses 'Gehenna' to describe such a place as a figure for condemnation. Another option is that Naboth was executed and had his blood licked up in Samaria, at the court of Ahab there. The way 1 Kings 22:38 triumphs in the fulfilment of the prophecy suggests there was no perceived gap between the prediction and its fulfilment. But another possibility is that because of Ahab's repentance, the sentence was modified, just as that upon Adam was (for he didn't die in the day he sinned, although he did die). This reflects God's openness to human repentance in response to His stated judgments. In the gap between statement and fulfilment, there can be repentance and a change of outcomes. This is what gives intensity to our living in that gap. LXX adds to 1 Kings 21:19 "and the harlots shall wash in thy blood". 1 Kings 22:38 LXX says that this was fulfilled. Perhaps the idea is that they washed themselves in a spring in the rubbish dump where Ahab's blood as it were was eternally present.

2 Kings 9:25,26 appears to see this prophecy as fulfilled in the death of Joram, Ahab's son: "Lift him out, and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember, when you and I rode side by side behind his father Ahab how the Lord uttered this oracle against him: 'For the blood of Naboth and for the blood of his children that I saw yesterday, says the Lord, I swear I will repay you on this very plot of ground.' Now therefore lift him [i.e. Joram] out and throw him on the plot of ground, in accordance with the word of the Lord". So we see here how because of Ahab's repentance, the judgment was reinterpretted and reapplied, transferred as it were, to his son. This shows how open and flexible God is, and how extremely

sensitive He is to human repentance. Even when, as in Ahab's case, that repentance is very nuanced and unstable. And we see many cases of where God clearly intended a ministry for someone but they let the ball drop, and it was transferred [with some ammendments] to another person. Elijah and Elisha are a classic case.

1Ki 21:20 Ahab said to Elijah, Have you found me, my enemy? He answered, I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of Yahweh-
What appeared to be mere manipulation of a weak minded man by his wicked, dominant wife was in fact judged as a selling of himself to do evil. Weak mindedness was indeed Ahab's problem, but it did not thereby make him less culpable for what he actually did. Selling oneself is the language of prostitution. The implication is that Ahab was in covenant relationship with Yahweh, but had prostituted himself to do evil. The reasons he did this aren't allowed to ameliorate that judgment- his spoilt upbringing, the dominance of his wicked wife over his naturally weak mind, all these factors were weighted in God's judgment of him, but didn't finally ameliorate what he had done. LXX adds that he sold himself "in vain". I explained on :15 that the whole obsession of "taking possession" of the vineyard probably didn't even work out for Ahab in legal terms as he so coveted.

1Ki 21:21 Behold, I will bring evil on you, and will utterly sweep you away and will cut off from Ahab every male, and him who is shut up and him who is left at large in Israel-
Elijah simply announces to Ahab: “Behold I will bring evil on *you...*”. We expect this to be prefaced by a “Thus says the Lord”- but Elijah was so close to God he assumed he was speaking directly from Him. And yet Elijah doesn’t repeat what God had told him to say in :19. Was he too familiar with God? Assuming he knew God’s will and words? But it must be said that he improves- in 2 Kings 1:6 he says that what he says is the word of Yahweh, and he repeats verbatim what he was told to say. We too know God’s word. We know the Bible text well. But this can lead to an assumption that we speak for God; that we must be right in all our attitudes and positions we adopt on issues. This is rather similar to how initially he says there will be no rain according to *his* word. He knew it was God's will that there be no rain if Israel sinned. But it raises the same issues- was he over familiar with God? Lacking humility? Or was his style reflective rather of a deep intimacy with God which came from familiarity with His word? Or, most likely, a bit of a mixture of these strands.

The destruction of Ahab's children, including those "shut up" as too young to go outdoors alone, and those "at large" and independent, matches how Ahab had murdered the sons of Naboth in order to ensure the inheritance would be unquestionably his (2 Kings 9:26). All his obsession with getting "possession" of the vineyard (see on :15) were to be "in vain" (:20 LXX) because his descendants would all be destroyed.

1Ki 21:22 I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah for the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and have made Israel to sin-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully

enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

The charge that Ahab made Israel to sin refers not just to his idolatry, but specifically in this context to what he did to Naboth. He had involved the elders and people of Jezreel in this sin, and set an example to others that they could despise God's principles about inheritance (see on :3). Sin is sin largely because of the effect it has upon others.

1Ki 21:23 Yahweh also spoke of Jezebel saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the rampart of Jezreel-

The "rampart" of Jezreel where Jezebel was to be eaten (1 Kings 21:23) is s.w. "trench" in 2 Sam. 20:15. It would refer to the trench immediately below the city wall. Jezebel was in a house on the city wall when she was thrown out of it (2 Kings 9:36,37), and her body would have landed in the drainage ditch which was probably dry. Dogs wandered there looking for scraps of food thrown out of the windows of the houses on the city wall.

1Ki 21:24 The dogs will eat him who dies of Ahab in the city; and the birds of the sky will eat him who dies in the field-

This repeats the judgment upon Jeroboam in 1 Kings 14:11. Ahab was another example of how Jeroboam made subsequent generations to sin, and thereby to share his judgment. Ahab was intended to have learnt from the history of Jeroboam, and we who have far more Biblical history available to us than he did... are intended to do the same from the biographies which the Bible is full of. Our responsibility is thereby the greater.

1Ki 21:25 But there was none like Ahab, who sold himself to do that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh-

See on :20.

Whom Jezebel his wife stirred up-

The idea may be that there was no man who did so much evil at the stirring up of his wife. So many turn down the call of Christ because their partner is against it. We see here for all time the call to brave individuality, to totally personal response to God's principles. The word "stirred up" means to persuade or entice, suggesting Ahab was resistant, but allowed himself to be persuaded against his basic conscience. And his naturally weak minded personality was no excuse. Zedekiah likewise was persuaded against his basic conscience (Jer. 38:22 s.w.), and was still judged for allowing himself to be persuaded.

Chronicles says "Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead", just as Jezebel persuaded Ahab to do wickedness (1 Kings 21:25 Heb.). It is a story of sin leading to sin, and sinful attitudes and behaviour spreading through wrong and unwise associations.

1Ki 21:26 He did very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites did, whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel-

The idea is that they followed the idols just as the Amorites did. And that may be a general term referring to the local Canaanite population. The idea is that a worship of their gods was revived by Ahab. He did exactly what people did who were driven out of the Kingdom for doing those things. He utterly refused to learn from Biblical history.

1Ki 21:27 It happened, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly-
"They that will be rich... have erred from the faith, and *pierced themselves through* with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9,10). The Greek translated "pierced themselves through" is related to the verb 'to crucify'. We are asked to crucify ourselves, to give up the brief materialism of this life. Yet if we refuse to do this, we still pierce ourselves through, we crucify ourselves, with the pain which comes from a mind dedicated to materialism and self-fulfilment, a life devoted to reaching the end of a rainbow. So what is the logical thing to do? It's crucifixion either way. The idea of piercing self through with sorrow is actually a direct quote from the LXX of 1 Kings 21:27, where Ahab was pierced with sorrow as a result of his coveting of Naboth's vineyard. And yet when Naboth was dead, Ahab tore his clothes and put on sackcloth, in sorrow for what he had done (1 Kings 21:16 LXX- omitted in the AV); but these very words are used in describing how when Ahab heard the words of his condemnation, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth (21:27). His sin brought him to tare his clothes, just as he did when his condemnation was pronounced. In his seeking for happiness he pierced himself through with the sorrow of condemnation.

I suggested on :19 that his repentance at least ameliorated the nature of the judgment upon him, and :29 says the same. If as suggested on :1, 1 Kings 21 should come before 1 Kings 20, then Ahab's subsequent failure to be obedient in 1 Kings 20 is the more tragic. His repentance here was genuine, so much so that God did take note of it, although He knew that the weak minded Ahab would again fail to retain that intensity.

1Ki 21:28 The word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite saying-
Surely Elijah was meant to tell Ahab this but there is no evidence Elijah spoke the words of mercy to Ahab of :29. If he did, we can imagine they would have gone right against the grain of his judgmental nature. He would have been the first to point out reasons to think Ahab's repentance wasn't complete or even genuine. But Elijah was being taught God's extreme sensitivity to human repentance, even if it is incomplete and the intensity of it may not be maintained. God is eager to respond to any slight movement towards Him, as we see in the prodigal son parable.

1Ki 21:29 See how Ahab humbles himself before Me? Because he humbles himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil on his family-
And God kept His word about this (2 Kings 9:25), although if 1 Kings 20 follows 1 Kings 21 (see on :1), then Ahab's repentance was not totally maintained. We see here how Divine prophecies can be modified; the essence of them comes true, but at different times and in ammended ways to what was originally spoken. Elijah could have been the prophet like unto Moses, but that prophecy was reinterpretted and reapplied to the Lord Jesus at a later point. And so it is with the many restoration prophecies, which could have come true at the return from Babylon but were reapplied to the last days.

God knew all Elijah's weakness as He knows ours, and He perceives them far better than we do. And He actively worked with Elijah to bring him to a greater perception of Him. Elijah was told by God that Ahab "humbles himself *before Me*". And Elijah was asked to "see" this, to perceive it, to notice it and think about. Yet Elijah also lived a life "before the Lord" (1 Kings 17:1); it's as if God was trying to

get Elijah to see himself in a similar position to Ahab. Living “before the Lord” is not only about faith in prayer and being aware of God. It’s also about being contrite before our Father, aware of our own very personal spiritual desperation. And it was this humility which Elijah lacked. And the Father sought to teach him it by drawing a similarity between Elijah and the man whom he spiritually despised- Ahab. In many Christian lives, we are much more spiritual than others around us. Yet we may be led to perceive that actually we are in essence no better than those to whom we consider ourselves so spiritually superior. See on 1 Kings 19:11.

1 KINGS CHAPTER 22

1Ki 22:1 They continued three years without war between Syria and Israel-
I suggested on 1 Kings 20:1; 21:1 that 1 Kings 20 and 21 should be the other way around, as they are in the LXX. In this case, 1 Kings 22 continues straight on from 1 Kings 20. That concluded with Ahab making a treaty with Benhadad of Syria, allowing him to go free if he renamed streets in Damascus after Ahab's God, and restored the cities his father had captured from Israel. Had Ahab done what he was told to and slain Benhadad, the events in this chapter which led to his death may not have happened. And all the treaty achieved was three years without war. Ahab is represented as a weak minded fool in making that agreement, caught up in the pride and glory of the moment. And it ends up that the man and people Ahab lets go from Divine judgment is the one who slays him.

1Ki 22:2 It happened in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel-
One sin and weakness led to another. We learn from Chronicles that Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had wrongly married Ahab’s daughter, Athaliah; probably under some false mantra of 'unity amongst God's people'. The visit was likely in connection with this. Had Jehoshaphat not fraternized with wicked Ahab, the possibility of the doomed venture which follows wouldn't have arisen. And if Ahab had slain Benhadad as commanded, Ramoth Gilead would have been returned to Israel. And indeed if Benhadad kept his covenant, it should have been returned anyway (1 Kings 20:34).

1Ki 22:3 The king of Israel said to his servants, You know that Ramoth Gilead is ours, and we are sitting still, and don’t take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?-
"Ours" suggests he was playing on the false mantra of "unity amongst God's people" noted on :2. Ahab clearly intended the city to remain under his control and not that of Judah. So much foolishness, unwisdom and sacrifice of basic Godly principle has gone on under this mantra of "unity". In the context, we have just read of Ahab's desiring and taking of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. Ahab presents as simply not ever learning from anything. His conscience ought to have prodded him over that matter; but now he again embarks upon grabbing a piece of territory that he fancies. "We are sitting still and don't take it..." is the essence of what Jezebel says to Ahab about Naboth's vineyard. He was willing to kill the righteous Naboth through lies to get the vineyard, and now he is willing to slay Micaiah, again through getting a crowd to lie.

1Ki 22:4 He said to Jehoshaphat, Will you go with me to battle to Ramoth Gilead? Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses-

Chronicles says "Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead", just as Jezebel persuaded Ahab to do wickedness (1 Kings 21:25 Heb.). It is a story of sin leading to sin, and sinful attitudes and behaviour spreading through wrong and unwise associations. We note they both have "horses", which were forbidden for the kings of Israel under the law of Moses. Jehoshaphat likely reasoned that a weak Syria on the east bank of Jordan was good for Judah, but he was also caught up in the false mantra of "unity" which had led his son to marry Ahab's daughter.

1Ki 22:5 Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Please inquire first for the word of Yahweh-
Ahab responded to the request for a word from Yahweh by summoning the group of 400 false prophets (:5). He had so mixed Yahweh worship with paganism that he considered their word to be that of Yahweh. And he gathered such a huge group in order to argue that the majority must surely be right. And the Bible consistently teaches that in these situations, the majority is usually wrong.

1Ki 22:6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?-
Ahab had 400 false prophets earlier in his reign (1 Kings 18:19), who were slain on Carmel. So it seems that he didn't learn his lesson, and raised up another such group. This fits with the common theme of purges and repentances at the time of the kings needing to be repeated. For the purges were only surface level, despite all the evidence for them at the time. "Forbear" means 'to cease'. Ahab, like us at times, had already started the project without asking God's guidance, and his request for guidance in the project was compromised in integrity by the fact he had already begun it.

They said, Go up; for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king-
This recalls the instant answer of Nathan when David enquired about building a temple for Yahweh. Too easily we assume we know the will of God, and speak and act as if we have His blessing on our endeavours already.

1Ki 22:7 But Jehoshaphat said, Isn't there here a prophet of Yahweh, that we may inquire of Him?-
Ahab had provided the 400 prophets of Baal in response to the request for a word from Yahweh. Jehoshaphat realized this; and ought to have immediately pulled out of working with someone who was presenting Baal worship as Yahweh worship. He means of course 'an old time, old school prophet of Yahweh who is not also a prophet of Baal and repudiates Baal'.

1Ki 22:8 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man-
The idea is, "one more man". He considered that the 400 prophets of Baal were also in touch with Yahweh (see on :5), and Micaiah was just one more who could do that, although he repudiated Baal worship. We wonder why Ahab would immediately think of Micaiah, rather than Elijah or Elisha, who were surely around at this time. We have read of Elijah rebuking Ahab in the preceding chapter. We again reflect that the Biblical narrative focuses upon just a few characters, and yet there were many others faithful to the Lord at their time. Of course it could be that Micaiah was the only known prophet of Yahweh in the immediate locality. But we again see how wrong and arrogant Elijah was to claim that he was the sole remaining faithful prophet of

Yahweh (1 Kings 19:14). "There is yet one man" seems to allude to [and deconstruct] Elijah's claim that "I alone am left" faithful.

By whom we may inquire of Yahweh, Micaiah the son of Imlah-

Again we are introduced to a true prophet of Yahweh who existed at the time of Elijah. His claim to be the only prophet of Yahweh is continually demonstrated to be false. Presumably Elijah knew these other prophets, but considered that they had all gone wrong on this or that point of doctrine or practice. And perhaps they had, but God still counted them as His prophets, and used them as such. And it was Elijah who was removed from the prophetic ministry because of his arrogance in considering none of them genuine, and he alone being the true representative of Yahweh. Micaiah had previously spoken critical things to Ahab in Yahweh's Name, hence Ahab says that this prophet only says "evil" about him and he doesn't want to consult him. Elijah was quite wrong to discount all these brave prophets as somehow not genuine.

But I hate him; for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. Jehoshaphat said, Don't let the king say so-

Again we sense the pouting, spoilt kid characteristics of Ahab. His characterization in the records is absolutely consistent and credible, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired history. We have here a parade example of how men come to God's word having already decided what they want to hear. Indeed there is a tendency to have "itching ears", heaping up teachers to confirm us in our own desires, lusts and hunches (2 Tim. 4:3; maybe a reference to Ahab heaping up 400 such teachers to tell him what he wanted to hear). This is why there are so many different interpretations of the Bible. Because readers / hearers like to hear only what confirms that which they already had a hunch about. To achieve a second naivety as we come to God's word, to be a born again virgin, is hard indeed. Jehoshaphat realized what Ahab was doing, and asked him not to talk like that- but to accept Yahweh's word. The fact Jehoshaphat himself still went into battle shows how he himself perceived the truth of all this, but didn't do accordingly. The "evil" prophesied was presumably of Ahab's condemnation, confirming Elijah's words.

1Ki 22:9 Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Quickly get Micaiah the son of Imlah-

"Who is like Yah?" was a direct challenge to the idea that Yahweh could be worshipped through Baal worship (see on :5). According to :26, Micaiah was imprisoned at this time. The 'quick' summoning from prison by an officer to speak God's word would have recalled to Micaiah the example of faithful Joseph.

1Ki 22:10 Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting each on his throne, arrayed in their robes, in an open place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them-

This was an impressive sight, and the area had clearly been especially prepared so that so many prophets could prophesy together. It was designed to sway Jehoshaphat according to the false maxim that the majority must be right, and how could so many be wrong. See on Ez. 10:5.

This mention of the kings sitting on their thrones in the place of judgment [the city gate, "the threshing floor" as some versions offer, the symbol of judgment] is not for random interest. It connects directly with the upcoming declaration of the vision of Yahweh enthroned in judgment in Heaven, with His "spirits" before Him, just as the kings had the prophets before them. The situation on earth was reflected in Heaven, as we often see in the Bible. Ahab and Micaiah were in awe of the court sitting on earth,

the court of public opinion. Even religious opinion. But they were to be shown that they in fact stood before the Heavenly court, right at one and the same time.

1Ki 22:11 Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron and said, Thus says Yahweh, 'With these you shall push the Syrians, until they are consumed'-
Zedekiah, like a typical apostate, is mixing the truth of God out of context with wrong ideas. He alludes to Moses' blessing of Joseph in Dt. 33:17 to the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh: "Buffalo horns are his (Joseph's) horns, with them he thrusts down nations". But of course he overlooked the fact that the blessings of Moses were predicated upon obedience to the covenant. He probably made the horns and held them on his forehead. Micaiah's response is to also quote from the law of Moses, but about the judgment for disobedience to the covenant (:17).

1Ki 22:12 All the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth Gilead, and prosper; for Yahweh will deliver it into the hand of the king-
These 400 prophets of Baal [for they were the equivalent of the 400 executed on Mount Carmel] still used the name of Yahweh. Their position was that they conducted Yahweh worship through Baal worship. Perhaps their usage of the Hebrew word for "prosper" alluded to how the word is four times used of the prospering of Abraham's servant on his journey and mission (Gen. 24:21,40,42,56). And this is probably our most common temptation as believers; to mix the flesh and the spirit, to justify sin in the name of serving God. But Ahab had broken the covenant, and would not prosper (s.w. Dt. 28:29). Jehoshaphat later learnt this lesson, for he uses the word in saying that only those who hear Yahweh's prophets will "prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20).

The background is that a victory for a king was seen as a victory for his gods. The most powerful god won the victory; the king and his god[s] were closely associated. But the Biblical record inverts all this. The God of Israel caused the enemy to win and to kill Israel's king. So often the Biblical, Godly worldview is at total variance with that of currounding society.

1Ki 22:13 The messenger who went to call Micaiah spoke to him saying, See now, the prophets declare good to the king with one mouth. Please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak good-
We sense the build up of pressure upon Micaiah. He was imprisoned for having spoken God's word against Ahab (see on :9,26), and would be under huge pressure from the presence of the 400 prophets and the audience watching (:28 "all you people"). And as the officer led him from prison towards the huge crowd of people gathered before the two kings, he too added his pressure. The request of the officer was perhaps because he actually liked Micaiah and could foresee the death sentence being given if he again "spoke evil" and not "good" to Ahab, and he didn't want to have to carry that out. But he still totally fails to perceive that God's word cannot be changed or controlled by man.

1Ki 22:14 Micaiah said, As Yahweh lives, what Yahweh says to me, that I will speak-
If Micaiah was at that time imprisoned for prophesying evil against Ahab (see on :9,26), bearing in mind Naboth had been slain for allegedly cursing the king, he would have been sorely tempted to now buy his freedom by saying what Ahab wanted to hear. And despite his determination not to do so, I suggest on :15 that he did temporarily fail. The pressure on him was intense. Micaiah uses the words and ideas of Balaam when pressured to not say Yahweh's word. He was clearly a spiritually

minded man who was deeply aware of Biblical precedent for his situation, as we ought to be.

1Ki 22:15 When he had come to the king, the king said to him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? He answered him, Go up and prosper; and Yahweh will deliver it into the hand of the king-
It could be argued that by repeating the very words of the false prophets, Micaiah was just repeating them sarcastically, with the tone of his voice indicating that. But I prefer to conclude that this faithful man, who had gone to prison for his witness of God's word to Ahab, now faltered under the pressure of the presence of the 400 false prophets. He acted like Nathan when David enquired about building a temple for Yahweh, who gave the answer that his enquirer wanted to hear. Such failure of a moment would be absolutely true to human experience and would be psychologically and spiritually credible. See on :14. For we all have a strong human tendency to perceive what others want us to say, and to say it.

1Ki 22:16 The king said to him, How many times do I have to adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of Yahweh?-
See on :15. We are left to speculate which singular "king" it was who said this, Ahab or Jehoshaphat. The Biblical record is intentionally open ended at some points, to encourage us to think ourselves into the situation. The king sensed that Micaiah was cowed by the situation, and really wanted to know what Yahweh thought. So we sense "the king" in view was Jehoshaphat.

1Ki 22:17 He said, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. Yahweh said, 'These have no master. Let them each return to his house in peace'-
As explained on :11, Zedekiah had quoted Moses' blessings of the tribes as justification for a successful battle- which were conditional upon obedience to the covenant. Zedekiah like many today, glories in the promises of the Spirit whilst ignoring the conditions. Micaiah responds by quoting the curses for disobedience to the covenant (Num. 27:16,17). The removal of the master / shepherd implies that the shepherd or king of Israel is to be slain, and the sheep would return to their homes once the shepherd was slain. And that is just what happened when it was recognized that Ahab had been slain.

"These have no master" or "masters" plural could mean that the focus of the battle was to be upon the masters, the kings, rather than the ordinary soldiers. Jehoshaphat fails to grasp this. This is a prophecy of the death of the shepherds. It seems the Syrians were aware of this prophecy, and therefore aimed to kill only the king of Israel. Otherwise we wonder why their soldiers were told to only kill the king of Israel.

1Ki 22:18 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Didn't I tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?-
Ahab intuitively sensed what Yahweh's true word was even before Micaiah pronounced it. His insistence on going ahead was therefore the more culpable. And God's word is often intuitively recognized as "truth" even by those who reject it, which is why they tend towards anger and other psychological reactions appropriate to denial.

1Ki 22:19 Micaiah said, Therefore hear the word of Yahweh-
There does not follow a "Thus says the Lord", but rather a description of the vision Micaiah had seen, a peek into the heavenly throne room, the court of heaven. Discerning the vision was perhaps the essential "word of Yahweh" which the kings were to "hear".

I saw Yahweh sitting on His throne, and all the army of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left-
Note "Standing by Him" rather than "before" Him. The Angels in the Divine council are not merely servants, awaiting words of command, but the advisors / decision makers who work with the King towards policy and operations in practice. "The army [host] of heaven" is a term used for the planets etc. (Dt. 4:19; 17:3). Possibly the connection is because these are the Angels who control all the universe. The context here is of the need to remove Ahab from being king. Such councils are described in the contemporary literature, and it has been observed "A significant function of the divine council is the removal of kingship in the Mesopotamian and Ugaritic sources". The parallel is to show that in fact human kings and their councils are not at all omnipotent; there is a higher King and Council.

The visions of 1 Kings 22:19-23, Isaiah 6 and Rev. 4 show God seated on a throne with Angels before Him, bringing information and requests to Him and departing with commands to obey; the idea of a council in Heaven is clearly hinted at in Job 1; Gen. 1:26; Ps. 89:7. God sitting on a throne implies that each request or piece of information presented is 'judged' and an appropriate decision made. The 'case' of the adversaries to God is presented by a 'satan' Angel in Job.

1 Kings 22:19-23 gives perhaps the most detailed picture of the Heavenly council. God told them His desire- for Ahab to die at Ramoth-Gilead. He then asked which Angel wanted to effect this- "Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And one (Angel) said on this manner, and another said on that manner". We thus learn that like us, on hearing God's desire the *elohim* all have different ways of trying to fulfil it. One "Spirit" (Angel) suggested that He would put a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, and this was the suggestion chosen and enabled by God. This shows that the Angels do not all automatically know the best way of bringing about God's purpose, and therefore they need to seek His advice and perhaps discuss things amongst themselves first before acting. Note that "*all* the host of Heaven" were there around the throne of God participating in this decision. And so all the Angels are involved in the decisions God and the Angels make about us. Lk. 15:6 implies the same.

The division of the Angels into groups on His right and left is interesting. Why would it be mentioned, if it were insignificant? All the Angels are of God's nature and obedient to Him, there are no sinful Angels. But there are Angels of evil, Angels specifically tasked with bringing evil (see on Ps. 78:49). We think of the Angel called "the destroyer" at Passover time, who was restrained by the Passover Angel from destroying the Israelite firstborn. And so one wonders whether "the destroyer" was one of those on the left hand side, and the Passover Angel one of those on the right hand.

We have here one of several insights into the Divine council, presided over by Yahweh (consider Is. 6:1-3; 40:1-8; Ps. 82; Ps. 89:5-8; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Jer. 23:16-22; Zech. 3:1-10). But there is discussion amonst the Angels- some have ideas which aren't "used". We have here a profound insight into what it is like to have Divine nature, into how we shall eternally be.

1Ki 22:20 Yahweh said, 'Who shall entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead?' One said one thing; and another said another-
"Entice" is the word elsewhere translated 'deceive'. Clearly God does deceive; for He confirms men in the mental path in which they themselves wish to go. Ez. 14:9 uses the word very clearly in this connection (see commentary there); and the teaching is confirmed in 2 Thess. 2:11. The Hebrew for "entice" or "deceive / lure" is in fact from the root 'to be foolish' (s.w. 2 Sam. 3:25; Hos. 7:11 "a silly bird"). As discussed on :10, to go to this battle, to bow to the court of public opinion, was in fact the foolish thing to do.

In Revelation we see the incense of human prayers arising into Heaven, resulting in Angels coming to earth, pouring out bowls, blowing trumpets, and major events happening on earth (Rev. 5:8; 8:3). Prayer is noticed; it brings forth quite out of proportion responses. The Angels discuss their plans for us in the court of Heaven, coming up with various possibilities of how to act in our lives, discussing them with God (1 Kings 22:20-22). They play some part in the whole process of our prayers. When we read that "Surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Am. 3:7), we might tend to take that as a statement of absolute principle that is obvious to all the Angels. But we find an Angel discussing with others: "Shall I hide from Abraham [who was a prophet] what I am about to do?" (Gen. 18:17). The Angels have more debate, expend more mental and physical energy than we surely realize, in order to operationalize things which we might consider to be standard and automatic in God's work with men. In our context, what this means is that when men reject the machinations and schemings of God's love, they reject an awful lot; and it grieves and disappoints Him, and appears tragic to those like the prophets who see things from His viewpoint.

1Ki 22:21 A spirit-
God makes His Angels "spirits" (Ps. 104:4), and Angels are in view here. But the word 'spirit' has a wide range of meaning. It can refer to power, but also to the thought which is then expressed through the power of action. The Angel is here called a "spirit" because the idea was to place a thought in the mind or spirit of the false prophets, and thereby Ahab.

Came out-
This is the same word as in :22 "I will go out". The Angel was as it were demonstrating how he intended acting.

And stood before Yahweh-
It was the true prophets who stood before Yahweh (1 Kings 17:1). The connection is to show that the true prophets were represented by the Angels in the court of heaven, and this Angel was as it were on their side. But the Spirit / Angel whose idea was chosen was in control of the false prophets and was going to judge them for persecuting Micaiah the true prophet. In Jer. 23:18,22 we have another connection between prophets and the Divine council: "For who has stood in the council of Yahweh, that he should perceive and hear His word? Who has noted My word, and heard it? ... I sent not these prophets, yet they ran: I didn't speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then had they caused My people to hear My words".

And said, 'I will entice him'-
Ahab had been persuaded or enticed to do evil by Jezebel, and had enticed or persuaded Jehoshaphat to go to battle. But this was because he had himself been

persuaded or enticed by God. He was being treated according to how he had treated others- enticing to do evil.

1Ki 22:22 Yahweh said to him, 'How?' He said, 'I will go out and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets'. He said, 'You will entice him, and will also prevail-

God deceived prophets to speak things in His Name which were actually false (1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 14:9 "If the prophet is deceived when he speaks a word, I, Yahweh, have deceived that prophet"). He sends strong delusion, so that those who don't love the truth will believe a lie. He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them (Is. 66:3,4). Jeremiah feared God had deceived *him* (Jer. 20:7)- showing he knew such a thing was possible. Dt. 13:1-3 warns Israel not to believe prophets whose prophecies came true although they taught false doctrines, because they may have been raised up to test their obedience. God deceived Israel by telling them about the peace which would come on Jerusalem in the future Kingdom; they didn't consider the other prophecies *which were given at the same time* concerning their imminent judgment, and therefore they thought that God was pleased with them and was about to establish the Messianic Kingdom; when actually the very opposite was about to happen (Jer. 4:10). This is why the Bible is confusing to those who aren't humble to God's word.

Go out and do so'-

This describes the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do God's word. So when we read of God sending lions (2 Kings 17:25,26), sending wild beasts and famine (Lev. 26:22; Ez. 5:17; Dt. 32:24), sending locusts (Joel 2:25), it would seem that Angels are sent forth from God's throne in order to command animals to obey God's word. And moreover, He sends an evil spirit between men (Jud. 9:23 "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech") and stubborn hearts are also sent from God (Ps. 81:13). The same Angels who are sent to control the animals can also therefore work to give men certain attitudes of mind.

1Ki 22:23 Now therefore, behold, Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and Yahweh has spoken evil concerning you-

This was exactly what Micaiah had said before about Ahab, and Ahab intuitively knew that this was coming. Ahab had lied in order to take Naboth's vineyard, and he is being punished appropriately- by his prophets lying to him, and leading him to his death. We naturally enquire what the point was of telling Ahab that he had been deceived because God had planned that he die in the upcoming battle. "Evil" or "disaster had been decreed, and the execution of it arranged by the Angels. But even at this late stage, outcomes could be changed. For the purpose of sharing the vision was surely was that even at this late stage, Ahab could have repented- and so the earlier prophecy that he would "die in peace" would have come true- and likewise 1 Kings 21:25-29: "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days". We see how open God is to change, and how desperate He is for human repentance. We also note that Micaiah initially spoke as the false prophets did. By sharing this vision, he is confessing his own weakness- that he had been open to the "lying spirit" and had accepted it and spoken according to it. That "spirit" was his own mind or spirit wanting to say what was acceptable and popular. His spirit was confirmed by a Divine spirit. Just as Saul's was. But then he had the humility to realize what had happened, and to speak the truth and thus refuse the lying spirit confirming his own wrong spirit.

1Ki 22:24 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way did the Spirit of Yahweh go from me to speak to you?-
"Cheek" can be "ear". The idea was that Zedekiah implied Micaiah was saying that the spirit had left him and entered Micaiah through his ear. And so he smote that ear. To strike on the cheek was the punishment for a heretic, and was applied to the Lord Jesus (Mic. 5:1).

1Ki 22:25 Micaiah said, Behold, you will see on that day when you go into an inner room to hide yourself-
The idea of going into an inner room is to pray- the idea may be that when Zedekiah would in future be hiding from catastrophe, brought down small and desperately praying to God, he would find God silent. And that is the greatest condemnation. We think of king Saul. When Ahab was defeated and slain, everyone in Samaria would be looking for the false prophets to kill them. Not least Jezebel. For the defeat would have been blamed upon them. So Zedekiah would have hid from shame and fear of being killed. There is a connection between Benhadad going into an inner room to hide when Ahab was given victory against him (1 Kings 20:30), and the false prophet Zedekiah going into an inner room to hide when Ahab was defeated (1 Kings 22:25). The same Hebrew words are used, and the connection becomes more apparent if we accept that 1 Kings 20 and 21 should be placed the other way around, as in LXX. This would mean that the hiding of Benhadad is recorded just a short time before that of Zedekiah. The connection would be to show that the false prophets were in fact bracketed together by God with Israel's enemies; whereas they had claimed that they were nationalists on Israel's side, proclaiming Israel's certain victory against their enemies. God sees not as man sees, and the real spiritual realities are often the very opposite of what appears.

1Ki 22:26 The king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son-
These men were those who ran the prison, for "carry him *back*" means Micaiah was already in prison. See on :9. Again we see how wrong Elijah had been to claim that no prophet of Yahweh existed apart from himself. Micaiah had gone to prison for speaking God's word to Ahab. But Elijah presumably considered there was some curious point of theology or matter of legal practice which enabled Elijah to rubbish Micaiah as not sincere and not a true prophet. It reminds us of how truly committed Christians who have gone to jail or even death for their witness... are trashed by others as somehow not the real Christians. And only they the critics are in fellowship with God. They really need to learn the lesson of Elijah. For he was ejected from his ministry because of those attitudes.

1Ki 22:27 Say, 'Thus says the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace'-
I suggest on :9,26 that he was already in prison for his faithful witness against Ahab. So the idea here seems to be that he was to be put in the inner prison and given a very tough regime.

1Ki 22:28 Micaiah said, If you return at all in peace, Yahweh has not spoken by me. He said, Listen, all you people!-
If I were Micaiah, I think I would have just shrugged and remained silent, fearing the

harsh regime of punishment in :27 could easily be changed into the death sentence. For Naboth had been slain for 'cursing the king'. But Micaiah bravely invites the large audience to listen and take note, because he seeks their conversion.

1Ki 22:29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead-

The record is intentionally silent about the utter folly of Jehoshaphat in going ahead with this. He was keenly interested to 'know the truth' from God's word, and didn't want to hear false teaching. But when the truth was presented, he didn't follow it. We can take a huge lesson from this. He allowed the intense pressure of the crowd of prophets, and his family relationship with Ahab as the in-law of his son, to lead him to walk right against the 'truth' he had sought. And there are many who seem to rejoice more in 'searching for the truth' than in actually following it when they are find it or have it presented to them.

1Ki 22:30 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and go into the battle; but you put on your robes. The king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle-

LXX even suggests that Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to wear Ahab's robes. The next verse describes why this was; Ahab was aware of the king of Syria's desire to resolve the issue by capturing or killing Ahab. The incident is a parade example of 'bad friends'. We marvel at Jehoshaphat's stupidity in agreeing. For surely he must have foreseen what could happen. This was the pressure he felt from Ahab and Jezebel, the in-laws of his son. And so often family pressure leads otherwise solid believers into uncharacteristic actions, seriously unwise behaviour and positions which are utterly the opposite of all they stand for. Because quite simply, they do not really commit to following God's word, even if they stand with their backs to the world.

The fact Ahab disguised himself reflects how he secretly believed the words of prophecy in :17 that he would die in the battle. For all man's bravado, there is a conscience within every man that discerns that God's word is true.

1Ki 22:31 Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots saying, Fight neither with small nor great, except only with the king of Israel-

Only three years previously (see on :1), the king of Syria had been foolishly spared by Ahab. Perhaps he couldn't live down that humiliation, and wanted to kill the man who had shown him so much mercy. That again is absolutely true to observed human experience, and the record time and again is absolutely psychologically credible.

We note the similarities with 1 Kings 20:1, where Ahab was again attacked by 32 captains under Benhadad's control. Likewise we read of victory as being 'given into the hand' in both 1 Kings 20:6,13 and also in 1 Kings 22:6,15. Clearly Ahab had utterly failed to learn from his own history. And therefore God was angry with him and slew him. Our world is likewise full of folk who refuse to learn from their own history, who refuse to accept Divine jogs and nudges, who fail to see history repeating itself in their lives or between their lives and Biblical history. And this refusal to join the dots is not mere intellectual failure; in Ahab's case, it was seen as worthy of severe judgment. It is a form of resisting the Holy Spirit. Not only did Ahab fail to learn; Ahaziah later likewise repeated the same mistake of joining the king of Israel to fight the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead: "[Ahaziah] went with Joram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram" (2

Kings 8:28,29). Perhaps this is why Ahab is repeatedly referred to as "the king of Israel" in 1 Kings 22, because the history is being recorded as a general warning to any who would seek fellowship with any idolatrous "king of Israel". 2 Kings 3-13 describe many conflicts with Syria- and always the lesson taught by the history of 1 Kings 22 was ignored.

1Ki 22:32 It happened, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely that is the king of Israel! And they turned aside to fight against him. Jehoshaphat cried out-
The Hebrew implies that they surrounded him. He was clearly "lucky" to escape with his life. It was only by Divine grace that he did. His 'crying out' was surely to God to save him from his foolishness.

1Ki 22:33 It happened, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him-
This was in response to his crying out to God for salvation in :32. Chronicles adds: "and the Lord helped him and turned them off from him". And yet he was strongly rebuked by God in 2 Chron. 19:2. His actions provoked "the wrath of Yahweh", but God saved a man by grace whilst at the same time having great wrath against him. This is so different to human wrath and attempts to show grace, which seem usually to be displayed without any other pole of feeling in mind. But God had both in perfect balance at the same time. This is the wonder of His Name, which includes all these poles of feeling toward men within His personality.

1Ki 22:34 A certain man drew his bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armour. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, Turn your hand, and carry me out of the battle; for I am severely wounded-
The gaps in armour around vital organs would have been relatively small. This is evidence for all time that there is no such thing as "random". This was so clearly of God.

1Ki 22:35 The battle increased that day. The king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, and died at evening. The blood ran out of the wound into the bottom of the chariot-
The weak minded Ahab genuinely wanted to do the best for his troops, and therefore remained in his chariot, propped up. Presumably Israelite soldiers knew where and who he was. It was this policy of not being removed from his chariot which resulted in the blood accumulating within it, which was required for the fulfilment of the prophecies about his blood.

1Ki 22:36 A cry went throughout the army about the going down of the sun saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his country!-
This was the exact fulfilment of Micaiah's prophecy that the shepherd of Israel would be slain, and the sheep would return to their homes (:17).

1Ki 22:37 So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria-
The double emphasis upon the death and burial of "the king" is perhaps to signpost attention to the fact that the prophecy of Micaiah about the death of the shepherd / master of the flock had been fulfilled (:17).

1Ki 22:38 They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood where the prostitutes washed themselves; according to the word of Yahweh which He spoke-
The idea may be that the women were washing in the pool whilst the blood of Ahab was washed off into it. According to 1 Kings 21:19 "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs will lick your blood, even yours" (Ahab's). But in 1 Kings 22:38 the dogs [LXX "the swine and the dogs"] licked Ahab's blood in the pool of Samaria, just outside the gate of Samaria; not in Jezreel. It could be argued that "the place" refers not to a geographical locality, but rather to the place where the garbage was thrown outside a city gate. The Lord uses 'Gehenna' to describe such a place as a figure for condemnation. The way 1 Kings 22:38 triumphs in the fulfilment of the prophecy suggests there was no perceived gap between the prediction and its fulfilment. But another possibility is that because of Ahab's repentance, the sentence was modified, just as that upon Adam was (for he didn't die in the day he sinned, although he did die). This reflects God's openness to human repentance in response to His stated judgments. In the gap between statement and fulfilment, there can be repentance and a change of outcomes. This is what gives intensity to our living in that gap. LXX adds to 1 Kings 21:19 "and the harlots shall wash in thy blood". 1 Kings 22:38 LXX says that this was fulfilled. Perhaps the idea is that they washed themselves in a spring in the rubbish dump where Ahab's blood as it were was eternally present.

1Ki 22:39 Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he built, and all the cities that he built, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
This may not refer necessarily to the same books of Chronicles we have in our Bibles. Houses adorned with ivory were condemned by God in Am. 3:15. All of the Bible seems to cry out against high luxury living, in a world of such great spiritual and material need.

1Ki 22:40 So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place-
Ahab's naming his sons with the 'Yah' suffix in their names (he had another son called Jehoram, 2 Kings 3:1) would be a nod toward Yahweh worship. And yet he is famed as a Baal worshipper. This helps us better understand the nature of the Baal worship then practiced; it was a mixture of Yahweh worship with Baal worship, claiming to worship Yahweh through Baal worship. This is why when Ahab is asked to produce a prophet of Yahweh, he calls up the 400 prophets of Baal who had replaced those slain by Elijah on Carmel. And this is typical of so much of our failure; justifying sin in the name of worshipping God.

1Ki 22:41 Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel-
Jehoshaphat means 'whom Jehovah judges'. And this is largely the point of his life, which Chronicles records in more detail. He made major mistakes in his relationships with Israel, incited the wrath of God against him (2 Chron. 19:2), died without removing the high places, and yet overall was judged as having a faithful *heart* before God (:43; 2 Chron. 19:3). And so we have a parade example of how indeed 'Jehovah judges', factoring in the various dimensions of a man's life in a way in which we cannot. The lesson is indeed that we cannot judge, nor should we be tempted to judge

a person according to the high and low points on their spiritual graph, nor upon the fact they may die with unconquered weaknesses.

1Ki 22:42 Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi-
Again the mother is maybe mentioned because of her great influence upon the spiritual path of her children. However, there is also the theme that believers arise from unbelieving backgrounds. "Azubah" means "forsaken". It is the same word used in 2 Chron. 15:2, where Jehoshaphat's father Asa was told of God "If you forsake Him, He will forsake you". It could be that Asa forsook Azubah and she was effectively a divorced woman; or perhaps the wife was renamed this because Asa felt she had forsaken Yahweh, which is how the word "forsaken" ('Azubah') is usually used.

1Ki 22:43 He walked in all the way of Asa his father; he didn't turn aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh: however the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places-
Again we marvel at God's positive overall opinion of Jehoshaphat. For he rejected Yahweh's word in going to fight at Ramoth Gilead, and was condemned by God for working together with those who hated Him, and "therefore is wrath upon you from Yahweh" (2 Chron. 19:2). A man may fail repeatedly, as Jehoshaphat did in his relations with Ahab and allowing his son to marry Jezebel's daughter, and even experience God's wrath. And yet finally be judged as having done what was right in God's eyes. That doing of right may refer therefore not to a spotless track record of behaviour, but rather to a basic faith in God, repentance and what the New Testament calls "abiding in Him". It is not the dramatic ups and downs on the graph of human spirituality over time which are significant to God. It is the overall state of the heart. And we can take courage from this in our own lives, and be guided therefore not to think too highly of those who at specific points show great commitment, nor to think too lowly of those who fail in specific points of their journey. We also learn that some men die with weaknesses, such as not taking away the high places. But this does not necessarily tip the balance towards their condemnation. This needs to be factored in to our thinking about the spiritual fate of those who die committing suicide.

1Ki 22:44 Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel-
Or, "kings". Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram were all contemporary with Jehoshaphat, and he seems to be commended for this. And yet the Chronicles record clearly shows that he was too close to them. His son married a daughter of Ahab (2 Chron. 18:1), and his insistence on supporting Ahab was seen as loving those who hated Yahweh, and the wrath of God was upon him because of it (2 Chron. 19:2). And yet he is commended for having peace with the kings of Israel (1 Kings 22:44), even though that desire for peace with them led him into major sin. But he was judged as having a heart right with God (2 Chron. 19:3). We sense God weighting Jehoshaphat's sins with his relations with Israel against his genuine desire for peace within God's people. And overall, as he was judged on the state of his heart, his desire for unity and peace was judged as his dominant desire. We simply cannot factor in or weight all the dimensions in a man's heart. Only God can. And the reason we are not to judge is because in fact we cannot judge, in that we don't have access to human hearts.

1Ki 22:45 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he showed, and how he warred, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

1Ki 22:46 The remainder of the sodomites, from the days of his father Asa, he put away out of the land-

Here we again encounter the theme of partial purges and partial living according to God's standards; and also the reality of the fact that no soon was one apostacy stamped out by a king that it rose up again. It was this lack of abiding spiritual change which led the nation to a downward spiral which climaxed in their rejection by God as having sinned worse than Israel (Ez. 16,23).

1Ki 22:47 There was no king in Edom: a deputy was king-

This explains why Solomon could have access to Ezion Geber (:48) which was in Edom (1 Kings 9:26). The "deputy" was surely one imposed by Jehoshaphat (s.w. 1 Kings 4:7). Perhaps this effective subjugation of Edom (2 Kings 8:20,22) by Jehoshaphat is part of the overall scene of his power over the surrounding nations which we find in 2 Chron. 17:10,11. Hadad of Edom had been an adversary to Solomon, who also traded through Ezion Geber (1 Kings 11:14); but not to Jehoshaphat.

1Ki 22:48 Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they didn't go; for the ships were broken at Ezion Geber-

2 Chron. 20:36,37 says that this was a joint venture with Ahab's son Ahaziah. He was so slow to learn the lesson that he should not work together with the apostate ten tribe kingdom. He had almost lost his life because of this whilst fighting at Ramoth Gilead. And like us, the situations were repeated, but he was so slow to learn.

"Ships of Tarshish" is clearly a technical term for a long distance trading vessel. "Tarshish" appears to have been the source of gold, peacocks, silver etc., which are only found together in southern India. But a ship of Tarshish wasn't necessarily a ship which went to Tarshish. "Tarshish" means 'endurance' and refers to vessels which had

a capacity for long distance trading. At that time, India was the end of the earth for someone living in Israel. There is an analogous situation with how 19th century long distance trading vessels were known as "Indiamen", not because they necessarily sailed the routes to India, but because they were long distance vessels of the kind which had sailed to India. This is why 'going to Tarshish' in 2 Chron. 20:36,37 is paralleled with 'going to Ophir in ships of Tarshish' in 1 Kings 22:48.

"Ophir" may have been a generic name for areas to the east, including southern Arabia (famed for gold in Ps. 72:15; Ez. 27:22) and India; Ophir was in Arabia according to Gen. 10:29. Sheba was nearby and was famed for gold, so it was through this trading that the Queen of Sheba heard of the wisdom of Solomon. 1 Kings 10:1 goes on to speak of her after mentioning gold of Ophir in 1 Kings 9:28, connecting her with this gold trade with Ophir. But 1 Kings 10:11 connects Ophir with "almug trees and precious stones". "Almug" appears to refer to sandalwood, "the Hebraized form of the Deccan word for sandal". This points to "Ophir" as being in the east, possibly as far as the Indian coast where these trees grow.

1Ki 22:49 Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with your servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not-

Jehoshaphat learned his lesson of not associating with the ten tribes because of their apostacy. But he was so very slow in learning it. We would have thought that his experience in the battle at Ramoth Gilead would have taught him. But it didn't. His ships had to be broken by the wind / storm of God's wrath (:48). And then when Ahaziah proposes another join venture, Jehoshaphat apparently learns the lesson. I say apparently, because after Ahaziah dies, Jehoshaphat again repeats the same mistake with Ahab's other son Jehoram (2 Kings 3:7). And yet he was finally counted righteous with God because his basic state of heart was for Him. We marvel again at God's patience with men. This means that we are to continue seeking the repentance of men and never cut them off, as is typically done by small minded churches 'disfellowshipping' people.

1Ki 22:50 Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; Jehoram his son reigned in his place-

"Jehoram", 'Raised by Yah', would reflect spirituality in Jehoshaphat. We note that so many of the kings of Israel didn't have the covenant Name within their names, whereas the kings of Judah did.

1Ki 22:51 Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel-

The fact Ahab gave his son a name with the 'Yah' suffix ['Yah has seized'] indicates that Ahab did have some desire to show commitment to Yahweh despite Jezebel; for Jezebel surely would have been against this name. But he failed to raise the boy to be a follower of Yahweh, and in the end, Jezebel's influence was stronger upon him. We again see in Ahab a man who knew better than to live how he did, and who showed moments and aspects of commitment to the true God, but lived a life of overall failure until his final repentance.

1Ki 22:52 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, in which he made Israel to sin-

The language here and in :53 appears to give no credit to Ahab for his repentance

which had so pleased Yahweh. Perhaps that was of no abiding value, seeing that immediately before his death he specifically rejected the word of Yahweh for that of the false prophets, which led him to his death.

1Ki 22:53 He served Baal and worshipped him, and provoked to anger Yahweh, the God of Israel, according to all that his father had done-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: 2 KINGS

2 KINGS

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

2 KINGS CHAPTER 1

2Ki 1:1 Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab-
We last heard of Moab when David subdued them (2 Sam. 8:2). The Moabite stone states that Israel and Moab were in conflict in the time of Ahab's father Omri. Tired of paying the heavy tax of 2 Kings 3:4, Moab seized the opportunity when Ahab died suddenly and Israel were defeated by Syria at Ramoth Gilead.

2Ki 1:2 Ahaziah fell down through the lattice in his upper room that was in Samaria, and was sick-
Elijah had prophesied that all Ahab's sons would be cut off, and here we see the fulfilment.

Ahaziah means 'Yahweh possesses'. Ahab knew this and liked the idea of it, but did exactly the opposite to this spirit in murdering Naboth for not selling him Yahweh's possession. We can know things on one level and yet act otherwise. Realizing this bids us go the way of total, absolute surrender. Or perhaps he named his son this in repentance for not accepting this principle.

The record is full of connection with Elijah's healing of the widow's son in 1 Kings 17. There is an "upper room", the child falls sick and dies just as Ahaziah does, both are on a bed in an upper room (Ahaziah went up onto a bed, 2 Kings 1:4), but clearly Ahaziah is unfavourably contrasted with the Gentile widow woman. Because the widow's child "revived" (1 Kings 17:22), whereas Ahaziah did not "recover" (s.w. revived, 2 Kings 1:2). He did not come down from the bed in the upper room, whereas the widow's son did. The intention is to demonstrate the superiority of Yahweh and His prophet Elijah over Baal. This is confirmed by Elijah using fire to destroy Ahaziah's men, whereas Baal was supposed to be the god of fire and rain, in that he was the god of fertility and supposedly could revive the dead. But surely this superiority of Yahweh over Baal had been demonstrated for all time by the triumph on Carmel in 1 Kings 18. But again fire is called down from Yahweh in the same way as Elijah had done in 1 Kings 18. We see how people so easily revert to idolatry, and physical, visible evidence is of little long term value.

So he sent messengers and said to them, Go, inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover of this sickness-

The Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of a false god called Beelzebub. Jesus said, “If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out?” (Mt. 12:27). 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, ‘Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true’. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, ‘actually, they do not exist’, He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

We note they didn't ask for healing. For only Yahweh heals. They consulted some kind of oracle there to see whether he would recover. It seems the damage from the fall had put him in some kind of condition which appeared to them as a "sickness". "Whether I will recover..." is a tacit acceptance that Baal was not a god known for healing, but simply as a foreteller of the future.

2Ki 1:3 But the angel of Yahweh said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and tell them, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you go to inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron?-
Elijah had been rejected from his ministry as the lead prophet of Israel at the time of 1 Kings 19; and he had called Elisha to replace him. But he is here given another chance to serve God as a prophet. Perhaps he repented of his arrogance in considering nobody else to be a true prophet, and so God was willing to use him in some measure again. Or it could be that Elijah persisted in being a prophet, and God was willing to allow him to continue although He had asked him to resign and annoint Elisha. Elijah arrogantly persisted until God forcibly brought fire down upon *him* and dramatically removed him from his ministry. This reading of things inverts the common idea that Elijah had a wonderful ministry that ended in a blaze of glory and Divine acceptance. The idea that Yahweh was a God only operative in His land, Israel, was widespread. We see it in some of David's Psalms, and in Jonah's vain attempt to flee Yahweh's presence in the land. And yet that wrong idea is 'gone along with' here, in order to make a point to Ahaziah. Just as the language of demons is likewise used in the New Testament, although demons have no real existence.

2Ki 1:4 Now therefore thus says Yahweh, You shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die’. Elijah departed-
Perhaps his bedroom was not on the ground floor; :2 could imply he had fallen from his upper room, and now was confined there again.

2Ki 1:5 The messengers returned to him, and he said to them, Why is it that you have returned?-

The messengers obviously took Elijah very seriously, because they did not proceed to Ekron but instead returned to Amaziah. Such disobedience to the king was not normal. They had been deeply struck by God's word, just as those sent to arrest the Lord Jesus returned saying that no man spoke like Him. Again we see how there is a niggling conscience in man towards the one true God, and it is easily aroused. This is a comfort to us in our mission of witnessing to apparent unbelievers and agnostics.

2Ki 1:6 They said to him, A man came up to meet us and said to us, 'Go, return to the king who sent you, and tell him, Thus says Yahweh, Is it because there is no God in Israel that you send to inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die'-
This usage of the "Thus says Yahweh" formula is an improvement upon Elijah's earlier way of speaking; he has never previously said this. In 1 Kings 21:21 Elijah simply announced to Ahab: "Behold I will bring evil upon you…". We expect this to be prefaced by a "Thus says Yahweh"- but Elijah was so close to God he assumed he was speaking directly from Him. And yet Elijah didn't then repeat exactly what God had told him to say in 1 Kings 21:19. But now he does much better. Is this a hint at spiritual reformation in him, which was why God continued to use him? Had he previously been too familiar with God? Assuming he knew God's will and words? But now he repeats verbatim what he was told to say. We too know God's word. We know the Bible text well. But this can lead to an assumption that we speak for God; that we must be right in all our attitudes and positions we adopt on issues.

Several times we read that they "returned to the king". Literally, 'Repent the King'. He has been assured that he will die, but there is the hint here that if he repented, even that need not happen. This is how flexible is God's plan of working.

2Ki 1:7 He said to them, What kind of man was he who came up to meet you, and told you these words?-
As with Ahab intuitively guessing what Micaiah's message from Yahweh was going to be, so surely Amaziah guessed who this man was. He has the image of Elijah in his mind as he asks this question. Again we see man's religious conscience; he had a deep fearful premonition that this person would have been Elijah. The call of Christ is to accept that conscience and to totally surrender, moment by moment and day by day in human life.

2Ki 1:8 They answered him, He was a hairy man, and wearing a leather belt around his waist. He said, It is Elijah the Tishbite-
Elijah was characterized by wearing a hairy garment like sackcloth (2 Kings 1:8 RV- "a man with a garment of skin" is a fair translation, and we learn from Zech. 13:4 that a hairy mantle was a sign of a prophet). He had been relieved of his ministry in 1 Kings 19,

and told to anoint Elisha to replace him. But he doesn't do that, and only symbolically threw his mantle at Elisha and only had Elisha follow him as his servant, not as his replacement prophet. Clearly he had retrieved his mantle from Elisha and wore it himself, rather than leaving it on Elisha. But despite this stubborn, arrogant disobedience- God still works with him. He calls fire down from Heaven and God does so. He is not told to do this, he presumes God will answer him. And God goes along with him. Because later he was intended to look back and realize with awed shock how patient God had been with him despite his arrogance.

The whole incident on Horeb had been to make Elijah see the supremacy of the still small voice; that it is in humble, quiet service rather than fiery judgment of others that the essence of God and spirituality is to be found. But God had prepared Elijah for this earlier. Elijah had to hide by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3) for three and a half years (Lk. 4:25,26). In Rev. 11:3,6 we meet another Elijah figure- also clothed in sackcloth, with the power to bring fire down from Heaven, who for three and a half years... prophesies / preaches. The Old Testament Elijah is famed for his hairy mantle, but the latter day Elijah has not a mantle of hair but the sackcloth of penitence and mourning. The image is of a repentant Elijah. I suggest that this figure is representative of the latter day witnesses to God's truth in the last days. Thereby we are connected with Elijah in his sackcloth. We would expect Elijah to have been preaching during his time hidden by Cherith- but there is not a word of this in the record. We are expected to be how Elijah should have been. Could it not be that the Father wishes to show us what He was then trying to teach Elijah- that the essential prophetic witness is through us being as we are, the still small voice of witness through example...?

2Ki 1:9 Then the king sent a captain of fifty with his fifty to him. He went up to him; and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. He said to him, Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!'-

There are several connections between Elijah and Carmel; he may well have had a school of the prophets on that mountain. So that may be the locality in view. Perhaps Elijah lived on it endlessly reminiscent of what he thought to be his most glorious moment there. But he is made to show grace and come down from it. The third group of 50 did what the previous two groups of 50 did. They obeyed a command to take Elijah. They were no morally different. But Elijah is commanded to show them grace.

The squadrons of 50 soldiers were clearly sent to take Elijah by force. Amaziah didn't like the message, and so he wanted to shoot the messenger. We see this so often as the root motive and psychology behind persecution, dislike and slander of Christian preachers.

2Ki 1:10 Elijah answered to the captain of fifty, If I am a man of God, let fire come down

from the sky, and consume you and your fifty! Fire came down from the sky, and consumed him and his fifty-

This incident of calling fire down from Heaven is specifically rebuked by the Lord Jesus as not being of His Spirit (Lk. 9:54,55). And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah's example. When Elijah was asked to "come down" from the hill, he responds by saying that fire would come down (2 Kings 1:9,10); he saw himself as the fire / judgment of God. Yet behind that bold façade was a very insecure man; for the Angel had to assure him not to fear, and to go down with the third captain (2 Kings 1:15). Beneath his apparent zeal for Yahweh, Elijah was basically fearful, of himself, of others, even perhaps of God. So often, fear is the basic reason for our failures and misperceptions and harsh judgments. His motives were mixed; he clearly saw the similarity with how he had called fire down to consume the sacrifice on Carmel, in order to convert Israel back to God. But he clearly failed to see the value of those 100 lives he had now taken by doing the same thing in consuming people. The value and meaning of persons was lost on him. All he could think of was fighting apostasy and judging it. Elijah called the fire down in evident allusion to how fire came down from the Lord to destroy Nadab and Abihu and also Sodom (Lev. 10:2; Gen. 19:24). He did the wrong thing from wrong motives and yet he Biblically justified it- for the prophets themselves saw an apostate Israel as being like Sodom (Is. 1:10). Now this is probably how most Christians sin. We rarely harden ourselves and sin in willful defiance. In the heat of the moment the 'devil' of our own self-talk persuades us to find a pseudo-spiritual justification for actions which only later we reflect were wrong. The Lord's wilderness temptations were all about doing justifiable things for wrong motives, based on a self-justifying recollection of Bible passages. And this in essence is how it is with most of our failures. The Lord's victory and Elijah's failure should serve to stop us in our tracks in careful and sustained self-examination.

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

Fire from Heaven is a clear symbol of Divine judgment; we think of Sodom's judgment and the fire that fell on Job's home. Elijah calls fire down from Heaven apparently at will- both on Carmel and in destroying the soldiers sent to take him. God is not recorded as telling him to do this. He is extremely confident that God's judgment must fall, and his faith is rewarded. But he was so far from God in his spirit, as the Lord's allusion to the incident shows. But God patiently doesn't forcibly stop him nor force him out of ministry. He allows us leeway in how we serve Him; as in the parable of the talants, we are given the ability to serve but aren't told specifically how to in practice. And we will make mistakes and be unbalanced in our positions as we work towards maturity. God's patience with us is amazing.

Finally God sends fire from Heaven to remove Elijah from his ministry, as he was refusing to quit it as asked. The fire that came from Heaven to remove Elijah was therefore some kind of judgment of him, although he was not slain by it and was apparently removed to live in obscurity elsewhere. The chariots of fire that came to remove him were not therefore the blaze of glory in which a glorious ministry ended- but rather the opposite. It was God's judgment upon him, although he was not destroyed by it, but forcibly removed to obscurity. And in that obscurity, he apparently repented- for the transfiguration appearance make it clear that he will be in God's Kingdom. Jonah is very similar to Elijah, and we are left to infer his similar repentance after the narrated events finished.

2Ki 1:11 Again he sent to him another captain of fifty and his fifty. He answered him, Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down quickly!'-
Elijah sees himself as the fire sent from God; he associates himself directly with God and His judgments. He hadn't learnt the lesson that God wasn't in the fire but in the small voice. The captain wanted Elijah to come down from the high hill (cp. Heaven), so Elijah calls fire to come down from Heaven. He sees himself as the fire, as God coming down. He had the wrong attitude and yet God still heard his prayers; God worked with Elijah as Elijah wanted. And so we perceive the subtleties of a man's relationship with God. Prayer may be answered, and the extent of Elijah's faith in 'commanding' the fire to come down is indeed awesome, but we may even then still be 'playing God' in a wrong way. This playing of God, this over certainty that God was behind him, led Elijah into some arrogance. Elijah was being sarcastic in quipping that they had asked him to "come down", but he would call fire to "come down" upon them. But God still worked with him, as with his calling of fire down on Carmel despite again being sarcastic about Baal being in the toilet. God does work with people despite their immaturity. The situations repeat- and so does Elijah's failure. We are tested with situations and we may fail each time.

2Ki 1:12 Elijah answered them, If I am a man of God, let fire come down from the sky, and consume you and your fifty! The fire of God came down from the sky, and consumed him and his fifty-

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

The same words are used as in 1 Kings 18:38 for how Elijah called down fire to "consume" the sacrifice. Probably Elijah is again on Carmel. He was not fold to do what

he did on Carmel, but rather he exercised his initiative. And the same here. This is my angle on the morality of the miracle. The fire came from God and consumed 50 men, all somebody's sons and fathers... and then, another 50. But I suggest God had delegated His power to Elijah, and he chose to use it this way. Elijah confidently states that fire shall come down- the Hebrew is emphatic. Just as he said there would be no rain according to *his* word. There is no "Thus says the Lord". Rather does he present as so strong in faith that he was confident that what he said would happen. Although he lacked the love which is so necessary.

2Ki 1:13 Again he sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. The third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and begged him and said to him, Man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty your servants, be precious in your sight-
Twice Elijah has said that if he is a "man of God", a prophet, then fire would come down. His ministry as Israel's lead prophet had been removed in 1 Kings 19 because of his arrogant refusal to accept the other faithful in Israel. So it's as if he really wants to demonstrate that he is still a "man of God", a prophet. And the third captain perceives that, and therefore addresses Elijah as "Man of God". But he implies that a true man of God would perceive the value and meaning of the human person, and not slaughter people in such a light hearted manner.

We wonder if this slaying of two groups of 50 contrasts with how Obadiah [whom Elijah had despised as insincere] had saved the lives of two groups of 50 prophets of Yahweh- whom Elijah had discounted as insincere, since he had protested that he was the only prophet of Yahweh. Elijah thought nothing of taking two groups of 50 lives, whereas Obadiah (whom he despised) risked his life to *save* two groups of 50. Time and again, Elijah is presented poorly. Defence of God's truth trumped, in a word, people. And he is condemned for this attitude, both by the record, and the Lord's interpretation of these events. We must not think that these things don't apply to us- for each of us has a strong tendency towards judgmentalism, seen from toddlers to old ladies facing their grave planks. And some of the greatest 'defenders of the faith' in Christianity have shown no care for people.

2Ki 1:14 Behold, fire came down from the sky, and consumed the two former captains of fifty with their fifties. But now let my life be precious in your sight-
The captain chose his phrase carefully, for these were the very words of Saul to David (1 Sam. 26:21). He is asking Elijah to show the spirit of grace which David showed to Saul; and David showed that spirit because he was but reflecting the extreme preciousness of human life in the sight of God. He uses the same phrase of how the Messianic King

would likewise consider the life of others to be precious in his sight (Ps. 72:14). Elijah is apparently unmoved by this appeal to show grace. He only goes down because an Angel tells him to (:15).

2Ki 1:15 The angel of Yahweh said to Elijah, Go down with him. Don't be afraid of him. He arose, and went down with him to the king-
Despite all the bravado of Elijah against these captains and their soldiers, one simple reason he called down fire was because he was "afraid" of them. The "him" of whom Elijah was afraid was perhaps the young king Ahaziah.

2Ki 1:16 He said to him, Thus says Yahweh, 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die'-
As noted on :6, Elijah's verbatim repetition of God's words, prefaced with a "Thus says Yahweh", was an improvement on his previous attitudes. Earlier it seems Elijah had preached Yahweh's word to Ahab and Jezebel with no fear of consequences, ready to die. But now he fears Ahaziah (see on :15), even though the man was sick and incapacitated. His repentance about his pride led him to open himself up as a real person, true to himself. His bravery came largely from his pride. Now he had repented of his pride, he is less brave. It is all so very psychologically credible, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired record; and of a man who really did repent and become humble.

2Ki 1:17 So he died according to the word of Yahweh which Elijah had spoken. Jehoram began to reign in his place in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son-
We note that both Israel and Judah had a king called Jehoram at this time. This was perhaps intentional, because Jehoshaphat's son had married Ahab's daughter. "The accession of the Israelite Jehoram (Ahab's brother) took place, according to 2 Kings 3:1, in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat. Jehoram of Judah perhaps received the royal title from his father as early as his father's sixteenth year, when he was about to join Ahab against the Syrians; the same year might then be called either the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat or the second year of Jehoram".

2Ki 1:18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
This is not necessarily the books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 2

2Ki 2:1 It happened, when Yahweh would take up Elijah-
The Lord Jesus likens Himself to Elijah at times. Jesus sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). He quotes Elijah's words "Your son lives" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn't separate Himself from someone who didn't have His Spirit. And here we have another example. The context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be "received up", and "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah being received up into the sky / heaven. Elijah set his face to do this; but it was a setting of his face to have the humility to give up his much coveted ministry to Elisha. We could possible reason[although see later] that Elijah set his face, he was determined... to be humble. To not cavil against God's word that Elisha was to replace him. And so the Lord set His face to the humility required for the cross, and the ascension not into the sky [as Elijah did] but into Heaven itself.

By a whirlwind into heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal-
Elijah didn't go to Heaven itself, for no man has ascended to Heaven (Jn. 3:13). He was a sinner and the wages of sin is death. The time for reward and eternal life is not after death, but at the return of the Lord Jesus. We know from 2 Chron. 21:12-15 that Elijah died, and wrote a letter soon before his death. So indeed he was snatched away and taken to another point on earth. Obadiah had implied this was a regular occurrence. Hence the young men later went out looking for Elijah. Elijah was taken away to a life of obscurity, during which he repented of his narcissism. He wrote a letter to Joram king of Judah, meaning he lived for quite some time after his snatching away.

Gilgal was where there was a school of the prophets (2 Kings 4:38). Before being snatched away, Elijah was it seems touring the groups of "sons of the prophets".

2Ki 2:2 Elijah said to Elisha, Please wait here, for Yahweh has sent me as far as Bethel. Elisha said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. So they went down to Bethel-
"Leave" is "deny". Elijah's ascension into the sky has remarkable similarities with that of the Lord, into Heaven itself- a group of men sent to take him; Elisha cp. Peter saying 'I will not deny you' (2 Kings 2:2 Heb.); a cloud of Angels receive him; men stand watching on earth; the Holy Spirit given on his ascension…

Elijah tells his servant to remain whilst he goes out into the desert alone, intent on committing suicide (1 Kings 19:3). When he is finally snatched away, he tried to get his servant Elisha to likewise remain whilst he went further alone. Again he intended suicide and Elisha likely perceived this. And so God did snatch him away, either to death or to make him end his ministry.

2Ki 2:3 The sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, Do you know that Yahweh will take away your master from your head today? He said, Yes, I know it. Hold your peace-
The day for Elijah to be publically removed and Elisha to take his place had been set, and the other prophets knew this. Elisha was to take over as their chief. We can appreciate how hopeless it was for Elijah to be leader of the various schools of the prophets, if he had been persuaded that they were all insincere and he alone was left

Yahweh's only true prophet. For this reason he was removed from the office. See on :5,23.

Elijah was told to replace himself with Elisha, but it seems he only called Elisha to be his servant and didn't anoint him as asked. Hence the section about this finishes with the comment that Elisha served him (1 Kings 19:21). 2 Kings 3:11 describes Elisha as the one 'who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah'- he was his servant. That was not at all what God asked of Elijah. His taking up and snatching away was God forcing him to end his ministry; Elisha was told that Yahweh would take away his master from above his head, indicating Elijah was in the role of Elisha's master [and Elisha was his servant] right up to the moment he was carried away in the whirlwind. Taken away from above his head (2 Kings 2:3 "Yahweh will take away your master from your head today") is a strange phrase. Perhaps it indicates that Elijah was forcibly removed from having Elisha as his servant, and the way Elijah refused to relinquish his role was displeasing to God. But we note how in the gap between being fires from his ministry and being forcibly stopped from continuing it, God graciously still used him. See on :9.

2Ki 2:4 Elijah said to him, Elisha, please wait here, for Yahweh has sent me to Jericho. He said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. So they came to Jericho-

It seems Elijah was being sent around the various schools of the prophets (all of whom, as noted on :3, he had despised as apostate). They were to see him as their leader for one last time. There is no sense that they were that distressed about losing him, unlike the weeping at Troas when Paul told the disciples they would see his face no more. This is understandable, seeing he had claimed he was the only true prophet and they were all astray on this or that point of doctrine or practice.

2Ki 2:5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came near to Elisha and said to him, Do you know that Yahweh will take away your master from your head today? He answered, Yes, I know it. Hold your peace-

We note that all the sons of the prophets speak to Elisha of Elijah as "*your* master" rather than "*our* master" (also :3). Perhaps Elijah had formally disfellowshipped them for some apostacy or other, and demanded they never call him their master. No wonder he needed to be replaced. Or perhaps they didn't share Elisha's huge respect for Elijah.

2Ki 2:6 Elijah said to him, Please wait here, for Yahweh has sent me to the Jordan. He said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. They both went on-

It seems Elijah didn't want Elisha to be present when he was snatched away. Or as suggested above, the similarity with his attempted suicide near Beersheba suggests that he wanted to do the same again. And although Elisha had been told Elijah would be snatched away, the record carefully avoids saying that Elijah knew he would be snatched away at that time. He keeps asking him not to follow him. Perhaps he knew that his mantle would then drop to the earth and Elisha would have it. And he was resistant, still, to the idea of another man taking his ministry. He knew that if Elisha saw him ascend into the sky, then Elisha would have a double portion of his spirit (:10), making him greater than Elijah. And Elijah apparently didn't want that.

2Ki 2:7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood opposite them at a

distance; and they both stood by the Jordan-
We recall how Obadiah had hidden prophets by groups of 50 in a cave; and yet Elijah didn't accept them as legitimate, considering himself the only true prophet of Yahweh and Obadiah as a servant of Ahab rather than Yahweh. So their relationship was somewhat strained. Perhaps these meetings with them were intended by God to lead Elijah to repentance. But he refused, and so was snatched away from any public ministry in a clear, dramatic way. There had been one cave for the two groups of 50 (1 Kings 18:4). So perhaps a 'group of 50 prophets' was not a literal group of 50 men, but a kind of prophetic division of prophets. Rather like a "thousand" likewise refers to a family or military subdivision of an army, rather than literally 1000.

2Ki 2:8 Elijah took his mantle, wrapped it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that they two went over on dry ground-
This recalls the great miracles of Joshua and Moses. The crossing of the Jordan was near Jericho (:4), exactly where Joshua dried up the Jordan and passed also to Gilgal (Josh. 3:16; 4:13,19). To ask for a double portion of this Spirit was reflective of quite some spiritual ambition on Elisha's part. We see here Elijah acting as Moses; although when in Moses' cave on Sinai, he had been shown that he was not as Moses because he lacked Moses' humility. Although he had been set up to be as Moses; see on 1 Kings 19:11. Perhaps he was trying still to assert himself as Moses; or maybe he had finally arrived at the required humility, and so was permitted to act as Moses. And that is why he is given a role parallel to Moses at the transfiguration. See on :21.

2Ki 2:9 When they had gone over, Elijah said to Elisha, Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you-
Maybe he knew that he would be snatched away east of Jordan, and so now they had crossed the river, he knew the end was near. However, it could be argued that he had no idea that he would be taken away as and when he was- although surely he had a premonition about it. The Hebrew could equally mean "What shall I do for you, seeing I've not yet been taken from you". The same word for "before" is found in 1 Sam. 3:7 "Samuel *did not yet* know Yahweh". So he could even be hinting that seeing he had not yet been forced out of the ministry, he could still do miracles, and so he enquired what he might do for Elisha personally. This position was what called forth the abrupt, dramatic, public ending of his ministry by the fire coming down from Heaven to remove him.

Elisha said, Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me-
The allusion may be to the double portion of the firstborn (Dt. 21:17). The "sons of the prophets" had Elijah as their father; and so Elisha as now the senior prophet is asking to be treated as the firstborn of Elijah amongst the sons of the prophets (:12). That Elijah should have rejected them all, considering himself the only prophet of Yahweh, was as bad as a father disowning his children. No wonder Elijah had to be replaced as the 'father' of the sons of the prophets. But by asking to be treated as the firstborn, Elisha is showing that he considers himself just another son of the prophet Elijah, even if the firstborn. Elisha has not grasped that he is to replae Elijah because Elijah had failed the test of humility, as explained in 1 Kings 19. And Elijah had clearly not explained that to him. But he is thereby not making any claim to be a new father to them. He therefore considered Elijah an impossible act to follow, even though Elijah had earlier condemned him. He focused on the positive in Elijah rather than being fazed by his arrogant rejection of all his brethren. This is indeed a challenge to us; for self congratulatory brethren who condemn all others are some of

the hardest people to be positive about. It is so hard to make ourselves see the good in them, as Elisha clearly did to Elijah.

If indeed Elisha is asking to be treated as Elijah's spiritual firstborn, he is apparently ignorant of the fact that Yahweh had told Elijah on Carmel to replace himself with Elisha by anointing him. But it seems Elijah hadn't told Elisha that, reflective of how he so struggled against the command to retire. See on :3. Elisha shouts out to Elijah as he departs "My father, my father!", as if he wishes to stake his claim as Elijah's spiritual firstborn. But Elijah considered all the other prophets to be fake, probably including Elisha and Elisha's family, and only himself sincere. As he departs, he throws his mantle onto Elisha, as if finally accepting that he has been replaced by Elisha.

2Ki 2:10 He said, You have asked a hard thing. If you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so-
It's difficult to see why the gift of a double portion should be predicated upon this. Maybe Elijah means that if Elisha will continue to follow him to the absolute end, then he would support this idea. But the giver of the Spirit was God and not Elijah. So Elijah may mean that if Elisha truly follows Elijah to the very end, when none of the other sons of the prophets apparently wanted to personally accompany him, then he was sure that God would indeed do so. See on :6.

The Hebrew for "hard" means 'unpleasant', rather than difficult. It was bitter and unpleasant for Elijah to have to give his prophetic spirit to Elisha. This indicates how bitterly he resented having to accept that he was fired from the prophetic ministry, and had been replaced by Elisha.

We enquire why Elijah should reason that if Elisha saw him taken away, then he would receive the requested gift of Elijah's spirit. Most expositors glide over this question. "When I am..." is in italics in the KJV. These are words added to try to make sense of a difficult text. The idea is, 'If you see me taken from you... then you will receive my spirit'. Elijah had been told to anoint Elisha, the oil representing his spirit being placed on Elisha. He had refused to do so, and only treated Elisha as his servant and run around. They are on the road together, visiting the sons of the prophets. Elijah had a premonition God might cut short his ministry but had no idea how that might happen. He ought to have anointed Elisha with his spirit, but he doggedly insisted on keeping on in his ministry when God had fired him from it on Horeb. It's as if he is saying: 'Elisha, I'd need to be taken forcefully away from my ministry for you to get my spirit. If you live to see that, then I guess you will get it'. This was arrogant disobedience to the command to anoint Elisha and thus give him his spirit. And so... woosh, God does indeed forcibly remove Elijah from his ministry. And Elijah gets that and throws his mantle (the sign of his prophetic office) down to Elisha as he is snatched away, in some kind of last minute acceptance that he has indeed been replaced by Elisha.

2Ki 2:11 It happened, as they still went on, and talked-
This has similarities with the lead up to the Lord's ascension (Lk. 24:50,51).

That behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into the sky-
This may have been visible only to Elisha and Elijah, just as Elisha's servant alone saw the horses and chariots at Dothan (2 Kings 6:17). Horses, fire from Heaven and whirlwind are all the language of Divine judgment. And Elijah himself had called fire

from Heaven in judgment. It is hard not to get the impression of God's wrath- with Elijah. This was not the ending of a ministry in a blaze of glory. The ministry had been ended on Horeb when God fired Elijah from the prophetic ministry. And yet Elijah had continued to want to work for God, and he had been accepted- so far. But his attitude to giving his spirit to Elisha was enough to trigger this dramatic, enforced ending of his ministry.

It could be that after the triumph on Carmel, there had been another vision of God's glory in order to humble Elijah. I say this on the basis that the description of the cloud in 1 Kings 18:44 "like a man's hand" recalls "the likeness of a man's hand" under the cherubim in Ezekiel's visions. Clouds and rain are invariably part of theophanies. Elijah spoke of how, by faith, he heard "the feet of rain" (1 Kings 18:41 LXX), as if he believed that the Angels were coming with rain. Perhaps Elijah therefore told Ahab "prepare *your* chariot" and ride with the rain- i.e. 'be part of the vision of glory / cherubim chariots on the ground as it passes overhead'. This was the point of Ezekiel's vision; Israel were to reflect the Cherubim on earth, just As David moved in step with the Spirit / the sound of marching in the mulberry trees. Therefore in 1 Kings 19:42 when in the face of all this, Elijah places his face between knees, he may be doing the same thing as when he hides his face in the mantle. He sensed the glory of God near him but didn't want to face up to it personally. He didn't want to become part of the Cherubic vision of glory, even though he advised Ahab to do so. We must identify ourselves with the vision of God's glory, and face up to the life-changing implications of it.

Elijah ultimately did this, although it took him a lifetime- he was caught up in another cherubic vision and threw away his mantle and became part of the vision of glory; and hence he was called "the chariot of Israel and the [great] horseman thereof" [reading "horsemen" as an intensive plural]. The chariots and horsemen of God appeared; and Elisha perceived that Elijah had finally become identified with them. For Elisha sees them and then describes Elijah as being them- the chariot and horseman of Israel (2 Kings 2:11,12). Finally, Elijah became part of God's glory; He merged into it rather than resisting it for the sake of his *own* glory. He was the charioteer of the cherubim; for his prayers had controlled their direction. This identification of ourselves with God's glory, this losing of ourselves and our own insistence upon our rightness, and our focus on others' wrongness... this is the end result of our lives if they are lived out after the pattern of Elijah's.

Fire from Heaven is a clear symbol of Divine judgment; we think of Sodom's judgment and the fire that fell on Job's home. Elijah calls fire down from Heaven apparently at will- both on Carmel and in destroying the soldiers sent to take him. God is not recorded as telling him to do this. He is extremely confident that God's judgment must fall, and his faith is rewarded. But he was so far from God in his spirit, as the Lord's allusion to the incident shows. But God patiently doesn't forcibly stop him nor force him out of ministry. Finally God sends fire from Heaven to remove Elijah from his ministry, as he was refusing to quit it as asked. The fire that came from Heaven to remove Elijah was therefore some kind of judgment of him, although he was not slain by it and was apparently removed to live in obscurity elsewhere. The chariots of fire that came to remove him were not therefore the blaze of glory in which a glorious ministry ended- but rather the opposite. Chariots and whirlwind are all the language of Divine judgment. It was God's judgment upon him, although he was not destroyed by it, but forcibly removed to obscurity. And in that obscurity, he apparently repented- for the transfiguration appearance make it clear that he will be in

God's Kingdom. Jonah is very similar to Elijah, and we are left to infer his similar repentance after the narrated events finished.

We note how in Lk. 9:8, Herod enquires whether the Lord is in fact Elijah, and then in Lk. 9:19 we learn that many people thought that He was Elijah. In between those two questions about whether the Lord was Elijah, we have the feeding of the five thousand- a miracle framed in terms of how Elisha, not Elijah, fed 100 men in a similar way (2 Kings 4:43.44). It could be that the Lord is replying that He is not Elijah, but He is more in the spirit of Elisha, the prophet intended to replace Elijah. This all again hints that the Lord is pointing out that He was not of Elijah's spirit.

2Ki 2:12 Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father-
We saw on :9 that Elisha considered himself as Elijah's spiritual son, indeed his firstborn.

The chariots of Israel and its horseman! He saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and tore them in two pieces-
Although Elijah had been rejected from his ministry as lead prophet of Israel because of his refusal to accept other prophets and believers as valid, and those included Elisha, Elisha really respects Elijah and the tearing of his own clothes reflects that. In this he showed the humility which was so necessary for the prophetic office.

Israel had been forbidden horses and chariots in Dt. 17. Elisha is saying that Elijah was the true horse and chariot of Israel, it was his ministry which had brought victory. And yet it seems Elisha had a wrong view of Elijah. Elisha had been chosen to be the prophet of Israel, from Horeb onwards. But Elisha had not risen up to this, and instead his loyalty to Elijah had reinforced Elijah in his rebellion against God's intentions. And this is so true to how things are amongst God's people. God may seek to remove a man from ministry, but this is militated against by his followers' blind loyalty and mesmerization with him. This is a phenomena seen in politics, religion, companies, families... someone who ought not to be leader any longer is upheld in power by unwise loyalists. Perhaps this is why in 2 Kings 6:17, Elisha is shown again who are the true horsemen and chariots of Israel- hosts of Angels, not Elijah: "The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha".

2Ki 2:13 He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of the Jordan-
In 1 Kings 19:13, Elijah had wrapped *his face* [s.w. "before" the Lord] in his mantle and "stood" [s.w. 'stand' before the Lord] in the cave mouth before the Angel. In Hebrew, the words for 'face' and 'before' are the same. Too ashamed to really stand before the Lord, Elijah therefore wrapped his face. Earlier, he had been so keen to use this phrase of himself (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15); he had prided himself on the fact that he stood before the Lord. But now he hid his face, a common idiom often used by God for withholding fellowship. The fact we too are God's covenant people can initially be a source of pride to us as we do our theological gladiatorship with others. But the implications are so far deeper; and through Angelic work in our lives, we too are brought to see this. The word for "Mantle" is translated "glory" in Zech. 11:3; Elijah wrapped his presence in his own glory, rather than face up to the implications of God's glory. A desire for our own glory prevents us perceiving God's glory. Perhaps Elijah was being pseudo-humble, misquoting to himself a Biblical precedent in all this, namely that the cherubim wrapped their faces (Is. 6:2). In this case. Elijah was doing a false impersonation of the cherubim, manifesting himself before God's manifestation of Himself. Only at the very end does Elijah cast away his mantle (2

Kings 2:13), his human strength, allowing himself to merge with God's glory. He should have cast away his mantle earlier, when he stood before the still small voice on Horeb. The question of 1 Kings 19:13 "Why are you still here, Elijah?" may imply that Elijah should have allowed himself to be carried away by the cherubim, he should have surrendered himself to the progress of God's glory, rather than so obsessively insist upon his own personal rightness and the wrongness of others. And this was why God's ultimate response to Elijah's attitude on Horeb was to dismiss him from his prophetic ministry and instate Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:16). Elijah seems to have finally learnt his lesson, for he calls Elisha to the ministry by 'passing by' Elisha as in a theophany, taking off his mantle and throwing it upon Elisha (1 Kings 19:19). He realized that he had hidden behind that mantle, using it to resist participating in the selfless association with God's glory [rather than his own] to which he was called. But he got there in the end; hence the enormous significance of Elijah giving up his mantle when he finally ascends to Heaven in the cherubim chariot (2 Kings 2:13).

Elijah's mantle doesn't have a good history. He went to Horeb / Sinai at his own initiative, trying to force himself to be the predicted prophet like unto Moses. He goes to the same cave Moses was in, the cleft in the rock, where Yahweh Himself hid Moses' face as He passed by him. Elijah expects this same intimacy with God and hides his face in his mantle in expectation of a similar theophany. But it was an empty theophany- Yahweh was not in the earthquake, wind nor fire, but in the sound of silence- that was the message to Elijah. "What are *you* doing here?" is a way of rebuking his attempt to put himself in Moses' place. He was not Moses, he prayed to God against Israel rather than as Moses did, offering himself for them. He was then fired from the ministry and told to anoint Elisha to replace him. He doesn't do this, but throws his mantle on Elisha as a sign that Elisha is to become his personal servant- an abuse of the mantle, a sign of his prophetic office. So in :14 we read that when Elisha tried to part the waters by striking them with Elijah's mantle, it seems it didn't work- and so he has to ask "Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?". The mantle of itself is shown not to be powerful. Elijah had rather abused it, considering that because he was a prophet therefore he could do anything.

2Ki 2:14 He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and struck the waters, and said, Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?-

The LXX says that the first time Elisha smote the waters, they didn't open. Hence his question. Perhaps this happened, as such things happen to us, to make Elisha realize that the action of God is not automatic. It requires intense personal faith, and not merely following the pattern of other believers.

When he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha went over-

Elisha is being taught that indeed, the spirit and power of Elijah had fallen upon him. He could perform the same miracles. The parting of water at the Red Sea and by Joshua at the same Jordan river had all been for the salvation of God's people, towards their entry into the kingdom. And so it was with Elisha's work too. This was the reason he was being given this power. Elisha is being set up as a second Joshua, who did the same in crossing the Jordan miraculously at the same place. Elijah was intended to have been the prophet like unto Moses, but he failed; and we wonder whether the lack of further allusions to Joshua in Elisha's life might suggest he likewise failed to be the second Joshua.

2Ki 2:15 When the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho opposite him saw him,

they said, The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. They came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him-
The present site of Jericho is about four miles from the Jordan, but perhaps "Jericho" is being used of the region around the city. "Which were over against him" (AV) could imply, as we shall see later, that they were not particularly supportive of Elisha.

2Ki 2:16 They said to him, See now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master-
They still call Elijah "your master" rather than "our master". A noted earlier, this suggests a lack of respect toward Elijah. And yet I will suggest on :18 that they respected Elisha even less. I suggested on :7 that a 'group of 50 prophets' was not a literal group of 50 men, but a kind of prophetic division of prophets.

Perhaps the spirit of Yahweh has taken him up, and put him on some mountain, or into some valley. He said, You shall not send them-
As Obadiah earlier pointed out, such snatching away of Elijah, from one place on earth to another, had been quite common (1 Kings 18:12). It was just as Philip was snatched away from the Ethiopian and then found at Azotus, and Ezekiel likewise (Ez. 37:1). It further indicates that Elijah was snatched away into the sky, not to Heaven itself.

2Ki 2:17 When they urged him until he was ashamed-
Probably a figure of speech meaning that he finally reluctantly agreed, for their benefit rather than his. He wanted them to accept the Divine word that Elijah had been removed and replaced by himself.

He said, Send them. They sent therefore fifty men; and they searched for three days, but didn't find him-
This strong desire to find Elijah likely reflected their dissatisfaction at the prospect of having Elisha as the 'father' of their school of sons of the prophets. Although they could not doubt that Elisha did now have the spirit of Elijah.

2Ki 2:18 They came back to him while he stayed at Jericho; and he said to them, Didn't I tell you, 'Don't go?'-
Elisha appeared angry that they were so persistent in trying to find Elijah. By being so desperate to have Elijah back with them, they were effectively going against the Divine intention that he be replaced by Elisha. So in political terms, things didn't start well for Elisha. The sons of the prophets at Jericho hankered after Elijah rather than Elisha; and those at Bethel despised both Elijah and Elisha (see on :23).

2Ki 2:19 The men of the city said to Elisha, Behold, please, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land miscarries-
2 Kings 2:19 (AV mg.) records how the people complained that "the water is naught, and that ground causing to miscarry". This was evidently an incorrect superstition of the time; barren ground cannot make the women who live on it barren. But Elisha does not blow them into next week for believing such nonsense. Instead he performed the miracle of curing the barrenness of the land. The record says that there was no more barrenness of the land or women *"according to the word of Elisha which he spoke"* (:22). Normally the people would have recoursed to wizards to drive away the relevant demon which they thought was causing the problem. But the miracle made it evident that ultimately God had caused the problem, and He could so easily cure it. This was a far more effective way of sinking the people's foolish superstition than a

head-on frontal attack upon it. The Lord's attitude to the ideas of demon possession in the NT is similar.

2Ki 2:20 He said, Bring me a new jar, and put salt in it. They brought it to him-
The Jordan valley, especially around Jericho, is full of salty springs which don't give good water. The Dead [Salt] Sea is not far from there. So putting salt into the salty spring to change it is a way of showing that God uses that which appears the problem in order to cure the problem. We think of the Lord Jesus having our human nature in order to make a way to overcome it. The jar perhaps represented the well.

We note that sprinkling salt on a city is a symbol of its destruction (Jud. 9:45). It's as if the just judgment upon Jericho is accepted, but through that acceptance, blessing and healing comes.

2Ki 2:21 He went out to the spring of the waters, and threw salt into it, and said, Thus says Yahweh, 'I have healed these waters. There shall not be from there any more death or miscarrying'-
Immediately after Moses had parted the waters, he made bitter waters "sweet" through casting a tree into them, looking ahead to the cross, so that the people could drink from them (Ex. 15:25). Elisha had just parted the waters, and he does a similar miracle to Moses. I discussed on :8 and 1 Kings 19:11 how Elijah was set up as another Moses, but he failed to completely attain that potential because unlike Moses, he was not meek enough. Elisha is being shown that he too is called to be as Moses. See on 2 Kings 3:9. This is how much of Bible prophecy works. A potential is set up [in this case for Elijah to be the prophet like Moses]; if the person failed, then another option is tried, in this case Elisha. When that person failed, the prophecy became reapplied and reinterpreted in the ultimate fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. And those failed fulfilments become, as some see them, 'types' of Christ- in that their experiences do partially point forward to Him.

2Ki 2:22 So the waters were healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke-
The miracle was essentially by the word of Yahweh which Elisha spoke; the use of the salt in the new jar was shown not to essentially be the cause for the cure. See on :19.

2Ki 2:23 He went up from there to Bethel-
Now the mantle had fallen upon Elisha, he visits the schools of the prophets at Jericho, Bethel (:3) and then at Carmel (see on :25).

As he was going up by the way, some youths came out of the city and mocked him, and said to him-
"Youth" is the same word used of Solomon when he became king. It can apply to young men and not just children. "The city" may not be Bethel but Jericho, because Elisha was going to Bethel from Jericho, and he turned behind him to address the youths (:24). They may have been young men who had worked as water carriers who were now out of work because Elisha had healed the bitter waters; but I suggest they are young men of the sons of the prophets who were bitter with Elisha because they were loyal to Elijah, and shared his bitter attitude and perspective that he could not be replaced- for he never anointed Elisha as asked, and resisted the Divine call to retire and give place to Elisha. The Hebrew *qereah* translated "baldy" is a form of "Korah",

who had rebelled against Moses' authority. The implication would be that they considered Elijah the prophet like unto Moses, and Elisha to be a usurper of Elijah. They saw Elisha as Elijah had taught them to. And this is an essay in his arrogant resistance to God's firing of him as lead prophet, and replacing him with Elisha. So the position of these young men actually says much about what Elijah's position was. But they were in fact the "Korah" usurpers of Divine authority; they were "torn" by the bears (:24), using the same word for how the ground 'tore open' beneath Korah and consumed him (Num. 16:31). The bears "went out" (:24), the same word for how the fire "went out" from Yahweh to destroy Korah's group (Num. 16:35).

Go up, you baldy! Go up, you baldhead!-

I suggest they were challenging him to "go up" into the sky as Elijah had. They mock him as being bald, rather than being as Elijah, who was famed for being a hairy man (2 Kings 1:8). These young people from Bethel were doubtful that Elisha could indeed carry the mantle of Elisha, which he was presumably wearing. Elijah and Elisha had visited the "sons of the prophets" in Bethel just before Elijah was snatched away (:3), and at that time they had spoken of Elijah as Elisha's master, "your master", rather than "our master". They were not great enthusiasts for Elijah, and it seems they were the "youths" here. They disliked the way Elisha was now claiming to be as Elijah, a prophet for whom they had no respect. I suspect therefore that it is some of them who were these youths, and they were not just random cheeky kids who were punished for their cat calling.

Another view would be that young men are always "the sons of the prophets" in this section of scripture. They may have been Elijah loyalists who like Elijah, considered all other prophets fake- including Elisha. "Go up" is also used to going up to a sanctuary to worship, e.g. Hos. 4:15 "Do not go up to Beth Aven" ['house of sin', another name for Bethel where Elisha was heading towards]. We note the frequent references to 'going up' to worship at Jerusalem or the sanctuary. They may have been challenging him to "go up" to the nearby sanctuary at Bethel and worship the golden calves there. Because they as Elijah loyalists considered him fake. But any such attempt to incite another to sin would account for the severe judgment of them. For to make others sin is the worst sin.

Despite these suggestions, we can also opt for the simplest view- that these were youngsters who were catcalling a bald man with no particularly malicious intent nor hidden meaning. Elisha calls down severe judgment upon them, apparently out of proportion to their naughtiness. He did this with all the immaturity and impatience of a young, prematurely bald man- for he lived around 60 years after this. This would then be exactly like Elijah calling down fire from Heaven to destroy the two groups of 50 soldiers- an act criticized by the Lord as being not of His spirit. But as discussed on 2 Kings 1, Elijah had been delegated God's power and had a wide leeway of parameters within which to use it. It could be that Elisha in a moment of irritation and embarassed anger followed the bad example of his one time master Elijah. He did just the same. The old covenant cursed those who went after Baal, and it's possible the "go up" was to the fake sanctuary at Bethel. Balaam could only curse those whom God had cursed (Num. 23:8), and "an undeserved curse does not come to rest" (Prov. 26:2). And so Elisha felt he could curse any idolators including these kids. This curse did come to rest, although it seems so extreme and uttered in irritation and short temper. Maybe Elisha was aware of Hos. 13:8 "Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open"; or Am. 5:19 "It will be as though a man fled from a lion and a bear met him". So perhaps, as with Elijah bringing drought upon Israel because this was the punishment for breaking the covenant, so Elisha is reasoning that

these youngsters were cursed by God anyway, so he could curse them in God's Name. Breaking the covenant would lead to God sending "wild animals against you, who will rob you of your children" (Lev. 26:22). The threat of wild beasts being sent against God's covenant breaking people is quite common (Jer. 5:6; 8:17; Ez. 5:17; 14:15,21 etc.). And so God went along with that, as He did with allowing Elijah to bring fire down from Heaven even if that was not how He wished His Spirit to be used. The spirit of Christ is to bless those who curse us and bless and not curse (Rom. 12:14; Mt. 5:44), to not repay cursing for cursing (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12; 2 Pet. 1:5-7).

2Ki 2:24 He looked behind him and saw them, and cursed them in the name of Yahweh. Two female bears came out of the woods, and mauled forty-two of those youths-
That he "looked behind him" shows they did not confront him, but called out these words from a secluded place. The extreme punishment, as explained on :23, was because they were the sons of the prophets at Bethel who had refused Elijah's leadership (probably because he despised them as unfaithful and rejected them when he should have accepted them)- and now refused that of Elisha, seeing he was acting as Elijah. The death of 42 of them may have meant the entire community of sons of the prophets there was virtually wiped out. For it could be argued from :16 that there were only 50 sons of the prophets at Jericho, and perhaps there were only the same at Bethel. There seems a connection with the disobedient prophet who was killed by a lion near this same city of Bethel (1 Kings 13:24). And these were disobedient sons of the prophets.

2Ki 2:25 He went from there to Mount Carmel-
Elijah seems often associated with Mount Carmel, and it seems likely he had a school of the prophets there, which Elisha now visited- having just visited the school of the prophets at Bethel (:3,23). This would corroborate the suggestion on :23 that the disrespectful youths were sons of the prophets.
And from there he returned to Samaria-
We learn from the account of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 that Elisha had a house there. Hence Naaman's maid talks of Elisha as "the prophet that is in Samaria".

2 KINGS CHAPTER 3

2Ki 3:1 Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years-
We noted on 2 Kings 1:17 that both Israel and Judah had a king called Jehoram at this time. This was perhaps intentional, because Jehoshaphat's son had married Ahab's daughter. "The accession of the Israelite Jehoram (Ahab’s brother) took place, according to 2 Kings 3:1, in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat. Jehoram of Judah perhaps received the royal title from his father as early as his father’s sixteenth year, when he was about to join Ahab against the Syrians; the same year might then be called either the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat or the second year of Jehoram".

2Ki 3:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, but not like his father or his mother; for he put away the pillar of Baal that his father had made-
Even amongst those who ultimately fail, God recognizes degrees of sin, and

graciously takes note of the good things they do. We see in all this His extreme sensitivity to human behaviour. And yet we also see that He judges the overall state of heart and spiritual thrust of a person's life, and occasional, isolated acts of righteousness [such as putting away the Baal pillar of Ahab] do not count for much, just as specific acts of failure likewise do not preclude God from saying that men like David and Jehoshaphat followed Him with all their hearts all their days.

2Ki 3:3 Nevertheless he held to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin; he didn't depart from them-
2 Kings 3:2,3 implies that Jeroboam did not actually worship Baal. Jehoram put away the image of Baal, but he cleaved to the sins of Jeroboam. The implication is that Jeroboam was not a Baal worshipper, which is what the majority of the wicked kings were guilty of. Instead he mixed true and false worship of Yahweh.

2Ki 3:4 Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder; and he rendered to the king of Israel the wool of one hundred thousand lambs, and of one hundred thousand rams-
This Mesha is mentioned on the very first line of the Moabite stone. Whilst the stone records history from the Moabite perspective, it is a powerful corroboration of the Biblical account here.

2Ki 3:5 But it happened, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel-
We last heard of Moab when David subdued them (2 Sam. 8:2). The Moabite stone states that Israel and Moab were in conflict in the time of Ahab's father Omri. Tired of paying the heavy tax of 2 Kings 3:4, Moab seized the opportunity when Ahab died suddenly and Israel were defeated by Syria at Ramoth Gilead (2 Kings 1:1).

2Ki 3:6 King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time, and mustered all Israel-
The 'going out' was to war. That it was the figure of speech means. "Mustered" is 'numbered' and we recall from David's numbering the people that Israel would be plagued whenever they were numbered and didn't pay the required temple tax. But the ten tribes had no temple, so we can assume this tax was not paid. And yet God gave Israel a victory at this time. God responds differently to the same sins being committed, because He weighs up the context and dimension of the sin in a way which we cannot. We are not to judge not least because we in fact cannot judge. We lack the huge and total background factoring which God alone has access to.

2Ki 3:7 He went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me against Moab to battle? He said, I will go up. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses-
This was the same request made to Jehoshaphat by Ahab, and he responds in the same positive way with the same language he used to him (1 Kings 22:4). And yet by doing that, he had incited the wrath of God against him for helping those who hated Yahweh (2 Chron. 19:2). He very nearly lost his life at Ramoth Gilead for doing this. But he didn't learn. So he was tested again by various requests from Ahaziah, Ahab's son, to do further joint ventures. He agreed, wrongly, and his ships were destroyed (1 Kings 22:48), Chronicles adding that this was because of God's wrath at his working with Ahaziah. After that Ahaziah made another such request, and it seemed Jehoshaphat learned his lesson and refused to work with him again (1 Kings 22:49). But he hadn't.

For now he again works with Ahab's son. And yet he was finally counted righteous with God because his basic state of heart was for Him. We marvel again at God's patience with men. This means that we are to continue seeking the repentance of men and never cut them off, as is typically done by small minded churches 'disfellowshipping' people.

Jehoshaphat agreed, partly because the sister of Jehoram had married his son, and partly because he himself had been attacked by Moab recently (2 Chron. 20:1). He allowed family pressures and the desire for personal security to override spiritual principle; and that in essence is our abiding temptation likewise.

2Ki 3:8 He said, Which way shall we go up? He answered, The way of the wilderness of Edom-

This answer perhaps came from Jehoshaphat, who as noted on 1 Kings 22:47 had installed his own deputy in Edom. The idea was that supportive Edomite forces, or perhaps the garrison of Judah in Edom, would join this assault upon Moab. There were two ways to attack Moab, from the north or from the south, and Jehoshaphat advises from the south. The northern route would have been through Ramoth Gilead, where Jehoshaphat had nearly lost his life supporting Ahab. So it is understandable he wished to avoid that.

2Ki 3:9 So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom; and they made a circuit of seven days' journey-

I suggested on 1 Kings 22:47 ("There was no king in Edom: a deputy was king") that Jehoshaphat had installed a Jewish deputy over Edom, so this "king" was likely a Jew governing Edom for Jehoshaphat. See on :8. The language of making a circuit in the wilderness is to point up the similarities with Israel in the wilderness; for they were to be tested likewise, and saved by the prophet Elisha, just as they had been saved by Moses. See on 2 Kings 4:3.

There was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them-

The language recalls Israel's crisis after they had come out of the Red Sea into that same wilderness. Elisha had been raised up to be, potentially, another Moses, as explained on 2 Kings 2:21. This was why he accompanied them (:11). See on :21.

2Ki 3:10 The king of Israel said, Alas! For Yahweh has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab-

We note the idolatrous king of Israel speaks of "Yahweh". The ten tribes believed that Baal worship was a form of Yahweh worship, and never totally rejected Yahweh. He wrongly assumes that Yahweh had called them all together to attack Moab, when clearly the campaign had been on his initiative. Yahweh had not been inquired of at this point (:11). So we see the theme continued of men wrongly assuming they know the will of Yahweh, as Nathan thought when he told David to go ahead and build a temple. This is a warning to us too. Our gut feeling, what seems right, following our own hearts and native intuition... is just that, and we are playing God if we assume those things are the same as God telling us to do things. In this we see the huge value and necessity of the Bible as God's word to us.

2Ki 3:11 But Jehoshaphat said, Isn't there here a prophet of Yahweh, that we may inquire of Yahweh by him? One of the king of Israel's servants answered, Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah-

Jehoshaphat repeats, more or less, his words at the time of the expedition against

Ramoth Gilead (1 Kings 22:7). He surely fears that he is about to almost lose his life as he did then. He sensed situations were repeating in his life, and didn't want to be disobedient to the prophetic word as he had been then. We too are intended to learn from situations which repeat in our lives. Jehoshaphat was apparently unaware that Elisha was present. For he seems to know Elisha (:12) but didn't realize he was with the army. As Elijah's personal assistant, 'pouring water on his hands', he would have been visible when Elijah had been.

2Ki 3:12 Jehoshaphat said, The word of Yahweh is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him-
To 'go down to' doesn't mean Elisha was somewhere else. They were all together in the desert, about to die of thirst. Typically men are spoken of going up to and down from Jerusalem. The idea is that the kings humbled themselves before God's prophetic word, and went down to His prophet from their higher estate in life. This needs to be our pattern every time we come to God's word, as we have it today in the Bible.

2Ki 3:13 Elisha said to the king of Israel, What have I to do with you?-
An idiom meaning 'go away' (Mk. 5:7; Lk. 8:28; Jn. 2:4). The next verse therefore says "Go [away from me] to the prophets of your father".

Go to the prophets of your father, and to the prophets of your mother-
He is recalling the 400 false prophets who had wrongly advised Ahab at the time of the campaign against Ramoth Gilead.

The king of Israel said to him, No; for Yahweh has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab-
"No" would seem to be a denial of Baal worship, although it could have been some kind of repentance. More likely he was still arguing that Baal worship was a form of Yahweh worship, and so he denied Elisha's attitude to him as being legitimate. This was and is always the problem for God's people- to worship the flesh in the name of serving God. Again Jehoram dogmatically assumes he knows Yahweh's plan, even though he has not inquired of His prophet.

2Ki 3:14 Elisha said, As Yahweh of Armies lives, before whom I stand-
The very style and language of Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1. Elisha was clearly imitating Elijah.

Surely, were it not that I respect the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward you, nor see you-
Elisha was accustomed to thinking of himself in terms of a man who stood before Yahweh, in His presence, before His face (Heb.- 2 Kings 3:14). Later, Naaman and his "company" 'stood before' Elisha (2 Kings 5:15,16). Remember that this was the Syrian army General, standing with a "company" in Israelite territory, at Elisha's house- at a time when 'companies' of Syrian soldiers carried out raids upon Israel (2 Kings 5:2). Any Israelite would've been terrified. But Elisha responds that he 'stands before' Yahweh. Elisha was so aware of how we live in God's presence, before His very face, that he wasn't the least phased by this. If only we can share this sense, of standing in God's presence... the most frightening of human situations will have little effective 'presence' because we know we are ultimately in God's presence, 24/7. See on 2 Kings 6:17.

Israel were God's people, His 'world', and the other nations were "not a people"; effectively, they weren't people, in God's eyes (Dt. 32:21). Is this Biblical evidence

for a social Gospel? These words are true of all those who are out of covenant relationship with Him, including those who have fallen away. Thus Elisha told the apostate king of Israel: "Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, *I would not look toward you, nor see you*" (2 Kings 3:14). We have an example here of how a man is positively dealt with by God for the sake of third parties with whom he is associated. The sick man was forgiven for the sake of his friends' faith (Mk. 2:5). This opens up huge responsibilities for us to intercede for others.

God 'looking toward' men means His salvation of them in Ps. 102:19,20; Is. 63:15 (s.w.). God 'looks toward' those who humbly tremble at His word (Is. 66:2), and not toward those who are sinners (Hab. 1:13 s.w.); and that person was Jehoshaphat and not Jehoram. But although God disapproved of Jehoshaphat's association with Jehoram, He doesn't practice 'guilt by association', and still responded to Jehoshaphat. There is a mutuality between God and man. The faithful look toward Him (s.w. Ps. 34:5; Is. 22:11; 51:1; Zech. 12:10; Jonah 2:4), and He looks toward them in salvation.

2Ki 3:15 But now bring me a minstrel. It happened, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Yahweh came on him-

It's unclear whether the "him" is the minstrel or Elisha. The sons of the prophets were musical (1 Sam. 10:5), and the hand of Yahweh coming upon a person effectively means they received a revelation of God's word (e.g. Ez. 33:22). "Minstrel" is a word multiple times used of David as he harped [LXX has "harper"] and sung his Psalms. So maybe this minstrel sung Psalms of David, which were then accompanied by this new prophetic revelation.

2Ki 3:16 He said, Thus says Yahweh, 'Make this valley full of trenches'-

As with the woman told to borrow empty pots to have oil multiplied in them (2 Kings 4:3), the extent of this miracle was controlled by the degree to which the people were obedient. The more ditches [LXX "pits"] were dug, the greater the amount of water would be provided, and the greater the effect of the illusion upon the Moabites. And in essence it is the same with us. The greater our faithful response, the further God works with us. God can do anything, but the extent of His working is in some sense limited by our faith and response, rather than His possibility- which is boundless. Hence when the man asks Jesus to help him "if You can do anything", the Lord replies that if *he* can believe, all things would be possible to him *(*Mk. 9:22,23).

The miracle is repeated in essence with the filling of the widow's pots in 2 Kings 4. The same word for "full" is used about the filling of the ditches and the filling of the pots. The scale of Elisha's work in 2 Kings 3 was national, saving the lives of thousands of soldiers and giving victory to God's people. Now the scale is different- one obscure widow woman. The same saving Divine hand at work amongst the nations is at work in one obscure life.

2Ki 3:17 For thus says Yahweh, 'You will not see wind, neither will you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, and you will drink, both you and your livestock and your animals-

Wind after a drought usually preceded rain in Palestine, and it could be "seen" in that wind blew the dust. I see this as meaning that the provision of water was by a miracle and not some cloudburst (see on :22), although see on :20. The allusion is clearly to the way Elijah did see wind and the approach of rain in 1 Kings 18:41,45, again in

response to his prayer. But God was working at a far greater extent through Elisha than He had done through Elijah. For now they would not see the rain or wind coming, but rain would come. And the rain came in response to Elijah's seven prayers for it, whereas there is no recorded, verbalized prayer here. God perceived their need and Elisha's presence as prayer, and responded even more mightily.

2Ki 3:18 This is but a light thing in the sight of Yahweh. He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand-
This is an example of answered prayer being above all we ask or think. God sees our unexpressed desires as prayer. He knew that they wanted victory over the Moabites as well as preservation from death by dehydration. Just as the desire of Mary and Martha was that Lazarus would be immediately resurrected, and not just at "the last day". Those desires weren't verbalized, but the power and nature of prayer doesn't depend upon our ability at verbalizing. For some can do this better than others. God sees our core desires as prayer, and responds. Perhaps this idea of a "light thing" inspired Hezekiah to have the spiritual ambition shown in 2 Kings 20:10.

2Ki 3:19 You shall strike every fortified city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all springs of water, and spoil every good piece of land with stones'-
Here we have an example of how prophecy merges into commandment, and if that commandment isn't fulfilled, then the prophecy doesn't have its fulfilment. The apparent prophecy of a temple in Ez. 40-48 is likewise more command than prediction, and most of it was not obeyed. The command to fell good trees presumably refers to fruit trees, for that was how a tree was defined as "good". A good tree brings forth fruit (Mt. 3:10; 7:17). But fruit trees were not to be cut down in military operations (Dt. 20:19). I see this as an example of where within the Biblical text, Divine laws can be overridden or changed according to situation. Even within the structure of the Mosaic law there are examples of this, and the Lord points out the apparent tension between the Sabbath laws and the need at times to work on the Sabbath. These tensions are not a case of situational ethics, whereby we allow situations to change ethics; but rather to demonstrate that God is not a literalist or legalist and neither should we be. The apparent conflicts within the Divine legal code are to elicit an appreciation of the spirit of the law. And we must note that it is God not man who can make these ammendments to Divine law.

2Ki 3:20 It happened in the morning, about the time of making the offering, that behold, water came by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water-
It could be implied by :17 that the water was totally miraculously provided, and not from any cloudburst. However it is possible in that mountainous region that there was a cloudburst the other side of a mountain, unseen by them, which resulted in water pouring towards them from the direction of Edom. But we note that the fulfilment of the promise was at the time of the morning daily sacrifice. The promise was potential, and required their continuance in regular daily obedience.

2Ki 3:21 Now when all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, they gathered themselves together, all who were able to put on armour, young and older, and stood on the border-
This matches the way Israel had gathered themselves together for this conflict (:6). "The border" may refer to the Arnon river (Jud. 11:18; Num. 21:13,15). The more

spiritually minded would have recalled that God had won a great victory against Moab in the time of the wilderness journeys, associated with the waters which formed their border (Num. 21:13-15). That victory was won by Moses, and so this would be another encouragement to Elisha that he was being used as a new Moses. This had been God's intention with Elijah, but Elijah lacked the meekness of Moses; see on :9. Now Elisha was being led to fulfil that potential.

2Ki 3:22 They rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water, and the Moabites saw the water over against them as red as blood-
This was a time of major drought, so they would have been sure this was not water, as there had been no rain. This confirms the suggestion that the water was provided by a total miracle and not be an observable cloudburst. See on :20. The redness of the soil combined with the rays of the sun at dawn would have created the optical illusion they experienced.

2Ki 3:23 They said, This is blood. The kings are surely destroyed, and they have struck each other. Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil!-
In this spirit, they ran towards the Israelites in an undisciplined way, each soldier bent on only personal gain rather than obedience to military formation or command. They were therefore very vulnerable to an orderly Israelite attack.

2Ki 3:24 When they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and struck the Moabites, so that they fled before them; and they went forward into the land smiting the Moabites-
"The camp of Israel" may refer specifically to that of the ten tribes under Jehoram, as the camp of Edom is mentioned separately in :26.

2Ki 3:25 They beat down the cities; and on every good piece of land they cast every man his stone, and filled it. They stopped all the springs of water, and felled all the good trees, until in Kir Hareseth only they left its stones; however the men armed with slings surrounded it, and struck it-
I will suggest on :27 that this destruction of the Moabites' land was the maximum judgment God had decreed upon Moab. The kings are to be commended for doing just this, and nothing further, even when it was in their power to do so. See on :19 for the issue of felling the "good trees".

2Ki 3:26 When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too severe for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew sword, to break through to the king of Edom; but they could not-
He may have considered that the Edomite contingent was the weakest out of the three kings. But he was wrong. I suggested on :8 that the king of Edom was in fact an Israelite deputy, and the soldiers with him were perhaps the garrison of Judah in Edom.

2Ki 3:27 Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall. There was great wrath against Israel, who departed from him, and returned to their own land-
Perhaps he was trying to imitate Abraham offering Isaac, in an attempt to desperately turn to Israel's God. As a Moabite, Abraham was also his ancestor. We wonder why Israel departed from him. Perhaps they were awed by God's grace, and realized that

the destruction of Moabite land and property was the extent of judgment God required, and they should not go beyond that. Maybe the sight of the man sacrificing his son was so tragic that they realized he had been punished enough and it would be inappropriate to press further the man's judgment. Anything further than what they did in destroying Moabite land would have been personal bloodlust rather than Divine judgment.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 4

2Ki 4:1 Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets to Elisha, saying, Your servant my husband is dead-

Josephus (*Antiquities* 9.4.2) says this woman was the widow of Obadiah, Ahab's servant. Many of the Elisha and Elijah incidents concern obscure characters. The widow woman with whom Elijah lived for three years was so obscure that Ahab's search for Elijah never led anyone there. And so it is with the widow of one of the sons of the prophets, Naaman's wife's servant girl, a guy who borrows an axe and the axe head goes plop in the river etc. Perhaps the obscurity of these people was a foil for the high profile life of Elijah and Elisha. They were being shown that humble spirituality in obscurity and personal suffering and difficulty is the essence, and not public work for its own sake. We observed this difference between Obadiah's more private spirituality, and Elijah's.

You know that your servant feared Yahweh-

This is exactly how Obadiah described himself (1 Kings 18:12). Obadiah also tells Elijah that Elijah "knows" that he fears Yahweh, and the widow says the same. We have here another example of how Elijah was so wrong to insist that he alone feared Yahweh; and for this arrogance he was removed from his post as chief prophet of Israel. Elisha 'knew' of this man's faithfulness to Yahweh, and therefore realized Elijah was wrong in his attitude; and yet Elisha clearly respected Elijah very deeply, looking at the whole man rather than one area of life in which he failed. This is an example to us.

Now the creditor has come to take for himself my two children to be slaves-

The sons of the prophets were not wealthy. We think of the borrowed axe head, and their cooking stew of whatever they could find. They would have been discriminated against in Israelite society. Such behaviour by a creditor was contrary to the spirit of the Mosaic law, but clearly it was the kind of thing which went on in Israel at the time. The children could be taken as servants, but not as slaves (Lev. 25:39-41 uses the same word for "slaves" as used here). Instead of challenging the creditor as to his disobedience to the Mosaic law, Elisha chose to resolve the situation another way. Head on confrontation with people over their disobedience to Divine law may have been the way of the spirit of Elijah and John the Baptist, but the Lord Jesus like Elisha tended to tackle such issues in a more oblique manner. As discussed on :7, a far more powerful witness and appeal

was made to the man when the woman paid her debt, than if he had simply been challenged point blank regarding his breaking the spirit and letter of the law.

According to Lev. 25:39,40 a poor Israelite could work as a hired servant until the year of Jubilee. To take the woman's children into such servitude was therefore technically in line with the law. We instinctively see a problem with this creditor- but we are thereby set up to want the spirit rather than the letter of Divine law. But Elisha worked to show grace above law through the oil of the Spirit. We see here how one can 'legally' treat brethren in a way that may be just about in line with the letter of a law, but which is in fact the opposite of the way of grace and the Spirit.

The creditor could have taken the sons of the widowed woman according to the law; but Elisha was taught that there was a higher way, and that the legalistic example and position of his idol Elijah wasn't the right way. See on :42 for more examples.

2Ki 4:2 Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you?-
The Lord Jesus appears to quote this in Mk. 10:36. Elisha is alluding to Elijah's words to him: "What shall I do for you?" (2 Kings 2:9). Elisha had asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. And he had apparently received that. And so his question to the woman is seeking for an opportunity to use that spirit. The woman doesn't answer this question. She simply expects Elisha to do a miracle. But Elisha wants her to have more involvement, to do her human side; hence he asks her what she has in the house.

"What can I do for you?" is a question Elisha asks twice (:13 also). But it is exactly the question Elijah had asked him (2 Kings 2:9). We wonder whether this reflects how he was too much in a personality cult behind Elijah, using his very terms and language. Or whether Elijah's grace to him was now being reflected by him to others, just as grace does have a natural way of being reflected.

"What shall I do?" could suggest Elisha was poor and couldn't help. He had once owned yokes of oxen, but true giving to the Lord leaves us minus for life and isn't always compensated. He could also however have been focusing her upon her need, like the Lord asking the blind man what he wanted, and appearing to walk on past the disciples on the lake or to take leave of those on the way to Emmaus. This focusing of man upon what he really wants is a feature of God's dealings with men.

Tell me: what do you have in the house? She said, Your handmaid has nothing in the house, except a pot of oil-
"Pot" is from the same root as 'anoint'; it refers to oil used for anointing, not for cooking.

Hence LXX "save the oil with which I shall anoint myself". It is the same word translated "jewels" in Ex. 3:22. She had no food. She was worse than the widow of Zarephath who had a little oil and a little flour. This widow had no food at all. So this is an example of Elisha doing greater miracles than Elijah, having a double portion of his spirit. The sale of a large amount of such anointing oil would really have been enough to clear her debts and to live on for the rest of her days, whereas multiplying cooking oil would not have had the same effect.

The idea is “an anointing of oil” - "so much oil, as would serve me for one anointing of my person". The hint may be that by faith, she could provide for the anointing of many others. The oil of the Spirit was to be provided for others through her plight and the resolution of her desperate situation. The oil may have been used for anointing, as her husband had been a "son of the prophets". It may have been what he was anointed with. And now through her suffering, this anointing was shared with others, mainly women.

2Ki 4:3 Then he said, Go, borrow containers, empty ones, from of all your neighbours-
The word for "container" is translated "jewels" in Ex. 3:22; 11:2, where the same three Hebrew words are found. The Israelite women were to "borrow" from their "neighbours" such "jewels / containers" and place them on their "sons" (Ex. 3:22). The connection is in that once again Elisha is being set up as Moses. Elijah had been set up to be as Moses; see on 1 Kings 19:11. But when in Moses' cave on Sinai, he had been shown that he was not as Moses because he lacked Moses' humility. And he had been sent to anoint Elisha to replace him. Elisha therefore is being set up as Moses, as noted throughout 2 Kings 3. It could be that now he takes the initiative, and himself now structures a miracle in order to present himself as Moses. The obvious connection was also to lift the woman up to a higher level, to see beyond her immediate problem of debt. She was not only going to get out of the debt problem, an exodus from her immediate 'Egypt'. She was to be given wealth which was to be used as the Israelites used what they borrowed from their immediate neighbours- to build God's tabernacle / dwelling place. But she was to do that through spending the wealth on raising her sons in the faith. That for her was building the tabernacle.

Don’t borrow just a few-
See on 2 Kings 8:10. The idea was, Don't just give God a half hearted try. Believe Him to the maximum, and act accordingly. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men. The widow woman was told to borrow pots in which to place the oil which would be miraculously provided. The extent of the miracle was limited by the number and size of the pots she borrowed in faith. The same principle is seen in 2 Kings 3:16; the more trenches were dug, the more water was provided. And so the exhortation is to us, to not "borrow just a few", to not be minimalists in our approach to God's ways but seek to realize our spiritual potentials to

the maximum. "Few" is the same word used for how the widow whom Elijah helped had a "little" oil in a container (1 Kings 17:12; also s.w. Ps. 37:16; Prov. 15:16). This widow woman was being invited to see the similarities, and to act likewise so that her oil would also be enough for her and her family.

I have discussed earlier how the use of the Spirit by Elijah was not always exactly as God wished, but power was delegated to him to use. Thus he brought fire down twice to destroy groups of 50 men, but the Lord implicitly criticizes this. And Elijah was stopped from scribbling the third group of 50. And so we wonder whether Elisha's miracle here was thought up by himself, although it used God's power. There are clear similarities with the widow woman and her son having her flour and cooking oil miraculously multiplied by Elijah in time of famine and want. And one suspects Elijah was seeking to emulate and replicate Elijah's work, rather than accepting Elijah had been fired from the ministry for arrogance and judgmentalism, and God intended Elisha to be a new man for Him. He was so but partially, because he was held back by his hero worship of Elijah and constant endeavour to be like Elijah, rather than being a totally new creation. And we see a lot of this in church life.

2Ki 4:4 You shall go in, and shut the door on yourself and on your sons-
There is a connection between shutting the door and praying (:33; Mt. 6:6). The idea was that her situation was going to be read as a prayer. And practically, Elisha didn't want others seeing the miracle. The actions of God in our lives are intimate, between Him and ourselves; and not to be disturbed by the observations and perceptions of others. Elisha wasn't present when the miracle happened; he wanted her to experience God alone, directly in her poverty stricken kitchen, without any religious representative present. Prayers and miracles behind shut doors are a feature of the narrative here; and the Lord alludes here by saying we should pray likewise. The idea is that relationship with God and His action in our lives is by its nature, totally personal. The Shunammite woman likewise closes the door on her dead son (:21).

Shutting the door was also to remind her later that nobody could have brought oil in to her. We all have a tendency to later rationalize away God's wonderful works. And that is made intellectually respectable by higher critics.

And pour out into all those containers; and you shall set aside that which is full-
The idea was that the pouring out had to be continuous (:6). This was an exhortation to use to the maximum the potential given. The oil would continue to be there to be poured out, as long as she had containers for it to go into. If she were to take a break and run out for more containers, the oil would cease to flow. The extent of the miracle was directly related to how much faith and effort she had shown in borrowing the containers. The miracle repeats the essence of the situation in 2 Kings 3:16, where the Israelites had to dig ditches, and then water was abundantly poured into them by God,

thus giving them the victory. The same word for "full" is used about the filling of the ditches and the filling of the pots. The scale of Elisha's work in 2 Kings 3 was national, saving the lives of thousands of soldiers and giving victory to God's people. Now the scale is different- one obscure widow woman. The same saving Divine hand at work amongst the nations is at work in one obscure life.

In the same way as they had to obediently dig the ditches, doing what was totally counter intuitive, so the woman had to borrow the vessels before the miracle happened. As with the woman told to borrow empty pots to have oil multiplied in them (2 Kings 4:3), the extent of this miracle was controlled by the degree to which the people were obedient. The more ditches [LXX "pits"] were dug, the greater the amount of water would be provided, and the greater the effect of the illusion upon the Moabites..

2Ki 4:5 So she went from him, and shut the door on herself and on her sons; they brought the containers to her, and she poured out-
The Divine cameraman is as it were zoomed in upon the scene, as the boys brought the containers to her, with her pouring continually into them. For the pouring was continuous (see on :4). The words for 'pouring out' and "oil" in :2 are those used of pouring out oil in anointing (Gen. 28:18; 35:14; Lev. 8:12; 1 Sam. 10:1 etc.) and preparing the offerings (Lev. 2:1,6). She was being bidden see this act of faith as a religious act, preparing for a life of further sacrifice and dedication to Divine service, rather than simply a means of getting out from her immediate problems. The word for 'pouring out' is used later in this chapter (:40,41). The same spirit of faith in pouring out was being asked for, and the widow was the parade example to those men.

The nature of the miracle required that the woman had her sons assisting her, gathering the vessels and holding them whilst she poured out into them; :6 implies she asked her son to bring another container whilst she held the pouring pot. They were the ones saved, and so they were the ones brought in to the work and used. Just as we are. Seeing Elisha wasn't present with them, the experience was intended to bind mother and sons closer together. Which is what participating in redemption should do to all experiencing it. This miracle behind closed doors would however have soon been shared by the woman- because she was seen in the village market selling oil from her neighbour's vessels and then returning those vessels to them. Questions would have been asked- 'Where did the oil come from?', 'What did you use my vessel for?'. And so the very private personal relationship and activity between God and the woman, behind closed doors, would have become the basis of her witness to her world.

2Ki 4:6 It happened, when the containers were full, that she said to her son, Bring me another container. He said to her, There isn't another container. The oil stopped flowing-
As discussed on :4, the oil flowed continually, and the extent of the miracle was

therefore only limited by the number of containers which they had borrowed in faith and works of faith. The filling of the containers with the oil of the Spirit may look forward to how Israel had become as empty containers at the hands of the Babylonians, but were to be filled with the Spirit as far as they believed the promise (s.w. Jer. 51:34). The idea is that the oil / spirit keeps flowing whilst there is a vessel able to receive it. A profound principle. We wonder why the detail of :6 is included. Possibly we are to infer that sons and mother looked at each other with the unspoken thought that if they had only borrowed more vessels, they would have had even more oil to sell.

2Ki 4:7 Then she came and told the man of God. He said, Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt-
We are left to imagine the surprise and awkwardness of the creditor. This was a far more powerful way of leading him to a more Godly attitude than a head on confrontation with him about his breaking the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law. See on :1.

And you and your sons shall live on the rest-
I suggested on :3 that the wealth received from borrowing pots from her neighbours was analogous to that received by the Israelites when they borrowed from their neighbours when they left Egypt. And they used it to build God's dwelling place. But she was to do that through spending the wealth on raising her sons in the faith. That for her was building the tabernacle.

2Ki 4:8 It fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman; and she persuaded him to eat bread. So it was, that as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat bread-
Shunem would have been a logical stopping point on journeys from mount Carmel, where it seems there was a school of the prophets, to the towns of Galilee where apparently Elisha ministered on the kind of circuit which Samuel operated. Maybe her persuasion of Elijah to eat food with her was because he felt awkward in the presence of a wealthy person. We can conclude that Elisha lived on Carmel, still following in the personality cult of Elijah rather than being a new creation for God's use after Elijah was found inadequate for the ministry.

2Ki 4:9 She said to her husband, See now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God that passes by us continually-
It seems that Elisha didn't specifically tell her of his prophetic work. Perhaps he as a poor man was shy to witness to the wealthy, as we can be. If even the lead prophet of Israel felt like this, it's unsurprising that we also do. Or perhaps she was a Gentile and he considered her unworthy of the Gospel.

2Ki 4:10 Please let us make a little room on the wall-
The fact she "went up" to the room (:21) suggests it was a room on the wall in the sense of built above and upon the structural wall of the ground floor.

Let us set for him there a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp stand. It shall be, when he comes to us, that he shall turn in there-
The furniture might suggest that Elisha was literate and was involved in the study of the scrolls as well as writing.

2Ki 4:11 One day he came there, and he turned into the room and lay there-
We are invited to imagine him meditating as he lay down, counting his blessings, amongst which was the kindness of this wealthy woman. And he wanted to respond to her grace.

2Ki 4:12 He said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. When he had called her, she stood before him-
Although she was a great woman, and I discussed on :8,9 how Elisha may have been keenly aware of this, she stands before him as a subordinate to his spirituality. Or it could be that she stood before Gehazi (:13), on the basis that the representative of a person is spoken of as them. This is why the Lord Jesus as God's supreme representative can be spoken of functionally as "God", although He was not God in any Trinitarian sense.

2Ki 4:13 He said to him, Say now to her-
As discussed on :12, it is possible that Gehazi spoke with her on Elisha's behalf. But it could be that [as so often with the Biblical text] this is not in chronological order. We are being given the background as to what had gone on when finally the woman "stood before" Elisha himself in :12. It would seem inappropriate for Elisha to ask Gehazi to call the woman to him if in fact Gehazi was to speak with her (:12). Rather would Elisha have told Gehazi to go to her and speak directly with her.

'Behold, you have cared for us with all this care. What is to be done for you?-
The Hebrew word for "care" also means "reverence". She 'reverenced' him (RVmg.). To reverence someone is to care for them. Care therefore comes out of a respect / reverence for the person. If we respect persons for who they are, we will care. Care in that sense can't in any sense be properly done or shown if it's simply from a sense of duty, because we're paid to do it, because we might get some benefit from doing so, etc.

Would you like to be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the army?'-
Elisha lived in Samaria, or at least had a house there, and was well known it seems to

the Israelite leadership- despite his insistence upon Yahweh worship. The leadership likely tolerated him in that they considered that they were worshipping Yahweh, but did it through their Baal worship. This was and is now the essential temptation to all God's people.

She answered, I dwell among my own people-
This would imply she was a Gentile, and didn't want to be spoken of to the king of Israel. This continues the similarities with Elijah, who was also cared for by a Gentile woman. The woman may well have been a Philistine, as the events of 2 Kings 8:2 appear to have happened at this time.

2Ki 4:14 He said, What then is to be done for her? Gehazi answered, Most certainly she has no son, and her husband is old-
The scene is so imaginable. Two men in the guest room discussing what the know about their host and how best to help her. Gehazi observes the age difference between the man and his wife, and seems to sense she had never had her own children. We are left to imagine the wide range of possible scenarios which may have resulted in this situation. The narrative seems purposefully open ended at points like this, so that we can enter into the situation.

This is what Elisha had been asked by Elijah. On one hand, we see here grace experienced being reflected to others. But we might also speculate that Elisha was dominated by a desire to replicate his master Elijah; when it was God's intention from Horeb onwards that Elisha replace Elijah and have a better spirit. Instead his spirituality was all about imitating a mentor. We see the same feature in so much small time Protestant sect mentality. Elisha, like Elijah, had some latitude if usage in using God's power to do miracles. We wonder whether at times he used that power to consciously imitate Elijah. Elisha lived on Carmel, :25, where Elijah liked to be after his triumph there in 1 Kings 18. This suggests a slavish following of Elijah rather than being a new man for God's service, who had learned from Elijah's errors. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, but the Lord clearly viewed Elijah's spirit as wrong and not of His spirit.

2Ki 4:15 He said, Call her. When he had called her, she stood in the door-
The Shunamite woman stood "in the door", i.e. on the threshold, when Elisha gave her the message that she would have a child. This was surely to help her see the similarities with Abraham and Sarah in the tent door, who were given the same message; and they like the Shunamite woman almost lost and then 'received back' the promised son.

2Ki 4:16 He said, At this season, when the time comes around, you will embrace a son. She said, No, my lord, you man of God, do not lie to your handmaid-

As noted on :15, this continues the connection with Abraham, for these are similar words to those spoken to him by the Angel (Gen. 18:14). And she responds as Sarah does. Seeing that God's word does not lie (Num. 23:19; Hab. 2:3), her words are tantamount to disbelief in the prophetic word. See on :17.

2Ki 4:17 The woman conceived, and bore a son at that season, when the time came around, as Elisha had said to her-
Again the language is so similar to the record of Abraham and Sarah having Isaac. But we note that the woman didn't apparently have faith in God's word to her. And as noted on :37, at the end of the story we are left wondering whether she did really personally believe. For unlike the widow woman whose son Elijah resurrected, there is no gratitude from her to God. Remember that she was a Gentile (:13). The point is, great things were done for a woman who was at best an agnostic, because of the faith of third parties. We see the same in Mk. 2:5. And this opens up a huge range of pastoral responsibility for us in the lives of others.

2Ki 4:18 When the child was grown, it happened one day that he went out to his father to the reapers-
There are intentional connections with Boaz, who also married a much younger woman and had a child by her. But as discussed on :37, the question is left open in the narrative here as to how much they really believed. The boy goes out to the field and finds death; later in this chapter we will read of a man going out into a field and finding death, in the wild gourds. Elisha saves from death in both cases. The idea surely is that God through him intervened in the daily crises of the lives of obscure, nameless individuals. And this is His style to this day. This is what it means to have God in your life.

2Ki 4:19 He said to his father, My head! My head! He said to his servant, Carry him to his mother-
He assumed it was just sunstroke. We note the man's wealth, having servants. We wonder why in the bigger picture, God allowed this to happen. Both Elisha and Gehazi wanted to do something wonderful for the woman as a reward for her merit. But that is contrary to the spirit of grace. And so all concerned had to be taught that life is given, taken and restored all by grace, and not according to merit.

2Ki 4:20 When he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees until noon, and then died-
Sitting on her knees implies he was still young.

2Ki 4:21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door on him, and went out-
I discussed on :4 how there is a connection between shutting the door and praying (:33; Mt. 6:6). But the record doesn't say that she prayed. She simply thinks in a superstitious way that the dead child may be somehow blessed if he lays on the bed of the man of God. The narrative leaves us guessing as to whether she ever came to true faith in the God of Israel, seeing she was a Gentile (:13) with her own belief systems.

2Ki 4:22 She called to her husband and said, Please send me one of the servants, and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God, and come again-
A full believer would surely have prayed directly to God. But she passionately believes that the physical presence of the man of God might possibly lead to the child's resurrection. Again the narrative teases us with the question of how far she really believed herself in Israel's God.

2Ki 4:23 He said, Why would you want go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath. She said, It's alright-
We conclude that she had not told her husband that the child had died, leaving him caught up in all the concerns of harvest time, his busiest time of the year, thinking that the child had just suffered sunstroke (see on :19). His response could suggest that she was used to travelling by donkey to keep the Sabbath and new moon feasts. Or his faith and spirituality may have been so weak that he thought that the man of God could not be bothered by anyone apart from on such occasions. This was the thinking of mere religion rather than spirituality. And he may be saying that a Jewish prophet could only be approached on such festivals, so it was a pointless journey. Again the record is intentionally vague, eliciting constantly in us the question as to whether or how far the woman personally believed in Israel's God. We note that the ten tribe kingdom considered Sabbath keeping and new moon observance as quite normal. The problem was that they thought they could worship Baal as part of Yahweh worship, and so festivals of Yahweh were mixed with Baal worship- just as effectively happened in the church at Corinth. "It is well...." here and in :26 likewise teases us, as to whether she was just fobbing him off because she didn't want to tell him their son was dead; or whether she said this in trust that Elisha would indeed make all things "well" through God's power.

2Ki 4:24 Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward! Don't slow down for me, unless I ask you to-
It was normal for the head of a household to have their donkey saddled by servants or

inferiors (1 Kings 13:13,27). But this "great woman" was so urgent that she saddled her own donkey.

2Ki 4:25 So she went, and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel. It happened, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, there is the Shunammite-
Although Elisha had a house in Samaria, he was clearly associated with a school of prophets on Mount Carmel. Elisha would have seen her coming up the mountain.

2Ki 4:26 Please run now to meet her, and ask her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?' She answered, It is well-
As noted throughout this account, we are left to ponder whether "It is well" was a statement of her faith that Elisha would make things "well" in the end; or a vague answer because she wanted to talk with Elisha and not Gehazi. There are so many of these kinds of open ended statements in the narrative that we assume they are intended.

2Ki 4:27 When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. Gehazi came near to thrust her away; but the man of God said, Leave her alone; for her soul is troubled within her; and Yahweh has hidden it from me, and has not told me-
Although she was angry with Elisha (:28), her passionate clinging to his feet reflects genuine respect and devotion. These two conflicting strands of feeling are quite often found in people as they come to God, or His representatives, in times of grief and loss. On one hand there is anger with God, and yet also devotion towards Him and a clinging on in faith. God hiding things from people is typically a sign of His displeasure; and He reveals that which is hidden from the world to His true servants (Is. 48:6; Lk. 10:21; 2 Cor. 4:3; Col. 1:26). So we can appreciate Elisha feeling at this point that he is somehow out of step with God.

2Ki 4:28 Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Didn't I say, Do not deceive me?-
Her view is that God had come into her life through Elisha, on His initiative, and she had been given the child on Elisha's initiative. She recalls years later how she had suspected Elisha was somehow deceiving her. And so she pins the guilt for the child's death directly on Elisha, even though this was unreasonable. But it is absolutely psychologically credible. For the death of a child creates an almost overwhelming desire to pin the guilt upon somebody. And Elisha was a convenient person.

There is a psychological credibility in the way she doesn't say he has died. Truly, "Great grief shrinks from putting itself into words". She cannot bring herself to say "My son is

dead;" but by reproaching the prophet with having "deceived" her, she sufficiently indicates her loss.

2Ki 4:29 Then he said to Gehazi, Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand, and go your way. If you meet any man, don't greet him; and if anyone greets you, don't answer him again. Then lay my staff on the face of the child-
Perhaps Gehazi was sent ahead at the fastest possible speed, not even wasting a moment on greeting people (which was often a lengthy business), because Elisha thought that time was of the essence in saving the child. And Gehazi could run or travel far faster than Elisha could as an older man.

But a snapshot of Gehazi's earnest, speedy journey is taken in the New Testament, and applied to the preachers of the Gospel, who likewise have limited time in which to share the vital power of resurrection with those who are about to die, or already spiritually dead. Therefore the disciples were to go on their preaching mission without pausing to greet others, such was their haste (Lk. 10:4 cp. 2 Kings 4:29). The Greek word translated 'greet' also carries the idea of joining together with others. People rarely travelled alone unless they were in great haste, but rather moved in caravans. But for the Lord's messengers, there was to be no loss of time. Every minute was to be precious. In a world full of time wasting distractions, information we don't need to know... this is all so necessary. No wonder that when those men finally came to themselves, realized their calling, and hurled themselves in joy at this world after the Lord's ascension... they preached repentance, immediate conversion and quick baptism, right up front.

2Ki 4:30 The mother of the child said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. He arose, and followed her-
The woman apparently had no faith in Gehazi, and was insistent that Elisha personally was her only hope for the restoration of her child. "I will not leave you" were the very words spoken by Elisha to Elijah (2 Kings 2:2,4,6). Elisha then had in view not simply a literal determination to follow Elijah, but a commitment to spiritually follow him. "Leave" is the usual word for "forsake", used in the many appeals not to forsake Yahweh for other gods. Again we are left with intentional unclarity, as to whether the woman was vowing to follow Elisha spiritually despite the loss of her child.

2Ki 4:31 Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he returned to meet him, and told him, saying, The child has not awakened-
Elisha was perhaps elderly or weak, and the urgency of the situation meant that Gehazi

was sent to run ahead of them. But the lesson was that the external symbols of religion, such as the staff of a prophet, would not bring the power and presence of God. "Neither voice nor hearing / response" is the very phrase used of how there was no such response or hearing from Baal when the prophets of Baal cried to him on Carmel (1 Kings 18:26,29). So we get the hint that Gehazi may possibly have invoked Baal as well as Yahweh, and we will see in 2 Kings 5 that his spirituality was at best questionable. Or it may be that the woman also entertained some aspects of Baal belief, for she was a Gentile (:13) and as noted throughout, we are left never completely sure that she was a fully believer in Yahweh.

2Ki 4:32 When Elisha had come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid on his bed-
The record implies that Elisha only now realizes that the child is dead; for he has commented that the Lord has hidden from him what has happened. This was surely to exercise his own faith. This is why crises come upon us unexpectedly; not because God is cruel, but to pique the intensity of our faith.

This was precisely the situation with the child whom Elijah resurrected; the same words for "laid on his bed" are used in 1 Kings 17:19. Elisha was inspired to faith by perceiving the similarities between this situation and that faced by Elijah. We too will be inspired by perceiving that no situation in essence is unique, but all were somehow met before in the range of histories we have in the Biblical record.

2Ki 4:33 He went in therefore, and shut the door on them both, and prayed to Yahweh-
The "therefore" may allude to how he perceived the situation as so similar to that Elijah had faced in 1 Kings 17:19. He knew what to do because he perceived the similarities with the precedent set for him by Elijah. It's hard to discern how much of this kind of behaviour was explicitly commanded by God, and how much was purely on Elisha's initiative. He had not laid the child on his own bed, the woman had, and so he was nudged by that towards perceiving the similarities with the Elijah precedent. And therefore he entered the room, knowing he was set up to resurrect the child. Mt. 6:6 alludes here, inviting each of us to see ourselves as in Elisha's position, every day-closing the door on our room and praying in secret.

2Ki 4:34 He went up, and cast himself on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, and his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. He lay upon him; and the flesh of the child grew warm-
Elijah *cast himself* down in prayer (1 Kings 18:42). The word occurs only in 2 Kings 4:34,35, as if it was Elijah's example which inspired Elisha likewise to cast himself down [AV "stretch"] upon the child. See on :32,33. The implication is that Elisha did so in

prayer; and in passing, we wonder whether this implies that Elijah's stretching himself upon another child, although a different Hebrew word, was also in prayer. Again we see that Elijah's prayerful example inspired another. Our attitude to prayer is so easily influential upon others, and we ourselves are likewise easily influenced. It should be no shame nor embarrassment to us to instantly break into prayer, nor to kneel down to further our intensity in prayer, regardless of the social embarrassment this may involve in some cultures.

It has been suggested that this involves three separate procedures from Elisha on eyes, hands and mouth. Because the proportion of an adult body to a child's wouldn't have allowed all this to be done simultaneously. In this case we again see how there was a process of apparently futile efforts and apparently unanswered prayers... before the miracle happened.

2Ki 4:35 Then he returned, and walked in the house once back and forth; and went up, and cast himself on him. Then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes-

The resurrection wasn't immediate. Elisha had to cast himself down in prayer again, just as Elijah (whose example he was imitating, 1 Kings 18:42) had to do so several times before the rain came. The reason is multi factorial, but as with Divine responses to our prayers, part of the picture may be that immediate answers to prayers would turn God into some kind of magic man who comes up with the goods at the click of our fingers. Whereas His response to man is part of the ongoing, mutual relationship with man which He so seeks. And the need to keep on praying, receiving partial answers before we get the complete answer, is part of developing that relationship.

The miracle didn't happen automatically. Elisha has to twice lay himself on the child, walking back and forth in prayer in between the two sessions. We note that prayer can be made whilst walking back and forth. Gehazi failed to revive the boy with the staff. Elisha had to more than once try to revive him. Heb. 11:35 says that by faith, women receives their dead to life. Both Elijah and Elisha experienced the need to keep on trying in faith and prayer before the miracle happened. We think of Elijah having to pray seven times for the rain to come, and stretching three times upon a dead child to revive it. Or Elisha initially failing to part the Jordan. Prayer is rarely immediately answered in order to pique our faith and intensity.

2Ki 4:36 He called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite! So he called her. When she had come in to him, he said, Take up your son-

Again we note that Elisha tends to operate with the woman through Gehazi. Perhaps this was to recall how he had asked Gehazi to call the woman, and she had likewise come to him, when he first told her she was to have a child. Elisha wanted her to perceive the

similarities, and to realize that the power of God's word which had made her pregnant was no less active at this time also. We too find we are treated in such a way as to restimulate past experiences with the Lord.

2Ki 4:37 Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground; and she took up her son, and went out-
There are strong similarities with Elijah's curing of the child of the woman who had cared for him in 1 Kings 17:24. That woman's response was "Now I know that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is truth". The situation is so similar that we are invited to wonder whether this Shunamite said or felt the same. But we aren't told. And again, the narrative is left hanging, to encourage us to enter into it.

2Ki 4:38 Elisha came again to Gilgal. There was a famine in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him-
We have in this chapter a collection of cameos from Elisha's ministry. They may not be chronological, as this famine was surely that of 2 Kings 8:1.

He said to his servant, Set on the great pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets-
We have the picture here of the communal life amongst the "sons of the prophets", using a large cauldron in which to cook their collective food; although we know from :1 that some of them were married with homes and children. We get the impression that instead of the sons of the prophets giving a meal to their respected visitor, as was normal custom, he cooked for them. This could be a reflection of their total lack of food, but I noted throughout 2 Kings 2 that the sons of the prophets can be detected as not being hugely respectful towards Elijah and Elisha. Elijah went too far in considering they were all apostate, and he was the only true prophet of Yahweh; but clearly he considered they were majorly spiritually compromised, and their attitude to Elisha and Elijah gives reason to think that indeed all was not spiritually well amongst them.

2Ki 4:39 One went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered of it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and shred them into the pot of stew; for they didn't recognize them-
The plant in view is hard to define, but "wild gourd" appears to refer to some kind of wild cucumber; or LXX "wild pumpkin". These plants were not necessarily poisonous, but would have given the stew a bitter and suspicious taste, leading them to fear that they were being poisoned.

2Ki 4:40 So they poured out for the men to eat. It happened, as they were eating of the stew, that they cried out, and said, Man of God, there is death in the pot! They could not

eat of it-
Given the tense relationship between the sons of the prophets and Elisha (see on :38), they maybe interpreted the unusual and bitter taste of the stew which Elisha had cooked as being because he and Gehazi wanted to poison them to death.

2Ki 4:41 But he said, Bring meal, then. He cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. There was now no harm in the pot-
The word for 'pouring out' is used earlier in this chapter (:5), again in connection with a pot or container. The same spirit of faith in pouring out was being asked for, and the widow was the parade example to those men. Using a handful of meal / flour in a miraculous way recalled what Elijah had done likewise (s.w. 1 Kings 17:12). And again we wonder whether Elisha chose to use flour in this way in order to consciously imitate Elijah, within the parameters of usage of God's power which he knew he had been given. And again we enquire as to whether Elisha [good man as he was] remained too much in the personality cult of Elijah, rather than becoming God's new man as needed and intended.

2Ki 4:42 A man from Baal Shalishah came, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits-
The first fruits were to be given to the priests, and there is no evidence that Elisha was a Levite. The faithful Levites had generally fled from the ten tribe kingdom to Judah. The "sons of the prophets" had effectively taken their place as the teachers of God's word to Israel.

Twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. He said, Give to the people, that they may eat-
The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

The firstfruits were brought to the Levites (Num. 18:13; Dt. 18:4,5). The miracle shares these things with the sons of the prophets, and so it effectively made the sons of the prophets the equivalent of the Levites in the ten tribe kingdom. Just as Elisha's laying on a dead body didn't make him unclean, nor did Elijah's contact with unclean ravens, so

again we see these men being taught a way of spirituality according to the spirit rather than the letter of the law. The creditor could have taken the sons of the widowed woman according to the law; but Elisha was taught that there was a higher way, and that the legalistic example and position of his idol Elijah wasn't the right way.

2Ki 4:43 His servant said-
The reference may be to Elisha's servant, Gehazi, who lacked the faith to raise the widow's son; and we will again see in 2 Kings 5 had some serious spiritual problems. The word for "servant" used here specifically means 'minister' (s.w. Ex. 24:13; 33:11).

What, should I set this before a hundred men? But he said, Give the people, that they may eat; for thus says Yahweh, 'They will eat, and will have some left over'-
See on :42. "A hundred men" may be a general number, but we recall the various mentions of "sons of the prophets" in groups of 50, and how Obadiah had hidden 100 of them by groups of 50 in a cave. It seems there are no more than four schools of the prophets mentioned at this time (Carmel, Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho), and possibly there were remnants of those at Ramah and Kirjath Jearim from the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 10:5). If there were 50-100 prophets in each, then along with their families this would have meant that there were likely several thousand people who were faithful to Yahweh in the ten tribe kingdom. It makes sense of God's comment that there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Although all of them were considered by Elijah as somehow astray on one point or another, as he felt he was the only true prophet of Yahweh who had not fallen away.

2Ki 4:44 So he set it before them, and they ate, and left some of it, according to the word of Yahweh-
This again was repeated by the Lord in His replication of this miracle in a far larger scale. There is always a generosity in God's dealings, an abundance of provision, which should be reflected in our attitudes too. We note how in Lk. 9:8, Herod enquires whether the Lord is in fact Elijah, and then in Lk. 9:19 we learn that many people thought that He was Elijah. In between those two questions about whether the Lord was Elijah, we have the feeding of the five thousand- a miracle framed in terms of how Elisha, not Elijah, fed 100 men in a similar way (2 Kings 4:43.44). It could be that the Lord is replying that He is not Elijah, but He is more in the spirit of Elisha, the prophet intended to replace Elijah. This all again hints that the Lord is pointing out that He was not of Elijah's spirit.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 5

2Ki 5:1 Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him Yahweh had given victory to Syria-

The reference may be to the Syrian victory of 1 Kings 22. It is unclear whether he was honourable to God because like Jehu, he as an unspiritual man had still done God's will against Israel. Or whether he was honourable to the Syrians because they realized God was working through Naaman. He was clearly a man whom Israel's God had an interest in, and this was recognized. The high value of the present taken to secure Naaman's healing from Yahweh would indicate that the Syrians had a real sense that Yahweh was very powerful, moreso than their own deities.

We note that Naaman was "with" / before his master; and the Israelite maiden likewise was with or before her mistress (:2). "Waited on" in :2 is the s.w. translated "with" in :1. She too had suffered, as Naaman was. The two are therefore presented as in parallel; the mighty and the obscure. But equal before God, and in fact the obscure, anonymous slave girl becomes the saviour of the mighty and famous. His skin is healed to become as a child (:14),the same word in the feminine form used in :2 of how the servant girl had been brought out of Israel as a child. He finally describes himself in :17 as Elisha's "servant". He found humility, and became as his servants.

We note the intended contrasts between Naaman and the Hebrew slave girl. He was a great man, she was a little or small girl. The small saved the great, in the inversion of principles which there is in the spiritual economy.

He was also a mighty man of valour-
Meaning he had slain many Israelites. Naaman had to submit himself on several occasions- before his wife, his wife's maid, the anonymous servant of :4, Elisha, his own accompanying servants... God's work with us is largely about eliciting in us humility, and bringing us ever down towards it. Naaman's mightiness was humbled. And yet he was angry with Elisha's command to dip in the Jordan... anger is so often a result of hurt pride. Anger management is really all about finding humility before God and man. So many angry people are really just cases of hurt pride.

But he was a leper-
We note that lepers were openly present in society in Syria, even at senior levels, whereas in Israel the law of Moses required they were excluded from society.

2Ki 5:2 The Syrians had gone out in companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden; and she waited on Naaman's wife-
It was the law of the jungle then (as it is now in primitive societies) that the men were killed, and the women raped. And the prettier ones carried off for further abuse. This girl would have witnessed all that, perhaps being a victim of it, and had probably experienced the murder of her parents and family. She was a great example of faith, spirituality and forgiveness that she was minded to try to help her master, who was the ultimate leader of the Syrian armed forces. See on 2 Kings 6:8.

Many of the Elisha and Elijah incidents concern obscure characters. The widow woman with whom Elijah lived for three years was so obscure that Ahab's search for Elijah never led anyone there. And so it is with the widow of one of the sons of the prophets, Naaman's wife's servant girl, a guy who borrows an axe and the axe head goes plop in the river etc. Perhaps the obscurity of these people was a foil for the high profile life of Elijah and Elisha. They were being shown that humble spirituality in obscurity and personal suffering and difficulty is the essence, and not public work for its own sake. We observed this difference between Obadiah's more private spirituality, and Elijah's.

The girl had been taken captive as a small child or young person, from an Israel where the majority were Baal worshippers. We wonder how much she actually knew or remembered about Yahweh worship, beyond a sense that this was right, and that Elisha as Yahweh's prophet could do miracles. And yet this slender knowledge of God led her to the grace whereby she wished blessing upon the figurehead of her abusers. For likely Naaman's men had slain her family and maybe sexually abused her. For that was what happened to female captives of whatever age. We likewise wonder how much Naaman "knew" beyond that intuitive sense that Yahweh through His prophet was possibly capable of healing him. But he is presented as the model Gentile convert to the Hope of Israel. His subsequent conviction of Yahweh is presented as very strong. But hardly on the basis of doctrinal instruction. We might prefer to read 'And Elisha instructed him in the things of Yahweh and he eagerly accepted them'. But that is absent. We conclude that there is a hole within every human heart that only the true God can fill. When a man responds to that inbuilt conscience, then he is progressively convicted and accepted by God. And of course as in Naaman's case, is therefore providentially brought into contact with God's true people. And yet Elisha's enigmatic "Go in peace", or "Goodbye", avoiding a yes / no answer to his question about continuing an appearance of Rimmon worship, leaves us enquiring about the depth of his conversion. But the validity of his conversion is certainly strongly implied by the record.

2Ki 5:3 She said to her mistress, I wish that my lord would visit the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would heal him of his leprosy-
Lk. 4:27 states: "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian". So when Naaman's maid asserted that Elisha could cure him of his leprosy, this was not therefore based on experience. She had not even heard of Elisha curing any lepers in Israel. But she believed it was the kind of thing he could do. The word "heal" means ‘to assemble’ or ‘gather together’, and we can be sure this was just what the girl said. For in Israel (see on :1), lepers were separated from the people, and the healing of a leper was the gathering back in of the person to society (Num. 11:14,15).

There is quite a theme of servants bringing blessings or good news (1 Sam. 9:6; 16:16; 25:4 cp. Gen. 41:10; 2 Kings 5:3). This may be to reflect God's interest in the significance of the lowly.

2Ki 5:4 Someone went in, and told his lord, saying, The maiden who is from the land of Israel said this-
LXX "She went in and told her lord", suggesting the "someone" in view was Naaman's wife. She had to treat him with respect as he was one of the leaders of Syria, perhaps second only to the king. But see on :1 as to why the servant is just a "someone".

2Ki 5:5 The king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel-
Probably Jehoram, Ahab's son. Possibly Jehu.

He departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of clothing-
The high value of the present taken to secure Naaman's healing from Yahweh would indicate that the Syrians had a real sense that Yahweh was very powerful, moreso than their own deities. See on :1. Perhaps they had learned this from their historical defeats at the hands of Israel. And yet they seem to have believed more strongly in Yahweh than did the Israelites themselves.

Two talents of silver was enough to buy the hill of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). He brought enough silver to buy it five times over, along with all the gold. He believed that human might and wealth could purchase God's gift... and when he learnt otherwise, he contrasts badly with Gehazi who so desperately wanted some of that vast wealth for himself.

2Ki 5:6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter has come to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy-
We wonder why the request was made of the king of Israel, rather than any mention being made of Elisha. Perhaps there had been a loss of information during transmission. For the Israelite girl had just passed a comment to her mistress, and then from her the message was passed to Naaman and thence to the king of Syria. Or maybe it was assumed that any prophet must be subject to the king of his country. The idea of personal faith was foreign to them, whereby a man like Elisha could have direct relationship with God regardless of his king.

2Ki 5:7 When the king of Israel had read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me to heal a man of his leprosy?

Surely he is seeking a quarrel against me-
The King fails to make the connection with Elisha; he doesn't think to ask Elisha to cure Naaman. He reasons on a totally human level. He purposefully contrasts with the anonymous slave girl who know that there is a prophet in Samaria who can cure leprosy. Just as she is a foil for Naaman, so she is for the king of Israel. Again we see how the humble and obscure are greater than the humanly great. We know from Lk. 4:27 that nobody had been cured of leprosy in Israel at that time. The king of Israel lacked faith, but the Gentile Syrians believed Yahweh could do this. All because the still small voice of an abused Israelite girl had been believed. Indeed the king of Israel considered healing from leprosy to be so impossible, that he concluded this was just a provocation. For Syria and Israel had often been in conflict with each other. And it was a rather bizarre thing, for a neighbouring enemy who only recently had raided Israel and carried people off into captivity... to then come to them offering lots of money so that their army general could be cured by them. The king of Israel saw it all in secular terms, he clearly had no real spiritual dimension in his thinking.

We enquire why there is this part to the story. I suggest we are invited to imagine how Naaman felt. He had come to Israel's king to ask to be cured of his leprosy through Elisha. But the King of Israel is angry and refuses to respond. The initial rebuf was to humble Naaman and deepen his faith; just as he had to dip six times in Jordan without healing before he was healed on the seventh dip.

2Ki 5:8 It was so, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king saying, Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel-
Elisha muscles in, as it were, because he sees that this situation is going to result in war unless he does. Elisha's motive for the healing was so that Naaman "shall know" that God's word was really spoken forth in Israel. And in the end, his desire was fulfilled in Naaman's conversion.

Elisha's retort to the king, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come to me, and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel" contrasts with the king's despairing as to why ever anyone should come "to me" to be healed (:7). It is possible to detect some level of prideful over assurance in Elisha at this point. His refusal to go and talk personally with Naaman could be read the same way, although through this, Naaman learns humility and obedience to God's word.

It could be argued that Elisha's motivation in healing Naaman was so that he would know there was a prophet in Israel- Elisha. We would rather read him saying that he cured him so that Naaman would know the God of Israel. But Elisha's possibly narcissistic attitude still resulted in Naaman coming to the God of Israel.

2Ki 5:9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha-

Elisha sat in his house and messengers from a powerful man, Naaman the leper, came to him; and Elisha displayed an amazing calm before them. This situation repeated in 2 Kings 6:32, where Elisha again sits in his house and the messengers of an aggressive King came to him. The theme of lepers recurs in this latter context also (2 Kings 7:3). And in 2 Kings 5:18 we read of Naaman as a man upon whose arm a King (of Syria) leaned; and we find one of those sent to Elisha the second time was likewise "a lord upon whose hand the King (of Israel) leaned (2 Kings 7:2). The connections show that God was working out His program in similar ways in widely differing situations.

In 2 Kings 6:17, Elisha prays that God will open the eyes of his frightened servant to behold the Angelic horses and chariots around him. And this may have happened before this present incident (2 Kings 6:8 note). Elisha was *so* confident they were there, that he didn't ask to see them himself. He *knew* they were there; he simply asked that his servant be enabled to see the unseen reality which he calmly knew was there. He of course had had first hand experience of the Angelic horses and chariots (a kind of cherubim) when he had been parted from Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11. This must have left an abiding impression upon him- he knew that those Angelic horses and chariots were in fact permanently encamped around him (cp. Ps. 34:7). And so we are surely to see significance in the way that Naaman came to Elisha's house with *his* horses and chariot- for this is surely a development of a theme of connection between Elisha, horses and chariots (2 Kings 5:9). Most other Israelites would've been petrified to have the horses and chariots of Naaman and a company of Syrians pull up at their door. But Elisha was quite unfazed. He didn't even bother coming out to meet Naaman, knowing this was an insult to Naaman's pride, and was humanly certain to result in Naaman simply killing him and burning his house. Surely the horses-chariot-Elisha connection taught Elisha that in fact there were Angelic horses and chariots around him- he need not fear any human horse and chariot. There is no hint that Angelic activity is any less, or operates in any different way, for us today.

2Ki 5:10 Elisha sent a messenger to him saying-

Elisha doesn't come out of his house and talk to him. He wanted the man to focus his faith in God's word, not in personalities. For his end aim was to help Naaman toward faith that there was a prophet in Israel (:8). But so often, faith is clouded by issues of personality. People join or leave churches because they like / dislike pastors or individuals. And Elisha didn't want that to happen. Elisha also may be insisting that Naaman was to be treated as an Israelite leper would be treated; which meant Elisha could not have contact with him, and therefore he didn't invite the leper into his home.

This was because he wanted Naaman to realize that his cure was on account of having been treated as an Israelite; in the hope that he would become a proselyte.

Elisha's healing from a distance recalls his approach with the widow and her two sons in 2 Kings 4. He tells her to shut the door upon herself and her sons, and experience the predicted miracle. Here too, he is careful not to be present at the miracle. He simply predicts it and asks for some obedience before it happens. This again was to help Naaman away from his religious idea that some "man of God" must dramatically interact with him and be present with him. He is being driven to personal experience of God; and the Father works likewise with us all today.

Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored-
Although this was not Christian baptism, it is perhaps analogous. Because humility was elicited by this request to dip in Jordan, as it is by the ritual of baptism. Elisha was aiming to convert Naaman, not simply heal him, so that he could continue as general of the forces who were marauding Israel. The fact there were plenty of lepers in Israel (Lk. 4:27) was evidence enough that the waters of Jordan contained no healing powers of themselves; Naaman was being taught faith in God's word, rather than supposed healing waters. The seven dippings recall the way Jericho was to be circled for six days before victory on the seventh (Josh. 6:3-5), the child sneezed seven times before resurrection (2 Kings 4:35) and the way Elijah was only answered at his seventh prayer (1 Kings 18:43). The intention was that through the six times performing something which had no immediate answer, faith, hope and humility were elicited. Lev. 14:8; 15:13 speak of the healed leper washing *after* the cure, in order to be then also ritually clean. And there were various sprinkling / cleansing rituals which had to be performed seven times upon the leper (Lev. 14:7,16,27). So Naaman was potentially cured of his leprosy, but what was necessary was that he become ritually clean, and therefore he had to take the step of faith in washing. Had he not done that, the potential cure would have remained an unrealized potential. He was bidden grasp that he had been cured by Elisha; but now he had to wash in order to become spiritually clean and acceptable within Israelite, and not Syrian, society (see on 2 Kings 5:1). It could even be that the washing with water was to invite Naaman to see himself as a Jewish priest being prepared for service (Ex. 29:4 s.w.). We marvel at how God chooses people who may appear the most unlikely. The general of the Syrian army, the enemy of Israel, whose men had just destroyed the family of his wife's servant girl... was the one chosen. And not just to be healed, but to be thereby prepared to work in essence as a priest for God, in the darkness of the high command of Gentile Syria. We learn at the very least never to consider anyone beyond the scope of God's purpose.

And you shall be clean-
This was in addition to having his flesh restored and being healed. As noted on :1, there was no sense amongst the Syrians of ritual uncleanness because of leprosy. Naaman

was being bidden see his healing as also something spiritual, which would enable him to serve Yahweh. The language of becoming clean recalls that of the rituals regarding leprosy in Lev. 14. This cleansing in water was to be done *after* the leper was healed. It's as if Naaman had already been cleansed of his leprosy but now had to do the ritual associated with the cleansing of the leper *after* the disease had been healed. From the Divine perspective, Naaman had been healed. But he had to be obedient to the cleansing ritual for this to become apparent.

2Ki 5:11 But Naaman was angry, and went away, and said, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Yahweh his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy'-

Clearly Naaman was not a personal believer in Yahweh at this stage. And yet contrary to Pentecostal teaching, true miracles don't always require the faith of the sick person. We also learn again that God is prepared to work powerfully in the life of a person for the sake of the prayers and faith of third parties (as in Mk. 2:5). Naaman like many people had his preexisting religious ideas, and he expected the true God to conform to them. He was to be taught that man is made in God's image, and we are not to make God into our image and make Him act according to our expectations of religion, wherever we picked them up from. Elisha's refusal to come out and meet him clearly stuck in his gut. But the purpose for that, as explained above, was so that he realized that leprosy made a man unclean before the true people of God; and once he was cleansed, he would then be able to be part of God's people. Likewise he was placing his faith in religious ritual, rather than in the word of Yahweh. And he needed to be corrected in that perspective.

2Ki 5:12 Aren't Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage-

"Jordan" means literally 'the descender', 'that which brings down'. The intention of the command was to humble him, and initially he baulked at this. His rage was likewise related to the fact he had made so much effort to come deep into enemy territory, with a huge financial reward. And all that was being spurned. Because it was his faith in Yahweh's word which was required, and not external, human strength. The idea was that the Jordan at that time of year was a muddy stream. But that was the paradox of faith- that what appears muddy and small can make clean. It's the same issue as "And what good can baptism do me?". Baptism is really likewise a test of humility.

Naaman's dislike of the Jordan may also have been because he was aware that Joshua had cursed Jericho, and the water of the Jordan there was known to cause miscarriages- but it had been cured by Elisha in 2 Kings 2. Being asked to enter those waters was therefore a hint that he had to believe in Elisha's healing power of the waters.

2Ki 5:13 His servants came near and spoke to him and said, My father, if the prophet had asked you do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? How much rather then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'-
We wonder if these servants were themselves Israelites, just as Naaman's wife had an Israelite servant. Perhaps he had thought it prudent to take them with him, seeing he was going into Israel, with many tensions between Syria and Israel at the time. Again Naaman, the mighty man of valour who had done many great things (:1), was being taught that the God of Israel is unimpressed by human works, and rather seeks humility and faithful obedience to His word. These were the 'great things' he was being asked to do, far more difficult and demanding more true bravery than all the mighty acts he had performed in his life. The fact he responds to his servants' suggestion shows that he did have some latent humility.

The salvation of Naaman was through the humble and obscure- the Israelite slave girl, and his servants. Rather like in 2 Kings 6, the salvation of Israel will be due to the desperate lepers who go outside the camp of Israel to die.

"My father, a great word the prophet has spoken…" (see ESV, NIBC). The idea is that true greatness is in humility. What he was asked to do was a great thing for a proud man like him.

2Ki 5:14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean-
"Then went he down" continues the idea of his progressive humilitation. This is the path of every spiritual life. At the end, we come to the point of humility required for us to rise again in glory at the resurrection. It's a race to the bottom. It's why the ageing process is a humbling process- to those who perceive it. The same words for dipping in the Jordan are only used in describing the priests crossing Jordan to take possession of God's kingdom in Israel (Josh. 3:15). Naaman was being invited to imagine himself now entering into the spirit of Israel and having their kingdom as his; and again being invited to see himself consecrated as a priest with a mission. We may note that he "dipped" in Jordan, when he was intended to "wash" in Jordan (:10). But despite this less than complete obedience, he was accepted. He was not only healed, but "was clean" in a religious, spiritual sense. His flesh being restored like a child looks ahead to being born again of water and spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).

We may enquire whether the command to "wash" was properly obeyed by "dipping". But at least Naaman responded on some level- and this was accepted.

Naaman was a Gentile leper who sought to be healed by the God of Israel. As such he represents sin-stricken man, effectively going through a living death due to sin. His cure

was by dipping in the River Jordan. Initially he found this simple act hard to accept, thinking that God would want him to do some dramatic act, or to dip himself in a large and well-known river, e.g. the Abana. Similarly, we may find it hard to believe that such a simple act as baptism can ultimately bring about our salvation. It is more attractive to think that our own works and public association with a large, well-known denomination (cf. the river Abana) can save us, rather than this simple act of association with the true hope of Israel.

We may be able to discern parallels with how the axe head is lost in the next chapter, but is restored after being immersed in the Jordan and obedience to Elisha's word from God. Naaman was his master's axe head, a title for the leader of the army. But he was only restored through immersion in Jordan. The idea may be that God was equally at work in the lives of impoverished "sons of the prophets" in 2 Kings 6, as he was in the life of Naaman the high profile Gentile. The comfort is that the same God who worked in the apparently high profile lives of Biblical characters is as much at work in our obscure lives.

Syria were Israel's enemy, and so to heal Naaman the commander of their army would have seemed strange and counter intuitive. But it is in line with how in 2 Kings 6, the captured, blinded Syrian forces are given food and drink and released home unharmed. When had they been killed, the Syrian war machine would have been significantly degraded. All this was a hint of the spirit of the Lord Jesus- loving enemies, and winning by grace rather than force. And yet in the short term, it didn't work. After Naaman's healing, the Syrians still again invade Israel in 2 Kings 6. After the release of the blinded Syrian soldiers in 2 Kings 6, the Syrians come and besiege Samaria in 2 Kings 6. Indeed, grace is counter intuitive and doesn't always have any immediate effect. That is surely why the king of Israel wants Elisha dead and blames him for the siege and suffering that arose from it (2 Kings 6:31).

2Ki 5:15 He returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and stood before him- Elisha was accustomed to thinking of himself in terms of a man who stood before Yahweh, in His presence, before His face (Heb.- 2 Kings 3:14). Naaman and his "company" 'stood before' Elisha (2 Kings 5:15,16). Remember that this was the Syrian army General, standing with a "company" in Israelite territory, at Elisha's house- at a time when 'companies' of Syrian soldiers carried out raids upon Israel (2 Kings 5:2). Any Israelite would've been terrified. But Elisha responds that he 'stands before' Yahweh. Elisha was so aware of how we live in God's presence, before His very face, that he wasn't the least phased by this. If only we can share this sense, of standing in God's presence... the most frightening of human situations will have little effective 'presence' because we know we are ultimately in God's presence, 24/7. See on 2 Kings 6:17.

And he said, See now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. Now therefore, please take a gift from your servant-

We would rather read that he said there is no God but the God of Israel. Naaman still held the primitive idea that Yahweh as the God of Israel was only present in Israel, and this was why he wanted to take some Israelite soil home with him. But reflection upon the logic of his position would have led him to see wider than that. For if Yahweh was the only God, and His greatness made all other gods effectively non-existent... then surely it made sense that the God who was "in Israel" was in fact the God of the whole planet. For otherwise, there was no God anywhere in the cosmos or on planet earth, only "in Israel". And sanctified common sense surely indicates that there is a God and creator. And yet God leaves Naaman to work this through without specifically correcting him, just as the Lord Jesus worked likewise with the wrong ideas about demons.

Naaman is presented in contrast with the king of Israel in 2 Kings 1 who didn't believe there was a God in Israel: “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?” .

There are clear connections with the healing of the centurion's servant in Lk. 7. Naaman is servant to the king of Syria. The Lord's comment “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Lk. 7:9) is clearly allusive to Naaman's words. Naaman is told about Elisha just as the Centurion hears about the Lord (Lk. 7:3). A message was sent to the king of Israel asking him to "heal my servant", just as the message is sent to the Lord to do likewise. And again there is a distance healing. The centurion is also a Gentile military man, like Naaman. The connections again suggest that Naaman is seen by the Lord as a model Gentile convert, just like the Centurion. And yet as discussed elsewhere, Naaman's knowledge was very limited. But his conversion to Israel's God is seen as valid.

2Ki 5:16 But he said, As Yahweh lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none. He urged him to take it; but he refused-
We see here the natural reaction of man to Divine grace- to want to give something material to Him or His representative. But it is refused, because the response intended from Naaman was that he would trust in Yahweh and share this with others in his homeland- which as a high ranking commander in the Syrian leadership, was a very large ask.

2Ki 5:17 Naaman said, If not, then please let two mules’ burden of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will from now on offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but to Yahweh-
Naaman the Syrian accepted the faith of the God of Israel, knowing full well how difficult this was going to be back in his home environment. He matures from thinking about Yahweh as 'Elisha's God' in :11. Now Yahweh is to be his God. He has clearly made a conscious allegiance to Yahweh although he feels unable to totally walk the talk. And

that is accepted by God. This is why I urge spiritually immature people to still be baptized. After his ‘conversion’ he asked for some Israelite soil to be given to him to take back to Syria (see on :15). This shows that Naaman was influenced by the surrounding superstition that one could only worship a god of another nation whilst on their soil. But this is not explicitly corrected by Elisha; he simply but powerfully comments: “Go in peace”. In other words, Elisha was saying that the peace experienced by Naaman in his daily life was so wondrous that it obviated the need for worshipping on Israeli soil. Syria's army continued to attack Israel, as we learn from the next chapter. We therefore find Naaman in a similar position to Obadiah managing Ahab's palace and yet believing in Yahweh, despite his master persecuting Yahweh's prophets. And so many others- Joseph and Daniel come to mind immediately. But this is the essence of the spiritual life for so many. And yet we note from 2 Kings 6:23 that after the awesome revelation of Yahweh's cherubim at Dothan, the Syrian military stopped operations against Israel. This was not for the sake of Israel's obedience, but surely for the sake of one man, Naaman, so that he could live at peace with God.

The command to make an altar of earth was in order to inculcate humility, teaching that God doesn't want the art and external religion of man, but our sacrifice offered upon our own raw dust, which is all we are. Naaman had previously held a 'religious' view of God, expecting to pay the equivalent of millions of wealth in order for a holy man to wave some wand over his leprosy and cure him. Now he realized this was not at all what the one true God was all about. Again, he does humble himself.

But we note that offering sacrifice at a place other than the sanctuary was not according to the law of Moses. His understanding that there was only a God "in Israel" is likewise deficient. But still he is presented as a convert.

There is repeated evidence in inscriptions that the earth of a country was transported to another country in order to commemorate a victory. The following is from Nadav Na'aman, An altar for YHWH in the Land of Aram (2 Kings 5:17), Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions 18 (2018), 133–144:
"- Shalmaneser I, the King of Assyria described how after conquering the city of Arinu, “I gathered [some of] its earth and made a heap of it at the gate of my city, Ashur, for posterity”.
- In one of his inscriptions, Sennacherib described in detail the systematic destruction of Babylon and how he transported earth from Babylon to his capital city of Ashur: “In order to pacify the god Ashur, my lord, for people to sing the praises of his might, (and) for the admiration of future people, I removed earth from Babylon and piled (it) up in heaps (and) mounds in the akitu-house [in Ashur].”
- The transportation of earth from one place to another is also mentioned in a Babylonian source called the Chronicle of Early Kings. It relates that Sargon, King of Akkad, “dug up the earth of the clay pit of Babylon and

built near Akkad a replica of Babylon." The author of the chronicle considered the transportation of its earth to Akkad an act of memorialization of its destruction.
- In his campaign against Ummanhaldash, King of Elam, Ashurbanipal took piles of earth from the ruined Elamite cult centres, and deposited them in Assyria. "The earth of Susa, Madaktu, Haltemash and the rest of their sacred cities I gathered together and took (it) to Assyria."
- Diodorus Siculus' account of the fall of Nineveh.claims that after the fall of Nineveh, Nabopolassar the Babylonian leader, requested as part of his share in the booty to transport the ashes of the ruined palace to Babylon. He planned to deposit the debris near the sacred precinct of the gods, thereby constructing a mound as an eternal monument for the downfall of Assyria".

Naaman was surely aware of this practice. He humbly wanted to take the soil of Israel in order to build an altar, according to Yahweh's wish for an altar to be built of simple earth. But this was the symbol of victory and glory. He was celebrating a victory, a conquest, a surrender- but of himself. Here we have the inversion of values which is typical in the spiritual life. The symbols of humility become the symbols of glory, the cross being the classic example.

2Ki 5:18 In this thing may Yahweh pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon. When I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, may Yahweh pardon your servant in this thing-
See on 2 Kings 5:9. Clearly there was no belief in any guilt by association, or this concession wouldn't have been given. The whole nature of being human means that we must live in this world, although we are not of it. Consider how Daniel's friends wore turbans (Dan. 3:21 NIV), how Moses appeared externally to be an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19), and how the Lord Himself had strongly Jewish characteristics (Jn. 4:9). Imagine all the difficult situations Joseph must have been in, as Prime Minister of Egypt, married to the daughter of the pagan High Priest. Or John the Baptist's soldier converts, told to do their jobs without using violence (Lk. 3:14); or Cornelius returning to his post as Centurion. It seems almost certain that these men would all have tried to engineer their way out of their positions. Think of Daniel.

Naaman was allowed to bow himself before Rimmon for the sake of losing his position. Yet the higher level would surely have been, as Daniel's friends, not to bow down to an idol. And when we ask what the rest of the Jews in Babylon did on that occasion, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that they took the lower level which Naaman did- and bowed down.

We would perhaps rather read that Naaman and the Israelite maid got together and did their devotions together to Yahweh. But instead we read of him continuing his external worship of Rimmon. And living in personal peace with God.

2Ki 5:19 He said to him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way-
The essence is to live in peace with God in covenant relationship. This is possible, even if like Naaman there are elements of misunderstanding of Him (:17), and dimensions of our lives where we are not serving God on the highest level we could (:18). It is my answer to people wanting to be baptized whilst still in the grip of addictions. They can go in peace. However there is some ambiguity about "Go in peace". It is not simply "Yes it's OK". For this is also the standard way for an oriental to say goodbye. Elisha avoids answering yes or no. Surely the highest level was for Naaman not to do this. Paul seems to have this incident in mind when he warns us to be highly sensitive about going into an idol's temple, lest we cause others to stumble: "But take heed, lest by any means this freedom of yours becomes a stumblingblock to the weak. For if a man sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be encouraged to eat things sacrificed to idols?" (1 Cor. 8:9,10). We are familiar with stories of Christians who died for refusing to offer a pinch of incense to Caesar, but the question is: 'And what about those who did do so?'. Those who refused to serve in Hitler's military and died for their conviction are rightly seen as heroes. But what about those believers who did? The enigmatic ending to Naaman's brief dialogue with Elisha leaves us thinking about these things and concluding that there these many "others", perhaps the majority of believers, are all the same with the Lord.

Elisha's enigmatic "Go in peace", or "Goodbye", avoiding a yes / no answer to his question about continuing an appearance of Rimmon worship, leaves us enquiring about the depth of his conversion. But the validity of his conversion is certainly strongly implied by the record.

2Ki 5:20 But Gehazi the servant of Elisha the man of God said, My master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought. As Yahweh lives, I will run after him, and take something from him-
'Said in his heart' is a common Biblical phrase (e.g. Gen. 17:17; 1 Sam. 27:1; 1 Kings 12:26; Esther 6:6). There is a huge importance attached to self talk and spiritual mindedness. Further, there are many instances where we read that a person 'said' something; but it's apparent that they said it to themselves, in their heart. Take Gehazi here. For sure, Gehazi said this to nobody but himself. Or Moses – he's recorded as saying "People have found out what I have done!" – surely he said this within himself (Ex. 2:14 GNB). We note that in his heart, Gehazi swears to himself by Yahweh. He is not an unbeliever. But we have here an insight into the functioning of the heart within a

believer in a moment of weakness. "This Naaman..." reflects how he failed to perceive the spiritual wonder of what had happened; that the general of a Gentile army had been converted to Israel's God. All he still saw was a wealthy Gentile whom he thought that he as an Israelite had the right to deceive. See on :23.

We enquire why Gehazi failed in this way. He had seen so much evidence first hand of God's activity through Elisha. So why do this? We can conclude that like Israel in the wilderness, he became over familiar with the holy (something the law of Moses often tried to save man from), and failed to any longer be impressed personally by the reality of God. In this we have a great warning to ourselves.

2Ki 5:21 So Gehazi followed after Naaman. When Naaman saw one running after him, he came down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?-
The Divine cameraman zooms in fairly close on this scene. We see Gehazi running after the cavalcade, running faster than they were moving, and catching up with Naaman. The way Naaman himself got down from his chariot to personally greet Gehazi is a reflection of the humility he had now learned. Again we see Naaman 'coming down', part of his progressive humiliation. We see his humility in how he himself came down to meet Gehazi, despite being surrounded by a large retinue.

2Ki 5:22 He said, All is well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Behold, even now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing'-
Gehazi was enough of an amateur psychologist to know that if this is what he asked for, Naaman was likely to multiply it several times. And as noted on :23, his mind was full of the things he could buy with that money.

2Ki 5:23 Naaman said, Please take two talents. He urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and laid them on two of his servants; and they carried them before him-
According to :26, Naaman pressed Gehazi to also take far more than this. Although the things he mentions there, olive yards and vineyards, could hardly have been given by Naaman. Elisha correctly and piercingly perceives that these were the things in Gehazi's mind which we coveted buying with the things he believed Naaman would give him. Again (see on :20), the Bible places such great value on the heart, the thoughts, the spirit of a person. Two talents means 68 kg. or 150 pounds. Too much to carry alone. Two talents of silver was enough to buy the hill of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). And we note that Gehazi and Elisha lived near a hill (:24); possibly the same hill? Gehazi the servant is contrasted unfavourably with the anonymous Hebrew servant girl. He wanted

huge amounts of wealth, far more than would possibly be needed to entertain a few visitors. His dreams were of materialism, not spirituality.

2Ki 5:24 When he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and stored them in the house. Then he let the men go, and they departed-
Naaman had returned to Samaria from the Jordan river, at least 20 miles (:15) especially to thank Elisha. It was the opposite direction. And now he was going back eastwards to Syria. Elisha lived in Samaria, presumably not far from the palace of the king. So "the hill" would be "the hill of Samaria" which was bought for two talents of silver (1 Kings 16:24). Exactly the amount of money given to Gehazi (:23). We may be able to deduce from this that it was Gehazi's intention to buy the hill for himself along with the olive groves and vineyards upon it (:26).

2Ki 5:25 But he went in, and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, Where did you come from, Gehazi? He said, Your servant went nowhere-
It's possible Elisha was now blind or of limited faculties. But even without the direct revelation of the Spirit, he likely guessed what Gehazi had been up to. By saying he had gone nowhere, he clearly lies to the Holy Spirit, as it were, as Ananias and Sapphira did. They were slain, again in a context of covetousness, whereas Gehazi was made a leper and allowed to apparently continue serving Elisha, even though (see on :1) he was supposed to be quarantined away from society. His ministry was allowed to continue, but every moment of his subsequent life he would have been aware that he was only allowed to continue in the ministry by God's grace. Which should always be our view anyway.

2Ki 5:26 He said to him, Didn’t my heart go with you, when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to receive money, to receive garments and olive groves and vineyards, sheep and cattle, and male servants and female servants?-
The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha's heart or thoughts went with Gehazi. Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When He saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). But the Spirit confirmed this spiritual sensitivity, as it can do today; for [the blind?] Elisha 'saw' Naaman turning from his chariot to meet Gehazi, and Elisha read the motives of Naaman in imagining the servants and vineyards on the hill of Samaria which he could buy with his two talents. However it is possible that Elisha wasn't given any specific

revelation from the Spirit, and correctly perceived all this himself, due to his own great sensitivity as a person.

These things weren't given to Gehazi. He was given money, but Elisha perceives that all these things were in his mind because he imagined buying them with the silver. This is so psychologically credible. This is exactly how the covetous, materialistic mind works.

2Ki 5:27 Therefore the leprosy of Naaman will cling to you and to your seed forever. He went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow-
This is not medically what actually happened. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi. God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

We enquire whether Elisha had to curse Gehazi so severely, just as we wonder whether he had to call down the curse upon the youngsters who mocked his baldness. Likewise we wonder whether he had to bring death upon the officer who doubted whether Elisha could really restore food supply in the besieged city (2 Kings 7:2,17-20). These curses all betray the spirit of Elijah, which the Lord Jesus condemned, in bringing down fire upon two groups of 50 men. In each case, it could be argued that Elisha felt mocked and so he used the power at his disposal in a very severe and judgmental way, justifying himself as having the spirit of Elijah. Yet it was for that spirit that Elijah had been removed from his office.

In 2 Kings 8, we find Gehazi standing before the king. Presumably, his leprosy had been cleansed and the curse had been lifted by his unrecorded repentance. Curses, even Divine ones, can be changed, as God is open to dialogue with repentant sinners. Just as Elijah and Jonah repented but it is not recorded, we are left to deduce this. Another alternative is that 2 Kings 8 is out of chronological sequence.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 6

2Ki 6:1 The sons of the prophets said to Elisha, See now, the place where we dwell before you is too small for us-
This continues the impression that the sons of the prophets lived poorly. The Mosaic idea was that Israel paid tithes to the Levites, out of whom the priests were to be the teachers of the people (2 Chron. 15:3; Mal. 2:7). But this wasn't functioning, and so

men of all tribes had come with their families to form these schools of the prophets, where God's word was studied and taught.

2Ki 6:2 Please let us go to the Jordan, and every man take a beam from there, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. He answered, Go!-
This school of the prophets was near the Jordan, so it must have been that at Jericho. And I noted on 2 Kings 2:5 that by no means all of them there had been supportive of Elisha. But they felt they needed Elisha's blessing to remove their camp from one place to another. They presumably had grown in size as there was more response to Elisha's ministry and disillusion with the apostacy in the nation. The idea of "every man" taking a beam was that all were to share in the work. The priests were served by the Levites, and if this had been a priestly group, then we would have expected the Levites to do this work. See on :1.

2Ki 6:3 One said, Please go with your servants. He answered, I will go-
The idea was that Elisha himself would be involved with the work. True leadership will always involve this kind of manual work together with those being led.

2Ki 6:4 So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down wood-
Josephus records the presence of good timber growing alongside the Jordan river.

2Ki 6:5 But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water. Then he cried and said, Alas, my master! For it was borrowed-
We have a window here onto the poverty of these communities of prophets. He had needed to borrow [Heb. 'begged'] an axe head, and also had no means of buying another one to replace it. It was a major tragedy that blew up suddenly out of left field. And his cry from the heart implies he was asking Elisha to try to find the means to replace it with. Another rendering is "It has been sought. It has fallen in, and I have sought it in vain".

We may be able to discern parallels with the previous chapter. Here, the axe head is lost, but is restored after being immersed in the Jordan and obedience to Elisha's word from God. Naaman was his master's axe head, a title for the leader of the army. But he was only restored through immersion in Jordan. The idea may be that God was equally at work in the lives of impoverished "sons of the prophets" in 2 Kings 6, as he was in the life of Naaman the high profile Gentile. The comfort is that the same God who worked in the apparently high profile lives of Biblical charaters is as much at work in our obscure lives.

Many of the Elisha and Elijah incidents concern obscure characters. The widow woman with whom Elijah lived for three years was so obscure that Ahab's search for Elijah never led anyone there. And so it is with the widow of one of the sons of the prophets, Naaman's wife's servant girl, a guy who borrows an axe and the axe head goes plop in the river etc. Perhaps the obscurity of these people was a foil for the high profile life of Elijah and Elisha. They were being shown that humble spirituality in obscurity and personal suffering and difficulty is the essence, and not public work for its own sake. We observed this difference between Obadiah's more private spirituality, and Elijah's.

2Ki 6:6 The man of God asked, Where did it fall? He showed him the place. He cut down a stick, threw it in there, and made the iron float-
Elisha was surely not wealthy, and yet had been asked to effectively buy a new axe

head. The method for the miracle was significant. Elisha himself cut down some wood; it was more than a stick because he had to cut it down. He showed his solidarity with the man, in that he himself cut down wood from a tree. The question "Where did it fall?" was to make the man relive the tragic moment, for his eyes would have seen the axe head go "splash" at a certain point in the river, and it was engrained in his memory. Elisha wanted the man to relive what had happened, and to realize that through his identity with him, as a fellow cutter of wood, God would do a miracle. This in essence was the spirit of the Lord Jesus in so many miracles. Thus He asked the blind man what he wanted; He was, like Elisha, making the man realize his desperation, and to focus upon what he so wanted. And it is how He works today too, piquing our desperation and realization of our need. Our understanding of Him as having had our nature, our representative and fellow, greatly enhances our appreciation of this. And it is on the basis of our shared humanity that we likewise are to work with people.

2Ki 6:7 He said, Take it. So he put out his hand and took it-
Elisha seeks the maximum involvement of the man in the miracle. The axe head 'swum' (AV) toward him, so that from the bank he could take it. It was clearly a miracle, and yet it involved the man's full engagement and openness to it. The spirit of the miracle was repeated by the Lord (Mt. 17:27).

2Ki 6:8 Now the king of Syria was warring against Israel; and he took counsel with his servants, saying, My camp will be in such and such a place-
Presumably the Benhadad of :24. Perhaps the following larger scale and more public miracle is intentionally juxtaposed against that of making the axe head swim. The idea therefore would be that God works in small private matters and also on the scale of the nations. We wonder where Naaman was in all this. He was commander of the Syrian military, and yet an avowed proselyte to Israel's God. Like Daniel, he was in a situation where loyalty to Yahweh was very difficult, and so he may well have resigned or purposefully slipped out of the limelight of senior leadership. However, the record is not all chronological. We have here a list of Elisha's various miracles, beginning with private ones and now more public ones. The Syrians were invading Israel with bands of marauders (:23), and it could have been from these raids that Naaman's wife got her Israelite maid. For she was taken captive by these "bands" of marauders (2 Kings 5:2). The record is really giving us cameos from the ministry of Elisha arranged according to theme and not chronology. See on 2 Kings 8:1 for another example of where the cameos are definitely not chronological.

2Ki 6:9 The man of God sent to the king of Israel saying, Beware that you not pass such a place; for the Syrians are coming that way-
The king of Israel would then have been Joram. If as noted on :8 this incident took place before that of 2 Kings 5, then we recall how in 2 Kings 5, Elisha was living in a house in Samaria very near to the palace. I suggested on :8 that this incident may have been before the events of 2 Kings 5. Elisha's knowledge was clearly by direct revelation from God. And yet Yahweh had also blessed the Syrian bands with success (2 Kings 5:1). But He also gives warnings to the Israelites to help them avoid the Syrians defeating them. The fact "Yahweh had given victory to Syria" at this time means therefore that Elisha's warnings were not always accepted and obeyed. We have a similar situation here to that on Passover night. Yahweh's destroyer Angel went out to slay all the firstborn in Egypt, including the Israelites. But for those

obedient to God's word, another Angel hovered over the homes of the obedient Israelites and preserved them from the destroying Angel. God's workings are so complex, and they likewise go on all around us, even if mostly unperceived by us. To accuse Him of injustice is to fail to humbly appreciate this. For all these actions were orchestrated by Him, articulating His ultimate justice and desire to save. This we must take on faith, but this kind of incident shows that there is every reason to believe that His actions are to this day likewise carefully balanced and just.

2Ki 6:10 The king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of; and he saved himself there, not once nor twice-
I suggested on :9 that the Israelites didn't always obey Elisha's warnings and suffered because of it. But it seems the king did, and saved himself personally from capture several times. Yet he was a murderer (:32) and God's summary of his life is that he did evil. But he was preserved, because God sought his repentance. Even if that never happened ultimately.

2Ki 6:11 The heart of the king of Syria was very troubled about this. He called his servants, and said to them, Won't you show me which of us is for the king of Israel?-
Naaman wanted to be a secret believer, even bowing down to Rimmon to keep his boss happy. God seems to have allowed this, but He worked in Naaman's life, I suggest, so that his faith was no longer secret. For soon after his conversion, his master got the hunch that one of his courtiers was "for the king of Israel" (2 Kings 6:11). And Naaman would have been the obvious suspect, as he had gone to Israel and been cured of his leprosy by an Israeli prophet. We then read that the army of Syria came against Elisha the prophet and sought to surround him in order to capture him. They were then judged by God. Could it really be so that Naaman would have led that army? Surely the situation arose so as to force Naaman to resign the job. Thus God worked to stop him being a secret believer, and to remove him from a position where he could not live with a free conscience before the Father. And so God will do in our lives- if we respond.

But another reading is possible, if we accept the suggestion on :8 that this happened before the events of 2 Kings 5. Naaman as commander of the army would have been aware of this strange action of Israel's God, whilst being also aware that Yahweh was giving him victory against Israel on the occasions when they did engage with and defeat them (2 Kings 5:1). It was all setting him up for faith in Yahweh, even though His first introduction to Him was through beholding His apparently contradictory behaviour. And there are many former atheists, agnostics and skeptics who have a similar testimony.

2Ki 6:12 One of his servants said, No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom-
If as suggested on :8, this happened before the events of 2 Kings 5... then we see a theme being set up, of senior leadership humbling themselves to listen to their servants. The king of Syria listened to his servant and sent horses and chariots to Dothan (:13) because he believed the servant. And because Naaman believed his wife's servant girl, he also came to Samaria to Elisha with horses and chariots. And because he finally listened to his servants, he dipped in Jordan and was cured. And he also believed Elisha's servant Gehazi, with his story about needing clothes. God works like this, giving us examples in observed experience of others (in this case, the king believing his servant) in order to prepare us personally for similar challenges.

We wonder too whether this servant of Benhadad was also an Israelite, just as Naaman's wife's servant was.

2Ki 6:13 He said, Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him. It was told him saying, Behold, he is in Dothan-
Dothan was near Shechem, and yet it seems from 2 Kings 5 that Elisha also had a home in Samaria near to the king's palace. This knowledge that he was at that point in Dothan would suggest that the Syrian's servant of :12 was an Israelite with connections in Israel. And so the theme continues, of listening to and believing Israelite servants.

2Ki 6:14 Therefore he sent horses, chariots and a great army there. They came by night, and surrounded the city-
This was tacit reflection of the belief in the words of the Israelite servant, and was to be repeated when again Naaman came with horses and chariots to the home of Elisha in Samaria (assuming as suggested on :8 that these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5). Step by step, God was setting Naaman up to believe in Him. He responded, although his pride nearly got in the way. But God works likewise in so many lives, in such detail, and yet their pride stops them being led to the intended outcome, of faith and conversion.

2Ki 6:15 When the servant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was around the city. His servant said to him, Alas, my master! What shall we do?-
This servant was presumably Gehazi. If this is chronological [and the records often aren't], then this would have been at a point after Gehazi had been made a leper (2 Kings 5:27). By saying he had gone nowhere (2 Kings 5:25), he clearly lied to the Holy Spirit, as it were, as Ananias and Sapphira did. They were slain, again in a context of covetousness, whereas Gehazi was made a leper but was allowed to apparently continue serving Elisha, even though (see on 2 Kings 5:1) he was supposed to be quarantined away from society. His ministry was allowed to continue, but every moment of his subsequent life he would have been aware that he was only allowed to continue in the ministry by God's grace. Which should always be our view anyway. But this issue evaporates if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5

2Ki 6:16 He answered, Don't be afraid; for those who are with us are more than those who are with them-
The surrounding of Elisha's home in Samaria with the same horses and chariots in 2 Kings 5 would have been a scary experience. But Elisha doesn't even come out (remember as suggested on :8 that these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5). For he had learned from this experience that they were of no ultimate power. He was surrounded by the heavenly armies and chariots of Angels.

2Ki 6:17 Elisha prayed and said, Yahweh, please open his eyes, that he may see. Yahweh opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha-
Elisha was *so* confident they were there, that he didn't ask to see them himself. He *knew* they were there; he simply asked that his servant be enabled to see the unseen reality which he calmly knew was there. He of course had had first hand experience of

the Angelic horses and chariots (a kind of cherubim) when he had been parted from Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11. This must have left an abiding impression upon him- he knew that those Angelic horses and chariots were in fact permanently encamped around him (cp. Ps. 34:7). And so we are surely to see significance in the way that Naaman came to Elisha's house with *his* horses and chariot- for this is surely a development of a theme of connection between Elisha, horses and chariots (2 Kings 5:9). Most other Israelites would've been petrified to have the horses and chariots of Naaman and a company of Syrians pull up at their door. But Elisha was quite unfazed. He didn't even bother coming out to meet Naaman, knowing this was an insult to Naaman's pride, and was humanly certain to result in Naaman simply killing him and burning his house. Surely the horses-chariot-Elisha connection taught Elisha that in fact there were Angelic horses and chariots around him- he need not fear any human horse and chariot. There is no hint that Angelic activity is any less, or operates in any different way, for us today.

2Ki 6:18 When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to Yahweh, and said, Please strike this people with blindness. He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha-
Elisha's game plan was that the Syrians be converted to Yahweh. Presumably (if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5) Naaman was present at this time, and was also struck with blindness and then healed of it. This would have been another step along the way of being set up for faith that he could be healed of leprosy. "They", the Syrian troops including Naaman, came down to Elisha, who had presumably gone out of the city gate to meet them. It would have been Naaman's first meeting with Elisha. And no sooner had he seen him, he and his men were smitten with blindness. Naaman may have perceived the similarity with the smiting of the Sodomites with blindness as they stood before the door of God's prophet Lot (Gen. 19:11). He would then have realized that he was being treated as a sinner.

2Ki 6:19 Elisha said to them, This is not the way, neither is this the city-
The idea was 'I am Elisha, but I usually live in Samaria, not here in Dothan. If you want to go to Elisha's house, I'll lead you there'.

Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek. He led them to Samaria-
This was to set up Naaman for again coming to Elisha's house in Samaria with his horses and chariots, to see Elisha (if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5). Clearly this was all intended to create patterns in life which Naaman was to perceive by as it were joining the dots and seeing the picture.

2Ki 6:20 It happened, when they had come into Samaria, that Elisha said, Yahweh, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. Yahweh opened their eyes, and they perceived that they were in the midst of Samaria-
They "perceived" this because many of them would never have been there before. The opening of eyes by Yahweh is often associated with spiritual vision, and this was the hope of Elisha. And it eventually worked for Naaman at least.

2Ki 6:21 The king of Israel said to Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I strike them? Shall I strike them?-
Naaman would have realized that he was now without his horses and chariots of

human strength, surrounded by Israelite soldiers eager to kill him. His only hope was salvation by the grace of Israel's God, and His prophet Elisha. And he was not disappointed. Slaying captives was permitted under the law (Dt. 20:13), but Elisha is showing that the spirit of the law was actually far above and in contradiction to the letter of it in many places.

2Ki 6:22 He answered, You shall not strike them. Would you strike those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master-
"Bow" and "sword" often occur together as almost an idiom for human strength (Gen.48:22; Josh. 24:12; 2 Kings 6:22; 1 Chron. 5:18; Hos. 1:7). The giving of food to captives and sending them back is exactly what was commanded later in 2 Chron. 28:15. The Israelites were intended to learn from the grace which had been shown to the Syrian captives. This is a great theme of the historical books; that situations in essence repeated, because God's people are expected to learn from Biblical history. And that is the relevance of these records for us today. The Syrians, Naaman especially, were likewise to learn about the grace of Israel's God and His prophet Elisha. For not only were their lives spared but they were given every courtesy, and a feast which was counter instinctive to all their culture understood- whereby you killed your enemies and invaders. And this was all to climax in Naaman's cure of leprosy and conversion to Yahweh (if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5).

2Ki 6:23 He prepared a great feast for them. When they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. The bands of Syria stopped raiding the land of Israel-
The way the King of Syria found his servants returning to him their master with stories of the amazing grace of the God of their enemy Israel was surely to try to bring him to conversion too (2 Kings 6:23; 5:1). Israel were to be the light to the Gentile world around them, the righteous servant who showed light to the Gentiles. But they sadly failed. This is all a great example of grace turning away aggression. But although the bands stopped marauding Israel, the Syrians were to return "after this" (:24) not with marauding bands but with a great army. If as suggested on :8 the events of 2 Kings. 6:1-22 happened before those of 2 Kings 5, then perhaps we are to insert 2 Kings 5 at this point. But Israel didn't remain committed to Yahweh's grace, and the Syrians refused to live under the impression of it.

2Ki 6:24 It happened after this, that Ben Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria-
For the chronology, see on :23. We have to assume that Naaman either died, lost his faith or resigned his position. The Biblical record leaves many such questions intentionally hanging open (such as did Jephthah kill his daughter), so that we might reflect and enter more fully into the narrative and explore the possibilities. This is now the third time we read of the Syrians coming into Israel with their armies; to Dothan, then to Samaria for Naaman to meet Elisha, and now they come to invade and take Samaria. They ought to have learned from their previous two experiences, as the king of Israel likewise should have learned faith in Yahweh.

2Ki 6:25 There was a great famine in Samaria. Behold they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of

dove's dung for five pieces of silver-
Famine was typically a punishment for apostacy. If Joram had gone out in faith and fought with Benhadad, then this situation need not have arisen. For there had been ample evidence in the besieging of Dothan that there were armies of Angelic help available. History repeated itself, in the hope that Israel would learn faith. And it does likewise in our lives. It was perhaps this same Benhadad who had been subjected by Ahab in 1 Kings 20. He was trying to get even with Israel, rather than humbly accept how he was being led like Naaman toward acceptance of Israel's God. Dove's dung was tiny, so this may have been a name for a very cheap kind of pulse, similar to how such food is called in German 'devil's dung', *teufelsdreck*.

2Ki 6:26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him saying, Help, my lord, O king!-
Presumably houses were joined to the wall of the city, and therefore this woman was in close range of the king.

2Ki 6:27 He said, If Yahweh doesn't help you, how could I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the winepress?-
The king states that he has no personal stocks of food for himself even, and so she needs to address herself to God and not himself. He was driven to faith in Yahweh in his extremity, and yet the summary of Joram's life is that he did evil before Yahweh. The faith of a moment is not the same as living by faith all life long.

2Ki 6:28 The king said to her, What ails you? She answered, This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow'-
This kind of argument about dead children, between two women apparently living in one house, recalls the case which was put to Solomon by the two prostitutes. But this king has no good answer, for he has no wisdom. His response is simply to kill Elisha, whom he blames for the overall situation.

2Ki 6:29 So we boiled my son, and ate him. I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him;' and she has hidden her son-
This was in direct fulfilment of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 28:56,57). The answer to it was repentance and reaffirmation of the covenant. But instead the king seeks to kill Elisha. Had he repented and not been so proud as to prolong the siege, then this tragic situation would not have arisen. He personally was solely responsible for it, but he seeks to put the blame solely upon another individual, Elisha, who was totally innocent. It is a classic case of psychological transference of guilt. And it confirms the absolute psychological credibility of the Biblical records, in contrast to the uninspired histories of other nations, full as they are of exaggeration, lack of credibility and bias.

2Ki 6:30 It happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes (now he was passing by on the wall); and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth underneath on his flesh-
Such sackcloth was a symbol of both mourning and repentance. If he had repented, then the curses of the covenant would not have come upon the people (see on :29). But his sackcloth was not visible openly. Perhaps he did in a way privately want to repent, but not far enough. A vague personal whim that we need to repent is not enough.

2Ki 6:31 Then he said, God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stay on him this day-
Blaming Elisha, transferring his personal guilt onto him (see on :28) was exactly what the king of Syria had done, and had made his ill fated attack upon Dothan because of it. The king ought to have learned from this. But the whole account here is a parade example of men refusing to learn from Biblical history.

Syria were Israel's enemy, and so to heal Naaman the commander of their army would have seemed strange and counter intuitive. But it is in line with how in 2 Kings 6, the captured, blinded Syrian forces are given food and drink and released home unharmed. When had they been killed, the Syrian war machine would have been significantly degraded. All this was a hint of the spirit of the Lord Jesus- loving enemies, and winning by grace rather than force. And yet in the short term, it didn't work. After Naaman's healing, the Syrians still again invade Israel in 2 Kings 6. After the release of the blinded Syrian soldiers in 2 Kings 6, the Syrians come and besiege Samaria in 2 Kings 6. Inded, grace is counter intuitive and doesn't always have any immediate effect. That is surely why the king of Israel wants Elisha dead and blames him for the siege and suffering that arose from it (2 Kings 6:31).

2Ki 6:32 But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Then the king sent a man from before him; but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders-
Elisha's house had been visited before, both in Dothan and twice in Samaria, by the armies of Syria. The king ought to have perceived this parallel. In 2 Kings 5:9, Elisha sat in his house and messengers from a powerful man, Naaman the leper, came to him; and displayed an amazing calm before them. This situation repeated in 2 Kings 6:32, where Elisha again sits in his house and the messengers of an aggressive King came to him. The theme of lepers recurs in this latter context also (2 Kings 7:3). And in 2 Kings 5:18 we read of Naaman as a man upon whose arm a King (of Syria) leaned; and we find one of those sent to Elisha the second time was likewise "a lord upon whose hand the King (of Israel) leaned (2 Kings 7:2).

Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent to take away my head? When the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold it shut against him. Isn't the sound of his master's feet behind him?-
The statement that the king and his father were murderers shows how sinful he was, and what grace God had shown him by saving his life (:10). This shows His long term patience and desire this man would come to repentance, even though he ultimately didn't. And He works likewise with men today.

2Ki 6:33 While he was still talking with them, the messenger came down to him. Then he said, This evil is from Yahweh. Why should I wait for Yahweh any longer?-
Elisha has an apparent roughness with the Almighty that could only surely come from his knowing that God fully viewed and knew his inner feelings. "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" (2 Kings 6:33 RV) expresses his exasperation, in words which are quite shocking to read- until we realize that our own hearts have probably harboured such basic feelings, even though never verbalized. The intimacy of other prophets with God is reflected in the roughness and familiarity which they sometimes use- take Ps. 44:23,24: "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, Lord? Awake! Do not cast us off for ever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?".

Or we could assume that the king followed the messenger, running after him and only shortly behind him (:32) and therefore these words are the king's. 2 Kings 7:17 makes it clear that the king himself came to Elisha at this time. He recognizes that evil is from Yahweh (not any cosmic satan figure, Is. 45:5-7). But that he is tired of following Elisha's constant message to "wait for Yahweh", in the spirit of many such statements in the Psalms.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 7

2Ki 7:1 Elisha said, Hear the word of Yahweh. Thus says Yahweh, 'Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria'-

This follows straight on from the enigmatic 2 Kings 6:33, where either the king of Elisha have expressed frustration with waiting for Yahweh any longer. We would have expected God to consider that such an effective throwing off of patient waiting for Him meant that He would in turn give up with them. But instead, He gives His word of promise that six times as much food would be soon sold for a fifth of the price. This is typical of His grace, meeting human faithlessness with His response. Just as He had commanded Israel to not slay the Syrian captives but instead to give them a feast and let them return home. There is something senseless about grace, to the secular mind. And it is with that awareness that we are to live in this present world. Grace therefore makes us radically out of step with the world.

2Ki 7:2 Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, Behold, if Yahweh made windows in heaven, could this thing be? He said, You shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat of it-

Clearly the king relied upon a faithless man as his second in command, and not upon Elisha. We note that the same term is used of faithful Naaman, a Syrian (2 Kings 5:18). See on 2 Kings 5:9. It can be that we accept God's existence without really believing that He is, therefore, all powerful, and that all His attributes which the Bible reveals are actually functional and real for us today. The unfaithful captain forgot that there *are* windows in Heaven (Gen. 7:11; Mal. 3:10) through which blessing can be given. He believed in God's existence. But he didn't think this God could do much, and he doubted whether He would ever practically intervene in human affairs. We must be aware of this same tendency. The man is punished as Moses was, able to see the promised land with his eyes but not experience it. And this will be the same kind of judgment given to all the condemned at the last day. They will see the Kingdom of God established, but be unable to enter it. This will be the reason for their gnashing of teeth.

We enquire whether Elisha had to curse Gehazi so severely, just as we wonder whether he had to call down the curse upon the youngsters who mocked his baldness. Likewise we wonder whether he had to bring death upon the officer who doubted whether Elisha could really restore food supply in the besieged city (2 Kings 7:2,17-20). These curses all betray the spirit of Elijah, which the Lord Jesus condemned, in bringing down fire upon two groups of 50 men. In each case, it could be argued that Elisha felt mocked and so he used the power at his disposal in a very severe and judgmental way, justifying himself as having the spirit of Elijah. Yet it was for that spirit that Elijah had been removed from his office.

2Ki 7:3 Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate. They said one to another, Why do we sit here until we die?-
In 2 Kings 5:9, Elisha sat in his house and messengers from a powerful man, Naaman the leper, came to him; and displayed an amazing calm before them. This situation repeated in 2 Kings 6:32, where Elisha again sits in his house and the messengers of an aggressive King came to him. The theme of lepers recurs in this latter context also (2 Kings 7:3). And in 2 Kings 5:18 we read of Naaman as a man upon whose arm a King (of Syria) leaned; and we find one of those sent to Elisha the second time was likewise "a lord upon whose hand the King (of Israel) leaned (2 Kings 7:2).

2Ki 7:4 If we say, 'We will enter into the city', then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. If we sit still here, we also die. Now therefore come, and let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we will live; and if they kill us, we will only die-
I suggested on 2 Kings 6:8 that the events of 2 Kings 6:1-23 may have happened before those of 2 Kings 5, which concludes with Gehazi becoming a leper. We are tempted to imagine that one of these lepers was Gehazi. And yet God was not done with him, despite his conscienceless behaviour with Naaman. He was still able to have a ministry of sorts, to be used by God significantly. But he had to be brought to this point of desperation and death in order for that to happen.

2Ki 7:5 They rose up in the twilight, to go to the camp of the Syrians. When they had come to the outermost part of the camp of the Syrians, behold, there was no man there-
As lepers, they had to dwell outside the gates (Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2,3). They must have longed for the Mosaic restrictions upon them to be lifted, recalling how Naaman the leper was allowed a prominent place in Syrian society despite being a leper. But it was thanks to obedience to those regulations that they actually saved Israel. For nobody else ventured outside the city gates to apparent certain death at the hands of the Syrians.

2Ki 7:6 For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great army. They said one to another, Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come on us-
Elisha had been full of faith in the presence of the Angelic horses and chariots when the Syrians surrounded Dothan. And he was not lacking in such faith now, although one could read 2 Kings 6:33 as meaning that in fact his faith was at a very low ebb indeed. Yet despite that low level of faith, God still came through for him. The same horses and chariots of Angels which he had seen in the removal of Elijah, and which he had believed in during the siege of Dothan... were still present. The ears of the Syrians were opened to hear their noise, as Gehazi's eyes had been opened to see them.

2Ki 7:7 Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their donkeys, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life-
This irrational flight of armies, or fighting amongst themselves because of some irrational fear, is typical of how God destroys His enemies. He prefers to work by His Spirit acting directly upon the minds of men, rather than by the swords of His people.

For it seems therefore not His preferred will that His people should take the sword themselves, even though He does work through that sometimes. The Syrians had been made to believe such haste was required that they hadn't even fled upon horses, but had left the animals still tethered. See on :15.

2Ki 7:8 When these lepers came to the outermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and ate and drank, and carried from there silver, and gold, and clothing, and went and hid it. Then they came back and entered into another tent, and carried from there also, and went and hid it-
The desperate, starving lepers found great treasure and went and hid it. The Lord used this as the basis for His parable about the man who finds the Gospel, as the treasure in a field, and hides it. But surely He intended us to think of what those men did afterwards. “They said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace”. They even felt that woe would be unto them if they did not share the good news of what they had found. The same joyful urgency must be ours.

2Ki 7:9 Then they said one to another, We aren’t doing the right thing. This day is a day of good news, and we keep silent. If we wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household-
We see here the sin of failing to share the Gospel. For those men were types of us (Mt. 13:44). Their position is so imaginable, and the Divine cameraman is focused in close up upon them. Their recorded conversation is absolutely credible and imaginable.

2Ki 7:10 So they came and called to the porter of the city and said, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but the horses tied, and the donkeys tied, and the tents as they were-
The animals being still tied indicates the absolute sense of urgency which fell upon them, fleeing on foot because they had no time to untether their horses. This was the extent of the Divine hand upon their minds.

2Ki 7:11 He called the porters; and they told it to the king’s household within-
As lepers they were not allowed inside the city gates. The Israelites were forced to believe good news, the Gospel, from the mouths of the most wretched and desperate people on planet earth at that time. This clearly looks forward to our witness, for the Lord's parable of treasure hid in a field (Mt. 13:44) makes those men types of us.

2Ki 7:12 The king arose in the night and said to his servants, I‘ll tell you what the Syrians are doing to us. They know that we are hungry. Therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field saying, ‘When they come out of the city, we shall take them alive, and get into the city’-
Despite Elisha's prophetic word to him about a dramatic change in situation (:1), the king was not open to the possibility of it having any fulfilment. He wasn't looking for a fulfilment, and was skeptical of any hint that it might be forthcoming. And yet the word still came true, and the blessing of God's grace was given to the undeserving. Perhaps the whole incident was for the sake of the salvation of Elisha, Gehazi and the other three lepers. For God can involve huge numbers of people in situations which finally work out in the salvation of a minority.

2Ki 7:13 One of his servants answered, Please let some men take five of the horses that remain in the city. Behold, they are like all the multitude of Israel who are left in it. They would perish anyway, like all the many Israelites who have already died. Let us send and see-
This servant has the same mentality as the lepers- that death is now near, and so there is no harm in risking further loss or death, because it will come anyway. The lepers are thereby connected with those whom they were separated from. They had the same mentality.

2Ki 7:14 They took therefore two chariots with horses; and the king sent after the army of the Syrians saying, Go and see-
We recall that the king of Israel was not to have chariots and horses (Dt. 17:17,18), and here we see how in any case, such human strength could not save them.

2Ki 7:15 They went after them to the Jordan; and behold, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. The messengers returned and told the king-
They had been so affected by the Spirit of God working directly upon their hearts that they had fled on foot, and not even untied their horses to flee upon them (:7). It seems the panic got even stronger, for they threw away even their own clothes and armour in order to run faster.

2Ki 7:16 The people went out, and plundered the camp of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of Yahweh-
The besieging army had their own supplies, which were now pillaged. In their desperation they would have not minded mixing with the four lepers who had saved them.

2Ki 7:17 The king appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to be in charge of the gate; and the people trod on him in the gate, and he died as the man of God had said when the king came down to him-
This means that in 2 Kings 6:33, the king himself and not just his messenger went down to Elisha's house, perhaps intending himself to have Elisha slain before his eyes.

2Ki 7:18 (It happened, as the man of God had spoken to the king saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria-
Perhaps this was the same open space where the false prophets had gathered and mocked Yahweh's words (1 Kings 22:10).

2Ki 7:19 and that captain answered the man of God and said, Now, behold, if Yahweh should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, you shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat of it-
The fulfilment of the prophecy over the mocking of the captain is laboriously stressed. The implication is that there was such an urgent stampede that the man literally didn't have time to eat of the food. Although he was apparently the second in command (:2), he had not himself gone out to the camp of the Syrians. He remained inside the city until the food and spoil had been brought into it. He just didn't want to see God's word

come true, even though it meant blessing for starving people. This was all due to pride, and the related fear of being proven wrong before God.

2Ki 7:20 It happened like that to him; for the people trod on him in the gate, and he died-
Death by trampling underfoot was seen as seen as a death of shame. Perhaps the people intentionally did this to him because he was trying to limit their access to the food, desperate by all means to stop the fulfilment of the prophecies which he had mocked. He may well have been the same officer as in 2 Kings 8:6 (see note there and on 2 Kings 8:1), who had previously witnessed the accounts of the power of Elisha. He was therefore the more reprehensible and accountable for his mockery of Elisha's words.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 8

2Ki 8:1 Now Elisha had spoken to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise and go, you and your household, and stay for a while wherever you can; for Yahweh has called for a famine. It shall also come on the land seven years-
The famine of 2 Kings 6:25 was because of the siege by the Syrians, but it seems the people didn't learn from the events of 2 Kings 7. The king and his captain had been in denial of the fulfilment of God's word right to the end. They were not reformed by the famine caused by siege, and so now a major famine is called for. We notice the contrast with how Elijah himself called for a famine (1 Kings 17:1), "according to my word". Elisha seems to have reflected upon Elijah's arrogance which had led to his dismissal as the lead prophet. And he expresses the call for a famine in far more humble, God-centred words.

However, the record in Kings isn't chronological. We are given cameos from the ministry of Elisha arranged according to theme and not chronology. These seven years famine may be the famine of 2 Kings 4:38, which was at the very time that Elisha had restored this woman's son to life. This would explain why Gehazi was not yet a leper, and could freely talk with the king.

2Ki 8:2 The woman arose, and did according to the word of the man of God. She went with her household, and lived in the land of the Philistines seven years-
This was a major act of obedience, especially as it resulted in living amongst the Philistines. Although she herself was likely Gentile, perhaps a Philistine. It is typical of God's grace that He would work with a Philistine, and a female- despised generally within Israelite society. The intention of the famine was to elicit repentance, and perhaps she was one of the few who had already repented and so didn't need the famine experience. "Seven years" may be an idiom or symbolic period and not literal.

2Ki 8:3 It happened after the seven years, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines. Then she went forth to plead to the king for her house and for her land-
It appears someone else had taken her land and house whilst she was away, and as a Philistine and a female head of house, apparently with no man around to plead for her, she was in a very weak position. It must have been through the good offices of Elisha that she even got a hearing with the king.

2Ki 8:4 Now the king was talking with Gehazi the servant of the man of God saying, Please tell me all the great things that Elisha has done-
I noted on :1 that the events in the record of Elisha's life aren't in chronological order. So if this happened at the time of 2 Kings 4:38, Gehazi was not yet a leper. However it could be that he repented and was healed of his leprosy, or that laws about lepers were not strictly enforced; we recall that Naaman as a leper had free access to his king and a place in Syrian society. And Gehazi would now be conducting his ministry with an appropriate sense of humility. King Jehoram is summarized overall as a wicked king, but perhaps he had some sense of conscience, and just as Herod was desirous to hear from John the Baptist, so he wished to learn more about Elisha's ministry.

2Ki 8:5 It happened, as he was telling the king how he had restored to life him who was dead, that the woman whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life-
It was perhaps orchestrated by Elisha that the woman approached the king whilst Gehazi was before him. Otherwise we can see this as a typical outcome of the hand of providence. The restoration of dead man to life was clearly the most gripping of all the Elisha stories, and then the mother of the man appears on the scene. God was really trying to persuade the king of the power of His word. And yet ultimately he refused to accept it in his own life.

2Ki 8:6 When the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed to her a certain officer saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now-
This latter provision was effectively a punishment for the person who had taken her land. Or it could be that the king himself had taken possession of the land, and now repents. This would explain the ease with which he rectifies the situation and can give the woman all the harvest she would otherwise have had in those seven years, which an ordinary farmer would not have been able to do. We wonder if this was the same officer of 2 Kings 7, seeing that the events are not arranged chronologically. In this case he was the more reprehensible for his mockery of Elisha's prophecy that food would be made instantly available during the siege of Samaria.

2Ki 8:7 Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben Hadad the king of Syria was sick. It was told him saying, The man of God has come here-
Ben Hadad is a generic term for the Syrian kings, like Pharaoh for the Egyptian rulers. As noted on :1, it is hard to work out exactly where this fits in to the chronological sequence. It could well have been after the events of Naaman in 2 Kings 5, seeing that the seven years famine began it seems at the time of 2 Kings 4:38. Elisha may well have also intended making a pastoral visit to his convert Naaman.

2Ki 8:8 The king said to Hazael, Take a present in your hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of Yahweh by him, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?'-
Hazael appears to have been the army commander. Depending upon the chronology (see on :1), he may have replaced Naaman, who as a convert to Yahweh wished to resign from his position or just fade out of the limelight of senior leadership. If this was after the events of 2 Kings 5, then he would have recalled how Naaman had been healed by Elisha. He lacks the faith to ask Elisha to heal him, although that may be

implicit in his request. He took a present for Elisha as Naaman had done; and thanks to the deception of Gehazi, he would have been under the impression that Elisha had accepted a present for healing Naaman.

2Ki 8:9 So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him and said, Your son Ben Hadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?'-
The language of good things, presents, camels and coming and standing before Elisha recalls how Naaman came with similar things and stood before Elisha's house, seeking healing. It seems almost certain that these things happened after the time of 2 Kings 5.

2Ki 8:10 Elisha said to him, Go, tell him, 'You shall surely recover;' however Yahweh has shown me that he shall surely die-
The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men. The widow woman was told to borrow pots in which to place the oil which would be miraculously provided. The extent of the miracle was limited by the number and size of the pots she borrowed in faith. Or take 2 Kings 8:10 AV: "Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die". Ben-Hadad *could* recover, it was possible in prospect, but God knew he would not fulfil certain preconditions, and therefore he would not. Or the idea may be that Hazael is told to tell the dying king that he would recover, as a courtier was supposed to bring only good news; although in fact, he was going to die.

2Ki 8:11 He settled his gaze steadfastly on him, until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept-
It is interesting to compare Elijah's attitude with how Elisha weeps tears over Hazael, knowing how much damage he is going to do to Israel in response to Elijah's prayer (2 Kings 8:12). Yet significantly, Elijah doesn't actually do what he is told; he doesn't anoint Jehu nor Hazael to destroy Israel (2 Kings 9:3). It's hard to decide whether this was disobedience or rather an awkward realization that he had been praying with too harsh a spirit for something that would have been best left to God. Elisha was effectively doing what Elijah ought to have done- anointing Hazael as king over Syria.

2Ki 8:12 Hazael said, Why do you weep, my lord? He answered, Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones and rip up their women with child-
The command to Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15) was therefore part of God's intended judgments upon Israel for their sins. There is no specific record of Hazael doing this, but in the records of his attacks upon Israel we are therefore to assume that he did so at those times (2 Kings 10:32; 13:3,22).

2Ki 8:13 Hazael said, But what is your servant, is he a dog, that he should do this awful thing? Elisha answered, Yahweh has shown me that you will be king over Syria-
This may have been mere politeness to Elisha. He was indeed what Israel would call a "dog", a Gentile. His denial of this may mean that he wanted to give the impression that like Naaman whom he had replaced, he was a proselyte.

2Ki 8:14 Then he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, What did Elisha say to you? He answered, He told me that you would surely recover-
This may have been a polite lie sanctioned by Elisha, or perhaps a literal repeat of Elisha's message, but only part of it. See on :10.

2Ki 8:15 It happened on the next day, that he took a thick cloth, dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died. Then Hazael reigned in his place-
If he had had true faith in the prophetic word, he would have surely waited for Hazael to die and then taken over from him. But on the other hand, he did believe what Elisha had said, and was impatient to get on and be the king Elisha said he would be. And so he forced the fulfilment of the prophecy by murdering Benhadad. LXX "coverlet" may mean he did it in such a way that it was not perceived as murder. For the body would have shown no signs of violence. We see here how a man can have both faith and unbelief within him at the same time. We are all the same, like the man who said he believed but asked for help with his unbelief (Mk. 9:24).

2Ki 8:16 In the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being king of Judah then, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign-
2 Kings 1:17 says Joram son of Ahab began reigning in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat of Judah. It seems that Jehoram reigned alongside his father Jehoshaphat. Putting together 1 Kings 22:42; 2 Kings 1:17; 3:1; 8:16, Jehoram began reigning as regent in around the 17th year of Jehoshaphat, and yet he was reaffirmed as king two years before Jehoshaphat died (:17).

2Ki 8:17 He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign. He reigned eight years in Jerusalem-
Putting together 2 Kings 1:17; 3:1; 8:3,16; 2 Chron. 21:5,20, it seems Jehoram became king as regent about two years before Jehoshaphat died.

2Ki 8:18 He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab as wife. He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh-
His wife was Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri (2 Chron. 22:2; 2 Kings 8:26). "Athaliah", 'Yah has constrained', may mean that she was bitter that Yahweh had as it were limited her; the same groundless complaint as in 2 Cor. 6:12.

Ahab's marriage to a Gentile was far worse than *all* the sins of Jeroboam; the idolatry, the perversion, the making of Israel sin; these were "a light thing" compared to the evil of marriage out of the faith (1 Kings 16:31). That perspective on marriage out of the faith needs to be appreciated. And further, those who married the daughters of Ahab were led astray by them (2 Kings 8:18,27).

2Ki 8:19 However, Yahweh would not destroy Judah, for David His servant's sake, as He promised him to give to him a lamp for his children always-
That promise was understood by God at this stage as meaning that a descendant of David would continue to reign on David's throne "always", and therefore He did not destroy Judah. However, He did eventually. He reinterpreted and reapplied His words of promise. And He does this often with the various possible futures prophesied. His word is not proven false but He reapplies it, as He continues His purpose with respect for the freewill decisions of man.

2Ki 8:20 In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves-
A sad decline from the situation in his father's time (2 Chron. 17:10).

2Ki 8:21 Then Joram passed over to Zair, and all his chariots with him. He rose up by night, and struck the Edomites who surrounded him, and the captains of the chariots; and the people fled to their tents-
We note that horses and chariots were forbidden to Israel's king (Dt. 17:17,18). Yet it seems that his chariots and captains prevailed against those of Edom, even when he was surrounded and about to be defeated. Perhaps this was a repeat of the situations of 2 Chron. 13:15; 18:31, where weak believers in their time of need called to God when surrounded by enemies, and were heard. This reflects God's deep sensitivity to faith in Him, even in time of desperation. And yet His final judgment is of the state of a person's heart.

2Ki 8:22 So Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time-
Libnah was a priestly city (1 Chron. 6:47), but the tribes seem to have given the Levites towns which were not particularly valuable to them, or which were exposed to attack. Contrary to the spirit of David, they offered to God that which cost them nothing. And we must take a lesson from that. Some manuscripts read “Then did the Edomites who dwelt in Libnah revolt”. So Libnah had been taken over by Edomites and was formerly only technically under Israelite control.

2Ki 8:23 The rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, aren’t they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
This may not necessarily the same books we have in our Bibles known as 1 and 2 Chronicles.

2Ki 8:24 Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 8:25 In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign-
2 Chron. 22:1 adds: "The inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place; for the band of men who came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the older ones". It could be that this band of men had preserved Ahaziah and were seeking for him to be a puppet king for them. And the fact his mother immediately took the throne after his death hints again at this.

2Ki 8:26 Twenty-two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Athaliah the daughter of Omri king of Israel-
In fact the granddaughter of Omri. "Athaliah", 'Yah has constrained', may mean that

she was bitter that Yahweh had as it were limited her; the same groundless complaint as in 2 Cor. 6:12. Ahaziah was 22 years old when he began to reign (2 Kings 8:26), but 42 in 2 Chron. 22:2. LXX has 20. But in Biblical Hebrew, numbers were expressed by single letters, and *mem,* forty, is very similar in orthography to *caph*, twenty. And that difference is even more probable in ancient Hebrew or 'Samaritan'. So this appears to be a case of where there were indeed slight errors in copying the Divinely inspired text.

2Ki 8:27 He walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did the house of Ahab; for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab-
2 Chron. 22:3 adds: "He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly".
His father had done the same (2 Chron. 21:6). So much sin and spiritual failure is due to a refusal to individuate from parental influence and be an independent person before God. "Counsellor" suggests she specifically instructed him in the ways of idolatry; and it was by listening to the wrong counsel that Rehoboam went wrong when the kingdom of Judah first began (s.w. 2 Chron. 10:8,9).

2Ki 8:28 He went with Joram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram-
Ahaziah was clearly intended to have learned from the experience of Jehoshaphat, who also went to war with Syria at Ramoth Gilead and was nearly slain there. He was only saved by grace, and afterwards experienced God's wrath for going there (2 Chron. 16:2). Circumstances and similarities repeat within our lives, and between our lives and those of people in the Biblical histories, in order that we might learn.
Jehoram is called "Joram" within this same verse, perhaps because the name of God was no longer part of his name in practice.

2Ki 8:29 King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick-
As noted on :28, Ahaziah failed to perceive the similarities with the situation of Jehoshaphat. And this was to lead to his death (2 Kings 9:27).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 9

2Ki 9:1 Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, Put your belt on your waist, take this vial of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth Gilead-
King Joram had gone away from the fighting to Jezreel, having been lightly wounded (so :15,21 imply- he was able to ride his chariot quite fine). This would not have sat well with the soldiers under Jehu who remained defending Ramoth Gilead, and so Jehu as the army commander was going to be a popular choice as next leader. Elijah had been told to anoint Jehu and Hazael, but it seems he did neither of those things, and Elisha is now doing it.

2Ki 9:2 When you come there, find Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brothers, and carry him to an inner

room-
Jehu was exalted from amongst his brethren as was the Lord Jesus Christ (Dt. 18:18; Ps. 45:7) and taken up into a chamber within a chamber (AVmg), cp. the most holy place / Heaven itself. There Jehu was anointed, made Lord and Christ, and then the people placed their garments underneath him (:13) and proclaimed him to the world as King of Israel. This symbolic incident teaches a clear lesson- the exaltation of Jesus should lead us to be witnesses for Him. The wonder and joy of it alone, that one of us, one of our boys, a man like us... should be *so* exalted.

2Ki 9:3 Then take the vial of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, 'Thus says Yahweh, I have anointed you king over Israel'. Then open the door, flee, and don't wait-
Elijah doesn't actually do what he was told; he didn't personally anoint Jehu nor Hazael to destroy Israel (1 Kings 19:15). It's hard to decide whether this was disobedience or rather an awkward realization that he had been praying with too harsh a spirit for judgment to come upon Israel, and didn't want it to come. The prophet was maybe told to leave immediately because Jehu was to be left to use his own initiative in how to take things forward now.

2Ki 9:4 So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth Gilead-
His being a "prophet" is stressed, because it was through the prophetic word that Jehu was to become king.

2Ki 9:5 When he came, behold, the captains of the army were sitting. Then he said, I have a message for you, captain. Jehu said, To which of us all here? He said, To you, O captain-
Jehu takes the initiative in asking the messenger to whom he is sent. This suggests he was already the de facto leader of the army captains now that the king had left the front and returned to Jezreel under the pretext of having had a slight wound. They were apparently sitting in a courtyard, perhaps having been discussing battle plans; for the prophet and Jehu now go "into the house" (:6).

2Ki 9:6 He arose, and went into the house. Then he poured the oil on his head and said to him, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'I have anointed you king over the people of Yahweh, even over Israel-
There is the reminder that God didn't really want human kings, and He was their real king. We also note that God considered Himself the king of the apostate ten tribes, just as much as over Judah through the Davidic line. All such divisions within God's people are not visible from God's perspective.

2Ki 9:7 You shall strike the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of Yahweh, at the hand of Jezebel-
Ahab had apparently repented in humility and had been accepted. But this didn't mean that his family were not going to be punished for his sins; there were still consequences for his sins, not least because it seems they continued in his sins.

2Ki 9:8 For the whole house of Ahab shall perish. I will cut off from Ahab every male, both him who is shut up and him who is left at large in Israel-
"He who is shut up and he who is left free" is apparently an idiom referring to

children still shut up at home, and those who are free to move about independently. The meaning would then be "young and old".

2Ki 9:9 I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah-
The extreme judgment pronounced was because of the great potentials God had enabled for Jeroboam (see 1 Kings 11:38; 14:10). But he refused to realize them. We live in an age of great potentials. We are generally literate, mobile, with easy access to God's word; and many members of the body of Christ live in relative ease and luxury, free from persecution. The potentials for service are far higher for the average believer today than they were centuries ago. So this issue of judgment according to wasted potentials is so relevant to our age. Baasha had failed to learn the lessons of Jeroboam and so he was judged in the same way (1 Kings 16:3,4). And the house of Ahab had likewise not learned these lessons.

2Ki 9:10 The dogs will eat Jezebel on the plot of ground of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her'. He opened the door, and fled-
The "rampart" of Jezreel where Jezebel was to be eaten (1 Kings 21:23) is s.w. "trench" in 2 Sam. 20:15. It would refer to the trench immediately below the city wall. Jezebel was in a house on the city wall when she was thrown out of it (2 Kings 9:36,37), and her body would have landed in the drainage ditch which was probably dry. Dogs wandered there looking for scraps of food thrown out of the windows of the houses on the city wall.

2Ki 9:11 Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord; and one said to him, Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you? He said to them, You know the man and what his talk was-
"You know the man", because he was dressed in the distinctive clothing of the prophets. Jehu tries to initially pass him off as a typical mad prophet, reflecting his disrespect of the prophetic word. See on :22,26,35,37. The prophets were often perceived as mad. And indeed the pressure upon them was great indeed. The psychological strengthening of the prophets (see on Ez. 2:4-6) was absolutely necessary- for no human being can live in a constant state of inspiration without breaking. The composer Tchaikovsky commented: "If that condition of mind and soul, which we call inspiration, lasted long without intermission, no artist could survive it. The strings would break and the instruments be shattered into fragments" (Rosa Newmarch, *The Life And Letters Of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (New York: Vienna House, 1973 ed.) pp. 274,275). The whole tremendous experience of having God's mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There's a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (e.g. Jer. 29:24,26; Hos. 9:7; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them… would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there's no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

2Ki 9:12 They said, That is a lie. Tell us now. He said, He told me, 'Thus says Yahweh, I have anointed you king over Israel'-
Although he appeared mad, they correctly perceived that he was not and that likely he

was a prophet with a message. People have a way of perceiving Divine truth when they encounter it. What they later do with it, or whether they then deny it, is another question. We get the impression Jehu rather blurts out the absolute truth. The record has every ring of psychological credibility.

2Ki 9:13 Then they hurried, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs and blew the trumpet, saying, Jehu is king-
As noted on :1, they were army captains who were disillusioned with Joram and were psychologically open to this prophetic message at this time- although not from spiritual motives.

2Ki 9:14 So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. (Now Joram was keeping Ramoth Gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael king of Syria-
As noted on :1, Joram as king was commander in chief of the army, and was defending Ramoth Gilead against the Syrians under Hazael, whom God had anointed to judge Israel. Yet He was also working through Jehu to judge Joram and the house of Ahab.

2Ki 9:15 but king Joram had returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria). Jehu said, If this is your thinking, then let no one escape and go out of the city to go to tell it in Jezreel-
See on :1. Jehu clearly intended to kill Joram and so he didn't want him to have advanced warning. For he was in Jezreel. LXX "If your mind be with me" begins the theme we will see developed in :18, that Jehu was on an ego trip, and demanded people follow him personally (:18 etc.).

2Ki 9:16 So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there. Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to see Joram-
2 Chron. 22:7 comments: "Now the destruction of Ahaziah was of God, in that he went to Joram". This is not guilt by association, but rather a case of bad company resulting in sharing in the judgments of those we prefer to company with.
There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

2Ki 9:17 Now the watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. Joram said, Take a horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'-
The zoom of the Divine cameraman is close in on the scene. Jehu was clearly not alone and had taken some of the army with him from Ramoth Gilead. The one horseman is seen by us from the tower on the wall, drawing closer to the larger group racing toward him. We feel the atmosphere of foreboding and imminent tragedy.

2Ki 9:18 So there went one on horseback to meet him and said, Thus says the king, 'Is

it peace?' Jehu said, What do you have to do with peace? Fall in behind me! The watchman said, The messenger came to them, but he isn't coming back-
As noted on :15, there is a theme here of Jehu wanting people to follow him personally. He comes over as being on an ego trip, using the apparent service of God and judgment of apostacy as an opportunity to flaunt his own ego. And that is not unheard of today.

2Ki 9:19 Then he sent out a second on horseback, who came to them, and said, Thus says the king, 'Is it peace?' Jehu answered, What do you have to do with peace? Fall in behind me!-
Again "fall in behind *me*" suggests a man on an ego trip. See on :18; 2 Kings 10:15. Jehu was using the old argument 'We cannot have peace until we judge apostacy'. But like many who use that argument, they despise the concept of peace, when this is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

2Ki 9:20 The watchman said, He came to them, and isn't coming back. The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he drives angrily-
We sense the native anger of Jehu reflected in the style of driving and lack of care for his horses which was well know; but it was now apparently channeled into serving God by judging others. Again, this ancient character speaks to so many of our age, who use the judgment of apostacy as a mere vehicle for their own anger, rather than genuinely serving God to His glory.

2Ki 9:21 Joram said, Get ready! They got his chariot ready. Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out to meet Jehu, and found him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite-
2 Chron. 22:7 says that Ahaziah "went out with Jehoram against Jehu"; perhaps not merely to meet him; although "against" can simply mean that they faced off against each other. See on :23. They met with Jehu almost as soon as leaving the palace, for they met at the vineyard of Naboth, which was next to Ahab's palace (1 Kings 21:1). It was Divinely overruled that the meeting was at the vineyard of Naboth which Ahab had wrongfully stolen from him, as Joram had apparently not returned the land to Naboth's family. He was not penitent for the sins of his father but continued in them.

2Ki 9:22 It happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? He answered, What peace, so long as the prostitution of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft abound?-
The last time Joram had seen Jehu was at Ramoth Gilead, when they had been fighting against the Syrians together. Jehu realized that his Divine remit was to judge the family of Ahab and Jezebel for her Baal worship, and especially her encouragement of others to do it [her "prostitution"]. And yet Jehu as a typical member of the ten tribe kingdom was likely also an idolater, and had spoken most disparagingly of Yahweh's prophet in :22.

2Ki 9:23 Joram turned around to flee-
Just as Ahab his father did before being slain (1 Kings 22:34).
And said to Ahaziah, There is treason, Ahaziah!-
This was the first Joram had sensed, it seems, of the putsch. He had presumably assumed that Jehu was racing towards Jezreel with news of events from the conflict

with the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead. He may have been giving Ahaziah a chance to get away, as Ahaziah did manage to flee (:27) and managed to hide in Samaria before being found (2 Chron. 22:9).

2Ki 9:24 Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and struck Joram between his arms; and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot-
LXX "Sunk down upon his knees". He was finally humbled, all too late. We sense Jehu's great physical strength, and his dependence upon that rather than God's strength. He comes over as strong, angry (see on :20), judgmental and on a massive ego trip (see on :18,19).

2Ki 9:25 Then Jehu said to Bidkar his captain, Pick him up, and throw him in the plot of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember how, when you and I rode together after Ahab his father, Yahweh laid this burden on him-
Jehu and Bidkar had been with Ahab when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, and would have heard Elijah's words to Ahab.

2Ki 9:26 'Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons', says Yahweh; 'and I will repay you in this plot of ground', says Yahweh. Now therefore take and cast him onto the plot of ground, according to the word of Yahweh-
This reported speech is not actually a quotation but rather an interpretation of 1 Kings 21:19. Again we see Jehu not really respecting the word of Yahweh which he claimed to be so obedient to. See on :11,22. The taking possession of the vineyard by Ahab was apparently in the sense of permanently having the vineyard registered in his name. For he could have leased it from Naboth until the next Jubilee year. And possibly renewed the lease after that. But Ahab was so obsessive about what he wanted. He wanted the vineyard as his permanent possession. This was why Naboth had to be killed, along with his sons (as we learn only here) so that they would not have any argument for inheriting it later. Ahab reasoned in a very long term manner, forgetting his own mortality. He 'just loved the idea' not only of the vineyard, but of adding it to his inheritance. And so Naboth and his sons had to die, and the people and leaders of Jezreel led into major sin. And yet legally it is hard to see how he could have added it to his inheritance, unless he was some relative of Naboth. So all the drama was to obtain a piece of legal documentation that was always going to be questionable as to its validity.

2Ki 9:27 But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house. Jehu followed after him, and said, Strike him also in the chariot!-
It seems however that he escaped from his chariot. 2 Chron. 22:9 says that Jehu "Sought Ahaziah, and they caught him (now he was hiding in Samaria), and they brought him to Jehu, and killed him". Putting the records together, it seems that Ahaziah fled in his chariot through the garden house road (2 Kings 9:27), avoiding Jehu's call to slay him in his chariot. He got to Samaria and hid somewhere, Jehu's men searched for him and found him (2 Chron. 22:9), brought him to Jehu who was then "by Ibleam" (2 Kings 9:27), who struck him so hard that he eventually died of it, but he managed to again escape in his chariot to Megiddo, where he died of the wounds inflicted by Jehu.

They struck him at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. He fled to Megiddo, and died there-
In the list of cities given to the Levites, this is called "Bileam". "Bileam" means 'not

of the people', called Ibleam, Jud. 1:27; 2 Kings 9:27, and in Josh. 21:25, Gath-rimmon. Perhaps it is called "Bileam" in 1 Chron. 6:70 because it continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24.

2Ki 9:28 His servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his tomb with his fathers in the city of David-
2 Chron. 22:9 adds: "They buried him, for they said, He is the descendant of Jehoshaphat, who sought Yahweh with all his heart".

2Ki 9:29 In the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign over Judah-
Ahaziah was Ahab's grandson because of the intermarriage between the rulers of Israel and Judah. So Jehu did have a commission to kill him. But it would seem from 2 Chron. 22:7 that Ahaziah could have avoided this had he not shown unity with Joram by visiting him when he was sick. Such is the flexibility of God's purpose, with so many potentials built into it, ever respecting the possibility of human repentance.

2Ki 9:30 When Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and attired her head, and looked out at the window-
Presumably this means she placed the crown upon her head. It seems the royal palace was on the wall of the city by the gate (:31), with Naboth's vineyard just next to it but outside the city limits (1 Kings 21:1).

2Ki 9:31 As Jehu entered in at the gate she said, Do you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?-
Zimri had slain his master some time before and was famed for it (1 Kings 16:9-20). So she is effectively calling Jehu "You Zimri!", pointing out that servants who slay their masters never have peace. Zimri slew all the male descendants of Baasha in fulfilment of God's word, and Jezebel was surely aware that Ahab was under the same judgment. She is arrogant to the end, saying that the man who fulfilled Yahweh's word (as Jehu was about to) had no peace. For he committed suicide after reigning only seven days.

2Ki 9:32 He lifted up his face to the window and said, Who is on my side? Who? Two or three eunuchs looked out at him-
Again, Jehu expresses things in terms of people being on his side and following him personally; see on :18,19. The reference to "two or three" may allude to how two or three witnesses were required to condemn (Dt. 17:6; 19:15).

2Ki 9:33 He said, Throw her down! So they threw her down; and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses. Then he trampled her under foot-
The blood on the wall suggests she may have put up a struggle and the eunuchs had attacked her, leaving her bleeding. To trample under foot was to despise.

2Ki 9:34 When he had come in, he ate and drank; and he said, See now to this cursed woman, and bury her; for she is a king's daughter-
The eating and drinking was a sign of having taken power, and was likely a small feast to celebrate himself as king. Clearly Jezebel had no supporters amongst her

retainers. She was daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon. By wanting to bury her, Jehu showed his lack of knowledge or respect of the word of Divine judgment against her, which said she would not be buried (:37). And yet he claimed to be so zealous in fulfilling it. Clearly he was grabbing hold of bits and pieces of God's word, and seeking to fulfil them as an excuse for giving his own ego and blood lust full reign. He is so similar to over zealous 'defenders of the faith' of our age.

2Ki 9:35 They went to bury her; but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands-
Nobody was concerned with her corpse, showing how unpopular she was. Nobody chased the wild dogs away from eating her. She is set up as representative of all whom God will finally reject, cast out of the city to the wild dogs in the rubbish tip in the small valley beneath the city walls (:36). And nobody will feel sorry for them. In the last day, we will see things differently, and from God's perspective. All questions about God's justice will evaporate.

2Ki 9:36 Therefore they came back, and told him. He said, This is the word of Yahweh which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite saying, 'The dogs will eat the flesh of Jezebel on the plot of Jezreel-
The "rampart" of Jezreel where Jezebel was to be eaten (1 Kings 21:23) is s.w. "trench" in 2 Sam. 20:15. It would refer to the trench immediately below the city wall. Jezebel was in a house on the city wall when she was thrown out of it (2 Kings 9:36,37), and her body would have landed in the drainage ditch which was probably dry. Dogs wandered there looking for scraps of food thrown out of the windows of the houses on the city wall.

2Ki 9:37 and the body of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel'-
Jehu clearly intended to give her some kind of burial (see on :35), but this was not according to the very prophetic word which Jehu claimed to be so zealous to fulfil. He comes over as consistently insincere and not truly respectful of God's word. See on :11.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 10

2Ki 10:1 Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. Jehu wrote letters and sent to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, even the elders, and to those who brought up the sons of Ahab, saying-
As noted throughout 2 Kings 9, Jehu now had blood lust, and his huge ego sought to fulfil it through the excuse that he was obeying God's word against Ahab. He was indeed fulfilling that word, but he didn't respect Yahweh's word in his heart (see on 2 Kings 9:11,35,37). "Samaria" is used for the region, as some were killed in Jezreel (:11). Although the rulers of Jezreel were apparently in Samaria at the time, unless we read with LXX "the rulers of Samaria".

2Ki 10:2 Now as soon as this letter comes to you, since your master's sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fortified city also, and armour-
This confirms that despite the unclarity of :1, the city of Samaria is in view. For at this time, Jehu was in Jezreel, and also needing to take care of the war in Ramoth Gilead.

2Ki 10:3 Select the best and fittest of your master's sons, set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house-
This shows again Jehu's self confidence and trust in human strength. He was challenging any who supported the house of Ahab to set a descendant of Ahab on the throne, and enter into a civil war with him and the Israelite military, who were all under his control at Ramoth Gilead. We note that he was thereby prepared to surrender control of Ramoth Gilead, to cease fighting the Syrians, in order that he might fight his own brethren in order to establish his own personal power base.

2Ki 10:4 But they were exceedingly afraid and said, Behold, the two kings didn't stand before him! How then shall we stand?-
It was known that he had recently murdered Ahaziah of Judah as well as Joram of Israel. He had done this almost singlehanded. But see on :7.

2Ki 10:5 He who was over the household, and he who was over the city, the elders also, and those who raised the children, sent to Jehu saying, We are your servants, and will do all that you ask us. We will not make any man king. You do that which is good in your eyes-
It was typical after a power grab to slay the entire family of the ousted king. These men knew well enough what was required of them, and they agree.

2Ki 10:6 Then he wrote a letter the second time to them saying, If you are on my side, and if you will listen to my voice, take the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by tomorrow this time. Now the king's sons, being seventy persons, were with the great men of the city who brought them up-
The Philistines in 1 Sam. 29:4 recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

2Ki 10:7 It happened, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and killed them, all seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to him to Jezreel-
It was only a few hours journey from Samaria to Jezreel. They did this all on the basis of the fact he had killed two kings (:4). But they likely imagined that had been on the basis of a battle, when in fact Jehu had effectively assassinated unsuspecting men. The two kings had rushed out to meet him without their body guards, assuming that he as their inferior and army general was bringing news from the battle front. So all on the basis of rumour and exaggerated impressions, the elders of Samaria killed 70 children of Ahab. This is the kind of thing which goes on all the time- people taking major decisions on the basis of fake news and exaggerated impressions and fears.

2Ki 10:8 A messenger came and told him, They have brought the heads of the king's

sons. He said, Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning-
This was to display them openly, in order to make openly clear his hold on power.

2Ki 10:9 It happened in the morning, that he went out and stood and said to all the people, You are righteous. Behold, I conspired against my master, and killed him; but who struck all these?-
Jehu consistently appears out of step with God's principles. It is for God and not men like Jehu to pronounce His people as just / righteous. The heaps of young heads would have been grotesque. Jehu's argument is that he indeed has killed his master, but who killed these 70 young men and boys? Not him, but the elders of Samaria who had raised them and now supported him over Ahab. It was clever enough as a political statement, but is very spiritually deficient. For the grosser sin of others doesn't remove nor justify our sins. And Jehu ought to have reasoned that in humility he had fulfilled God's word about Ahab's family, rather than seeking to justify it by such mind games.

2Ki 10:10 Know now that nothing shall fall to the earth of the word of Yahweh, which Yahweh spoke concerning the house of Ahab. For Yahweh has done that which He spoke by His servant Elijah-
Time and again we are brought to realize that the same external action can be judged by God quite differently, according to our motives. Uzziah was condemned for acting as a priest; when David did the same, he was reflecting his spirituality. God commanded Jehu to perform the massacre of Ahab's family at Jezreel, and blessed him for it (2 Kings 10:10,29,30); and yet Hos. 1:4 condemns the house of Jehu for doing that. Why? Presumably because their later attitude to that act of obedience was wrong, and the act therefore became judged as God as something which brought just punishment on the house of Jehu many years later. Why? Because even an outward act of obedience, when perceived through wrong motives and feelings, becomes an act of sin and a basis even for condemnation. All our works need careful analysis once we grasp this point.

2Ki 10:11 So Jehu struck all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, with all his great men, his familiar friends, and his priests, until he left him none remaining-
The Divine commission was to destroy the male descendants of Ahab, but Jehu excuses his blood lust in the name of serving God. And right wing Christian extremists have and still do the same. Even though there is actually a lack of understanding and respect for the Divine word they claim to be fulfilling (see on 2 Kings 9:11,35,37). We note Jehu killed Ahab's personal priests, which suggests Ahab's repentance was not very thorough.

2Ki 10:12 He arose and departed, and went to Samaria. As he was at the shearing house of the shepherds on the way-
This probably referred to some inn where the brothers of Ahaziah were staying for the night. RV margin "'house of gathering", where the sheep were gathered before slaughter, and so Jehu likes to imagine this is a providential hint that he should kill these people there. Such imagination of 'the hand of providence' is common amongst those who set themselves on a supposed path of fulfilling God's word, without really doing so from the heart and with full understanding.

2Ki 10:13 Jehu met with the brothers of Ahaziah king of Judah and said, Who are you? They answered, We are the brothers of Ahaziah. We are going down to greet the

children of the king and the children of the queen-
Ahaziah was grandson of Ahab, so they were relatives of Ahab. But the Divine commission had been to destroy his male descendants. Jehu is seeking to justify his own blood lust by apparently generously interpreting that commission. These men were obviously ignorant of the putsch, and we have to remember that they were living in an age where communication was difficult. The "queen" is better 'the queen mother' (as 1 Kings 15:13), referring to Jezebel.

2Ki 10:14 He said, Take them alive! They took them alive, and killed them at the pit of the shearing house, even forty-two men. He didn't leave any of them-
This seems to suggest Jehu originally thought of taking them captives, but then killed them in the cistern (RVmg.) where the sheep were washed before shearing or slaughter. His change of plan shows that he was far from clear in his understanding of the Divine commission.

2Ki 10:15 When he had departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him. He greeted him and said to him, Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart? Jehonadab answered, It is. If it is, give me your hand. He gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot-
The Rechabites were part of the Kenites (1 Chron. 2:55), from where Moses' wife came (Jud. 1:16). Jael was married to a Kenite (Jud. 4:17), and they were not slain along with the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:6). They were clearly a nomadic, spiritually minded family (Jer. 35:6,7). It seems there is a purposeful juxtaposition here, between the truly spiritual person and Jehu, whose zeal for Yahweh was clearly only superficial, and was a justification of his own pride and ego. Jehu asks Jehonadab to be of his own "heart", because his heart is "right". Again we see the same spirit as in 2 Kings 9:18,19. To follow God meant following Jehu personally, and we sense his desire for power and leadership everywhere in this.

2Ki 10:16 He said, Come with me, and see my zeal for Yahweh. So they made him ride in his chariot-
This so obviously smacks of pride, and exhibiting human pride and strength under the cover of 'I am doing this for Yahweh'. And this is to be seen so often in misguided religious attempts to serve self in the name of serving God. I noted on :15 the intended contrast between Jehonadab and Jehu; and Jehu makes him ride in his chariot, as if this was agreed to reluctantly by Jehonadab.

2Ki 10:17 When he came to Samaria, he struck all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke to Elijah-
If he had been truly zealous for Yahweh, he would have removed the calves in Dan and Bethel. But instead he seemed interested in murdering people, on the mistaken basis of some kind of guilt by association ethic. It could be that we are intended to read this as meaning 'according to his interpretation of the word of Yahweh', because his massacre of anyone remotely associated with Ahab was not what the Divine command had stated. He was using God's word, as many do, to justify his own native desire for power and abuse of others.

1 Kings 21 states that the death of Joram at Jehu's hand was "in accordance with the word of the LORD". Likewise the murder of Ahab's 70 sons is stated to be an explicit fulfilment of Yahweh's word here "through His servant Elijah" (2 Kings

10:10,17 cp. 1 Kings 21:21). But the "through" begs many questions. Elijah maybe repeated these words- but failed to anoint Jehu to do the job as requested. Or maybe the idea is that God's word still finally comes true despite human failure, as we have here on Elijah's part. See on 1 Kings 19:17.

So God's word through Elijah was fulfilled, but not through the initially intended mechanism- that Elijah would anoint Jehu. Actually he didn't, Elisha took on the job but got his servant to do it- who nervously ran off after doing it. But still God's word came true- although the path to fulfilment of it varied in accordance with human weakness and, as it were, availability to God. This explains why and how prophecies have varying fulfilments but always somehow come true in the end.

2Ki 10:18 Jehu gathered all the people together and said to them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu will serve him much-

The gathering of all the Baal worshippers together was meant to imitate Elijah on Carmel, whose words Jehu claimed to be fulfilling. But Elijah was clear that he was not a Baal worshipper, and would never have used this kind of deceit which Jehu did. His claim that he personally wanted to hold a feast to Baal had credibility and people attended because of it- because he was well known himself as a Baal worshipper. His hypocrisy was awful.

2Ki 10:19 Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Baal, all of his worshippers, and all of his priests. Let none be absent; for I have a great sacrifice to Baal. Whoever is absent, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtlety, intending that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal-

As noted on :19, he had clearly been a Baal worshipper because his invitation had credibility and was responded to. Threatening to murder any who didn't attend again reflects the bloodlust with which Jehu appears to now be drunk with. The word "subtlety" suggests he was as the serpent in Eden and not acting as he ought to have done. LXX "Now, O ye prophets of Baal, call ye unto me all his servants" would further underline that he had absolutely solid credibility with them as a Baal worshipper, who had only slain Ahab's personal prophets because he was destroying Ahab's inner circle. We note that he proclaims he is doing this in accord with Yahweh's word to Elijah (:17). And yet he can also credibly announce that he is a Baal worshipper. This again shows how Baal worship was practiced as a form of Yahweh worship. This has been the perennial problem for God's people; to claim to serve God through serving the flesh, to mix Divine truth with pagan error. See on :20,21.

2Ki 10:20 Jehu said, Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal! They proclaimed it-

This is the very word used of proclaiming feasts and assemblies of Yahweh (Joel 1:14; Lev. 23:36; Num. 29:35; Dt. 16:8; Neh. 8:18). As noted on :19, he was mixing paganism with Yahweh worship. Feasts to Baal were seen as fulfilling the commands to hold feasts to Yahweh.

2Ki 10:21 Jehu sent through all Israel; and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that didn't come. They came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was filled from one end to the other-

Again we note that the credibility of Jehu's appeal was only because he must have been a known worshipper of Baal. This "house of Baal" must have been huge, and

was likely an imitation of the Jerusalem temple. For the nature of Baal worship was that it was understood as a form of Yahweh worship; see on :19.

2Ki 10:22 He said to him who was over the vestry, Bring out robes for all the worshippers of Baal! He brought robes out to them-
As noted on :21, this house of Baal was an imitation of the Jerusalem temple, which also had rooms where the priestly robes were kept (see on 2 Kings 22:14). See on :19.

2Ki 10:23 Jehu went with Jehonadab the son of Rechab into the house of Baal. Then he said to the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there are here with you none of the servants of Yahweh, but the worshippers of Baal only-
We get the impression that the humble, spiritually minded Jehonadab would not have approved of this deceit, and just as he had been "made" to ride in Jehu's chariot, so he was being used here. The demand that any worshipper of Yahweh should leave would mean that really Jehonadab and Jehu ought to have themselves exited. The whole situation was unethical, and Jehonadab, like many good men, was railroaded into it. I have shown on :19-22 that Baal worship was seen as a form of Yahweh worship. So "the servants of Yahweh" would be a technical term here for those known to insist upon only worshipping Yahweh and who rejected Baal worship.

2Ki 10:24 They went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had appointed him eighty men outside and said, If any of the men whom I bring into your hands escape, he who lets him go, his life shall be for the life of him-
If the house of Baal was so packed, we wonder whether 80 men were really enough to kill all the hundreds or thousands of Baal worshippers inside it. But numbers in the Hebrew Bible are often not to be read literally, especially when used in connection with numbers of soldiers. This could refer to a group or division of soldiers called 'an eighty'.

2Ki 10:25 It happened, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and kill them! Let none escape-
It seems Jehu himself offered the offering, as if he were the high priest of Baal. As noted above, he could only have done this if he were well known as a senior Baal worshipper.

They struck them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went into the inner room of the house of Baal-
The house of Baal appears to have been an imitation of the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem. It also had an "inner room", corresponding to the most holy place. See on :19.

2Ki 10:26 They brought out the pillars that were in the house of Baal, and burned them-
As there were "pillars" associated with the Jerusalem temple, so there were with this house of Baal. See on :19. However these pillars were burned, meaning they were made of wood, which as a fertility symbol would have been associated with the worship of the likes of Astarte and Baal.

2Ki 10:27 They broke down the pillar of Baal, and broke down the house of Baal and made it a latrine, to this day-
The house of Baal was broken down, but soon afterwards, it was rebuilt and had to be

destroyed yet again (2 Kings 11:18). There are examples galore of purges and re-purges in the record of the Kings. This was an apparent obedience to Dt. 7:5,25; 12:2,3- but the real idols were the pride and ego in Jehu's heart. That is the fairly clear implication of the narrative. External obedience didn't deal with those idols.

2Ki 10:28 Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel-
The next verse shows the hollowness of this. For other idols were allowed to continue, such as the calves (:29) and Asherah (2 Kings 13:6), and it is clear that Baal was replaced with Moloch worship (2 Kings 17:17). It's rather like the addict who quits one drug for another. Destruction of one form of idolatry is in no way any guarantee that our heart is therefore given over to Yahweh.

2Ki 10:29 However Jehu didn't depart from following the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin: the golden calves that were in Bethel, and in Dan-
See on :28. The political motive for retaining them was so that Israel would not reunite with Judah (1 Kings 12:26-30); and for Jehu, his hold on personal power was of paramount importance to him, far more than instituting worship of Yahweh and seeking His glory.

2Ki 10:30 Yahweh said to Jehu, Because you have done well in executing that which is right in My eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in My heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel-
Hosea's prophesied that the blood of Jezreel would be visited upon the house of Jehu (Hos. 1:4). At Jezreel, Jehu had killed Ahab's family in a quite literal bloodbath. And God had commented that because Jehu had done this and thus fulfilled His word, Jehu's family would reign for the next four generations. So why, then, does Hosea start talking about punishing the house of Jehu for what they did to the house of Ahab? Jehu became proud about the manner in which he had been the channel for God's purpose to be fulfilled, inviting others to come and behold his "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10:16). Jehu and his children showed themselves to not really be spiritually minded, and yet they prided themselves in having physically done God's will. And because of this, Hosea talks in such angry terms about retribution for what they had done; the house of Jehu's act of obedience to God actually became something his family had to be punished for, because they had done it in a proud spirit. We see this all the time around us. Men and women who clearly are instruments in God's hand, like the Assyrians were, doing His will… but being proud about it and becoming exalted in their own eyes because of it. And Hosea is so sensitive to the awfulness of this, he goes ballistic about it.

2Ki 10:31 But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Yahweh, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel to sin-
Jeroboam was apparently a believer. He had his eyes open. He was an apparent enthusiast in doing God's work, and working for the good of His people Israel in strengthening their cities, fighting their enemies etc.. He had some faith, for example that God would heal him. He knew the real date of the feast of tabernacles; he knew his Bible, he had an enthusiasm for studying the genealogies and some aspects of the Mosaic Law. He seems to have taught the truth to his son. He understood a little about the symbology of the ark and the cherubim. But he shut his eyes to the real spirit of

God's word. Now we can't say we have no similarity with that man. 2 Kings 10:31 sums up his real failures. Jehu "took no heed to walk in the law with all his heart, for (because)" he followed the sins of Jeroboam. So this was his specific sin; not walking in God's law *with all his heart* . It is stressed in the records that he was "the son of Nebat". 'Nebat' means 'one who pays careful attention'; as if to emphasize that Jeroboam was not that person; he was the son of that person. Israel , Malachi says, were "partial" in God's law. Are we partial? Are we just focusing on those parts of spiritual life which we don't find difficult? Are we avoiding the real pain of spiritual growth? See on Hos. 1:4.

2Ki 10:32 In those days Yahweh began to weaken Israel; and Hazael struck them in all the borders of Israel-

This was the fulfilment of Elisha's words to Hazael in 2 Kings 8:12: "I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones and rip up their women with child". The command to Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15), which Elisha fulfilled, was therefore part of God's intended judgments upon Israel for their sins. There is no specific record of Hazael doing this, but in the records of his attacks upon Israel we are therefore to assume that he did so at those times (2 Kings 10:32; 13:3,22).

2Ki 10:33 from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the valley of the Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan-

This meant that about 25% of Israelite territory was taken from them, and these areas were famed as good pasture land. Bashan was famed for the "fat bulls of Bashan" and for "the oaks of Bashan".

2Ki 10:34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

2Ki 10:35 Jehu slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria. Jehoahaz his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 10:36 The time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years-
This was the second longest reign of an Israelite king. The kings of Israel lived and reigned far shorter than those of Judah. And yet in the final analysis, Ezekiel says that Judah sinned more than Israel. But their kings had greater signs of external blessing, and perhaps overall they were generally more righteous than their people. Whereas the kings of Israel were as wicked as their people.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 11

2Ki 11:1 Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal-
So obsessed was she with personal power that she killed her own relatives, perhaps her own children, in order to establish herself as the only living heir to David's throne. The royal family had already been depleted because of the murders of 2 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 21:4,17. She saw the significance of the promises to David, but twisted them into mere religion. For she was an idolater, Jezebel's daughter.

2Ki 11:2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were slain, even him and his nurse, and put them in the bedroom. They hid him from Athaliah, so that he was not slain-
In a sense, God's entire purpose through the line and seed of David depended upon the quick thinking of a young woman, and was concentrated in this small baby. For "all the royal seed" had been slain (:1). Her name means 'sworn to Jehovah', and this likely represents her later character rather than her birth name. She came from a bad background, but was married to the high priest (although we note Jehoiada is not listed in the list of high priests in 1 Chron. 6). "The bedroom" is better "the chamber of the beds", perhaps a room in the temple (:1) used for the storage of old beds and furniture. Or maybe this was where he was temporarily hidden, before being moved to somewhere in the temple (:2). We marvel at how Jehoiada kept his own faith in Yahweh strong (2 Chron. 23:1), although surely he must have been somewhat of an underground believer at this time.

2Ki 11:3 he was with her hidden in the house of Yahweh six years. Athaliah reigned over the land-
The temple was likely relatively disused, as Athaliah was such a strong worshipper of Baal. Therefore Joash later had to majorly repair it. However in 2 Chron. 23:1-8 we do read of its usage, but perhaps not as it was before. It could be inferred from 2 Chron. 23:18 that the burnt offerings were not offered during Athaliah's dictatorship. And 2 Chron. 24:7 is clear: "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up God's house". See on 2 Chron. 24:13 for the extent of the damage done. So they hid the child in one of the disused chambers for the priests of Yahweh, who likely were not regularly officiating any more at that time. We note how Jehoshabeath and

her husband Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron. 22:11) would have had access to both the palace and the temple because of their positions. And although they must have been underground believers to some extent, they used their connections well, to keep alive the line of David. Joash became king at seven, so he was a one year old baby when saved from Athaliah.

2Ki 11:4 In the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the captains over hundreds of the Carites and of the guard, and brought them to him into the house of Yahweh. He made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of Yahweh, and showed them the king's son-
The Carites were the Cherethites of 2 Sam. 20:23. More information is given in 2 Chron. 23:1: "In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him". The five men and their followers of 2 Chron. 23:1 match the description of three "third parts" and another "two parts" in 2 Kings 11:5-7. The corroboration between the records, clearly written by different hands, reflects the Divine inspiration of the record. The names of all these men include the name of God. To overthrow Athaliah was a risky undertaking and their faith and commitment to the Davidic line was very strong.

2Ki 11:5 He commanded them saying, This is the thing that you shall do: a third part of you, who come in on the Sabbath, shall be keepers of the watch of the king's house-
This is fleshed out by 2 Chron. 23:4: "This is the thing that you shall do. A third part of you, who come in on the Sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters at the thresholds". Chronicles stresses the role of the Levites (2 Chron. 23:2,4) whereas Kings hardly mentions them in the record. Clearly Chronicles is largely a history of the priesthood and Levites, written up in captivity to encourage the Levites to return to Judah and revive Yahweh worship there. Comparing with 2 Chron. 23:8, the idea is that the Levites had a changeover of shifts that Sabbath. Those who were going off shift were to remain, so that there would be a larger number of them present. It seems that the Kings records speaks of three battalions of royal guards, one of which was on duty, and the others later brought into the temple by Jehoiada (2 Chron. 23:7). Whereas Chronicles has three battalions of Levitical temple guards / doorkeepers. They could be the same groups, but it seems easier to read them as separate. This would mean that somehow Jehoiada had persuaded even Athaliah's own bodyguards to betray her.

2Ki 11:6 a third part shall be at the gate Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard. So you shall keep the watch of the house, and be a barrier-
We must compare this with 2 Chron. 23:5 "A third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation. All the people shall be in the courts of Yahweh's house". "The king's house" isn't the royal palace; for in any case, Athaliah was a queen and not a king. It refers to the place where the king Joash was hiding. The Gate of the Foundation was apparently near the valley separating Moriah from the hill opposite it, literally "the gate of Sur", mentioned in 2 Kings 11:6. But "Svr" may be "Svs", the horse gate, which is that of 2 Chron. 23:15; 2 Kings 11:16.

2Ki 11:7 The two companies of you, even all who go out on the Sabbath, shall keep the watch of the house of Yahweh around the king-

Those whose period of service ended that Sabbath were to remain present. We again note how even under Athaliah's idolatrous rule, the temple services continued. Baal worship was thought to be a form of Yahweh worship. See on 2 Kings 10:19.

2Ki 11:8 You shall surround the king, every man with his weapons in his hand; and he who comes within the ranks, let him be slain. Be with the king when he goes out, and when he comes in-
The reference is specifically to the Levites*:* "The Levites shall surround the king, every man with his weapons in his hand. Whoever comes into the house, let him be slain. Be with the king when he comes in, and when he goes out" (2 Chron. 23:7). The whole putsch was a risky undertaking, and Jehoiada was aware of the possibility of armed opposition from Athaliah's loyalists. The Levites were armed, presumably with weapons like knives or whatever they could get hold of. Perhaps this command foresaw how Athaliah would come running into the temple (:13) and should therefore be slain.

2Ki 11:9 The captains over hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded; and they took every man his men, those who were to come in on the Sabbath, with those who were to go out on the Sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest-
The idea is that the Levites had a changeover of shifts that Sabbath. Those who were going off shift were to remain, so that there would be a larger number of them present. "All Judah" being present in 2 Chron. 23:8 refers to the representatives of all Judah who were present. "All" in the Bible often refers not to literally everybody but to representatives of the "all". The taking of the Gospel to "all the world" must surely be understood in that way. "The Levites and all Judah" is therefore matched here by “the captains over the hundreds".

2Ki 11:10 The priest delivered to the captains over hundreds the spears and shields that had been king David’s, which were in the house of Yahweh-
Possibly the shields of gold David had taken and dedicated at the time of 2 Sam. 8:7,11. Gold represents faith, and they were probably not very functional for combat. But this whole putsch was on the basis of faith and not secular strength and wisdom.

2Ki 11:11 The guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, along by the altar and the house, around the king-
2 Chron. 23:10 "He set all the people...". The altar would be the altar of burnt offering in the outer court. "All the people" refers to those other than the priests and Levites who had agreed to help in the putsch.

2Ki 11:12 Then he brought out the king’s son and put the crown on him, and gave him the testimony. They made him king and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, Long live the king!-
"The testimony" was a copy of the law the king was supposed to write out when he became king, but it had presumably been written out for him (Dt. 17:18-20).

2Ki 11:13 When Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came to the people into the house of Yahweh-
See on :8. Any who came into the temple were to be slain, and it seems Jehoiada set

her up to do just what she did. That this was all pulled off right under her nose was quite an achievement.

2Ki 11:14 She looked, and behold, the king stood by the pillar, as the tradition was-
Heb. 'pedestal', a kind of podium, considering he was only seven years old and small.

And the captains and the trumpets near the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, Treason! Treason!-
"Treason" is literally "conspiracy". She realized all too late that a huge conspiracy had been going on under her nose.

2Ki 11:15 Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of hundreds who were set over the army, and said to them, Bring her out between the ranks. Kill him who follows her with the sword. For the priest said, Don't let her be slain in the house of Yahweh-
This confirms the suggestion that the command in :8 to slay whoever entered Yahweh's house was planned with Athaliah in view. "The ranks" would likely refer to the ranks of soldiers; or possibly to the temple precincts.

2Ki 11:16 So they made way for her; and she went by the way of the horses' entry to the king's house. She was slain there-
Making way for her suggests they all restrained themselves from touching her, the unclean, until she was outside the temple. It would have been an awful last walk to her death. I suggested on 2 Chron. 23:5 that "the horse gate" is the same as the "gate of the foundation".

2Ki 11:17 Jehoiada made a covenant between Yahweh and the king and the people, that they should be Yahweh's people; also between the king and the people-
"Between himself and the people" (2 Chron. 23:16) suggests Jehoiada was absolutely representing Yahweh; 2 Kings says the covenant was between Yahweh and the people. The Bible is full of examples of where men function as God and functionally represent Him to man. But this didn't make them God Himself in person. And it is within this context that we must read the passages which likewise speak of the Lord Jesus as functioning as God- without being God Himself.

2Ki 11:18 All the people of the land went to the house of Baal, and broke it down. They broke his altars and his images in pieces thoroughly, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. The priest appointed officers over the house of Yahweh-
The allusion is to how "all the people" were to put to death those who incited others to idolatry (Dt. 13:9). It seems that the temple of Baal had been built near the temple, just as Solomon had built such idol temples near to the temple. The house of Baal was broken down in 2 Kings 10:27. But now, soon afterwards, it was rebuilt and had to be destroyed yet again. There are examples galore of purges and re-purges in the record of the Kings.

2Ki 11:19 He took the captains over hundreds, and the Carites, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of Yahweh, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house. He sat on the throne of

the kings-
"The upper gate" of 2 Chron. 23:20 is here "the gate of the guard".

2Ki 11:20 So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet. Athaliah they had slain with the sword at the king's house-
Quietness or peace is often associated with obedience. We read of this at least twice during Jehoshaphat's reign. Going God's way is the only way to true peace; although that peace is juxtaposed against the violent slaying of Athaliah which had been necessary to bring it about.

2Ki 11:21 Jehoash was seven years old when he began to reign-
He had been hidden six years in the temple (2 Chron. 22:12), and so it follows that he was grabbed to safety when he was a one year old baby. That was how frail was the line of descent from David, for the rest of the male line had been slain by Athaliah (2 Chron. 22:10). The royal family had already been depleted because of the murders of 2 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 21:4,17.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 12

2Ki 12:1 In the seventh year of Jehu began Jehoash to reign; and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba-
Beersheba was famed for idolatry at this time (Am. 5:5; 8:14), and the mother's name, meaning 'gazelle', has no mention of God's Name in it.

2Ki 12:2 Jehoash did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him-
Joash did right before God whilst the priest Jehoiada was alive, and then apostatized; Uzziah did likewise, with Zechariah the priest (2 Chron. 24:2; 26:5). He didn't reflect upon the personal implications of Divine history. And we too must appreciate that there are Bible characters whose experiences are framed in terms directly relevant to us- for our learning. Interestingly, straight after Jehoiada died, the princes of the land came to Joash with a request, which he wrongly listened to. This has great similarities with the tragic mistake made by Rehoboam after Solomon died (2 Chron. 10:3,4 cp. 24:17). So Joash was given chance after chance to be directed back to previous examples and be instructed by them- but he went on in his own way.

But when Jehoiada died, Joash listened to, and was influenced by, the wicked princes of Judah (2 Chron. 23:17). It is clear that for all his apparent strength of character and zeal for God, Joash was simply a product of those he was with. And so it can be that our generation especially, can tend to be people with no real character, their very personalities influenced by others rather than being real, credible people. Insofar as we can break free from all these moulding influences, we will be real, credible persons. And our independence, our realness, is what will attract others to the message of Divine influence which we preach. Those raised in Christian homes need to pay especial attention to the possibility that they are where they are spiritually because of the good influence of others upon them. There is no harm in this; but we need to strive to have a faith that is not merely the faith of our fathers, but a real and personal response to the love of God which we have for ourselves perceived in the man Christ.

2Ki 12:3 However the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places-
From this we get the hint that despite all this initial zeal, things were not spiritually solid with Joash even from the start. Likewise from 2 Chron. 24:3 we learn that Joash was a polygamist from the start, for "Jehoiada took for him two wives".

2Ki 12:4 Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the holy things that is brought into the house of Yahweh, in current money, the money of the persons at which each man is rated, and all the money that it comes into any man's heart to bring into the house of Yahweh-
This presumably meant that the half shekel temple tax had not been paid for some time. So Joash urged that it be paid, although unsurprisingly there was reluctance. Plague was threatened for not paying it, but there is no record that this happened.

2Ki 12:5 let the priests take it to them, every man from his acquaintance; and they shall repair the breaches of the house, wherever any breach shall be found-
These breaches in the temple had presumably been caused not only by assault, but more likely by the various apostate kings taking the valuable building materials (timber, cut stone etc.) in order to build pagan temples. He had a personal emotional attachment to the temple, seeing that he had grown up hiding in one of its disused side rooms (2 Chron. 22:12). The temple was in a serious state of disrepair at Athaliah's time; she was an idolater, and the daily sacrifices weren't offered (2 Chron. 23:18). The way Joash later desecrates the temple with idolatry is therefore a tragic example of turning away from the faith. No amount of devotion to the things of God's house, or emotional, sentimental feelings towards them, is a guarantee that true faith will be retained in the long term. This restoration of the temple would have been programmatic for the exiles, for whose benefits these historical records were originally written.

2Ki 12:6 But, in the twenty third year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house-
We have the abiding impression that the priesthood was never completely dedicated solely to Yahweh. Although it was through the temple being in such a state of disrepair, that Joash could be hidden in it for six years, living as if the child of some homeless woman squatting in one of the disused side rooms (see on 2 Chron. 22:11).

2Ki 12:7 Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and for the other priests, and said to them, Why don't you repair the breaches of the house? Now therefore take no more money from your treasurers, but deliver it for the breaches of the house-
The collection ordered in:5 was abandonned. Instead of going around Judah trying to get donations, those who came to offer were to be encouraged to donate. Trying to force money out of God's people is never a good idea; it must be offered freely by those who already understand the concept of sacrifice.

2Ki 12:8 The priests agreed that they should take no more money from the people, neither repair the breaches of the house themselves-
The priests had not done these repairs, and so the responsibility for them was removed from the priests. And they accepted that (:11).

2Ki 12:9 Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of Yahweh. The priests who kept the threshold put therein all the money that was brought into the house of Yahweh-
"Chest" is the Hebrew word usually used for "ark". I suggested on 2 Chron. 24:6 that the ark may have gone missing or even been destroyed by Athaliah, resulting in the rather strange term "tent of the testimony" [the tables of stone] being used for the most holy place. Kings says it was in the court opposite the porch, by the side of the altar of burnt offering. But "outside" in 2 Chron. 24:6 may also mean outside of the most holy place. It could be that the chest was stored by the altar, but in the day time was taken to the gate of the temple to receive contributions (see on 2 Chron. 24:11). 2 Chron. 24:9 GNB says this was for "the tax which Moses, God's servant, had first collected in the wilderness". The idea may be that that was the only time they ever really obeyed the law of giving the half shekel. Israel's collective disobedience to the law is quite stunning.

2Ki 12:10 It was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags and counted the money that was found in the house of Yahweh-
This was done "day by day" (2 Chron. 24:11), which can mean 'from time to time', suggesting it was done whenever the chest was full. We note that the counting and management of the money was done not by the priests and Levites, another hint (as in :15) that they had embezzled it before.

2Ki 12:11 They gave the money that was weighed out into the hands of those who did the work, who had the oversight of the house of Yahweh. They paid it out to the carpenters and the builders, who worked on the house of Yahweh-
Those who had the oversight of the repair work were not the priests, who had failed to do this previously (:8). We sense the priesthood were very weak at this time, and Jehoiada was almost alone in his dedication to the work. So when he died, things immediately reverted to the previous apostacy.

2Ki 12:12 and to the masons and the stone cutters, and for buying timber and cut stone to repair the breaches of the house of Yahweh, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it-
The language is rather similar to that used of building the temple, as if this rebuilding was really major, seeing Athaliah had consciously "broken up" the temple (2 Chron. 24:7). We have the repeated impression that the overseers were the ones who "laid out" the money for workers and materials, suggesting again that the Levites and priests had not been honest with this (see on :10).

2Ki 12:13 But there were not made for the house of Yahweh cups of silver, snuffers, basins, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of Yahweh-
The idea seems to be, comparing with 2 Chron. 24:14, that these vessels were made only after the house was completed. The focus was to be upon repairing the house first, and the vessels were seen as of secondary importance. We wonder whether this is also a hint at spiritual weakness and wrong priorities; for surely the house was not of the essence. God had said He didn't in fact want a physical house built. Surely the

vessels which enabled the rituals to be performed ought to have been made first, so that Divine worship could continue, even within a ruined building.

2Ki 12:14 for they gave that to those who did the work, and repaired therewith the house of Yahweh-
As discussed on :13, it seems that all the funds were given solely to the builders, because of a wrong perception that the building of a physical temple was more important than what went on within it.

2Ki 12:15 Moreover they didn't demand an accounting from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to give to those who did the work; for they dealt faithfully-
This may be in implied contrast to the priests and Levites who had not done the work, perhaps because of embezzlement of the funds. See on :10. The money was delivered to these overseers directly from the king (:11), and not via the priesthood.

2Ki 12:16 The money for the trespass offerings, and the money for the sin offerings, were not brought into the house of Yahweh: it was the priests'-
It seems there had begun the practice of buying sacrificial animals in Jerusalem, at the temple, and this in turn degraded to giving money to the priests in lieu of sin offerings. The Mosaic commands said nothing about this; the sinner was to bring an animal and make personal identification with it (Lev. 5:1-12; 14:13). And we see here the easy slide away from personal repentance and dedication to Yahweh, to merely giving some money.

2Ki 12:17 Then Hazael king of Syria went up and fought against Gath, and took it; and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem-
2 Chron. 24 adds the account of Joash's apostacy and murder of Jehoiada's son after Jehoiada dies. 2 Chron. 24:23 adds: "It happened at the end of the year, that the army of the Syrians came up against him. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus".
The princes were those who had encouraged Joash to idolatry after Jehoiada died (2 Chron. 24:17). We wonder why they spared Joash. Perhaps his extra bit of life was in order to give him the chance of repentance. But he turned it down.

2Ki 12:18 Jehoash king of Judah took all the holy things that Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own holy things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and of the king's house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria; and he went away from Jerusalem-
It could be that this effectively means that he saved his life by paying them off, after they had already entered Jerusalem and slain the princes (2 Chron. 24:23).

2Ki 12:19 Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
This is not necessarily the same books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 12:20 His servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and struck Joash at the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla-
We wonder whether his servants were so loyal to Yahweh that they killed him for what he had done to the sons of Jehoiada. Although these servants were apparently

secular Gentiles (2 Chron. 24:25), perhaps even they were disgusted at his deep ingratitude. Or it could mean that their conspiracy against Joash was meant by God as punishment for his conspiracy against Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:21). Joash was killed on his bed, probably his sick bed (2 Chron. 24:25), "at the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla". This may have been the equivalent of a hospital.

2Ki 12:21 For Jozacar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, struck him, and he died; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. Amaziah his son reigned in his place-
2 Chron. 24:26 "Shimeath the Ammonitess and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabitess". We wonder whether these servants were in fact his sons by Gentile wives. If so, then even before the death of Jehoiada he had shown his unspirituality by marrying Gentiles, for all his avowed devotion to the rebuilding of the temple. This is why there was specific commentary written about "his sons" (2 Chron. 24:27).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 13

2Ki 13:1 In the twenty-third year of Joash son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria for seventeen years-
This appears to be a slight contradiction with :10, but it is not so in the LXX- which is the version the New Testament prefers to quote over the Hebrew Masoretic text.

2Ki 13:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, in which he made Israel to sin. He didn't depart from it-
At the end of Jehu's reign, God had removed 25% of Israel's territory (2 Kings 10:33). But Jehoahaz didn't repent, he refused to learn any lesson from his father's sins. We note that although Jehu had no real spirituality, he inserted the name of God in his son's name. The usage of the Divine Name in the names of the kings of Israel was the same mere tokenism with which the Name is used by effective unbelievers today.

2Ki 13:3 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben Hadad the son of Hazael, continually-
He had already done this in Jehu's time (2 Kings 10:32), but as Israel had failed to learn the lesson, His anger was the more kindled. We note that Ben Hadad is a generic term for a leader of Syria, like "Pharaoh". For Hazael had murdered the Ben Hadad before him, and yet has a son who was also a Ben Hadad.

2Ki 13:4 Jehoahaz begged Yahweh, and Yahweh listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, how that the king of Syria oppressed them-
This was the fulfilment of Elisha's words to Hazael in 2 Kings 8:12: "I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones and rip up their women with child". The command to Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15), which Elisha fulfilled, was therefore part of God's intended judgments upon Israel for their sins. There is no specific record of Hazael doing this, but in the records of his attacks upon Israel we are therefore to assume that he did so at those times (2 Kings 10:32; 13:3,22).

2Ki 13:5 Yahweh gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians; and the children of Israel lived in their tents as before-
We note the simple love and pity of God for His children, responding to their suffering which He Himself had brought upon them in anger (:3)- even though they were impenitent (:6). We see the two conflicting aspects of God's character, His justice and His grace, His anger and His pity. They were reflected in Hosea's conflicting feelings for his sexually addicted, unfaithful wife Gomer (Hos. 11:8). The saviour was Jeroboam (2 Kings 14:27), although he was a wicked man.

2Ki 13:6 Nevertheless they didn't depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel to sin, but walked therein. There remained the Asherah also in Samaria-
Jehu's apparent zeal to destroy Baal worship was just an excuse for the flaunting of his own power and blood lust. It was not real "zeal for Yahweh" as he proclaimed; for he destroyed Baal, but the Asherah remained. See on 2 Kings 10:28.

2Ki 13:7 For the king of Syria didn't leave to Jehoahaz of the people any more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria destroyed them, and made them like the dust in threshing-
The king of Israel was not supposed to have horses and chariots anyway (Dt. 17:16). So this could be read as God still seeking the repentance of Jehoahaz, trying to elicit from him true trust in Him.

2Ki 13:8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

2Ki 13:9 Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division

between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 13:10 In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria for sixteen years-
This appears to be a slight contradiction with :1, but it is not so in the LXX- which is the version the New Testament prefers to quote over the Hebrew Masoretic text.

2Ki 13:11 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh; he didn't depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin; but he walked therein-
The note that he did *not* depart from those sins would reflect how the prophets had appealed to him to depart from them; but he didn't. Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 13:12 Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
See on :8. The account occurs in 2 Kings 14:8-14 and 2 Chron. 25, but this may not be the same books of Chronicles in view which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 13:13 Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat on his throne. Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel-
We note the use of "his throne" rather than "the throne of Yahweh". They had no sense of being kings on God's behalf. Samaria had only recently been built by Omri, Ahab's father, so we should not imagine that there was a long line of kings already buried there.

2Ki 13:14 Now Elisha contracted a sickness of which he would die-
Evidence enough that Pentecostalism is wrong in claiming that the righteous don't due of illness and always recover.

Joash the king of Israel came down to him and wept over him and said-
Joash was not a spiritual person, but he wept over Elisha as a prophet of Yahweh. For Israel had mixed Baal worship with that of Yahweh, and never rejected Yahweh totally.

My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!-
Elijah's example clearly influenced Elisha, both in the nature of the miracles which he performed, and in how when Elisha died, he was likewise seen as "My father, the chariot of Israel, and its horsemen", the same words used at Elijah's departure from ministry. How Elisha related to Elijah, was how people came to relate to Elisha. This is not only a neat cameo of the immense personal influence which we have upon each other; it reflects how Elisha learnt the lesson from Elijah, which we too must learn, of freely and totally absorbing ourselves in the progress of God's Angelic, cherubic work to bring about *His* glory and not our own. Elisha had related to Elijah as his spiritual father, so now others were relating to Elisha in just the same way- as *their*

spiritual father. The child had become the father, in spiritual terms. He had brought forth a spiritual child in his own image and likeness.

2Ki 13:15 Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows; and he took to him bow and arrows-
The victory was to be through bow and arrows, not horses and chariots, which were forbidden to Israel′s kings (Dt. 17:16), nor through swords. See on :17.

2Ki 13:16 He said to the king of Israel, Put your hand on the bow; and he put his hand on it. Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands-
Joash was intended to understand that this was a symbolic act, and that what he now did had God's prophetic blessing upon it through the hands of Elisha. But he failed to perceive that, and so the extent of blessing was far less than potentially it could have been. The story of wasted potentials is so frequent in the Bible, and in the lives of God's people to this day. Joash would have felt how feeble were Elisha's hands, for he was on his death bed. But those apparently feeble hands were those of God.

2Ki 13:17 He said, Open the window eastward; and he opened them. Then Elisha said, Shoot! And he shot. He said, Yahweh's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Syria; for you shall strike the Syrians in Aphek-
We might think that Elisha was being rather unreasonable with Joash; how was he to know what was in Elisha's mind? But the point is, Elisha expected the king to be more spiritually perceptive, to understand that they were enacting a parable of deliverance, to have grasped that those arrows were symbolic of victory over Syria. And so the lesson comes to us: we may be expected to have a greater understanding than we think reasonable of God to expect of us. "Aphek" means 'strength', so the idea was that Divine strength was to triumph over human strength. Hence the use of bows and arrows (see on :15). This was to repeat the defeat at Aphek (1 Kings 20:26), a victory also given by faith to an unspiritual Ahab. Yahweh had earlier given victory to Syria (s.w. 2 Kings 5:1), but this was now to be reversed. Victory against Syria was to be given to Israel. Both sides were probably about equally unspiritual, but by grace God had finished trying to educate Israel through defeat at the hands of the Syrians. Now He wanted to educate them by giving the grace of undeserved victory, in the hope that would elicit their repentance. The arrow was shot eastwards toward Gilead which was then under the control of Syria, from the hands of Joash. The idea was that the victories depended upon his personal faith, and putting his hand in God's hand, represented by Elisha's hands.

Until you have consumed them-
But :19 states clearly that Joash would not consume them (s.w.). He lacked the spiritual vision to enable this potential to come true. No specific conditions are mentioned at this point, and neither are they in many prophecies. Yet that is not to say that they are not in fact only conditionally true, and may not come true unless certain unstated conditions are fulfilled.

2Ki 13:18 He said, Take the arrows; and he took them. He said to the king of Israel, Strike the ground; and he struck three times, and stopped-
"Ground" is the word for "land"; if 'earth' was solely meant, then another word would have been used. The same phrase is used five or six times in Exodus of the smiting of the land of Egypt with plagues. Perhaps that is the significance of the complaint that Joash ought to have struck the land five or six times (:19). The intention was that

these victories would have led to not only the salvation of Israel, but their rebirth as a nation. Even at this late stage in their history, God was looking and hoping for their rebirth. See on :21.

2Ki 13:19 The man of God was angry with him and said, You should have struck five or six times. Then you would have struck Syria until you had consumed it, whereas now you shall strike Syria just three times-
See on :17,18. Elisha tells Joash to smite upon the ground with arrows; if Joash had perceived deeper what Elisha meant, he would have smitten many times and the Syrian threat would have been eliminated entirely. But he didn't, and therefore Elijah was frustrated with him; the great potential victory was limited by a man's lack of spiritual perception.

2Ki 13:20 Elisha died, and they buried him. Now the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year-
We assume Elisha died at his home in Samaria. In this case, the Moabite bands had crossed the Jordan from Gilead, which was in Syrian hands, and had boldly entered this far into Israel. The promised victory against enemies didn't seem to happen. Because Joash simply respected Elisha as a great person and liked the culture of Yahweh worship, and yet failed to live up to the huge potentials. See on :22.

2Ki 13:21 It happened, as they were burying a man, that behold, they spied a band; and they cast the man into the tomb of Elisha. As soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet-
The band is one of the Moabite bands of :20. We see how weak Israel were at this time, for Elisha had lived in Samaria. Even near their capital, Israel were prone to such fear at the appearance of just one band of marauders. The idea of course was that there was power and potential of new life in the word of the prophets. I noted on :18 the potential for a rebirth of the people at this time. The language is later applied to the exiles in Ez. 39, who likewise could have been revived by the Spirit to stand upon their feet as a great army. But that potential was likewise wasted.

2Ki 13:22 Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz-
See on :4 for the extent of the evil done to Israel at this time. This statement seems to exemplify how the promise of potential victory against Syria wasn't realized in practice because of Israel's lack of spiritual vision.

2Ki 13:23 But Yahweh was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and had respect to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither did He cast them out from His presence at that time-
The implication is that a time did come when even their connection with the fathers didn't save them. The covenant which led to so much grace was broken by Israel, and God eventually accepted that. He broke the covenant with them in response to how they had themselves broken it (Zech. 11:7-14). Covenant relationship meant salvation and blessing by grace alone; for Israel were impenitent at this time. And yet they broke it and spurned it as mere history irrelevant to them, as many do today.

The presence of God may have been articulated at that time through the Angels. Angels being physically with us in our lives means that we are always in the presence of God, as they represent Him. The fact that "the Lord spoke to Moses face to face" through an Angel shows that they represent God's face, and they are also likened to

the eyes of God. Even when a man is wicked in some ways , he may still have presence of the Angels in his life. Thus although Israel were wicked in the time of Jehoahaz and were therefore punished by Hazael of Syria, because of the covenant with Abraham "neither cast He them from His presence (Heb. face) as yet" (2 Kings 13:23). And therefore Jehoahaz is described as doing what was right in the sight (the eyes) of the Lord (i.e. the Angels with him), although he did not take away the high places (2 Kings 14:3-5). It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

2Ki 13:24 Hazael king of Syria died; and Ben Hadad his son reigned in his place-
We note that Ben Hadad is a generic term for a leader of Syria, like "Pharaoh". For Hazael had murdered the Ben Hadad before him, and yet has a son who was also a Ben Hadad.

2Ki 13:25 Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben Hadad the son of Hazael the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Joash struck him three times, and recovered the cities of Israel-
We must compare this with the statement in :22 that there was constantly oppression from Syria. The three victories were not enough to stop this, and we conclude that the huge potential available to Israel, as demonstrated by Elisha, wasn't realized. The history of God's people is such a tragic list of wasted potentials.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 14

2Ki 14:1 In the second year of Joash son of Joahaz king of Israel began Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah to reign-
Amaziah's father Joash died at 47, so Joash would have been 22 when Amaziah was born. He would have lived under the Godly influence of Jehoiada for some time, and witnessed his father's apostacy and gross ingratitude to Jehoiada shown by murdering his sons.

2Ki 14:2 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem-
His mother, 'pleasing to Jehovah', was one of the wives chosen for Joash by his Godly uncle Jehoiada.

2Ki 14:3 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, yet not like David his father- Chronicles says, "not with a perfect heart", Kings says "yet not like David". David was far from perfect, but he had a heart wholly ['perfectly'] devoted to God.

He did according to all that Joash his father had done- Repeatedly, the New Testament speaks of converting others as a bringing forth of children. This means that our level and style of spirituality is likely to be replicated in those we convert. Thus Amaziah "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord… according to all things as Joash his father had done" (2 Kings 14:3). What spirituality he had was according to that which his father had displayed.

2Ki 14:4 However the high places were not taken away. The people still sacrificed

and burnt incense in the high places-
"Taken away" is the same word as 'depart from' in :24. The way of Jeroboam was not departed from, and so the high places were not departed from. The suggestion is that they were associated with the calf worship.

2Ki 14:5 As soon as the kingdom was established in his hand, he killed his servants who had slain the king his father-
This continues a theme, of the kings of Judah strengthening or establishing themselves, often when they first became king; but then having that human strength tested by God or removed. The same word is used repeatedly (1 Chron. 11:10; 2 Chron. 11:11,17; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 23:1; 25:3,11; 26:8,15; 29:3; 32:5). The lesson of course was that it is God's Angelic eyes who run to and fro in the land promised to Abraham, "to shew Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

2Ki 14:6 But the children of the murderers he didn't put to death; as written in the book of the law of Moses, that Yahweh commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin-
Overall this man appears to have spiritually failed. But he as it were grabs hold of one commandment and religiously obeys it. We see this kind of thing all the time in 'religious' approaches to Christianity. But it is the heart which God is looking at, and it was in this that Amaziah failed, ultimately. Chronicles was written for the exiles, and perhaps they needed reminding of this principle (as in Ez. 18:20) because of their wrong idea that they were being unjustly punished for the sins of their fathers.

2Ki 14:7 He killed of Edom in the Valley of Salt ten thousand and took Sela by war, and called its name Joktheel to this day-
Far more details are given in 2 Chron. 25:5-10. This was where David had won a great victory (1 Chron. 18:12). Amaziah was being guided to follow in David's footsteps. This, as noted on 2 Chron. 25:7, was another baby step taken to try to reform him.

2Ki 14:8 Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face-
The soldiers he had hired were apparently mercenaries. They had apparently been paid, but not used in the battle. And so they had gotten offended and sacked cities of Judah (2 Chron. 25:13). And Amaziah was demanding compensation for this from the king of Israel. By so doing he demonstrated that his apparent willingness to lose the money paid for them was not a decision taken from the heart. He was still after compensation for his losses, rather than believing that God could give him all riches (see on 2 Chron. 25:9).

2Ki 14:9 Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as wife. Then a wild animal that was in Lebanon passed by, and trampled down the thistle-
This is similar to the parable of the trees in Jud. 9:7-15, which also talks of the land of Israel as "Lebanon" (Jud. 9:15). The king of Israel presents himself and Amaziah as both living in the same land, and considered himself to be the glorious cedar and

Amaziah merely a thistle. It was quite inappropriate, he felt, for Amaziah to provoke him over the fact mercenaries from his country had ransacked towns in Judah over an argument about money and payment. He is saying that it as inappropriate as a poor man asking a wealthy man to give him his daughter to marry the poor man's son. And he threatens to act not just as an elegant cedar, but to morph into a wild beast who would trample down Amaziah. Perhaps Amaziah had indeed provoked Joash by making a marriage proposal which he knew Joash would turn down.

2Ki 14:10 You have indeed struck Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Enjoy the glory of it, and stay at home; for why should you meddle to your harm, that you should fall, even you, and Judah with you?'-
The victory against Edom was from God, but by accepting the vanquished gods of Edom, Amaziah shows that he trusted in his own strength rather than that of Yahweh. So often the victories God gives, be it passing an exam or military victory, lead to pride and boasting.

2Ki 14:11 But Amaziah would not listen. So Jehoash king of Israel went up-
2 Chron. 25:20 says this was "of the Lord". There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. The fact a man does something "of the Lord" doesn't mean that he is guiltless. In the same context of God's deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, men who did things "of the Lord" were punished for what they did (Dt. 2:30; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Chron. 22:7; 25:20). God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

And he and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah-
This was on the border of Judah and Dan, the frontier of Judah. The pagan name, "house of the sun", had not been changed; and reflects Judah's abiding penchant for idolatry.

2Ki 14:12 Judah was defeated by Israel; and they fled each man to his tent-
This was not because Israel were more spiritual or faithful, but because God has a special interest in judging pride. Victories of secular people must be understood in this context. The giving of victory by God (in whatever context) is multi factorial and is not simply a reflection of His pleasure with the victor.

2Ki 14:13 Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits-
This is s.w. Neh. 1:3; 4:7, and would have helped remind the exiles how the walls of Jerusalem had come to be so broken down. It would seem by the implication of Jer. 31:38; Zech. 14:10 that this gate was on the north of Jerusalem. Depending how we define a cubit, this would have been between 600 and 700 feet.

2Ki 14:14 He took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of Yahweh and in the treasures of the king's house, with hostages also, and

returned to Samaria-
This faithful family who had cared for the ark had been entrusted with caring for the gold and silver in the temple. But Joash had given much of this to the Syrians previously.

2Ki 14:15 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

2Ki 14:16 Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 14:17 Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years-
The implication may be that he was given ample opportunity to repent; and we have noticed that in the lives of other kings.

2Ki 14:18 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
This may not necessarily be the same books of Chronicles which we have in our Bible.

2Ki 14:19 They made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and killed him there-
Perhaps he was trying to flee to Egypt, ever representative of human strength which fails. For Lachish was on the road there. Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah each died due to a conspiracy. Surely Amaziah was intended to learn from the deaths of his

predecessors, but the great theme of Biblical history is that so few learn from it. And that is the challenge to us. The planning of the conspiracy apparently took at least 15 years (2 Chron. 25:25).

2Ki 14:20 They brought him on horses; and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David-
Horses were forbidden to the kings of Israel (Dt. 17:16) so this is an appropriate end for an unfaithful man who trusted in human strength.

2Ki 14:21 All the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah-
Called Uzziah in 2 Chron. 26:1. Those who conspired against Amaziah were apparently stopped by the people from taking power. And they insisted upon the line of David continuing, through Uzziah. Despite their general unspirituality. "Uzziah", 'strength of Jehovah', has a very similar meaning to the name of his father Amaziah, 'power of Jehovah'. Yet Amaziah had not lived up to that (see on 2 Chron. 25:15. He may have named his son similarly in a hope that he would succeed where he failed.

2Ki 14:22 He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers-
Amaziah his father had defeated Edom, and Eloth was in Edom. This explains the comment that Uzziah did this after his father died. But in doing so he was really living out the ghost of his father and fulfilling parental expectation; for he repeated the works for Yahweh which his father had done (2 Chron. 26:4). Those raised in believing families must ever probe the degree to which their faith and works are possibly just living out parental expectation.

2Ki 14:23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria for forty-one years-
This was the longest reign of an Israelite king. The kings of Israel lived and reigned far shorter than those of Judah. And yet in the final analysis, Ezekiel says that Judah sinned more than Israel. But their kings had greater signs of external blessing, and perhaps overall they were generally more righteous than their people. Whereas the kings of Israel were as wicked as their people.

2Ki 14:24 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh: he didn't depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
See on :4. Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 14:25 He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which He spoke by His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was of Gath Hepher-
Jeroboam was a wicked man, but God reversed Israel's fortunes through him, by grace alone (:26). The entrance of Hamath generally means the northern border of Israel

(Num. 13:21; 34:8); the sea of the Arabah is the Dead Sea. The Jonah of the book of Jonah was also the son of Amittai, so we conclude this was the same prophet. Hosea and Amos also prophesied at this time. This prophecy of restoration of territory was fulfilled by grace alone (:26), and would have been an encouragement to the exiles at the time of the restoration, who would have feared that the exiles were generally so unspiritual that the restoration could not happen. "Restored" is the usual word used for the "return" of the exiles. Gath Hepher was near Nazareth in the tribe of Zebulon. According to Jewish tradition, he was the son of the widow of Zarephath.

2Ki 14:26 For Yahweh saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter; for there was none shut up nor left at large, neither was there any helper for Israel-
As noted on :25, the restoration of :25 was therefore an example of God's fulfilment of His prophetic word by grace alone, rather than in response to the righteousness of His people.

We must watch out for the tendency to think that because a man has dug a hole and then fallen into it, well, that's his problem. But we have all done this, hopelessly so. We only have ourselves to blame. And yet God has rushed to us in Christ. He was grieved for the affliction of Israel, even though it was purely due to their own sin and wilful rebellion. If a man has fallen into his own hole, well he is still there and needs help, however he got there.

Scripture repeatedly speaks as if God notices things and is then hurt by what He sees (Jonah 3:10; Gen. 29:31; Ex. 3:4; Dt. 32:19; 2 Kings 14:26; 2 Chron. 12:7; Ez. 23:13; Is. 59:15 cp. Lk. 7:13). If He knew in advance what they were going to do, this language is hard for me to understand. But God is therefore hurt and 'surprised' at sin- He saw Israel as the firstripe grapes, but they were worshipping Baal even then (Hos. 9:9). Thus God can allow Himself to feel an element of surprise- and this was a shock to Jeremiah, who queried: "Why are You like a man who is caught by surprise...?" (Jer. 14:9).

2Ki 14:27 Yahweh didn't say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under the sky; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash-
And this Jeroboam was a wicked man, although the appointed saviour (2 Kings 13:5). The idea may be that He did not say at that time that He would blot out the name of Israel. Or perhaps the message is that for all their sins, God did not blot out the name of Israel, for it continued, as in a sense He never cast away His people (Rom. 11:1,2).

2Ki 14:28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered for Israel Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
See on :15. This may not be the same books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles. David had put garrisons in Damascus (2 Sam. 8:6) and had made Hamath's king a tributary to him (2 Sam. 8:9-11). So we are reading here of how Jeroboam restored to some extent the Davidic kingdom and situation- but by grace alone (:26), seeing he was wicked. This was all encouragement to the exiles, that God's word of restoration had come true earlier, by grace alone, despite His people's weakness.

2Ki 14:29 Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel; and Zechariah his son reigned in his place-

This was now the fourth generation from Jehu who were to reign on the throne before being cut off (2 Kings 10:30).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 15

2Ki 15:1 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign-
Azariah is called Uzziah in 2 Chron. 26. The margin of the earlier versions of the AV states: "This is the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam's partnership in the kingdom with his father, who made him consort at his going to the Syrian wars. It is the sixteenth year of Jeroboam's monarchy". Lightfoot tries to reconcile with 2 Kings 14:16,17 by claiming that "At the death of Amaziah, his son and heir Uzziah was but four years old, for he was about sixteen in Jeroboam's twenty-seventh year; therefore, the throne must have been empty eleven years, and the government administered by protectors while Uzziah was in his minority". These explanations rather founder when compared with 2 Chron. 26:1; 2 Kings 14:20,21. Probably the better resolution is to just accept that the numerals 15 טו and 27 כז have been confused by copying error. The difference between them is not that great, just a few tiny stems on letters.

"Uzziah", 'strength of Jehovah', has a very similar meaning to the name of his father Amaziah, 'power of Jehovah'. Yet Amaziah had not lived up to that (see on 2 Chron. 25:15. He may have named his son similarly in a hope that he would succeed where he failed.

2Ki 15:2 Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem-
This means that he was born about the time that his father Amaziah turned away from Yahweh (2 Chron. 25:25-27). His spirituality may therefore have been due to his mother, 'Yah will enable'.

2Ki 15:3 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that his father Amaziah had done-
God's judgment of Amaziah was that he *did* what was right, but his heart was not consistently with God. So the meaning of this may be that Uzziah likewise *did* what was right, he did something which were right, as Amaziah did. But there is no comment at this point about the all important judgment of God about his state of heart. And I suggested on 2 Chron. 26:2 that be began by simply living out parental expectation. See on 2 Chron. 26:16.

2Ki 15:4 However the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places-
"Taken away" is the same word as 'depart from' in :9. The way of Jeroboam was not departed from, and so the high places were not departed from. The suggestion is that they were associated with the calf worship.

2Ki 15:5 Yahweh struck the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house. Jotham the king's son was over the household, judging the people of the land-
There is far more background in the record in 2 Chron. 26. This living in a separate house indicates obedience to God's law. For Naaman was a leper and yet had an active place in Syrian society, and Uzziah and Judah might have adopted their attitude

to leprosy. The fact Uzziah didn't seek to get around this could perhaps indicate that he accepted his judgment and may have repented. But see on 2 Chron. 26:23.

2Ki 15:6 Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
This may not be the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 15:7 Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. Jotham his son reigned in his place-
2 Chron. 26:23 is more detailed: "So Uzziah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the field of burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper". They were hyper sensitive to the Mosaic legislation about leprosy (see on :5), and yet Isaiah says that Judah at that time were spiritually so leprous, and they didn't even realize it. They focused upon external obedience to the law when it concerned others, but failed to see that they in essence were just as bad as those whom they were carefully separate from. And this again is an abiding lesson for us. We note that sleeping with fathers doesn't have to mean being buried next to them.

2Ki 15:8 In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months-
Some wicked kings reigned just six months, others decades. We cannot immediately explain this, although it seems some showed signs of repentance whereas others didn't, and God patiently worked with them- even if in the end He didn't persuade them of repentance.

2Ki 15:9 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as his fathers had done: he didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
See on :4. Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 15:10 Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him before the people, and killed him, and reigned in his place-
Amos was a prophet contemporary with this situation and he had prophesied in Am. 7:9 that God "will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword". Hence the murder was committed "before the people", in some kind of public execution.

2Ki 15:11 Now the rest of the acts of Zechariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-
Not necessarily the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles. See on :21.

2Ki 15:12 This was the word of Yahweh which He spoke to Jehu, saying, Your sons to the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. So it came to pass-
We must read in an ellipsis; "this was the [fulfilment of] the word of Yahweh". His

word is so sure of fulfilment that His word is the fulfilment of it. We are to grasp this perspective by living as if the word of promise has been fulfilled in essence.

2Ki 15:13 Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah; and he reigned for a month in Samaria-
Amos describes the situation at this time as being of very deep moral failure.

2Ki 15:14 Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and killed him, and reigned in his place-
Tirzah may have been the home town of Menahem. Or it could be that he was at Tirzah on the way to a campaign in Tiphsah (:16); Menahem appears to have been the commander of the army.

2Ki 15:15 Now the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-
Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles; see on :21.

2Ki 15:16 Then Menahem struck Tiphsah, and all who were therein, and its borders, from Tirzah, because they didn't open to him. Therefore he struck it; and all the women therein who were with child he ripped up-
Tiphsah was on the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:24). But this was very far away, and maybe the reference is to some other town; the name means "passage" or "ford". Perhaps Zachariah had sought to continue on his father's policy of restoring Israel's border, and had gathered an army to do this which was at the royal city of Tirzah, with Menahem as general. But before they marched "from [i.e. starting from] Tirzah", they heard that Shallum had murdered Zachariah and taken the throne. Menahem therefore marched from Tirzah to Samaria, destroyed Shallum, returning to his military base as Tirzah, and then continued the eastern campaign.

Slaying the pregnant women was surely not in accord with the spirit of the Mosaic laws of engagement. And yet he conducted his campaign under the excuse he was zealously restoring Israel's borders in accordance with the covenant.

2Ki 15:17 In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi began to reign over Israel for ten years in Samaria-
"Gadi" means "fortune" and is a term associated with idolatry. He doesn't have even God's name in his name nor did his son Menahem, and Amos describes the spiritual situation in Israel as utterly dire at this time.

2Ki 15:18 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh. He didn't depart all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
For "depart", see on :9.

2Ki 15:19 There came against the land Pul the king of Assyria; and Menahem gave Pul one thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm the kingdom in his hand-
Menahem clearly didn't have a strong hold on power within Israel nor amongst the surrounding nations, and sought strength from Pul rather than God. "Pul" does not appear in the Assyrian Canon, but Babylonian documents seem claim Pul (Pulu) was the Babylonian name for Tiglath-pileser, who reigned under that name in Babylon during his last two years. It was the same power which was to desolate Israel; and yet they invited them to come into their land, in their faithfulness.

The 1000 talents was maybe a punishment for taking Tiphsah.

2Ki 15:20 Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and didn't stay there in the land.-
Fifty shekels was a heavy tax, and to get 1000 talents, it would have had to be taken from 60,000 people. This confirms the impression we get from the prophecies of Amos at this time; that there was wealth in Israel, although in the hands of the ruling elite. And it was this wealth which led to their apostacy.

2Ki 15:21 Now the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-
Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles, which says nothing about Menahem.

2Ki 15:22 Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 15:23 In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria for two years-
We note the contrast in the general lengths of reign; the kings of Judah reigned far longer on average that those of Israel. Although Menahem was far from God, he inserted the name Yah in his son's name. Typically Israel sinned not by totally rejecting Yahweh, but as we are tempted to, mixing His religion with our own idolatry and agendas.

2Ki 15:24 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh. He didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
For "depart", see on :9.

2Ki 15:25 Pekah the son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him and struck him in Samaria, in the castle of the king's house, with Argob and Arieh; and with him were fifty men of the Gileadites. He killed him, and reigned in his place-
The men of Gilead were those whom a few years ago Menahem had sought to restore to Israel through his campaign at Tiphsah on the Euphrates (see on :16). But the people were disloyal and ever seeking for petty advantage and settling old scores, so they helped to murder his son. "With Argob and Arieh" suggests they were with him at the time and not part of the conspiracy against him. Perhaps they were his deputies, but we note neither of them have the name of God in their names.

2Ki 15:26 Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-
Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles, see on :21.

2Ki 15:27 In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of

Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria for twenty years-
Isaiah mentions Pekah as 'the son of Remaliah' only, without mention of his name, perhaps because his life was a denial of his name, 'Yah is watching'.

2Ki 15:28 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh. He didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
For "depart", see on :9.

2Ki 15:29 In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria-
Yet despite this loss of his northern borderlands, he planned on restoring the size of his territory by attacking Judah, as explained in Is. 7-9.

2Ki 15:30 Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him, and killed him, and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah-
The end of Israel is associated with conspiracies and brother murdering brother. This is why division and aggression between brethren is associated with condemnation, and by behaving like this, we herald not only the destruction of our own community of believers but are living out our own condemnation (see on Gal. 5:15).

2 Kings 15:30 says that Hoshea began to reign in the twentieth year of Jotham; but Jotham only reigned 16 years (2 Kings 15:33). But 2 Kings 17:1 says that Hoshea became king of Israel in the 12th year of Ahaz. There are various possibilities here. One is that if 2 Kings 15:30 "in the twentieth year of Jotham" means "in the twentieth year from the accession of Jotham" i.e. in the fourth year of Ahaz, as Jotham reigned sixteen years (2 Kings 15:33). There may have been some overlap in the reigns, whereby two kings rule at the same time, an "interregnum". Although we must then somehow factor in 2 Kings 15:30. Another possibility is that although Hoshea killed Pekah in the fourth year of Ahaz (2 Kings 15:30), he didn't fully become king until eight years later. Eight years of anarchy between the death of Pekah and establishment of Hoshea as king would not be unimaginable, given the terribly divided state of Israel at the time.

2Ki 15:31 Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-
Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles, see on :21.

2Ki 15:32 In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign-
Verse 33 notes that "He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem".
He died at 41, which is a number which repeats at least three other times in the history of the kings (1 Kings 14:21; 15:10; 2 Kings 14:23). We can only ponder whether this is all some kind of Divinely arranged program, the exact function of which we cannot understand although we perceive it as existent.

2Ki 15:33 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok-

Zadok, righteousness, is a typical priestly name; so we wonder whether this was another example of the kingly and priestly lines uniting.

2Ki 15:34 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done-
So often kings who were not very faithful or spiritual are described with a rubric like: "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: he did according to all that his father... had done". This may not mean that he totally did what was right in God's sight. He did what was right *only insofar as his father had done*. And this is why over time, the spirituality of the kings of Judah decreased.

2Ki 15:35 However the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burned incense in the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of Yahweh-
This was the gate which led from the king's palace to the temple. The fact the king rebuilt it would reflect his desire for access to the temple and a wish to show solidarity with the temple.

2Ki 15:36 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
Bearing in mind the note on :21, it is so that 2 Chron. 27 records in great detail Jotham's mighty works.

2Ki 15:37 In those days Yahweh began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah-
God had condemned and forbidden any fighting between His people. But He sent Pekah of Israel against Judah. He confirms division and conflict between brethren if that is what they wish, just as He confirms the unity of the Spirit through His Spirit.

2Ki 15:38 Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Ahaz his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 16

2Ki 16:1 In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign-
Ahaz means 'taker hold of', and Isaiah [who prophesied at his time] seems to make a play on his name when he uses the word about the judgment which was to come upon or 'take hold of' him (Is. 5:29; 13:8; 21:3; 33:14).

2Ki 16:2 Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He didn't do that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh his God, like David his father-

Isaiah, Hosea and Micah all prophesied during his evil reign and provide more details about the awful nature of his sins.

2Ki 16:3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel-
Although Israel is often described as the source of Judah's apostacy, we must give due weight to Ezekiel's word that Judah was in fact more wicked than Israel. This could have been because Judah fell further, from greater spiritual potential. Or maybe because sinners can provoke people to sin worse than they do.

Yes, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations, whom Yahweh cast out from before the children of Israel-
Hezekiah his son somehow survived this, but may have reacted to his father's murder of his brothers by turning right against such idolatry. This means that his apparent zeal for Yahweh [remembering that he turned away from Him in the end and raised Manasseh] was partly due to a psychological reaction against his father and traumatic childhood experiences. For he would have lived in constant fear that he would also be offered, at the whim of the gods of his father. It was common to make children pass through fire as a kind of dedication ceremony; but he actually burnt his children in the fire, such was his obsession.

The valley of Hinnom, Ge Hinnom, was to later be known as Gehenna, and became a symbol used by the Lord for complete destruction (Mt. 5:22). As they burnt their children there, to destruction, so sinners would be burnt to destruction in that same place. Joachim Jeremias explains how the literal valley of Gehenna came to be misinterpreted as a symbol of a 'hell' that is supposed to be a place of fire: "[*Gehenna*]…since ancient times has been the name of the valley west and south of Jerusalem…from the woes pronounced by the prophets on the valley (Jer. 7:32 = 19:6; cf. Is. 31:9; 66:24) because sacrifices to Moloch took place there (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), there developed in the second century BC the idea that the valley of Hinnom would be the place of a fiery hell (Eth. Enoch 26; 90.26)… it is distinguished from *sheol*" *(New Testament Theology*, London: SCM, 1972 p. 129).

2Ki 16:4 He sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places and on the hills, and under every green tree-
Large, flourishing green trees weren't so common in the landscape, and they therefore came to be seen as the presence of fertility gods. This is the huge significance of the old covenant promising fertility from Yahweh- for most of the pagan gods were seen as fertility gods, and this is why they were worshipped by largely agricultural people.

2Ki 16:5 Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him-
2 Chron. 28 records their massive military victories against Ahaz. But Kings wishes to stress that despite these, they could not overcome him in order to take Jerusalem. He outlived their siege. It seems he lost nearly all of Judah apart from Jerusalem. This focus upon the fact Jerusalem was retained is perhaps to show how it was preserved by grace, because of God's special grace toward the throne of David there. But that grace was not limitless, and the situation was to repeat in Hezekiah's time, until finally Jerusalem did fall, because of the persistent evil of the people.

2Ki 16:6 At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath; and the Syrians came to Elath, and lived there, to this day-

Elath was Judah's eastern port, and yet it was surrounded by Edom. "The Syrians" could be as LXX "the Idumeans", i.e. the Edomites.

2Ki 16:7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria saying, I am your servant and your son. Come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me-
2 Kings 16:7 "Syria" is LXX "Edom". Although Kings then records the Assyrian attack upon Syria (:17). So perhaps the idea is that the Edomites of 2 Chron. 28:17 were in fact under the control of Syria: "For again the Edomites had come and struck Judah, and carried away captives". It seems Edom was under the control of Syria. And so Ahaz paid Assyria to attack Syria. Or it could be [putting the Kings record together with this] that Ahaz paid Assyria to help him against Edom, but Assyria instead attacked Syria, claiming that was good enough work done for the money. Even though Assyria had their own agenda for attacking Syria (Aram).

2Ki 16:8 Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of Yahweh, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria-
Chronicles says that he "gathered together the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God", as if he melted them down to send to Assyria. He showed thereby how little respect he had for the things of Yahweh worship. Gold is a symbol of faith (1 Pet. 1:7), and his faith was clearly not in God but in the might of Assyria- which was to later almost destroy Judah in Hezekiah's time.

2Ki 16:9 The king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin-
2 Chron. 28:20 comments that "Tilgath Pilneser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, but didn't strengthen him". Giving God's money to Gentile powers never achieved anything but only ever made matters worse (2 Chron. 16:2; 2 Kings 12:18; 18:15). But even Hezekiah refused to learn this clearly taught theme in the history of God's people. "It didn't help him" was to be Judah's later experience in seeking help from Egypt against Babylon (s.w. Is. 31:1; Lam. 4:17). Again, they failed to learn the lessons from history, unwilling to see that these historical situations spoke directly to their own situations and lives. We too can fail to perceive this. In fact the choice of histories and biographies we have in the Bible have been carefully selected in order that man need never feel alone; in essence, every life situation has been met at some point and time in the past.

2Ki 16:10 King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria, and saw the altar that was at Damascus-
This was surely one of the mobile altars which the Assyrians took with them. Assyria had conquered Damascus and so were enthroning their gods there. Tiglath Pileser was known for holding regional courts for his vassals as he travelled around on his campaigns.

And king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and its pattern, according to all its workmanship-
However, Ahaz also tried worshipping the gods of Syria (Aram) whom he had asked Assyria to attack: "For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which struck him. He said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, so I will sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chron. 28:23). The increasing distress upon Ahaz was intended to elicit his repentance and

turning to Yahweh. But instead he turned even more to idolatry. This mad obsession with idolatry is described in Ezekiel and Hosea as like a kind of sexual addiction, whereby the more partners a sex addict has, the more they require. Most nations had a set of national gods, and they only changed them if they were conquered by other nations and forced to accept their gods. But God's people had an obsession with every kind of god, until the Jerusalem temple was filled with all manner of shrines to various gods at the time of its destruction. And the bizarre thing was that Syria was to fall at this time to Assyria (2 Kings 16:9); their gods didn't ultimately help them, and in fact Ahaz had paid money to Assyria to attack the Syrians.

"Fashion... pattern" is a similar phrase to that in Gen. 1:26, where God made man in His image and likeness. Here, Ahaz creates after another image and likeness. Just as man has in a sense created gods after his own image and likeness, and not in God's.

2Ki 16:11 Urijah the priest built an altar: according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus, so Urijah the priest made it for the coming of king Ahaz from Damascus-

If Urijah the priest is the one of Is. 8:2, we see how even Isaiah's inner circle had fallen away. Assyrian altars were small and mobile (see on :10), built on a triangular base with very specific Assyrian inscriptions. We note the pagan associations of the triangle have a long history, which continues in the false doctrine of the Trinity.

2Ki 16:12 When the king had come from Damascus, the king saw the altar, and the king drew near to the altar, and offered on it-

He acted as a priest within the temple. Uzziah did this and was struck with leprosy. Ahaz apparently 'got away with it'. But this connects with the question as to why such a sinful man had such a long reign. We can only assume that this was because God kept trying with him, in the hope of repentance. But God responds differently to sin in every life; and therein lies the fallacy of churches seeking to have a standard policy on how to respond to sin and failure. Each case is different, even if the external sin is apparently the same. Seeing and then worshipping recalls the sin of Adam and Eve, seeing the fruit and then eating it. Their sin was indeed the essence of every sin which was to follow.

2Ki 16:13 He burnt his burnt offering and his meal offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar-

Again we see Ahaz acting as a priest (see on :12), although with no faithful priest like Azariah to step in and stop him (2 Chron. 26:17). We note he offered peace offerings, something only possible through having persuaded himself that he could worship idols as a form of Yahweh worship. Are we going to be like Israel, who offered peace offerings, and then rose up from their tables to worship idols and indulge their flesh (Ex. 32:5,6)? Are we going to be like those Israelites who offered a peace offering, when actually they were not at peace with God at all (1 Sam. 13:9; 2 Kings 16:13; Prov. 7:14; Am. 5:22)? These are challenges especially appropriate to the breaking of bread meeting, which is a kind of new covenant equivalent for the peace offering.

2Ki 16:14 The bronze altar, which was before Yahweh, he brought from the forefront of the house, from between his altar and the house of Yahweh, and put it on the north side of his altar-

We note he didn't destroy Yahweh's altar nor melt it down as he did other things in the

temple (2 Chron. 28:24). He saw himself as reinterpreting Yahweh worship, rather than destroying it.

2Ki 16:15 King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest saying, On the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meal offering, and the king's burnt offering, and his meal offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meal offering and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice; but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by-

Again we see Ahaz continuing to worship Yahweh, but claiming to do so through worshipping idols. This has been the perennial temptation for God's people, to mix flesh and spirit, to go the way of the flesh in the name of the Spirit. The king continued to have "his" special offerings. He did not turn away from Yahweh officially, but rather sought to show that he was continuing faithful to the tradition of the king leading the way in offering sacrifice (1 Kings 8:62).

2Ki 16:16 Urijah the priest did so, according to all that king Ahaz commanded-

We must compare the scene with the reminiscence of 2 Chron. 29:7: "Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel".

I suggest that offerings were offered there, but to Yahweh through the pagan gods. But this was not therefore offering to the God of Israel, who demands totally devotion to Himself as the only true God. For the temple services continued on some level (2 Kings 16:14-16), although Ahaz had brought idols into the holy place of the temple (2 Chron. 29:5).

Ahaz didn't totally reject Yahweh worship (see on 2 Chron. 28:24). He had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry, which in essence is the temptation we all have. Scientific atheism, a total rejection of our God, is likely not our biggest temptation; rather is it to mix His ways with those of the flesh and the secular world.

2Ki 16:17 King Ahaz cut off the panels of the bases, and removed the basins from off them, and took down the sea from off the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pavement of stone-

Ahaz saw no need for cleansing within the rituals of worship. He had no conscience of personal sin. And so his desecration of the laver is particularly recorded. The 'gathering together' of the temple vessels (2 Chron. 28:24) may mean he melted them down. However 2 Kings 16:17 implies this was only done to the huge supports of the laver. I suggest Ahaz retained some level of belief in Yahweh, for the temple services continued on some level (2 Kings 16:13), although Ahaz had brought idols into the holy place of the temple (2 Chron. 29:5). He had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry, which in essence is the temptation we all have. Scientific atheism, a total rejection of our God, is likely not our biggest temptation; rather is it to mix His ways with those of the flesh and the secular world.

2Ki 16:18 The covered way for the Sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry outside the house of Yahweh, he changed because of the king of Assyria-

2 Chron. 28:24 says that "Ahaz gathered together the vessels of God's house, cut in pieces the vessels of God's house, and shut up the doors of the house of Yahweh; and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem". But perhaps 2 Kings 16:18 helps understand this as meaning that he shut up one door or gate of the temple and devoted

it to the idols of Assyria; without meaning that all the doors or gates of the temple were closed. It's doubtful Ahaz resigned all belief in Yahweh, but rather wanted to treat all his gods equally. Lest he offend any of them. The fundamental teaching that Yahweh is one, the one and only God, was ignored. This particular "way" was the passage between the king's house and the temple which he used every Sabbath. He "changed" it, or perhaps named it in honour of the king of Assyria.

These changes to the temple and its equipment in :17,18 are similar to how the Egyptian kings are recorded as mutilating their gods and temples when the gods fell out of favour with them. However we noted on :15 that Ahaz continued the semblance of worship of Yahweh, but dedicated it instead to his new gods. It is too simplistic to think that he totally rejected Yahweh for other gods. Our temptations likewise are not a case of becoming atheists.

2Ki 16:19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
This may not be the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles. See on 2 Kings 15:21.

2Ki 16:20 Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 17

2Ki 17:1 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel for nine years-
2 Kings 15:30 says that Hoshea began to reign in the twentieth year of Jotham; but Jotham only reigned 16 years (2 Kings 15:33). But 2 Kings 17:1 says that Hoshea became king of Israel in the 12th year of Ahaz. There are various possibilities here. One is that if 2 Kings 15:30 "in the twentieth year of Jotham" means "in the twentieth year from the accession of Jotham" i.e. in the fourth year of Ahaz, as Jotham reigned sixteen years (2 Kings 15:33). There may have been some overlap in the reigns, whereby two kings rule at the same time, an "interregnum". Although we must then somehow factor in 2 Kings 15:30. Another possibility is that although Hoshea killed Pekah in the fourth year of Ahaz (2 Kings 15:30), he didn't fully become king until eight years later. Eight years of anarchy between the death of Pekah and establishment of Hoshea as king would not be unimaginable, given the terribly divided state of Israel at the time.

2Ki 17:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him-
There are degrees of sin. God sees some wicked men as more wicked than others; for He is sensitive to every one of their sins. "For three transgressions and for four" of Israel or the Gentiles, God would still punish Jew and Gentile alike (Am. 1,2)- i.e. He still feels the fourth sin, He doesn't become insensitive after the third sin. See on :7.

2Ki 17:3 Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and brought him tribute-
Shalmaneser appears from the inscriptions to be the Shalman of Hos. 10:14, and the Sargon of Is. 20:1.

2Ki 17:4 The king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison-
Hoshea paid the tribute for six years (cp. :5,6). The notice that he was imprisoned will be explained in :5,6 as to how it came about. He was likely imprisoned after Samaria fell. Although it is possible there was a battle with the Assyrians before the siege began, during which Hoshea was captured.

Judah were intended to learn from the judgments upon the ten tribes. For they were not much better, and Ez. 16,20 say that finally they were worse than the ten tribes. As Samaria was besieged, so was Jerusalem to be besieged by the same nation. But Hezekiah apparently didn't learn the lesson. As Israel tried to avoid paying tribute to Assyria and instead made a covenant with Egypt for help (2 Kings 17:4), so did Hezekiah. And the message 'don't ever trust in Egypt' was engrained in the Biblical narrative. But likewise we find the consistent theme that God's people refuse to learn from their history. See on :7.

2Ki 17:5 Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years-
The King of Assyria “came up” throughout the land promised to Abraham (2 Kings 17:5). The Hebrew word used is *alah*, meaning to ascend up- and this is the very battle cry of the Islamic fundamentalists, *Allah ahbar*. The Assyrians were persuaded that the one true God, Yahweh, had sent them against Israel (2 Kings 18:25)- just as the Islamic fundamentalists are today. The three years were not three whole years, but one year and parts of two others (cp. 2 Kings 18:9,10).

2Ki 17:6 In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away to Assyria-
It seems that in this very year (BC722), Sargon succeeded Shalmaneser IV in a revolution. Sargon in his annals refers to his victory over Samaria as his earliest act. 2 Kings 18:9,10 record that Shalmaneser "came up against Samaria, and besieged it" but "they took it" rather than "he took it". It seems the representatives of these kings are referred to, and they were not personally present. Sargon as it were capitalized on the progress made whilst Shalmaneser was king. The annals of Sargon claim that 27,290 people were deported from Samaria. But those annals also imply many were left in the land and paid tribute to him.

And placed them in Halah-
Perhaps the Calah of Gen. 10:11, the old capital of Assyria.

And on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes-
Assyria had only recently overrun those cities, and so the captured Israelites were used to populate them and thus dilute the ethnicity of the local population.

2Ki 17:7 It was so, because the children of Israel had sinned against Yahweh their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They had feared other gods-

Hoshea is not recorded as being a wildly sinful king, and although not a true believer, he did not sin as badly as those before him (:2). And yet judgment came in his day. The judgment is presented here as being because of the sin of the people, not so much their leaders. The reformers of God's people were it seems lone voices, with very little groundswell of support amongst the ordinary people. The fearing of other gods is here blamed upon their refusal to learn the spirit of the Passover, to refuse to be awed by the great redemption which they had historically experienced. This continues the consistent theme that God's people refuse to learn from their history. See on :4. The equivalent for us would be a failure to learn the lesson of historical redemption which is intended to be regularly learned through the breaking of bread memorial service.

2Ki 17:8 and walked in the statutes of the kings of Israel which they had made, and of the nations, whom Yahweh cast out from before the children of Israel-
2 Kings 17 points a contrast between people deciding to follow the *customs* and *manners* of their own kings and the pagan nations, rather than accept the *commandments* of God; His commandments were and are designed to elicit a way of life, to be the alternative to the customs or tradition which we previously lived by. Judah walked in the habits ["customs"] of the heathen and of the kings of Israel; "they followed vanity and became vain and went after the heathen" (:15). The habits of our world likewise are vain; wasting time online, following gossip and speculations, and in the end we become as vain as the vain habits we have slipped into. Once habit solidifies, it becomes effectively part of our nature and almost impossible to change, at least in human strength- so Jer. 13:23 teaches us: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil". The Hebrew translated "accustomed" carries the idea of repeated habit. The Hebrew idea of 'teaching' is connected to the words for 'habit' or 'custom'; because teaching was by repetition.

2Ki 17:9 The children of Israel did secretly things that were not right against Yahweh their God. They built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city-
There was no ultimate secret, for God knew their ways, and their actions were manifest on "every high hill and under every green tree" (:10). The 'secrecy' was in that they thought their deeds could be kept secret from God. And the record reflects their wrong perspective with no further comment. It is for us to perceive it. And the same is true with the matter of demons. This is one reason why the apparent error isn't corrected.

Having high places "in all their cities", from lonely watchtowers to their larger fenced cities, contrasts with the intention of centralized worship in Jerusalem at the temple. The division with Judah precluded that; and so we see how division amongst God's people sets up the possibility of not serving Him as we ought.

2Ki 17:10 and they set them up pillars and Asherim on every high hill, and under every green tree-
Large, flourishing green trees weren't so common in the landscape, and they therefore came to be seen as the presence of fertility gods. This is the huge significance of the old covenant promising fertility from Yahweh- for most of the pagan gods were seen as fertility gods, and this is why they were worshipped by largely agricultural people.

2Ki 17:11 There they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the nations whom

Yahweh carried away before them; and they worked wicked things to provoke Yahweh to anger-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 17:12 and they served idols, of which Yahweh had said to them, You shall not do this thing-
"Idols" here translates an unusual word, a form of *galal,* meaning "dung". We always feel how God so detests idolatry. And this is how He sees it. Plain simple commandments (Ex. 20:4,5,23) were just ignored by them.

2Ki 17:13 Yet Yahweh testified to Israel and to Judah, by every prophet and every seer, saying, Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets-
See on Jer. 23:18,22. "Testified" is the language of the court room. In the court of Heaven, they had been testified to by the prophets. The last generation had the testimony of "every" prophet against them. God's word became a cumulative weight of evidence against them. And we in our last days, having a completed Bible so readily available to us, likewise have a greater responsibility than those of earlier days. We cannot claim ignorance to God's will. See on :16.

2Ki 17:14 Notwithstanding, they would not listen, but stiffened their neck, like the neck of their fathers, who didn't believe in Yahweh their God-
Judah in their last days were to fail to learn from the example of Israel (2 Chron. 36:13). See on :4,7. The hardening of the neck was in order to refuse the yoke of Yahweh's covenant which was placed upon them; they refused to cooperate and work with Him. It was for this reason that Judah too were taken into captivity (s.w. Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15). We would likely have focused upon their idolatry as the reason for their judgment. But the essential problem, as always, was human pride in refusing to hear God's word. They were intended to have the yoke of the covenant upon them, but they like a difficult beast of burden refused it. They didn't want covenant relationship with Yahweh. They "did" the ordinances as a matter of casuistic legal obedience, but didn't live in their spirit.

2Ki 17:15 They rejected His statutes and His covenant that He made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified to them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom Yahweh had commanded them that they should not do like them-
See on :8. Although it is true as it was with Saul that those who reject Yahweh's word are rejected (1 Sam. 15:23), God's grace is beyond such a simplistic picture. Israel were to despise / reject God's word (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44 s.w.). Israel rejected Yahweh when they wanted Saul to be their king (s.w. 1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19), and yet He did not reject them immediately because of that. The relevance to the exiles was in that they were in captivity because they too had rejected God's word and therefore God had rejected

them (2 Kings 17:15 cp. 2 Kings 17:20; 23:27), because they rejected His prophetic words, He rejected them (Jer. 6:19,30; Hos. 4:6), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44; Jer. 31:37 s.w.). For ultimately God has not rejected / cast away His people (Is. 41:9; Jer. 33:26; Rom. 11:2). This is the mystery of grace, no matter how we may seek to explain it away by Biblical exposition and balancing Bible verses against each other.

2Ki 17:16 They forsook all the commandments of Yahweh their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah-
This is clearly a historical survey of Israel's sins, but the last generation are going to be judged for it because they refused to repent; and as noted on :13, that last generation had the testimony of "every" prophet against them. God's word became a cumulative weight of evidence against them. As it is with our generation too. The Asherah or grove refers to that set up by Ahab.

And worshipped all the army of the sky-
This was not mentioned previously in the accounts of Israel's apostacy, although it is in the record of Judah's. Star worship was specific to the Assyrians and Babylonians, so it seems they accepted a whole package of Assyrian gods and idolatry. See on :24.

And served Baal-
Jehu's reforms were not therefore permanent (2 Kings 10:28).

2Ki 17:17 They caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, to provoke Him to anger-
Sin is serious. An example of this occurs in the fact that the last generation of Israel were judged for their sins not because they had sinned more than any other generation, but because the collective, unforgiven sin of Israel had accumulated with God to such an extent that His judgments fell (2 Kings 17:2,13-18; Ez. 9:9). God is not passive and overlooking of unrepented sin, even though His patience and the high threshold level He sets before releasing judgment may make it look like this. The Amorites were likewise only judged once the cup of their iniquities reached a certain level (Gen. 15:16).

"Sold themselves" is the language of prostitution, and is commonly used by the prophets of the time, Hosea especially. Every and any idol is a form of competition with Yahweh, and this remains chillingly true to this days.

2Ki 17:18 Therefore Yahweh was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight. There was none left but the tribe of Judah only-
We see how in a way, Israel and Judah are spoken of as the same entity. There was nothing left of "Israel" apart from "Judah". God has never recognized the divisions amongst His people, and neither should we.

2Ki 17:19 Also Judah didn't keep the commandments of Yahweh their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made-
The contrast is between God's "commandments", and the "statutes" of Israel, by which they had enshrined their idolatry. Whilst "statutes" is indeed used of God's commandments, there may be an intended contrast here between God's commandments, and the "statutes"- s.w. "custom", "manner", referring more to tradition and culture. For this is the basis of most merely religious forms of Christianity, and it stands in contrast to following God's living word.

2Ki 17:20 Yahweh rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight-
See on :15. Jonah, a contemporary prophet, recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jonah 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at this time (1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15). But the lesson was that there was hope that even through the traumas in the sea of nations, Israel could still be restored and resume their intended mission in the Gentile world. We marvel at how Jonah was so proud of Israel and nationalistic that he didn't want the Assyrians of Nineveh to repent. But Israel were so unspiritual at his time.

2Ki 17:21 For He tore Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following Yahweh, and made them sin a great sin-
God tore them, and Jeroboam drove them. Clearly the division amongst God's people was from God, even though He didn't recognize it in some ways. The division was the fault of men, and yet God caused it. He will confirm divisive behaviour just as He will confirm the spirit of true unity. "Tore" is the word usually used for the rending of clothes. It is as if even at the time of the division, God tore His own clothes in grief at the behaviour of His people. The word used for how Jeroboam "drove" Israel away from Yahweh to idols is that used in Dt. 4:19; 13:5,10,13 of the false prophet who should be killed for doing this. But Israel didn't do that to Jeroboam, and Judah were so parochial and arrogant that even their better leaders didn't consider that dealing with Israel's apostacy was their duty. So the end of Israel and Judah was really a case of failure all around. But we can also translate that Israel tore themselves away from the house of David. So the Divine judgment of division was in fact only confirming men in what they themselves had done and set up. All Divine judgment and condemnation is really only giving men what they themselves lived out in their lives.

2Ki 17:22 The children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they didn't depart from them-
Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 17:23 until Yahweh removed Israel out of His sight, as He spoke by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away out of their own land to Assyria to this day-
"Removed" is s.w. 'departed from' in :22. They did not depart from their way of sin, and so they were departed from. The frequent references to Israel being removed from His sight, or eye (e.g. 2 Kings 17:23) may refer to the way that an Angel was permanently present in Israel, the land in which the Angel eyes of the Lord ran to and fro. By going into captivity, Israel were thus removed from God's Angelic 'eye'. This would explain how Israel were never out of God's sight in the sense of His awareness of them. And yet language of limitation is being used here- because the Angel dwelling in Israel no longer 'saw' the people. This idea may be behind the references

to God's eye not sparing nor pitying Israel (Ez. 7:4)- when in fact God Himself did and does spare and pity Israel. The implication would then be that His grace and pity is even greater than that of His Angels- which is an encouraging thought to us here on earth who struggle to believe in the extent of God's personal grace to us.

2Ki 17:24 The king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and lived in the cities of it-
This was really living out how Israel had taken to themselves the gods of Babylon, whom Assyria had only recently conquered, as their gods. For the reference to their worship of the stars is something distinctly Babylonian (see on :16). They let their gods possess their hearts, and so the people of those gods took their inheritance.

2Ki 17:25 So it was, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they didn't fear Yahweh; therefore Yahweh sent lions among them, which killed some of them-
Even in judgment and great sorrow for sin, for God takes no pleasure in punishing sin, God still worked toward human salvation. His vision was of Gentiles from throughout the land promised to Abraham (:24) living in His land and worshipping Him. So He sought to move them toward Him by acting as they imagined, as if the land was unhappy with them because they weren't worshipping its God.

2Ki 17:26 Therefore they spoke to the king of Assyria saying, The nations which you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria, don't know the law of the god of the land. Therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they kill them, because they don't know the law of the god of the land-
There were plenty of Israelites left in the land, but none of them could teach the law of Yahweh. And it seemed Judah were not much better. "Law" here is the word for "judgment". The truth is, neither Israelite nor Gentile perceived the judgment of God, considering the invasion and captivity as just the passage of time and tide. Lions would have naturally increased with a depleted population, but God was surely behind this, and those lions elsewhere represented the Gentile nations who entered the land.

2Ki 17:27 Then the king of Assyria commanded saying, Carry there one of the priests whom you brought from there; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the law of the god of the land-
The main priestly duty was to teach God's word to the people. A whole string of texts make this point: Dt. 24:8; 2 Kings 17:27; 2 Chron. 15:3; Neh. 8:9; Mic. 3:11. Note too the common partnership between priests and prophets. Because of their role as *teachers*, it is understandable that the anger of the first century priesthood was always associated with Christ and the apostles *teaching* the people: Mt. 21:33; Lk. 19:47; 20:1; Acts 5:21. The priests felt that their role was being challenged. As part of the priesthood, our duty is to *all* teach or communicate the word of God to each other. It was God's intention that natural Israel should obey the spirit of this, so that they would "teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord" (Heb. 8:11). That was how God intended Israel of old to fulfil this idea of being a priestly nation.

The priesthood had failed to teach God's law earlier. But now God was working through the fallacious idea that Yahweh was a mere localized God of the land, who needed to be placated lest He send lions, in order to give the priesthood a chance to do what they ought to have done before- to teach His law. And to be a light to the Gentile

world thereby, for He had allowed Gentiles to be brought to live in the land. We see how God's judgments are always ultimately creative, and designed towards restoration- they were not the lashing out in anger of an offended deity.

2Ki 17:28 So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear Yahweh-
See on :27. Bethel had been the centre of idolatry before the captivity, the location of one of the golden calves. The priest would surely have reflected that their captivity had been because of that, and would have apparently taught them the true fear of Yahweh.

2Ki 17:29 However every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities in which they lived-
This was the same miserable story of Israel's apostacy all along. True worship of Yahweh was apparently taught (:28), but mixed with their own idolatry. The fear of Yahweh which was taught would surely have included the fact that to fear or worship Him meant having no other gods. But this cardinal point in the fear of Yahweh was ignored, and His worship again reduced to mere ritualism.

2Ki 17:30 The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth-
Zir-banit, the wife of Merodach (also known as Bel).
The men of Cuth made Nergal-
The Babylonian god of war (cp. Mars). Cuthah was therefore near Babylon, the city devoted to Nergal located between the Tigris and Euphrates.

The men of Hamath made Ashima-
The god of shepherds and the woods, the equivalent of Pan.

2Ki 17:31 the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burnt their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim-
Even though burning children in fire had led to Israel's expulsion from the land, the newcomers continued to do so. Again the theme repeats, of nobody learning anything from history, although the Bible is full of it.

2Ki 17:32 So they feared Yahweh, and made to them from among themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places-
They accepted the teaching about fearing Yahweh (:28), and yet continued in their idolatry. Even though the most basic tenet of Yahweh worship was that He was to be the only God, and no other god was to be worshipped. Their acceptance of the teaching was therefore only on the level of theory and ritual, and we have to ask ourselves whether we have not done just the same.

2Ki 17:33 They feared Yahweh, and served their own gods, after the ways of the nations from among whom they had been carried away-
See on :32. The mixed worship of the Samaritans is almost derided by the all demanding Yahweh: "So these nations feared Yahweh, and served their graven images... as did their fathers, so do they unto this day... unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the Lord" (2 Kings 17:33,34,41). Did they fear Yahweh, or didn't they? They did, but not wholeheartedly; therefore from God's

perspective, they didn't fear Him at all. The Lord wasn't just trying to shock us when He offered us the choice between hating God and loving Him (Mt. 6:24 cp. James 4:4); He was deadly literal in what He said. The Lord hammered away at the same theme when He spoke of how a tree can only bring forth one kind of spiritual fruit: bad, or good (Mt. 7:18,19). James likewise: a spring can either give sweet water or bitter water (James 3:11). We either love God, or the world. If we love the world, we have *no* love of God in us (1 Jn. 2:15).

2Ki 17:34 To this day they do what they did before: they don't fear Yahweh, neither do they follow their statutes, or their ordinances, or the law or the commandment which Yahweh commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel-
Jacob's name change reflected God's perception that Jacob had changed. And yet at that point in time, it seems Jacob didn't realize his change; for he had to be reminded of the change of name later, he had to be encouraged to accept that it was really true. See on :38. 2 Kings 17:34 criticizes men for worshipping Yahweh but also their own gods; they are rebuked with the comment that God had made a covenant with "the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel". The suggestion is surely that when Jacob became Israel, he quit the life of half-hearted service to God. This was the decision he came to that night when he wrestled with the Angel, and his name was changed.

2Ki 17:35 Yahweh had made a covenant with them and commanded them saying, You shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them-
It seems unclear whether this is a historical reminiscence of how Yahweh became Israel's God (:34), or whether the "them" refers to the people living in Israel after the Assyrian invasion. The ambiguity is perhaps purposeful, because God did make a covenant with those people, just as He did with Israel; but they responded as Israel did, breaking the covenant by worshipping other gods as well as Yahweh. See on :40. It was God's intention in all this that Gentiles would join a repentant Israelite remnant in the land, and be taught to fear Him in truth (:28), enter covenant with Him- and thus form a reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel. And He as it were tried to push this through with them, making a unilateral covenant of grace with them, even though they were not fully committed to Him. For neither were Israel when they entered covenant with Yahweh, for Ezekiel says they had with them the idols of Egypt which they carried through the Red Sea. And so the fulfilment of these things has to be in the last days.

2Ki 17:36 but you shall fear Yahweh, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, and you shall bow yourselves to Him, and you shall sacrifice to Him-
God's deliverance of Israel by grace was intended to be the abiding memory or awareness which defined Israel's later faithfulness. Just as we are to remember the wonder of our Red Sea baptism and the shedding of the saving blood of the lamb of God for us. We are therefore to remember these things at the breaking of bread service regularly, as well as all the time.

2Ki 17:37 The statutes and the ordinances, the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do for evermore. You shall not fear other gods-
That law was designed to help Israel achieve the awareness of their great redemption mentioned in :36. It was not a meaningless set of regulations and laws designed just as

simple tests of obedience. They had a far higher intention. Through obedience to those laws, there would be achieved an abiding awareness of their salvation by grace, and a desire to remain in covenant.

2Ki 17:38 You shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you; neither shall you fear other gods-
The "covenant" referred to is not the covenant of circumcision, for the Gentiles now in the land weren't asked to be circumcised. Rather it refers to the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 19:5-8). For it is this which Israel were urged never to forget (Dt. 4:23; 8:11; 26:13). Just as spiritually weak, idolatrous Jacob was called Israel because of the covenant of grace, so these Gentiles could be called Israel.

2Ki 17:39 But you shall fear Yahweh your God; and He will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies-
This promise had been reiterated so often, and it was available to the Gentiles now offered covenant relationship with Yahweh (Ex. 23:27; 26:8; Dt. 6:18,19; 20:4; 23:14; 28:7). Whenever Israel had been faithful, then this had been fulfilled. The Assyrians were equally enemies of the Babylonians and others who had been transported to live in Israel. They too could be free from those enemies, if they joined in covenant with Yahweh.

2Ki 17:40 However they did not listen, but they did what they did before-
I suggested on :35 that these words apply to both historical Israel, and to the mixed peoples of the land after the Assyrian transportations. God also entered into covenant with them. This is why the "they" of :40 identifies naturally with the "these nations" of :41. This making of a covenant with Gentiles didn't work out; and so it was reapplied and deferred to the work of the Lord Jesus, through whom the Gentiles along with Israel could enter a new covenant with God.

2Ki 17:41 So these nations feared Yahweh, and served their engraved images. Their children likewise, and their children's children, as their fathers did, so they do to this day-
At baptism, we changed masters, from 'sin' to 'obedience'. It may seem that we flick back and forth between them. In a sense, we do, but from God's perspective (and Rom. 6:16-20 describes how *God* sees our baptism), we don't. The recurring weakness of natural Israel was to serve Yahweh *and* the idols (1 Sam. 7:3; 2 Kings 17:41; Zeph. 1:5). For the new Israel in the first century, the temptation was to fellowship with both the Lord Jesus and the idols (1 Cor. 10:21,22). But there is no lack of evidence that this was actually counted as total idol worship in God's eyes; thus the prophets consistently taught the need for wholehearted devotion to Yahweh, and nothing else. In essence, we have the same temptation; to serve God and mammon, to have a little of both, to be passive Christians; to flunk the challenge of the logic of devotion.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 18

2Ki 18:1 Now it happened in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign-

This was a parade example of a wicked man having a righteous son, who in turn had a wicked son [Manasseh]; and the reverse happened in Biblical history. And this is how we would expect, if indeed people must each ultimately build their own personal relationship with God rather than merely follow the religion of their fathers. Wicked Ahaz was married to Abijah (:2), apparently a Godly woman. True spirituality is about being a new creation, breaking with the ties that apparently bind.

2Ki 18:2 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem-
Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year or his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 38:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence. Hezekiah's healing came just before the miraculous destruction of the Assyrians (2 Kings 20:6 "I will add to your days fifteen years and I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria"). I suggest the healing of Hezekiah was to encourage faith in the possible deliverance of Jerusalem from a likewise humanly impossible situation. We have meetings and encounters with others in our lives, we hear their testimonies of deliverance, in order to encourage us in our situations.

His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah-
Or "Abijah", as in the Chronicles record, meaning "Jehovah is my father". Zechariah may be the one of Is. 8:2.

2Ki 18:3 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that David his father had done-
It seems that in the last 15 years of his life, Hezekiah turned away from God. I have commented quite negatively upon Hezekiah in 2 Chron. 32 and Is. 39. The way he gave the gold of the temple to the Assyrians and trusted in Egypt really speaks for itself. Isaiah is very critical of Hezekiah in his prophecies. His work fortifying Jerusalem and building the water tunnel are criticized by Isaiah as faithless. Rabshakeh points out that Hezekiah both trusted in Yahweh and in Egypt. He showed faith in breaking his servitude to Assyria, then declined from that faith and paid whatever Assyria demanded of him, then turned to Egypt for help... but by turning to Egypt for help, he provoked Assyria. And so he was left really with only Yahweh to turn to. This sounds like faith born from desperation rather than a pure faith. Even when offered 15 years extra, he still asks for a sign God will actually do it. And the way Isaiah applies a poultice of figs to his boil seems the sort of thing one does to someone who is weak in faith. For the figs of themselves didn't give him the extra 15 years. And yet we are told here that he did what was right, as David did. But David was far from perfect and spiralled downwards spiritually in the last decades of his life. Perhaps this is simply a record that he did what was right, as we read about here and especially in Chronicles- before the deliverance from Assyria, after which he was lifted up in pride and fell away. I suggest this is an example of where the Biblical narrative is at times intentionally open or ambiguous, because it invites us to reflect, and try to enter into the characters and situations. Because we could also argue that just as David sinned at many points in his life, and ended his life on a spiritual low, ordering the deaths of those he had earlier forgiven... so Hezekiah too failed at

specific points, and ended his life on a spiritual low, but was ultimately seen as acceptable to God. But the correct interpretation of these words is, it seems to me, left intentionally vague; to exercise our thoughts. For by doing so, we are led to examine ourselves. And to not be wrongly judgmental of others' lives.

2Ki 18:4 He removed the high places, and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah-
This was a radical move, as even good kings before him had failed to remove the high places. The tendency to worship Baal as a form of Yahweh worship was so strong, and so attractive. His hatred of idolatry, brought out more strongly in 2 Chronicles, was partly a psychological reaction against his father, who had sacrificed Hezekiah's siblings to idols and perhaps tried to do the same to Hezekiah. Human motivation is never pure, and we must remember this when considering how Hezekiah at many points displays unspirituality.

He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for in those days the children of Israel burned incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan-
The Lord Jesus interpreted it as a symbol of Himself, lifted up on the cross, identified with us as sinners. And just as the bronze serpent was abused and prayed to, so has the cross been abused. "Nehushtan" is literally "the bronze [copper] thing", "the mere piece of bronze" being the idea. Hezekiah called it for what it was, as we should call out idolatry for all it is. An expensive car is just a mass of metal, plastics and chemicals arranged in a certain way. An expensive house can be described in similar terms. And that is what Hezekiah did to the bronze serpent. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence that there were cults of snake worship in Canaan. The usage of the bronze serpent would then be a typical example of how the Jews had mixed paganism with Yahweh worship, the flesh with the spirit... just as we are tempted to do. Rabshakeh rightly points out that the high places he removed were Yahweh's high places- the Jews had mixed Yahweh worship with paganism. We too need to see to the bare naked essence of things, call them as they are for what they are, and strip religiosity down to its essence. And reject it if need be as Hezekiah did here.

2Ki 18:5 He trusted in Yahweh the God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him-
If Hezekiah was the stellar example of trust in Yahweh at that time, then Hezekiah's proverb (see on Prov. 25:1) applies to himself: "One who is greedy stirs up strife; but one who trusts in Yahweh will prosper" (Prov. 28:25). Hezekiah has in view the Assyrians, with himself as the prospering one who trusted in Yahweh. He was using these Divine truths to justify himself. As discussed on :3, Hezekiah is commented upon very positively here. But his faith was very weak or non existent at times; he cut off the gold [representing faith] of the temple and gave it to the Assyrians, and paid the Egyptians to try to save him from the Assyrians- rather than having faith in God. Either this statement describes how things were at one point in his life; or God very graciously counts him as righteous and faithful more than he was.

Hezekiah and faith go together. There was no king like him for his faith / trust [note a similar rubric used about Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25, in relation to Josiah's obedience to the Law]. Josiah was the most obedient king; Hezekiah was the most faith-ful. But 2 Kings 18:6 goes on to say that this faith was "for" or because Hezekiah was obedient to God's commandments. Here we see the upward spiral in the spiritual life, and how

each aspect of spirituality reinforces others. His obedience reinforced his faith; indeed the entire Law of Moses wasn't designed as a hopeless obstacle course, it was "holy, just and good" and was intended to lead people to *faith*, especially in the Messiah to come.

We observe that there is a feature in the records to describe a king as incomparibly good or bad. The language of Hezekiah being incomparibly good is also applied to Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25. And so I suggest that these characters were incomparably good in specific areas; faith, in Hezekiah's case, and reforming in Josiah's case. And yet as Paul observes, faith alone cannot save- if it has not love, or works appropriate to that faith. Faith without works cannot save. Or it may be that e.g. in Hezekiah's case, he was incomparible in how *at one point* he reached a peak of (:6) joining with Yahweh and obedience to Him. But that is not to say that that peak did not later subside, as it clearly did in the cases of both Hezekiah and Josiah. For both of them died far spiritually weaker than they were at various points in their earlier lives. Solomon likewise had unparalleled wisdom at one point (1 Kings 3:12), but he didn't retain it in his later life. Indeed, dying at a spiritually weaker point than a man was once at... seems to be the story of so many Biblical characters. Gideon, Moses, Jacob and others come to mind; there were flashes of brilliance at some points in their lives, but it was a fade to grey at the end. Our spiritual path is not a simple upwards trajectory. See on :19. Another option is that despite all these weaknesses, God looked finally upon Hezekiah as faithful. Just as we may look back upon a period of time- a week's holiday, 5 years spent living in a place, the childhood of our children- and overall feel it was "good", despite bad parts, experiences and aspects of that period. This is an example of how God's love imputes righteousness.

The Hebrew word for "trust" is played on repeatedly. "Confidence" is s.w. "trust" in :19, and the word is found again in :20,21,22,30. And in 2 Kings 19:10 he admits that Yahweh is the God in who Hezekiah trusts. Hezekiah is commended as having inimitable faith / trust, more than any other king of Judah ever had (see on :5). Clearly Rabshakeh recognized Hezekiah's trust / faith. And yet even that was only skin deep, because he cut off the gold from the temple and trusted in Egypt and horses (:23,24), as Isaiah often laments. Likewise he asks for a sign that he would be healed. We see here the weakness of human faith, and how amazing faith can coexist with unbelief. Even Hezekiah, who had so much confidence in Yahweh that it exuded from him and was noticed by even his enemies, still collapsed into unbelief so easily. Yet God counts his faith very highly, and like the Lord Jesus, views human faith so positively. We recall how the Lord marvelled at the faith of the centurion... when His own faith so far stronger. Is. 30:15 is specific that Judah generally did not "trust", although Hezekiah did at least on one level; and to his credit, it is always hard to have faith / trust when surrounded by others who do not: "in quietness and in *trust* shall be your strength. But you refused". Instead they 'trusted' in oppression and deceit (Is. 30:12 s.w.). The intention of the whole experience with the Assyrian invasion and Hezekiah's sickness was so that "the result of righteousness will be quietness and *trust* forever" (Is. 32:17). The people were even envisioned as singing a hymn about their trust in Yahweh: "In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in Yahweh forever; for in Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting Rock. For He has brought down those who dwell on high" (Is. 26:1-5). And yet God's intention that the people

should "trust" in Him was apparently not realized. For Hezekiah turned to trust in his wealth and house of armour (Is. 39), and his son Manasseh turned away from faith. Hezekiah's prayers at times allude to Solomon's prayer and idea that the temple of itself would save God's people. This was not God's intention. When Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem, the people wrongly trusted in the temple for its own sake: "Don't trust in lying words by saying, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple... thus will I do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust" (Jer. 7:4,14).

2Ki 18:6 For he joined with Yahweh; he didn't depart from following Him, but kept His commandments which Yahweh commanded Moses-
As discussed on :3 and :5, Hezekiah did at times depart from following Yahweh. So we can conclude this either describes how things were in the earlier, more faithful part of Hezekiah's life; or it is how God very graciously counted Hezekiah to be, looking at his heart which cleaved or was joined to Him, and not the fact he did depart from Him and ended his life on a spiritual low.

2Ki 18:7 Yahweh was with him; wherever he went forth he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and didn't serve him-
After the lapse of faith in paying off Sennacherib, it became harder for Hezekiah to show faith again. After that, it was going to be really hard to rebel against him and refuse the payments. I take the comment here that Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria and refused to serve / worship him as part of a summary of what Hezekiah did in his life. He refused any longer to serve Sennacherib as God, but decided to serve Yahweh alone. This rebellion against Sennacherib is singled out as the most noteworthy thing he did. He had submitted to Assyria, paid what they asked, made an agreement with them. And then he broke it, and so the Assyrians sent their army against Hezekiah. If this isn't the correct reconstruction, then we have the scenario of Hezekiah sending money to Assyria as they requested, but then them coming and invading anyway. In every other case of gold being given to buy off Israel's enemies, it seems the bargain was stuck to, at least in the short term.

2Ki 18:8 He struck the Philistines to Gaza and its borders, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city-
This may not be chronological; rather are we reading cameos from Hezekiah's life which demonstrated his faith. As Gaza was the most far south of the five Philistine cities, "to Gaza" may mean the Philistines were entirely subdued, and we never hear much more about them.

2Ki 18:9 It happened in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it-
Judah were intended to learn from the judgments upon the ten tribes. For they were not much better, and Ez. 16,20 say that finally they were worse than the ten tribes. As Samaria was besieged, so was Jerusalem to be besieged by the same nation. But Hezekiah apparently didn't learn the lesson. As Israel tried to avoid paying tribute to Assyria and instead made a covenant with Egypt for help (2 Kings 17:4), so did Hezekiah. We likewise are intended to learn from the patterns and experiences of those whom God brings into our lives. We may see the experience of sudden wealth

from an inheritance destroying a family we know- and that is to warn us when or if we have the same experience.

The King of Assyria "came up" throughout the land promised to Abraham (2 Kings 17:5). The Hebrew word used is alah, meaning to ascend up- and this is the very battle cry of the Islamic fundamentalists, *Allah ahbar*. The Assyrians were persuaded that the one true God, Yahweh, had sent them against Israel (2 Kings 18:25)- just as the Islamic fundamentalists are today.

2Ki 18:10 At the end of three years they took it: in the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken-
This may look forward to a three and a half year tribulation of Israel at the hands of a latter day Assyrian.

2Ki 18:11 The king of Assyria carried Israel away to Assyria-
This was in the ninth year of Hoshea (2 Kings 17:6). It seems that in this very year (BC722), Sargon succeeded Shalmaneser IV in a coup. Sargon in his annals refers to his victory over Samaria as his earliest act. 2 Kings 18:9,10 record that Shalmaneser "came up against Samaria, and besieged it" but "they took it" rather than "he took it". It seems the representatives of these kings are referred to, and they were not personally present. Sargon as it were capitalized on the progress made whilst Shalmaneser was king. The annals of Sargon claim that 27,290 people were deported from Samaria. But those annals also imply many were left in the land and paid tribute to him.

And placed them in Halah-
Perhaps the Calah of Gen. 10:11, the old capital of Assyria.

And on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes-
Assyria had only recently overrun those cities, and so the captured Israelites were used to populate them and thus dilute the ethnicity of the local population.

2Ki 18:12 because they didn't obey the voice of Yahweh their God, but transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded, and would not hear it, nor do it-
Israel did not obey / hearken to the voice of Yahweh, and He did not hearken to their voice in prayer (Dt. 1:45; 9:23; 28:15; Josh. 5:6; Jud. 2:20; 6:10 cp. Dt. 8:20 s.w.). 2 Kings 18:12 states this specifically. God hearkened to Joshua's voice in prayer (Josh. 10:14) because Joshua hearkened to His voice. It was to be the same with Saul. He didn't hearken to God's voice (1 Sam. 15:19) and God didn't hearken to Saul's voice in prayer in his final desperation at the end of his life (1 Sam. 28:18). If God's word abides in us, then our prayer is powerful, we have whatever we ask, because we are asking for things according to His will expressed in His word (Jn. 15:7).

2Ki 18:13 Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them-
He succeeded in taking all of Judah apart from Jerusalem. Isaiah describes the invasion as a flood of waters which engulfed Judah "up to the neck", the surviving head referring to Jerusalem and Hezekiah. See on :2. This judgment upon Judah was

because of their lack of faith and unspirituality as pointed out by Isaiah in Is. 1-35. The salvation of Jerusalem was by grace alone. And because of the faith of a very small remnant there.

2Ki 18:14 Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish saying, I have offended; return from me. That which you put on me, I will bear. The king of Assyria appointed to Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold-
"I have sinned" (AV) suggests Hezekiah took false guilt; lack of faith in God often is related to false guilt. Faith in God's opinion and perspective on us saves us from such false guilt. Even worse, Hezekiah treated Sennacherib as God, addressing him with the language of confession and repentance which should be directed only to God. By doing so, he believed in Sennacherib as God. And whenever we let people give us false guilt, we are effectively believing in them as God rather than in the one true God. Hezekiah then stripped the temple of its gold, representing faith, and gave it to the Assyrians. It was a sad blip on the screen in Hezekiah's life of faith. The way he has to deal with the prophet Isaiah through messengers soon afterwards may suggest an estrangement between Hezekiah and Isaiah- exactly because of this.

The Rassam Cylinder and the Taylor Prism lists what the Assyrians claim Hezekiah gave them. It includes "thirty talents of gold" as also stated in 2 Kings 18:14, but also lists many high luxury items made of ivory, and also Hezekiah's daughters. The list would suggest Hezekiah was living a high luxury life and was a lover of wealth. The Cylinder and Prism also claim the Assyrians took not only gold and silver, but also spices, precious oil and the contents of Hezekiah's well stocked armoury, "the house of his armour". But in 2 Kings 20:13 and Is. 39:2, these are the very things which Hezekiah has in abundance after the Assyrian destruction, and shows off to the Babylonians. So we can better imagine psychologically what happened. Hezekiah had amassed great wealth before the invasion, probably from transit taxes on the trade routes he had gained control of through taking the territory around Gaza [there is archaeological evidence of this]. But he gives it all to the Assyrians and Egyptians through lack of faith. But he amazingly receives it all back, and more, after the miraculous defeat of Assyria. And this lead to his pride. How often is this proved true, that wealth brings pride and lack of faith. It is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. Assyrian records show how much tribute was demanded and paid by various nations over their history- records of tribute from 26 countries have been preserved. The tribute demanded from Judah was one of the highest- indicating the relative wealth of Judah under Hezekiah. This wealth was what led him to lack of faith, and is criticized by Isaiah repeatedly. Archaeological evidence, especially from Lachish, likewise indicates that Hezekiah ruled over a very prosperous and wealthy society.

2Ki 18:15 Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of Yahweh, and in the treasures of the king's house-
He repeated the failure of his father Ahaz, who emptied the treasuries likewise instead of trusting in God (2 Kings 16:8). One major dimension of sin is the example it sets to others, especially within families.

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had stripped the Temple of all its silver and gold, as well as all the gold and silver in the palace treasury, and sent it to Tiglath-Pileser (2

Kings 16:8,9). We see how he reacted against his father's idolatry, but followed the same faithless script of his father in other ways. This again is so psychologically credible. It's how sons are with their fathers, unless they are born again and made free of all the ties that bind. But only 30 years later, Hezekiah was able to give 30 talents (or 900 kg) of gold and 800 talents (or 24,000 kg) of silver to Sennacherib. He had built up considerable wealth quite quickly- especially bearing in mind he is recorded as undertaking huge building and fortification projects, repairing the Temple, providing huge numbers of sacrifical animals for the Passover, funding a campaign against the Philistines and having enough wealth to try to buy Egyptian military support against Assyria.

This suggests Hezekiah was materialistic and on the look out for wealth. He believed his wealth could save him- he offered money to Egypt to help him, and paid a huge amount to Assyria to leave him alone. All of which was criticized by God through Isaiah. When his wealth revived after the Assyrian defeat, again it was his undoing- because he boasted of it to the Babylonians, who clearly were covetous and thence planned to come and take it by force. Which Isaiah says, God would empower them to do because of Hezekiah's pride. That pride arose from his great and sudden wealth, which was given to him by God: "Hezekiah enjoyed immense riches and honour. He built himself treasuries for gold, silver, precious stones, spices, jewels and every kind of desirable object, as well as storehouses for his returns of grain, new wine and olive oil, and stalls for all kinds of cattle and pens for the flocks. He also provided himself with donkeys in addition to his immense wealth of flocks and herds, since God had made him immensely wealthy" (2 Chron. 32:27-29). The promised blessing upon the land, producing "of itself", seems to have been responsible for the agricultural prosperity. The lands around him had been ravaged by the Assyrian scorched earth policy. They perhaps traded their wealth for food. But we note that this wealth led him to proudly show it off to the Babylonians, who came to find out about "the wonder that was done in the land" (2 Chron. 32:31, i.e. the amazing agricultural blessing). We now understand better why God is careful about giving wealth; because it typically leads to pride and loss of spirituality.

2Ki 18:16 At that time, Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of Yahweh's temple, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria-

We each have two 'people' as it were within us; we act both as spiritual and as fleshly people. The record of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:16 reflects this: "At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from… the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, because of the king of Assyria". The Hezekiah who faithfully overlaid the pillars with gold was the same man, acting a different persona, who then cut it off faithlessly when under pressure. Likewise the Jews could be described as both Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37) and not Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:39); as having Abraham as their father (Jn. 8:56), and yet also having the devil as their father (Jn. 8:39-41,44).

This undoubted weakness of faith, recalling that gold represents faith, highlights God's great understanding and grace to stress that overall, Hezekiah was such a man of faith.

2Ki 18:17 The king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great army to Jerusalem. They went up and came to

Jerusalem. When they had come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field-
The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin. This location was significant, because it was there that Hezekiah's father Ahaz had been met by Isaiah and his son Shearjashub [a man of sign, 'a remnant shall return / repent'], with their demand for Jerusalem to surrender to God (Is. 7:3). So Hezekiah was intended to recall how Ahaz had been faced with Isaiah at that same spot; and the call was to repent, to be washed, to become the remnant which would triumph. Circumstances repeat in our lives and between our lives and those of others; in this case, the experience of Ahaz repeated in the life of his son Hezekiah. And we are intended to join the dots and learn the lesson.

2Ki 18:18 When they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebnah the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder-
The "scribe" or historian was a senior advisor in the Hebrew court (2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 2 Chron. 34:8) because of the huge value attached to history in the Hebrew mind, and as reflected in the Bible being largely history. Advice on how to act was to be based upon historical, or as we would now say, "Biblical", precedent.

"Shebna" is an Egyptian name and may have been installed in office by Hezekiah as part of his deal with Egypt, upon whom he trusted rather than solely in Yahweh. He had the office of being "over the house" but by the time of the Assyrian invasion Shebna had been replaced in this office by Eliakim (Is. 22:15,20; 37:2). However, Shebna had not been completely 'hurled away' for his immorality of Is. 22:15-19 as required by Is. 22:17, because he is mentioned here as being the "scribe", a senior secretary, although Eliakim was "over the household". This seems typical of the partial response made to Isaiah's prophecies. Shebna was likely installed in power as part of a deal with Egypt for their help. But it seems Yahweh accepted that partial response and repentance of a remnant, and so the invaders were destroyed and the awful outcome threatened upon Jerusalem in this chapter was averted or at best deferred.

2Ki 18:19 Rabshakeh said to them, Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust?-
LXX "Why are you secure". GNB "the emperor wanted to know what made King Hezekiah so confident". Clearly Hezekiah did have some faith; and real faith is always evident to others. Rabshakeh's words are a tacit admission that Hezekiah did indeed trust in Yahweh.

2Ki 18:20 You say (but they are but vain words), 'There is counsel and strength for war'. Now on whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me?-
"Vain words" is literally "a mere word of the lips". If the lips in view are Isaiah's, the idea is 'What good can words do? Even the words of the Bible, God's words. Hard evidenced support in visible terms is what man needs...'. And we have all given in to this so many times.

The immediate reference is to how "he took *counsel* with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the springs which were outside of the city" (2 Chron. 32:3).

GNB "Do you think that words can take the place of military skill and might?". This is the essence of our temptations today- to think that the ideas of God's word are merely abstract and philosophical, and have no cash value in reality. But God's word is active and powerful, once spoken, it is done. The "counsel" in view is primarily the prophecies of Isaiah (s.w. Is. 5:19; 28:29), and in the last day application, the "counsel and strength" of the Messiah of Israel (Is. 11:2 s.w.). But Rabshakeh may have been mocking the "counsel" of the false prophets (see :6), which had been to trust in Egypt rather than Yahweh (s.w. Is. 19:3,11; 29:15; 30:1; Jer. 19:7). The "counsel" or prophetic word of Yahweh, however, was what could save Israel; it was that which would bring them back from captivity and reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom in the land (s.w. Is. 44:26; 46:10). Although most in Judah still refused to trust in Yahweh's "strength for the war" (s.w. Is. 30:15), yet by grace and in respect to the faith of the remnant, He still saved them from Assyria at this time.

Hezekiah had taken counsel with men in order to try to avert the fall of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:3). Isaiah had earlier warned against trust in human "counsel" (s.w. Is. 5:19; 19:3). Woe was pronounced upon those (like Hezekiah?) who took counsel from men rather than God (Is. 30:1 s.w.). Prov. 25:28 LXX advises doing things with "counsel". As explained on Prov. 25:1, this may be a justification of Hezekiah, who dealt with the Assyrian crisis by saying he trusted in God's counsel to overcome the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:20 AV). Like Solomon, Hezekiah's Proverbs are all Divinely inspired and true, but he seems to insert into them a subtext of self justification.

Rabshakeh observes that Hezekiah trusts in both Yahweh and in Egypt (:20,21). He wasn't wrong in his observation, and his presentation of Hezekiah as a fickle leader not worth following. He really did try to have a foot in both camps.

2Ki 18:21 Now, behold, you trust in the staff of this bruised reed, even in Egypt-
"Bruised reed" is better "broken reed", and this is the very phrase used about how the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would not break a "bruised / broken reed" (Is. 42:3). Egypt were a broken reed, recently broken in battle and now useless to save Israel. They were too weak to uphold the weight of Judah if they were to lean upon it for strength. God turns the figure around- He as it were is in need of man, He wishes to trust upon us; and although we are broken reeds, we will not be crushed nor will He be disappointed. He so wishes to work with us.

If a man leans on it, it will go into his hand, and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust on him-
Hezekiah paid all the wealth of Judah to Assyria and entered an agreement with them. And it seems he impoverished Judah yet more by then making some arrangement with Egypt to throw off the Assyrian domination (2 Kings 18:21,24). Hezekiah really did mess up. But then he breaks the agreement with Assyria, inevitably provoking an Assyrian invasion of his now impoverished country. He must've been almost alone in this. Because doing this made no human sense; his cabinet and people would've surely been against it. Following our conscience often puts us in situations like this.

"Lean" here is the same word for "steadfast" in Is. 26:3 "You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You". The LXX understands

this to be a description of the "righteous nation" of Is. 26:2. They are saved from their traumas by the state of their mind. And Yahweh will respond to this through the work of His Spirit on the human spirit, to keep their mind in perfect peace. This is the peace which comes from knowing sin is forgiven. "Mind" here is literally 'imagination'. We must ask what are our fantasies, our hopes, according to which we live, think and feel day by day. If they are above all for the Kingdom, then we will be 'kept' in this. In Isaiah's immediate context this was in contrast to leaning upon Egypt for salvation (s.w. "lean"). The great salvation of the restored Kingdom could have come apart at that time, but it was precluded by a lack of real faith and focus on the Kingdom in the majority of Israel.

Judah did as it were trust in Egypt, and so were left with pierced hands. But that was exactly what the Lord Jesus experienced on the cross. Here we have one of many examples of where although He did not personally sin, He on the cross experienced the sufferings for sin which were due to God's people.

2Ki 18:22 But if you tell me, 'We trust in Yahweh our God'; isn't that He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?'-
Rabshakeh argues as if the high places and altars to the idols were actually used for Yahweh worship. And that was true. There is plenty of archaeological evidence for this: "The Asherah, one of the main targets of cult criticism, was closely connected with Yahweh and his cult, as shown by the inscriptions from Kuntillet Agrud and Khirbet-el-Qom". Judah justified their idol worship by claiming it was a form of Yahweh worship; and that is an abiding temptation for God's people of all ages. Rabshakeh mocked at the idea of a religion which had only one altar and high place; although that was indeed appropriate to the worship of the one true God who had given one specific way of approach to Him.

2Ki 18:23 Now therefore, please give pledges to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them-
Although many in Judah had fled into Jerusalem, the siege conditions and battle losses meant that there were not even 2000 fighting men within the city. But the Assyrians were destroyed by just one Angel, a member of the Angel cherubim, the heavenly horses and riders who stood for Israel. They were left with no human horses nor army, so that they might trust in Yahweh of Hosts of Angelic armies and the cherubim chariot. And this is why we too at times are stripped of all human strength.

"Make a pledge" is literally to be sweet or pleasing, and it appears to be sarcastic. But it is the word used by Hezekiah when he asks Yahweh to "undertake" or be sweet to him in the oppression of his sickness, which came at the same time as the siege of Jerusalem (Is. 38:14).See on :2.

2Ki 18:24 How then can you turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?-
This was clearly wrong for the king of Israel, as the law specifically stated. Hezekiah had been repeatedly criticized for this by Isaiah in several prophecies. There are various translation options here. LXX "And how can ye then turn to the face of the satraps? They that trust on the Egyptians for horse and rider, are our servants"; GNB "You are no match for even the lowest ranking Assyrian official, and yet you expect

the Egyptians to send you chariots and horsemen". 2 Chron. 32:21 uses the same phrase to describe the king of Assyria turning away his face in shame from Jerusalem after the Angelic destruction of his army; all was to be dramatically reversed overnight. Just as Joseph was elevated from prison rags to royal glory in a few hours, so God can work very quickly to save us from otherwise humanly impossible situations.

2Ki 18:25 Have I now come up without Yahweh against this place to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it'-
The King of Assyria "came up" throughout the land promised to Abraham (2 Kings 17:5). The Hebrew word used is alah, meaning to ascend up- and this is the very battle cry of the Islamic fundamentalists, *Allah ahbar*. The Assyrians were persuaded that the one true God, Yahweh, had sent them against Israel (2 Kings 18:25)- just as the Islamic fundamentalists are today.

Rabshakeh appears to have been an apostate Jew, speaking fluent Hebrew, fully aware of the situation within Judah and of the prophetic message that Yahweh would be behind their invaders; and quoting Isaiah's prophecies. We can look to some possible equivalent in the events concerning the latter day Assyrian.

2Ki 18:26 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebnah and Joah said to Rabshakeh, Please speak to your servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it. Don't speak with us in the Jews' language, in the hearing of the people who are on the wall-
Rabshakeh knew Hebrew and was likely a renegade Jew. The fact the Jewish leadership knew the Assyrian language is a tacit reflection of the way they had made it their business to communicate with them in the past, in seeking ways around the Assyrian threat other than through trust in Yahweh.

2Ki 18:27 But Rabshakeh said to them, Has my master sent me to your master, and to you, to speak these words? Hasn't he sent me to the men who sit on the wall, to eat their own dung, and to drink their own water with you?-
Rabshakeh was aware of the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah. He was fully aware that Isaiah had opened his prophecies by insisting that his message of judgment was against both the heavens and the earth, the leadership and the ordinary people; for they were alike guilty.

2Ki 18:28 Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spoke, saying-
This very loud voice becomes the prototype for the great voice of Babylon (Jer. 51:55), akin to the great voice of Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian, which is to be answered by the far greater voice of Yahweh in the last days commanding the Angels to unleash judgment upon the latter day Assyrian confederacy (Joel 2:11; Rev. 16:1; 18:2). But in the immediate context, this "loud voice" is that of Is. 29:6 bringing destruction and judgment upon Jerusalem; they were condemned, but were saved by grace and God's respect of the prayers and repentance of a small minority. The loud voice of the "great king" of Assyria is being set up as a parody of that of Yahweh, who is the supreme "great king" (s.w. Ps. 47:2; 95:3; Mal. 1:14).

Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria-
"Hear [*shema*] the word of the great King, the King of Assyria" (2 Kings 18:28) is a

conscious imitation of the *shema* to Israel from their King, Yahweh. "The great king" is a title of Yahweh. The king of Assyria was parodying the giving of the Law to Israel, implying his commandments were a new Torah for Israel; and some Islamic fundamentalists have spoken of producing a new Torah, making him the one mentioned in Daniel as changing laws.

2Ki 18:29 Thus says the king, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you out of his hand-
This was part of his narrative, that the gods of the nations were "not able to deliver" them from the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:15). He encouraged them to see the one true God as just another god, another source of secular strength as good as anything else. Yahweh the one true God is not, however, just another religious system. There is something awesomely and radically different. Surely all those who were raised as believers have at some point wondered whether Christianity is simply another one of many religious systems which are equally useless. Here we have the answer- that there is ultimate truth and relationship with God which thereby makes the others all appear for what they are. Those who convert to Christ from atheism or non Christian backgrounds have a great advantage here and need to appreciate the difficulties for those who were raised Christian. Rabshakeh's words recognize that Hezekiah alone was seeking to lead the people to totally trust in Yahweh. His influence was considered hugely significant. As we noted on Is. 1:1, the reforms of Hezekiah were largely ineffective in encouraging the general populace towards spirituality. In accordance with that, Rabshakeh perceived Hezekiah as effectively seeking alone to persuade the people to trust Yahweh.

2Ki 18:30 Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh saying, Yahweh will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria-
Rabshakeh appears to know the very words of Hezekiah within Jerusalem, supporting the suggestion made that he was a renegade Jew. Hezekiah's faith that the city wouldn't fall was presumably based upon Isaiah's prophetic words; and yet Isaiah also speaks as if the city would fall, unless there was repentance in Judah. Perhaps Hezekiah really believed that the repentance of a minority would be counted by God as enough, and that their prayers would ensure the salvation of Zion. And this huge faith in Divine grace was rewarded.

It would seem from Rabshakeh's words to the people of Jerusalem that Hezekiah had begun a 'Trust in God!' campaign: "Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, 'The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria'... do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us" (2 Kings 18:30,32 AV). "The Lord will deliver us" therefore appears to have been a catch cry of Hezekiah to all the people. Jerusalem was surrounded by her strong enemies, whom Hezekiah had sorely provoked by faithlessly siding with Egypt against them and then in faith towards God breaking off his agreement with the Assyrians. So now Hezekiah was driven to throw himself upon God for a miracle. His utter confidence is recognized by God, when He speaks of how the faithful remnant in Jerusalem- the "virgin daughter of Zion"- had despised Assyria, laughed her to scorn, and wagged her head at Assyria (2 Kings 19:21). That would've required an extraordinary level of faith to do that. Hezekiah wasn't just hoping for the best, using prayer as a last resort, a kind of back up insurance policy after doing all he could. This was the prayer and faith of utter confidence, believing that things that are not are in fact, and being so sure they will

come about that this faith actually affects our feelings. Hezekiah felt confident, superior to the Assyrians, all the feelings that come from knowing that one is in a far stronger position. This is a challenge in our self-assessment. To what extent does our confidence in faith affect our emotions and feelings?

2Ki 18:31 Don't listen to Hezekiah'-
It seems Hezekiah was singlehandedly seeking to persuade the people to totally trust in Yahweh.

For thus says the king of Assyria, 'Make your peace with me, and come out to me-
LXX "If ye wish to be blessed, come out to me". Receiving peace or 'blessing' (LXX) was what comes from Yahweh; Judah were being offered covenant relationship with a false pretender to Yahweh. All this is the stuff of the latter day antiChrist; for an anti-Christ is strictly not someone against Christ but rather posing as the Christ, a fake, imitation Christ.

And every one of you will eat of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and everyone will drink the waters of his own cistern-
Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was set up as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chron. 9:8). A glance through the descriptions of the beasts- the Kingdoms of this world- reveals that they are all set up in terms of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Rabshakeh was aware of Isaiah's prophecies as he quotes from them here; see on :10. And in essence the world today offers a fake, imitation Kingdom of God.

2Ki 18:32 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and of honey, that you may live, and not die. Don't listen to Hezekiah when he persuades you saying, Yahweh will deliver us-
As noted on :31, Assyria was presented as an imitation kingdom of God. The language all alludes to God's descriptions of the promised land, which were familiar to Rabshakeh as a renegade Jew. The allusions are to Num. 14:7; Dt. 8:7-9; 11:11,12. "Persuade" is 'seduce', as if the Assyrians had the one true religion and Hezekiah was seducing Judah away from it. The Assyrian inscriptions describe and portray their wars as religious wars between their god Asshur and the gods of the nations they conquered. It was perhaps this very aspect to the Assyrian boasts which as it were provoked Yahweh to action. His unique victory against Asshur when all other gods and religious systems had failed was intended to help the Gentile nations see the utter supremacy of Yahweh- and to turn to Him.

2Ki 18:33 Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?-

It seems that when Hezekiah said "The Lord will surely deliver us", he said it with such confidence that the people were inclined to share his faith. Several times, Rabshakeh picks up this word "deliver" and mocks that no other nation had been 'delivered' from Assyria, so why should Judah be. It seems Hezekiah took this

catchword from Isaiah's earlier prophecy of Is. 31:5, where he had stated that "Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it". Hezekiah had heard those words of the Lord; and he believed them, even when they appeared to have no human chance of fulfilment. We too need to cling on to just one verse of Scripture and believe it. Of course we try to excuse our lack of faith by spiritualizing it away, wondering whether it can really apply to me, here, today. Hezekiah must've gone through the same. But it seems he ceased upon that one verse... and clung to it. This is where our faith in the Bible as God's word isn't merely a painless academic assent to a proposition. To believe God's word is true demands an awful lot from us.

2Ki 18:34 Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?-
Rabshakeh, knowing the prophecies of Isaiah as a renegade Jew, may be alluding to the common prophetic theme that Judah were in fact no better than Israel, and would face the same judgment. And he knew that Samaria, the ten tribes, had trusted in the gods of the surrounding nations. Hamath and Arpad were in Syria, and so probably Sepharvaim was likewise. Is. 8 and Is. 10:9-11 had condemned Israel for their trust in Syria against Assyria, and clearly their covenant with Syria had involved taking on the worship of their gods.

2Ki 18:35 Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?'-
The point of course was made: Who or what indeed were any of those gods compared to Yahweh.

2Ki 18:36 But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, Don't answer him-

I suggest that Prov. 26:4 alludes to this: "Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him". This verses is clearly intended to be connected with Prov. 26:5 ["answer a fool according to his folly"], the idea being that there are times when a fool should be answered according to his folly, and times when he shouldn't be. This is one of the Hezekiah Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1), and the allusion may be to how Hezekiah commanded the people not to answer Rabshakeh, who is thereby interpreted as the archetypical "fool". But a fool must at times be answered (Prov. 26:5), and the idea may be that God will answer fools like Rabshakeh in His own way and in His own time; and we don't need to. But we then get the hint that Hezekiah, like Solomon, was using the Divine truth of the Proverbs with a subtext of his own self justification, just as we can.

2Ki 18:37 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, came with Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of Rabshakeh-
This sign of sorrow was to be turned into joy. But for now, there was sorrow. Their deep grief however suggests they didn't believe Hezekiah's assurances of Divine salvation. They were not part of the daughter of Zion whom Isaiah describes as laughing at the Assyrian threats.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 19

2Ki 19:1 It happened, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of Yahweh-
Instead of devising human schemes of salvation, he does as we should, turning to God's house, His presence, and His people. Although we are left wondering, especially after reading Isaiah's criticisms of Hezekiah, whether he turned to God as a last resort rather than a first resort. Because by strengthening the walls and building the water tunnel in his own strength, trusting in Egypt... he appears only to be turning to God now all that had apparently failed. He could have prayed anywhere, but he felt that God's presence was there in particular. Judah's leadership had torn their clothes but not dressed in sackcloth (Is. 36:22). Sackcloth was a sign of repentance, as witnessed by the response of Nineveh. Nineveh had repented the generation before; and it seems Hezekiah is now seeking to imitate their repentance. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria; if their repentance had been permanent, they would not have invaded Judah. Hezekiah was seeking to imitate Nineveh but make it permanent, although after the crisis passed, it seems his repentance likewise didn't hold. God knew all this from the start, and yet still so respected the repentance of Hezekiah and Nineveh in their extremity that He still changed His threatened judgment of them. Hezekiah was aware that he had sinned by trying to buy off the Assyrians with the gold of the temple, representing faith sacrificed to human expedient; and Judah had definitely trusted in Egypt for help rather than God. His words of :3 are a recognition that the invasion was a Divine rebuke and rejection of him. But a man may be rejected by God in this life, having a foretaste of condemnation ahead of time; but still change the verdict. Hence Peter went out from the Lord's presence and wept and gnashed his teeth, the very language of the rejected; but changed the verdict. This is the intensity of our situation, as Paul in Romans emphasizes; we stand condemned, and yet in this life we can change the verdict, by God's grace.

This repentance by Hezekiah may be what is in view in 2 Chron. 32:26 "Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart". He repented at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but after that was resolved and he had been healed, 2 Kings and Is. 39 leave us to understand that he slipped away from personal faith.

Is. 28:14,17-19: "hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem... the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place... when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report". This is the same idea in Hezekiah's lament that he would die by morning. His terminal illness, which was delayed by grace, represented Judah's judgment. Elsewhere the Assyrian invasion is likened to flood waters which swallowed all Judah, and left Jerusalem alone with head above water, about to be drowned. It was God's intention that Jerusalem also would fall. It didn't by grace alone, and the power of Isaiah's intercession. There is the possibility in Is. 28:22,23,26 that repentance could change the outcome: "Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth [land, including Jerusalem]. Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech... For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him". There was some repentance, shown by Hezekiah and the leadership wearing sackcloth. This and Isaiah's prayers changed the outcome.

It was in the context of the Assyrian invasion that Is. 29:13 had described the state of Judah: "this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me". Is. 31:8,9 are clear that Judah were worshipping idols right up to the Assyrian defeat: "In that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin. Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited". Hezekiah's repentance, as well as the peoples', was therefore required because the great reforming zeal of 2 Chron. 30 had been on the cusp of emotion and had not bee permanent. That was why the Assyrian invasion came.

2Ki 19:2 He sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz-

Humanly speaking, sending your right hand men to a prophet was not the way out of the situation. But he realized as should we, that the only ultimate recourse is to God's word. The covering of the leadership with sackcloth as noted on :1 was a sign of repentance, again imitating how the leadership of Nineveh repented in sackcloth and achieved a change of the Divinely promised judgment. Seeing Isaiah had been so critical of Hezekiah in his prophecies, we wonder whether this sending of messages to Isaiah reflects some stress or distance in their relationship. For three years Isaiah had walked naked and barefoot to plead either Judah not to trust the Egyptians and other Gentile powers. His prophecies of doom against the surrounding nations were in the context of appealing to Judah not to trust in them. But Hezekiah and the Jerusalem leadership did just that. This too would explain Hezekiah's reticence in going directly to Isaiah.

2Ki 19:3 They said to him, Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of trouble, of rebuke, and of rejection-

As noted on :1, Hezekiah understood he had sinned, hence his sackcloth and desperate repentance. Isaiah has repeatedly condemned Judah for trusting in Egypt for help from the Assyrians (Is. 20:5, 6; 30:1-4; 36:6,9). Those passages all say that if Judah did this, they would be rejected by God, as they were rejecting His help. And Hezekiah realizes that now those prophecies were going to come true. But the depth of his repentance meant that they didn't; just as the destruction of Nineveh in 40 days didn't happen, all because of human repentance. See on :1,4; Is. 22:5, which prophecy Hezekiah appears to allude to here. Yet the grace of it all is that God knew that despite this cusp of intensity in repentance, Hezekiah would later slip away from it. But it's as if He so respects human faith and repentance that when it is displayed at specific moments, it as it were melts His heart and He responds. Even though He foreknows that intensity will not be retained.

The "trouble" that came upon them was the promised judgment for persistent sin. Thus the word is used often, e.g. Dt. 31:17,21. Hezekiah's reforms had only been on the surface. His covering with sackcloth in :1 was in repentance, and this is the referent in 2 Chron. 32:26 where we learn that because he and the people humbled themselves, the wrath upon Zion was deferred: "His heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath on him, and on Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Yahweh didn't come on them in the days of Hezekiah". I suggest

this doesn't refer to any repentance by Hezekiah after the events of Is. 39. So here we have another example of the grace praised in Neh. 9:27- God by grace saved them from the "trouble" He brought upon them, when they cried to Him.

Likewise, the word "rebuke" leads to reflection on the fact that most occurrences of the word concern God's rebuke of His people, ultimately through judgment upon Zion. His wrath against Zion was coming to a climax, again indicating that Hezekiah's reforms had been very superficial. If the "rebuke" was not from God, who was it from? Likewise "of rejection" surely refers to Divine rejection of His people. The reforms of 2 Chron. 30 and zealous keeping of Passover were therefore done on the cusp of emotion and group psychology. For the language here speaks of God's wrath coming to a peak, and only being deferred by Hezekiah's repentance.

For the children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to deliver them-

The birth of a remnant is spoken of in Isaiah in spiritual terms; "the children" here are "the remnant" of :4. The sense may be that Hezekiah sensed there had been some spiritual reformation, which he himself had done so much to bring about through his banishing of idolatry in Judah, but the final strength for the birth was lacking; they had indeed trusted in Egypt and in gold rather than in God, despite all the purging of idolatry. This was the tragedy which Hezekiah felt, as we do; that there was some genuine spirituality, but not enough. That may be the idea in Hos. 13:13 where the imagery is used again. However as noted above, the wrath of God had been provoked throughout Hezekiah's reign, leading to His rebuke and rejection of His people. His reforms had therefore been hollow and shallow. But Hezekiah likes to see this as the spiritual new life of Judah having come to the point of birth- but he somehow holds God guilty for now being about to slay them, when he claims they are just about to be born. Hezekiah so often comes over as self justifying, especially in his claim to God that he has lived a sinless life and therefore the judgment of death upon is unreasonable. He likewise appears here to consider God's judgments upon Judah to be unreasonable.

Is. 26:27,18 shows Isaiah's perspective: Judah had brought forth, but just wind. Her suffering had been in vain, because she had not repented: "Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth". Hezekiah however twisted this to saying that she was in labour, but God had not allowed her to bring forth because of the Assyrian invasion.

Hezekiah's perspective differed from God's. He saw the people as children whose birth was being unjustly stopped by God through not empowering the mother. Whereas Yahweh had lamented of His people at this time "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Is. 1:2). That same chapter speaks of a time when the cities of Judah had all fallen to the invader, apart from Jerusalem. So the context is precisely that of the Sennacherib invasion.

Is. 66:9 can be read as an implicit criticism of the words of Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, who lamented that the children had come to be born but there was no strength to bring them forth: "Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh: shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God". God is saying that He will certainly bring forth the new nation of Zion out of their trauma at the hands of their invaders. He is not powerless, and therefore Hezekiah was wrong to imply this. Why the children were not brought forth at Hezekiah's time was

because of the lack of spirituality in the daughter of Zion, rather than because of God's limited ability.

2Ki 19:4 It may be Yahweh your God-
This continues the connection with Nineveh's repentance (see on :1,3); in this case, to Jon. 3:9 "Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?". However "your God" is a recognition by Hezekiah that Isaiah stood closer to God than he did.

We note that Hezekiah tries to get Isaiah to pray to Isaiah's God, rather than praying himself. This is the way of religion. When he reveives the letter from Rabshakeh, he himself goes to the temple and prays. But when he was personally sick and terminally ill, he turns to the wall away from all others and on his own bed himself prays to God. This is God's intention, to lead us away from religion, step by step, and to personal engagement with Him.

Will hear all the words of Rabshakeh-
"Hear" is used at times to mean 'hear and respond to', as God in that sense 'hears' all things and there is no need to ask Him to hear anything.

Whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to defy the living God-
This is not just Hezekiah trying to get God to see the situation from the viewpoint of His own glory; rather was there a real and actual spiritual dimension to the invasion. The idea of 'defying' Israel's God is stressed so much (Is. 37:4,17,23,24); although Isaiah concludes by using this word about what Judah had effectively done to their own God (Is. 65:7 "they defied Me upon the hills" in their high places). Sennacherib really did despise Yahweh and wanted to impose his gods upon Judah, and this will be the dominant feature of the latter day Assyrian invasion of the land. Radical Islam would appear the obvious latter day equivalent.

And will rebuke the words which Yahweh your God has heard- "Rebuke" here is a legal word, used of legal reasoning against an accuser in court (as in Is. 1:18; 11:3,4; 29:21; Mic. 6:2). Hezekiah had a strong sense of the court of Heaven; and so the answer is expressed in terms of an Angel 'coming out' from that court room and articulating the agreed judgment (:36). This is a huge comfort; that all situations on earth are reflected in Heaven, and judged there.

Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left'. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah-
The remnant would refer not only to the fact that Jerusalem alone remained, but to the righteous remnant within the city who were now repentant. The desire to get others to pray for issues is found throughout the Bible. But we should not draw the implication that God is as it were hard of hearing and only responds if enough of us offer enough prayers. But on the other hand, the combined prayerful requests of many of God's children are not unnoticed by God.

In response to Isaiah's prayer, an Angel 'went forth' on earth and slew 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35). Hezekiah was aware of the court of Heaven responding to his prayer; for he had commented that God would there "reprove the words" of Rabshakeh (2 Kings 19:4). The Hebrew for "reprove" is a legal term, meaning to convict, judge, plead etc. Hezekiah knew that the court of Heaven was considering Rabshakeh's words, and his prayer was a plea for those words to be convicted in Heaven's court, and an answer sent out. And this is what happened. Later, we read of Hezekiah asking that same court to "remember" his good life- again using a word capable of having legal overtones, of considering witness. And God replied by saying that He had "heard" that prayer- the same Hebrew word is translated 'to make a

proclamation', as if He had considered Hezekiah's 'plea' and would respond (2 Kings 20:3,5).

Isaiah's prayer was an amazing intercession. Is. 22:4,5 suggests Isaiah had been shown that there was to be no escape from the day of trouble coming upon Judah. Just as Hezekiah their representative was to die. But Isaiah intercedes and changed or delayed the judgment, just as happened for Hezekiah's terminal illness: "Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord GOD of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains". Is. 22 goes on to show that they had refused the call to repent and so judgment had to come. We note Isaiah's criticism of Hezekiah's fortification work: "Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool: but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago. And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord GOD of hosts".

2Ki 19:5 Isaiah said to them, Thus you shall tell your master, 'Thus says Yahweh, Don't be afraid of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me-

We too can fear words, forgetting that the only ultimate reality in all things is God. "Servants" here translates a word which is almost colloquial, the idea being "lackeys". Just as the risen Lord referred to the disciples as "guys, fellas" (see on Jn. 21:5), so His Father is able to relate to people on their language level too. "Don't be afraid of the words..." connects with "Perhaps [the Hebrew may mean "surely"] Yahweh will hear the words of Rabshakeh" (:4). The idea is that we should not be put in fear by words, because Yahweh has heard those words. "Yahweh will [also] hear" is the response to "the words you have heard".

2Ki 19:6 Behold, I will put a spirit in him-

Sennacherib retreated because God "put a spirit in him". The AV has: "I will send a blast / spirit upon him". Was it not that the Angel who later destroyed his army came upon him and put a spirit / disposition of mind within him that made him want to retreat? We see how God can directly affect the human spirit / mind. He can give a holy spirit, or an evil spirit. The Old Testament sets us up to understand that God can work directly on the human spirit, and then the New Testament says that He can give us a holy spirit, working again directly on the human mind and perception.

And he will hear news, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land'-

The "news" could have been of the destruction of Rabshakeh's army; or of the approach of Tirhakah, or some other threat to his empire. The situation points ahead to how the latter day "king of the north" will likewise hear "news" (s.w. Dan. 11:44 "tidings"). The Lord 'caused' Sennacherib to fall by the sword in that He put a spirit of jealousy in his sons, resulting in the murder of :39.

"Send a blast" is the same phrase used in1 Kings 22:23 for how God put a spirit in the mouths of the false prophets. And of how conversely He will put a new spirit in the heart of His people as part of the new covenant (Ez. 36:26).

The connection with God putting a lying spirit in Ahab's prophets (1 Kings 22:20-23) could lead us to think this "news" was in fact a false rumour. For it was this kind of thing that led to Israel's enemies fleeing at various times. Thus 2 Thess. 2:11 says that "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie".

2Ki 19:7 So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah; for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish-
Sennacherib was aiming for Egypt and was attacking the fortresses on the route there; and Libnah was just south of Lachish, which he had destroyed. This is the scene we have in Dan. 11, where the "king of the north" attacks "the king of the south", Egypt, ransacking Palestine along the way, but then had to return to his own land after hearing the "tidings" of Dan. 11:44. The historical invasions of Israel and Judah therefore follow a pattern; and this will be repeated in the final latter day invasion which all the previous invasions point forward to. The image of Dan. 2 stands complete in the last days, and all the beasts of Dan. 7 are incorporated into the mega beast of the last days. This is to say that the final destructive entity oppressing Israel in the last days will combine features of all her historical oppressors, including the Assyrians. We note too the difference between Rabshakeh and Sennacherib, and wonder how far this points forward to the "false prophet" of Revelation who appears to be an agent of the beast.

2Ki 19:8 When he heard it said of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he has come out to fight against you, he sent messengers again to Hezekiah saying-
Tirhakah was the dominant king in Egypt at the time. We wonder if the much criticized efforts of Judah to get "Egypt" to help them were actually directed towards Tirhakah. But we wonder why therefore God still used this person to play a part in His plan to destroy Sennacherib. Or it could be that Tirhakah was the one who had destroyed the Egyptians upon whom Judah had hoped [rather than upon their God], and so it was appropriate that he and not Egypt played a part in the Divine plan to destroy "the king of the north".

2Ki 19:9 Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah saying, Don't let your God in whom you trust deceive you saying, Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria-
The king recognizes that Hezekiah does indeed trust in God, and that Yahweh was indeed his God. This may have comforted him, as we noted on :4 that Hezekiah speaks of God as Isaiah's God rather than his God.

2Ki 19:10 Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly. Will you be delivered?-
This is the classic challenge to faith; no other god achieved anything, therefore, the one true God can't either. But the point is that the gods of this world didn't achieve anything precisely because they are not God. The 'utter destruction' of conquered lands by Assyria is historically well attested. But the word has the sense of 'sanctified' in a religious sense; like the latter day "king of the north", the invader thought that they were serving their God by destroying people, and the barbarity of the destruction was a sign of how far they had devoted people and lands to their God. Jihadist Islam exactly fits this scenario.

2Ki 19:11 Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have

destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the children of Eden that were in Telassar?- These were the very cities to which the Assyrians had deported the ten tribe Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11). The implication is that Judah would be taken there likewise.

The historical Assyria 'destroyed utterly' the nations around Israel (2 Kings 19:11); but the Hebrew word used specifically means to consecrate or dedicate. It has a distinctly religious sense. And this is precisely the idea of *jihad*- taking land in a holy war in order to dedicate that land to Allah. In practice, the Assyrians did this by 'destroying' or 'drying up' these lands. *Charab,* 'to dry up', is used about their scorched earth policies (2 Kings 19:17), and Assyria threatened to 'dry up' Judah (2 Chron. 32:11), just as he boasted "with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places" (2 Kings 19:24); and the metaphor continues with the idea of Assyria being like a river gushing forth over the land they had dried up (Is. 8:7). This is why God's answer to the Assyrian threat to Judah is expressed in terms of His reminding Judah that it is *He* who has ultimate power to dry up rivers and nations (Is. 44:27; 50:2; 51:10- every time, the same Hebrew word *charab* is used).

2Ki 19:12 Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivvah?-
The kings of these cities are paralleled with their gods (:11). The parallel Is. 36:19 asks "Where are *the gods*" of these same cities. Truly we become like that which we worship; football fans become like their idols, in spirit. And if we worship the one true God of Israel, Yahweh, then we will become like Him.

Is. 10:9-11 speaks specifically of Rabshakeh's taunts: "Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?". It is clear that Hezekiah's reforms and the idol smashing of 2 Chron. 30, 14 years earlier, were all of a surface level. The Jerusalem under siege by Assyria in Hezekiah's time was full of idols. And Is. 2 lamented that the land of Judah was "full of idols".

2Ki 19:13 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it. Then Hezekiah went up to the house of Yahweh, and spread it before Yahweh-
Hezekiah responded to the threats of Assyria by sending to Isaiah, and up to :12 we have the story of the response to that. But he also himself prayed to God, and we are now reading about that here. Hezekiah read the letter- out loud, the Hebrew definitely means, even suggesting he cried it out. This parallels his spreading it before Yahweh. It was his way of expressing transparency before God, demonstrating his trust that God really saw and heard all that he was seeing and hearing.

"Spread" translates the same Hebrew word used about spreading abroad the hands in prayer (Ex. 9:29,33 etc.). It was as if the letter was the prayer. Our situation is read by God as our prayer. There are times especially in serious illness when we are too weak or mentally unclear to be able to verbalize prayer; or where the situation is so complex that we do not know what to pray for in terms of our desired outcome. And some are simply better at verbalizing than others. But the essence is our faith that God sees the situation and will respond. It was in this sense that Hezekiah spread the letter before Yahweh, as we might place an unpleasant hospital diagnosis on the kitchen table and attempt to pray, but what we are doing is bringing the situation before God and asking for His wise and powerful response.

Rabshakeh confirmed the threatened destruction of Jerusalem with a letter. Hezekiah took this “before the Lord”. His first response was not to turn to Egypt; he’d learnt the wrongness of that. He went to the house of the Lord. Whilst we are always in God’s presence, there is surely a sense in which coming into His presence through prayer is drawing yet closer to Him. And so it was with the special presence of YHWH in the temple at that time. Hezekiah was aware that YHWH ‘dwells between the cherubim” (2 Kings 19:15). Presumably standing before the ark, Hezekiah “spread out” the letter (2 Kings 19:14). The Hebrew word translated ‘spread out’ is the same as that usually used about how the wings of the cherubim were ‘spread out’ over the ark (Ex. 25:20; 37:9). It’s also the word used in Solomon’s prophecy of how repentant people would spread out their hands in the temple at the time of the punishment for their sins, and receive forgiveness and help: “Whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow and stretching out his hands in this house, then hear from heaven your dwelling place and forgive” (2 Chron. 6:29,30). And Hezekiah would also have been only too aware of Isaiah’s judgment against Judah of a few years earlier: “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen” (Is. 1:15). But Hezekiah summoned his faith in God’s forgiveness, and spread out his hands as he spread out the letter. He showed his deep repentance, and his faith in forgiveness to such an extent that he was bold enough to ask God for deliverance. Faith in forgiveness of our sins is perhaps one of the hardest things to believe in- strangely enough, seeing that God delights in forgiveness.

2Ki 19:14 Hezekiah prayed before Yahweh and said-
As noted on :13, the situation itself was the prayer; but Hezekiah, like us, does his best to articulate things in words. I discuss on :15 how "before Yahweh" refers to the temple (:13). Hezekiah prayed in the temple because he thought this was how God would best 'hear' him and 'see' the problem. But he was later shown that in fact God hears sincere prayer from the heart wherever it is offered, even outside the temple. 1 Kings 8:37 envisaged Israel when sick or besieged praying to God and being heard because of the physical temple: "If their enemy besieges them in their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer and supplication is made by any man, or by all Your people Israel, who shall each know the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear in heaven". Hezekiah was both besieged and sick. But he was to be taught that Solomon's envisioning of the physical temple as a kind of talisman was incorrect. Even after he is healed he immediately wants to go to the temple: "Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I will go up to the house of Yahweh?" (Is. 38:22). He couldn't as it were live without that temple.

The outcome of Hezekiah's loss of faith and wrong attitude to the temple was that Judah would be destroyed by Babylon, along with the temple, and go into captivity. I suggest this is one reason for this material being put into the historical interlude of Is. 36-39. The good deeds of Hezekiah in his earlier life are not dwelt upon in that interlude. The material is used at that point because Is. 40-66 is relevant to the exiles in Babylon. The anti Babylon polemic in Is. 40-45 follows straight on from the explanation in Is. 39 as to why they are suffering under Babylon. The Hezekiah material is in order to remind them why they were in exile. It was because of Hezekiah's wrong attitude to the temple and self satisfied, partial faith. Despite earlier having been of strong faith. This was exactly the position of Judah in exile. He serves as a warning to them, and an explanation as to why the temple was in ruins and they

were in exile. This is surely why Isaiah alone records Hezekiah's song of praise in Is. 38:9-20; because it is full of phrases relevant to the later exiles. Thus he says that he feels as if his life is a shepherd's tent that is being taken down (Is. 38:12). But the restored Zion will be a shepherd's tent that will not be taken down (Is. 33:20). Hezekiah in sickness was therefore Zion in destruction and exile. His sin was theirs; although there is also an element to which he, like the Lord, carried their sin. Zion too is likened to a chronically sick man. And Hezekiah's judgment of death was deferred, not removed. As with Zion's. Zion likewise pleaded "Do not take me away, O God, in the midst of my days" (Ps. 102:25) in the very words of Hezekiah in Is. 38:10. "You restore me", after confession of sin (Is. 38:16), is of course the obvious connection with the restored Zion. If they did this, then like Hezekiah they would feel as in Is. 33:24 "The inhabitant won't say, I am sick because the people who dwell therein will be forgiven their iniquity". The connection between Hezekiah and the people is made clear in 1 Kings 20:6: "I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria".

Yahweh, the God of Israel, Who sits above the cherubim-
Hezekiah has just "spread" the letter before Yahweh (:13), using the same word for how the cherubim 'stretched forth their wings' (Ex. 25:20; 1 Kings 8:7 etc.). He knows that God is in Heaven with the cherubim as it were around Him, and also in the Most Holy place of the temple where Hezekiah was. And he imagined that letter as being with God, spread out as the cherubic wings were spread out. Those wings were spread out over the mercy seat, the cover over the ark, which was sprinkled with the blood of atonement each year. This is a profound insight into prayer. Our situations are not unnoticed. They are placed as it were upon the blood of the Lord Jesus, in the very presence of God, with the cherubim overshadowing them, peering down into them. And we can understand the cherubim in this context as representing God's Angelic might. And appropriately enough, an Angel was sent to bring about the great deliverance sought. There over our kitchen table with the troubling letter placed upon it, as with Hezekiah, there are the cherubim and the presence of Almighty God Himself.

God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous of which we cannot conceive. Ezekiel saw God enthroned above the cherubim, with the silhouette of "the likeness of a man" (Ez. 1:26; 10:20); it is God Himself who is located above the cherubim (2 Kings 19:14 RV). All this has a practical import; because we are in the image of God, because it is imprinted on every part of our bodies, we must give that body to God, just as men were to give the penny which had Caesar's image on it to Caesar (Lk. 20:25).

You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth-
Believing that the cosmos was created and didn't evolve from nothing isn't a painless academic decision which we take somewhere within our brain cells. To believe God is the creator means that we believe that nothing in the life of this planet or our own lives is therefore too hard for Him to do.

Reflection upon God's power in creation should inspire our faith too; the God who could do that has made all men and their kingdoms, and is unlimited in what He can do for us. To let 'science' diminish our faith in God as creator is to remove such inspiration from us. Hezekiah states that God alone is the God of all kings or kingdoms of the earth; and yet we have just learnt that those kings were identified with their idols and were no more. Perhaps Hezekiah was using the present tense as

God does, speaking of the reality of the final Messianic Kingdom as being so sure of ultimately coming about.

The appeal to God as creator was still an appeal to grace alone. Is. 26:17 had said that they were beyond the mercy even of their creator: "Therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour".

2Ki 19:15 Incline Your ear, Yahweh, and hear. Open your eyes, Yahweh, and see. Hear the words of Sennacherib, with which he has sent to defy the living God-
The appeal for God to open His eyes alludes to Solomon's prayer, that God's eyes would be open towards the temple (1 Kings 8:29,52). The statement in :14 that Hezekiah prayed "before Yahweh" could suggest he went into the temple to pray. He thus betrays a 'religious' view of the temple, as if God was obligated to hear him because he was praying in the temple, or at least, because of the temple's very existence. Perhaps this is why his prayer not to die was responded to with the comment that God had indeed seen, and once healed, Hezekiah after three days would go to the temple [to praise God for His grace]. Hezekiah therefore prayed that prayer not in the temple, but on his deathbed at home, facing the bedroom wall. He was thus being taught that God opens His eyes to sincere prayer- not simply because of the religious value of the temple. I take this to be God showing that He was not particularly in agreement with Solomon's 'religious' idea that the temple of itself would obligate God to hear prayer. And that is surely why the final judgment upon Hezekiah was that the Babylonians would come and sack Jerusalem, which included destroying the temple.

This is not to say that God is deaf and blind usually. Seeing and hearing are being used with the sense 'See, hear and respond'. God sees and hears but doesn't respond immediately, usually; He waits until judgment day. Hezekiah is asking for an immediate response in the here and now, for the essence of judgment day to come now, just as we noted on :16 that he was in expectation of the Messianic Kingdom being established.

Perhaps he even placed the letter upon the top of the ark, beneath the spread out wings of the cherubim, upon the blood-sprinkled mercy seat or atonement cover, symbolizing the future work of the Lord Jesus. He brought the situation before the presence of God. He asks God to open His eyes and see. I take this as a tacit recognition from Hezekiah that God had turned away His eyes from Judah and Hezekiah personally because of their sin. But Hezekiah believed in the promises of forgiveness, and asks God to therefore respond to the awful situation they were in. He believed that the cherubim-Angels, God's eyes, would take note of that letter. And it's significant that God's response was to send an Angel to destroy the Assyrians. It may help us to focus our faith in prayers by being aware of the way that God responds to prayer through sending out Angels. He is enthroned, as Hezekiah put it, upon the cherubim.

2Ki 19:16 Truly, Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands-
"Destroyed / laid waste" is the word for sanctifying and devoting in a religious sense. The king of Assyria, like his latter day equivalent, was deeply religious, and saw the cruel destruction of other lands and peoples as part of his service to God, and a sign that his god was triumphant over their gods and belief systems. This exactly fits the spirit of jihadist Islam, which I suggest is the latter day equivalent.

Goliath's defiance of Israel is a major theme (s.w. 1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross should be to us. The history of Goliath would have been inspirational when the Assyrians likewise defied the living God, and again this is a theme of the record (2 Kings 19:4,16,22,23; 2 Chron. 32:17 s.w.).

2Ki 19:17 and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they have destroyed them-
Here we have an example of the Bible using language from the viewpoint of men on earth. They thought their gods were indeed "gods", but they were "no gods". Likewise the language of demons is used in the New Testament, but this doesn't mean demons exist or have power in reality.

Passages like this almost define God by reason of His being uncreate. Whatever is created, is not God. And it follows that if we think that we have truly created anything, or that we are anything that God didn't create, then we are in fact playing God. Understanding God as creator, in its true, deep and thought-through sense, leads to an understanding of grace. That all we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Likewise, to take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God

2Ki 19:18 Now therefore, Yahweh our God, save us, I beg You, out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, Yahweh, are God alone-

This alludes to the statement just made in :15 "You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth". Hezekiah is asking that his faith and understanding of God would be accepted by all peoples. Hezekiah wants people to understand and perceive what is potentially true for them. And this is really the function of all evangelism.

Hezekiah's confident assurance to the people that the Assyrians were an arm of flesh compared to Yahweh (2 Chron. 32:7,8) is hard to square with his own apparent lack of faith at this time. He stripped the temple of its gold [faith], made alliances with Egypt, and fortified the city in his own strength- which Isaiah strongly criticized in Is. 22. One solution is to recognize that faith and unbelief can co-exist in a "believer", and yet when speaking to others, we may give a stronger exhortation to faith than we personally believe ourselves.

The day when all earth's kingdoms shall know Yahweh is the Kingdom age, as Isaiah points out elsewhere with the same Hebrew phrase (Is. 12:5; 49:26; 61:9). Hezekiah envisaged salvation from the "king of the north" as leading directly to the establishment of the Kingdom; and that is the scenario in Dan. 11:40-12:3. Perhaps it was potentially possible; but Judah's general lack of repentance and Hezekiah's apostacy meant it was deferred in fulfilment. The desire for salvation was therefore not simply for the sake of personal safety, but for the wider glory of God in the earth.

There will come a day when all the world realizes that God is one (Is. 37:20 Heb.)- in that they will realize that He alone is God and all else is pure vanity. Because God alone is holy, only He will be worshipped then (Rev. 15:4). "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:11,17).

Hezekiah's faith was also strengthened by having the right motives: "Save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone". This is alluded to by the Lord in His prayer just before His death: "That the world may know" (Jn. 17:23). Hezekiah's prayer for the Assyrian

destruction was in fact so that the Gentile nations around Judah would come to know Yahweh, to accept Him. What finer motivation! This was no selfish shriek for help.

That God is one is a command, an imperative to action (Mk. 12:28,29). It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, thou shalt keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4 suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

2Ki 19:19 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Whereas you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard you-

Answers to prayer don't often come through bolts of revelation; in this case it was through another believer, Isaiah. And we note the power of one man's prayer- because of this prayer, God's word of :20 was uttered. See on Mk. 2:5. The implication could be that it was Isaiah's prayer and not Hezekiah's which was answered.

2Ki 19:20 This is the word that Yahweh has spoken concerning him: The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and ridiculed you. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you-

The remnant within the closed city of Jerusalem, likened to a protected virgin who had not been 'opened', had hardly despised and ridiculed the Assyrians. They were terrified of them. But their faith was counted to them for more than it was; according to Ps. 2, it was God within Zion who despised and ridiculed the armies outside the walls. But His characteristics were counted to them. This is exactly the reasoning of Paul in Romans about imputed righteousness. The idea may also be that the Assyrians had intended to enter and take Zion's virginity; but the prophetic perfect is used of how soon, the inhabitants of Zion would come out and shake their head in ridicule at the remaining Assyrians as they fled homewards. She had retained her virginity from them.

2Ki 19:21 Whom have you defied and blasphemed? Against whom have you exalted your voice and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel-

When and how was this mocking made? I suggest on Prov. 25:1 that a number of the Proverbs in the later part of the book of Proverbs were rewritten in the context of the Assyrian crisis at the time of Hezekiah. We may have a clue in Prov. 26:6: "One who sends a message by the hand of a fool is cutting off his own feet and drinking violence". Rabshakeh, the servant of the king of Assyria, is presented as a "fool" (see on Prov. 26:4), and by using him, the king of Assyria was cutting off his own feet. This and other of Hezekiah's Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1) which mock messengers would then be the reference of 2 Kings 19:21, where we read that the daughter of Zion had mocked at and despised the Assyrians and their messengers. There is no other recorded fulfilment of this. Defeat by Assyria looked certain, and so to mock

them at the time when they would [humanly speaking] soon be seeking their grace- was a true act of faith. See on :32.

That would've required an extraordinary level of faith to do that. Hezekiah wasn't just hoping for the best, using prayer as a last resort, a kind of back up insurance policy after doing all he could. This was the prayer and faith of utter confidence, believing that things that are not are in fact, and being so sure they will come about that this faith actually affects our feelings. Hezekiah felt confident, superior to the Assyrians, all the feelings that come from knowing that one is in a far stronger position. This is a challenge in our self-assessment. To what extent does our confidence in faith affect our emotions and feelings?

Sennacherib was fully aware that he had done all these things against Yahweh; the motivation for his rage against Jerusalem was his particular hatred of Yahweh. And so it shall be in the latter day invasion, which will also be strongly motivated by religion. This verse is simply restating the truth about Sennacherib. It is addressed to him, so presumably Isaiah's duty was to get the message to him. We wonder why God would, as it were, bother. But there are many points of contact with Pharaoh. God even tried to bring him to repentance, and perhaps this address to Sennacherib was to likewise give even him a chance. This is great encouragement to us, to never consider anyone not even worth trying with.

2Ki 19:22 By your messengers you have defied the Lord, and have said, 'With the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon-

The intensive plurals here refer to the great mountain, of Zion. Sennacherib spoke in the present tense because he was certain he would achieve it. His intention was to desecrate the innermost parts of the cedar-of-Lebanon decorated temple.

And I will cut down its tall cedars, and its choice fir trees; and I will enter into His deepest dwelling place, the forest of His fruitful field-

This could continue the allusion to the cedar-of-Lebanon covered temple. Or the whole verse may be simply as GNB: "You sent your servants to boast to me that with all your chariots you had conquered the highest mountains of Lebanon. You boasted that there you cut down the tallest cedars and the finest cypress trees, and that you reached the deepest parts of the forests". However, an obsession with destroying the temple would fit the theme of Sennacherib's rage against Yahweh and particular desire to destroy the temple and gain the temple mount. This would match the similar motivations of the latter day Assyrian.

2Ki 19:23 I have dug and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt'-

Rabshakeh tried to cut off water from Jerusalem (hence Hezekiah's tunnel of 2 Kings 20:20). Perhaps the idea is that despite this, the Assyrians had dug wells and found new water sources for their army. Isaiah had criticized Hezekiah for doing this rather than trusting in God. And it would seem that Hezekiah's efforts didn't succeed anyway. Sennacherib considered victory against Egypt as just as certain; although he was clearly fazed by Tirhakah's approach. In fact the Assyrian army was to never set foot in Egypt at this time.

2Ki 19:24 Haven't you heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it of ancient times? Now have I brought it to pass, that it should be yours to lay waste fortified cities into ruinous heaps-

This is the Divine response. Understanding predestination helps us see the frailty of all human strength and device; and Paul introduces it into his argument in Romans to likewise demonstrate that salvation is of grace and not by works. "Destroy" is literally to rush upon, and the word is used of how the rushing of the nations against God's people would be turned back (see on Is. 17:13).

2Ki 19:25 Therefore their inhabitants were of small power. They were dismayed and confounded. They were like the grass of the field, and like the green herb, like the grass on the housetops, and like grain blasted before it has grown up-
Similar language is used in Is. 40:6 of how "all flesh" is like this. The reference is to the "all flesh" of the nations around Israel whom the Assyrians had conquered, who trusted in their own human strength.

2Ki 19:26 But I know your sitting down, and your going out, and your coming in, and your raging against Me-
This reflects David's awareness that God knows our every physical movement, standing or sitting. God knew Sennacherib's going out from his homeland and how he would return there. Sennacherib's rage was against Yahweh; he intended to utterly subvert the true faith; see on :27.

2Ki 19:27 Because of your raging against Me- There was a specifically religious, spiritual aspect to the invasion; the idea was that the claims of this Yahweh were to be shown false. The motivation of the latter day Assyrian will be the same. Dan. 11:40 [see note there] envisages the "king of the north" likewise raging against the God of the fortress of Zion.

And because your arrogance has come up into My ears, therefore will I put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came- This is the language of the latter day invasion by Gog (Ez. 38:4), which has this Assyrian invasion as its prototype. The Gog confederacy, of 10 nations headed by a *rosh*, a charismatic leader, will likewise be unsuccessful.

The language of coming up to God's ears usually refers to the prayers of the righteous - in the Hezekiah context, "their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, even to heaven" (2 Chron. 30:27). What came up to His ears was the blasphemy of His enemies. But perhaps the idea is that the situation of His people is read by Him as their prayer. Hezekiah spread the blasphemous letter "before Yahweh"and prayed over it. This reflected faith and trust that God did in fact see and hear what was written there, and here we have confirmation of that.

2Ki 19:28 This shall be the sign to you: You shall eat this year that which grows of itself, and in the second year that which springs of the same; and in the third year sow, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat its fruit-
They were besieged in Jerusalem. This sign was a medium term sign, not the short term indication of salvation they perhaps wanted. The sign was that there was the potential for the house of Judah to bear fruit "upward", to God (:29); the fruit of repentance. But there are hints later in Isaiah that this sign was not believed; they did not respect the Jubilee year, they did sow instead of trusting that the land around Jerusalem would miraculously bring forth its own fruit. And this reflects how they did not bring forth the fruit of the Spirit "upward" to God but rather of their own strength (:29). See on :30. The language here seems to suggest that the events of the Assyrian invasion and deliverance happened around a year of Jubilee, which later in Isaiah is

alluded to as a type of the time of the Lord's return and the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come then; but Is. 58 and other hints in later Isaiah are that the Jubilee year was not respected, they did plant instead of trusting in the Lord's provision, and so the Kingdom was precluded from coming then. The idea of planting vineyards and eating their fruit is used in Is. 65 of the Messianic Kingdom; it is kingdom language.

The verse has been translated: 'Ye did eat (the first year) such as groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same, but in this third year sow ye'. This would mean that they were now in the third year of the Assyrian invasion. Perhaps there was a three and a half year domination of Judah by the Assyrians, just as there shall be in the last days.

2Ki 19:29 The remnant that has escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward-

See on :28,30. Apart from Jerusalem, Judah had been overrun by the Assyrians, so this remnant who escaped could refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; or it could be that "the remnant" refers to the spiritually faithful minority.

Is. 4:2 had spoken of how this "remnant" (s.w.) would be the basis of a revived kingdom of God in Judah, based around a Messianic "Branch", "in that day"- the day of Is. 4:1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 10:20); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace.

2Ki 19:30 For out of Jerusalem a remnant will go out, and out of Mount Zion those who shall escape. The zeal of Yahweh will perform this'-

This is the language of Obadiah about the final establishment of Messiah's Kingdom. As noted on :28, this could have happened then, if Judah had kept the year of Jubilee as intended and brought forth spiritual fruit "upward" to God.

2Ki 19:31 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, 'He shall not come to this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it-

This is in contrast to Sennacherib's first approach to Jerusalem, when according to his own inscriptions he did cast up a mound: 'Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms, and by the might of my power, I took 46 of his fenced cities, and of smaller towns scattered about I took a countless number. And I carried off as spoil 200,150 people. And Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in. Then upon this Hezekiah there fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs of Jerusalem, with 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver'. The fact not an arrow would be fired must be compared with how Is. 22:6 had predicted the presence of the archers of Elam around Jerusalem at the invasion, who would overthrow her. It was deferred until this same nation came with the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date (Jer. 49:35). Likewise Is. 22:7 foresaw the Assyrians 'coming before' the city; but this too was averted by the

repentance and intercession of a minority. It is all a great lesson in the power of the repentance and intercession of a minority.

2Ki 19:32 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come to this city', says Yahweh-
The promise that the Assyrians would not build forts against Jerusalem alludes to Is. 29:1-3: "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow... And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee". This was averted or delayed by repentance and intercession. Is. 29:4 continues: "And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust". This is the language of Hezekiah's prayer when he was terminally ill,, again showing he represented Jerusalem.

This unsuccessful invasion is like that of Ez. 38 and Ps. 2; the nations surround Jerusalem but fail to capture it because of the Lord's presence there. Jerusalem will indeed fall in the last days and be desecrated, but the Lord will return and save Israel, establish Himself in Zion- and then there will be this unsuccessful invasion which He crushes.

As discussed on :21, the Proverbs of Hezekiah are relevant to this situation. At this point, Prov. 26:8 "As one who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honour to a fool". I suggested on Prov. 26:4,6 that the particular fool in view is Rabshakeh, who had been honoured by the king of Assyria. But because of God's anger with this "fool", the military technology of Assyria would be confounded. Not a stone would be hurled at Jerusalem- exactly as stated here.

2Ki 19:33 'For I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake and for My servant David's sake'-
The implication could be 'not for the sake of your righteousness, but by grace alone; for My sake, and because I respect the covenant of grace I gave David'. Perhaps this is why 2 Kings 20:6 reminds Hezekiah that his other prayer, for personal healing, is likewise because God is the God of David his ancestor: "Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you". This was by grace, and not because of Hezekiah's allusions to praying towards the temple and thereby being saved, both nationally and personally.

2Ki 19:34 It happened that night, that the angel of Yahweh went out-
He went out from the throne room of heaven, where the case had been as it were considered; see on :4. Isaiah 37 is shot through with allusions to the Angel cherubim destroying the Assyrian host. The Angel went out- perhaps referring to Him physically going forth out of the temple where He dwelt to slay the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem. This phrase 'went out' is nearly always used about literal physical movement, which we have seen is what Angels literally do. Thus in the Ezekiel visions of the cherubim, they and the lightnings "went forth", physically and literally, in performing God's work. "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence (Angelic language); let Thine eyes (Angels) behold the things that are equal", seeing they are involved with the 'coming forth', according to the parallelism of this verse. Similarly Job's satan Angel "went forth" from the presence of the Lord (Job 1:12). And so it happened that there were Angels on earth, as it were. Zech. 2:3 also has an

Angel going forth to answer the prayers concerning restoring the fortunes of Jerusalem (see Zech. 5:5 too). Ps. 81:5 describes the Angel going out through the land of Egypt in order to "remove (Israel's) shoulder from the burden". Ps. 81 is 'Angelic', following Ps. 80, which is another such Psalm. Heb. 1:14 also offers support: the Angels are "sent forth" to minister to us- by answering prayers offered in the spirit of Hezekiah's prayer here?

And struck one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians. When men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies-
The bodies were spoiled by the Jerusalem Jews (Is. 33:4). The agent of destruction appears to have been fire and hail (Is. 29:6; 30:30), both of which may be used in the last days too. We observe that this major event was never prophesied by Isaiah in all the previous material we have in Isaiah. Hezekiah's illness and healing was intended to be programatic for Judah. Just as Hezekiah's death was determined but was delayed for 15 years by God's response to his prayer, so it could be that it was indeed God's intention to destroy Jerusalem at this point. But it was deferred, just as Hezekiah's death had been, because of the faith of a very few. We again see the openness of God.

2Ki 19:35 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and lived at Nineveh-
This was due to the "tidings" he received (:8), presumably of the destruction of his army outside the walls of Jerusalem. His murder by his sons is recorded in Assyrian inscriptions, but a a space of about 20 years after his withdrawal from Judah. We enquire why God waited so long, by human standards. Surely it was because He sought this man's repentance, as with Pharaoh.

2Ki 19:36 It happened, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Esar Haddon his son reigned in his place-
As noted on Is. 38:7, this was caused by God putting a spirit / attitude of mind in these sons to do this. His Spirit, as today, confirmed the human spirit. He was killed as he was worshipping, about 20 years later; worshipping a god who had spectacularly failed him. We see here the terrible power of religion in blinding men to spiritual reality. He was given a chance to repent; just as was Pharaoh. God was extremely patient with him.

We note the contrast between the two kings. Both go into the house of their God but with different outcomes. Likewise the three delegated representatives of the king of Assyria, Tartan, Rabshakeh and Rabsaris, are paralleled with the three representatives of Hezekiah king of Judah, Shebna, Eliakim and Joah (2 Kings 18:18). The Angelic horses and chariots thus correspond to the much vaunted horses and chariots of Assyria. In this context we understand how Rabshakeh offers a fake Kingdom of God, alluding consciously to the descriptions of God's Kingdom in Mic. 4 and Isaiah.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 20

2Ki 20:1 In those days was Hezekiah sick to death-
Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year or his reign- the very same time that

Assyria invaded (Is. 36:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence. The full title of Isaiah is given perhaps because the theme is that Hezekiah was to live because of the prophetic word.

It could be that Hezekiah shared the smiting of the Assyrians, so that his suffering [the basis of Isaiah 53] was on account of suffering the judgment upon Israel's enemies- all so looking forward to the Lord's death. And his recovery from certain death at this time was intended to encourage the people to have faith that they too could be saved from certain destruction by the Assyrians, against all odds. We likewise are often given encounters with others whose experiences are to encourage us as we pass through the same, in essence.

Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, Thus says Yahweh, 'Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live'-

We should not assume too quickly that Hezekiah had no family at this stage; for he is commanded here to put in order his household ("house" is so often 'family' rather than the bricks of a house). Indeed the very same phrase is used of how Abraham would "command his household" to keep God's laws (Gen. 18:19). Perhaps that was the idea. He was to urgently teach his household more of God's ways as he was to soon die.

2Ki 20:2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to Yahweh saying-

The divans, which were also beds, were arranged next to the walls. We are left with the impression of a man utterly alone with God, turning his face away from Isaiah when he had delivered the message, facing the wall- and praying to Yahweh.

Hezekiah doesn't specifically request healing. But this is how his prayer was interpreted by God, and that was the answer given. We have here another example of how God understands the essence of our thinking and treats that as prayer. Romans 8 is clear that we know not how to pray for as we ought, but the Lord Jesus as "the Lord the Spirit" intercedes according to our spirit. Those who can't verbalize are not therefore any weaker in prayer than those to whom verbalization comes much easier.

We note that earlier, Hezekiah had prayed for those who kept the Passover whilst unclean, and they had been "healed" according to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:20 "Yahweh listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people"). Hezekiah is here "healed" (s.w. 2 Kings 20:5,8). We wonder why he doesn't specifically request his own healing? Perhaps he was too depressed. Or just willing to accept God's will. Or perhaps it was that the peoples' plague was due to infringement of Divine law, whereas he wrongly felt he had not sinned. He therefore felt he didn't deserve his death, and pleads with God to remember his spotless life. Something is clearly wrong here in his thinking, as it is in the thinking of all who consider death to be somehow unfair.

2Ki 20:3 Remember now, Yahweh, I beg You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your sight-

This is another allusion to Solomon's prayer. Solomon's idea was that if Israel walked before God with a perfect heart, then their prayers would be heard because of the physical temple; for Yahweh "keeps covenant and grace with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart" (1 Kings 8:23). But Hezekiah was to be shown that this was far too simplistic. God hears prayer by grace and not because of the existence of any temple. And so Hezekiah prays this prayer not in the temple; for the answer he gets assures him that in three days he will be able to enter the temple.

Hezekiah claimed to have lived with a good conscience but was at the same time aware of his sins (Is. 38:3 cp. 17); and his cutting off the gold of the temple to try to buy peace was surely a failure. Yet the conscience can be cleansed of sin, through the depth of the power of God's forgiveness. This is not the same as forgetfulness, self-righteousness or minimization of personal failings. Paul must surely have had twinges of guilt over his behaviour at times (not least over the bust up with brethren Barnabas and Mark, Acts 15:39 cp. 2 Tim. 4:11); and yet he insists that he always had a good conscience. Paul likewise claims that the Jewish forefathers served God with a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3 NIV). Yet the Jewish fathers, dear Jacob particularly, must have had plenty of twinges of guilt over their years.

Walking in truth is the term used to characterize the seed of David (1 Kings 2:4; 3:6), as David personally walked in truth (Ps. 26:3; 86:11), and may not of itself mean that Hezekiah is saying he has not sinned; it's as if Hezekiah assumed that because he was the seed of David, he therefore ought not to die. As will be explained later, the adding of days to his life was a way of saying that he was being accepted as the seed of David; and yet he failed to use those years to save his people. It could be argued that by refusing to die when asked to, Hezekiah was disallowing his being the fulfilment of the Messianic suffering servant who was to die for his people.

Hezekiah wept bitterly-

Perhaps in prayer, asking God to change the outcome. For as with Nineveh, in the gap between Divine statement and its fulfilment, we can repent and change the word which otherwise would have come true (Jer. 18:8-10). See on 2 Kings 19:35. In 2 Chron. 30 we read of Hezekiah having to make decisions at the great Passover which he organized. Some ate it on the second month, and others ate it unclean or with priests unclean. Numbers 9 allowed for those who were distant or travelling to keep the Passover a month later. But that legislation doesn't cover the eventuality here- that the priests were unclean. Likewise in 2 Chron. 30:18, "yet they ate the Passover otherwise than it is written". So we see how God's laws were not seen as a leash, as a letter that had to be literalistically obeyed. By contrast, contemporary Hittite laws condemned any failure to keep a festival on its specified day. The law of Moses is hereby shown to be open to interpretation and obedience according to spirit and not letter. Perhaps it was this perception of Divine flexibility that led Hezekiah to reason with God to change His plan that Hezekiah should die.

The bitterness may have been because he perceived, as most then did, that premature death was a judgment from God because of sin. The Psalms ask for wicked men to be cut off in their prime (Ps. 54:23; 89:45); and long life was a blessing of keeping the covenant (Dt. 6:2; 32:47). Perhaps indeed Hezekiah had sinned. And had to repent of his pride. He considered himself righteous- when measured against men. But his later psalm of gratitude, recorded in Is. 38, shows him appreciating that his sins had been cast behind God's back in forgiveness. We too experience things which help us to perceive our sinfulness, and to stop justifying ourselves by our relative righteousness when compared to men. We also could note that Hezekiah seems to have little conception of a future resurrection. He wants to be healed so he can return to the temple and do his music...

2Ki 20:4 It happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle part of the city, that the word of Yahweh came to him saying-

Once he reached the middle court of the palace, he was told by God to "turn again"

and give Hezekiah assurance of healing. The whole incident shows the speed with which God responds to prayers, and His sensitivity to human prayer and repentance.

2Ki 20:5 Turn back and tell Hezekiah the prince of My people, 'Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of Yahweh-
The defence of Zion at this time was predicated upon God's grace; judgment was intended to come unless they repented, and most of them hadn't. And so God stresses He will save Zion by grace, for His own sake and not that of His peoples' prayer or repentance. The cure was not instant, it took three days; for the same reason as there will be the process of judgment between our resurrection and entrance to the Kingdom. The period between God's pronouncement of blessing and the realization of it is for our benefit, that we might grow in appreciation. The healing enabled Hezekiah to enter the temple; from God's perspective, the most significant aspect of his illness was that its uncleanness precluded him from entering the temple. We notice the parallel between Hezekiah's prayer and his tears; God reads situations as prayers. Prayer is understood by Him far wider than simply words as lexical items. Otherwise those more able to verbalize would pray 'better'; and acceptable prayer is not related to our ability to verbalize.

See on 2 Kings 19:15. I suggest there that in his prayer for national deliverance, Hezekiah had prayed in the temple, thinking that God "saw" things uttered there. But he is being taught that God 'sees' sincere prayer regardless of the temple building. And after three days, Hezekiah was to go to the temple just to praise God for His grace.

2Ki 20:6 I will add to your days fifteen years-
The years 'added' to the king's life are expressed in the words of Ps. 61:6, where David felt that God would "prolong [s.w. "add to"] the king's life [s. w. "days"]. The clear allusion to David's words was perhaps to show that God considered Hezekiah to be the Davidic king who could have been the Messianic Son of David. But Hezekiah despised that and wasted those years in self-satisfaction. There is also a theme in Solomon's teaching that his son would have 'days added' (the same Hebrew phrase) to his life, because of his obedience to wisdom (Prov. 3:2; 9:11; 10:27). Again, the idea is that the adding of days to Hezekiah's life was confirming him as the seed of David.

We frequently read of a man's "days" as if there is a Divinely appointed number of says to each human life. But God can cut short a wicked man, so that he doesn't live out half his days (Ps. 55:23). With Hezekiah, God added to his days. Just as Dt. 27:20 promised that the good king would "prolong his days". Dt. 4:26 warns Israel that if they sinned, they would not prolong their days- as if the idea of prolonging was potentially there for them, but they might miss it. The very idea of years being "added" to Hezekiah suggests that an original plan was amended. So again we see God's openness and sensitivity to human prayer and behaviour, modifying plans accordingly.

There is a strong sense that God has determined a number of "days" for our mortal life (Ps. 23:6; 2 Sam. 7:12), and David like all of us wished to know how many those days were for him, in order that he might live an appropriately humble life in response to realizing his frailty (Ps. 39:4). But that predetermined number of days can be cut short (Ps. 102:4,23,24) or extended (1 Kings 3:14; Prov. 9:11). Hezekiah would be the parade example of this; his days were cut short (Is. 38:10), and then lengthened in response to prayer (2 Kings 20:6). God is open to dialogue, His timetable in our personal lives is flexible according to our prayers; and He is also responsive to human

behaviour. Like Job we should perceive our life as "my days" (he uses this term multiple times), so that we might use each of them for Him.

I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake'-

Yahweh had earlier stated that He would not "deliver" (s.w.) Jerusalem from the Assyrian lion (Is. 5:29). But as in Hosea, God speaks in wrath but then His grace is such that He doesn't carry out what He threatens. He has emotion and speaks and acts in that fire of passion. That was normal in the Middle East; it is the western obsession with nicespeak and measured responses which make outburst behaviour and language appear inappropriate. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and he spoke of the 'deliverance' (s.w.) of the city from the Assyrians as being due to the appearance of a Messianic figure (Mic. 5:6). Here, the deliverance of Hezekiah personally from inevitable death is tied up with the deliverance of Jerusalem from inevitable judgment. He surely could have been one of the possible fulfillments of the Messianic figure, which makes his failure to rise up to it all the more tragic.

We learn here that although Hezekiah's sickness and the deliverance from the Assyrians happened at about the same, Hezekiah's healing from sickness happened before the deliverance of the "sick man" of Judah from the Assyrians. It was all by grace, and Hezekiah's healing was intended to give inspiration to others to believe that the Assyrian "death" would also be removed. We likewise encounter people whose expriences of God's grace are designed to inspire us in our issues.

2Ki 20:7 Isaiah said, Take a cake of figs. They took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered-

It's surely significant that Hezekiah is stated to be Judah's most faithful King, and yet he had a major lack of faith when he cut off the gold of the temple and gave it to the Assyrians; and he asks God to give him a sign that the promised healing was really going to happen. Indeed the whole nature of the dialogue here seems to indicate a man of somewhat faltering faith, needing every encouragement. And so although the healing was completely through God's power, perhaps this human mechanism of the cake of figs was used for Hezekiah's benefit; not because it had any efficacy of itself.

2Ki 20:8 Hezekiah said to Isaiah, What shall be the sign that Yahweh will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh the third day?-

Hezekiah asks for a sign "to prove" that God's predicted cure of him was going to happen. And when given the option of the shadow of the sun jumping forward by ten degrees, he almost mocks that as too 'easy'. Yet this is the man with the accolade that no King believed in God like he did. Perhaps he reached his heights of faith through having these low moments. 'Putting God to the test' as it seems Hezekiah did is seen in Scripture as not fully believing in Him (Num. 14:20-24; Dt. 6:16; Is. 7:12; Lk. 11:33-36). Maybe God left Hezekiah to test him in the matter of the ambassadors from Babylon as a kind of response- 'You put me to the test, I'll put you to the test' (2 Chron. 32:31). Let's remember that in Bible characters like Hezekiah, we are reading only a few cameos of their lives. Most of his life history, his inner thoughts, are unknown to us. But God's summary statement was that he was the most believing King of Judah. So when we read cameos from his life that reflect a weakened faith, we surely have little option but to conclude that somehow in the Divine economy, low points of faith lead a person to higher and stronger ones. And we can all take a lot of comfort from that conclusion as we survey our own lives.

2Ki 20:9 Isaiah said, This shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?-

It seems that unlike his father Ahaz, Hezekiah had asked for this sign (:8). It is apparent that the experiences of believers are often suggestive of those of other believers. Insofar as we appreciate this, we will find strength to go the right way. Consider how Hezekiah was intended to see the similarities between himself and the earlier king Ahaz his father, and learn the lessons. They were both threatened by invasion and tempted to turn to human help (Is. 7:2; 37:1); Visited by Isaiah and told to not fear (Is. 7:4-9; 37:6,7). Ahaz was unfaithful by "the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field" (Is. 7:3); and in just the same place Hezekiah's faith was tested and he learnt the lessons of Ahaz' failure (Is. 36:2). Both were given a sign by God and promised deliverance (Is. 7:14; 37:30). Ahaz refused to ask for a sign when offered one (Is. 7:11); whereas Hezekiah learnt, and asked for a sign (Is. 38:7,22). Thus his asking for a sign was not a sign of faithlessness but rather his seeking to not be like Ahaz. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it" was spoken to both Ahaz (Is. 9:6) and Hezekiah (Is. 37:32).

2Ki 20:10 Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go forward ten steps. Nay, but let the shadow return backward ten steps-

Hezekiah's attitude in asking for a sign, and the way he responds to the offer for the shadow to go forward, all hardly indicates firm faith and trust. And yet he had earlier had such faith. The Hebrew word translated "light" can mean two things, and neither of them read very nicely for Hezekiah to say this. It can mean 'easy'; and to say it was easy for the light to go forward, involving the apparent manipulation of the sun and therefore the entire cosmos, was no "light" thing for God to do. The word can by extension mean "despised" or "cursed", and is often translated like that. Hezekiah is saying that for life to be 'fast forwarded', for him to be cut off in the midst of his days by the sun advancing forward, is easy for God. But it would be harder, surely, for God to make the sun as it were go backward, to create time, to reverse the time of his life by giving him more time. And despite that unpleasant, bitter attitude to God, God responds by giving him more life. *Hezekiah had faith, but so did Elijah; but faith without hope and love is nothing, as Paul says. And Elijah was removed from his ministry despite having so much faith.* The reversal of time spoke only of a delay; Hezekiah's death was not removed, but delayed by 15 years. The time shift would have reminded the perceptive of Joshua's long day, when again time was as it were tampered with- in order to enable a military victory. And a similar victory was given against Assyria at this time.

2Ki 20:11 Isaiah the prophet cried to Yahweh; and He brought the shadow ten steps backward, by which it had gone down-

"Gone down" is the word used by Hezekiah in speaking of how he feels he had "gone down" into the grave (:18). It is as if Hezekiah has died, the sun gone down those degrees, and then resurrected, brought up the same amount. He could have been a Messianic figure in a reestablished kingdom of God in Judah. The "return backward" of the sun is a phrase often used of the return of the exiles from Babylon to be part of that reestablished Kingdom. Hezekiah's revival / resurrection was to be seen as that of his people. How the miracle happened is not the essential question; but it could have

been caused by the glory of Yahweh bursting forth so that the shadow was chased back.

Shadows can go back if a light brighter than the sun shines upon the object causing the shadow. This was observed during the meteorite incident in Chelyabinsk, Russia, which was brighter than the sun. It is Isaiah who speaks of God's glory in Zion appearing brighter than the sun (Is. 60:19; 62:21). The intention of this was to be that Gentiles came to this light and brightness (Is. 60:3). The Babylonian ambassadors came to enquire of the sign done in the land. So it seems that the bright light of Yahweh's glory appeared in the land and changed the shadow. This is far preferrable to speculation that the earth, and the entire solar system, reversed its direction of travel. This was a foretaste to Judah, in their dark hour surrounded by their enemies, of what potentially could happen. The Kingdom of God could then have been established in some form. But Hezekiah let the ball drop. Instead of converting the Babylonians, he boasted to them. And brought judgment upon Zion. We reflect that if Hezekiah had asked to bring the shadow forward, then God had another option in view. We see here the interplay between human freewill and Divine openness.

Is. 30:26 again parallels Hezekiah's sickness with Jerusalem's woeful state [as does Is. 33:24 "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity"]. The healing was to be associated with a bright light, and that is what made the shadows go back: "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound".

On the dial of Ahaz-

"The stairway built by King Ahaz", Hezekiah's father, was part of his idolatrous sun worship which Hezekiah ought to have destroyed. It was a kind of small ziggurat. It was the Babylonians who had begun telling the time in this way; there is no mention of "hours" of the day in the Hebrew Bible until the time of Daniel. Here we have another hint at the incomplete spirituality and reformation of Hezekiah. The "songs of degrees" were written or rewritten to apply to this experience of the sun returning ten degrees or steps. There are 15 of them, matching the 15 extra years of life given to Hezekiah. It seems that 10 of the 15 songs of degrees were written by Hezekiah, perhaps connecting with how the shadow returned 10 degrees. We enquire however why the shadow returned ten degrees to symbolize how Hezekiah was being given fifteen years. One possibility is to consider that the Hebrew term for "fifteen" is two distinct words, the words for 'five' and 'ten'. God's openness is such that perhaps He is hinting that He would add five or ten or fifteen years.

It could also be that the sundial of idolatrous Ahaz had probably been brought from Assyria, as such things were common there and had pagan associations. Hezekiah had not destroyed his father's idol- another hint that his devotion to God was far less than ideal.

2Ki 20:12 At that time Berodach Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick- Gentiles bringing presents to Zion is the language of the reestablished kingdom (Ps. 68:29). It could have come about then, when the surrounding nations brought presents to Hezekiah; but human pride and impenitence precluded it. See on Is. 18:7. And Hezekiah and his descendants adopted the ways of those nations rather than ruling over them and helping them toward Israel's God. 2 Chron. 32:31 describes these people as "the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon", but an unusual word is used

there for "ambassadors"; it is the word usually translated "scorner" or "mocker". The idea is clearly that these men had an agenda and were not sincere. And Hezekiah was willfully duped by them, falling for their agenda and being blinded by their gifts, rather than seeking to share the ways of Yahweh with them. Hezekiah ought to have learnt not to trust in them, seeing that trust in the "princes and ambassadors" of Egypt had been proven so false just in recent history (Is. 30:4). God likewise brings situations into our lives whereby situations repeat- to test our faith and understanding.

The "letters" and 'ambassadors' recall the 'letter' from the ambassadors of Assyria in Is. 37:14. He didn't respond spiritually to this 'trial by prosperity'. Hence: "However concerning the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). "The wonder" could refer to the miracle on the sundial, or to the miraculous revival of the land physically in line with Isaiah's prophecies.

2Ki 20:13 Hezekiah listened to them-
Is. 39:2 "Hezekiah was pleased with them". "Pleased" is s.w. "joy", "to rejoice". It is used of how Hezekiah previously had rejoiced in spiritual things (2 Chron. 29:36; 30:25). Now he rejoices in material things, and being respected by Gentiles rather than God. His "joy" or 'pleasure' ought to have been solely in Yahweh's salvation (Is. 25:9 s.w.). Hezekiah rejoiced "with them"; the Hebrew text is emphatic about this joy "with them". But the whole land had been charged not to rejoice at the fall of Assyria because it would revive in another form (s.w. Is. 14:29). Hezekiah is presented as totally ignorant of all this.

And showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, the house of his armour and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah didn't show them-
LXX "the houses of his treasures". This sounds as if his kingdom had become like that of Egypt and Solomon, where treasure cities were associated with gross materialism and refusal of the things of God's Kingdom. The Babylonians had revolted against Assyria, and they wanted help from Judah to form a political alliance against Assyria. But Hezekiah was taken in by the presents and attention paid to him, responding in pride rather than telling them he had nearly died because of his alliances; he ought to have told Babylon to accept Yahweh as their God, and thus be saved from Assyria as Judah had been. Presumably he agreed to the alliance; hence the judgment given, that his people would go into captivity in Babylon. He had recently been so lacking in gold that he had stripped the temple's gold and given it to the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:16). This sudden abundance of wealth may well have come from nations such as Babylon, who were eager to have Judah onside with them as a now significant and respected ally against Assyria. The wealth of the Gentiles flowed in to the liberated Zion, but only as a very weak foreshadowing of the things of the Kingdom. Human "armour" ought not to have been gloried in; for the entire message of Zion's deliverance was that it was achieved by God's power and grace and not at all by human strength. But the same Hebrew word is used repeatedly of the temple vessels which Hezekiah had earlier sanctified for usage (2 Chron. 29:19,26,27; 30:21). But now he had removed them out of temple service in Yahweh's house into his *own* house. His focus was upon *his* kingdom ["dominion"], rather than the things of Yahweh's Kingdom. It was these very vessels which were to be carried to Babylon (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:7).

2Ki 20:14 Then Isaiah the prophet came to king Hezekiah and said to him, What did these men say? From where did they come to you? Hezekiah said, They have come from a far country, even from Babylon-
Surely these were rhetorical questions aimed at rebuking Hezekiah. His reply was made in pride (2 Chron. 32:25, although see note there). The prophetic intention had been that the Gentiles would come from far countries to Israel's God with offerings to Yahweh, but Hezekiah sees it in terms of them coming to *him* with presents and respect for *him*. He uses the very phrase of Dt. 28:49, of how a nation "from a far country" was to come and destroy Israel.

2Ki 20:15 He said, What have they seen in your house? Hezekiah answered, They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them-
As in :14, these are rhetorical questions; and rather like those given to Adam in Eden, they were intended to elicit repentance. LXX "yea, also the possessions in my treasuries". Note the emphasis on "my... my.. I". The focus on his possessions and treasuries suggests the Lord quarried the parable of the rich fool from Hezekiah, who thought he had wealth to enjoy for the remainder of his days; see on :17. "My house... your house" stands in contrast to the temple / house of Yahweh which ought to have been Hezekiah's focus. All that was in his house was to be taken to Babylon (:17). The intention was that the Gentiles "from a far country" (s.w. Is. 5:26) would come to Zion and "see" or "be shown" (s.w.) God's glory (Is. 49:7; 52:15; 60:5; 61:9; 62:2; 66:18 s.w.). But instead Hezekiah showed them his own glory. He precluded the fulfilment of these prophecies in terms of his kingdom being the reestablished kingdom of Yahweh.

2Ki 20:16 Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Yahweh-
"Hear" may be an appeal to repent and stop the prophesied outcome from happening in accordance with Jer. 18:8-10.

2Ki 20:17 'Behold, the days come, that all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have laid up in store to this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left', says Yahweh-
This would have seemed impossible; for Babylon was one of many apparently irrelevant small powers whom both Sargon and Sennacherib had overrun, destroyed her towns, and enforced direct Assyrian rule. That in 160 years' time Babylon would be the dominant power and would take Judah captive... appeared laughable. But God had just demonstrated that He could destroy the Assyrian army in a moment; and indeed it happened (2 Kings 24:13). 'Storing up' is surely alluded to by the Lord in the parable of the rich fool; he stored up riches only to lose them in a moment of Divine judgment, and was not rich toward God. See on :15.

2Ki 20:18 'Of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you shall father, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon'-
There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing

forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24). Hezekiah's immediate sons "who will issue from you, whom you shall father" weren't permanently taken to Babylon. Manasseh was taken there but repented and returned to Judah (2 Chron. 33:11-13); but it was in Dan. 1:3 that "the king's seed" were all deported there permanently. Again we have an example of a prophecy being delayed and suspended in fulfilment. This could have been because of the prayer and repentance of a minority, not least Manasseh; the spirituality of Josiah; or God's constant pity towards His people.

2Ki 20:19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, The word of Yahweh which you have spoken is good. He said moreover, Isn't it so, if peace and truth shall be in my days?-
Sadly despite the warning from the example of Shebna (see on Is. 22:15) and the specific command not to just live for today and resign ourselves to an eternal death (Is. 22:13), Hezekiah at the end of his life gave in to just this same mentality. The sense is as GNB "King Hezekiah understood this to mean that there would be peace and security during his lifetime, so he replied, "The message you have given me from the LORD is good". "Peace and truth" is the language of the restored kingdom of God (Jer. 33:6); and it is the same term used by Hezekiah when he failed to grasp the potential of the Kingdom being reestablished in his times; he was content with peace and truth in his times alone (see on Is. 38:18,20). Likewise the Jews of Esther's time were content with "peace and truth" in their times, rather than seeing that what had happened was to lead them towards the eternal peace and truth with God of His Kingdom and not their own (see on Esther 8:13-16; 9:30). And this is the abiding temptation for all believers; to be satisfied with some degree of "peace and truth" emotionally and intellectually in their lives now, but resign the far greater realities of the Kingdom to come when "peace and truth" shall be in eternal reality.

2Ki 20:20 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all his might-
This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his

might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

And how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
Hezekiah's doing this is cited in Is. 22:9 in a negative light, as if done without faith and in seeking to defend Jerusalem in his own strength rather than God's. It was done in *his* might- not Yahweh's.

2Ki 20:21 Hezekiah slept with his fathers; and Manasseh his son reigned in his place-
Typically there is some Divine commentary upon a king when he dies. When Hezekiah began reigning, he receives a very positive accolade from God. But the silence at the end is perhaps because he messed up and failed to realize the great potential there was for him. I suggested earlier that the comment that he was faithful with God may be ultimately true, although he undoubtedly ended his life on a spiritual low. And he raised one of Judah's most wicked kings during his last 15 years. His complaint that he was dying without an heir is therefore to be contrasted with how things actually worked out.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 21

2Ki 21:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah-
"Causing to forget" is a strange name for a child unless the father [like Joseph] had a previous life he wanted to forget. Manasseh was born three years into Hezekiah's final 15 years of life in which he turned away from God. So I suggest that his name reflects Hezekiah's desire to 'forget all that God stuff' and get on with 'enjoying' his last 15 years without God. And this was naturally reflected in the way he raised a son who was one of Israel's most evil rulers.

2Ki 21:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, after the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel-
We may wonder why God let such an evil man live and reign for 55 years (:1), the longest reigning of any king. Surely if he had been slain for his wickedness, as other men were, then he would have led fewer people astray? I suggest the answer is that God worked for decades towards this evil man's repentance- and it paid off. He did repent in the end. And we can look forward to eternity together with him. We see in this the huge meaning and value God places upon the individual person, and how He will not give up searching for the lost until He finds them. Manasseh would be the parade example of that.

See on :15. Jonah recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jonah 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at this time (1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15).

2Ki 21:3 For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made an Asherah, as did Ahab king of Israel, and worshiped all the host of the sky, and served them-
This revival of idolatry would not have been possible unless the people generally

were eager and willing for it. I suggested previously that Hezekiah's reforms were largely on the cusp of his becoming king. They were partly a psychological reaction against the misery of Ahaz's reign, and the reforms of 2 Chron. 31 were often a result of group psychology rather than personal reformation of the heart. They were all too sudden and spontaneous, at the same moment, to have been the outcome of all the concerned individuals having the same heart response. There was a group psychology there, a going with the crowd. And so it is unsurprising that they all turned away relatively soon afterwards.

2Ki 21:4 He built altars in the house of Yahweh, of which Yahweh said, I will put My name in Jerusalem-
The Name *is* called upon us; and therefore and thereby we are Yahweh's servants, dominated by His principles and character. Because the Name was called upon the temple, therefore it was simply impossible that those who realized this could worship idols in it (2 Kings 21:4,7); whatever has God's Name called upon it, whatever bears His image, must be devoted to Him alone. The Lord pointed out that this applies to our very bodies, which being in God's image should be given over to Him.

This was precisely the behaviour of his grandfather Ahaz. I suggest that this was only done by persuading themselves that these altars were in fact a form of Yahweh worship. For there is never any specific statement that Judah formally renounced Yahweh. And this continues to be the abiding weakness of God's people; to justify wrongdoing by claiming it is part of worshipping God. Such as justifying luxury homes and goods in the name of needing them to serve God with.

2Ki 21:5 He built altars for all the host of the sky in the two courts of the house of Yahweh-
These were the court of the priests, and the court of the common people (2 Chron. 4:9). The priesthood were surely complicit in this. For when Uzziah had tried to offer incense himself, 80 faithful priests resisted him. But there is no record of any such resistance to Manasseh. The priests in Hezekiah's time had been reticent to devote themselves solely to Yahweh (1 Chron. 29:34). I suggested that this was because they were accustomed to being priests both of Yahweh and of the pagan gods. This means that they took a cut from all the offerings to all the gods.

2Ki 21:6 He made his son to pass through the fire, and practised sorcery, used enchantments and dealt with those who had familiar spirits and with wizards-
This would have meant that his surviving children would have hated him for slaying their siblings; although passing through the fire may have been a dedication ceremony rather than actually burning them to death. 2 Kings 21:6 has "his son", 2 Chron. 33:6 has "his children". As he had more than one son, we are to infer surely that this focus upon "his son" meant that one of his sons in particular passed through the fire, and that could imply that he sacrificed his son [maybe his firstborn]. Israel should have removed from amongst them a man who did this (Dt. 18:10), and the fact they didn't suggests they therefore passively supported him in his apostacy.

The valley of Hinnom, Ge Hinnom, was to later be known as Gehenna, and became a symbol used by the Lord for complete destruction (Mt. 5:22). As they burnt their children there, to destruction, so sinners would be burnt to destruction in that same place. Joachim Jeremias explains how the literal valley of Gehenna came to be misinterpreted as a symbol of a 'hell' that is supposed to be a place of fire: "[*Gehenna*]…since ancient times has been the name of the valley west and south of

Jerusalem… from the woes pronounced by the prophets on the valley (Jer. 7:32 = 19:6; cf. Is. 31:9; 66:24) because sacrifices to Moloch took place there (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), there developed in the second century BC the idea that the valley of Hinnom would be the place of a fiery hell (Eth. Enoch 26; 90.26)… it is distinguished from *sheol*" *(New Testament Theology*, London: SCM, 1972 p. 129). AV "a familiar spirit" is misleading, and many of the modern versions give something like "witch" or [ESV, GNB] "a medium". LXX has "a divining spirit". It doesn't mean she did actually have any such spirit; but that she was considered as having this. Such people were thought to be able to be possessed by the spirit of dead people, and to therefore speak in their name. But the Bible clearly teaches that the "spirit returns to God" (Ps. 146:4; Ecc. 12:7), and that death is unconsciousness. The spirit of dead persons don't enter other people. I would go so far as to say that the record of the witch at Endor, who supposedly had a "familiar spirit", is deconstructing this belief. For Samuel himself appears, and speaks directly to Saul, and not through the "medium". The woman therefore screamed in shock when Samuel actually appeared. He was resurrected, briefly, in order to give God's final message to Saul. The people claiming to have "familiar spirits" lay on the ground and mumbled hard to understand words in a voice seeking to imitate the dead person (Is. 29:4) but Samuel appeared in person and spoke clearly to Saul, directly. We also note that Samuel appeared to Saul standing upright, because Saul bowed before him: "Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and showed respect" (1 Sam. 28:14). This was quite different to how the mediums lay on the ground and mumbled words into the dust.

He worked much evil in the sight of Yahweh, to provoke Him to anger-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 21:7 He set the engraved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which Yahweh said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name forever-
Manasseh is criticized for placing an idol in the very place where God's Name of Yahweh was meant to dwell. He replaced the invisible things- the more abstract things of the characteristics of God which the Name speaks of- by something material and visible. We make the same mistake when we turn away from true spirituality and become lost in physical works. If Judah had not forgotten the Name [and this must refer to their lack of appreciation of it rather than forgetting the letters JHVH], then they wouldn't have served Baal and other gods (Jer. 23:27). It is this particular idol which it seems was returned to the temple just prior to the destruction of the temple (Ez. 8:3), despite Manasseh himself removing it on his repentance.

2Ki 21:8 neither will I cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land which I gave their fathers, if only they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them-
This is apparently (:7) a quotation from what God said to David and Solomon. But it appears to be an adaptation about the promises to the singular seed, that he must continue in obedience if the promises were to be fulfilled through him. But just as

Abraham's seed is both the Lord Jesus and all those in Him, the true Israel of God, so the promises about David's seed also have a collective dimension.

2Ki 21:9 But they didn't listen: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations did whom Yahweh destroyed before the children of Israel-
God's tolerance of Judah in His land was therefore by grace, and in hope of their repentance. Their doing "more evil" than the Gentiles could refer to the fact that as in covenant relationship with God, they were the more responsible for their sins. Or the idea may be that most Gentiles were faithful to their set of gods, only changing them if that was enforced upon them by the military dominance of a neighbour. But Judah went running madly to every god they could, described by Hosea under the figure of sexual addiction.

2Ki 21:10 Yahweh spoke by His servants the prophets saying-
2 Chron. 33:10 Yahweh spoke to Manasseh, and to his people; but they gave no heed". "They gave no heed", or 'did not listen', is a phrase used in the later prophets as they appeal to the exiles (Neh. 9:34; Zech. 1:4). The sins of Manasseh in 'not listening' to God's word are cited as the main reason for the exile. We note that refusing to listen to God's word is the essence of all the sins of idolatry etc. It is the spurning of relationship with God which appears to hurt Him even more than the list of sins which Manasseh was also guilty of.

2Ki 21:11 Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, and has done wickedly above all that the Amorites did who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols-
Making others to sin is a major dimension of human sin, although personal sin is still a significant issue here in the condemnation of Manasseh. The mention of the Amorites is because they were cast out of the land once they had sinned to a certain point, and Israel were treated in the same way (Gen. 15:16).

2Ki 21:12 therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, 'Behold, I bring such evil on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle-
God is repeatedly presented as the ultimate source of "evil". There is no radical evil in the cosmos outside of His control. There is no cosmic Satan figure; all "evil" is under His control, and performed by His Angelic "armies" manifested through human armies used by them, as the Babylonians were at this time.

2Ki 21:13 I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab-
They would be judged like Israel, because they had sinned in fact worse than Israel, according to Ezekiel's parable of the two adulterous sisters.

And I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down-
The idea is that not one drop would be left. And yet by grace many were left in Judah, and there was even some attempt at worship at the temple site, according to Jeremiah. "Turning it upside down" is 'to turn it upon its face', as if never to be used again. "Wipe" is s.w. for utter destruction (Gen. 7:4; Ex. 32:33; Num. 5:23). We could render it as 'wiping out'. Yet this was spoken in wrath, and in wrath God remembered mercy. For a set time to remember Zion was yet to come, and He would restore Jerusalem. It is this kind of apparent contradiction within God which Hosea speaks of, as His "repentings" being "kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). See on :14.

2Ki 21:14 I will cast off the remainder of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies. They will become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies-
But Israel were not cast off eternally. See on :13, where we can understand the apparent contradiction as the wrath of love, a threat and feeling which was not carried out. Or we can argue that Israel's not being cast off was a result of a reinterpretation and redefinition of God's people. Paul's positive approach to Israel's conversion is reflected in his whole reasoning in Romans 11, his classic statement about preaching to Israel. He begins by saying that God has not cast off His people Israel totally, because some, e.g. himself, have turned to Christ. So, seeing that God will not cast off His people Israel in the ultimate sense, it perhaps follows that in every generation some of them will come to Christ as Paul did (Rom. 11:1,2). In some sense, God has cast off His people (2 Kings 21:14 RV; Zech. 10:6); and yet, because a minority of them will always accept Christ, it is not true that God has cast off His people in a total sense (Rom. 11:1 RV). It was only because of this remnant that Israel have not become like Sodom (Rom. 9:29)- even though Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 16 clearly liken Jerusalem to Sodom. Yet they are not as Sodom ultimately, for the sake of the remnant who will believe.

The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake / cast off those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). We can therefore conclude that His desperate "Why have You forsaken me?" was because He was so intensely identified with our sins that in the crisis of the cross, He indeed felt forsaken because of sin. He did not sin, but felt like a sinner; He thereby knows how sinners feel.

2Ki 21:15 because they have done that which is evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt even to this day'-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions (see on :13), and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 21:16 Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh-
Josephus claims many prophets were slain at this time. Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was slain by being "sawn asunder", and that apparently is alluded to in Heb. 11:37.

2Ki 21:17 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
We wonder why Kings says nothing of Manasseh's repentance, which is recorded in detail in Chronicles and was one of the most amazing examples of human repentance

(2 Chron. 33:12-19). Perhaps it is because the record wishes to provide a relatively uninterrupted record of the sins of God's people. For the Babylonian destruction was not because of the sins of the kings so much as for those of the people.

2Ki 21:18 Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza; and Amon his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 21:19 Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah-
He had been raised in the spirit of his father's apostacy, and was apparently unimpressed by Manasseh's amazing repentance.

2Ki 21:20 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as Manasseh his father did-
2 Chron. 33:22 adds: "He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did Manasseh his father; and Amon sacrificed to all the engraved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them". Manasseh had removed the images, but not apparently destroyed them. The history of the kings abounds with such references to idolatry being reformed, and then so quickly revived. The speed of its revival reflects the fact that the heart of the people generally was with the idols. And we must assess our own episodes of apparent repentance in this light. Manasseh had repaired the temple (2 Chron. 33:16), but by Josiah's time it needed repairing again; so it could be that Amon also desecrated and damaged the temple yet further.

2Ki 21:21 He walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them-
See on :20. He revived the idols his father had destroyed on his repentance.

2Ki 21:22 and he forsook Yahweh the God of his fathers-
We get the impression Amon was never "with" Yahweh, so his forsaking Yahweh may refer to how there is a conscience toward God in every man, however latent, but he had forsaken this.

And didn't walk in the way of Yahweh-
Think through the implications of Lk. 3:4, where we read that John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways.

2Ki 21:23 The servants of Amon conspired against him and put the king to death in his own house-
There seems a special stigma and shame attached to being murdered in ones' own home, rather than on a battlefield or dying from old age.

2Ki 21:24 But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place-
The final part of Judah's history, like that of Israel's, involves division between brethren, conspiracy and politics. Those who indulge in such things are really living out their own condemnation, as well as sounding the death toll for their own communities of God's people (see on Gal. 5:15).

2Ki 21:25 Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
This may not necessarily be the books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 21:26 He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; and Josiah his son reigned in his place-
Josiah means 'foundation of Yah'. It's unlikely this was the name Amon gave him, although a repentant Manasseh may have influenced it. However, at no point did even kings like Amon and Manasseh formally deny Yahweh. They worshipped Him, so they thought, through worshipping idols. So it is not impossible that indeed this was Josiah's birth name. And from that we can take yet another warning, to serve Yahweh with our whole hearts; and not assume that our service of the flesh is serving Him.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 22

2Ki 22:1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath-
Josiah means 'foundation of Yah'. It's unlikely this was the name Amon gave him, although a repentant Manasseh may have influenced it. However, at no point did even kings like Amon and Manasseh formally deny Yahweh. They worshipped Him, so they thought, through worshipping idols. So it is not impossible that indeed this was Josiah's birth name. And from that we can take yet another warning, to serve Yahweh with our whole hearts; and not assume that our service of the flesh is serving Him.

2Ki 22:2 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and walked in all the way of David his father, and didn't turn aside to the right hand or to the left-
There is a huge imputation of righteousness to human beings, reflected right through Scripture. God sought them, the essence of their hearts, and was prepared to overlook much ignorance and misunderstanding along the way. Consider how good king Josiah is described as always doing what was right before God, not turning aside to the right nor left- even though it was not until the 18th year of his reign that he even discovered parts of God's law, which he had been ignorant of until then, because the scroll containing them had been temporarily lost (2 Kings 22:2,11). Josiah is described as having done "that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh"- even though he was

ignorant of part of God's word and law (2 Kings 22:2,10-13), not knowing *all* "that is enjoined us to do" (2 Kings 22:13 RVmg.), and not knowing all that was in "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2). Full knowledge, even of some quite important things, didn't stop Josiah from being credited with doing what was right before God and not 'turning aside to the right hand or to the left'. He was judged according to how well he responded to that which he *did* know. And this may be a helpful window for us into how we should feel towards those who sincerely seek to follow the Lord and yet with imperfect knowledge.

2Ki 22:3 It happened in the eighteenth year of king Josiah that the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of Yahweh, saying-
We wonder if Meshullam was a relative of Meshullemeth, the female form of Meshullam, who was Josiah's grandmother (2 Kings 21:19). Shaphan was the father of Ahikam (:12) and the Gemariah of Jer. 36:10-12) and the grandfather of Gedaliah of Jer. 39:14; 40:5,9,11. Shaphan would have been elderly, as 35 years later his grandson Gedaliah was set up as governor of Judah by the Babylonians.

2Ki 22:4 Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the money which is brought into the house of Yahweh, which the keepers of the threshold have gathered of the people-
Hilkiah is well attested as the one who found the lost book of the law (2 Kings 22:8), helped in Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:14-20) and arranged the great Passover observance of 2 Chron. 35:1-19. But Hilkiah did all this despite being the son of a High Priest called Shallum (1 Chron. 6:12,13), whose name can mean 'bribe' (s.w. Mic. 7:3 about the corruption of the priesthood). Perhaps this was what he was known for. But his son / descendant rose above that bad background, as we can. The "scribe" or historian was a senior advisor in the Hebrew court (2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 2 Chron. 34:8) because of the huge value attached to history in the Hebrew mind, and as reflected in the Bible being largely history. Advice on how to act was to be based upon historical, or as we would now say, "Biblical", precedent.

2Ki 22:5 Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of Yahweh; and let them give it to the workmen who are in the house of Yahweh, to repair the breaches of the house-
The half shekel temple tax was to be paid when a census was taken, and it seems this is what he did. 2 Chron. 34:9 notes the generosity of the people even in the northern tribes, as well as the Israelites living in Judah ["the remnant of Israel"].

2Ki 22:6 to the carpenters, to the builders and to the masons, and for buying timber and cut stone to repair the house-
2 Chron. 34:10 says this was because "the kings of Judah had destroyed" the temple. The destruction of the temple by these kings may not have been because they totally rejected Yahweh. The essence of their apostacy, as ours, was to use the things of Yahweh for idolatry, to mix paganism and the way of the flesh with Yahweh worship. So it is likely that when we read of men like Manasseh building other temples or shrines to idols in the vicinity of the temple, what happened was that they took the materials from the temple structure and used them for the idol temples. For materials like cut stone and timber were expensive and hard to source; Solomon had spent huge effort in bringing them from far away to build Yahweh's temple.

2Ki 22:7 However there was no accounting made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand; for they dealt faithfully-
This is exactly the same as happened in 2 Kings 12:15. This may be in implied contrast to the priests and Levites who had not done the work at that time, perhaps because of embezzlement of the funds. The money was delivered to these overseers directly from the one who had received and counted in, and not via the priesthood.

2Ki 22:8 Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Yahweh. Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan, and he read it-
All spiritual endeavour leads to the Lord inviting us deeper into that endeavour; thus it was *as* Barnabas and Paul went about their ministering to the Lord that they were invited to go on a missionary journey (Acts 13:2). Likewise it was *as* the Levites were in process of collecting funds for repairing the temple, that they found the book of the law- perhaps because they needed more space in which to store the donations, and whilst making space they found the scroll. In the process of being a deacon, faith is developed (1 Tim. 3:13). The very process of service and obedience leads to greater faith in practice.

2Ki 22:9 Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again and said, Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of Yahweh-
There is an apparent parallel between money being found in the temple, and the book of the law being found (2 Kings 22:8,9). The idea is that as David often says in Ps. 119, Yahweh's law was the greatest treasure. So much so that the Chronicles record focuses so much on the book of the law being found that no mention is made of the money also found along with it. Even in Kings, the discovery of the money is only mentioned in passing, as if the greatest discovery was not wealth, but God's law. And that is an abiding principle.

2Ki 22:10 Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, Hilkiah the priest has delivered a book to me. Shaphan read it before the king-
This book was probably not the entire Pentateuch, but the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28, for Josiah's response is appropriate to someone who had just heard them read. But see on :5. Jer. 15:16 refers to this: "Your words were found, and I did eat them... [they] were to me the joy and the delight of my heart: for I am called by Your name, Yahweh". Jeremiah rejoiced in those words of judgment. And as a result, “I am called by Your name”- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband’s name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his “joy [and] delight”- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was “full of the wrath / passion of God” (Jer. 6:11). Jeremiah's lament that the people had no joy or delight in God's word (Jer. 6:10) is the basis for this comment that when *he* found God's words, they were his joy.

What was read were the curses for disobedience. The harder side of the Father and the Lord Jesus should actually serve as an attraction to the serious believer. Peter knew that if it really was the Lord Jesus out there on the water, then He would bid

him walk on the water to Him. Peter knew his Lord, and the sort of things He would ask men to do- the very hardest things for them in their situation. He knew how Jesus could be a demanding Lord. Jeremiah "knew that this was the word of the Lord" when he was asked to do something so humanly senseless- to buy property when he was in prison, when the land was clearly about to be overrun by the Babylonians (Jer. 31:8). When Jeremiah had earlier found the curses for disobedience recorded in the book of the Law which had been lost, He 'ate them', those words of cursings were "the joy and rejoicing of my heart" - they so motivated him (Jer. 15:16 = 2 Chron. 34:18-21). When Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, fear came upon "as many as heard these things" .

2Ki 22:11 It happened, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he tore his clothes-
Although Josiah was personally innocent, he felt so passionately for God's people. We too need to have hearts that bleed for others, and not be solely concerned with our own standing before God. For our standing before Him involves our attitudes to others and our concern for their salvation, if we truly seek God's glory and not our own. See on :2.

2Ki 22:12 The king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying-
We note Josiah didn't go to her himself. For the significance of this, see on :15.

2Ki 22:13 Go inquire of Yahweh for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found; for great is the wrath of Yahweh that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that which is written concerning us-
"Poured out" in Chronicles is "kindled" in 2 Kings; the sense was that he realized the wrath of God was kindled and was literally about to burn against them, and so repentance must be immediate with no time to lose.

2Ki 22:14 So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the second quarter); and they talked with her-
"The second quarter" may refer to a newer area of Jerusalem (Zeph. 1:10 RV), or as AV "the college", implying as a prophetess she had a kind of Bible study centre. "Keeper of the wardrobe" may refer to the priestly garments (cp. 2 Kings 10:22).

2Ki 22:15 She said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to Me-
We see here how Josiah had no direct vision from God. He was dealing all the time through the prophetic word relayed to him, and his obedience to it is the more commendable. Because it reflects his humility to God's revealed word, in a way more impressive than if these words had come directly to him. We are in his position, and should learn from him.

2Ki 22:16 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read-

2 Chron. 34:24 adds: "even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah". The reference to curses suggests that the scrolls discovered contained at least Dt. 28 and Dt. 27:15-26.

2Ki 22:17 Because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and it shall not be quenched-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

Idolatrous Israel never *consciously* tried to provoke Yahweh to anger with their apostasy; the words of the prophets must have seemed to them a gross exaggeration. But this was really how God saw it (2 Chron. 34:25).

Although "it shall not be quenched", Josiah knew God well enough to try to quench it, by getting all His people to make a from the heart commitment to Him. Even though God had told Josiah that His wrath with His people would not be quenched, it would seem that there was still some possibility of "remedy", had the people accepted God's word in their hearts (2 Chron. 36:16). We see here His absolute eagerness for their repentance, and unwillingness that any of His people should have to perish. And that is the same God with whom we have to do.

2Ki 22:18 But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of Yahweh, thus you shall tell him, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Concerning the words which you have heard-
See on :15 for the significance of Josiah not receiving these words directly.

2Ki 22:19 because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before Yahweh when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and have torn your clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard you, says Yahweh-
We see here the mutuality between God and man; He hears the man who hears Him. We see the root of humility as being in having a heart / mind sensitive to Him. But "tender heart" is the same phrase used for being "faint hearted" in time of battle (Dt. 20:3; Is. 7:4; Jer. 51:46). It was as if Josiah saw the judgment of God coming, as if it had come, and was faint hearted before the soldiers he saw coming against him. And yet even such a tender heart can be given by God (s.w. Job 23:16), for He can also give attitudes of mind by His sovereign operation .

Josiah's zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). Interestingly, the very words which Jeremiah was tempted not to speak forth, so stern was their message of judgment to come, were what had the power to lead Israel to repentance (Jer. 26:2,3).

2Ki 22:20 Therefore behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil which I will bring on this place'. They brought back this message to the king-

There are times when God takes away the righteous from the evil of this life (Is. 57:1- probably alluding to what God did to Joash, 2 Kings 22:20 cp. 23:29). There are other Biblical instances where the wicked have long life and prosperity in this world. This is because the Bible presents the ultimate judgment and reward of human life and faith as being at the last day, and not right now.

This is a similar situation to the promise to Hezekiah and Ahab (1 Kings 21:29). It is as if God judged the entire weight of sin to be such that even Josiah's reformation could only delay and not remove the judgment for it. However, if the people had all repented in their hearts, rather than passively allowing a reformer like Josiah to remove the external evidence of idolatry, then surely the outcome could have been different. See on :31.

The reality was that Josiah died in battle, not in peace (2 Chron. 35:22-24). Yet he had been promised to be gathered to his grave in peace (2 Chron. 34:28). Here we have an example of God making a statement about the future which is conditional upon human behaviour. Thus He stated that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days; but it wasn't, because they repented. There is a gap between the pronouncement and its fulfilment, and in that gap our behaviour can change the outcome. We too must waste so many potential futures.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 23

2Ki 23:1 The king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem-

Josiah's idea was to bring about a reformation of the ordinary people, as in :2 we read of the people small and great being gathered. So presumably his gathering of the leaders was in order for them to bring their people with them.

2Ki 23:2 The king went up to the house of Yahweh, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great. He read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of Yahweh-

See on 2 Kings 22:2. Josiah’s zealous reforms started with reading “the book of the covenant” (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). Interestingly, the very words which Jeremiah was tempted not to speak forth, so stern was their message of judgment to come, were what had the power to lead Israel to repentance (Jer. 26:2,3).

2 Kings has "prophets" for Chronicles "Levites". There were clearly prophets actively operating at this time. As noted on :3, Josiah saw the only way to change the threatened judgments as getting the ordinary people to repent in their hearts. Unlike Hezekiah, he was not satisfied with simply avoiding seeing judgment come in his days. Indeed he learned from Hezekiah's mistake in that matter. See on 2 Chron. 35:7.

2Ki 23:3 The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after Yahweh-

Maybe a reference to Dt. 10:12,13, which perhaps was in this scroll.

And to keep His commandments, His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to confirm the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people stood to the covenant-

Josiah recognizes that Judah have broken covenant with God and must be judged appropriately. God was unwilling to ultimately avert the judgment upon the people because of their state of heart. And yet Josiah throws himself into trying to persuade the people to totally give themselves to covenant relationship. He realized that in the gap between the pronunciation of judgment, and it being carried out, there was the possibility of repentance and the judgment not being performed. His mentor Jeremiah had made this point in Jer. 18, and was also appealing to the people to change their hearts so that the threatened judgment wouldn't happen. This is how open God's purpose is, and Josiah and Jeremiah perceived that.

Josiah's actions here are one of a number of Old Testament examples of preaching the word after becoming aware of the depth of one's own sins. Consider Jonah preaching the second time, with the marks in his body after three days in the whale, admitting his rebellion against Yahweh, pleading with them to respond to His word. Reflect how when his head was wrapped around with seaweed, at the bottom of the sea at the absolute end of mortal life, he made a vow to God, which he then fulfilled, presumably in going back to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 2:9). His response to having confessed his sins and daring to believe in God's forgiveness, turning again towards His temple even from underwater, was to resolve to preach to others if he was spared his life. And this he did, although as with so many of us, the pureness of his initial evangelical zeal soon flaked. Or consider Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33:16; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19:3 cp. 18:31; 19:2; Josiah, 2 Chron. 34:29,32; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3:29; 4:2...

We note the specific reference in 2 Chronicles 34:32 to the people of Jerusalem. It seems that Josiah tried to gather together literally all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all "found" there. And yet Jerusalem particularly was to suffer in the judgments to come, and Jeremiah's prophesies at this time tend to single out Jerusalem for particular judgment for the unspirituality of the population. So again we perceive that this was all the enthusiasm of Josiah; the people's hearts weren't affected. This is the trouble with mass meetings for "revival". Reformation is essentially personal and of the heart.

2Ki 23:4 The king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the threshold, to bring forth out of Yahweh's temple all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the Asherah, and for all the host of the sky; and he burned them outside of Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel-

Josiah discovered the book of the Law- and he then went on to do something about it in practice. Reflect through what he did:

Passover kept in Jerusalem (23:21-23) = Dt. 16:1-8; Removed asherahs (23:4,6,14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:21; Star worship removed (23:4,11) = Dt. 17:3; The 'high places' and cults removed (23:8-20) = Dt. 12; Child sacrifice ended (23:10) = Dt. 12:31; 18:10; The cultic stones / 'mazzeboth' removed (23:14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:22; Conjouring up the dead ended (23:24) = Dt. 18:11.

Do you notice from where in Deuteronomy he got those ideas? From chapters 12 - 18. My suggestion is that he maxed out on that part of the 'book of the law' which was read to him, and went and did it. The Lord in the wilderness was likewise motivated by Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 8.

In the first century, when people heard the Gospel, they were generally baptized immediately. This meant that the prison keeper was baptized in the middle of the night, amidst an earthquake… in essence, people heard the message, and responded

immediately. We likewise heard of the Bible's teaching about baptism, and we did something concrete and actual- we got wet. We went under the water. But we must ask ourselves whether we are continuing to be responsive to the word of God which we become increasingly familiar with as we read daily. Our very familiarity with it can militate against a real response. When last did you read / understand something from Scripture, and then get up and *do something real, concrete and actual about it?*

2Ki 23:5 He put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, the moon, to the planets and to all the host of the sky-
We notice here Judah's addiction to idolatry. Usually a nation was loyal just to one god, e.g. the sun god; but as Hosea puts it, Judah were like a sexually obsessed woman going after every man or god of the surrounding nations.

2Ki 23:6 He brought out the Asherah from the house of Yahweh, outside of Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and beat it to dust, and cast its dust on the graves of the common people-
This may have been inspired by Hezekiah, who likewise destroyed idolatry in the Kidron and then called for the Passover to be celebrated (2 Chron. 30:14,15). We are to take inspiration from Biblical history as Josiah did.

2Ki 23:7 He broke down the houses of the sodomites that were in the house of Yahweh, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah-
These sodomites were associated with the idol shrines (1 Kings 14:23,24). They may well have been Gentiles from Phoenicia, hence they were expelled from the land rather than killed. They may well have been involved with homosexual practices, but the Hebrew *qadesh* means literally a devoted person.

2Ki 23:8 He brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah-
The priests had ostensibly offered only to Yahweh in the high places (2 Chron. 33:17), but those high places were destroyed and the priests who officiated there were removed to Jerusalem, but not allowed to come up to the altar (:9). Clearly they had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry.

And defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba-
The limits of Judah.

And he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city-
The open spaces by the city gates were where Manasseh and Amon had set up idol worship.

2Ki 23:9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places didn't come up to the altar of Yahweh in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers-
See on :8. The priests who had previously been unfaithful at the high places were disciplined, but were allowed to eat of the sacrifices which the other priests could eat. For according to the law, those portions of food could not have leave in them. "Bread" may be used here for 'food'.

2Ki 23:10 He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech-
This became Gehenna (Ge Hinnom) in the Lord's time, the rubbish dump and previous place of idolatry which was now despised. And it was used by Him as a symbol of the total destruction and shame of the rejected at the last day. It was as if they were seen by Him as being offered there to the idols they had worshipped during their lives.

2Ki 23:11 He took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entrance of the house of Yahweh, by the room of Nathan Melech the officer, who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire-
The idea was that the sun god daily drove his chariot across the sky. As so often noted, the kings of Judah had not turned away from Yahweh completely, but mixed idolatry with Yahweh worship. This kind of syncretism is seen all around us, in practical and doctrinal terms; and it is the perennial temptation of God's people to mix the flesh and spirit.

2Ki 23:12 The king broke down the altars that were on the roof of the upper room of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of Yahweh-
This is a tacit recognition that Manasseh's repentance and apparent destruction of his idols had not been very thorough. Perhaps that is why Kings doesn't mention it. And Hezekiah's apparently radical reforms had not even removed the altars on the roof of his father's house. The reforms of the reformers were never really as radical as they might appear. See on :15.

And beat them down from there, and cast their dust into the brook Kidron-
This may have been inspired by Hezekiah, who likewise destroyed idolatry in the Kidron and then called for the Passover to be celebrated (2 Chron. 30:14,15). We are to take inspiration from Biblical history as Josiah did.

2Ki 23:13 The king defiled the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mountain of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon-
What a contrast with Ps. 125:2 "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds His people from this time forth and forever". The hills around Jerusalem are not huge mountains. They are small hills, and this is the picture of God's protection; not hugely visible, but there. But the mountains around Jerusalem became the "high places" of idolatry (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13; 2 Chron. 21:11); what should have been the symbols of Yahweh's protection became perverted. "The mount of corruption" appears to have been the mount of Olives.

The way Solomon built idol temples for his wives on mock temple mounts near Jerusalem was surely a studied statement that he saw himself as a hopeless apostate. Like the alcoholic or drug abuser, Solomon could analyze his problem in Ecclesiastes so accurately- and yet do nothing about it. This is the utter tragedy of all spiritual failure. Even politically, his marriages with all those Gentile women didn't seem to achieve him the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he

always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn't destroy the idol temples he built for them.

2Ki 23:14 He broke in pieces the pillars, and cut down the Asherim, and filled their places with the bones of men-
The idols were desecrated in the eyes of the worshippers by dead bodies being near them. And yet the sense that dead bodies brought defilement was itself from the law of Moses (Num. 19:14,15). We see here the confused conscience of the people, partly formed by their experience of Yahweh's principles, and partly blunted by the experience of idol worship. The idols were typically associated with fertility cults, and so to make the dead bones of their priests placed on their altars and pillars was a denial of all they stood for.

2Ki 23:15 Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and beat it to dust, and burned the Asherah-
We marvel that despite the reforms of Hezekiah and others, this altar and high place remained in Israel. There was a kind of false temple complex still there (1 Kings 12:31). See on :12. The reforms of the reformers were never really as radical as they might appear. Although Bethel was in the area of the ten tribes, Josiah realized that it was their influence which had led Judah into such apostacy. He set an example for all time of having a sense of spiritual care even for brethren he was separated from; for they were still his brethren.

2Ki 23:16 As Josiah turned himself, he spied the tombs that were there in the mountain; and he sent, and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of Yahweh which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things-
We get the impression that Josiah may have been ignorant of the prophecy of 1 Kings 13:2, or had forgotten it (:17); and fulfilled this unconsciously. We have the impression that he just happened to notice tombs far away in the mountain side, and the idea thus came to his mind to take the bones from there and use them to desecrate the altar. This is how the Spirit works in our lives too. We "by chance" notice something, from the corner of our eye; turn left rather than right. But that was all of God's direct operation upon our hearts and eyes, to take His purpose further and, in this case, to fulfil His prophetic word.

2Ki 23:17 Then he said, What monument is that which I see? The men of the city told him, It is the tomb of the man of God, who came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that you have done against the altar of Bethel-
It seems that therefore, as noted on :16, he fulfilled those prophetic words unconsciously rather than consciously. For the man of God had prophesied of Josiah by name as doing this. But we are given to understand that he did not consciously try to fulfil it, and therefore we conclude he was either ignorant of the prophecy or had forgotten it; or perhaps didn't know all the details of it.

2Ki 23:18 He said, Let him be! Let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria-
Both prophets had been to some extent unfaithful to God's word, and yet in other

aspects of their lives they had been faithful (1 Kings 13:31). And this is surely the position with all God's children. They were at least honoured at this point as having been faithful rather than unfaithful.

2Ki 23:19 All the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke Yahweh to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 23:20 He killed all the priests of the high places that were there, upon the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem-
We notice the contrast with how he treated the priests of the high places in Judah (:9), whom he allowed to live. Although for sure they were also apostate, or else they would not have been demoted as they were. These priests in Israel however were not Levites. Perhaps he was made more aware of the prophecies of the man of God in 1 Kings 13:2, and therefore fulfilled them.

2Ki 23:21 The king commanded all the people saying, Keep the Passover to Yahweh your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant-
Josiah urged the people to keep this, despite having been told in 2 Chron. 34:25 that the people would indeed to judged for their sons. He had sought to change this by appealing for all the people to enter covenant with Yahweh from their hearts (2 Chron. 34:30). And he seeks to confirm this by holding a huge Passover, where he provided the people with the sacrifices.

2Ki 23:22 Surely there was not kept such a Passover from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah-
This Passover was unique both in terms of numbers of offerings, and in the strict obedience to all the legislation about it. We note the repeated treatment in 2 Chron. 35 of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" as a separate group. And yet Jeremiah, who was the contemporary prophet, specifically criticizes this group above all as being so far from Yahweh in their hearts. And this was the critical dimension which was not addressed by all this ritualistic obedience.

2Ki 23:23 but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah was this Passover kept to Yahweh in Jerusalem-
We have no record of what Josiah did in the last 13 years of his reign, apart from the note we will have in 2 Chron. about how he died in disobedience to God's word. Perhaps this was the end point of a spiritual slip in that period. Tragically, so many of the kings started well and slipped at the end; truly a warning to us. We would rather hope to read that Judah continued to keep Passovers after this one, but there is no record of that. See on 2 Chron. 35:20.

2Ki 23:24 Moreover Josiah removed those who had familiar spirits, and the wizards, the teraphim, the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah

and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of Yahweh-
He was trying by all means to avoid the judgments for disobedience which were written in the book of the law read to him. But God had said that He would not change that judgment. Josiah would have been motivated by the example of Moses in seeking to still change the outcome. But the reforms of a king were not the same as the required change of heart of the people. Removing all visible signs of idolatry was not the same as transforming hearts; and God looks upon the heart, rather than the external state of religion amongst His people.

Hilkiah is well attested as the one who found the lost book of the law (2 Kings 22:8), helped in Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:14-20) and arranged the great Passover observance of 2 Chron. 35:1-19. But Hilkiah did all this despite being the son of a High Priest called Shallum (1 Chron. 6:12,13), whose name can mean 'bribe' (s.w. Mic. 7:3 about the corruption of the priesthood). Perhaps this was what he was known for. But his son / descendant rose above that bad background, as we can.

2Ki 23:25 Like him was there no king before him, who turned to Yahweh with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him-
As noted on :24, the point was that God was interested in the hearts of His individual people, and the spiritual zeal of one man could not alter that. Perhaps this is why Kings omits the account of Josiah's death in disobedience to God's word, which we find in Chronicles. The idea is that even this generally good man could not avert the judgment of others if their hearts were not with Him.

2Ki 23:26 Notwithstanding, Yahweh didn't turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger was kindled against Judah,
The fact that men such as Moses and Jeremiah (Jer. 18:20) turned away God's wrath without these things happening, or simply by prayer (Dan. 9:16) therefore means that God accepted the intercession of those men and counted their righteousness to those from whom His wrath turned away. We shouldn't assume that these righteous men merely waved away God's wrath. That wrath was real, and required immense pleading and personal dedication on their behalf. Thus we read that despite Josiah's righteousness, the wrath of God against Manasseh was still not turned away. Truly "wise men turn away wrath" (Prov. 29:8). And they evidently pointed forward to the work of the Lord Jesus- perhaps, like the sacrifices, those men only achieved what they did on account of the way they pointed forward to the Lord Jesus. He delivered us from God's coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:10)- the wrath of God is frequently spoken of in the New Testament as being poured out with devastating physical effects in the last days. All those not reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). The very existence of the law of God creates His wrath, because we break that law (Rom. 4:15). Romans has much to say about the wrath of God; and the letter begins with the reminder that we are all sinners, and the wrath of God will be revealed against all forms of sin (Rom. 1:18). It is only through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus that we are saved from this wrath and 'reconciled' to God (Rom. 5:8-10).

Because of all the provocation with which Manasseh had provoked Him-
There is a connection with Prov. 27:3 GNB, where the same Hebrew word is used: "A stone is heavy and sand is a burden; but a fool's provocation is heavier than both". This is a Hezekiah Proverb (see on Prov. 25:1); the "provocation" of his son

Manasseh led to the huge burden of judgment upon Judah. Hezekiah's son clearly paid no attention to his father's proverbs.

2Ki 23:27 Yahweh said, I will remove Judah also out of My sight as I have removed Israel-

Jonah recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jonah 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at his time (1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15).

And I will cast off this city which I have chosen, even Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there'-

Although it is true as it was with Saul that those who reject Yahweh's word are rejected (1 Sam. 15:23), God's grace is beyond such a simplistic picture. Israel were to despise / reject God's word (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44 s.w.). Israel rejected Yahweh when they wanted Saul to be their king (s.w. 1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19), and yet He did not reject them immediately because of that. The relevance to the exiles was in that they were in captivity because they too had rejected God's word and therefore God had rejected them (2 Kings 17:15 cp. 2 Kings 17:20; 23:27), because they rejected His prophetic words, He rejected them (Jer. 6:19,30; Hos. 4:6), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44; Jer. 31:37 s.w.). For ultimately God has not rejected / cast away His people (Is. 41:9; Jer. 33:26; Rom. 11:2). This is the mystery of grace, no matter how we may seek to explain it away by Biblical exposition and balancing Bible verses against each other.

2Ki 23:28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

Not necessarily the same as the books of Chronicles we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 23:29 In his days Pharaoh Necoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went against him; and Pharaoh Necoh killed him at Megiddo when he had seen him-

There are times when God takes away the righteous from the evil of this life (Is. 57:1- probably alluding to what God did to Joash, 2 Kings 22:20 cp. 23:29). There are other Biblical instances where the wicked have long life and prosperity in this world. This is because the Bible presents the ultimate judgment and reward of human life and faith as being at the last day, and not right now.

2Ki 23:30 His servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. The people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's place-

2 Chron. 35:22 gives a different perspective (see on :25 for why this is): "Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and didn't listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo". Going into battle disguised is exactly what Ahab did (2 Chron. 18:29), and was slain doing it- having also defied God's prophetic word to do so. Josiah totally failed to hear God's word at this point, both from the historical precedents and the explicit prophecy given to him. The valley of Megiddo, and mourning in it (2 Chron. 35:24), will have an equivalent in the latter days (Zech. 12:10). Josiah therefore seems to represent a disobedient Israel, who will be finally saved by grace as he was.

2Ki 23:31 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; and he

reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah-
2 Kings 23:31 says that Jehoahaz was the son of Hamutal, whereas his brother Eliakim was the son of Zebudah (2 Kings 23:36). So we see that Josiah practiced polygamy- another indication that he was not such a stellar example of spirituality, despite his works of obedience to the Mosaic law; see on :30 and 2 Chron. 35:19,20. And the mothers of his sons are blamed in Ez. 19 for leading them into very bad behaviour, so these were not good women.

2Ki 23:32 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his fathers had done-
It is possible that Josiah was spiritually sliding downwards in the last 13 years of his reign; see on :30 and 2 Chron. 35:19,20. So the formative years of his sons may not have been spent under a good parental influence, which would explain their weakness and apostacy.

2Ki 23:33 Pharaoh Necoh put him in bonds at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold-
He was "deposed at Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 36:3) but put in bonds at Riblah (2 Kings 23:33), which was on the Orontes river on the road from Babylon to Palestine. This was the same place where Nebuchadnezzar was based during the destruction of Jerusalem, and where the captives were brought to him for judgment (2 Kings 25:20,21). The parallel is to show how Judah were intended to learn from their sufferings at the hands of the Egyptians and to repent. But they didn't, and so the situation repeated with the Babylonians.

2Ki 23:34 Pharaoh Necoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim; but he took Jehoahaz away; and he came to Egypt, and died there-
"Eliakim" means "God will raise", alluding to their hope that 2 Sam. 7:12 would be fulfilled in him; and "Jehoiakim" means the same, only "Yah will raise". Perhaps the king made Eliakim swear by his God Jehovah, that he would be subservient to him. But it could be that the "Jeh" prefix meant something different to the Egyptians, and was effectively a sign of subservience to them; it may even refer to an Egyptian god. But see on :36. Joahaz died in Egypt as prophesied in Jer. 22:12. Shallum in Jer. 22 is the same as Jehoahaz. Perhaps he is called Shallum because that word means 'The one marked out for judgment'. I explain on Ez. 4:6 that potentially, the captivity of Judah need only have lasted for 40 days or years, but this period was extended, just as it could have been reduced. But Jehoahaz was not going to experience this, he had precluded any reduction in his captivity period because of his impenitence at that time. Jer. 22:11,12 imply that the false prophets were claiming that his exile was going to be very short lived and he would return to establish a Messianic kingdom, thus twisting the prophecies of the restoration which Jeremiah may have already given, along with those of Isaiah which were already extant.

2Ki 23:35 Jehoiakim gave silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh. He exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of each one according to his taxation, to give it to Pharaoh Necoh-

Jehoiakim raised the tribute for the Babylonians by imposing a poll tax on the people. And he succeeded in raising the money. Yet such a tax ought to have been paid to the temple, but Jehoiakim hadn't bothered doing that.

2Ki 23:36 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah-
The change from Eliakim to Jehoiakim (:34) is so similar that perhaps the change was just symbolic, to show Pharaoh's power over him; or maybe Jehoiakim was another name he already went under, or a name he himself suggested as an alternative.

2Ki 23:37 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his fathers had done-
Jer. 22:13-18 gives an example of the sins of Jehoiakim- he built an opulent home for himself and refused to pay the labourers for their work. He also murdered the prophet Urijah who spoke against him (Jer. 26:20-23), and burnt the scroll of God's words and persecuted Jeremiah (Jer. 36).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 24

2Ki 24:1 In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years, then rebelled against him-
2 Chron. 36:6 adds: "Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon". It may not have been Nebuchadnezzar in person. "To carry him to Babylon" means that was the intention, but it may not have happened. Jer. 22:18,19 says he was to be thrown out onto the garbage tip outside Jerusalem like a dead donkey. 2 Kings says that bands of the Babylonians attacked him at this time, and he may have been slain at this time.

2Ki 24:2 Yahweh sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, the Syrians, Moabites and of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke by His servants the prophets-
Dt. 11:17 had said that God's people would "perish [s.w. "destroy"] quickly from off the good land". But by grace, that didn't happen "quickly" at all. They were finally destroyed from off it (2 Kings 24:2 and often), but God did not bring that about quickly but after much patient pleading through the prophets. This is one of so many examples of where God simply did not punish His people to the extent He said He would; simply because of His grace and love toward them.

2Ki 24:3 Surely at the commandment of Yahweh came this on Judah, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did-
We can't be brethren in Christ who have no effect on the rest of the body. We all have an influence on others. Our behaviour, however passive, has a powerful effect on our brethren. We are all members of one body. Job pointed out that the words of another can assuage grief in a way that ones' own self-talk simply cannot (Job 16:5,6). On the contrary, a whole community can be cursed for the sake of one man's sin, even if he later repents (2 Kings 24:3,4). The fact we can be guilty of causing others to stumble means that we can limit God's gracious plan for them. However, it is also true that God would not punish innocent people on the basis of guilt by association with a

sinner. So we conclude that the "sins of Manasseh" were practiced from the heart by the people, and that was the basis of their condemnation.

2Ki 24:4 and also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which Yahweh would not pardon-
"Would not pardon" quotes from Dt. 29:20, about the false teacher who is a root that bears gall, influencing others to idolatry: "Whose heart turns away this day from Yahweh our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations; lest there should be among you a root that bears gall and wormwood, who, when he hears the words of this curse blesses himself in his heart saying I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart, to destroy the moist with the dry.
Yahweh will not pardon him, but then the anger of Yahweh and His jealousy will smoke against that man, and all the curse that is written in this book shall lie on him, and Yahweh will blot out his name from under the sky" (Dt. 29:18-20).
To presumptuously think that promised judgment will not come, to have a stubborn heart, is what God will not pardon. And this was the case with Jehoiakim.

2Ki 24:5 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-
Not necessarily the same as the books of Chronicles we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 24:6 So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers; and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 24:7 The king of Egypt didn't come again out of his land any more; for the king of Babylon had taken, from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt-
This is mentioned to demonstrate the utter folly of later trusting in Egypt and breaking oaths to Babylon through alliances with Egypt. Egypt was weak, the world is weak, the arm of flesh is weak- and yet God's people always are tempted to trust in it.

2Ki 24:8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign; and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem-
Three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as "thirty cubits", although it was ten cubits broad. Taking 'pi' to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, "thirty".

"Nehushta" is a form of Nehushtan, 'the copper thing', a hint that his mother was an idolater.

We note that he was judged as a sinner at eighteen years old, for what he did over a 70 day period. We sometimes tend to excuse ourselves on the basis of only being products of our background. But eighteen year old Jehoiachin reigned a mere three months and ten days: and God's comment was that "he did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh". We could, of course, make the excuse that his surroundings, his immediate family, his peers... were all idolatrous. But Yahweh evidently didn't see this as any real excuse: he, at sweet eight years old, "did that which was evil" and was punished accordingly. Not only does this give an unusual insight into God's view of responsibility; but it shows that God expects even a young person to break away from background influences when they are evil. Chronicles says he was eight when he became king, not 18. Kings also gives "three months" rather than "three months and ten days", and it has been suggested that the "ten" has been misplaced by a copyist, explaining why 18 has been miscopied as 8.

2Ki 24:9 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his father had done-
See on :8. Jehoiachin is Jeconiah of 1 Chron. 3:16 who is Coniah in Jer. 22:14, and Jehoiachin in 2 Chron. 36:8,9. A reminder that people carried multiple names, explaining some of the apparent contradictions in the genealogies. Ez. 19 says that he was effectively made king by his ambitious mother, whose hope was to be the glorious queen mother, teaching her sons to be ambitious, aggressive lions to that end.

2Ki 24:10 At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged-
These servants were his senior military officers with their armies, as opposed to the marauding bands of :2.

2Ki 24:11 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it-
This recalls how David came to Rabbah after it had been besieged for some time, so that he would have the honour of witnessing the surrender and taking the glory for the victory.

2Ki 24:12 and Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, his mother, his servants, his princes and his officers; and the king of Babylon took him prisoner-
His mother is mentioned because according to Ez. 19, she was the one driving him to independence from Babylon because she was so bent on having the glory of being queen mother for herself.

In the eighth year of his reign-
That is, of Nebuchadnezzar.

2Ki 24:13 He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of Yahweh and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold, which Solomon king of Israel had made in Yahweh's temple-
Some had already been taken at the time of Jehoiakim (2 Chron. 36:7). The various stages of the exiles and taking away of the vessels were surely because God was

desperately hoping that there would be repentance in response to each stage. But there was not.

As Yahweh had said-

Thus fulfilling 2 Kings 20:17; Jer. 15:13; 17:3.

2Ki 24:14 He carried away all Jerusalem, all the princes and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, except the poorest sort of the people of the land-

It was to these captives that Jeremiah wrote his letter of Jer. 29:1-23. Jeremiah explained that actually these who went into captivity in Babylon could become "good figs" if they repented there (Jer. 24).

2Ki 24:15 He carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; and the king's mother, the king's wives, his officers and the chief men of the land, he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon-

Ezekiel went into captivity at this time (Ez. 1:2,3), so it seems he was a priest of some standing, or from a senior family.

2Ki 24:16 All the men of might, even seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths one thousand, all of them strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon-

Although it was the wealthier who were taken into captivity and those who "had nothing" and posed no threat who were left (Jer. 39:10), it seems from Jer. 24:1-10 that these were the "good figs", the spiritually stronger than the "bad figs" who remained. So we see that spirituality and poverty do not always go together, for poverty so easily distracts from spiritual focus. And although it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, some do.

2Ki 24:17 The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's father's brother, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah-

Nebuchadnezzar changed the name Mattaniah, 'gift of Yah', to "Zedekiah", 'Yah is right / just'. Perhaps even Nebuchadnezzar perceived that Yahweh was judging Judah justly. But "Zedekiah" is also "Yahweh our righteousness", but his birth name was Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17). We wonder if this was a pre existing name given him by Josiah, and that Josiah named him this in keeping with his vision of reestablishing the Kingdom of God, based around a united Israel and Judah centered around worshipping Yahweh. For this is the term associated with king of the restored kingdom in Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 51:10. But he again was a case of wasted potential.

2Ki 24:18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah-

Hamutal his mother is severely criticized in Ez. 19 as an ambitious, aggressive and scheming mother lion who set up her young lion sons for destruction by wanting them to be kings. Instead they needed to heed Jeremiah's message and humble themselves before Babylon, realizing they had sinned, rather than trying to break away from Babylon to achieve the independent kingship their mother was so obsessed with.

2Ki 24:19 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that Jehoiakim had done-

2 Chron. 36:12 explains more: "He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh his God; he didn't humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking the words of Yahweh". The prophets "spoke from the mouth of Yahweh" Himself; and yet the people scoffed at them (2 Chron. 36:12,16 RV). The power of inspiration was and is so great; and to not heed God's word is therefore a personal affront to Him. And those words have been recorded. When we read His word, we hear His voice. 1 Kings 13:21 speaks of us hearing "the *mouth* of God". Jeremiah spoke "from the mouth of the Lord". His word brings Him that near to us, if we will perceive it for what it is. Jeremiah's appeals for Zedekiah to submit to Babylon were repeated so often (Jer. 21:1-7; 34:8-22; 37:1-10,17; 38:17-23).

And yet we wonder whether Zedekiah may have finally repented. For Ez. 21:14 speaks of Zedekiah as "the deadly wounded", likewise "You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come" (Ez. 21:25). The intention was that Zedekiah would die by the sword, but in fact he didn't. He was blinded, but died peacefully in prison (Jer. 52:11). The wound that ought to have been unto death was in fact not unto death- because God wanted him to be moved by His grace to repent. And the change of judgment upon him would suggest to me that he did repent. See on 2 Kings 25:7.

The implication is that he was intended to have learnt from the fate of Jehoiakim his half brother, but instead he acted just the same. God also brings people into our lives so that we might learn from their life path and destiny. We never specifically read of Zedekiah worshipping idols, and he hardly comes over as the worst of Judah's kings, but his "evil" was in the weakness of character which he displayed when faced with God's demand for him to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.

2Ki 24:20 For through the anger of Yahweh, it happened in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence-

Zedekiah's rebellion was purely of his own device. But he is described here as rebelling "through the anger of Yahweh"; God intended to pour out His wrath, and so His hand was in the rebellion of Zedekiah, using that man's freewill decisions although through Jeremiah pleading with him not to go that way. We marvel at the perfect balance and intimate involvement in the psychology and decision making of people.

That Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon-

2 Chron. 36:13 adds that "He also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart against turning to Yahweh". Turning to Yahweh with a soft heart therefore involved his accepting that Judah had sinned, and therefore their servitude to Babylon was the appropriate punishment. But egged on by his mother (see on 2 Chron. 36:11), Zedekiah broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, which he had made in the name of Yahweh. He thus despised the Name. The parable of Ez. 17:12-20 clearly condemns him for doing this (also Ez. 21:25). Ez. 17:14 explains the intention of God in all this: "That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand". The idea may be that it was God's plan that through keeping the covenant, the royal family and leadership would be humbled, and this would bring about God's favourite paradox- the brought down could then be exalted, "that... it might stand". See on Ez. 17:24. But they refused to repent, to be humbled, to be ashamed, and instead sought to wriggle out of the covenant by making agreements with Egypt to attack the Babylonian forces, liberate Jerusalem and perhaps later themselves from Babylon itself. Yet all these things had been explicitly promised to

Judah; God would do all these things, if they repented. But instead of doing so, they sought by all manner of desperate means to bring about this liberation in the strength of Egypt. This is so typical of human behaviour. It is for us to learn the lesson.

Ez. 17:15 commented: "Shall he who does such things escape? Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?". This is the language of Judah breaking covenant with God, just used in Ez. 16:59. God had designed the covenant between Zedekiah and the Babylonians, for the spiritual growth and repentance of the Jews. To break it was therefore to effectively break covenant with God. Or we could instead perceive that covenant breaking with God is reflected in covenant breaking with men. Our attitude to God becomes our attitude to men. Hence Ez. 17:19 specifically states: "Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely My oath that he has despised, and My covenant that he has broken, I will even bring it on his own head". Judah were light hearted in their attitude to everything; they "gave the hand" in covenant (Ez. 17:18) in order just to get "bread" (Lam. 5:6). They were in need, and instead of turning to God in repentance, they madly made promises of total loyalty to various peoples and their gods. It is this light hearted, not serious attitude, seeking for the immediate for the total sacrifice of principle, which dominates our age today.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 25

2Ki 25:1 It happened in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it around it-

These forts had been portrayed and 'built' by Ezekiel when he drew them upon a tile in an acted parable (Ez. 4:1-3). Had the earlier exiles in Babylon repented, then this would not have happened. Likewise if Zedekiah had repented, it would not have happened. We see here how God doesn't just let things happen in a disinterested way, allowing natural forces to take their course. What happened was so avoidable; Zedekiah's weakness could have been cancelled out, as it were, by the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel. And their refusal to repent could have been cancelled out by Zedekiah's repentance. Or if both of these elements failed, had the wealthy rulers of Jerusalem really let their slaves go free and not re-enslaved them, the siege could have been lifted. And there were other such factors and potential possibilities. Stubborn, proud refusal to bow our heads in repentance precludes so much from happening, and allows so much judgment to come which could have been averted.

2Ki 25:2 So the city was captured, by the eleventh year of king Zedekiah-

Literally, was entered. But “I will not enter into the city” (Hos. 11:9). But the enemies of Israel, manifesting God’s judgments, did enter into the city. The Hebrew words for “enter” and “city” occur together in several passages describing this (2 Kings 25:2; Jer. 32:24,29; 44:2; 52:5; Dan. 9:26; Joel 2:9). The promise that they would not was surely uttered in emotional passion; or at best it was conditional. Jer. 39:1,2 allows us to conclude that the city was besieged for exactly 18 months.

2Ki 25:3 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was severe in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land-

Jeremiah had earlier prophesied that many would die from famine and plague during

the siege. It was by special grace that Jeremiah in prison was given bread right up to the day that Jerusalem fell.

2Ki 25:4 Then a breach was made in the city-
The Babylonians made a breach in the wall to the north, from where the cherubim had left and would return. But Zedekiah tried to escape by digging a hole in the southern wall (Ez. 12:12). He did to the city what the Babylonians did. This "breach" is the same word used for the breaking up of things at the time of the flood (Gen. 6:11), a well established foretaste of the destruction of Jerusalem by the flood waters of the Babylonians, albeit with the promise of a new creation coming as a result of it.

And all the men of war fled by night-
Jer. 52:7 says that they "went out by night". "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain '"went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, who also went out at night, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). Zedekiah's experience of condemnation is presented as typical of every man condemned at the last day.

By the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden (now the Chaldeans were against the city around it)-
It seems Zedekiah had taken refuge in the temple. From there, he saw the princes of Babylon who had breached the northern wall and were now at the temple gate (Jer. 39:3). And so they fled by "the king's garden", which was his own private entrance to the temple, and then came to the double walls of the southern perimeter of the city. Zedekiah himself dug through those walls, the strongest point of his defence and human strength (Ez. 12:12). He was being taught that all human defence, and the physical temple, was not going to save him.

And the king went by the way of the Arabah-
The chalky depression into which the river Jordan ran.

2Ki 25:5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him-
The allusion is to how an Israel who broke covenant with their God would surely be overtaken by curses and judgment (Dt. 28:15). As his pursuers closed the distance between them and him, with him unable to gather more speed nor find a suitable place to run, now completely alone and without his bodyguards, he was a living exemplification of how Divine judgment will catch up with every man. He would then have dearly wished he had had the humility to listen to Jeremiah's pleas for repentance and submission. And he there was and is the exemplification of every man condemned before God.

The grace of Jesus framed the parable of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho in terms of Zedekiah's flight from Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:4); a man who had repeatedly spurned the offers God made to him through Jeremiah, and who was attacked on that road by the Babylonians (cp. the robbers). Yet the parable shows that Christ will graciously save even a man like that; for according to the parable, Zedekiah represents every one of us.

2Ki 25:6 Then they took the king, and carried him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment on him-
Zedekiah fled, was overtaken, wept (Ez. 7:27), judgment was given upon him (Jer. 52:9), he was punished in the presence of the king (Jer. 52:10), cast into prison (Jer. 52:11 cp. Mt. 5:25). He had his judgment in this life; and perhaps he may yet therefore be saved in the last day, seeing he apparently repented (see on :7; 2 Kings 24:19).

2Ki 25:7 They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon-
We wonder why Zedekiah was spared but his sons were not. I will suggest on 2 Kings 24:19 that he later repented, even though he refused to repent and humble himself before God's word when he ought to have done. His sons presumably were foreknown that they would not repent, and so they were slain. Perhaps seeing their deaths made Zedekiah realize that they were dying because he had not repented when he ought to have done; for it was his lack of repentance earlier which, he was told, would bring about the death of women and children. We may just possibly have some window here onto the terrible problem of the death of children.

Jer. 52:11 says that he was imprisoned, LXX "in the mill", as if he was in hard labour, now blinded, exactly like Samson (Jud. 16:21), and as the young men were made to (Lam. 5:13). And the similarities continued, in that it seems Zedekiah likewise did finally repent. Jer. 21:7; 27:13 had prophesied that Zedekiah would be slain by the sword of Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell. But Zedekiah wasn't slain by Nebuchadnezzar, but rather died in captivity. Perhaps he repented; or God chose to work out another path of judgment with Zedekiah which would achieve more glory for Him and His objectives than simply having him slain by the sword. The statement in Jer. 21:7 that Nebuchadnezzar would not show him "pity nor have mercy" and not spare him was therefore not fulfilled; because he was reflecting the God who had also said He would not spare or pity, but yet He did. I explained on Jer. 34:5 that Zedekiah died "in peace", peace with God, and the threatened judgments upon him weren't completely carried out- presumably because he did finally repent. If we are to finally repent, then let us repent now before suffering comes upon us to elicit that repentance.

The intensity of Samson's repentance was quite something. It must have inspired Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:11), who like Samson was bound (Jud. 16:21) and humbled (Jud. 16:5,16,19 AVmg.)- and then repented with a like intensity. And Zedekiah went through the same basic experience, of capture by his enemies, having his eyes put out, his capture attributed to false gods; and he likewise repented (2 Kings 25:7).

2Ki 25:8 Now in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, to Jerusalem-
Jer. 52:12 says "in the tenth day of the month". It could be that he arrived on the seventh day, and burnt the houses and temple (:9) on the tenth day. I suggested on Jer. 52:1 that the Kings record was as it were copied and pasted into the appendix to Jeremiah which we have in Jer. 52, so we could have here a simple error in copying.

2Ki 25:9 He burnt the house of Yahweh and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burnt he with fire-

Jeremiah earlier criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians, but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls (Jer. 33:4). Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

Jerusalem was threatened with the eternal fire of God's anger, due to the sins of Israel: "Then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:27). Jerusalem being the prophesied capital of the future Kingdom (Is. 2:2-4; Ps. 48:2), God did not mean us to read this literally. The houses of the great men in Jerusalem were burnt down with fire (2 Kings 25:9), but that fire did not continue eternally. Fire represents the anger/punishment of God against sin, but His anger is not eternal (Jer. 3:12). Fire turns what it burns to dust; and we know that the ultimate wages of sin is death, a turning back to dust. This perhaps is why fire is used as a figure for punishment for sin.

2Ki 25:10 All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem-
We note in the prophecies of Jer. 50 and Jer. 51 a special emphasis upon the breaking down of the walls of Babylon because of what they had done to Jerusalem, i.e. breaking down her walls. But we also observed on Jer. 51:44 that when the Medes took Babylon, the walls weren't broken down, and in fact they were only broken down bit by bit over the course of many years. So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. Vengeance or "recompense" was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

2Ki 25:11 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the residue of the people who were left in the city, and those who fell away, who fell to the king of Babylon, and the remainder of the multitude of the people-
Or as AVmg. "residue of the artificers" or workmen. I suggested elsewhere that these may have been those skilled in building the defences; or it could refer to those who were the makers of idols. See on Jer. 10:18.

2Ki 25:12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to work the vineyards and fields-
This was probably the majority of the population. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social*

Context of the Babylonian Exile (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed, hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple. See on Jer. 12:4; 13:19.

2Ki 25:13 The Chaldeans broke up the pillars of brass that were in the house of Yahweh and the bases and the bronze sea that were in the house of Yahweh, and carried the brass pieces to Babylon-
The breaking in pieces was likely for ease of transportation. But it also symbolized the ending of the temple system. Israel had broken the covenant, and the only way back to God was to be through repentantly accepting His new covenant, as explained on Jer. 31.

2Ki 25:14 They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the spoons, and all the vessels of brass with which they ministered-
These things were kept in Babylon and then sent back with the exiles, by the special decree of Cyrus. The new covenant offered to Israel at the time in Jer. 31 was not a repeat of the law of Moses, but it did include similar rituals. The worship system of Ez. 40-48 was command more than prediction, and it utilized these vessels.

2Ki 25:15 The captain of the guard took away the fire pans, the basins, whatever was of gold, and of silver-
We get the impression that an orderly inventory was kept, with the vessels divided up according to their metal. David's obsession with building the temple which God never wanted was so great, that he calculated the exact weight of gold for each vessel (1 Chron. 28:14). Even though this was not specified in the commands for building the tabernacle. 1 Kings 7:47 implies Solomon tried to calculate the total weight of all the vessels once they had been made, but the inventory was so huge that he left off. Yet so many vessels were not required by the tabernacle service. This was a completely different, grandiose religious system of David's own device; and in the end, all these vessels of mere religion were taken off into captivity (2 Kings 25:14-16 emphasizes this).

2Ki 25:16 The two pillars, the one sea and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of Yahweh, the brass of all these things was without weight-
Although as noted on :17, the gold and silver was apparently weighed, and the bronze pillars measured.

2Ki 25:17 The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and a capital of brass was on it; and the height of the capital was three cubits, with network and pomegranates on the capital around it, all of brass, similarly the second pillar with its network-
The capitals were placed on the tops of the pillars (as in 1 Kings 7:16). "Tops" is "heads", and the Hebrew for "capitals" suggests "crown". The height of the capitals is given as three cubits in 2 Kings 25:17, but five cubits in 2 Chron. 3:15. The difference would be whether the crowns ["capitals"] were measured to the peak of the highest spike of the crown, or the top of the rim of the crown. But the idea is that everywhere

in his house, Solomon had been glorifying his own kingship; forgetting that it was by grace, and conditional upon his obedience.

2Ki 25:18 The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest-
An ancestor of Ezra (Ezra 7:1).

And Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold-
The Zephaniah of Jer. 21:1 who refused to heed God's word and was associated with persecuting Jeremiah for speaking it (Jer. 29:25,29).

2Ki 25:19 and out of the city he took an officer who was set over the men of war; and five men of those who saw the king's face, who were found in the city; and the scribe, the captain of the army, who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the city-
Seven men in Jer. 52:25. 'The seven who saw the king's face' was likely a technical term for his immediate courtiers or politburo, although they may have only numbered five men. The sixty men were surely not arbitrarily chosen, but were likely the priests in the temple "in the midst of the city", perhaps those whom Ezekiel had seen offering incense to the sun god in the temple precincts.

2Ki 25:20 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah-
They were obviously seen as representative of the civil and religious leadership of Judah. It was deemed that they needed to be killed so that there was no leadership left; but this then makes it all the more amazing that Zedekiah was not killed as God had said he would be. It would seem that he was the logical one to die. We recall how when the Medes took Babylon, there was little bloodshed but king Belshazzar was slain. All this was to highlight to Zedekiah the amazing grace of his survival, and it seemed he did respond in repentance (see on :7).

2Ki 25:21 The king of Babylon struck them, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away captive out of his land-
See on :20. I noted on :12 that perhaps the majority of Judah remained in the land. For most of the population were the poor masses. But the exile and destruction of the leadership is seen as "Judah" being carried away captive. But perhaps the phrase is used in order to connect with the description of the ten tribe kingdom being carried away captive out of his land (Am. 7:11,17; 2 Kings 17:23). It was as if to put a final end to Judah's supposition that was somehow morally better than Israel. They shared an identical judgment.

Jehoahaz had been "deposed at Jerusalem" by Pharaoh Neco (2 Chron. 36:3) but put in bonds by him at Riblah (2 Kings 23:33), which was on the Orontes river on the road from Babylon to Palestine. This was the same place where Nebuchadnezzar was based during the destruction of Jerusalem, and where the captives were brought to him for judgment (2 Kings 25:20,21). The parallel is to show how Judah were intended to learn from their sufferings at the hands of the Egyptians and to repent. But they didn't, and so the situation repeated with the Babylonians.

2Ki 25:22 As for the people who were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor-
I suggested on :12 that the numbers remaining in the land were relatively large.

Ahikam, Gedaliah's father, had saved Jeremiah's life (Jer. 26:24). Jeremiah initially lived with Gedaliah once he became governor (Jer. 40:6).

2Ki 25:23 Now when all the captains of the bands of soldiers, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men-
Ishmael was later to murder Gedaliah, considering that he was the rightful king of Judah. It seems he had taken refuge with Baalis king of the Ammonites during the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 40:14).

2Ki 25:24 Gedaliah swore to them and to their men and said to them, Don't be afraid because of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you-
Gedaliah was advocating the earlier appeal of Jeremiah; if the people accepted they had sinned and willingly accepted the judgment for it, servitude of their enemies, then all would be well for them. They were not to fear the Babylonians; "because of the servants of the Chaldeans", referring to the various Babylonian garrisons now stationed throughout the land. "Amend" in the earlier appeals for repentance (e.g. Jer. 7:5) is the word here translated 'to do well to'. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

2Ki 25:25 But it happened in the seventh month-
Three months after the capture and two after the burning of the city.

That Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal seed, came with ten men and struck Gedaliah so that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldeans that were with him at Mizpah-
Ishmael was from the royal family, and therefore assumed that he ought to be the rightful ruler of Judah rather than Gedaliah, who was but a willing puppet of Babylon. But it was not then the time to restore the Kingdom and throne of David, and certainly not in the form of someone as deceitful as Ishmael. Ishmael clearly disbelieved the prophecies concerning the ending of the royal family. Perhaps Gedaliah's willing naivety about Ishmael in Jer. 40:16 was because he could not entertain any plan to slay a member of the royal family, remembering David's attitude to Saul.

They failed to accept that Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, doing His will, and therefore the appointment of Gedaliah was also sanctioned by God. Perhaps their game plan was that Baalis of Ammon would take over Judah, and Ishmael would be made the ruler (Jer. 40:14). People will commit murder and any manner of sin for the sake of dreams of power. If Ishmael truly wished to do the best for Judah by becoming their ruler, he surely would not have killed his fellow Jews. But he did so because he was working for the king of Ammon and was following his agenda, in hope of personal benefit and power thereby.

2Ki 25:26 All the people, both small and great, and the captains of the forces, arose and came to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans-
They ought not to have even though of going into Egypt, but should have trusted Yahweh's further grace to be shown to them, despite the foolish provocation of the

Babylonians by Ishmael; see on Jer. 42:2,12. Jeremiah was to assure them that in fact God's grace would continue to them through the grace of Nebuchadnezzar; he would not take revenge by slaying all Judah as they feared (Jer. 42:12). Fear is so often based upon lack of faith; and such fear can become gripping and all consuming. This fear of certain revenge proving unfounded, by God's grace, is what Jacob learnt after his sons pillaged Shechem. The surrounding tribes did not attack and destroy him, as he had thought would inevitably follow. The people went to Egypt, despite Jeremiah pleading with them to believe God's grace and remain in His land. He warned them that if they went to Egypt, they would go there to their condemnation. But they insisted on going there.

2Ki 25:27 It happened in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evilmerodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison-
Lifting up the head out of prison recalls Joseph (Gen. 40:13,20); for the similarities with Joseph, see on :29.

2Ki 25:28 He spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon-
There is no reason given for this amazing grace toward Jehoiachin, who would have been considered the legitimate king of Judah. The lack of explanation is perhaps to simply highlight that it was indeed pure grace. He may well have repented, but that is not mentioned. We get the impression that God pitied His people in their well deserved captivity- simply because He so loved them.

2Ki 25:29 and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life-
See on :30. The change of garments by the king would have recalled the experience of Joseph in Gen. 41:14. But Jehoiachin had not had the spirituality of Joseph, and he would have reflected upon that truth; and thereby perceived yet more the huge grace being shown him. We too may experience blessings which we are totally unworthy of, just so that we bow our heads in marvel at God's grace.

2Ki 25:30 For his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him of the king, every day a portion, all the days of his life-
Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him on his lower level.

Ezekiel had prophesied that those who survived the famine and invasion of Judah would go into captivity, "and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ez. 5:2,12). We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). I can only understand these things as pure grace. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved. And He

does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we *so* easily can end up abusing His grace likewise.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: 1 CHRONICLES

1 CHRONICLES

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 1

1Ch 1:1 Adam, Seth, Enosh-

We have to ask why these genealogies were prepared. It is quite likely that they were first formalized in the time of Hezekiah, but I would suggest that they were completed at the time of the restoration, when there was a problem in finding a High Priest and priesthood because it was hard to prove who was descended from Aaron, presumably because the genealogies were destroyed when the temple was burnt. The genealogies give much emphasis to the descendants of Aaron, far more than to the other tribes. There are a number of references to faithless men being punished by invasions (e.g. 1 Chron. 5:6). Ezra 8 contains a genealogy recorded in similar style and language to these in Chronicles. Nehemiah made a special study of the genealogies in order to find an acceptable priesthood (Neh. 7:5,64). So there were Israel returning from captivity, led by a faithful remnant of the priests, looking back through their history, right back to Abraham and beyond, and seeing that their history was shot through with failure. Such self-examination extended even to considering the names parents gave their children. Marriage out of the faith was a problem at the time of the restoration, and therefore the records of the genealogies stress how this had been a problem in the past- and had still not been forgotten by God (Ezra 9:1,2). The prophets foretold that Israel's restoration would only come once they achieved a suitable recognition of their sinfulness. And Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are without doubt applicable to the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's return; which means that Israel at the time of the restoration should represent us now, on the brink of the second coming and the full re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom. The coming of that blessed time may well be dependent upon our self-examination, to the point of really taking a breath when we realize the extent of our personal and collective shortcomings all down the years. The priests who wrote those records in Chronicles were writing down the result of their national self-examination. This was the record of their lessons from Chronicles. Each of the genealogies say something about the people they are concerned with; and thus 2 Chron. 12:15 RVmg. speaks of how the acts of Rehoboam are reflected in the reckoning of the genealogies.

1Ch 1:2 Kenan-

Perhaps this was from whom the faithful Heber the Kenite was descended (Jud. 4:11,17; Jud. 5:24).

Mahalalel, Jared-

Mahalalel is "Praise of God". It's questionable how much significance we should attach to the meaning of names; but this meaning would encourage us to again see some spirituality in the line of Seth. Jared had a child somewhat later in life (Gen. 5:18). Perhaps this reflects a lengthy search for a Godly wife; or perhaps his earlier children

were spiritual failures and weren't therefore the ones through whom the seed was to be preserved.

1Ch 1:3 Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech-
Adam Clarke and others see "Methuselah" as meaning something to the effect of "When he dies, it [or judgment] shall come". And he died in the year the flood came. Jude 14 mentions that Enoch prophesied of judgment to come upon the world of his day. This would suggest that there had been a revelation about the flood before Noah received the command to build the ark. He would've obeyed, encouraged by Methuselah. The threat of judgment was therefore hanging over the earth for many centuries before the flood came; they were a society without excuse, and the gradual falling away of the faithful until only Noah was left would've been an awful period to live through. And the days of Noah are as our last days.

We wonder why Lamech was not saved in the ark, and why he died relatively young (Gen. 5:26). We can assume that he fell away from the faith, whilst his father and son [Noah] remained faithful. To hold to the faith amidst such mass apostacy, including amongst your immediate family, is notable indeed. Or it could simply be that he died younger than the others because of persecution or natural causes.

Another alternative is that we are to understand 'comfort' in Gen. 5:29 as only one possible translation; the idea could be that Lamech hoped that his son Noah would be the one who would bring about repentance / changing in God regarding the curse upon the earth. In this case, we see Lamech hoping that this son of his would be the promised "seed of the woman" of Gen. 3:15, a Messiah figure. However, the Lamech of Gen. 5:28 may well be the Lamech of Gen. 4:18-22; both Lamechs are described as having Methuselah as their father. As often in early Genesis, this would be a case of one history being recorded in one chapter and then another one in the next- as with the two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2. In this case, if Lamech is the same Lamech, then Noah had very gifted and high flying siblings. His brother Jabal was the leader of the cattle owners (Gen. 4:20); his brother Jubal was the leading musician of the age (Gen. 4:21); Tubalcain his other brother was the leader of all the metalworkers. Lamech was the first polygamist, who killed a young man for a slight insult and boasted about it; and whose wife Adah means 'decorated / adorned'. These were people of the world. And Noah was the sidekick brother who was to do all the menial farm work so the rest of them could pursue their careers and social lives. Against this of course it can be argued that there are differences in the genealogies of Genesis chapters 4 and 5. However, in the context, Gen. 6:1-4 describes how the lines of Seth and Cain intermarried [the sons of God married the daughters of men] and it could be argued that the genealogies we have aren't complete, generations are skipped, and 'having a son' could be understood in a wider sense than referring to a son directly fathered by the person concerned. 'Lamech' in Hebrew is comprised of the three central letters of the Hebrew alphabet

and it could be argued that this reflects his 'joining' function [as it does in other Semitic literature], in joining the Sethite and Cainite lines together. The resemblances between the six names in Gen. 4:17,18 with six in chapter 5 is striking, and they both culminate in Lamech, as if he was the one in whom the lines mixed. Interestingly, Lamech in Gen. 4:24 speaks of 77 fold vengeance coming upon him; and the Lamech of Gen. 5:30 [the same Lamech?] dies at 777 years old. It also needs to be carried in mind that Semitic 'genealogies' aren't always chronological; they are constructed in order to make various points or develop themes, as in the genealogies of the Lord in Matthew and Luke.

1Ch 1:4 Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth-
Did Noah's parents expect Noah to be the child who would do all the hard menial work for them, so that they would suffer less from the curse placed upon the ground in Eden? This might explain why Noah had children when he was 500, far older than others of his time (Gen. 5:32- Noah's father had had his first children at 182, Gen. 5:28; Seth had his first child at 105, Gen. 5:6; Enos at 95, Gen. 5:9; Cainan at 70, Gen. 5:12; Mahalalel at 65, Gen. 5:15; Jared at 162, Gen. 5:18; Enoch at 65, Gen. 5:21; Methuselah at 187, Gen. 5:25); Gen. 6:18 implies that Noah only had three sons, whereas for people with such long life spans we'd have expected him to have had far more than that. He only had three children- for he prepared the ark to save "his house" (Heb. 11:7) and Gen. 7:1 is quite clear: "Go into the ark, you and *all* your household"- his whole household was his wife, three sons and their wives. Period. Perhaps we get the picture of a man who was the underdog, the farm worker, the sidekick of the family, whose own family life was delayed and limited by this background. Perhaps he turned to alcohol for comfort (hence Gen. 9:21). But it was he whom God chose to save, he alone who was righteous in that generation which perished. It was the quiet, broken man who was saved. The Hebrew word for "Comfort" [a play on 'Noah'] occurs later, when we read how God "repented" that He had made man (Gen. 6:6,7). Lamech's desire for 'comfort' was fulfilled but not as he imagined; not through his son being his personal slave, but rather in God changing His mind about humanity and making a new start. We get what we desire, in essence; and so we need to desire the right thing.

1Ch 1:5 The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras-
These and other names here occur in the list of nations in Ez. 38 who will invade Israel in the latter days, and we see that they are therefore all within the territory of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. And that is precisely the situation we see developing there today. The idea that "Japheth" refers to western Europe is mere fancy; the context here clearly explains that these are the nations living in the *eretz*. "Madai" refers to the Medes. "Tiras" is Tyre; and clearly Meshech refers to an area within the *eretz* and not to Moscow; and likewise with Tubal.

We note that out of Noah's three sons, fewest descendants are listed for Japheth. And there is no suggestion in this genealogy that they lived "in the tents of Shem", as Noah had predicted in his half drunken cursing of Ham and blessing of Japheth. This would suggest that his cursings were just that, the cursings of a man awaking with a hangover... and are not to be taken as actual prophecies of the future relationships between the sons.

1Ch 1:6 The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Diphath and Togarmah-
Ashkenaz was one of the nations which overthrew Babylon (Jer. 51:27). Again, we're dealing with a people within the *eretz* and not outside of it. I would argue that the Bible has very little to specifically say about the peoples beyond the *eretz*.

1Ch 1:7 The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim and Rodanim-
Tarshish is a relative of Togarmah (:6), Meshech and Tubal (:5). This confirms my suggestion on Ez. 38 that Tarshish is with the other invaders and not against them. Tarshish may be another name for Tyre. The Tel Amarna tablets mention some of these names as peoples in the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

1Ch 1:8 The sons of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan-
The Canaanites were therefore under Noah's curse to be subservient to Shem. But as discussed on Gen. 9, it's hard to know whether to take Noah's cursings as any more than the cursings of a man awaking from a drunken stupor.

Pan-Arabism will in the end come to its full term (however short-lived), in the final invasion of Israel. The Hebrew word translated “Libya” is also translated “Phut” or “Put”, which was another name for Libya in Bible times. “Mizraim” likewise is the Biblical name for Egypt. Significantly, Phut, Mizraim and Canaan were brothers (Gen. 10:6). There is therefore a strong and valid idea of Arab brotherhood between the Palestinian Arabs [i.e. the Arabs living in Canaan or the land of Israel] and the Arabs of Libya, Egypt and the other countries in the surrounding Arab world. The Babylonian invasion of Judah was a type of the invasion of Israel by latter day ‘Babylon’, which will bring on the return of Christ. But this invasion [as at the time of the Assyrian invasion of Israel] was really by a confederacy of nations- including the Ethiopians, Lydians, Egyptians and Libyans (Jer. 46:8,9 cp. Nahum 3:9). And history will repeat itself- in that these nations along with Babylon will invade Israel in the last days. But where history shall stop, the red line of human time come to a terminus, will be in the simple fact that this time, the Lord Jesus shall return to earth to establish God’s Kingdom here.

1Ch 1:9 The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raama and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba, and Dedan-
Sheba and Dedan are found in Ez. 38 as amongst the enemies of Israel in the last days; see on Ez. 38:13. The impression is given that all the nations surrounding Israel in the *eretz*, descendants of all three sons of Noah, will invade her in the last days.

1Ch 1:10 Cush became the father of Nimrod, who began to be a mighty one in the earth-
Nimrod founded Babel or Babylon (Gen. 10:10). The "top" or *rosh* of the Babel tower was to reach to heaven; as in Ez. 38:2, the *rosh* refers to a person who was being elevated, and we assume this person was Nimrod. Ham and his descendants were not therefore black Africans, as proposed by 19th century racist theologians. The connection is clearly with the "mighty ones" of Gen. 6:4, for whose sake the earth was destroyed by the flood. Again, the potential for restoring Eden was messed up by human dysfunction. The term is used of the 'mighty ones' of Canaan who were to be subdued (Josh. 6:2; Jud. 5:13,23). Israel in the wilderness listening to Moses' teaching would have learnt that there had been 'mighty ones in the land', the very land they were now approaching, who likewise would ultimately come to nothing.

The "mighty in the land" or *eretz* promised to Abraham had been the likes of the "giants" of Gen. 6:4; Nimrod / Assyria (Gen. 10:8); Babylon (Gen. 46:12) and indeed all the Gentile nations of the *eretz* (Ez. 32:27); but the hope of the promises to Abraham was and is that "*his* seed will be mighty in the land" (Ps. 112:2). There is to be a radical inversion of all things upon the earth.

Nimrod "the mighty hunter against the Lord" (Gen. 10:9 Heb.) uses a word related to 'Gibbor', the title of Christ used in Is. 9:6. Nimrod appears to be a prototype anti-God and anti-Christ, and for this he was well known even then. Gen. 10:10,11 shows his characteristic of building cities in the Babylon/Assyria area. Seeing that "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel" (Gen. 10:10), it is not unreasonable to assume that when "a man said to his neighbour, Go to, let us make brick" to build the tower of Babel, this is in fact referring to Nimrod (Gen. 11:3 A.V. mg.).

1Ch 1:11 Mizraim-
This is the usual word for "Egypt". The *eretz* extended to the river of Egypt, and so we can assume that this person lived in Egypt east of the Nile, rather than referring to "Egypt" as it is now defined.

Became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim-
Anamim may be related to the "anakim", the giant people who inhabited Canaan. This material reminded Israel of the origin of the peoples they were to encounter in Canaan. These people were mere men, descendants from the same Noah whom they too were

descended from; and whatever their size or physical features, they were not to be unduly feared. We note the absence of Divine names in nearly all the descendants of Noah here listed; in contrast to the way that they feature in the names of those before the flood. The impression we get is that Noah's descendants failed to keep the faith, until it had totally died out and God called Abram and revealed Himself to him.

1Ch 1:12 Pathrusim, Casluhim (where the Philistines came from) and Caphtorim-
As noted on :12, one intention of this genealogy was to assure Israel that the enemies they were encountering in the *eretz*, such as the Philistines, were mere men; there was nothing superhuman about them.

1Ch 1:13 Canaan became the father of Sidon his firstborn, Heth-
Sidon is known as a town in northern Palestine. Constantly, we encounter evidence that this genealogy describes the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham. Heth likewise lived in the land of Canaan (Gen. 25:3).

1Ch 1:14 the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgashite-
The Jebusites inhabited Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24:18), and so often the Hivites, Jebusites and Amorites are spoken of as the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. There is no way that Canaan therefore refers to Africa and negroid peoples.

1Ch 1:15 the Hivite, the Arkite, the Sinite-
These were the tribes through whom the Israelites would've travelled on their wilderness journeys; the Sinites lives around mount Sinai.

1Ch 1:16 the Arvadite, the Zemarite and the Hamathite-
Gen. 10:18 adds: "Afterward the families of the Canaanites were spread abroad". The same word is used for how the builders of Babel feared being "spread abroad" (Gen. 11:8), and yet they were "spread abroad" after the confusion of languages (Gen. 11:9). Again this is evidence that the genealogy of chapter 10 is descriptive of what came to pass after the Babel incident in chapter 11. We read there of how the situation in chapter 10 came about; see on :20. The same word is frequently translated "scattered", and usually refers to Divine judgment. So we could read this as meaning that the Canaanites were scattered, spread abroad, after Babel, in judgment for wanting to resist that judgment; and for wanting to build the blasphemous ziggurat, a massive temple system intending to place themselves as God Himself. There is reason to think that in the last days a similar structure will be built by the same ethnic groups in the same land... and likewise judged.

If we include Canaan himself, we have here a description of 12 tribes of Canaan. They were a fake, imitation Israel; and were to be superseded by the 12 tribes of Israel.

1Ch 1:17 The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram, Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech-
Wherever these peoples later lived, they were at this time all within the *eretz* promised to Abraham. "Aram" is the word usually translated "Syria". Job lived in the land of Uz. The Meshech of Ez. 38 is to be interpreted as some people within the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

1Ch 1:18 Arpachshad became the father of Shelah, and Shelah became the father of Eber-
"Shelah" like most of the names in this genealogy has a rather negative spiritual meaning; in this case, "missile". The impression given is that spirituality died out over these generations, until God started again with the call of Abram.

1Ch 1:19 To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg; for in his days the land was divided; and his brother's name was Joktan-
This "division" refers not to plate tectonics, but to the division of the earth according to language which we read of in Genesis chapter 11. The division of the *eretz* at Babel is therefore presented here as occurring four generations after the flood; although the Biblical genealogies frequently skip generations, and in this case, they must be compared with the information provided in Genesis 5 and 10.

1Ch 1:20 Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah-
More sons of Joktan are recorded than for any other in this genealogy. Yet his name means "made little"; perhaps we are to understand that the one who was somehow made little was the one who became great, in terms of descendants.

1Ch 1:21 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah-
"Hadoram" meaning "high place", we again get the impression of unspirituality amongst these peoples. This genealogy is explaining how indeed the descendants of Noah were scattered throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham after Babel; where they later may have migrated to isn't in view here. But it is also noteworthy that the children of Joktan would appear to be located in the Arabian peninsular and what is now Yemen. The southern borders of the *eretz* are hard to define; perhaps we are to include these areas within it.

1Ch 1:22 Ebal, Abimael, Sheba-

Most commentaries focus upon where these tribes ended up living later. But let's remember that we are here reading of how the descendants of Noah were scattered throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham after the events of Babel. Where they may have migrated to afterwards is not what is in view here.

1Ch 1:23 Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan-
There is a "Havilah" in :9, which may suggest that the lines of Ham and Joktan intermarried. This again would be evidence that the curses of Noah didn't come into effect; for he presupposed that the lines of descent from his sons would be distinct, especially between Ham and the others. According to LXX notes, this "Jobab" is the Job of the book of Job.

1Ch 1:24 Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah-
It should be noted that the Septuagint gives different ages and inserts other generations in genealogies such as this one. Yet the Septuagint is usually the version quoted by the inspired New Testament writers, including for passages where the Masoretic Text reads quite differently. This has large implications for the theory that Adam was created 4000 BC, and the six thousand year plan theory.

1Ch 1:25 Eber, Peleg, Reu-
The genealogies of Genesis 11 reveal how some human lives repeat according to the same outline schema. See on Gen. 11:10,14. Both Arphachsad and Shelah each lived 403 years after the births of the eldest sons.

1Ch 1:26 Serug, Nahor, Terah-
Peleg, Serug and Shelah were each 30 when their first sons were born (Gen. 11:14,18,22). We too can find uncanny similarities between our lives and those of others in the faith; or between our lives and Biblical characters. The same Divine hand is at work. Nahor therefore died at 148 (Gen. 11:25), the shortest liver among the post-flood patriarchs. We wonder why exactly that was... seeing that his grandson Abram was to be the one chosen. It perhaps made Abram reflect upon the brevity of life and the failure of idolatry to offer real salvation. It's a very strange 'co-incidence' (if that's indeed what it is) that Noah, Peleg and Nahor all died in the same year- when Abraham was about 50 years old, living in Ur. Whilst we have no evidence that these men were all living together, it's not impossible that they were. Perhaps they died in some calamity in Ur. So it could well be that the motive for leaving Ur in the first place was therefore mixed- it was fleeing from a material threat more than plain obedience to a Divine command. This would explain why the family settled in relatively nearby Haran, and remained there for so long.

1Ch 1:27 Abram (the same is Abraham)-
The meanings of Abraham's immediate ancestors all have associations with idolatry, confirming the note in Josh. 24:2 that Abram and his ancestors were idolaters. Out of that background, God chose a man who had the potential to be different. Another reading of "Terah" is that it means "One who tarries / remains", which would fit with his remaining in Haran and not going further towards Canaan.

1Ch 1:28 The sons of Abraham: Isaac, and Ishmael-
Ishmael was born before Isaac, but clearly Isaac is presented as Abraham's lead descendant.

1Ch 1:29 These are their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam-
I suggested on :1 that these genealogies were written up at the time of the exile, making them contemporary with the prophecies of later Isaiah about Nebaioth and Kedar being reconciled with Abraham's seed through Isaac and Jacob, and worshipping Yahweh together in a restored, multiethnic Kingdom of God in Israel (Is. 60:7).

1Ch 1:30 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema-
Dumah intermarried with the Edomites (Is. 21:11,12). These 12 tribes of Ishmael make them a pseudo Israel, and yet also, as Paul develops in Gal. 4, representatives of unbelieving Israel after the flesh.

The names of Ishmael's sons make a statement about their final acceptance in God's Kingdom, in language which is picked up in the later prophecies about them in Is. 60:6,7; 43:19,20: "In the high places a powerful people will experience a miracle of God. For they shall cause sweet odours to ascend, calling His fame to remembrance. Their burden will be lifted, they will become mighty in power, conquerors of the desert, strong in defence, numerous in population, at the forefront of the nations".

1Ch 1:31 Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael-
Ishmael is recorded as having 12 sons, who grew into tribes. This makes them a kind of parallel with the 12 sons and tribes of Jacob. But as noted on :29, one of the purposes of these genealogies was to persuade the exiles against their tendency to racial elitism, and to accept that all the tribes of the *eretz* promised to Abraham were Divinely intended to reconcile around Him in a restored kingdom of God. They were being reminded that they were in fact all very similar in their roots.

Abraham's prayer that Ishmael might be accepted into the covenant was heard [his name means 'God has heard']. The same promises were made to him as to Isaac; his 12 tribes (Gen. 17:20) could also have become some kind of people of God. But in this world, they chose not to; although for Abraham's sake, their latter day representatives will finally be saved.

1Ch 1:32 The sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bore Zimran, Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan-
These records seem to stress the weakness and occasional strength of these children of God. This is one of the major lessons from Chronicles. Every now and then, the list of names is interrupted by a piece of information which indicates God's awareness of their spirituality. For example, the fact some men had more than one wife or a wife from a nation other than Israel is often recorded (1 Chron. 1:32; 2:3,26,35,48; 4:18; 5:1; 7:14; 8:8). The way these interruptions occur in the lists of names stands out. This is surely to indicate two things: that many faithful men (e.g. Abraham and Caleb, 1 Chron. 1:32; 2:46) made mistakes in this area of life, and secondly that all down the centuries God has not forgotten that they married out of the faith, or that they allowed the pressures of their surrounding world to influence them to break away from the ideal one man: one woman standard of Eden. These two facts provide us with both warning and comfort, in that although God is sensitive to failure, He is still able to justify men, to count them as if they are righteous for the sake of their covenant relationship with Him, even though (e.g.) their married life was not completely in order.

1Ch 1:33 The sons of Midian: Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All these were the sons of Keturah-
Is. 60:6 and Ps. 72:10 envisage Ephah and other children of Keturah as ultimately saved along with Israel in the Kingdom age. The blessing upon Abraham will ultimately come true upon all his seed, by grace alone.

1Ch 1:34 Abraham became the father of Isaac. The sons of Isaac: Esau and Israel-
Isaac had no other recorded children, which is unusual for a wealthy man who lived a long time. This would reflect a great loyalty to Rebekah, in an age of polygamy.

1Ch 1:35 The sons of Esau: Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam and Korah-
The Eliphaz the Temanite of the book of Job, who it seems eventually came to know God through Job's forgiveness of him and prayer for him. So we see here how relationship with God skipped a generation, as often happens. Reuel is "Friend of God". We wonder if as with Eliphaz, this was another example of a spiritual person emerging from an unspiritual background and genealogy.

1Ch 1:36 The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, Timna and Amalek-
Amalek became a major enemy of Israel; but his father Eliphaz was a believer, if as suggested on :35 he is the Eliphaz of the book of Job. And so we see what is apparent in the records of the kings of Judah; good men have bad sons and bad men have good sons. Spirituality is personal and not inherited; and bad background is not an insurmountable handicap to faith and spirituality.

1Ch 1:37 The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizza-
Reuel, "friend of God", may have been a believer, despite having a father and mother (Gen. 36:10) and maternal grandmother who didn't want the things of the Kingdom promises. The new creation in Christ means that we are free of such background influences if we truly respond to the word of promise. But his sons weren't. For the names of the sons are distinctly unspiritual, especially bearing in mind the Semitic way of giving a name to a person which reflects their character. Respectively, these names mean "declining", "sun rising" and "wasting". Their birth names could have been recorded, but instead the names they were known by later are recorded.

1Ch 1:38 The sons of Seir: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer and Dishan-
Again the names are hardly suggestive of true spirituality; Dishon and Ezer respectively mean "the trampler", "man of treasure". "Dishan" is another form of "Dishon"; it would be likely that Dishon died prematurely and so was as it were replaced by Dishan. Anah could be a female name.

Gen. 36:20 adds: "These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah". The idea is that they were formerly the inhabitants of that land, but were driven out by the Edomites (Dt. 2:12,22), an encouragement to Israel in the wilderness who first heard Genesis to likewise drive out the tribes from their allotted possession as Edom / Esau had done. The sons of Seir are listed amongst the descendants of Esau perhaps on the basis of the idea that Gentile peoples were counted as his descendants, just as was to be true, in a different sense, of Abraham's true seed. As noted on :30, Esau's nation is portrayed as an imitation of the true people of God. Or it could be argued that the similarities are because God chose to bless Isaac's son in this life, but without the eternal and Messianic dimension which was attached to the line through Jacob.

1Ch 1:39 The sons of Lotan: Hori, and Homam; and Timna was Lotan's sister-
"Homam" means "raging anger", continuing the uncontrolled passion of the moment which was seen in Esau. We note the uncommon mention of a woman. Why this special mention of Timna ["restraint"] as being the aunty of "Heman", "raging anger"? Perhaps to

continue the theme developed here- that out of all this unspirituality and unrestrained human nature, there were various individuals who were different and rose above their surrounding environment. This is of huge encouragement to us today.

1Ch 1:40 The sons of Shobal: Alian, Manahath, Ebal, Shephi and Onam. The sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah-
Shobal = 'overflowing'; Alian = 'haughty'; Manahath = 'rest / peace'; Ebal = 'naked'; Shephi = 'naked'; Onam = 'strong man'. As noted on :39, in the midst of these names with sexual and other very human connotations, Manahath has a much nicer meaning. Perhaps again we have one spiritual person amongst unspiritual siblings.

1Ch 1:41 The son of Anah: Dishon. The sons of Dishon: Hamran, Eshban, Ithran and Cheran-
Hamran = 'desirable wine' (s.w. Is. 27:2 AV "red wine"); Eshban = 'vigorous growth'; Ithran = 'excess'; Cheran = 'angry'. We have the same idea as noted on :37,38; in the midst of very unspiritual names, we have one which speaks of something positive, of growth. Out of all this unspirituality and unrestrained human nature, there were various individuals who were different and rose above their surrounding environment. This is of huge encouragement to us today.

1Ch 1:42 The sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan and Jaakan. The sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran-
Bilhan = 'humble'; Zaavan = 'not at peace'; Jaakan = 'twister'. As noted on :41, we again have here one spiritual name in the midst of very unspiritual ones, remembering that names were attached to individuals according to what they were known well for. See on :39.

1Ch 1:43 Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel: Bela the son of Beor; and the name of his city was Dinhabah-
This seems a rather irrelevant statement- until it is appreciated that the point is being made that Israel's desire for a king was influenced by the fact the surrounding peoples had them. However, the reference could be to Moses as "king" of Israel effectively (Dt. 33:5), and the idea may simply be that this was how things were before the time of Moses. The list of kings we now have could be a chronological list of those who reigned in the area up until the time of Moses and the book of Genesis being completed.

1Ch 1:44 Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place-
The Septuagint states that Job was the "Jobab" of 1 Chron. 1:44,45, who lived five

generations after Abraham. Again we see how individuals amongst the otherwise unspiritual line of Esau did turn to the true God and were accepted in covenant relationship; some of the names and localities of his three friends also occur in this list of Esau's descendants and associates. In this case we marvel at the spiritual growth of Job, coming from such an unspiritual background, with the previous king living in a city called "Robbers' den" (:43).

1Ch 1:45 Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place-
Teman is apparently near Petra and Mount Paran (Hab. 3:3), as is Dinhabah (:43). We can therefore assume that Job lived in that area too.

1Ch 1:46 Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who struck Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place; and the name of his city was Avith-
Israel in the wilderness also smote Midian (Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:21). The fact others had "struck Midian" was therefore recorded as encouragement to them; and we too are intended to be inspired by Biblical history, realizing that our experiences are not totally unique, but in essence are repetitions of Biblically recorded situations and past victories.

1Ch 1:47 Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place-
Masrekah means "vineyards" and we assume he was famed for his wine; contributing to the generally negative spiritual tone found in most of these names. "Samlah" likewise means 'mantle', perhaps a referring to the mantles used in religious rituals.

1Ch 1:48 Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth by the River reigned in his place-
"The river" is the Euphrates, which formed the boundary of the promised land; again the impression is given that the people of Esau chose to live outside the promised land.

1Ch 1:49 Shaul died, and Baal Hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place-
Strong offers "possessor of grace" as the meaning of Baal Hanan, which would fit in with the theme of there being occasionally very spiritual people amongst the otherwise unspiritual line of Edom, encouraging us also to rise up against the factors of environment and hereditary; for his father Achbor means 'attacker'. But it could equally mean the Baal or Lord of Canaan, even though they were not in Canaan.

1Ch 1:50 Baal Hanan died, and Hadad reigned in his place; and the name of his city was Pai: and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab-

More detail is given about this Hadad. I suggested on :43 that this list of kings could be a chronological list of those who reigned in the area up until the time of Moses and the book of Genesis was completed. Hadad would be "the king of Edom" with whom Israel had dealings in Num. 20:14.

1Ch 1:51 Hadad died. The chiefs of Edom were: chief Timna, chief Aliah, chief Jetheth-
There are only 11 recorded here compared to the 14 earlier in this chapter and in Gen. 36. This could be because some were assimilated into others; or because what we now read is a list of their localities rather than of individuals, and there may have been more than one "chief" within the same single locality.

1Ch 1:52 chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon-
Oholibamah ['tent of the high places'] was a woman, and I suggested on :38 that Anah was also a female chief. Elah = 'oak tree', associated with paganic shrines; Pinon = 'distracted'. All evidence of paganism and unspirituality.

1Ch 1:53 chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar-
Kenaz = 'hunter'; Teman = 'stronger', Mibzar = 'strong hold'; all the language of human strength and prowess. See on :54.

1Ch 1:54 chief Magdiel, chief Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom-
Iram = 'wisdom of the city'. The names of the other chiefs in :52 and :53 were all very unspiritual and some have definite paganic hints. Therefore Magdiel, 'precious to God', stands out in its meaning. Again, we are being shown that out of an unspiritual lineage, family and environment, individuals can be transformed and overcome all that to be part of God's covenant purpose. This is significant encouragement for we today who can feel swamped by unspiritual environments.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 2

1Ch 2:1 These are the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun-
This list is not by order of birth, but is split up according to the mothers. It begins with the six sons of the first wife Leah; then the older son of Rachel's handmaid Bilhah; the two sons of the favourite wife Rachel; the other son of Rachel's handmaid Bilhah; and finally the two sons of Zilpah, handmaid of Leah.

1Ch 2:2 Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher-
We note the inclusion of Dan in the list when he is later excluded in such lists. At this point, the genealogy is a statement of fact rather than theological interpretation.

1Ch 2:3 The sons of Judah: Er, Onan and Shelah; which three were born to him of Shua's daughter the Canaanitess. Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of Yahweh; and He killed him-
More detail will be given to the children of Judah, because these genealogies were written up for the exiles of Judah in Babylon. And the descendants of Judah are given first. But lest there be any idea that Judah was somehow spiritually superior, the genealogy starts with a clear recollection that Judah was far from a spiritual man.

1Ch 2:4 Tamar his daughter-in-law bore him Perez and Zerah. All the sons of Judah were five-
Gen. 38:29 gives the background: "It happened, as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out, and she said, Why have you made a breach for yourself? Therefore his name was called Perez". The theme of the second born being the chosen one continues. It was accepted that Perez was the one in the line of the Messianic seed and that this pregnancy was of God (Ruth 4:12), even though he was not technically the firstborn. "Made a breach" is literally 'to spread abroad', and is the word used in the promises of how the Messianic seed was to break forth or spread abroad (Gen. 28:14).

1Ch 2:5 The sons of Perez: Hezron, and Hamul-
"Hamul" means 'The one who was spared', which rather suggests he too had sinned like Er and Onan, but was spared by grace. Again, we hardly get a very positive spiritual impression of Jacob's family. They were saved by grace.

1Ch 2:6 The sons of Zerah: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol and Dara; five of them in all-
Calcol and the other names mentioned in 1 Kings 4:31 as wise men are all mentioned in 1 Chron. 2:6 as sons of Zerah, men of Judah. The idea of 1 Kings 4:30,31 is that Solomon's wisdom exceeded that of famous Gentile wise men, and also of the wise men of Judah. "Ethan the Ezrahite" of 1 Kings 4:31 and Ps. 89:31 is this Ethan; "Ezrahite" is "Zarhite", or descendant of Zerah.

1Ch 2:7 The sons of Carmi: Achar the troubler of Israel, who committed a trespass in the devoted thing-
This is alluded to in Prov. 15:27: "He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house". The initial reference would be to Achan who loved and coveted wealth and thereby troubled Israel and his own house (s.w. 1 Chron. 2:7).

1Ch 2:8 The son of Ethan: Azariah-
The wise spiritual man (see on :6) had but one son , "Yah has helped". Perhaps that was enough for him, or maybe this is the one son who was faithful.

1Ch 2:9 The sons also of Hezron, who were born to him: Jerahmeel, Ram and Chelubai-
The descendants of the younger brother Ram are given first because they include David. "Chelubai" is "Caleb" (:42).

1Ch 2:10 Ram became the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, prince of the children of Judah-

Amminadab, the generous kinsman like Boaz (see on Ruth 4:19), had a descendant called Nahshon, meaning 'snake'. The abrupt juxtaposition is so that we understand that spirituality is not at all inherited genetically. It is a case of consciously choosing to follow good examples.

1Ch 2:11 and Nahshon became the father of Salma, and Salma became the father of Boaz-
Mt. 1:5 says that Salmon ["Salma"] had Boaz by Rahab. Yet Rahab lived some time earlier. I therefore suggest that Salmon was the ancestor of Boaz [not the literal father], through the child he had from Rahab. This is mentioned to highlight the fact that Boaz was descended from Rahab, and therefore was generous to the strangers and saw nothing wrong with a Moabitess marrying into the congregation of Yahweh.

1Ch 2:12 and Boaz became the father of Obed, and Obed became the father of Jesse-
I noted on Ruth how the nameless relative of Ruth refused to redeem her lest he mar the inheritance for his sons. But that petty materialist remains anonymous, as will countless millions of others like him; whereas Boaz, who was prepared for love's sake to further divide his inheritance, goes down in perpetuity as the ancestor of David and the Lord Jesus.

1Ch 2:13 and Jesse became the father of his firstborn Eliab, Abinadab the second, Shimea the third-
His sons generally have spiritual names, surely reflective of his faith. This contrasts with the genealogy and names of the background family of Saul in 1 Chron. 8,9.

1Ch 2:14 Nethanel the fourth, Raddai the fifth-
Raddai may be the Rei of 1 Kings 1:8, one of David's warriors.

1Ch 2:15 Ozem the sixth, David the seventh-
In 1 Chron. 2:15, David is placed seventh of seven sons, but elsewhere eighth of eight (1 Sam. 14:10,11; 17:12). Perhaps the eighth son was the Elihu of 1 Chron. 27:18. Or perhaps one of the sons died without children, and is therefore not included in 1 Chron. 2:15.

1Ch 2:16 and their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. The sons of Zeruiah: Abishai, Joab and Asahel, three-
David several times laments the hardness of heart to be seen in "the sons of Zeruiah". I assumed that Zeruiah was a man- until considering 1 Chron. 2:16, which says that Zeruiah was a sister of David. Joab was his nephew or cousin. The fact that the hardness of those three men seems to be associated with their mother would lead us to conclude that David's sister Zeruiah was an extremely hard woman. Her name "wounded" means that she may have been a hurt person who was therefore hard to everyone else. Inevitably there must have been strands of hardness in David too (consider his treatment of Uriah, his intended massacre of Nabal's encampment, torturing the Ammonites etc.); and yet more often than not, we get the impression that David was a real softy. His experience of life made him progressively more soft, whilst his sister and nephews went the other way. Truly could he comment towards the end of it all: "Your gentleness has made me great". We need to soberly consider the fact that we are either getting harder, or softer. There is no in between status. The softness and gentleness of the Lord Jesus, the great antitype of David, mixed as it was

with that firmness of resolve and purpose (remember how He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem!) is surely something to really appreciate about Him, something to rise up to, to be truly inspired by.

1Ch 2:17 Abigail bore Amasa; and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite-
David's sister therefore had a relationship with a non Israelite. Again we see the theme of spiritual weakness in these genealogies. See on :18.

1Ch 2:18 Caleb the son of Hezron fathered children by Azubah his wife, and by Jerioth; and these were her sons: Jesher, Shobab and Ardon-
Heb. "took Azubah the wife of Jerioth"; as on :17,21 we have the theme of marital and sexual weakness in the family of Israel, and David in particular at this point. Hezron the grandson of Judah was one of those who went down into Egypt with Jacob (Gen. 46:12,26). Yet Caleb son of Jephuneh was 40 when the people left Egypt (Josh 14:7). So the Caleb in view is not the son of Jephuneh who spied out the land.

1Ch 2:19 Azubah died, and Caleb took to him Ephrath, who bore him Hur-
Ephrath was the early name of David's home town of Bethlehem, named after a woman (cp. Mic. 5:1).

1Ch 2:20 Hur became the father of Uri, and Uri became the father of Bezalel-
This is the Bezaleel who helped make the tabernacle (Ex. 31:2). If Caleb of :19 is indeed the famous Caleb (but see on 1 Chron. 2:18), he was only 40 when he first spied out the land (Josh. 14:7), and Bezaleel was his grandson and made the tabernacle that same year. In this case Bezaleel was little more than a child. This would be typical of how God works through the weak and those considered inappropriate by men. He gave His Spirit to the young Bezaleel, who may have been only 12 years old, and through him built His dwelling place. We can be sure there would have been many older and experienced builders, who had worked for the Egyptian building projects, who would have been far more qualified in secular terms.

1Ch 2:21 Afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir the father of Gilead, whom he took as wife when he was sixty years old; and she bore him Segub-
As on :17,18 we have the theme of marital and sexual weakness in the family of Israel, and David in particular at this point. From 1 Chron. 7:14 we learn that Machir was Manasseh’s oldest son by a Syrian, Gentile woman. It was the Divine intention that marriage should be within the tribes of Israel so as to keep the inheritance which God intended. But here we have Manasseh and Judah intermarrying.

1Ch 2:22 Segub became the father of Jair, who had twenty-three cities in the land of Gilead-
This is the judge of Jud. 10:3,4. Some claim that the Bible doesn't recognize genealogy through women, and find some problem in the Lord Jesus being descended from Abraham and David through a woman. But there are Biblical examples of genealogy being reckoned through a woman. We have one here. Jair's father was of the tribe of Judah (1 Chron. 2:22); yet in Num. 32:41 he is described as "the son of Manasseh", showing that his mother must have been of the tribe of Manasseh. His descent was reckoned for some reason through his mother rather than his father.

1Ch 2:23 Geshur and Aram took the towns of Jair from them, with Kenath, and its

villages, even sixty cities. All these were the sons of Machir the father of Gilead-
Heb. “the tent-villages of Jair"; "cities" is used not quite how the word is in modern English. The record of the loss of inheritance to Gentiles is again an example of spiritual weakness being recorded in the genealogies.

1Ch 2:24 After that Hezron was dead in Caleb Ephrathah, then Abijah Hezron’s wife bore him Ashhur the father of Tekoa-
The sense of the Hebrew may be as in LXX “And after Hezron was dead Caleb went in to Ephrath [:19] his father Hezron’s wife and she bare him...”. Again, we are seeing the record of spiritual weakness, especially in the area of sexual relationships. Hur was Ephratah's firstborn (1 Chron. 4:4), so Ashhur would have been Hur's younger brother.

1Ch 2:25 The sons of Jerahmeel the firstborn of Hezron were Ram the firstborn, Bunah, Oren, Ozem and Ahijah-
"Ozen and Ahijah" could be as LXX "Ozem his brother. Jerahmeel settled in the south of Judah (1 Chron. 27:10; 30:29).

1Ch 2:26 Jerahmeel had another wife, whose name was Atarah; she was the mother of Onam-
Again we note the record of weakness in the area of sexual relationships. The point is that out of all this background weakness there arose the people of Judah and David the man after God's own heart. We cannot blame bad background for our lack of spirituality.

1Ch 2:27 The sons of Ram the firstborn of Jerahmeel were Maaz, Jamin and Eker-
*"*Eker" is s.w. Lev. 25:47, and may mean 'a transplanted person', as if this was an adopted Gentile son. All the genealogies, not least those of the Lord Jesus, make the point that there was much Gentile blood in "Israel"; they were identified as God's people by faith and culture, and not on ethnic grounds.

1Ch 2:28 The sons of Onam were Shammai and Jada. The sons of Shammai: Nadab and Abishur-
"The sons of Shammai" is not in all the manuscripts, in which case Nadab and Abishur are two other sons of Onam.

1Ch 2:29 The name of the wife of Abishur was Abihail; and she bore him Ahban and Molid-
This unusual mention of the wife's name would imply special recognition of her. The Bible is remarkably respectful and inclusive of women when compared to contemporary writings.

1Ch 2:30 The sons of Nadab: Seled and Appaim; but Seled died without children-
To die without children was seen as a curse for unfaithfulness, so maybe this is yet another hint at the weakness of the Jewish fathers.

1Ch 2:31 The sons of Appaim: Ishi. The sons of Ishi: Sheshan. The sons of Sheshan: Ahlai-
In :34 we read that Sheshan had no sons, only daughters. Perhaps Ahlai had died by the point of summary given in :34. Or maybe "Ahlai" was a woman's name, and

"sons" means 'descendants' rather than males [there are other examples of this].

1Ch 2:32 The sons of Jada the brother of Shammai: Jether and Jonathan; and Jether died without children-
Israel's sinfulness seems to be emphasized in 'interruptions' in the flowing list of names. Thus it is sometimes stressed that a man did not have many children (e.g. 1 Chron. 2:4,6,16,32,34; 4:27), as if to indicate that God's blessing was not with him (there seems an undoubted connection in Old Testament times between blessing and number of sons).

1Ch 2:33 The sons of Jonathan: Peleth and Zaza. These were the sons of Jerahmeel-
"Peleth", 'the one who fled', would suggest spiritual weakness; for it was only an Israel who had broken covenant who would flee before their enemies.

1Ch 2:34 Now Sheshan had no sons, but daughters-
See on :31.

Sheshan had a servant, an Egyptian, whose name was Jarha-
Occasionally there are implications of spiritual strength in the records (e.g. 1 Chron. 4:10). And more than this; several times the apparent weaknesses of men are covered over by God's imputed righteousness, and because God saw the ultimate end. Thus Boaz's marriage to a Gentile is not recorded; simply "Boaz begat Obed" (1 Chron. 2:12), whereas others' marriage out of the faith is recorded in the same chapter (1 Chron. 2:3,34). In harmony with this theme of imputed righteousness, there is no mention of Dan in these genealogies of the tribes of Israel- because the serpent was his symbol? (Dan is likewise omitted in Rev. 7:4).

1Ch 2:35 Sheshan gave his daughter to Jarha his servant as wife; and she bore him Attai-
Sheshan was so desperate for a line of descendants that he gave his daughter to a Gentile to marry. Yet again, an indication of spiritual weakness.

1Ch 2:36 Attai became the father of Nathan, and Nathan became the father of Zabad-
Possibly the Zabad who was one of the mighty men of David (1 Chron. 11:41).

1Ch 2:37 Zabad became the father of Ephlal, Ephlal became the father of Obed-
Zabad is in the 14th generation from the patriarch Judah, and this would make him roughly of the same generation as David.

1Ch 2:38 Obed became the father of Jehu, Jehu became the father of Azariah-
"Obed", 'the servant', may mean that he was treated as a family servant because he was the youngest son, or that he was the son of a servant woman- again, an indication of spiritual weakness. And yet he had a son whom he named "Jehovah is he!" ('Jehu').

1Ch 2:39 Azariah became the father of Helez, Helez became the father of Eleasah-
We note in this line that the names are generally spiritual or include the 'Yah' prefix or suffix.

1Ch 2:40 Eleasah became the father of Sismai, Sismai became the father of Shallum-

It is hard to know with these Hebrew names whether they were really given at birth, or whether the person's subsequent character and life experience became the name by which they were known. The Hebrew concept of a 'name' would suggest the latter, and even in English, people were known by the name of 'shepherd' or 'smith' or 'joiner' because that was what they did in their lives. But see on :41,43.

1Ch 2:41 Shallum became the father of Jekamiah and Jekamiah became the father of Elishama-
Names like 'Yah will rise' ['Jekamiah'] and 'God of hearing' ['Elishama'] suggest these were names given at birth, in hope and thankfulness on the part of the parents; whereas other names apparently arose in reflection of the person's character and life experience. See on :40.

1Ch 2:42 The sons of Caleb the brother of Jerahmeel were Mesha his firstborn, who was the father of Ziph. The son of Mareshah was Hebron-
The question is whether this is the same Caleb of the time of Joshua, who appears in view in :49 as the father of Achsah. But it could be a different Caleb, who also had a daughter called Achsah, in imitation of the earlier Caleb. I would think not, if this is the Caleb son of Hezron of :18. Hezron the grandson of Judah was one of those who went down into Egypt with Jacob (Gen. 46:12,26). Yet Caleb son of Jephuneh was 40 when the people left Egypt (Josh 14:7). So the Caleb in view is not the son of Jephuneh who spied out the land. .

1Ch 2:43 The sons of Hebron: Korah, Tappuah, Rekem and Shema-
"Korah" means 'bald', and would support the suggestion made on :40 that some names reflect character and life experience, rather than the birth name given by the parents.

1Ch 2:44 Shema became the father of Raham, the father of Jorkeam; and Rekem became the father of Shammai-
Who would name a child "destructive" ['Shammai'] at birth? I suggest as on :40 that many of these names reflect character and life experience, rather than the birth name given by the parents. And this is the basis upon which we shall be given a unique name in the Kingdom age, only appreciated by us and the Father and Son.

1Ch 2:45 The son of Shammai was Maon; and Maon was the father of Beth Zur-
"Maon", 'residence', and Beth Zur ['house on a rock'] have homes as a common theme. We see the concerns of the family reflected in the choice of names over the generations.

1Ch 2:46 Ephah, Caleb's concubine, bore Haran, Moza and Gazez; and Haran became the father of Gazez-
These records seem to stress the weakness and occasional strength of these children of God. This is one of the major lessons from Chronicles. Every now and then, the list of names is interrupted by a piece of information which indicates God's awareness of their spirituality. For example, the fact some men had more than one wife or a wife from a nation other than Israel is often recorded (1 Chron. 1:32; 2:3,26,35,48; 4:18; 5:1; 7:14; 8:8). The way these interruptions occur in the lists of names stands out. This is surely to indicate two things: that many faithful men (e.g. Abraham and Caleb, 1 Chron. 1:32; 2:46) made mistakes in this area of life, and secondly that all down the centuries God has not forgotten that they married out of the faith, or that they allowed

the pressures of their surrounding world to influence them to break away from the ideal one man: one woman standard of Eden. These two facts provide us with both warning and comfort, in that although God is sensitive to failure, He is still able to justify men, to count them as if they are righteous for the sake of their covenant relationship with Him, even though (e.g.) their married life was not completely in order. Some of the names given to children seem to hint at a weakness in the parents. One wonders why Caleb called his illegitimate son "Haran", after the city which Abraham left behind in order to attain God's promises. .

1Ch 2:47 The sons of Jahdai: Regem, Jothan, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah and Shaaph-
"Jahdai" is about the closest Hebrew term for 'Judaism', literally a fullness of the things of Judah. We presume this person was one of the offspring of Caleb's various relationships with concubines.

1Ch 2:48 Maacah, Caleb's concubine, bore Sheber and Tirhanah-
"Maacah" means 'depressed', and gives weight to the suggestion discussed on :40 and elsewhere that Hebrew names were often a reflection of character and life experience, rather than the birth name given by the parents.

1Ch 2:49 She bore also Shaaph the father of Madmannah, Sheva the father of Machbena, and the father of Gibea; and the daughter of Caleb was Achsah-
This makes us think that this is the same Caleb of the time of Joshua, but it could be a different Caleb, who also had a daughter called Achsah, in imitation of the earlier Caleb. See on :18; although this may be a different Caleb.

1Ch 2:50 These were the sons of Caleb, the son of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah: Shobal the father of Kiriath Jearim-
The definition of "Caleb" is make complicated here because there appear to be men of the same name (see on :18), and one of them sought to imitate the earlier Caleb of Joshua's time (:49).

1Ch 2:51 Salma the father of Bethlehem, Hareph the father of Beth Gader-
"Father" here may refer not to having literal children, but to being the founder of towns such as Bethlehem. This is made explicit in :52.

1Ch 2:52 Shobal the founder of Kiriath Jearim was the ancestor of the people Haroeh and half of the people of Menuhoth-
The text is difficult. It could be "Who provided for half the resting-places", as if Shobal set up the resting stations for the caravans which passed through the territory of Judah. Cp. similar details (cp. 1 Chron. 4:21-23). Seraiah was called 'Prince of the resting-places' (Jer. 51:59 Heb.). This may have been of interest to the exiles who may have stopped at these places on their journey into exile.

1Ch 2:53 The families of Kiriath Jearim: The Ithrites, Puthites, Shumathites and the Mishraites; of them came the Zorathites and the Eshtaolites-
The faithful Ithrites (2 Sam. 23:38) were from Kirjath Jearim (1 Chron. 2:53), perhaps converted to a more spiritual outlook by the long presence of the ark amongst them (1 Sam. 7:2).

1Ch 2:54 The sons of Salma: Bethlehem and the Netophathites, Atroth Beth Joab, and

half of the Manahathites, the Zorites-
Being a 'father' and having 'sons' here may refer not to having literal children, but to being the founder of towns such as Bethlehem. This is made explicit in :52. See there for another reading of the text "half of...".

1Ch 2:55 The families of scribes who lived at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites who came of Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab-
Jabez was a man from Judah (1 Chron. 4:9). The previous verses have been talking of the towns and settlements founded by men of Judah, so perhaps the idea is that he established a place for the scribes in his home area. The Rechabites were well known at the time of the exile (Jer. 35:2), and here we learn of their origin; as Gentiles from Hammath, Kenites, who came to live with the scribes in a place set up for them by Jabez. And they remained more faithful to the law than Israel did.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 3

1Ch 3:1 Now these were the sons of David, who were born to him in Hebron: the firstborn, Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the second, Daniel, of Abigail the Carmelitess-
"Daniel", 'God is judge', is an understandable name for David to choose at a time when he was under persecution from Saul and opposition from the house of Saul to whom he had been so gracious. He was trying to learn to leave judgment to God, although his imprecatory Psalms seem to struggle at leaving things at that.

1Ch 3:2 the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith-
We note David early in his reign had relations with a Gentile woman, daughter of a Gentile king. It is unsurprising that Solomon repeated this error, also early in his reign, by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. Whilst spirituality isn't genetic, it is true that unspiritual attitudes pass on very easily from fathers to sons.

1Ch 3:3 the fifth, Shephatiah of Abital; the sixth, Ithream by Eglah his wife-
Solomon wished to imitate his father David in every sense; his own real personality only really came out in the Ecclesiastes years, when he took to drink, materialism, women and idolatry. It took the influence of his parents many years to wear off. David had weaknesses for horses (2 Sam. 8:4) and many wives; and Solomon followed in these steps too. Note that David had six sons in seven years by six different women, including Gentiles (1 Chron. 3:3). And in addition to these, David had children by “the concubines” (1 Chron. 3:9). Doubtless Solomon reasoned, albeit deep within his psyche, that such behaviour was legitimate because David his father had done it. David seems to have over interpreted the promises made to him about Solomon and the temple, and assumed that his interpretation was certainly correct. And Solomon did exactly the same. The weaknesses of the parents all too easily are repeated by the children to an even greater extent.

1Ch 3:4 Six were born to him in Hebron; and there he reigned seven years and six months. In Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years-
David was 30 when he became king (2 Sam. 5:4), meaning he lived 70 years. But we must be aware that time periods are often used symbolically or generally. For David,

Saul and Solomon are all said to have reigned 40 years. The period of 40 years assigned to Absalom in 2 Sam. 15:7 has to be read less than literally.

1Ch 3:5 These were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, Shobab, Nathan and Solomon, four, of Bathshua the daughter of Ammiel-
This could imply that Bathsheba had no other children before those she had by David. This means that she may have been barren until that point; her conception was certainly brought about by God. Was it that they would both have been aware of the unlikelihood of her bearing children, and therefore perhaps more inclined to take a chance?

1Ch 3:6 and Ibhar, Elishama, Eliphelet-
Eliphelet, "God of deliverance", was to celebrate God's deliverance of David. But he died in childhood (see on :8), perhaps to remind David that God doesn't always deliver as we expect.

1Ch 3:7 Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia-
The lists in 1 Chron. 3:5-8; 14:4-7 mention two more sons than we find in 2 Sam. 5:15, Eliphalet or Elpalet and Nogah. Perhaps they are omitted here because they died in infancy, and that the second Eliphalet was named after his dead brother.

1Ch 3:8 Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet, nine-
The two sons named Eliphelet (:6) presumably means that one died and was replaced by another son of the same name.

1Ch 3:9 All these were the sons of David, besides the sons of the concubines; and Tamar was their sister-
See on :3. The repeated reference to the possession of concubines can be read as an indication of Israel's weakness in abandoning the ideal standards of God regarding marriage. Yet we read that even David had concubines- as if to show the extent of Israel's weakness in the area of marriage.

1Ch 3:10 Solomon's son was Rehoboam, Abijah his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son-
The kings of Judah all have, for the most part, the 'Yah' prefix or suffix. Rehoboam stands out as an exception, as does Manasseh and Amon.

1Ch 3:11 Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son-
Ahaziah is Jehoahaz (2 Chron. 21:17), Azariah (2 Chron. 22:6) and Ahaziah (1 Chron. 3:11); a reminder that people carried multiple names, which explains many of the so called contradictions in the genealogies.

1Ch 3:12 Amaziah his son, Azariah his son, Jotham his son-
Azariah is usually called Uzziah.

1Ch 3:13 Ahaz his son, Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son-
This is a parade example of how a bad king [Ahaz] has a good son [Hezekiah] who has a bad son [Manasseh]. One thing we learn from these genealogies is that spirituality is not genetic. Faith cannot be passed on, in the sense; but each must forge their own unique, individual relationship with the Father, just as today.

1Ch 3:14 Amon his son, Josiah his son-
As noted on :13, we have another example of a bad king having a good son. "Christianity" in its religious sense seems to be generally passed on from parents to children, but we learn from the genealogies that true spirituality cannot be passed on. It has to be personally forged.

1Ch 3:15 The sons of Josiah: the firstborn Johanan, the second Jehoiakim, the third Zedekiah, the fourth Shallum-
This is a list of the kings of Judah, so we wonder why Johanan is mentioned when he was never king. Shallum is also known as Jehoahaz (2 Chron. 36:1 cp. Jer. 22:11).

1Ch 3:16 The sons of Jehoiakim: Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son-
"His son" may also mean 'his heir' (see on :17), because Zedekiah was not son but uncle to Jeconiah. "Son" has a wide range of meaning in Hebrew. Jeconiah of 1 Chron. 3:16 is Coniah in Jer. 22:14, and Jehoiachin in 2 Chron. 36:8,9; 2 Kings 24:6. A reminder that people carried multiple names, explaining some of the apparent contradictions in the genealogies.

1Ch 3:17 The sons of Jeconiah the captive: Shealtiel his son-
"The captive" could be translated as AV as the name of another son, "Assir". Jeconiah didn't have sons in the sense that he had no son to succeed him on the throne (Jer. 22:27,30), a reminder that "sons" doesn't always mean literal male children, but descendants who inherited the throne. See on :16.

1Ch 3:18 and Malchiram, and Pedaiah, and Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah-
It is unclear whose sons these were (cp. 2 Kings 24;12,15; Jer. 22:30).

1Ch 3:19 The sons of Pedaiah: Zerubbabel, and Shimei. The sons of Zerubbabel: Meshullam, and Hananiah; and Shelomith was their sister-
In Ezra 7, 15 names are listed between Ezra and Aaron- covering about 1000 years. Clearly many generations were omitted. We note there are 26 names listed between Zerubbabel (a generation or two before Ezra) and Nashon a contemporary of Aaron, in 1 Chron. 2:10-15; 3:1-19). Some details of the omitted generations are found in 1 Chron. 9:10,11; Neh. 11:11.

Zerubbabel was son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2; Hag. 1:1,2; Lk. 3:27-31). But it seems he was grandson of Pedaiah on his mother's side.

1Ch 3:20 and Hashubah, Ohel, Berechiah, Hasadiah and Jushab Hesed, five-
This separate group of sons may be because they were from a different mother. Jushab-hesed means "Grace is returned", as if reflecting the restoration, by grace.

1Ch 3:21 The sons of Hananiah: Pelatiah and Jeshaiah; the sons of Rephaiah, the sons of Arnan, the sons of Obadiah, the sons of Shecaniah-
The LXX is very different in :19-24, giving six generations between Hananiah and Shemaiah, and accounting for eleven generations from Zerubbabel in this genealogy.

1Ch 3:22 The sons of Shecaniah: Shemaiah. The sons of Shemaiah: Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah and Shaphat, six-

This would make Hattush the great-great-grandson of Zerubbabel. He returned only at the time of Ezra 8:3, so it seems his family had not returned with Zerubbabel. Shemaiah is the one of Neh. 3:29. He must have been an old man, as his son Hattush had returned to Jerusalem with Ezra (Ezra 8:2,3); again we get the impression of those not naturally adequate to the work still doing it (goldsmiths, perfumers, daughters, administrators and now old men). Whilst we are given talents which we should use in God's service, it is also true that His service is a going against the grain of our natural desires and not a mere reinforcement of our natural aptitudes and personalities; ultimately, we are called to carry the cross of the Lord Jesus.

1Ch 3:23 The sons of Neariah: Elioenai, Hizkiah and Azrikam, three-
Elioenai means “My eyes are towards Jehovah”, implying the looking for the restoration.

1Ch 3:24 The sons of Elioenai: Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah,
Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah and Anani, seven-
Hodaviah (1 Chron. 3:24) may be Abiud (Mt. 1:13) or Juda (Lk. 3:26), (Ezra 3:9; Neh. 11:9; cp. Ezra 2:40; 1 Chron. 9:7).

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 4

1Ch 4:1 The sons of Judah: Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur and Shobal-
Again, "sons of" is being used in a broad sense of 'descendants of', as Hezron was the son of Perez (1 Chron. 2:5), and Shobal was the son of Hur (1 Chron. 2:50).

1Ch 4:2 Reaiah the son of Shobal became the father of Jahath; and Jahath became the father of Ahumai and Lahad. These are the families of the Zorathites-
In 1 Chron. 2:53 the Zorathites appear to be people who lived in Zorah, rather than a descendant of a person called Zerah or Zorah.

1Ch 4:3 These were the sons of the father of Etam: Jezreel, Ishma and Idbash; and the name of their sister was Hazzelelponi-
Whenever a woman is specifically mentioned in these genealogies, it appears she is worthy of particular significance. But we my be reading here of names of places, remembering that the 'daughters of' a town are the villages surrounding it. Etham was a town in Judah (2 Chron. 11:6). People and their towns appear to be united at times, making the genealogies even more difficult to follow from our distance.

1Ch 4:4 and Penuel the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father of Hushah. These are the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah, the founder of Bethlehem-
Ephratah was a woman mentioned in 1 Chron. 2:19,24. She is credited for founding the town which was later known as Bethlehem (Mic. 5:1).

1Ch 4:5 Ashhur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah-
The note of polygamy is again an example of spiritual weakness being recorded in the genealogies.

1Ch 4:6 Naarah bore him Ahuzzam, Hepher, Temeni and Haahashtari. These were the sons of Naarah-
"Naarah" is the usual word for 'young woman' or 'girl'. Perhaps Ashhur came to

despise the older wife (see on :7) and married a youngster, whom he continued to call "the girl". His marriage doesn't sound very happy. Polygamy led to no pleasure for him in real terms.

1Ch 4:7 The sons of Helah were Zereth, Izhar and Ethnan-
"Helah" is the usual word translated "scum", and we wonder whether Ashhur called his wife this; for it would hardly have been her birth name. Again we have the theme of weak marriages. Ashhur didn't find any joy in his polygamy but rather came to bitterly despise one of his wives.

1Ch 4:8 Hakkoz became the father of Anub, Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel the son of Harum-
Hakkoz is introduced abruptly, as we find at times happens in the genealogies. But in the context, he must have had some connection with the tribe and inheritance of Judah, and the names mentioned must have been significant to the exiles or whoever was the primary audience of the genealogies.

1Ch 4:9 Jabez was more honourable than his brothers: and his mother named him Jabez saying, Because I bore him with sorrow-
The idea is "But his mother had named him Jabez", meaning 'he brings sorrow'. This is the classic case of the underdog rising up to honour through his faith in God. Hence Jabez prays that he would not bring sorrow (:10), but rather have God's hand with him to enlarge his border, to the joy of others and God's glory. We are all to some extent in some way born under a bad sign, some more visibly than others, i.e. we have many factors against us, bad cards dealt, it seems, by the hand of fortune. But these need not hold us back. That is the inspiration of the example of Jabez. We can rise above all that; see on :13.

1Ch 4:10 Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, Oh that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that it not be to my sorrow! God granted him that which he requested-
See on :9. Jabez just appears on the scene in :9, not "the son of" anyone. His calling "on the God of Israel" may mean he was a Gentile, who through faith came to be associated with the tribe of Judah. Which is why he is mentioned at this point in the genealogy of Judah. He asked that he too would be blessed as a seed of Abraham, who were to be blessed and "multiplied" (s.w. "enlarge"). I noted on :9 that Jabez had the spiritual ambition to rise up above the ties that apparently bind. The land was divided up by God amongst the tribes. But he had the spiritual ambition to ask that his allotment be enlarged. And as we see from comparing the various descriptions of the land's boundaries, the allotments were indeed negotiable and were changed by God over time in accordance with Israel's spiritual ambition. The only other reference to Yahweh's hands being with man is in fulfilment of His promises (Ps. 89:21). This incident is an example of where occasionally there are implications of spiritual strength in the records, amidst many hints of spiritual weakness. The targum on :13 claims that Jabez is Othniel, the nephew of Caleb.

This gives an example of using previous Angelic promises and preparatory work in order to achieve an act of faith. Some of the children of Judah later requested that their border be enlarged, at the expense of driving out neighbouring Canaanite tribes. "Jabez called on the God of Israel (an Angelic term), saying, Oh that Thou

wouldest bless me indeed (a reference back to the Angelic blessing of Abraham's seed with the promise of possession of the land?), and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand (an Angelic phrase) might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested. In passing, is this the basis of "deliver us from evil... (i e.) lead us not into (spiritual) temptation" in the Lord's prayer? In that case our sins are being likened to the tribes which Jabez drove out in faith, and we should believe that our Angel has driven our sins out for us in prospect, so that we might inherit the promises.

1Ch 4:11 Chelub the brother of Shuhah became the father of Mehir, who was the father of Eshton-
This could be the Shuhah of 1 Chron. 2:3; Gen. 38:2.

1Ch 4:12 Eshton became the father of Beth Rapha, Paseah and Tehinnah the father of Ir Nahash. These are the men of Recah-
I have mentioned earlier that people and places appear confused in the genealogies. This appears confusing to modern readers, but the Hebrew audience would have understood the connection between a person and his living place; hence a town had 'daughters', an idiom referring to inhabitants or surrounding villages. And this verse seems an example of this. 'Beth Rapha', house of the giant, seems a typical example.

1Ch 4:13 The sons of Kenaz: Othniel, and Seraiah. The son of Othniel: Hathath-
This may be mentioned at this point because it could be that Jabez of :10 was the original name of Othniel, but he changed his name to Othniel, "force of God", because he had seen God acting with such force in response to his own desire to rise above all the things implied in his birth name.

1Ch 4:14 Meonothai became the father of Ophrah: and Seraiah became the father of Joab the father of Ge Harashim; for they were craftsmen-
AV "the father of the valley of Charashim" suggests that as discussed on :12, we are reading of towns and geographical areas which came to be the names of people. The same thing is reflected in the Anglo Saxon surnames which are also place names, "London", "Essex", "Wales" etc.

1Ch 4:15 The sons of Caleb the son of Jephunneh: Iru, Elah and Naam; and the son of Elah: Kenaz-
Othniel is called the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother (Jud. 1:13). This would be possible once we understand the wide elasticity of the Hebrew terms "son of" and "brother".

1Ch 4:16 The sons of Jehallelel: Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria and Asarel-
Ziph was a town in southern Judah (1 Sam. 23:15,19). The reference may therefore be to where the sons of Jehallelel came to settle.

1Ch 4:17 The sons of Ezrah: Jether, Mered, Epher and Jalon; and she bore Miriam, Shammai and Ishbah the father of Eshtemoa-
It is unclear who the "she" refers to, and it may be possible to connect this sentence with the Bithia of :18. Eshtemoa may refer to the town in Judah of that name; see on :12.

1Ch 4:18 His wife the Jewess bore Jered the father of Gedor, Heber the father of Soco and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah. These are the sons of Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered took-
See on :17. "His wife" would refer to Mered, and Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh is called "the Jewess" because she married Mered from Judah, and was totally accepted as a Jewess, having totally identified with Judah and the hope of Israel. The obvious daughter of Pharaoh whom we think of was the one who saved Moses. Perhaps she, like Moses, resigned from the wealth of Pharaoh and went to live with the Hebrew slaves, and married Mered, a man of Judah. And she renamed herself to Bithiah, "daughter of Yah"- rather than daughter of Pharaoh. She had a daughter called Miriam (:17), which is corroborating evidence for the idea that she was the princess who saved Moses and from the Nile and spoke with Miriam, sister of Moses, at the time. This was one of the most amazing conversions of all Biblical history; but we would never know it, were it not for the Chronicles genealogies. But "Mered" means 'rebel', the word used of Israel's rebellions against Yahweh in the wilderness. It could be that for all her outstanding devotion to Yahweh, the man she married was not worthy of her, and died in rebellion against Yahweh in the wilderness. She will be one we look forward to meeting in the Kingdom.

1Ch 4:19 The sons of the wife of Hodiah, the sister of Naham, were the fathers of Keilah the Garmite and Eshtemoa the Maacathite-
Keilah and Eshtemoa were both towns in Judah, and there may be a geographical reference here as discussed on :12.

1Ch 4:20 The sons of Shimon: Amnon, Rinnah, Ben Hanan and Tilon. The sons of Ishi: Zoheth and Ben Zoheth-
We see how the son of Zoheth ["Ben Zoheth"] was counted as a son of Ishi, although he was his grandson. Again we see the elasticity of the phrase "son of" in Hebrew.

1Ch 4:21 The sons of Shelah the son of Judah: Er the father of Lecah, Laadah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of those who worked fine linen, of the house of Ashbea-
Er was slain by Yahweh for gross wickedness (1 Chron. 2:3). It seems his brother Shelah called his own son Er in memory of his slain brother, perhaps suggesting his disagreement with Yahweh's judgment. Lecah and Mareshah are place names (see on :12).

1Ch 4:22 and Jokim, the men of Cozeba, Joash and Saraph, who had dominion in Moab, and Jashubilehem. The records are ancient-
"Had dominion" can also mean 'married'. Perhaps this is another record of marriage to Gentiles, reflecting the continual and widespread spiritual weakness of God's people. "Jashubilehem″ could be translated "who returned to Bethlehem", and this creates a parallel with the family of Naomi; they too married in Moab but returned to Bethlehem. The idea would then be that situations repeat in and between human lives, that we might learn from spiritual history and the hand of God in human history. Indeed the verse can be repointed and read as it is by some Rabbinic commentaries: "Yokim and Cozeba and Yoash and Saraph who married Moabites who returned to Bethlehem"; Yoash and Saraph being understood as Mahlon and Chilion of the book of Ruth. We note they too were from the tribe of Judah. Mahlon and Chilion meaning

sickness and pining away are surely names given to the characters, because nobody would name thier boys in that way. Perhaps here in 1 Chron. 4:22 we have their original names.

1Ch 4:23 These were the potters, and the inhabitants of Netaim and Gederah where they lived and worked for the king-
The reference may be to those who worked in preparation of things for the temple in Solomon's time (1 Kings 7:46).

1Ch 4:24 The sons of Simeon: Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerah and Shaul-
"The sons of Simeon were Nemuel, Jamin... and Shaul"; but Gen. 46:10 shows that Shaul was Simeon's son by a wrong, casual relationship. Yet this is not recorded in Chronicles, even though so many other weaknesses are. Surely this is to demonstrate how if God imputes righteousness for a repented of sin, there really is no record of this kept by Him. This and other such lessons from Chronicles only come from digging under the surface.

1Ch 4:25 Shallum his son, Mibsam his son, Mishma his son-
The record in Num. 26 implies these were the sons through Shaul. But Shaul was the one born from a wrong, casual relationship with a Gentile (Gen. 46:10). But it was through this that Simeon's line is considered as continuing. Again we see God's working through human weakness, and the fact that Israel were not at all ethnically pure.

1Ch 4:26 The sons of Mishma: Hammuel his son, Zaccur his son, Shimei his son-
"Zaccur" is the word for "remember" often used in the restoration narratives (Neh. 1:8 etc.). Remember that these genealogies were rewritten for the exiles.

1Ch 4:27 Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters; but his brothers didn't have many children, neither did all their family multiply like the children of Judah-
Israel's sinfulness seems to be emphasized in 'interruptions' in the flowing list of names. Thus it is sometimes stressed that a man did not have many children (e.g. 1 Chron. 2:4,6,16,32,34; 4:27), as if to indicate that God's blessing was not with him (there seems an undoubted connection in Old Testament times between blessing and number of sons).

1Ch 4:28 They lived at Beersheba, Moladah and Hazarshual-
Beersheba was in Judah, but had been given to Simeon as a shared inheritance (Josh. 19:1,2).

1Ch 4:29 and at Bilhah, Ezem, Tolad-
These are the same 13 cities with five accompanying "cities" / villages (:32) as in Josh. 19:1-9.

1Ch 4:30 Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag-
These towns were all associated with David, and he sent presents of the Amalekite spoil to them (1 Sam. 30:26-31). It seems he wanted them under the control of Judah not Simeon.

1Ch 4:31 Beth Marcaboth and Hazar Susim, Beth Biri and at Shaaraim. These were their cities to the reign of David-

The implication could be that David tended towards a policy of 'Judah for the men of Judah', and the agreement that Simeonites could live in Judah was then not honoured. This was to come to full term in the tragic division of the kingdom in the next generation.

1Ch 4:32 Their villages were Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Tochen and Ashan, five cities-
The parable of the pounds describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities (Lk. 19:17). This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and " five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.) . We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

1Ch 4:33 and all their villages that were around the same cities, to Baal. These were their habitations, and they have their genealogy-
Baal is Baalath Beer (Josh. 19:8). Ezra 2:62 records Judah being ‘reckoned by genealogies’, using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of 1 Chron. (4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God’s ‘bringing out’ of Judah from Babylon with His ‘bringing out’ the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion’s fortunes: “The LORD shall count, when He writes up the people, that this man was born there”. The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel’s Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come. This is another reason for understanding Ezekiel’s temple as being broadly of the same dimensions as that of Solomon.

1Ch 4:34 Meshobab, Jamlech, Joshah the son of Amaziah-
We now have a list of 13 leaders of Simeon who went looking for new territory. These 13 may have been the leaders of the Simeonite communities in the 13 towns in Judah just listed, where the Simeonites had been allowed to live. But it seems they were effectively expelled from those towns by Judah, although they were allowed to live there according to Josh. 19:1-9. And so they went looking for new territory.

1Ch 4:35 Joel, Jehu the son of Joshibiah, the son of Seraiah, the son of Asiel-
The names of these Simeonite leaders are nearly all spiritual and include the name of Yahweh. It would have been wrong to exclude them from the inheritance in Judah which they had been specifically allowed (:34).

1Ch 4:36 and Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah-
Jeshohaiah ("Yah will empty") and Jesimiel ("Yah will place") could be seen as names expressing faith that God would provide for these displaced Simeonites, and

place them in a new inheritance. These men and their faith is being held up to the exiles as their pattern. For in essence they were in a similar situation.

1Ch 4:37 Ziza the son of Shiphi, the son of Allon, the son of Jedaiah, the son of Shimri, the son of Shemaiah-
We wonder why this one of the 13 Simeonite leaders has his genealogy traced back five generations, unlike the others mentioned.

1Ch 4:38 these mentioned by name were princes in their families; and their fathers' houses increased greatly-
They therefore needed more land, and as discussed on :34, they were effectively pushed out of the special allotment given them within the tribe of Judah. So there was a desperate need to find land.

1Ch 4:39 They went to the entrance of Gedor, even to the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks-
A territory called "Gedor" which matches the description in :40 is hard to locate. So we may consider LXX "Gerar". This was then under Philistine control but was taken from them in Asa's time (2 Chron. 14:14). However this doesn't seem to fit the description of the land as "peaceable" in :40, and :41 says they took this land in Hezekiah's time.

1Ch 4:40 They found fat pasture and good, and the land was wide, quiet and peaceable; for those who lived there before were of Ham-
Perhaps the Simeonites' determination to find and enjoy their inheritance was presented as inspirational to the exiles, who likewise were promised a land of "fat pasture" at the restoration- if they too believed and acted in faith (s.w. Ez. 34:14). Likewise a quiet and peaceable land was promised at the restoration (s.w. Jer. 30:10; Zech. 1:11).

1Ch 4:41 These written by name came in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and attacked their tents, and the Meunim who were found there, and destroyed them utterly to this day, and lived in their place; because there was pasture there for their flocks-
This could suggest that these genealogies were initially written up in the time of Hezekiah, perhaps explaining his regret that he was to die with no descendant; although they were rewritten at the time of the exiles. The motivation however was not to drive out the pagans from Yahweh's land, but because there was pasture there for their flocks. The question of *why* we wish to inherit the Kingdom must be capable of a genuine, spiritual answer; rather than a materialistic and fleshly one.

1Ch 4:42 Some of them, even of the sons of Simeon, five hundred men, went to Mount Seir, having for their captains Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi-
Because of their lack of land and removal from the inheritance within Judah they were promised in Josh. 19:1-9, they had to find and make the effort to inherit some new land. They are thereby an example to the exiles, for whom these genealogies were rewritten [under Divine inspiration]. These captains all have God's Name within their names, perhaps meant to imply that they did what they did in faith.

1Ch 4:43 They struck the remnant of the Amalekites who escaped, and have lived there to this day-
Saul was empowered to smite the Amalakites but he didn't completely do this (s.w. 1 Sam. 15:3,7). As often happens, God then passed on the job to another, firstly David (2 Sam. 1:1), and now to these sons of Simeon. We can see His hand working in similar ways today. This seems to be the idea of Esther 4:14. If she had not saved her people, then God would have pursued another plan to the same end.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 5

1Ch 5:1 The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn; but, because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright-
These records seem to stress the weakness and occasional strength of these children of God. This is one of the major lessons from Chronicles. Every now and then, the list of names is interrupted by a piece of information which indicates God's awareness of their spirituality. For example, the fact some men had more than one wife or a wife from a nation other than Israel is often recorded (1 Chron. 1:32; 2:3,26,35,48; 4:18; 5:1; 7:14; 8:8). The way these interruptions occur in the lists of names stands out. This is surely to indicate two things: that many faithful men (e.g. Abraham and Caleb, 1 Chron. 1:32; 2:46) made mistakes in this area of life, and secondly that all down the centuries God has not forgotten that they married out of the faith, or that they allowed the pressures of their surrounding world to influence them to break away from the ideal one man: one woman standard of Eden. These two facts provide us with both warning and comfort, in that although God is sensitive to failure, He is still able to justify men, to count them as if they are righteous for the sake of their covenant relationship with Him, even though (e.g.) their married life was not completely in order.

1Ch 5:2 For Judah prevailed above his brothers, and of him came the prince; but the birthright was Joseph's)-
"Prince" or "captain" is God's term for the king of His people (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1). Israel's true king was to be from Judah, and God therefore didn't accept those of the ten tribe kingdom as the true kings of Israel.

1Ch 5:3 the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi-
Hanoch [s.w. Enoch] was named after the son of Cain (Gen. 4:17) and means "initiated", rather hinting at unspirituality and paganism.

1Ch 5:4 The sons of Joel: Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son-
Gog was an apostate Jew who went away from the God of Israel, attracted by the grazing grounds to the north east of Israel, and who eventually ended up living permanently in the land of Israel's enemies, the land of the Hagarenes (sons of Hagar, i.e. the Arabs) and Assyria. The Gog of Ez. 38 may well be an apostate Jew (after the pattern of Rabshakeh) who leads an invasion of his ancient homeland. He attacks because he loves cattle (Ez. 38:11,12)- which was a characteristic of the Gog of 1 Chron. 5.

1Ch 5:5 Micah his son, Reaiah his son, Baal his son-
Naming a Hebrew child "Baal" surely indicates unspirituality and the besetting weakness of idolatry which dogged the generations.

1Ch 5:6 and Beerah his son, whom Tiglath Pilneser king of Assyria carried away captive: he was prince of the Reubenites-
We have to ask why these genealogies were prepared. It is quite likely that they were first formalized in the time of Hezekiah, but I would suggest that they were completed at the time of the restoration, when there was a problem in finding a High Priest and priesthood because it was hard to prove who was descended from Aaron, presumably because the genealogies were destroyed when the temple was burnt. The genealogies give much emphasis to the descendants of Aaron, far more than to the other tribes. There are a number of references to faithless men being punished by invasions (e.g. 1 Chron. 5:6).

1Ch 5:7 His brothers by their families, when the genealogy of their generations was reckoned: the chief, Jeiel, and Zechariah-
Ezra 2:62 records Judah being 'reckoned by genealogies', using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron. 4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there". The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

1Ch 5:8 and Bela the son of Azaz, the son of Shema, the son of Joel, who lived in Aroer, even up to Nebo and Baal Meon-
Aroer was on the east of Jordan, and these areas were always associated with Moab in later scripture. "Nebo" continued to be the name used for that town, and it was the name of an idol. "Baal Meon", habitation of Baal, likewise suggests that these Reubenites were ill advised to go so far into pagan territory in search of material advantage. And they ended up drifting into the Gentile world and losing their identity as God's people. All the time we see this sad drift going on in lives.

1Ch 5:9 and eastward he lived even to the entrance of the wilderness from the river Euphrates, because their livestock were multiplied in the land of Gilead-
This continues the theme of 1 Chron. 4, that the men of Simeon likewise went away from their tribal allotment in search of pasture for their flocks. And it drove them away from the sanctuary and the teaching priests, until they assimilated into the Gentile world on the edges of the land promised to Abraham.

1Ch 5:10 In the days of Saul, they made war with the Hagrites, who fell by their hand; and they lived in their tents throughout all the land east of Gilead-
God so seeks for faith, and some of the 'flash' victories He granted in the Old Testament were to otherwise unspiritual men who in their desperation turned to Him. He so respects faith that He responded (e.g. 1 Chron. 5:10-20). Perhaps more details follow in :18-22, although that may refer to later conflict.

1Ch 5:11 The sons of Gad lived over against them, in the land of Bashan to Salecah-
The boundaries of Gad appear to in practice encroach upon that given to Manasseh (1 Chron. 5:11 cp. Josh. 13:8,7,11,25,30; Dt. 3:10-13). But the tribe of Manasseh had extended their borders northward (1 Chron. 5:23). The territory was given to Israel as their intended inheritance in the Kingdom of God; but God was open to some flexibility about this. We think of Caleb and Othniel asking for territory as an inheritance. And so it is with our dialogue with God's and His eternal intentions for us.

1Ch 5:12 Joel the chief, Shapham the second, Janai and Shaphat, in Bashan-
LXX "Janai the scribe".

1Ch 5:13 Their brothers of their fathers' houses: Michael, Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia and Eber, seven-
These may have been a group of seven who were the effective governing body of the tribe. It is unclear when these people lived, but we could guess they were the leaders at the time of the war with Hagrites in Saul's time (:10, 18-22).

1Ch 5:14 These were the sons of Abihail, the son of Huri, the son of Jaroah, the son of Gilead, the son of Michael, the son of Jeshishai, the son of Jahdo, the son of Buz-
The seven ruling brothers of :13 were sons of Abihail, and we then have a very long genealogy for that man. To have seven sons who formed the ruling elite of a tribe was a significant achievement, and so his name was Abihail, 'father of might'. But this exemplifies how names were often given to people appropriate to their character and life experience, and are not necessarily their birth names.

1Ch 5:15 Ahi the son of Abdiel, the son of Guni, chief of their fathers' houses-
Ahi was perhaps the leader in Gilead (:16) whereas Joel was the chief in Bashan generally (:12).

1Ch 5:16 They lived in Gilead in Bashan, and in its towns, and in all the suburbs of Sharon, as far as their borders-
There is no Sharon known on the east of Jordan, although there may have been. If the Sharon near Carmel is intended, then we have the picture of these people so obsessed with their cattle that they herded them from the east of Jordan to territory they controlled in Sharon.

1Ch 5:17 All these were reckoned by genealogies in the days of Jotham king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam king of Israel-
Perhaps these kings took a census of their people, in seeking to calculate their military might. This material has been worked into these records. Jeroboam was full of works, of activity in fighting the Lord's battles. He was active in the Truth, as we would say. In 1 Kings 12:32 we read of Jeroboam ordaining a feast "*Like* unto the feast which was in Judah". He ordained a new feast on the 15th day of the 8th month, no doubt copying the feast of tabernacles, on the 15th of the 7th month. So Jeroboam lacked an attention to detail, despite an appearance of spirituality. 1 Chron. 5:17 says that in Jeroboam's reign, the genealogies we read in the early chapters of Chronicles were written. So in some ways, he gave great attention to detail- when it suited him.

1Ch 5:18 The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, of valiant men, men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war, were forty-four thousand seven hundred and sixty, that were able to go forth to war-
"Bow" and "sword" often occur together as almost an idiom for human strength (Gen. 48:22; Josh. 24:12; 2 Kings 6:22; 1 Chron. 5:18; Hos. 1:7).

1Ch 5:19 They made war with the Hagrites, with Jetur, Naphish and Nodab-
These were all descendants of the twelve sons of Ishmael. These twelve tribes make them a pseudo Israel, and yet also, as Paul develops in Gal. 4, representatives of unbelieving Israel after the flesh. God gave His people victory against them in fulfilment of the promises about Ishmael and His favour for the chosen seed; but not necessarily because the chosen seed at the time were great believers in Him. These are the same peoples we read of in Ps. 83, which appears to be a prophecy of God's latter day conflict with these people, which has as its prototype this victory of a spiritually weak Israel against them, empowered by God by grace.

1Ch 5:20 They were helped against them, and the Hagrites were delivered into their hand, and all who were with them; for they cried to God in the battle, and He was entreated of them, because they put their trust in Him-
This could imply that they began to lose the battle, but as Jehoshaphat cried out to God in the midst of a battle he shouldn't have been fighting and was saved, so it seems these Israelites did. I suggested on :19 that there were reasons for the victory within God's broader narrative. "The war was of God" (:22). Although it began by Israelites wanting more pasture land for their flocks.

1Ch 5:21 They took away their livestock; of their camels fifty thousand, and of sheep two hundred and fifty thousand, and of donkeys two thousand, and of men one hundred thousand-
The motive of the war was to find more pasture land. But not only did these Israelites want more *lebensraum*, they also stole a huge amount of cattle. Yet God worked through this because He wanted to vindicate His chosen seed over that of Ishmael. At times victories or blessings can be given to us which are part of a wider Divine narrative, and should not be seen as a blessing upon us for our spirituality.

1Ch 5:22 For there fell many slain, because the war was of God. They lived in their place until the captivity-
There was a wider narrative going on here (see on :19-21). God's Spirit works in human life according to that narrative, and not simply in direct response to faith. The Spirit teaches that in our time of dying, human beings are the same as animals. It is tragically sad that animals are tortured and exterminated. But is there any higher degree of tragedy, in God's sight, in the suffering of unenlightened men? Because the Reubenites cried to God in faith, "there fell down many slain (of the Hagarites), because the war was of God" (1 Chron. 5:22). And consider how millions live and die or die in the womb, with God's full knowledge and allowance, never to have the invitation of the Gospel. Short of believing in a universal 'second chance', we just have to accept that human death does not mean to God what it does to us as men.

1Ch 5:23 The children of the half-tribe of Manasseh lived in the land: they increased

from Bashan to Baal Hermon, Senir and Mount Hermon-
"The land" is presumably that taken from the Ishmaelites of :19, east of Jordan. Yet as discussed on :19-22, the blessing of increase was not necessarily in response to their spirituality; for they turned away from Yahweh (:25). We recall how Isaac was greatly blessed with increased flocks immediately after he had lied about his wife and behaved shamefully. Blessing and cursing do not necessarily come immediately in response to faith or unbelief.

1Ch 5:24 These were the heads of their fathers' houses: even Epher, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah and Jahdiel, mighty men of valour, famous men, heads of their fathers' houses-
They had names reflective of a belief in Yahweh, but worshipped other gods (:25). This was Israel's constant weakness, as it can be ours; to claim to worship God through worshipping the flesh, to mix flesh and spirit.

1Ch 5:25 They trespassed against the God of their fathers, and played the prostitute after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God destroyed before them-
These particular peoples of the land would refer to the land of :23, presumably that taken from the Ishmaelites of :19, east of Jordan. Covenant relationship with Yahweh is as marriage to Him; unfaithfulness to Him is as adultery. And they were not only adulterers, but as Hosea shows, they acted as prostitutes, as if sexually addicted to going after as many other gods as they could. And gods whom they had seen defeated before Yahweh when they took their land in the first place. This is the utter idiocy of idolatry, and yet human nature is not at all logical when it comes to faithfulness to God.

1Ch 5:26 The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tiglath Pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor and Hara, and to the river of Gozan, to this day-
God worked by stirring up the spirit of Gentile kings. He can work directly on the human mind, placing thoughts and inserting motivations, in order to achieve His will. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit in our minds, if we are open to it. "Stirred up" is s.w. "open the eyes". Our eyes / hearts can be opened, as Lydia's was, through the sovereign and direct operation of God on the human heart. "To this day" suggests these genealogies were rewritten at the time of the exile.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 6

1Ch 6:1 The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari-
Chronicles pays special attention to the Levites and temple services. These genealogies were produced at the time of the restoration because of the need to show who was a genuine Levite. The temple records may have been destroyed at the destruction of the temple, and so this new list was vitally important. Joshua son of Jehozadak was appointed High Priest at the restoration, and the intention of these lists is to demonstrate his legitimacy. This is why the lists are incomplete and jump many generations. The generations listed would make the period from Moses to the captivity about 440 years, when it was more like 700. This explains why some known High Priests are omitted from the list: Eli, Ahimelech (son of Ahitub), Abiathar,

Azariah (of Uzziah)'s time, Urijah (at the time of Ahaz), and Azariah (2 Chron. 31:10).

1Ch 6:2 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel-
"Gershon" means 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn [he is mentioned first as if he was the firstborn]. This is a theme of the Genesis record. But perhaps because of these weaknesses, the line to the high priest ran through Kohath.

1Ch 6:3 The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses and Miriam. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar-
We note the lack of emphasis upon the children of Moses and Miriam, the great wilderness leaders of Israel. There was to be no cult of personality nor nepotism, no riding on the name of a forefather in order to be a leader of God's people. Spiritual leadership in the Bible was intended to be based upon spiritual qualification.

1Ch 6:4 Eleazar became the father of Phinehas, Phinehas became the father of Abishua-
Eleazar's two older brothers, Nadab and Abihu, died without recorded children (Num. 3:4). So as noted on :2, it is the younger son who takes the precedence in God's purpose and not the older sons. To use the weak and marginal has ever been His style.

1Ch 6:5 Abishua became the father of Bukki, Bukki became the father of Uzzi-
Eli [high priest in Samuel's time] is omitted here. See on :1.

1Ch 6:6 Uzzi became the father of Zerahiah, Zerahiah became the father of Meraioth-
"Meraioth", 'rebellious', as surely not the name given to the child at birth. It confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 6:7 Meraioth became the father of Amariah, Amariah became the father of Ahitub-
I suggested on :6 that "Meraioth" was indeed "rebellious" as his name means. But if he had been slain as required by the law as the rebellious child (s.w. Dt. 21:18), then the line would not have continued as it did. We see how God works through grace and failure.

1Ch 6:8 Ahitub became the father of Zadok, Zadok became the father of Ahimaaz-
Zadok and Abiathar appear to have been joint high priests in David's time, but the line is developed through Zadok (2 Sam. 8:17; 15:29; 20:25). Probably because Abiathar supported Adonijah's rebellion and was removed from office because of it (1 Kings 2:27,35).

1Ch 6:9 Ahimaaz became the father of Azariah, Azariah became the father of Johanan-
Just as Meraioth was apparently spiritually weak (see on :6,7), so "Ahimaaz" means "brother of anger". It was through the man with an anger problem that the line of high priests was to be continued.

1Ch 6:10 Johanan became the father of Azariah (he it is who executed the priest's office in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem)-
Psalm 127 is prefaced with the information that it is a Psalm for Solomon- perhaps given by some nameless prophet (Gad? Nathan?) to warn him of where he was going. Verse 1 reminds him that God must be the builder of any house, or else the builders labour in vain. There is good reason to think that Solomon utterly failed to appreciate this. The records stress time and again that *Solomon* built the temple (1 Kings 6:2,14; 9:10,25; 10:4; 1 Chron.6:10,32; 2 Chron. 8:1,12; 9:3; Acts 7:47); yet the house referred to in the Davidic promises was to be built by God, through David's Messianic Son, the Lord Jesus. Zechariah prophesied at the time of the rebuilding of the physical temple. It is significant, in this context, that Zech. 6:12 reminds Israel that the true temple of God will be built by the Branch, the Lord Jesus.

1Ch 6:11 Azariah became the father of Amariah, Amariah became the father of Ahitub-
Azariah's job would have become most difficult. For Solomon himself quit Yahweh worship, and built temples near to His temple where he could worship the gods of his wives. Amariah was in the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 19:11) so there are several generations missed here. See on :1.

1Ch 6:12 Ahitub became the father of Zadok, Zadok became the father of Shallum-
Shallum can mean 'bribe' (s.w. Mic. 7:3 about the corruption of the priesthood). Perhaps this was what he was known for. It would continue the theme of spiritual weaknesses in the Chronicles genealogies.

1Ch 6:13 Shallum became the father of Hilkiah, Hilkiah became the father of Azariah-
Hilkiah is well attested as the one who found the lost book of the law (2 Kings 22:8), helped in Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:14-20) and arranged the great Passover observance of 2 Chron. 35:1-19. But Hilkiah did all this despite being the son of a High Priest called Shallum (1 Chron. 6:12,13), whose name can mean 'bribe' (s.w. Mic. 7:3 about the corruption of the priesthood). Perhaps this was what he was known for. But his son / descendant rose above that bad background, as we can.

1Ch 6:14 Azariah became the father of Seraiah, Seraiah became the father of Jehozadak-
Seraiah was the last active high priest, and was sent into captivity by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:18,21; Jer. 52:24-27).

1Ch 6:15 Jehozadak went into captivity when Yahweh carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar-
His son was Jeshua / Joshua, the high priest appointed for the restoration. Compare Neh. 12:10 "Jeshua became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada". Then in Neh. 12 we have a brief genealogy of the high priest. The list follows right on from this list of high priests in 1 Chron. 6:3-15 which concluded with Jehozadak father of Jeshua / Joshua, who "went into captivity when the Lord carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar".

1Ch 6:16 The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath and Merari-
A repeat of :1; see note there.

1Ch 6:17 These are the names of the sons of Gershom: Libni and Shimei-
We note that both Moses and Aaron had sons called Gershom (Ex. 2:22). Such repetition of names within families and in the same generation was quite common, and is one thing which makes the study of the genealogies difficult in places.

1Ch 6:18 The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel-
A repeat of :2, see note there.

1Ch 6:19 The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers' households-
"Mahli" and "Mushi" mean 'sickly' and 'sensitive' respectively. This confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 6:20 Of Gershom: Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimmah his son-
This list of seven sons of Gershom appears to be part of the longer list of 13 sons of Gershom in :39-43. There are so many similarities, and the differences may be accounted for on the basis of people having more than one name, as explained on :19.

1Ch 6:21 Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, Jeatherai his son-
Apart from Joah, these three generations have names which are completely secular and not at all spiritual; not as we would expect for the high priests.

1Ch 6:22 The sons of Kohath: Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son-
Korah was the rebel of Num. 16:1.

1Ch 6:23 Elkanah his son, and Ebiasaph his son and Assir his son-
The repetition of "Assir" (:22) shows how similar names were used within families, which explains some otherwise puzzling parts of the genealogies. We can too quickly assume that the occurrence of the same name means the same person. We recall that there was a time when Israel and Judah both had a king called Jehoram (2 Kings 1:17).

1Ch 6:24 Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziah his son and Shaul his son-
The lists here must be connected with those of :33-37, but clearly some people had more than one name, or variations in the spelling. This it would have read: Tahath, Uriel, Zephaniah, Uzziah (also known as Azariah), Shaul (a.k.a Joel), Elkanah, Amasai, Ahimoth (a.k.a. Mahath), Elkanah Zophai (a.k.a. Zuph), Nahath (a.k.a. Toah, Tohu, 1 Sam. 1:1), Eliab (a.k.a. Eliel, Elihu, 1 Sam. 1:1), Jeroham, Elkanah, Samuel (a.k.a. Shemuel), Joel (1 Sam. 8:2).

1Ch 6:25 The sons of Elkanah: Amasai and Ahimoth-
Ahimoth is the Mahath of :35; see on :24.

1Ch 6:26 As for Elkanah, the sons of Elkanah: Zophai his son, and Nahath his son-
The children of Elkanah and Hannah don't have very spiritual names, apart from Samuel. I suggested on 1 Sam. 2 that after the birth of Samuel, Hannah became very bitter and arrogant, and this was perhaps reflected in the naming of her sons. Spiritually she may have been better off remaining barren, as Hezekiah would have been better off dying when God intended him to, rather than living another 15 years in which he apparently fell away from God.

1Ch 6:27 Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son-
We wonder whether Elkanah, "obtained of God", may have been the name by which he was subsequently known after Hannah 'obtained' Samuel by her prayers. See on :19.

1Ch 6:28 The sons of Samuel: the firstborn Joel and the second Abijah-
This gives the name of the firstborn as Vashni, meaning "weak", rather than Joel as in 1 Sam. 8:2, meaning "Jehovah is God". But this could be a scribal error. If we stick with "Vashni", we have an example of how character and personal history became reflected in the names by which men were remembered by, whereas his birth name was Joel, reflecting parental hope rather than actual reality.

1Ch 6:29 The sons of Merari: Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzzah his son-
"Mahli" means "sickly", but we see how from the weak and sickly there came a line of priests who all had spiritual names. Again we see how God works through the weak and not the strong.

1Ch 6:30 Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, Asaiah his son-
"Haggiah", feast of Yahweh, may have been born on a feast day. This would be an example of where some names are actual birth names, whereas others were names acquired later in response to life experience and character development.

1Ch 6:31 These are they whom David set over the service of song in the house of Yahweh, after that the ark had rest-
This doesn't conclude the previous section, but begins a new section; these persons are now going to be listed.

1Ch 6:32 They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting, until Solomon had built the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem; and they served in their office according to their order-
This could suggest that Solomon's temple meant a change in personnel and organization of the worship. For these served "until Solomon had built the house...".

1Ch 6:33 These are those who waited, and their sons. Of the sons of the Kohathites: Heman the singer, the son of Joel, son of Samuel-
It should be noted that Samuel's son was reckoned as a Kohathite, although Samuel's parents were from Ephraim (1 Sam. 1:1). Perhaps this means that Samuel married a Kohathite. Or that there had been earlier inter tribal intermarriage, meaning that Samuel was both from Ephraim and Levi.

1Ch 6:34 son of Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Eliel, son of Toah-

Elkanah is introduced in 1 Sam. 1:1 as a man of Ephraim. Yet here he is presented as a Levite. Clearly there was intermarriage between the tribes, although this was not God's ideal intention.

1Ch 6:35 son of Zuph, son of Elkanah, son of Mahath, son of Amasai-
The lists here must be connected with those of :24-27, but clearly some people had more than one name, or variations in the spelling. And the order appears to be reversed. This it would have read: Tahath, Uriel, Zephaniah, Uzziah (also known as Azariah), Shaul (a.k.a Joel), Elkanah, Amasai, Ahimoth (a.k.a. Mahath), Elkanah Zophai (a.k.a. Zuph), Nahath (a.k.a. Toah, Tohu, 1 Sam. 1:1), Eliab (a.k.a. Eliel, Elihu, 1 Sam. 1:1), Jeroham, Elkanah, Samuel (a.k.a. Shemuel), Joel (1 Sam. 8:2).

1Ch 6:36 son of Elkanah, son of Joel, son of Azariah, son of Zephaniah-
If this is the Joel of :28, son of Samuel [although the order of the genealogy is the other way around at this point], then we note that there the name is given as Vashni, meaning "weak", rather than Joel as here and in 1 Sam. 8:2, meaning "Jehovah is God". If we stick with "Vashni", we have an example of how character and personal history became reflected in the names by which men were remembered by, whereas his birth name was Joel, reflecting parental hope rather than actual reality.

1Ch 6:37 son of Tahath, son of Assir, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah-
See on :35.

1Ch 6:38 son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, the son of Israel-
"Izhar" means literally 'the anointing oil'. An absolutely appropriate name for a Levite.

1Ch 6:39 His brother Asaph, who stood on his right hand, even Asaph the son of Berechiah, son of Shimea-
Asaph was his brother in the sense only of a relative. Asaph himself composed songs, under the influence of Divine inspiration as a prophet (2 Chron. 29:30).

1Ch 6:40 son of Michael, son of Baaseiah, son of Malchijah-
Malchijah, "Yah is king", would be an abiding recognition that the system of human kingship was far less than idea, and for the faithful, Yahweh remained the king of Israel.

1Ch 6:41 son of Ethni, son of Zerah, son of Adaiah-
"Adaiah", adorned by Yah, would be an appropriate name for any Levite who wore the robes.

1Ch 6:42 son of Ethan, son of Zimmah, son of Shimei-
*"*Zimmah", wicked / wicked planner, would be a most unlikely birth name for a Levite. This is an example, as discussed on :19, of where subsequent character and life experience gave rise to the name by which a person was known. Indeed this is the whole Hebrew idea of 'naming', and we see it in the idea of the Yahweh Name, which is all about His history, personality and actions according to that character.

1Ch 6:43 son of Jahath, son of Gershom, the son of Levi-

This list of seven sons of Gershom in :20,21 appears to be part of this longer list of 13 sons of Gershom in :39-43. There are so many similarities, and the differences may be accounted for on the basis of people having more than one name, as explained on :19.

1Ch 6:44 On the left hand were their brothers the sons of Merari: Ethan the son of Kishi, son of Abdi, son of Malluch-
Ethan is called Jeduthun in 2 Chron. 35:15. We wonder if the division of singers into groups on the right and left was to reflect the structure of the court of Heaven, where the Angels were thus arranged in 1 Kings 22:19. For the sanctuary on earth was to be a pattern of the things in heaven (Heb. 8:5).

1Ch 6:45 son of Hashabiah, son of Amaziah, son of Hilkiah-
Hilkiah was an appropriate name for a Levite, 'Yah is my portion', or 'Portion of Yah'. For they had no portion or inheritance, just as Israel were Yahweh's "portion" (Dt. 32:9). We are to catch that spirit, as a kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2:5) whose portion or inheritance is the honour of doing God's work for His people, rather than building up any material inheritance in this world.

1Ch 6:46 son of Amzi, son of Bani, son of Shemer-
Here we have three generations without the name of God or anything spiritual in their names, whereas in :45 we had three generations who all had the name of Yahweh in their names. But having a Godly name was no guarantee that these people were spiritual (cp. Rev. 3:1).

1Ch 6:47 son of Mahli, son of Mushi, son of Merari, the son of Levi-
"Mahli" and "Mushi" mean 'sickly' and 'sensitive' respectively. This confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 6:48 Their brothers the Levites were appointed for all the service of the tabernacle of God's house-
Heb. "all the kinds of service...". We can see the various kinds of service in passages like 1 Chron. 15:18-24; 16:37-42; 23:2-32; 25:1-8; 26:1-26.

1Ch 6:49 But Aaron and his sons offered on the altar of burnt offering, and on the altar of incense, for all the work of the most holy place, and to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded-
This language of Aaron making atonement for all Israel raises the question as to whether sin is forgiven purely on the basis of individual repentance and approach to God for forgiveness; or whether there is some dimension whereby the prayers and efforts of another can bring that forgiveness. We seem to have examples of that in Mk. 2:5; James 5:15. But there are invisible limits to it; for no sinner who doesn't want forgiveness nor salvation will have it forced upon them. But for those who do, then there appears to be a component in their salvation, indeed that of all of us, which can depend upon others.

1Ch 6:50 These are the sons of Aaron: Eleazar-

Eleazar's mother was Elisheba daughter of Amminadab, a descendant of Judah through Pharez. Here the priestly and kingly lines met.

Phinehas his son, Abishua his son-

The genealogy of the sons of Korah, the gatekeepers of the temple, is recorded in 1 Chron. 9:17-19. It can be shown from the genealogies that they were brought up by their second cousin, Phinehas. They obeyed the command to leave the tents of their father Korah when he was consumed in the earthquake. Num. 16:27 mentions Dathan and Abiram's children standing outside their tents at this time, but there is the pointed omission of Korah's children; they had left the tents. We can therefore build up a picture of Phinehas as a zealot for the purity of God's Truth (Num. 25), yet mixed with compassion, as shown by the way he took those children of Korah under his wing, and brought them up soundly in the Truth, with the result that wrote at least 11 of the Psalms and protected the purity of temple worship.

1Ch 6:51 Bukki his son, Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son-

The list here of :49-53 seems to repeat that in :3-8; perhaps because that earlier list was produced at the time of the exile (:15), whereas this one concluding with Ahimaaz (:53) was written at the time of David or Solomon, for Ahimaaz was contemporary with the final part of David's life (2 Sam. 15:27).

1Ch 6:52 Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son-

"Meraioth", 'rebellious', as surely not the name given to the child at birth. It confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 6:53 Zadok his son, Ahimaaz his son-

I suggested on :52 that "Meraioth" was indeed "rebellious" as his name means. But if he had been slain as required by the law as the rebellious child (s.w. Dt. 21:18), then the line would not have continued as it did through Zadok. We see how God works through grace and failure.

1Ch 6:54 Now these are their dwelling places according to their encampments in their borders: to the sons of Aaron, of the families of the Kohathites (for theirs was the first lot)-

With various differences of spelling, this is the same list as in Josh. 21.

1Ch 6:55 to them they gave Hebron in the land of Judah, and its suburbs around it-

In the Hebrew text of 1 Chron. 6:55-60 we have eleven names, but thirteen towns are stated in :60. Juttah and Gibeon were promised (Josh. 21:16,17), but were not possessed. But as also experienced in :81, and as often happens with God's people, they do not take all the blessing that God promised and intended for them.

1Ch 6:56 but the fields of the city, and its villages, they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh-

As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us

now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself. See on 1 Chron. 7:29.

1Ch 6:57 To the sons of Aaron they gave the cities of refuge: Hebron; Libnah also with its suburbs, Jattir, Eshtemoa with its suburbs-
The cities of refuge represented salvation in the Lord Jesus (Heb. 6:18). But most of them were situation in remote or mountainous areas, Hebron being an exception. The idea was that those wishing for salvation from sin they had unintentionally committed must make quite some conscious effort and choice to get there, as is true today. And more such cities were promised, but Israel didn't take up that offer. This would have made salvation more easily accessible, as it were, had they done so.

1Ch 6:58 Hilen with its suburbs; Debir with its suburbs-
Hilen is Holon in Josh. 21.

1Ch 6:59 Ashan with its suburbs and Beth Shemesh with its suburbs-
Ashan is Ain in Josh. 21.

1Ch 6:60 and out of the tribe of Benjamin, Geba with its suburbs; Allemeth with its suburbs and Anathoth with its suburbs. All their cities throughout their families were thirteen cities-
Allemeth is Almon in Josh. 21. See on :55.

1Ch 6:61 To the rest of the sons of Kohath were given by lot, out of the family of the tribe, out of the half-tribe, the half of Manasseh, ten cities-
The parable of the pounds describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities (Lk. 19:17). This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and " five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.) . We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

1Ch 6:62 To the sons of Gershom, according to their families, out of the tribe of Issachar, out of the tribe of Asher, out of the tribe of Naphtali and out of the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, thirteen cities-
This refers to the half tribe of Manasseh on the east of Jordan.

1Ch 6:63 To the sons of Merari were given by lot, according to their families, out of the tribe of Reuben, out of the tribe of Gad and out of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities-
Four cities from each of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Zebulun (Josh. 21:7,34-40).

1Ch 6:64 The children of Israel gave to the Levites the cities with their suburbs-
The total of 48 cities (Num. 35:7; Josh. 21:41) is reflected in the summaries here (13 in :60, 10 in :61, 13 in :62 an 12 in :63). But whether those cities were given wholeheartedly and completely is open to question.

1Ch 6:65 They gave by lot out of the tribe of the children of Judah, out of the tribe of the children of Simeon and out of the tribe of the children of Benjamin, these cities which are mentioned by name-
The "lot" was presumably in that the tribes selected some kind of representation of their various cities, and lots were taken as to which cities should be given to the Levites. But this was not exactly how things had been envisaged when the Levitical cities were first defined.

1Ch 6:66 Some of the families of the sons of Kohath had cities of their borders out of the tribe of Ephraim-
The idea could be that Ephraim had cities on the very border of the territory of Ephraim, perhaps land which Ephraim had not settled and therefore the gift of those cities to the Levites was less costly or significant for them. Which raises the question as to how fairly the "lots" of :65 were arranged.

1Ch 6:67 They gave to them the cities of refuge: Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim with its suburbs; Gezer also with its suburbs-
I noted on :57 that the cities of refuge represented salvation in the Lord Jesus (Heb. 6:18). But most of them were situation in remote or mountainous areas, Hebron being an exception. The idea was that those wishing for salvation from sin they had unintentionally committed must make quite some conscious effort and choice to get there, as is true today.

1Ch 6:68 Jokmeam with its suburbs; Beth Horon with its suburbs-
Beth Horon was in the mountains (Josh. 18:14), called Beth Horon "the upper" (Josh. 16:5). See on :67.

1Ch 6:69 Aijalon with its suburbs and Gath Rimmon with its suburbs-
These cities were in Dan (Josh. 21:23,24), but were given by Ephraim to the Levites (1 Chron. 6:66,69). This continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24.

1Ch 6:70 and out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Aner with its suburbs and Bileam with its suburbs, for the rest of the family of the sons of Kohath-
"Bileam" means 'not of the people', called Ibleam, Jud. 1:27; 2 Kings 9:27, and in Josh. 21:25, Gath-rimmon. Perhaps it is called "Bileam" in 1 Chron. 6:70 because it continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24. Or perhaps only relatively unwanted cities were added to the list of cities to be divided amongst the three sons of Levi by lot

1Ch 6:71 To the sons of Gershom were given, out of the family of the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan with its suburbs, and Ashtaroth with its suburbs-
Golan was one of the cities of refuge on the east of Jordan. Those cities of refuge could have been increased in number (Dt. 19:9), thereby making salvation that much 'easier' or accessible; but there is no evidence Israel availed themselves of this. Ashtaroth is Beeshterah in Josh. 21:27.

1Ch 6:72 and out of the tribe of Issachar: Kedesh with its suburbs; Daberath with its suburbs-
This Kedesh is that of Josh. 13:22 called Kishon in Josh. 21:28.

1Ch 6:73 Ramoth with its suburbs; Anem with its suburbs-
Ramoth in 1 Chron. 6:73 is called Jarmuth in Josh. 21:28,29, and perhaps Remeth in Josh. 19:21. Anem of 1 Chron. 6:73 is En-gannim in Josh. 19:21; 21:29.

1Ch 6:74 and out of the tribe of Asher: Mashal with its suburbs; Abdon with its suburbs-
Mashal, Hukok, Hammon and Kiriathaim, are the Mishal, Helkath, Hammoth-dor and Kartan of Josh. 19:35; 21:30-32.

1Ch 6:75 Hukok with its suburbs and Rehob with its suburbs-
See on :74.

1Ch 6:76 and out of the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee with its suburbs; Hammon with its suburbs and Kiriathaim with its suburbs-
See on :74.

1Ch 6:77 To the rest of the Levites, the sons of Merari, were given, out of the tribe of Zebulun: Rimmono with its suburbs; Tabor with its suburbs-
Rimmono and Tabor in 1 Chron. 6:77 are in Josh. 21:35 as Dimnah and Nahalai.

1Ch 6:78 and beyond the Jordan at Jericho, on the east side of the Jordan, were given them, out of the tribe of Reuben: Bezer in the wilderness with its suburbs; Jahzah with its suburbs-
Again, Bezer "in the wilderness" suggests it was an isolated outpost which was not of great value. It continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots, or the choice of which cities were to be distributed by lot, so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites. See on :70.

1Ch 6:79 Kedemoth with its suburbs and Mephaath with its suburbs-
Kedemoth was "in the wilderness" (Dt. 2:26). Nearly all these cities gifted to the Levites weren't in good locations. See on :70.

1Ch 6:80 and out of the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead with its suburbs; Mahanaim with its suburbs-
To give Ramoth Gilead to the Levites was hardly much of a gift, because this town is recorded as so often falling into the hands of Israel's enemies. See on :70.

1Ch 6:81 Heshbon with its suburbs and Jazer with its suburbs-
This list was perhaps how things worked out in practice, because Jokneam and Kartah

were also promised (Josh. 21:34). But as often happens with God's people, they do not take all the blessing that God promised and intended for them.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 7

1Ch 7:1 Of the sons of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron, four-
Not all of the tribes have their genealogies given, and the detail is far less than for Judah and Levi. The details also varies between the tribes, with Dan getting no mention and Naphtali only one verse. This is because the purpose of these genealogies was for the exiles of Judah at the time of the restoration. But the call was for the ten tribes to return at the same time, and there were some of the ten tribes who remained in the land after the mass deportation to Assyria. These would have joined with the people of Judah in going into captivity in Babylon. Perhaps just the information relevant to them is recorded.

1Ch 7:2 The sons of Tola: Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam and Shemuel, heads of their fathers' houses, of Tola; mighty men of valour in their generations. Their number in the days of David was twenty-two thousand six hundred-
This may refer to the census taken by David which resulted in wrath upon Israel (2 Sam. 24:1). That census was incomplete because not all Israel wanted to pay the temple tax associated with a census. And so here we just have the number of fighting men [which was what David had wanted to know] of the clan of Tola.

1Ch 7:3 The son of Uzzi: Izrahiah. The sons of Izrahiah: Michael, Obadiah, Joel and Isshiah, five; all of them chief men-
These are all Godly names. Maybe that corroborates the suggestion on :2 that these were those numbered at the time of 2 Sam. 24:1 who paid the temple tax associated with a census. Those who didn't pay it weren't numbered. And it was the more Godly who would have paid it.

1Ch 7:4 With them, by their generations, after their fathers' houses, were bands of the army for war, thirty-six thousand; for they had many wives and sons-
The mention of many wives continues the theme of these genealogies- the moral weakness of the people, especially in terms of marital relationships, is constantly noted.

1Ch 7:5 Their brothers among all the families of Issachar, mighty men of valour, reckoned in all by genealogy, were eighty-seven thousand-
Ezra 2:62 records Judah being 'reckoned by genealogies', using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron. 4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there". The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

1Ch 7:6 The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher and Jediael, three-
Jediael ("Known to God") is substituted for the pagan Ashbel ("Man of Baal" in Gen.

46:21, following the principle that the name of Baal should be removed from the mouths of God's people (Hos. 2:17).

1Ch 7:7 The sons of Bela: Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth and Iri, five; heads of fathers' houses, mighty men of valour. They were reckoned by genealogy twenty-two thousand and thirty-four-
The apparent difference with the list in 1 Chron. 8:3-5 is that we are here reading the numbers of fighting men taken at the time of the census in 2 Sam. 24:1. At the time of a census, the temple tax had to be paid, or else plague would come. Plague was chosen by God as the punishment for Israel at this time, because many refused to be counted as they didn't want to pay the temple tax. Hence David took false guilt in feeling personally guilty for the plague. But it seems that some paid the tax for others, and so "sons" are counted to them who may not have been their literal sons. See on :11 for an example.

1Ch 7:8 The sons of Becher: Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth and Alemeth. All these were the sons of Becher-
Some of these are names of places (1 Chron. 6:60; Jer. 1:1), and it seems in all the genealogies there is a confusion between people and places. The settlements around a city are therefore often called the sons or daughters of that city.

1Ch 7:9 They were reckoned by genealogy, after their generations, heads of their fathers' houses, mighty men of valour, twenty thousand two hundred-
The purpose of the census in David's time was to find out how many soldiers there were. But it seems that whilst numbering them, there was also in some cases a note made of their genealogies.

1Ch 7:10 The son of Jediael: Bilhan. The sons of Bilhan: Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Chenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish and Ahishahar-
Jediael had only one son, but the sons of his son were counted to him. I suggest this was because he paid the temple tax for them at the time of the census when they were numbered; see on :11.

1Ch 7:11 All these were sons of Jediael, according to the heads of their fathers' households, mighty men of valour, seventeen thousand and two hundred, who were able to go forth in the army for war-
The particular detail given about the men of Jediael reflects how he was willing to pay the temple tax at the time of the census (see on :2). And I suggested on :6 that he had broken free of his weak spiritual background and changed his name to a more Godly name.

1Ch 7:12 Shuppim also, and Huppim, the sons of Ir, Hushim, the sons of Aher-
The addition of others, as if connected with Jediael but not his direct relatives ["Shuppim also..."] could be explained by the suggestion on :2,6, and :11 that Jediael paid the temple tax for these people. Therefore they were numbered under his name, but were not his relatives.

1Ch 7:13 The sons of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shallum, the sons of Bilhah-
Naphtali gets only one verse. I suggested on :1 some reasons for this. There would

have been few from the far north of Israel, where Naphtali was, amongst the exiles from Judah.

1Ch 7:14 The sons of Manasseh: Asriel, whom his concubine the Aramitess bore. She bore Machir the father of Gilead-
These records seem to stress the weakness and occasional strength of these children of God. This is one of the major lessons from Chronicles. Every now and then, the list of names is interrupted by a piece of information which indicates God's awareness of their spirituality. For example, the fact some men had more than one wife or a wife from a nation other than Israel is often recorded (1 Chron. 1:32; 2:3,26,35,48; 4:18; 5:1; 7:14; 8:8). The way these interruptions occur in the lists of names stands out. This is surely to indicate two things: that many faithful men (e.g. Abraham and Caleb, 1 Chron. 1:32; 2:46) made mistakes in this area of life, and secondly that all down the centuries God has not forgotten that they married out of the faith, or that they allowed the pressures of their surrounding world to influence them to break away from the ideal one man: one woman standard of Eden. These two facts provide us with both warning and comfort, in that although God is sensitive to failure, He is still able to justify men, to count them as if they are righteous for the sake of their covenant relationship with Him, even though (e.g.) their married life was not completely in order.

1 Chron. 2:21 adds: "Afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir the father of Gilead, whom he took as wife when he was sixty years old; and she bore him Segub". We again have the theme of marital and sexual weakness in the family of Israel. Machir was Manasseh's oldest son by a Syrian, Gentile woman. It was the Divine intention that marriage should be within the tribes of Israel so as to keep the inheritance which God intended. But here we have Manasseh and Judah intermarrying.

1Ch 7:15 Machir took a wife of Huppim and Shuppim, whose sister's name was Maacah; and the name of the second was Zelophehad: and Zelophehad had daughters-
The fact God allows His children to live His truth on different levels needs to be grasped firmly by us, lest we become discouraged that others live on an apparently lower level than we do in some aspects of life. Being surrounded by 'lower levels' ought to inspire us to the higher levels. Zelophehad had only daughters; usually, in his context, a man would have taken concubines in order to produce sons. The record of his only having daughters is presented in the context of genealogies which show that many Israelite men had more than one wife (1 Chron. 7:15). But Zelophehad wasn't dragged down by this; God inspired him to maintain the higher level which he had chosen to live by. He didn't use the principle of Jephthah's vow. And his daughters likewise refused to be limited by their status as females, but obtained an inheritance amongst their brethren (Num. 27:1-7).

1Ch 7:16 Maacah the wife of Machir bore a son, and she named him Peresh; and the name of his brother was Sheresh; and his sons were Ulam and Rakem-
"Peresh" means 'dung' (s.w. Ex. 29:14; Lev. 4:11). Here we have an example of how some names were birth names; and others, like this, were names which reflected life experience and character, and were what others called the person. Which is why people had multiple names.

1Ch 7:17 The son of Ulam: Bedan. These were the sons of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh-
This Bedan is perhaps the judge mentioned in 1 Sam. 12:11 about whom we do not read in the book of Judges.

1Ch 7:18 His sister Hammolecheth bore Ishhod, and Abiezer, and Mahlah-
We note the prominence given to this woman. Her name means 'Queen of Molech', the god to whom children were sacrificed. Her infamy is therefore noted, continuing the theme of the genealogies noting the widespread spiritual weakness of the people. But from her came Abiezer, from whom Gideon was descended. So we are again taught that a man can overcome bad background by response to God's word and His love.

1Ch 7:19 The sons of Shemida were Ahian, and Shechem, and Likhi, and Aniam-
Shemida appears out of context here, but Josh. 17:2 says he was also one of the male descendants of Manasseh. Seeing no other pedigree is given, perhaps Shemida was adopted into the tribe, maybe having been a Gentile.

1Ch 7:20 The sons of Ephraim: Shuthelah, Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eleadah his son, Tahath his son-
Called Shuthelah, Becher, Tahan and Eran in Num. 26:35,36.

1Ch 7:21 Zabad his son, Shuthelah his son, and Ezer and Elead, whom the men of Gath who were born in the land killed, because they came down to take away their livestock-
The men of Gath are recorded as slaying some of the men of Ephraim the largest tribe (1 Chron. 7:21), whereas the men of Benjamin, the smallest tribe, slew the men of Gath (1 Chron. 8:13). It is God's way of showing how He works through the small and confounds the things which appear mighty.

1Ch 7:22 Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brothers came to comfort him-
It is unclear when this skirmish with the men of Gath occurred (:21). It could have been whilst Israel were living in Goshen. For their father Ephraim, the patriarch, was still alive, and his brothers. This means that the Israelites in Goshen were still not converted by their experience of Joseph's grace, and the great beneficence of Pharaoh towards them. They still hankered for more cattle, and raided southern Palestine in order to steal.

1Ch 7:23 He went in to his wife, and she conceived and bore a son, and he named him Beriah, because it went evil with his house-
Ephraim would have been very old by this point. Having a child in old age after the death of adult children... is absolutely psychologically credible. The inspired record is indeed credible at every point.

1Ch 7:24 His daughter was Sheerah, who built Beth Horon the lower and the upper, and Uzzen Sheerah-
The context of :23 suggests Sheerah was either the daughter or granddaughter of Ephraim the patriarch. This would confirm the suggestion on :22 that Israel in Egypt

had more contact with Canaan than we might imagine. She apparently build settlements there.

1Ch 7:25 Rephah was his son, and Resheph, and Telah his son, and Tahan his son-
The "he" is either Ephraim himself or Beriah (:23). Rephah and Resheph are names with pagan god associations. But from this background was to come faithful Joshua (:27).

1Ch 7:26 Ladan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama his son-
Unusually for the genealogies, we have here probably a complete genealogy from Ephraim who entered Egypt with Jacob, to Joshua who came out of Egypt.

1Ch 7:27 Nun his son, Joshua his son-
"Nun" means "to sprout", so Joshua is presented as the shoot; which is a Messianic term in Zechariah. Joshua, with the same meaning as 'Jesus', could potentially have been a Messiah figure, but he failed to live up to the full potential.

1Ch 7:28 Their possessions and habitations were Bethel and its towns, and eastward Naaran, and westward Gezer, with its towns; Shechem also and its towns, to Azzah and its towns-
Gezer is not the more well known Gaza, which was in Judah not Ephraim.

1Ch 7:29 and by the borders of the children of Manasseh, Beth Shean and its towns, Taanach and its towns, Megiddo and its towns, Dor and its towns. In these lived the children of Joseph the son of Israel-
But Beth Shean was in Issachar (Josh. 17:11-13; 1 Kings 4:11,12). Dor was in Asher (Josh. 11:1,2; 12:23; 17:11; Jud. 1:27,28). Taanach was within either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But these towns were also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

1Ch 7:30 The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and Serah their sister-
The mention of women in this list is unusual. The names are of those who became heads of family clans within the tribes. So the mention of Serah would mean that she became a head of family; although rare or unknown in the world around them, this was not totally unheard of in the Jacob family and we see in this the respect of women amongst them.

1Ch 7:31 The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel, who was the father of Birzaith-
"Birzaith" is female, and may refer to a place name ["well of olives"]. "Father of" is used about founding cities in 1 Chron. 2:51,52; 4:4,5.

1Ch 7:32 Heber became the father of Japhlet, Shomer, Hotham and Shua their sister-
Shomer and Hotham of :32 are Shamer and Helem of :34,35.

1Ch 7:33 The sons of Japhlet: Pasach, Bimhal and Ashvath. These are the children of Japhlet-

The apparently needless repetition of Japhlet as the father may be because as noted on :2,7,11, these names were produced at the time of David's census of 2 Sam. 24:1, and that meant that those numbered had to pay the temple tax or else plague would come. Japhlet perhaps paid the tax for the three sons, and this is stressed. Plague was chosen by God as the punishment for Israel at this time, because many refused to be counted as they didn't want to pay the temple tax. Hence David took false guilt in feeling personally guilty for the plague. But it seems that some paid the tax for others, and so "sons" are counted to them who may not have been their literal sons. See on :11 for an example.

1Ch 7:34 The sons of Shemer: Ahi, Rohgah, Jehubbah and Aram-
Jehubbah ['hidden place'] and Aram ['upland'] appear more appropriate as place names than personal names.

1Ch 7:35 The sons of Helem his brother: Zophah, Imna, Shelesh and Amal-
Shomer and Hotham of :32 are Shamer and Helem of :34,35.

1Ch 7:36 The sons of Zophah: Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah-
This list of 11 sons of Zophah may also include his grandchildren.

1Ch 7:37 Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran and Beera-
Several of the names of the 11 "sons of Zophah" (:36) are known place names, or sound as if they are; e.g. "Bezer" means 'inaccessible place', more appropriate to a place than a person.

1Ch 7:38 The sons of Jether: Jephunneh, Pispa and Ara-
Here and in :39 we appear to have the mention of people (Jether and Ulla) of whom we have no background information. Perhaps they are also "sons of Zophah" of :36.

1Ch 7:39 The sons of Ulla: Arah, Hanniel and Rizia-
Ulla is a female name. Yet she was a household head and mighty soldier (:40). The genealogies are noted for their mention of significant women.

1Ch 7:40 All these were the children of Asher, heads of the fathers' houses, choice and mighty men of valour, chief of the princes. The number of them reckoned by genealogy for service in war was twenty-six thousand men-
In 1 Chron. 12:36 Asher's troops were 40,000, and even more in Num. 1:41; 26:47. The smaller number here is because as explained on :33, this list was compiled at the time of the census of 2 Sam. 24:1. Those numbered had to pay the temple tax or else plague would come. Plague was chosen by God as the punishment for Israel at this time, because many refused to be counted as they didn't want to pay the temple tax.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 8

1Ch 8:1 Benjamin became the father of Bela his firstborn, Ashbel the second, Aharah the third-
Although the Chronicles genealogies and record tends to focus upon the Levites, the genealogy of Benjamin is perhaps stressed here because it is to provide a backdrop to Saul, whom we will begin reading about when the narrative begins in 1 Chron. 10. But

that genealogy will begin specifically at :29. Here we are reading of the Benjamites who lived in Jerusalem (:28). Benjamin was originally in Benjamite territory.

1Ch 8:2 Nohah the fourth and Rapha the fifth-

Gen. 46:21 says that Benjamin had ten sons when the Jacob family moved into Egypt, but here seven of them are in fact his grandsons. Benjamin was hardly a child when the brothers came to buy corn. He was in his 20s, and according to the Hebrew text he had ten sons already, and presumably some daughters; perhaps suggesting that his father's favouritism and obsession with him had not been helpful morally, and had resulted in him having multiple relationships from a young age. However, the LXX lists only three sons, and makes the rest of the list the sons of Bela. And yet Benjamin would not have been old enough to have been a grandfather. So it could be that he had married a woman who had children of her own who became Benjamin's, or that he somehow adopted these children. There would have been a very large extended family around Jacob, and maybe these children were simply under the care of Benjamin. However, the genealogy in Num. 26:40 appears to support the LXX text here, with Ard and Naaman given as grandsons of Benjamin and not sons. We must remember that genealogies, numbers and dates are not used in Semitic languages in the strictly literalistic way in which they are in European languages. Heb. 7:10 can therefore argue that Melchizedek blessed Levi because he blessed Abraham, and Levi was a descendant of Abraham, "yet in the loins of his father". And this establishes Melchizedek as greater than Levi, and in turn, the priests descended from him. That argument may appear very stretched and even technically inaccurate to European ears. But it had absolute validity in Hebrew thought. And so the grandchildren of Benjamin, yet unborn, could be listed as being in existence when Benjamin went into Egypt, and even be numbered amongst the group at that time. This is why the grandchildren of the maids are counted as if they are the direct children of the maids; see on Gen. 46:9,18. We likewise read that Jacob brought his twelve sons out of Mesopotamia, including Benjamin (Gen. 35:24,26). But Benjamin was born later, in Canaan. But on this basis of being counted as "in the loins of" an ancestor, Benjamin could also be presented as having come out of Mesopotamia. If this kind of thing were better appreciated by Bible readers, it would be better understood that there was no personal pre-existence of the Lord Jesus in actuality, although He is spoken of as existing prior to His birth.

1Ch 8:3 Bela had sons: Addar, Gera, Abihud-

The simple truth is that Benjamin, the "little one" (Gen. 44:20), has more descendants listed to his name than any of the brothers. Is. 60:22 clearly alludes to this- "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation". It is the theme of the patriarchal family; the firstborns are deposed, the elder serves the younger, the weak become strong, the little one becomes mighty.

1Ch 8:4 Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah-
These names of Benjamin's sons / grandsons recur in :7. Perhaps the sons of Ehud were named after those of Benjamin / Bela, as a sign of loyalty to the founding fathers of the tribe. There seems another example of this noted on :16. See on :22.

1Ch 8:5 Gera, Shephuphan and Huram-
See on :4. These names, meaning "grain", "serpent like" and "white", hardly reflect much spirituality. Indeed the true Israel of God had very shaky beginnings, and their founding fathers were nothing at all to be proud of in spiritual terms. They were to be God's people by grace alone.

1Ch 8:6 These are the sons of Ehud, who are the heads of fathers' households of the inhabitants of Geba, and they carried them captive to Manahath-
This Ehud appears rather abruptly, and may be the same as "Abihud" of :3. But the judge of Israel, Ehud, was a Benjamite who was son of Gera (Jud. 3:15), and he sounds like the same person. So these men listed as "sons of Ehud" may actually simply be 'relatives of' Ehud, for "sons of" is a very vague phrase in Hebrew. In this case we would be learning that Ehud's family were carried captive to Manahath, a place in Moab. And this would explain his motivation in fighting to free Israel from Moabite domination.

1Ch 8:7 Naaman, Ahijah and Gera. He carried them captive, and he became the father of Uzza and Ahihud-
See on :4. The idea may be that Ehud had two sons after his relatives had been taken captive to Moab. Their names, "strong" and "riddle", may refer to Ehud's being left-handed, and his slaying of Eglon by that strength. See on :8.

1Ch 8:8 Shaharaim divorced his two wives, Hushim and Baara. Later, when he lived in the country of Moab, he married Hodesh-
These records seem to stress the weakness and occasional strength of these children of God. This is one of the major lessons from Chronicles. Every now and then, the list of names is interrupted by a piece of information which indicates God's awareness of their spirituality. For example, the fact some men had more than one wife or a wife from a nation other than Israel is often recorded (1 Chron. 1:32; 2:3,26,35,48; 4:18; 5:1; 7:14; 8:8). The way these interruptions occur in the lists of names stands out. This is surely to indicate two things: that many faithful men (e.g. Abraham and Caleb, 1 Chron. 1:32; 2:46) made mistakes in this area of life, and secondly that all down the centuries God has not forgotten that they married out of the faith, or that they allowed the pressures of their surrounding world to influence them to break away from the ideal one man: one woman standard of Eden. These two facts provide us with both warning and comfort, in

that although God is sensitive to failure, He is still able to justify men, to count them as if they are righteous for the sake of their covenant relationship with Him, even though (e.g.) their married life was not completely in order.

But the translation of this verse is very difficult and I suggest we may be intended to understand that Shaharaim ['double dawn'] went into captivity in Moab, and there he had many children. This would then connect with how when Ehud's relatives went into captivity in Moab, he had two sons and vowed to liberate Israel from Moab (:7)- which he did.

1Ch 8:9 his wife and had seven sons: Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam-
These children of his second marriage were a new beginning for Shaharaim, perhaps that is the sense of his name, 'double dawn'. But their names include the god Malcam of Ammon [which was likely also worshipped in Moab where they had been in captivity], which doesn't give the impression of much spirituality.

1Ch 8:10 Jeuz, Shachia and Mirmah. These were his sons, heads of fathers' households-
As noted on :9, these names all tend to have idol or apostate associations. Jeuz = 'departure / apostacy', Shachia = 'captivation', Mirmah = 'deceit'.

1Ch 8:11 By Hushim he became the father of Abitub and Elpaal-
But in :8 we read he had divorced Hushim. Perhaps he remarried her, an abomination under the law. Maybe that is also the reference of his name, 'double dawn'. The theme of spiritual weakness is again continued.

1Ch 8:12 The sons of Elpaal: Eber, Misham and Shemed, who built Ono and Lod with its towns-
The Chronicles genealogies were rewritten for the exiles, to enable them to better locate themselves within Israel's history. These cities featured in the restoration (Ezra 2:33; Neh. 7:37; 11:35). The Targum adds "Which the children of Israel ravaged and burnt with fire, when they made war on the tribe of Benjamin in Gibeah".

1Ch 8:13 and Beriah and Shema, who were heads of fathers' households of the inhabitants of Aijalon, who put to flight the inhabitants of Gath-
This appears in purposeful contrast to how the men of Gath are recorded as slaying some of the men of Ephraim the largest tribe (1 Chron. 7:21), whereas the men of Benjamin, the smallest tribe, slew the men of Gath (1 Chron. 8:13). It is God's way of showing how He works through the small and confounds the things which appear mighty.

1Ch 8:14 and Ahio, Shashak, Jeremoth-
From :13,14 we appear to have a new list of Benjamite heads of families. The names from :14 - :27 are divided into five groups: the sons of Beriah (:16), Elpaal (:18), Shimei (:21), Shashak (:25) and Jeroham (:27).

1Ch 8:15 Zebadiah, Arad, Eder-
Arad, "fugitive / exile", is one of several examples of names which sound appropriate to the exiles; see on :18. The message of the genealogies was and is that God's people had been in defeat, exile and captivity before, but had survived.

1Ch 8:16 Michael, Ishpah and Joha, the sons of Beriah-
I suggested on :14 that this is a new list of Benjamite heads of families, separate to that which precedes it. But the names Beriah and Shashak repeat (:16,25) what is in :13,14. It could be the names simply repeat, as we saw on :4, where the sons of Ehud were named after those of Benjamin / Bela, as a sign of loyalty to the founding fathers of the tribe. Perhaps this was a tradition of the Benjamites. See on :22.

1Ch 8:17 and Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki, Heber-
We wonder whether these are sons of the same Elpaal of :12. But as suggested on :16, to recycle personal names appears to have been a Benjamite tradition, as it has been in many tribes worldwide.

1Ch 8:18 Ishmerai, Izliah and Jobab, the sons of Elpaal-
These names again, as noted on :15, are examples of names which sound appropriate to the exiles. Ishmerai ("He who will be preserved"), Izliah ("Yah will draw out") and Jobab ("weeper", as the exiles wept by the rivers of Babylon). The message of the genealogies was and is that God's people had been in defeat, exile and captivity before, but had survived.

1Ch 8:19 and Jakim, Zichri, Zabdi-
Names again pertinent to the exile; respectively, "He will raise up / He will remember / He will give".

1Ch 8:20 Elienai, Zillethai, Eliel-
Elienai is “My eyes look towards Jehovah", which was the feeling of the faithful captives in Ps. 123:2.

1Ch 8:21 Adaiah, Beraiah and Shimrath, the sons of Shimei-
"Yah has adorned" (Adaiah) and "Yah has created" (Beraiah) state the parents' faith that what God had promised, to create (Is. 65:17) and adorn (Jer. 31:4) a restored Israel, He had as good as done. For this is the essence of faith- to feel and believe that what is not yet fulfilled has in fact happened, so certain is God to come through with His purpose (Mk. 11:24).

1Ch 8:22 and Ishpan, Eber, Eliel-
Again we see the repetition of the name Eliel (:20). This confirms the suggestion on :4,16,17 that this chapter is not in fact hopelessly jumbled by various editors, but simply reflects a common tribal tradition of repeating names. We recall how Israel and Judah both had a king called Jehoram at the same time (2 Kings 1:17).

1Ch 8:23 Abdon, Zichri, Hanan-
As noted on :22, many of these names repeat; another Zichri is in :19.

1Ch 8:24 Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah-
Perhaps meaning a person from Anathoth, which was in Benjamin and was a priestly town, where Jeremiah was from (Jer. 1:1). But the form in which it is here means 'Yah answers'.

1Ch 8:25 Iphdeiah, and Penuel the sons of Shashak-
I suggested on :14 that this is a new list of Benjamite heads of families, separate to that which precedes it. But the names Beriah and Shashak repeat (:16,25) what is in :13,14. It could be the names simply repeat, as we saw on :4, where the sons of Ehud were named after those of Benjamin / Bela, as a sign of loyalty to the founding fathers of the tribe. Perhaps this was a tradition of the Benjamites. See on :22.

1Ch 8:26 and Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah-
"Shehariah", "Yah has sought", has relevance to God's seeking of His lost sheep at the restoration, as prophesied in Ez. 34 and often. But they had to seek Him (Hos. 5:15 uses the same word for "sought"); and the meeting of the searching God with the man searching for Him can be electric, the Father meeting the prodigal.

1Ch 8:27 Jaareshiah, Elijah and Zichri, the sons of Jeroham-
There is also a Zichri in :19,23; see on :22. "Elijah", 'Yahweh is the God', would be a challenge to Israel's common idea that they could serve Yahweh through serving the

other gods. But their one and only God was to be Yahweh, and that left no space for worshipping any other god.

1Ch 8:28 These were heads of fathers' households throughout their generations, chief men: these lived in Jerusalem-
This appears to begin the summary of the Jerusalem Levites and their division of labour which finishes in 1 Chron. 9:34.

1Ch 8:29 In Gibeon there lived the father of Gibeon, whose wife's name was Maacah-
The following genealogical information on Saul is to provide background for the historical narrative which will begin with the death of Saul in 1 Chron. 10. And it begins with the point that Saul was grandson of the founder of Gibeon, or Gibeah of Saul. When he made out to Samuel that he was from an insignificant family, he was [like us when facing God's call] making desperately untrue excuses.

1Ch 8:30 and his firstborn son Abdon, and Zur, Kish, Baal, Nadab-
When a passage is repeated twice, surely God wishes us to perceive something. 1 Chron. 8:30-34 is repeated in 9:36-40. The reason seems to be that the name 'Baal' was used by the leaders of Israel. Gibeon's children included Kish and *Baal* , Kish's son was king Saul, Saul had a son called Esh*baal* as well as Jonathan, David's beloved friend; and Jonathan had a son called Merib*baal* . These are not the names as recorded elsewhere; evidently the Chronicles record is highlighting the fact that there was a strand of weakness for idols in the family of Saul, including in Jonathan- who was a type of us in his friendship of David / Jesus. Surely this helps us to better relate to him; his love of David, his appreciation of David's righteousness, his belief that David would have the future Kingdom, struggled against the fact that the worldly influence of his father and great-grandfather still rubbed off upon him.

1Ch 8:31 Gedor, Ahio and Zecher-
We note that none of the names of the sons of Kish feature the 'Yah' prefix or suffix. Saul didn't come from a spiritual background, and yet the Spirit of God was strong enough to change him and give him "another heart". Just as it can transform secular, irreligious man today.

1Ch 8:32 Mikloth became the father of Shimeah. They also lived with their brothers in Jerusalem, over against their brothers-
The idea is that some of the family lived in Jerusalem, 'opposite', as it were, the family who remained in Gibeah. Jerusalem was originally in Benjamin's territory. Mikloth may

refer to another brother of Saul. For the purpose of this genealogy is to introduce us to Saul.

1Ch 8:33 Ner became the father of Kish; and Kish became the father of Saul; and Saul became the father of Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab and Eshbaal-
See on 1 Sam. 16:8. 1 Sam. 31:2; 1 Chron. 10:2 read "Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua", whereas 1 Sam. 14:49 has "Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua". "Ishvi" may be another name for Abinadab; or we may note that the word means "and the second...", which would make sense in 1 Sam. 14:49. The genealogies of 1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39 also mention Esh-Baal or Ishbosheth; perhaps his name mentioning the "Baal" compound was the reason for its exclusion. Having such a name reflects upon Saul's lack of total devotion to Yahweh.

1Ch 8:34 The son of Jonathan was Merib Baal; and Merib Baal became the father of Micah-
Merib-baal (1 Chron. 8:34; 9:40) could mean 'the shame of Baal', but there is evidence that Saul's daughter Michal had an idol and it is likely that even Jonathan was not free of idolatry. Idolatry has always been a besetting weakness amongst even the best of God's people. He is called "Mephibosheth" in 2 Sam. 9:6, which is apparently a name which would have arisen from changing his original name, Meribbaal 'man of Baal' (1 Chron. 8:34), to something which means 'the dispeller of shame'. i.e. Baal. The suffix 'baal' could suggest that even Jonathan was closer to idolatry than we would like, and at least he didn't use the 'Yah' suffix in the name of his children. But Mephibosheth had perhaps repented of this, renouncing Baal as shameful, and yet still struggled to believe in the extent of Yahweh's grace to him through David.

Tragically, we so often read of Yahweh's people carrying the names of Baal or other gods within their own names- e.g. Merib-baal (1 Chron. 8:34; 9:40); Ishbaal (1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39); Baal-yada (1 Chron. 14:7); and perhaps worst of all, Baal-Yah (1 Chron. 12:5). Is our 'name' or personality before God the same tragic mixture of flesh and spirit?

1Ch 8:35 The sons of Micah: Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz-
Micah may refer to another brother or son of Saul, or possibly to a child of Jonathan. For the purpose of this genealogy is to introduce us to Saul. "Melech", "king", may refer to the son or relative whom Saul favoured to succeed him, as kings often didn't choose their firstborn sons to succeed them. In this case, it reflects his refusal to believe the reality of the fact that David was to succeed him. Men are all the time in denial of God's word and all the evidence that it is going to come true, and act and plan as if sleepwalking or in amnesia, as if it will not.

1Ch 8:36 Ahaz became the father of Jehoaddah; and Jehoaddah became the father of

Alemeth, Azmaveth and Zimri; and Zimri became the father of Moza-
Jehoaddah is called Jarah in 1 Chron. 9:42. "Jarah" is the very same word for "honeycomb" used in the record of how Jonathan ate of a honeycomb after his great victory over the Philistines, and his father Saul sought to kill him for it (1 Sam. 14:27). We are reading here of the relatives of Saul, so it may well be that this child was named in favour of and respect for Jonathan rather than Saul.

1Ch 8:37 Moza became the father of Binea; Raphah was his son, Eleasah his son, Azel his son-
We may wonder this particular line of Saul's family is recorded. We note that unlike the names of Saul's brothers, the names of this branch generally speak of God or spiritual things. Perhaps the names carried significance to those for whom these genealogies were first prepared. Or maybe the idea is that those who are spiritually minded are the ones whose name is preserved.

1Ch 8:38 Azel had six sons, whose names are these: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah and Hanan. All these were the sons of Azel-
As noted on :37, these are all generally Godly or spiritual names. The fact they are all such names is surely a signpost to the fact that Azel was a spiritual person. And yet Saul's branch of the family didn't have such names. This may be to point up the way that God it seems willfully chose a person from an unspiritual background, when there were more spiritually qualified people even within his own wider family. Because He wished to declare His power of transformation in that man, through the work of the Spirit on his heart; even though Saul was to later refuse to cooperate. But this, it seems, was God's potential plan for him.

1Ch 8:39 The sons of Eshek his brother: Ulam his firstborn, Jeush the second, and Eliphelet the third-
Ulam is twelfth from Saul, although generations are often skipped in these genealogies. So seeing that Hezekiah was thirteenth from David, we can conclude that it was Isaiah or Hezekiah who may have first ordered these genealogies to be drawn up, although they were rewritten at the times of the exiles.

1Ch 8:40 The sons of Ulam were mighty men of valour, archers, and had many sons, and sons' sons, one hundred and fifty. All these were of the sons of Benjamin-
Saul is likewise described as a "mighty man of valour" (1 Sam. 9:1). The impression is given that he was from a family which included many such people. And yet this would mean that Saul was making excuses when he attempts to turn down Samuel's call of him to kingship; for he therefore wrongly claimed that he was from a small and

insignificant, unqualified family in Benjamin. We too can make all manner of dumb excuses and paint a quite wrong self image- in order to avoid God's call.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 9

1Ch 9:1 So all Israel were reckoned by genealogies - they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. Judah was carried away captive to Babylon for their disobedience-
Ezra 2:62 records Judah being 'reckoned by genealogies', using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron. 4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there". The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

1Ch 9:2 Now the first inhabitants who lived in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites and the Nethinim-
"First" here refers to importance rather than first chronologically. The sense is as in Ezra 2:70 "Now those who first returned from Babylon to dwell in Judaea, again, dwelt [not in Jerusalem, but] in their own cities; this did they all whether they were laymen, priests, Levites; or Nethinim". We note that the common "Israelites" are placed first rather than last. The Levites were themselves but servants, and we see here the importance God attaches to the rank and file.

1Ch 9:3 In Jerusalem lived of the children of Judah, of the children of Benjamin and of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh-
The fact some of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh also lived there is omitted by Nehemiah (Neh. 11:4). Perhaps Nehemiah recognized in his edited version that the prophetic intention of Israel and Judah reuniting in Zion hadn't come about as intended. There had been no repentance, and most of them preferred to remain in exile. So he didn't even want to give the impression that the intended restoration had happened in this respect.

1Ch 9:4 Uthai the son of Ammihud, son of Omri, son of Imri, son of Bani, of the children of Perez son of Judah-

From :4-6 we see (as in Num. 26:20) the threefold division of the tribe of Judah (into the children of Perez, Shelah and Zerah).

1Ch 9:5 Of the Shilonites: Asaiah the firstborn, and his sons-
Related not to the town of Shiloh, but to the descendants of Shelah in the line of Judah (Num. 26:20). Shelah had a very shady beginning and might have seemed doomed to spiritual failure (Gen. 38:5,11,14); he was half Canaanite. But from shaky spiritual beginnings, some do make good. And now we are reading of his descendants as those living in Jerusalem as the vanguard of the restoration of God's Kingdom.

1Ch 9:6 Of the sons of Zerah: Jeuel, and their brothers, six hundred and ninety-
Neh. 11:6 says that "All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men". At this point the list in 1 Chron. 9 gives the number of the sons of Zerah as 690. It is clear therefore that neither list is complete. But that is no contradiction.

1Ch 9:7 Of the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, son of Hodaviah, son of Hassenuah-
Better “and Hodaviah the son of Hasenuah”, the same person as “Judah the son of Hassenuah” in Neh. 11:9.

1Ch 9:8 and Ibneiah son of Jeroham, and Elah the son of Uzzi, son of Michri, and Meshullam the son of Shephatiah, son of Reuel, son of Ibnijah-
Neh. 11:8 adds: "After him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred and twenty-eight". These are not mentioned here in the parallel 1 Chron. 9:8 where the chiefs of Benjamin inferior to Sallu are Ibneiah, Elah and Meshullam. There is no contradiction; it's simply that neither of the lists are exhaustive.

1Ch 9:9 and their brothers, according to their generations, nine hundred and fifty-six. All these men were heads of fathers’ households by their fathers’ houses-
"Brothers" is a vague term in Hebrew, and this would account for the slight difference in numbers with Neh. 11:8.

1Ch 9:10 Of the priests: Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jachin-
Those three are names of the priestly orders in 1 Chron. 24:7. In Ezra 7, 15 names are listed between Ezra and Aaron- covering about 1000 years. Clearly many generations were omitted. We note there are 26 names listed between Zerubbabel (a generation or

two before Ezra) and Nashon a contemporary of Aaron, in 1 Chron. 2:10-15; 3:1-19. Some details of the omitted generations are found in 1 Chron. 9:10,11; Neh. 11:11.

1Ch 9:11 and Azariah son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, the ruler of God's house-
This might (2 Chron. 31:10,13) or might not (2 Chron. 35:8) refer to the High Priest.

1Ch 9:12 and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, and Maasai son of Adiel, son of Jahzerah, son of Meshullam, son of Meshillemith, son of Immer-
Compare this with Neh. 11:13: "And his brothers, chiefs of fathers' households, two hundred and forty-two; and Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer". AV: "Amashai (R.V. Amashsai) the son of Azareel (R.V. Azarel), the son of Ahasai (R.V. Ahzai), the son of Meshillemoth]". Compare the parallel in 1 Chron. 9:12, "Maasai the son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemith". The same person is in view. Comparing the names we see how the Biblical genealogies omit some names and generations, and also how the same name is rendered slightly differently. This is partly because of the difficulty of transliterating letters from non-Latin languages, especially ancient ones. But there are also substantive differences. Names in non-literate societies were pronounced differently and spelt differently in different contexts.

1Ch 9:13 and their brothers, heads of their fathers' houses, one thousand seven hundred and sixty; very able men for the work of the service of God's house-
Neh. 11:14 "mighty men of valour". Their "valour" was in their ability to serve. For this is the true bravery.

1Ch 9:14 Of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, of the sons of Merari-
Hashabiah is called "the son of Bunni" in Neh. 11, but a man could be the descendant of more than one person, understanding "son of" as 'descendant' rather than literally.

1Ch 9:15 and Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, and Mattaniah son of Mica, son of Zichri, son of Asaph-
The Hebrew words can be read differently, either as proper nouns with meanings, or words; hence Neh. 11:17 "Bakbukiah the second among his brethren".

1Ch 9:16 and Obadiah son of Shemaiah, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun, and Berechiah son of Asa, son of Elkanah, who lived in the villages of the Netophathites-

These villages were hamlets around Bethlehem (1 Chron. 2:54; Neh. 7:26). Perhaps because of the long term influence of David, who was from there, this area became a source of faithful people (Ezra 2:22; 1 Chron. 27:13,15; Neh. 12:28).

1Ch 9:17 The porters: Shallum, Akkub, Talmon and Ahiman, and their brothers (Shallum was the chief)-
The genealogy of the sons of Korah, the gatekeepers of the temple, is recorded in 9:17-19. It can be shown from the genealogies that they were brought up by their second cousin, Phinehas. They obeyed the command to leave the tents of their father Korah when he was consumed in the earthquake. Num. 16:27 mentions Dathan and Abiram's children standing outside their tents at this time, but there is the pointed omission of Korah's children; they had left the tents. We can therefore build up a picture of Phinehas as a zealot for the purity of God's Truth (Num. 25), yet mixed with compassion, as shown by the way he took those children of Korah under his wing, and brought them up soundly in the Truth, with the result that wrote at least 11 of the Psalms and protected the purity of temple worship. It should be noted that Samuel was a Korahite (6:33-38).

1Ch 9:18 who previously served in the king's gate eastward: they were the porters for the camp of the children of Levi-
This was the gate specially built in the temple by which the king entered (2 Kings 16:18; Ez. 46:1,2).

1Ch 9:19 Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his brothers, of his father's house, the Korahites, were over the work of the service, keepers of the thresholds of the tent. Their fathers had been over the camp of Yahweh, keepers of the entry-
When Israel walked with God, "The hosts of the children of Levi" were actually called "the host / camp of Yahweh" (1 Chron. 9:18,19 Heb.). If we each have a guardian Angel, it makes sense that the hosts of God's people on earth are represented by Angelic hosts in the Heavens.

1Ch 9:20 Phinehas the son of Eleazar was ruler over them in time past, and Yahweh was with him-
The allusion may be to how it was at the door of the tabernacle / tent of the congregation that Phinehas stopped the apostasy of Israel. It seems from Num. 25:6-8 that the Midianite woman and the Israelite were having sex within "the tent", the tabernacle. Phinehas was remembered for this by his descendants directing the guards at the door of the tent (1 Chron. 9:19). The actions of the couple were therefore intended to turn the holy place into a place where Yahweh was supposedly worshipped through

sex with prostitutes, exactly the way of pagan religions, and which was a problem in the churches at Corinth and Ephesus.

1Ch 9:21 Zechariah the son of Meshelemiah was porter of the door of the Tent of Meeting-
The "porters and singers" at the restoration were Levites (Neh. 7:1). The use of Levites to guard the gates was a conscious attempt to restore the situation in Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 9:17-22; 26:12-19). We should also remember that the Levites and priests accounted for about half the population of Jerusalem (Neh. 11:6-19 cp. 1 Chron. 9:9-22). According to Ez. 44:11-14, the repentant Levites were to be the gatekeepers in the restored temple. But there is no evidence they did repent, indeed the record in Nehemiah shows they were on the side of the Samaritan opposition, intermarrying with them; and so the Kingdom situation possible at the restoration was precluded.

1Ch 9:22 All these who were chosen to be porters in the thresholds were two hundred and twelve-
Compare Neh. 11:19 "Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brothers, who kept watch at the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two". 1 Chron. 9:22 gives 212. It depends exactly what time 1 Chron. 9 refers to. And guards of the gates may have included others who were not in this particular list of "porters", for as noted several times, neither of the lists are exhaustive.

These were reckoned by genealogy in their villages, whom David and Samuel the prophet ordained-
This gives us an insight into David's mind when he was fleeing from Saul. The last time that Samuel and David are seen together is when David fled for his life from his own house – before Saul was dead and David on the throne.

In their office of trust-
As any employer soon learns, delegation is a risk. We have been "entrusted with the Gospel" (Tit. 1:3 RV); and therefore the world God so wants to love, the world God is appealing to, may never see Him; for He makes His appeal through us, as Paul told the Corinthians. Those who did God's work in the Old Testament temple were similarly given a "trust", they were entrusted with God's work.

1Ch 9:23 So they and their children had the oversight of the gates of the house of Yahweh, even the house of the tent, as guards-
This could imply that the holy and / or most holy place was still beneath a tent; or that it was still called this in recognition of the fact God didn't really want a house at all, but preferred to dwell in a tent.

1Ch 9:24 On the four sides were the porters, toward the east, west, north, and south-
Further details are in 1 Chron. 26:14-18.

1Ch 9:25 Their brothers, in their villages, were to come in every seven days from time to time to be with them-
Perhaps it is the villages of the Netophathites which are in view (:16; Neh. 12:28). These were in Bethlehem, not so far from the temple.

1Ch 9:26 for the four chief porters, who were Levites, were in an office of trust, and were over the rooms and over the treasuries in God's house-
See on :22. These chambers around the temple court were where the holy vessels and tithes were stored (1 Chron. 28:12; 2 Chron. 31:5,11,12; Neh. 13:4-9). It could be to these rooms which the Lord Jesus alludes when He says that in God's house / temple, there are many such rooms and He will go to die on the cross to prepare them for our use (Jn. 14:1-3). As :33 shows, the Levites at times slept in them. He clearly has in view the temple as a spiritual house, comprised of people not bricks. The idea is that His death achieved for us not only salvation, but eternal service as priests within God's "house", being about God's work and business for the sake of others' salvation and implementing their relationship with God. This is what eternity will be about. And it is in this life which we develop our desire to do these things, so that the Kingdom will be a time when all the frustrations and barriers to such service are removed.

1Ch 9:27 They lodged around God's house, because that duty was theirs. To them pertained its opening morning by morning-
"They" are the four chief porters of :26. We recall how Samuel as a non-Levite was charged with this work.

1Ch 9:28 Certain of them were in charge of the vessels of service; for by count were these brought in and by count were these taken out-
This could imply that things were at such a low ebb spiritually that there was the possibility of them being stolen, as they would have been made of precious metals.

1Ch 9:29 Some of them also were appointed over the furniture, and over all the vessels of the sanctuary, and over the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the frankincense and the spices-
These were specifically the things required for the daily sacrifices.

1Ch 9:30 Some of the sons of the priests prepared the mix of the spices-
This was forbidden to any others on pain of death (Ex. 30:33,35). This refers to the careful preparation of the incense (Ex. 37:29), which represents how the Lord Jesus fuses together so many different factors in our prayers (Ps. 141:2). For "we know not how to pray as we ought" (Rom. 8:26), and He is the only priest who can put together all the surrounding dimensions which are what God sees as 'prayer'. For prayer before God is far more than the words we think or say.

1Ch 9:31 Mattithiah, one of the Levites, who was the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, had the office of trust over the things that were baked in pans-
Zechariah is the firstborn of Shallum in 1 Chron. 26:2. These may be the same person, as people often had more than one name. Or "Shallum" may refer not to an individual but to a family.

1Ch 9:32 Some of their brothers, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the show bread, to prepare it every Sabbath-
Literally, "the pile"; the cakes were piled in two rows on the table of shewbread (Lev. 24:5-8).

1Ch 9:33 These are the singers, heads of fathers' households of the Levites, who lived in the rooms and were free from other service; for they were employed in their work day and night-
These rooms were storerooms but were lived in by the Levites when on duty. As explained on :26, they were understood by the Lord Jesus to symbolize our eternal place in God's purpose. We will therefore be eternally as Levites on duty, "day and night". It is in this life that we attain a taste for that work and a desire to be always about it. If we approach the Lord's service from a minimalist perspective, then such service being done eternally will not be something we really want.

1Ch 9:34 These were heads of fathers' households of the Levites, throughout their generations, chief men. They lived at Jerusalem-
This appears to draw to a conclusion the summary of the Jerusalem Levites and their division of labour which began in 1 Chron. 8:28.

1Ch 9:35 In Gibeon there lived the father of Gibeon, Jeiel, whose wife's name was Maacah-

This genealogical information on Saul is to provide background for the historical narrative which will begin with the death of Saul in 1 Chron. 10.

1Ch 9:36 His firstborn son Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab-
When a passage is repeated twice, surely God wishes us to perceive something. 1 Chron. 8:30-34 is repeated in 9:36-40. The reason seems to be that the name 'Baal' was used by the leaders of Israel. Gibeon's children included Kish and *Baal* , Kish's son was king Saul, Saul had a son called Esh*baal* as well as Jonathan, David's beloved friend; and Jonathan had a son called Merib*baal* . These are not the names as recorded elsewhere; evidently the Chronicles record is highlighting the fact that there was a strand of weakness for idols in the family of Saul, including in Jonathan- who was a type of us in his friendship of David / Jesus. Surely this helps us to better relate to him; his love of David, his appreciation of David's righteousness, his belief that David would have the future Kingdom, struggled against the fact that the worldly influence of his father and great-grandfather still rubbed off upon him.

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We note that none of the names of the sons of Kish feature the 'Yah' prefix or suffix. Saul didn't come from a spiritual background, and yet the Spirit of God was strong enough to change him and give him "another heart". Just as it can transform secular, irreligious man today.

1Ch 9:38 Mikloth became the father of Shimeam. They also lived with their brothers in Jerusalem, over against their brothers-
The idea is that some of the family lived in Jerusalem, 'opposite', as it were, the family who remained in Gibeah. Jerusalem was originally in Benjamin's territory. Mikloth may refer to another brother of Saul. For the purpose of this genealogy is to introduce us to Saul.

1Ch 9:39 Ner became the father of Kish; and Kish became the father of Saul; and Saul became the father of Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab and Eshbaal-
1 Sam. 31:2; 1 Chron. 10:2 read "Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua", whereas 1 Sam. 14:49 has "Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua". "Ishvi" may be another name for Abinadab; or we may note that the word means "and the second...", which would make sense in 1 Sam. 14:49. The genealogies of 1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39 also mention Esh-Baal or Ishbosheth; perhaps his name mentioning the "Baal" compound was the reason for its exclusion. Having such a name reflects upon Saul's lack of total devotion to Yahweh.

1Ch 9:40 The son of Jonathan was Merib Baal; and Merib Baal became the father of Micah-
Merib-baal (1 Chron. 8:34; 9:40) could mean 'the shame of Baal', but there is evidence that Saul's daughter Michal had an idol and it is likely that even Jonathan was not free of idolatry. Idolatry has always been a besetting weakness amongst even the best of God's people.

Tragically, we so often read of Yahweh's people carrying the names of Baal or other gods within their own names- e.g. Merib-baal (1 Chron. 8:34; 9:40); Ishbaal (1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39); Baal-yada (1 Chron. 14:7); and perhaps worst of all, Baal-Yah (1 Chron. 12:5). Is our 'name' or personality before God the same tragic mixture of flesh and spirit?

1Ch 9:41 The sons of Micah: Pithon, Melech, Tahrea and Ahaz-
Micah may refer to another brother or son of Saul. For the purpose of this genealogy is to introduce us to Saul. "Melech", "king", may refer to the son or relative whom Saul favoured to succeed him, as kings often didn't choose their firstborn sons to succeed them. In this case, it reflects his refusal to believe the reality of the fact that David was to succeed him. Men are all the time in denial of God's word and all the evidence that it is going to come true, and act and plan as if sleepwalking or in amnesia, as if it will not.

1Ch 9:42 Ahaz became the father of Jarah; and Jarah became the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth and Zimri; and Zimri became the father of Moza-
"Jarah" is the very same word for "honeycomb" used in the record of how Jonathan ate of a honeycomb after his great victory over the Philistines, and his father Saul sought to kill him for it (1 Sam. 14:27). We are reading here of the relatives of Saul, so it may well be that this child was named in favour of and respect for Jonathan rather than Saul.

1Ch 9:43 and Moza became the father of Binea, and Rephaiah his son, Eleasah his son, Azel his son-
We may wonder this particular line of Saul's family is recorded. We note that unlike the names of Saul's brothers, the names of this branch generally speak of God or spiritual things. Perhaps the names carried significance to those for whom these genealogies were first prepared. Or maybe the idea is that those who are spiritually minded are the ones whose name is preserved.

*1Ch 9:44 Azel had six sons, whose names are: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah and Hanan. These were the sons of Aze*l-
1 Chron. 8:38,39 says that Azel had a nephew called Ulam. Ulam is twelfth from Saul,

although generations are often skipped in these genealogies. So seeing that Hezekiah was thirteenth from David, we can conclude that it was Isaiah or Hezekiah who may have first ordered these genealogies to be drawn up, although they were rewritten at the times of the exiles.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 10

1Ch 10:1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain on Mount Gilboa-
It is really stressed that Saul and Jonathan "fell" on Gilboa (1 Sam. 31:1,8; 2 Sam. 1:10,12,19,25,27), using a Hebrew word which is often associated with spiritual falling. The fact that "the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons" (1 Sam. 31:2) gives the impression of them fleeing from the Philistine soldiers. This sends the mind back to the Law's warning that an apostate Israel would flee before their enemies (Dt. 28:25). Saul and Jonathan are described in terms representative of apostate Israel; see Am. 2:14,15; Micah 1 and 2 and expositions there. But the fall of Israel was due to the fall of Saul (see on 1 Sam. 28:19); instead of being the king who led to victory as Israel had hoped and as God had enabled, he led to shame and defeat.

Earlier the Philistines had 'fallen down slain' after David's victory over Goliath (same words in 1 Sam. 17:52). That victory had now been reversed; for Saul was the antithesis of David. And yet we have noted that David was spiritually weak at this time. All this was by grace alone, God's grace towards David, because He recognized that beneath all David's weakness there was a heart after His own. Fleeing before enemies and falling down before them is the language of Israel's punishment for breaking the covenant. But David deeply laments the falling down slain of Saul and Israel (2 Sam. 1:19,25 "the beauty of Israel is slain... how are the mighty fallen... how are the mighty fallen... O Jonathan, you were slain on your high places"). We enquire whether Jonathan had slipped away from the covenant, seeing he too fell down slain; he is strongly identified with Saul in 1 Chron. 10:6: "So Saul died, and his three sons; and all his family died together". The curious expression 'on your high places' suggests of course the idolatrous high places, as if Jonathan had been as it were sacrificed on the altar of his own preferred 'high place'. Ez. 6:4 sounds so similar, using the same words for 'falling down' and 'slain': "I will cast down [make to fall down] your slain men before your idols". We see here the danger of the Jonathan choice- to reject coming out for David / Jesus, and instead to choose to remain 'in the world' and appear as of the world, whilst speaking up for David / Jesus at times. It could sadly be that like many who have made the Jonathan choice, he was caught up in that world and suffered their judgment. Or it could be that we have here an example of how good men can suffer the results of

others' breaking of covenant. Although surely it is far from God to slay the righteous with the wicked, as Abraham argued regarding Lot in Sodom. Whatever, David's lament for those judged for breaking covenant makes him even more a man after God's own heart- for the condemnation of the wicked grieves God deeply, and is never done with any smug self satisfaction or lashing out in punishment.

1Ch 10:2 The Philistines followed hard after Saul and after his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul-

"Followed hard after" suggests the Philistines chased Saul. Just as he had chased David. We could see this as him reaping some poetic justice. Yet it could be that even in these last hours of his life, God was appealing to Saul to understand what he had done to David, and repent. Saul had chased David up a conical hill- and then the arrival of the Philistines had saved David. Now Saul was chased by the Philistines up a conical hill- to death. Saul was being reminded of this, but not as poetic justice for the sake of it, but as a nudge to repentance. For God doesn't give up with man until his last breath, and it's only over when it's over. Likewise we ponder why Saul's sons were slain first, and then he was hit by an arrow (:3). That isolating him alone, having lost his sons [he would have perceived, although wrongly, that all his sons were slain] and therefore all hope of his kingly dynasty continuing, was perhaps also a desperate appeal for his repentance and acceptance that his "kingdom", his dynasty", was not to continue. Or again, we ponder the word used for "archer" in :3. It is the word 'to point out', and is the word more commonly used for a "teacher". Samuel says in 1 Sam. 12:23 that he will not cease to "teach [s.w. "archer"] you the good and right way". Perhaps again there is a hint that even at that final stage, God was appealing for Saul to be teachable. So likewise we ponder how after Saul's sons are killed, he appears to be isolated alone with his armourbearer. And the only other mention of Saul's armourbearer is when we read that this was David's role earlier (1 Sam. 16:21). Was not this also a nudge towards thinking of David, and repenting of how he had abused David his armourbearer? We have no insight into the final psychological moments of those who die after falling away from God, but very likely His efforts with them likewise continue to the end of life. These are only hints, because God makes His appeals subtly and not in a way which would railroad man into repentance. For man is free, created free by God, and He ever respects that human freedom He has granted to man. To railroad to repentance is not His style nor His way in this world.

1 Sam. 31:2; 1 Chron. 10:2 read "Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua", whereas 1 Sam. 14:49 has "Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua". "Ishvi" may be another name for Abinadab; or we may note that the word means "and the second...", which would make sense in 1 Sam. 14:49. The genealogies of 1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39 also mention Esh-Baal or

Ishbosheth; perhaps his name mentioning the "Baal" compound was the reason for its exclusion. Having such a name reflects upon Saul's lack of total devotion to Yahweh.

1Ch 10:3 The battle went hard against Saul, and the archers overtook him; and he was badly wounded by the archers-
This was all such a reversal of fortunes. When the Philistines stopped the Israelites from having metal weapons, they honed their skills as slingers and archers. But now it was Philistine archers who wounded Saul. Tragically, David would use archers to slay Uriah. His words of Ps. 64:7 were being fulfilled: "God shall shoot at them [David's enemies] with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded". But when this happened, David weeps and laments over Saul. The Hebrew for "wounded" may also be rendered “and he was sore afraid" [s.w. "be in anguish", Dt. 2:25] . This is the final end of the rejected. Fear. Alone with none to help.

1Ch 10:4 Then Saul said to his armour bearer, Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me-

We see again the record present the demise of Saul and the rise of David. For David had earlier cut off the foreskins of 200 Philistines whom he has slain; “For
Saul devised to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam. 18:25). But Saul now faces abuse [of his circumcision?] by the uncircumcised and will himself fall by their hand.

"Lest [they]... mock / abuse me" were to be the very words of Zedekiah (Jer. 38:19). The message for the exiles was that their leadership had indeed acted and been judged as Saul, but there was hope for restoration in a revived David figure.

But his armour bearer would not; for he was terrified. Therefore Saul took his sword and fell on it-
We need to realize that we have more influence upon others than we may think. It can be that an illiterate sister in a male dominated society can think that her attendance at ecclesial meetings cannot encourage anyone. It can be that the Christian stockbroker feels that it is impossible for him to influence those he works with. But we do have influence. Saul’s armour bearer would not kill him when he was mortally wounded. Although he was one of Saul’s men, in the anti-David camp, yet David’s example of not killing Saul must have deeply influenced him. We do make a difference. We have become so humiliated by a shame based society that we can underestimate the value and power of our own personhood.

This man, although close to Saul, had been influenced by the spirit of David who would not lift up his hand against Yahweh's anointed. He may well have been near Saul on the

two occasions David had come close to him and had chosen not to slay him. We learn from this that there may be people who think rightly in positions we would not imagine. "Terrified" is literally "he feared", and David uses the word in 2 Sam. 1:10 in asking why the Amalekite did not "fear" to slay Saul as Saul requested. David appears aware of the faithfulness of Saul's armour bearer.

Saul was Yahweh's anointed, but he slew Yahweh's anointed- by killing himself. This was what he had attempted to do to David; and he ended up doing it to himself. And so is revealed a profound principle- that what we would wish to do to others, we ultimately do to ourselves. If we refuse to forgive them, we remain unforgiven. If we judge / condemn them and in our minds exclude them from God's Kingdom, we do the same to ourselves. If we wish our most difficult enemies salvation- we shall be saved. If we hate them and thereby kill them, as the Lord teaches- we hate and slay ourselves.

1Ch 10:5 When his armour bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell on his sword and died-

Fair attention is given to this man. As noted on :4, he was like Jonathan and many, in that his loyalties were divided. He was personally loyal to Saul, feeling that Saul's death was his death; and yet also loyal to the spirit of David, in that he would not slay Yahweh's anointed, and respected him as that right up to Saul's hopeless end. We may well meet him in God's Kingdom.

1Ch 10:6 So Saul died, and his three sons; and all his family died together-

To all die on the same day was tragic; and recalls the deaths of Eli and his sons at the hands of the Philistines. They died in fulfilment of prophecies that they must be replaced by a faithful priest, of whom Samuel was a potential fulfilment. The situation with the deaths of Saul and his sons was so similar. We see the same Divine hand at work.

"Many of the people" (2 Sam. 1:4) is no contradiction with this or 1 Sam. 31:6, where “all his men” refers to Saul’s immediate body-guard.

1Ch 10:7 When all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that they fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled; and the Philistines came and lived in them-

We enquire who is in view when we read that "When all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that they fled... they fled [also]" (1 Chron. 10:7). The reference to Saul being 'overtaken' in 1 Chron. 10:3 suggests it was Saul and his men who fled. This caused the men of Israel in the valley to flee; and then 1 Sam. 31:7 adds that the men of

Israel "on the other side of the valley" [a separate group] fled, when they say that the "men of Israel" in the valley had fled. It was a collapse mentality, led by the fleeing of Saul. David in 2 Sam. 1 presents Saul as gallantly fighting to the end, but he was surely imputing goodness to Saul. True to a man who disobeyed the covenant, he fled before his enemies, according to the curse of the covenant. And this led his men to progressively flee.

The valley of Jezreel is in view in the parallel 1 Sam. 31:7; it was the most fertile part of Israel. The translation may be better "on the side of the valley". The forsaken cities appear to apply only to that valley. "Beyond the Jordan" may mean 'on the river banks'. There is little archaeological evidence that the Philistines possessed the territory east of Jordan for very long. Soon after this, Abner proclaimed Ishbosheth as king at Mahanaim, about twenty miles east of the Jordan (2 Sam. 2:8). So these gains of the Philistines were short-lived, and they lacked the numbers of population to really settle all this territory. But the impression is given of a total Philistine victory in the north of Israel.

'Forsaken cities' is a term often used in the prophets of how Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were forsaken during the Babylonian invasion. The 1 Samuel record was surely written or edited as comfort to the exiles- that under David their prince, a glorious restoration was possible.

1Ch 10:8 It happened on the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa-
The fact this was done the next day suggests the battle continued into the late evening, with Saul fighting literally to the end.

1Ch 10:9 They stripped him, and took his head, and his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines all around, to carry the news to their idols, and to the people-
This may well have been to allude to what David had done to Goliath many years before, placing his armour in the tabernacle; the sting of which remained with them. But the record mocks how they had to take the news to their idols; unlike Yahweh who sees and knows all things, and even before they happen.

We note they stripped his armour. His crown and bracelet was taken by the Amalekite looter whom we learn of in 2 Sam. 1. The man came to spoil the slain bodies, and finding the crown and bracelet, took them to David, hoping for a reward.

If Saul was stripped, it means his royal robe was stripped off him. He had done this before when he was in the cave, and when he went to the medium. He should have stripped off those robes and given them to David, accepting God's word to him that this must happen. But he refused, and so it was done to him in his final condemnation. We either accept our condemnation now, or we will experience it at judgment day.

The death of Saul was 'published' (AV) by the Philistines. But David uses the word in saying "Publish it not" (2 Sam. 1:20). Perhaps he means that Israel were not to speak of this tragedy; hence he kills the Amalekite who 'published' the news to him (2 Sam. 4:10 s.w.).

1Ch 10:10 They put his armour in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the house of Dagon-
1 Sam. 31:10 adds: "They put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan". 1 Chron. 10:12 adds the detail that the bodies of his sons were likewise fastened to the wall. Herodotus writes of a great temple to Venus in Ashkelon.

Clearly the Philistines had in memory how David had brought the head of Goliath to Jerusalem. They were seeking to as it were undo David's work and victory.

1Ch 10:11 When all Jabesh Gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul-
They had been saved by Saul in 1 Sam. 11, maybe 40 years before (Acts 13:21). They had total loyalty to Saul even now at the end, when surely it was clear that David was the king of God's choice and Saul had sinned and failed. Perhaps they set a good example of appreciating the good a man once did or taught, even if in later life he turned away from God. As explained on 1 Sam. 30:23, this was how David treated Saul.

1Ch 10:12 all the valiant men arose and took away the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days-
1 Sam. 31:12 adds: "All the valiant men arose and travelled all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan, and they went to Jabesh and burnt them there". Cremation was not common amongst the Israelites, but perhaps they did this lest his body be abused further, seeing that they were under Philistine domination. We recall how it was beneath a tamarisk tree that Saul had ordered the massacre of the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:6). Now it is his bones which are beneath such a tree. But the bones were buried, so only the rest of the bodies were burnt. Or we can read "Burnt for them there", the burning referring to incense rather than the bodies.

1Ch 10:13 So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against Yahweh, against the word of Yahweh, which he didn't keep; and also because he asked counsel of one who had a familiar spirit, to inquire-

"So Saul died for his trespass..." suggests the hand of God in it- "He killed him" (:14). But he committed suicide. Yet God's hand overruled that. It was of Him.

"The word of Yahweh" connects directly with 1 Sam. 15:2, where the same phrase "the word of Yahweh" refers to the divine order to exterminate the Amalekites. Because he didn't want to "hear" God's word in his life, he didn't get to hear it when he desperately wanted to at the end ("Yahweh didn't answer him", 1 Sam. 28:6). Just as with the foolish virgins and their oil. We reflect that "just" for two sins Saul was condemned. There were many others of course, not least his persecution of David or murdering the priests of Nob, which we might consider to have been his greatest sins. But they aren't mentioned. Why? Perhaps in order to again underline to us that "just" one sin warrants condemnation. Or because his disbelief in and disobedience to God's word was the root failing in all his other sins, e.g. in persecuting David. Or possibly because they were the first and last sins of his kingship.

AV "a familiar spirit" is misleading, and many of the modern versions give something like "witch" or [ESV, GNB] "a medium". LXX has "a divining spirit". It doesn't mean she did actually have any such spirit; but that she was considered as having this. Such people were thought to be able to be possessed by the spirit of dead people, and to therefore speak in their name. But the Bible clearly teaches that the "spirit returns to God" (Ps. 146:4; Ecc. 12:7), and that death is unconsciousness. The spirit of dead persons don't enter other people. I would go so far as to say that the record of the witch at Endor, who supposedly had a "familiar spirit", is deconstructing this belief. For Samuel himself appears, and speaks directly to Saul, and not through the "medium". The woman therefore screamed in shock when Samuel actually appeared. He was resurrected, briefly, in order to give God's final message to Saul. The people claiming to have "familiar spirits" lay on the ground and mumbled hard to understand words in a voice seeking to imitate the dead person (Is. 29:4) but Samuel appeared in person and spoke clearly to Saul, directly. We also note that Samuel appeared to Saul standing upright, because Saul bowed before him: "Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and showed respect" (1 Sam. 28:14). This was quite different to how the mediums lay on the ground and mumbled words into the dust.

David felt preserved by God from Saul and his other enemies (1 Sam. 30:23; 2 Sam. 22:44), because he had preserved or obeyed [s.w.] God's ways (2 Sam. 22:22,24; Ps. 18:21,23); whereas Saul didn't obey / preserve them and was destroyed (1 Sam. 13:13,14; 1 Chron. 10:13). Hence Ps. 145:20: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy".

1Ch 10:14 and didn't inquire of Yahweh. Therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse-
Just before his final fight with the Philistines, "Saul enquired of the Lord (but) the Lord

answered him not" (1 Sam. 28:6), and therefore he went to a witch. But in God's final analysis of Saul, Yahweh says that He smote Saul because Saul sinned against God's word by *not* enquiring of God, but of a witch (1 Chron. 10:13,14). But Saul *did* enquire of God (see 1 Sam. 14:37 s.w. 1 Sam. 28:6), but God didn't answer him (note how often in the records it is stated that David enquired successfully of Yahweh). The point is that although Saul prayed to God and enquired of His word on the surface, in his heart, he did nothing of the sort; and therefore his prayer and enquiry was reckoned never to have happened. And we must ask how much of our prayer and Bible study is seen by God as being only spoken and read on a surface level. This was exactly the problem of natural Israel. "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled (in prayer) upon their beds" (Hos. 7:14). "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7). We have here a powerful challenge to our prayer life. For we can enquire of God on a surface level, as a kind of formality, to soothe the religious conscience which is somewhere in every man. But this is not to really enquire of Him.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 11

1Ch 11:1 Then all Israel gathered themselves to David to Hebron saying-
This was to enter the covenant which Abner had persuade them to make (see on 2 Sam. 3:21). We noted earlier that God had told David to go up to Hebron and it seems that is where God intended David to be king from. But it was David who preferred Jerusalem and possibly transferred that desire onto God.

Behold, we are your bone and your flesh-
Eph. 5:30 alludes here and makes the amazing statement that even now, "We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones". In a very detailed study of this language, Henricus Renckens concluded: "In Israel, in order to say that someone was a blood relation, one said: "He is my flesh and my bones" (Gen. 29:14; Jud. 9:2; cp. Gen. 37:27; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13 ff.; Is. 58:7)". This is how close we are to the Lord Jesus- blood relatives. This language could in no way be justified if Jesus were God Himself in person.

1Ch 11:2 In times past, even when Saul was king, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. Yahweh your God said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of My people Israel, and you shall be prince over My people Israel'-
The mutuality between God and David is often brought out. Yahweh was his shepherd (Ps. 23:1), and he was to shepherd Israel). All Israel recognized that David had always been Israel's saviour, and Saul generally had failed to experience the Divine potential for him to be this. The people may possibly be alluding to Gen. 49:10 "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it

belongs. To him will the obedience of the peoples be". And so the people gathered to David, the king chosen from Judah, the shepherd who had a staff. Although for them it now seemed so logical that a shepherd man from Judah should be their king, God's choice of Saul of Benjamin shows that He sees His purpose as capable of multiple different paths of outworking. This is why the interpretation of prophecy can never be conducted dogmatically, because there are various possible outcomes- depending upon human freewill response.

1Ch 11:3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before Yahweh; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of Yahweh by Samuel-
This is the covenant which Abner had engineered in 2 Sam. 3:21, aimed at providing total amnesty and assurance to all those who had once supported Saul. David had already been anointed by Samuel, but this was stating that all Israel approved of that and wanted to work with God's plan rather than against it. It was a covenant of amnesty and forgiveness, the past was to be the past. And this looks forward to the situation when the Lord is finally enthroned king at His return.

1Ch 11:4 David and all Israel went to Jerusalem (the same is Jebus). The Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, were there-
Defining the Jebusites as "the inhabitants of the land" may be another mark left by the inspired editing of these records for the exiles. Such explanatory notes would have been unnecessary for the primary readership. The encouragement to them was that restoration of Israel's fortunes was indeed possible, under a new David.

Hebron was a priestly city and Jerusalem the kingly city, so maybe this is intended to present David as a king-priest, beginning his kingship at the same age as the priests began their service (2 Sam. 5:4). But I have suggested that Yahweh's command in 2 Sam. 2:1 was for David to be king in Hebron ["David inquired of Yahweh saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? Yahweh said to him, Go up. David said, Where shall I go up? He said, To Hebron"], but he chose Jerusalem [partly in Judah, partly in Benjamin] for political purposes and God went along with that.

1Ch 11:5 The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, You shall not come in here-
2 Sam. 5:6 gives more detail: "The king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David saying, Unless you take away the blind and the lame, you shall not come in here; thinking, David can't come in here". "Thinking, David can't come in here" continues a theme in the Samuel records- that human thoughts are so significant to God. This is what they thought, and therefore from the abundance of their hearts, their mouths spoke. A person who feels they are

somehow a nice guy and worthy of invitation will be the one who tends to consider others as unworthy of invitation to the Kingdom. He or she who perceives their own desperation will eagerly invite even those they consider to be in the very pits of human society. The lame, blind etc. were not allowed to serve God under the law (Lev. 21:18), nor be offered as sacrifices (Dt. 15:21), nor come within the holy city (after 2 Sam. 5:6-8). The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind (Mt. 15:30), and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace.

Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion. The same is the city of David-
The contrast is with how Saul's tribe of Benjamin had failed to drive out the Jebusites (Jud. 1:21). Jerusalem was originally in Benjamin, but David's capture of the city made it "the city of David" and therefore in Judah. We see here how different potential futures could have worked out. If Benjamin had taken and inherited their possession and Saul had 'worked out' as he could have done, then Jerusalem would have been in Benjamin. We see here how God's plans are flexible, reflective of His great respect of human freewill and initiative.

The "city of David" was not a city, it is defined here as a stronghold, and elsewhere the term is used specifically of the burial places of the Davidic kings. It was a hill southeast of Jerusalem. In the wilderness Psalms, David so often talks of Yahweh as his stronghold, his fortified tower. And we think of 2 Sam. 22:1-3: "David spoke to Yahweh the words of this song in the day that Yahweh delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: and he said, Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, even mine; God, my rock, in Him I will take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge. My saviour, You save me". But once he settles in Jerusalem, we repeatedly read of the city / stronghold of David, the area he built a fortification around, the "milo". Again we see his spiritual decline once he settled down and we must beware of this. He himself and his fortified home fortress was his own stronghold rather than Yahweh.

It can be inferred that the Jebusites surrendered when the blind and lame were so cruelly slain. There is no mention of any battle; and Araunah the Jebusite is living and owning part of the future temple mount nearby at the time of 2 Sam. 24.

1Ch 11:6 David said, Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain. Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, and was made chief-

If David was indeed Jonathan's armourbearer in 1 Sam. 14, he would have seen how God had punished the pride of the Philistines when they thought likewise. For Jonathan had shinned up an almost vertical cliff, with the Philistines mocking him- and slew them. This inspired David with the possibility that someone of similar faith and bravery could climb up the sewer line into Zion and do the same. Jonathan's example, from some decades earlier, inspired faith in this later situation. And so will all Godly examples. The fact it was Joab who rose up to this example means that he must surely have had some faith as well as bravery, despite his rather unspiritual ways.

But the Hebrew of David's words in the parallel in 2 Sam. 5 reads like a kind of song, which could be translated:

Whosoever smites the Jebusite,
let him hurl down the precipice
both the lame and the blind,
hated of David’s soul.

We sense here a bitterness and lack of respect of the human person, which maybe resulted in his not being allowed to build the temple later. To murder the handicapped was unethical, but David's bitterness and desire for power led him to command it. Hence LXX "Whosoever smiteth the Jebusite, let him slay with the sword both the lame and the blind who hate David’s soul".

There are echoes of Saul's offer at the time of the fight with Goliath. Chronicles records: "Whosoever smites the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain". And thus Joab was restored to being chief of the army.

We note that the exclusion of blind and lame in Lev. 21:18-20 only applied to "the seed of Aaron" not being able to officiate with sacrifices. And lame and blind sacrifices weren't to be offered (Dt. 15:21). But this is being twisted by David's extremism and anger issues into a general prohibition of lame and blind people coming into sacred space. The Jebusites were making typical pre-battle taunts- and David falls deeply for it. The words lodged in him and he got furiously angry. But Lev. 21:21,22 was clear that disabled priests were allowed to eat the holy things although not to offer them: "he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. He *shall* eat the food of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy". That holy food was to be eaten in the holy place, beside the altar (Lev. 6:16,26; 7:6; 10:12,13; 24:9- all very different from the attitudes of other religions at the time which stigmatized disability and wouldn't have allowed any disabled priests). So David was quite wrong to demand that no disabled person come into the temple. The Lord healed the blind and lame and allowed them to enter the temple, as if undoing this whole law and principle (Mt. 21:14 "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them"). Jacob was lame but Yahweh is so often stated to be his God. There is no grace in David's position, nor in those who upheld

it. The reason is given that the lame and blind were hated of David's soul. Hardly a great basis morally. And yet, as ever, David's feelings are nuanced- because he shows huge grace to the lame Mephibosheth and has him live within his house and eat at his table (2 Sam. 9:13). We all have these contradictory feelings and positions, where anger struggles against grace. We think of his expressed hatred for Saul in the Psalms, and yet his love and grace to him in practice. This is not the same as hypocrisy, it is what it is to be a spiritually flawed human. And the promise of the new covenant is that specifically the blind and lame are those who will come to Zion: “I will bring them in from the northland, gather them from the ends of the earth—the blind and the lame among them, those with child together with those in labour—in a vast throng they shall return here” (Jer. 31:7). Indeed the law of Moses taught respect for the disabled- the deaf were not to be reviled, and no stumbling hazard placed where blind people were (Lev. 19:14), because "I am Yahweh". David's attitude is completely opposite to this; he is presented as plain wrong right from the get go of his establishment in Zion. But soon after he receives the amazing grace of the promises of 2 Sam. 7. Rather like directly after Abraham and Isaac are weak in faith regarding their wives- they receive the promises and material blessings.

1Ch 11:7 David lived in the stronghold; therefore they called it the city of David-
Jerusalem was particularly loved by David. He thereby moved the city into Judah's possession from Benjamin's; see on :5.

1Ch 11:8 He built the city all around, from Millo and all around; and Joab repaired the rest of the city-
Literally “the Millo” or "filling up”, referring to the defences of the citadel. Perhaps it refers to a place where armour was kept or a tower. "Repaired the rest" can be translated "spared / kept alive" (cp. Ex. 1:17). Maybe the reference is to the Benjamites who lived there, as well as the remaining Jebusites (cp. Jud. 1:21).

1Ch 11:9 David grew greater and greater; for Yahweh of Armies was with him-
Yahweh's hosts of Angelic armies were with David's armies on earth. This is the same phrase as used in David's protestation of humility in Ps. 131:1: "Nor do I concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me". 'To go' ["concern myself"] with 'great things' is the phrase used of David in the parallel 2 Sam. 5:10; he "went on [s.w. "concern myself"] and grew great" [s.w. "with great matters"]. So the idea of Ps. 131:1 may be that David didn't pay attention to these things so as not to become proud. And yet this humility was mixed with the bitterness noted on :6. We are all strange mixtures of spiritual strength and weakness. And we need to remember that in our interactions with others at their points of weakness.

2 Sam. 5:12 adds: "David perceived that Yahweh had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake".
He realized that the promises of Samuel so long ago had finally come true, despite all the times when it had seemed they could not come true (see on 1 Sam. 27:1). But this sense of fulfilment led him to take yet more wives (:13), which is surely to be read negatively in spiritual terms. Yet he realized that his establishment was located in a wider context than just for himself; it was for the sake of His people Israel.

2 Sam. 5:13 continues: "David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he had come from Hebron; and there were more sons and daughters born to David". This is hard to read in a positive light spiritually; for Israel's king was not to multiply wives (Dt. 17:17). He seemed to feel the need to prove himself established by having more wives and children, but this was itself a failure to appreciate that Yahweh had established him (:12). He did perceive this, but only on one level. David in Ps. 119 says that he studied God's law day and night. But he like us can miss the totally obvious and filter out the direct personal relevance. David was acting as monarchs did- having children by women from his chosen capital city, to establish his dynasty and establish himself as king there. Yet by doing this, David is breaking Divine principle by marrying multiple wives, for the sake of his political agenda rather than love marriage. And if the women were from Jerusalem, they were likely Gentiles / Jebusites as Jerusalem had not been in Israel's hands in recent times.

1Ch 11:10 Now these are the chief of the mighty men whom David had, who showed themselves strong with him in his kingdom, together with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of Yahweh concerning Israel-
Here we have an equivalent list to the "thirty" mighty men or "captains" of David in 2 Sam. 23. But there are more than 30 listed here. "Captains" is a form of the word translated "thirty" used in 2 Sam. 23:23, and is evidence that the "thirty" are not to be read as a literal number; in any case, 37 names are given for the "mighty men" in 2 Sam. 23, not 30. And there are more here in the parallel record in Chronicles.

1Ch 11:11 This is the number of the mighty men whom David had: Jashobeam, the son of a Hachmonite, the chief of the thirty; he lifted up his spear against three hundred and killed them at one time-
As noted on :10, "the thirty" is not a literal number. Likewise "hundred" need not be taken literally as 100, rather like the term "legion", and can refer to a military group.

1Ch 11:12 After him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, who was one of the three mighty men-
He "defied" the Philistines (2 Sam. 23:9). "Defied" is the word used of how Goliath had

defied Israel (1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). Later Philistine defiance is described with the same word (2 Sam. 21:21). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross should be to us.

1Ch 11:13 He was with David at Pasdammim, and there the Philistines were gathered together to battle, where there was a plot of ground full of barley; and the people fled from before the Philistines-

It seems from 1 Chron. 11:13,14 that soon after the fight with Goliath, there was another skirmish with the Philistines at Pas-Dammim [RVmg. 'Ephes-Dammim'- the same place where David fought Goliath]. Again, the men of Israel fled, but those who held fast were given a "great deliverance" ["salvation", RVmg.], just as David is described as achieving. Those men who stayed and fought were doubtless inspired by David; just as we should be, time and again, by the matchless victory of our Lord on Golgotha. See on 1 Sam. 17:1. "Plot of ground" is the same phrase used in Ruth 2:3, and again, it was full of Barley. And Ruth and Boaz were the ancestors of David.

He defended the field of barley because it was valuable to the Israelites. And in this we have a corroboration of the record with how Absalom had burnt Joab's field of barley (2 Sam. 14:30). We may wonder why Joab slew Absalom. It could have been that to lose a field of barley was to lose food for many months or even a year. It was therefore a major loss to Joab. As Shammah defended a field of barley with his life, so Joab was so vengeful at the loss of his field of barley that he later slew Absalom.

1Ch 11:14 They stood in the midst of the plot, and defended it, and killed the Philistines; and Yahweh saved them by a great victory-

David's men 'delivered' God's land, and He delivered them (s.w.). There is a mutuality between God and man. Defended" or "delivered" is the word used for David's victories (1 Sam. 17:37; 30:8,18,22) which were clearly so inspirational to his men, as the Lord's victory should be to us. The record continually gives the glory to Yahweh for working through His willing workers. They did not achieve these victories in their own strength alone. The very phrase is used in 1 Sam. 19:5 describing how Yahweh gave David the great victory over Goliath. This was clearly inspirational to David's men in their own battles, just as the Lord's victory on the cross should not be seen simply as a historical achievement for us, but an abiding inspiration to us to in essence do likewise.

Joab apparently murdered because his field of barley was burnt down, showing the value of the field. To lose it would mean starvation.

1Ch 11:15 Three of the thirty chief men went down to the rock to David, into the cave of Adullam; and the army of the Philistines were encamped in the valley of Rephaim-

Not literally thirty; see on :10. The giants of the Philistines were in the valley of the giants. And they even had a garrison in David's home town (:16). They appeared insuperable. This refers to an incident during the campaign of 2 Sam. 5:17.

1Ch 11:16 David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem-
The hideout of 2 Sam. 5:17. The rock or hill of Adullam was surrounded by valleys fully viewable from the top of the hill, making it a strong position. Yet despite the obvious tactical advantages of the place, David's Psalms repeatedly describe Yahweh as his rock, stronghold and fortress.

1Ch 11:17 David was thirsty and said, Oh that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!-
This has absolute psychological credibility. A leader of partisans sitting with his men in a cave, bitterly reflecting that the enemy have placed a garrison in his home village... would indeed make such a passing, under his breath comment like this.

1Ch 11:18 The three broke through the army of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David. David would not drink of it, but poured it out to Yahweh-
We see here the intense personal loyalty to David which is a theme throughout the record. It looks forward to that which there is to be between the Lord Jesus and we who follow Him in these outlaw days of our generation.

1Ch 11:19 and said, My God forbid it me, that I should do this! Shall I drink the blood of these men who have put their lives in jeopardy? For they risked their lives to bring it. Therefore he would not drink it. The three mighty men did these things-
Despite the intense personal loyalty which David inspired, he is to be commended for not allowing this to turn into a mere personality cult. He poured out that water to Yahweh, feeling unworthy to drink it. We note that water represented blood. This is a warning against being too literalistic in requirements concerning the elements of the breaking of bread service. David perceived the spirit of the law about drink offerings, and "poured [water] out to Yahweh" (:18) in a cave, not being a Levitical priest, and far from the sanctuary.

1Ch 11:20 Abishai, the brother of Joab, he was chief of the three; for he lifted up his spear against three hundred and killed them, and had a name among the three-
"Hundred", like "legion", need not be read literally; it could refer to a group or military

subdivision. Again the idea of singularly attaining victory against a multitude is a replication in spirit of David's victory over Goliath.

1Ch 11:21 Of the three, he was more honourable than the two, and was made their captain: however he didn't attain to the three-
This apparently means that he was demoted. This happened several times, as David considered that military valour was not the prime qualification for the post of army general, but rather perceiving grace and not shedding the blood of war in peace. Because Joab clearly failed to understand grace, David replaced him with Amasa- whom Joab later murdered out of jealousy.

1Ch 11:22 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, had done mighty deeds-
Benaiah was one of David's senior military commanders (2 Sam. 8:18; 1 Chron. 27:5), and the Hebrew of 2 Sam. 23:20 can be translated "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest, as head", i.e. of a group of David's mighty men. The Jehoiada in view as his father would therefore be Jehoiada the priest. The idea is that priests were also military leaders within David's army, indeed it seems there were a large group of them as ordinary soldiers in 1 Chron. 12:27. This shows how priesthood was not understood as abstract spirituality, but that spirituality was articulated in practice. And this, along with the hints in the names of the mighty men that some were Levites, is significant in that the Levites were not numbered as they were exempt from military service (Num. 1:47). But these chose to do it. See on 2 Sam. 24:5.

He killed two lion-like men of Moab. He went down also and killed a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow-
Benaiah killed a lion in order to prepare him for killing two lionlike men. For other examples of repetition in Biblical narratives see 2 Kings 7:9,11,16; 1 Chron. 7:22 [cp. Jacob being comforted by his sons over the loss of Joseph]; Benaiah killed a lion in order to prepare him for killing two lionlike men (1 Chron. 11:22); Peter, James and John were asleep at the transfiguration, but became "fully awake" and therefore beheld the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32)- they feel asleep in Gethsemane, and didn't learn from the transfiguration experience.

2 Sam. 23:20 has: "He killed the two sons of Ariel of Moab: he went down also and killed a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow". Perhaps this incident occurred at this time of the campaign in 2 Sam. 8:2. Although that campaign was not David and his men at their spiritual best; see note there. We see him following the path of David, whose victory over a literal lion gave him courage to fight Goliath. So Benaiah was inspired by David personally to kill a lion, and then kill two lion like men (AV) of Moab. The lion would have

been driven by the cold from the forests, and was preyed upon people. Benaiah therefore risked his life for the sake of his people, and slew the lion. See on :46.

1Ch 11:23 He killed an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits high; and in the Egyptian's hand was a spear like a weaver's beam; and he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear-
Again this is a repeat of the spirit of David's victory over Goliath, coming to Goliath with a staff and sling, and slaying him with his own weaponry. The point is repeatedly made that like the Lord's victory on the cross, David's over Goliath was programmatic for the inspiration of his followers to be like him.

1Ch 11:24 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada did these things, and had a name among the three mighty men-
As noted on :21, there seems to be the idea that some of these men were demoted. Thus Benaiah was both amongst the three, but didn't attain / remain amongst them (:25). "The three" is likely not to be read too literally, but may be a technical term for a group office, like "the thirty"; see on :10,11.

1Ch 11:25 Behold, he was more honourable than the thirty, but he didn't attain to the three; and David set him over his guard-
The numbers "three" and "thirty" are not necessarily to be taken literally. A form of the word for "thirty" is used of the "captains", see on :10,11, and of Pharaoh's captains (Ex. 14:7; 15:4); in any case, in 2 Sam. 23, 37 names are given for the "mighty men", not 30.

Heb. 'David appointed him to his audience', he was a member of David's inner circle of advisers on the basis of his faith shown in personal life, and not because of any possession of only theoretical wisdom.

1Ch 11:26 Also the mighty men of the armies: Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem-
Elhanan had also replicated David's victory over Goliath; see on 2 Sam. 21:19.

1Ch 11:27 Shammoth the Harorite, Helez the Pelonite-
This Shammoth was "Shammuth the Izrahite" of 1 Chron. 27:8. "Izrahite" there could be "the Zarhite" a man descended from Zerah the son of Judah. But he was from Harod, near mount Gilboa in the north. Perhaps he was given this name because he had done something valiant for Saul in the last fateful battle he fought in that area against the Philistines.

1Ch 11:28 Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite, Abiezer the Anathothite-
We get the impression that many of these men were living outside the territory of their native tribes. That could have been for various reasons, but perhaps we are to conclude that the men who supported David were [as with us and our loyalty to Jesus] those who had had non standard personal lives which left them isolated from their home areas. Anathoth was a priestly town in Benjamin. Perhaps he too was a priest; see on 2 Sam. 23:20.

1Ch 11:29 Sibbecai the Hushathite-
Mebunnai of 2 Sam. 23:27. He was a descendant of Zerah of Judah (see also on :27) (1 Chron. 4:4; 27:11).

Ilai the Ahohite-
Zalmon the Ahohite of 2 Sam. 23:28. There is only one Hebrew letter different. This would be an example of slight errors in copying which are found in the Hebrew text, although overall it is Divinely inspired.

1Ch 11:30 Maharai the Netophathite, Heled the son of Baanah the Netophathite-
This was near Jerusalem and the Levitical singers lived there after the exile (Ezra 2:22; Neh. 11:28); so he too may have been a Levite living in Judah. See on :22.

1Ch 11:31 Ithai the son of Ribai of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin-
He was from Saul's birthplace, and so would have rejected Saul for David, although David was not from his tribe. He did what was counter instinctive and countercultural, as all David's followers did. And as do the followers of his greater Son.

Benaiah the Pirathonite-
Pirathon was in Ephraim (Jud. 12:15), and there was always antipathy between Judah and Ephraim. So here again was a man who stepped out from his surrounding cultural expectations in loyalty to David.

1Ch 11:32 Hurai of the brooks of Gaash, Abiel the Arbathite-
Beth Arabah was a small settlement right out in the desert (Josh. 15:61; 18:22), therefore also called Arabah (Josh. 18:18). From such a poor and obscure place there arose a man who was attracted to David's cause (2 Sam. 23:31), just as the Lord calls all manner of unusual people to Himself today.

1Ch 11:33 Azmaveth the Baharumite-

Coming from Bahurim, he would have been aware of David's shameful behaviour there (see on 2 Sam. 3:16) and yet he still followed David. He would have seen David's actions to Michael and Paltiel as out of character with David generally, and didn't allow his loyalty to be fazed by them.

Eliahba the Shaalbonite-
Eliahba was from Shaalabbin in Dan in the far north, very far from David's origins (2 Sam. 23:32; Josh. 19:42). But somehow he encountered David, and loyally followed him. We marvel at the extent of those who followed David; they were from all over Israel. In those days of limited communication, we wonder how he came to know David well enough to give his life to his cause. But it is the same marvel as we reflect how people are called to the Lord Jesus today.

1Ch 11:34 the sons of Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan the son of Shagee the Hararite-
As explained on :35, "Jonathan the son of Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite".

1Ch 11:35 Ahiam the son of Sacar the Hararite, Eliphal the son of Ur-
Compare with 2 Sam. 23:33 "Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Ararite". To reconcile this with the record in Chronicles, we may need to read Shammah as one of the sons of Jonathan of the preceding verse. We could then read this verse along with the last part of 2 Sam. 23:32 as "Jonathan the son of Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite".

1Ch 11:36 Hepher the Mecherathite, Ahijah the Pelonite-
"The Maacathite" (2 Sam. 23:34). Beth-Maachah was a town in Naphtali (2 Sam. 20:14), confirming the impression that David's closest supporters were not just local family friends, but men providentially drawn to him from all over Israel.

1Ch 11:37 Hezro the Carmelite, Naarai the son of Ezbai-
2 Sam. 23:35: "Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite".
Arab is in Judah whereas Carmel is in northern Israel. The juxtaposition of the two confirms the impression that David's supporters were from all over Israel. The way they were all united together around this man from Bethlehem is amazing, and points forward to the gathering of the disparate followers of the Lord Jesus around Him today."

1Ch 11:38 Joel the brother of Nathan, Mibhar the son of Hagri-
2 Sam. 23:36 has "Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah". Chronicles has "Joel the brother of Nathan" but Igal and Joel in Hebrew are very similar. Igal would have been a Syrian from Zobah, perhaps one of the soldiers who fought against David (2 Sam. 10:6) and then converted to him. The Gittites who followed David were likewise Philistines from Gath

who were once his enemies but converted to his God, and devoted themselves zealously to Him. This is an incredible witness to the power of Yahweh to convert, because such willing defections of individuals to the people and God of their enemies, and being zealously committed to Him, was unheard of in their society.

1Ch 11:39 Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Berothite, the armour-bearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah-
As noted on :38, the one time enemies of David such as Zelek the Ammonite became his most committed followers. Or perhaps his conversion was a result of the one time friendship between David and Ammon, and the support for David by Shobi (2 Sam. 17:27). Likewise Naharai was from Beeroth, which although counted to Benjamin (2 Sam. 4:2) was inhabited by Gentile Gibeonites, whom Saul had persecuted.

1Ch 11:40 Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite-
The faithful Ithrites (2 Sam. 23:38) were from Kirjath Jearim (1 Chron. 2:53), perhaps converted to a more spiritual outlook by the long presence of the ark amongst them (1 Sam. 7:2).

1Ch 11:41 Uriah the Hittite, Zabad the son of Ahlai-
2 Sam. 23:34 adds "Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite".
Eliam was the father of Bathsheba, making Ahithophel her grandfather. We can more readily understand why he turned against David after his shameful behaviour with his granddaughter.

1Ch 11:42 Adina the son of Shiza the Reubenite, a chief of the Reubenites, and thirty with him-
This confirms the suggestion on :10,11 that "thirty" is not to be read as a literal number, but as a group of captains or some other military division.

1Ch 11:43 Hanan the son of Maacah, and Joshaphat the Mithnite-
The names in :43-47 don't occur in the list of mighty men of 2 Sam. 23. I suggest that many of them were Gentiles who converted to the cause of David and remained faithful to him; see on :38,39.

1Ch 11:44 Uzzia the Ashterathite, Shama and Jeiel the sons of Hotham the Aroerite-
This is not the Aroer on the river Arnon, but some smaller settlement in southern Israel, the one listed in 1 Sam. 30:28 as having supported David during his wilderness years. “Shama and Jehiel the sons of Hothan the Aroerite” were amongst David’s mighty men;

we conclude that David hid in the area whilst on the run from Saul, and these two men went off with him. It has been observed that Ashterathite and Aroerite are Gentile nouns, Aroer being far east of Jordan (Josh. 13:16,25), as if here we have more examples of Gentiles converting to David's cause and remaining faithful, as suggested on :38,39.

1Ch 11:45 Jediael the son of Shimri, and Joha his brother, the Tizite-
The location of Tiza or Tits is unknown, but I suggested on :43 that these were Gentiles who converted to the cause of David and remained faithful to him; see on :38,39.

1Ch 11:46 Eliel the Mahavite, and Jeribai, and Joshaviah, the sons of Elnaam, and Ithmah the Moabite-
This Moabite would have been another case of former enemies converting to David's cause (see on :38,39), impressed by the power of Yahweh. We note that one of David's mighty men had killed Moabites (:22), so we have here in Ithmah a man who totally reoriented himself from his natural background towards that of God's people. As all must do who are true converts to the Israel of God and the hope of Israel.

1Ch 11:47 Eliel, and Obed, and Jaasiel the Mezobaite-
"Metsobajah", 'found of Yah', might confirm the above suggestions that this final group of names are of Gentiles who converted to the cause of David and remained faithful to him; see on :38,39.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 12

1Ch 12:1 Now these are those who came to David to Ziklag, while he yet kept himself in secret because of Saul the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men, his helpers in war-
David was given Ziklag to live in by the Philistines, and he was there 16 months, hemmed in by Saul's men on the Israelite side of the border. The theme developed now is that in that apparently hopeless situation, living with his one time enemies the Philistines for fear of Saul- all manner of people came forward to identify with him. We can understand David at this time as in the position of the Lord Jesus now, before the establishment of His Kingdom. And we are the men who come out to Him, when His cause appears hopeless in a secular sense. He was hemmed in by Saul, but we will now read in :2 that Saul's own family came to support David.

1Ch 12:2 They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in

slinging stones and in shooting arrows from the bow. They were of Saul's brothers of Benjamin-
This continues the theme developed on 1 Chron. 11:38,39, that there was something in David and his cause which attracted his enemies to come over to his side. And so it is with the cause of the Lord Jesus in our age. The Philistine monopoly on iron and metalwork meant the Israelites had to become skilled in archery and slinging, just as David had. So there was an immediate sympathy between these men and David, who was known surely as the greatest Israelite slinger of all time, after his victory over Goliath.

1Ch 12:3 The chief was Ahiezer; then Joash, the sons of Shemaah the Gibeathite, and Jeziel, and Pelet, the sons of Azmaveth, and Beracah, and Jehu the Anathothite-
These are the men of Saul (:2) who came over to David; some were from "Gibeah of Saul", the home town of Saul. But they were joined by men from the priestly town of Anathoth, and so develops the theme that David's supporters were from widely different backgrounds, as are the Lord's followers, but cemented together around him and his cause of the Kingdom.

1Ch 12:4 and Ishmaiah the Gibeonite, a mighty man among the thirty, and over the thirty, and Jeremiah, and Jahaziel, and Johanan, and Jozabad the Gederathite-
"The thirty" is not a literal number, as "captains" and "thirty" are similar words. "The thirty" of 1 Chron. 11 and 2 Sam. 23 are not literally 30; there are more than 30 listed in 1 Chron. 11. "Captains" is a form of the word translated "thirty" used in 2 Sam. 23:23, and is evidence that the "thirty" are not to be read as a literal number; in any case, 37 names are given for the "thirty... mighty men" in 2 Sam. 23, not 30.

1Ch 12:5 Eluzai, and Jerimoth, and Bealiah, and Shemariah, and Shephatiah the Haruphite-
Tragically, we so often read of Yahweh's people carrying the names of Baal or other gods within their own names- e.g. Merib-baal (1 Chron. 8:34; 9:40); Ishbaal (1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39); Baal-yada (1 Chron. 14:7); and perhaps worst of all, Baal-Yah ("Bealiah", 1 Chron. 12:5). Is our 'name' or personality before God the same tragic mixture of flesh and spirit?

1Ch 12:6 Elkanah, and Isshiah, and Azarel, and Joezer, and Jashobeam, the Korahites-
These "Korahites" are not the Levitical ones, but rather the descendants of Caleb through a man called Korah (1 Chron. 2:43), and they would therefore have been men of Judah.

1Ch 12:7 and Joelah, and Zebadiah, the sons of Jeroham of Gedor-
Jeroham was a Benjamite (1 Chron. 8:27) living in Gedor of Judah (1 Chron. 4:4), perhaps because of his disagreement with the ways and cult of Saul.

1Ch 12:8 Of the Gadites there separated themselves to David to the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valour, men trained for war, that could handle shield and spear; whose faces were like the faces of lions, and they were as swift as the roes on the mountains-
David's ecclesia in the wilderness had faces "like the faces of lions" (Angel-cherubim language?), being "a great host, like the host of God"- David's host became increasingly in line with God's Heavenly Hosts of Angels, the four living creatures. We are to reflect the court of Heaven on earth. The Gadites were marauders (Gen. 49:19; 1 Chron. 5:19-22), and exemplify the kind of rough people who came to David with their own agenda, and yet were transformed by him into men of the Kingdom; pointing forward to the work of the Lord Jesus.

This verse explains how the situation of :1 came about. These men were firstly with David in the wilderness, and then came to him in Ziklag. Coming to David, as with coming to Jesus, meant they had to "separate themselves". They left their tribal homeland east of the Jordan, and had come to "the stronghold", perhaps the cave of Adullam, or the place of 1 Sam. 23:14.

1Ch 12:9 Ezer the chief, Obadiah the second, Eliab the third-
These names all have trust in God as part of their meaning. So the rough, marrauding types of Gad became known for their spirituality as a result of being with David.

1Ch 12:10 Mishmannah the fourth, Jeremiah the fifth-
Mishmannah, 'one who became fat', stands out from the others as not having a very spiritual name (s.w. Dt. 32:15; Neh. 9:25; Jer. 5:28). It confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these lists of names we read the birth names, at other times, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 12:11 Attai the sixth, Eliel the seventh-
"Eliel", 'God is God', could have come to this conclusion from experience with David; see on :10.

1Ch 12:12 Johanan the eighth, Elzabad the ninth-

These names surely reflect their experience with David; "Yahweh's grace" and "Yahweh has bestowed".

1Ch 12:13 Jeremiah the tenth, Machbannai the eleventh-
"Yahweh will raise up" (Jeremiah) shows faith in the future elevation of David and those who had taken his side in these outlaw years.

1Ch 12:14 These of the sons of Gad were captains of the army: he who was least was equal to one hundred, and the greatest to one thousand-
The similarity in language to Lev. 26:8; Is. 30:17 could suggest that they were in covenant relationship with God and therefore one of them chased a much larger group.

1Ch 12:15 These are those who went over the Jordan in the first month, when it had overflowed all its banks; and they put to flight all them of the valleys, both toward the east, and toward the west-
This was the month of the snow melt (cp. Josh. 3:15). They had crossed from Gad, east of Jordan, to be with David in Ziklag. Those in the valleys who were loyal to Saul may have tried to stop their passage on the east to west route they were taking, but they put them to flight.

1Ch 12:16 There came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the stronghold to David-
David was naturally fearful that his ranks would be infiltrated by Saul's Benjamite supporters.

1Ch 12:17 David went out to meet them and responded to them: If you have come peaceably to me to help me, my heart shall be knit to you; but if you have come to betray me to my adversaries, since there is no wrong in my hands, may the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it-
We sense David's great mental unity with those who sincerely followed him. They would experience his heart, which was after God's own heart, knit with theirs. And that is the promise of the spirit of Jesus to those who likewise sincerely come out to Him in this life. But he warns of the fearful consequences of conscious betrayal of him, after the pattern of Judas to the Lord Jesus. If we are not in that category, then we have the assurance of the gift of the spirit / heart of Jesus united with us.

1Ch 12:18 Then the Spirit came on Amasai, who was chief of the thirty, and he said, We are yours, David, and on your side, you son of Jesse. Peace, peace be to you, and peace be to your helpers; for your God helps you. Then David received them, and made them

captains of the band-
This Amasai is likely “Amasa” (2 Sam. 17:25; 19:13). They had observed that God was really with David, having witnessed or heard of David's amazing escapes from Saul, and how God was clearly preserving David for a purpose. Perhaps this protestation of sincerity was supported by some activity of the Spirit, so that David would no longer be sceptical of their professions of loyalty to him (see on :17).

1Ch 12:19 Of Manasseh also there fell away some to David, when he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle; but they didn’t help them-
To go and fight God's people, specifically with Saul, Yahweh's anointed, was exactly against David's previous principles. But because he had lied about fighting and killing Israelites, he was now told to go and do it. He was being taught that boasting about things you haven't done is still counted as if you have done them. And he was now being forced to a position where he has to quit his sinful situation.

For the lords of the Philistines sent him away after consultation, saying, He will fall away to his master Saul to the jeopardy of our heads-
The Philistines recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

This was the grace of Divine intervention. As discussed above, David got into it by his own weakness of faith. But God saved him from it now at the last minute by an unforeseen situation. The Philistines refused to have David and his men anywhere near the battle.

1 Sam. 29:5 adds: "Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, ‘Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?’". If indeed Saul reigned literally 40 years (Acts 13:21), this celebration would have been quite some time previously. But the memory of that great humiliation was still very much alive amongst the rank and file of the Philistines. Achish seems so out of touch with these feelings that we wonder if he was himself actually a Philistine, or some non-Philistine who had taken power.

David had 600 soldiers and their families with him- a large entourage of probably a few thousand people. He had apparently run a protection racket involving Nabal, guarding sheep and isolated farmsteads. He was a military force to be reckoned with, as shown by his behaviour whilst with Achish. Saul had 3000 men under his command, David had

600. We pause to enquire whether David was solely a pious shepherd boy who was fleeing from Saul's obsessive persecution. He was a considerable chieftain, with a strong military reputation. And we enquire whether as time progressed, he was not in some way thinking of taking the throne from Saul by force, whilst sparing Saul's life. And Saul correctly perceived this. Again we wonder at the contrast between this historical David, and the David of Ps. 119 and elsewhere who is waiting patiently in faith for God's word of promise to him to come true. At the same time as having that faith, he was certainly giving the appearance of trying to make it come true in his own strength. This may account for his self talk at this time, that Saul would one day win, and therefore he offered himself to Achish as a mercenary [rewarded, as mercenaries often were, with a land grant, of Ziklag]. There is further evidence from 1 Chron. 12 that David was joined by some of Saul's disillusioned warriors, and that David's intention was to use this large force "to make war against Saul": "The following joined David at Ziklag while he was still in hiding from Saul son of Kish; these were the warriors who gave support in battle; they were armed with the bow and could use both right hand and left hand to sling stones or shoot arrows with the bow; they were kinsmen of Saul from Benjamin... Of Manasseh also there fell away some to David, when he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle; but they didn't help them; for the lords of the Philistines sent him away after consultation, saying, He will fall away to his master Saul to the jeopardy of our heads" (1 Chron. 12:1,2,19). This seems to imply that David was fully intending to go with the Philistines to attack and kill Saul, and then to be made some kind of vassal king of Judah on behalf of the Philistines. This was politics at its worst, and a far cry from the David who twice refused to slay Saul and instead wanted to wait for God's word of promise to come true.

1Ch 12:20 As he went to Ziklag, there joined him of Manasseh, Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu and Zillethai, captains of thousands who were of Manasseh-
These names generally have God's name within them. It was the more spiritually minded who came over to David.

1Ch 12:21 They helped David against the band of rovers; for they were all mighty men of valour, and were captains in the army-
These "rovers" are the Amalekites who attacked Ziklag in 1 Saam. 30. "Band" is the same word used there in 1 Sam. 30:8,15. "Were captains" is better "became captains". They were promoted for their valour at the time of the battle with the Amalekites. Even though at the time, the men had spoken of stoning David.

1Ch 12:22 For from day to day men came to David to help him, until there was a great army, like the army of God-

David's host increased, until it became "a great host", "like the host of God" (1 Chron. 12:22 AV)- the parallel between David's men and the Angelic hosts is clear. Significantly, the Angelic armies that destroyed the Syrians are called 'a great host' in 2 Kings 7:6. Asa and his army defeated the Ethiopians- and it's described as them being "destroyed before Yahweh and before His host" (2 Chron. 14:13). Again, the hosts of Israel become the hosts of God. We too are the manifestation of God's heavenly system upon earth.

1Ch 12:23 These are the numbers of the heads of those who were armed for war, who came to David to Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of Yahweh-

The word of Yahweh was that David would become king. The men who came to David to support him in this were therefore doing God's will and word, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they were acceptable with Him. For even wicked men can be used to fulfil God's word.

1Ch 12:24 The children of Judah who bore shield and spear were six thousand eight hundred, armed for war-

This seems a relatively small number for Judah, who were David's tribe. Perhaps initially it was a case of a prophet not being without honour, except amongst his own people. We note that the numbers of soldiers who came to David from the tribes in the north, and especially those from the tribes east of Jordan, are very high. The southern tribes, Judah, Simeon, Levi and Benjamin, total 25,200. But the men from Zebulun, Naphtali, Dan and Asher total 155,600. But later in David's reign, an incomplete census of soldiers gave 800,000 "men who drew sword" (2 Sam. 24:9). David's support base was perhaps driven at this stage by those who had been marginalized by Saul, who seemed to what to concentrate power with his tribe of Benjamin. And perhaps these more peripheral peoples had suffered economically from Saul's abusive reign. So as with those who come to Christ today, the push factors are sometimes initially greater than the pull factors and the 'matter of principle' issues.

1Ch 12:25 Of the children of Simeon, mighty men of valour in war, seven thousand one hundred-

The tribes are listed as from South to North.

1Ch 12:26 Of the children of Levi four thousand six hundred-

The Levites had soldiers and were not simply absorbed with religious matters.

1Ch 12:27 Jehoiada was the leader of the household of Aaron; and with him were three thousand seven hundred-

Benaiah was one of David's senior military commanders (2 Sam. 8:18; 1 Chron. 27:5), and the Hebrew of 2 Sam. 23:20 can be translated "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest, as head", i.e of a group of David's mighty men. The Jehoiada in view as his father would therefore be Jehoiada the priest. The idea is that priests were also military leaders within David's army, indeed it seems there were a large group of them as ordinary soldiers in 1 Chron. 12:27. This shows how priesthood was not understood as abstract spirituality, but that spirituality was articulated in practice. Jehoiada was not high priest, but "leader" of the Levitical soldiers; the same word is used in 1 Chron. 9:11 of the “captain” of the temple.

1Ch 12:28 and Zadok, a young man mighty of valour, and of his father’s house twenty-two captains-
In :17 he appears to have the function of Jehoiada in :27. Perhaps he was his successor.

1Ch 12:29 Of the children of Benjamin, the brothers of Saul, three thousand; for hitherto the majority of them had kept their allegiance to the house of Saul-
AV "kept the ward of the house of Saul". The number of Benjamites is understandably small, as they still hoped to remain the kingly tribe even after Saul's demise.

1Ch 12:30 Of the children of Ephraim twenty thousand eight hundred, mighty men of valour, famous men in their fathers’ houses-
This is a very small number compared to the northern tribes, seeing Ephraim were likely the largest tribe at the time. Clearly support for David followed factors other than supporters per head of population. Support was highly localized.

1Ch 12:31 Of the half-tribe of Manasseh eighteen thousand, who were mentioned by name, came and made David king-
This appears to refer to the half of Manasseh on the west side of the Jordan river.

1Ch 12:32 Of the children of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, their heads were two hundred; and all their brothers were under their command-
This is a small number, but they are defined as men who understood life, spiritually wise men (Est. 1:13; 1 Chron. 29:30; Ps. 31:15).

1Ch 12:33 Of Zebulun, such as were able to go out in the army, who could set the battle in array, with all kinds of instruments of war, fifty thousand, who could command and were not of double heart-

The idea seems to be, men old enough to handle weapons, rather than boys. But this is a rather sad contrast with the faith of David when fighting Goliath, who was considered too young to fight, and who apparently couldn't manipulate the armour and weaponry he was offered by Saul- but instead fought Goliath in faith. To not be "of double heart" meant to be "of one heart", for God and David in faith (2 Chron. 30:12).

1Ch 12:34 Of Naphtali one thousand captains, and with them with shield and spear thirty-seven thousand-
This could suggest that they had "shield and spear", weaponry in abundance compared to the other tribes.

1Ch 12:35 Of the Danites who could set the battle in array, twenty-eight thousand six hundred-
Each tribe has a slightly different description for the nature of their soldiers. The idea here may be as in GNB "trained men", soldiers who had undergone military training.

1Ch 12:36 Of Asher, such as were able to go out in the army, who could set the battle in array, forty thousand-
GNB "ready for battle". Each group of soldiers is described differently.

1Ch 12:37 On the other side of the Jordan, of the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and of the half-tribe of Manasseh, with all kinds of instruments of war for the battle, one hundred and twenty thousand-
This appears to be a rough number, assuming 40,000 to each tribe, as 40,000 came from Asher (:36). Sometimes the Bible is very vague. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And here 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”. Surely this is to show that God is God, not man, and as such He’s not on the back foot, writing under the fear of criticism. His word is not contradictory, but on the other hand, God has more spiritual culture than to sink down to the level of a man who wanted to foresee all criticism in writing something which could stand all petty criticism. He has a

spiritual culture much higher than this. And this is the answer to many of the petty objections about 'Bible contradictions' which are raised by critics.

1Ch 12:38 All these being men of war, who could order the battle array, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel. All the rest of Israel were also of one heart to make David king-

The state of their hearts is twice emphasized, and this has always been of critical importance in the Divine record of men. It was David's heart which is described with the term "a perfect heart" (1 Kings 11:4; 15:3 s.w.). The idea is that they were of one mind and spirit with David. And as noted on :17, David's spirit was eager to be united with their spirit. It all speaks of the spiritual relationship between the Lord Jesus and His people. See on 1 Chron. 13:4.

1Ch 12:39 They were there with David three days, eating and drinking; for their brothers had made preparation for them-

This was the kind of religious meal which ratified a covenant, as in Gen. 31:46,54. It looks ahead to the breaking of bread meeting as a confirmation of the covenant between the Lord Jesus and those who have come out of this world to support His cause and Kingdom.

1Ch 12:40 Moreover those who were near to them, as far as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, brought bread on donkeys, and on camels, mules and oxen, food of meal, cakes of figs, and clusters of raisins, and wine and oil, and cattle and sheep in abundance; for there was joy in Israel-

The religious meal of :39 was supported in spirit by those even in the far north, who sent food to be consumed at this feast. The provision of clusters of raisins [a form of wine] along with bread confirm the religious nature of the meal, and the way [as noted on :39] it looks ahead to the breaking of bread. The same was to be seen in 1 Sam. 25:18; 30;12; 2 Sam. 16:1.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 13

1Ch 13:1 David consulted with the captains of thousands and of hundreds, even with every leader-

2 Sam. 6:1 says thirty thousand attended. "Thousand" may refer to families or

squadrons. They were "chosen" or 'shown as tested / approved'. It was a reunion gathering of all those who had been faithful to David over the years. This was a huge number of people to gather together, given the problem of providing food and lodging for them. This was why battles were fought swiftly in those days, for the men were needed on their farms, and the supply of food was difficult to arrange over longer periods. So this huge effort reflects the importance David attached to bringing up the ark.

1Ch 13:2 David said to all the assembly of Israel, If it seems good to you, and if it is of Yahweh our God, let us send abroad everywhere to our brothers who are left in all the land of Israel, with whom the priests and Levites are in their cities that have suburbs, that they may gather themselves to us-
It seems the invitation was particularly to the Levites and priests wherever they were. We note that there had been obedience to the idea of the Levites not having inheritance but living in allotments from the other tribes. This was really an appeal for all the priests and Levites to assemble.

1Ch 13:3 Let us bring again the ark of our God to us; for we didn't seek it in the days of Saul-
This was hardly David's fault, as he had spent the majority of the "days of Saul" on the run from in exile. But he graciously speaks of "we" being at fault. We wonder at the unspirituality of the priesthood in Saul's time, and wonder why Samuel had not emphasized the need to have the ark in worship. Perhaps it had been kept somewhere out of sight, at Saul's command. It may even have become badly thought of, or feared.

I have discussed on 1 Sam. 4:3 how there was always a tendency to use the ark as a talisman; and God was against that. The religious eclipsed the spiritual as regards the ark, several times in Israel's history. And I suggest David was not immune to this. He brings the ark to Zion without any Divine command to do so and without consultation with Him [David earlier asks God for guidance about his decisions in 2 Sam. 5, but not in the context of the ark]; and there was the disaster with Uzzah the first time he attempted it. This is to be compared to Israel's defeat when they took the ark with them into battle against the Philistines in the time of Eli. David clearly also veered towards seeing the ark as a talisman. It was almost as if he wanted to underwrite his own enthronement in Jerusalem by having Yahweh enthroned there also over the ark. Likewise David's desire to permanently locate the ark in a physical temple in Jerusalem can be seen as a desire to legitimate the enthronement of his dynasty in that city. But on the other hand, David often 'gets it' about the lack of need for the ark's physical presence. His psalms speak of how he lived permanently beneath the shadow of the cherubic wings, as if he lived on the mercy seat, on the sprinkled blood. In 2 Sam. 15:24-

29 he flees from Absalom, and refuses the suggestion he take the ark with him. But, so true to real spiritual life, he also had tendencies towards needing the physical and religious when it came to the ark. Just as we pine for the religious at times, whilst also rejoicing in God's presence in our hearts quite regardless of religious context.

David wrote at least two Psalms about bringing the ark to Zion, Ps. 68 and Ps. 132. Ps. 68 clearly expects God to bring victory to Israel because of the ark's presence in Zion, and Ps. 132 seems to reason that once the ark is in Zion it will be there forever. This wasn't to be the case. But we see in David's reasoning that he still considered the ark as some kind of physical guarantee of God's presence, and the legitimization of his own enthronement in Jerusalem- and that of his dynasty after him, as he imagined. He was proven wrong- the ark disappeared, his dynasty was cut off, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. But God's spiritual presence in human hearts continued and became the stronger after these things. We marvel at how God works through human weakness to achieve His wider purposes. The Chronicles record hints at political reasons for David's wanting the ark when we read David saying "let us lead the ark of our God back to *us*" (1 Chron. 13:3). David wanted it firmly under his control and his motive for bringing the ark to Zion was clearly to centralize religious as well as political power in his chosen capital city.

1Ch 13:4 All the assembly said that they would do so; for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people-
We sense as discussed on 1 Chron. 12:38 that the people were of one mind with David, sharing his spirit and he theirs.

1Ch 13:5 So David assembled all Israel together, from Shihor the brook of Egypt even to the entrance of Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim-
This widespread support continues the impression we get from 1 Chron. 12:39,40, where people from even the far north sent large numbers of men and much food to be consumed at the feast which celebrated a declaration of loyalty to David. The entering in of Hamath is a technical term for the Orontes river. The definition of the land between two rivers would be an appeal to the promises to Abraham, of a land with rivers as boundaries.

1Ch 13:6 David went up, and all Israel, to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath Jearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of Yahweh God who dwells between the cherubim, that is called by the Name-
Baalah, or Kirjath-Baal, "the city of Baal" was the old Canaanite name of Kirjath-jearim (Josh. 15:9,60). David's bringing up / going up / ascending of the ark (2 Sam. 6:2) recalls

how the ark did not go up into Canaan in Num. 14:44 (s.w.); for the land was not to be given to Israel. But when the time came, the ark was brought up into Canaan (Josh. 4:16,18 s.w.). And so now, the land was being given to them again. David felt as if he was as Joshua reconquering Canaan in fulfilment of the promises. This may explain why Paul in Acts 13:21 parallels the 40 years wandering of Israel with the 40 year reign of Saul; and he may speak of Saul reigning 40 years because of this, even if it was not literally true. It creates big chronological problems if we read that 40 year reign of Saul literally. Solomon imitated David's bringing up of the ark to Zion in 1 Kings 8:1,4. He lived out his father's faith and devotion, but only on an external level. He in due course was to turn away from Yahweh to idols, and descend into the nihilism of Ecclesiastes.

"David went up... to bring thence the ark of God the LORD that dwelleth between the cherubims, whose name is called on it" (AV). The unusual phrase 'God the LORD' may imply 'the Angel the Yahweh', as if recognizing that the Angel had God's Name, as we know the Angel which lead Israel was given by God. Thus in this context David goes on to say about the ark of the Lord "whose Name is called on it". When Uzzah died it is stated "there he died before God" (:10), as if he died in the presence of an Angel- i. e. the Angel present inside the ark which he touched. See on Ps. 78:60

1Ch 13:7 They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart-

There were very specific laws about the transportation of the ark. It was to be carried on poles on the shoulders of not just Levites but specifically the sons of Kohath (Num. 4:15); and Abinadab's family were not the right people to carry it. David claims in Ps. 119 to have studied God's law all the day whilst on the run from Saul, reciting it to himself. Perhaps he forgot these details. But I suggest because he came to see that God wanted the spirit and not the letter of the law to be followed, he came to totally place himself above Divine law. We face the same temptation. And it was this which led David into his sin with Bathsheba. Shaving off bits and pieces of God's laws and principles, on the basis that we are above His law, leads to the final catastrophe of David's sin with Bathsheba. Instead of following God's laws about the transportation of the ark, it seems David instead followed the pattern of the Philistines, who also transported the captured ark on a cart (s.w. 1 Sam. 6:10,11). And considered that having built a new cart, never used before, he was in his own way showing respect to it. Uzzah walked at the side, whilst Ahio went before the oxen to guide them. The Divine cameraman is zoomed in close upon the scene.

David was influenced by others' behaviour and treatment of the ark rather than God's word; he failed to learn from history. He surely reasoned that the Philistines had transported the ark on a cart, so why shouldn't he. David here reflects his religious approach to the ark rather than a spiritual one. During the wilderness years, he felt that

he was as it were dwelling on the mercy seat, between the cherubim, covered by the blood of atonement. But he has slipped down from that spiritual peak, now hankering for the physical ark, sliding back from the spiritual to the merely religious. In Saul's time, the ark was not enquired of ("let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul", 1 Chron. 13:3). Ps. 132:6 likewise hints at its obscurity: "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood" (Baale-Judah, the woods of Judah). David is now looking to be religious, when he had been driven to personal spirituality by his exclusion from formal religion whilst on the run from Saul.

1Ch 13:8 David and all Israel played before God with all their might, even with songs, harps, stringed instruments, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets-
The actual fact of making music and praise to God doesn't necessarily mean our acceptability before Him; the very experience of music and its effect can lead us to think that our participation means our acceptability before God. But all this praise was made whilst God was extremely angry with them for how they were treating the ark.

Many of the brief Psalms exhorting all kinds of music to be used in praising Yahweh were probably composed at this time. This description is very similar to those of how holy objects / idols were brought on beds by the state treasurer to Sargon II of Assyria. Offerings and music were made in front of the objects in order to placate and please the god thought to be in the object. But of course the ark was not a god in itself; David and his people have veered towards the religious rather than the spiritual. Just as most kings once established built a temple to their patron deity, and David also wants to do this to Yahweh. Perhaps the huge punishment on Uzzah reflected God's anger at the religious dominating the spiritual, as if the ark as a box was being worshipped rather than Him. The scene is also similar to that of Assurbanipal's return of Marduk's statue from Assur to Babylon: "Just as Assurbanipal's army participated in the return of Marduk to his new sanctuary, so David's army participated in the return of the ark of Yahweh. Just as Marduk's journey was accompanied by music and rejoicing, so was the ark's. Moreover, just as the Assyrians offered sacrifices every double mile from the quay of Assur to the quay of Babylon, so David offered an ox and a fatling after every six steps" (Miller & Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel, JHNES* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977)).

The death of Uzzah is one of a number of incidents studded throughout the Biblical record which remind us that sin is serious and a felt offence by God, and provokes His wrath and the necessary death penalty. We think of Eve taking the fruit having been deceived; the prophet of 1 Kings 13 who ate something; Ananias and Sapphira. Whilst otherwise God appears to tolerate sin, this doesn't mean that every sin isn't felt by Him. His feelings are those of Hosea regarding Gomer's continued unfaithfulness.

1Ch 13:9 When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon-
1 Chron. 13:9 has "the threshing floor of Chidon" and 2 Sam. 6:6 has "of Nacon". I suggest Nacon was the name of the owner, and Chidon was the location. A threshing floor has associations with Divine judgment, and this is what happened.

Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark-
We wonder if Paul has this in mind when he praises the Lord Jesus for not trying to grasp hold of equality with God (Phil. 2:6). In this case, Uzzah is being accused of playing God by what he did. And yet this appears to be a very harsh reading of motives into a quite simple and natural, well meaning reaction. But this is the point; we cannot judge or know human motivations or thoughts. Who knows what was really in Uzzah's mind. For all we know he was cussing the ark as it wobbled on the cart. Only God knows, and we should respect His judgment and our own inability to judge. The other possible issue which arises from this is that we are to accept that there are huge implications to our apparently harmless, surface level sins. Only God can judge them. But He does extrapolate the implications of human thoughts and actions. The whole incident is a test of our humility before God, a test David initially failed.

For the oxen stumbled-
"Stumbled" is s.w. "threw down" (2 Kings 9:33; Ps. 141:6). It seems the ark itself was thrown down onto the ground, despite Uzzah trying to stop it.

He did what was instinctive to do- but doing what is naturally instinctive can lead to Divine condemnation. Here we see for all time that human action is not OK just because it seems and feels right, instinctive, obvious and logical to the human mind at the time.

1Ch 13:10 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Uzza, and He struck him, because he put forth his hand to the ark; and there he died before God-
Yahweh had likewise struck down (s.w.) those who had earlier failed to respect the ark (1 Sam. 5:6,9; 6:19). And they had imitated the transport of the ark upon a new cart. The failure of man to learn from Biblical history is one of the greatest tragedies. We may consider this incident as parallel with the sin of Adam and Eve in Eden, whereby an apparently small failure lead to huge consequences. But these incidents are placed in Biblical history to help us humble ourselves before God, and not to fall into the assumption that God is not serious about His principles. Yahweh's anger being kindled is a phrase used multiple times about His anger with Israel for breaking the covenant. The sin of Uzzah personified all that was wrong with Israel. They had assumed that they could serve Yahweh on their terms and not His, and that this was just a mere surface level failure which He should overlook. All this is so challenging for us, who are tempted to think in just the same way.

Samuel appears to have slept next to the ark, and in 1 Sam. 5:1 the Philistines manhandled it on a long journey of 60 km. Uzzah was slain but they weren't. Again we see how boundaries of holiness are relative, and God looks at the heart; something clearly was very wrong in Uzzah's heart, in a way it was not wrong in the hearts of the child Samuel or these Philistines. Attitude and heart are paramount in God's judgment of men.

Uzzah was a son or grandson of Abinadab (:3), in whose house the ark had been kept for some years (perhaps from 1 Sam. 7:1, where the ark is taken to the house of Abinadab, to 2 Sam. 6:3, where the ark is taken from Abinadab's house). Perhaps he felt he knew the ark well and had probably touched it before. But he was slain for the sin of familiarity with God leading to contempt. Perhaps he cursed the ark box as it fell. Or perhaps "he reached out his hand to the ark" [Heb.] or as in 1 Chron. 13:10 "he put his hand to the ark" was in fact part of a prearranged plan to grab the ark and make a sanctuary for it there at the threshing floor. Clearly there was far more going on that a simple breaking of Divine law.

1Ch 13:11 David was displeased, because Yahweh had broken forth on Uzza; and he called that place Perez Uzza, to this day-

David was “displeased” with God because He had slain a man who was trying to assist David’s pet project of bringing the ark to Zion (2 Sam. 6:8,9). Do we not again see the anger and irrational emotion of David flaring up? For the Hebrew for "displeased" really means "anger", and is the same word used of Yahweh's anger in :7. God was fiercely angry, and David was likewise fiercely angry with God for being angry. Whilst on one level this is a terrible example of human pride, David's response could be argued to reflect a closeness with God which enabled him to feel like this. The exiles were warned that all who are "incensed" against God must be humbled and ashamed before the ark could, as it were, come to Zion and Israel be restored (s.w. Is. 41:11; 45:24). The exiles, who were also angry with God for His anger with them, were to go through the humbling process David went through over the next three months.

The Old Testament body of Christ was based around Israel, and thus when the Lord made a breach upon Uzzah, David could say that the Lord “made a breach upon *us*” (1 Chron. 13:11; 15:13). Just as Saul's persecution of the body of Christ was persecuting the Lord Jesus personally.

However we could read this another way. David was angry, but he was afraid of Yahweh (:12). Possibly his anger was therefore with himself.

We note David's surprise at judgment for touching the ark, as with the men of Bethshemesh earlier when they opened the ark. Perhaps this was because the ark had

been regularly touched earlier. For example, surely they manhandled the ark onto the wagon without incident; and how did Obededom handle it without being struck down? And now, it seemed, God was suddenly deciding to apply an applicable law which usually He seemed to disregard. David presents as the child who is shocked and hurt when for once, he isn't allowed to get away with regularly breaking a requirement or law. The law in Num. 4:15-20 was clear; the Kohathites were to deal with the ark and even they must handle it properly "that they may live, and not die, when they approach to the most holy things". The Chronicles record labours how the second attempt to bring the ark to Zion 'worked' because David was careful to follow the Mosaic precepts about handling the ark. And this perhaps is the point: All sin merits death and Divine wrath, but only occasionally is this truth revealed by God in practice. His grace operates in shielding man from His wrath, but this doesn't mean His wrath and sense of sin and infringement of His holiness isn't there. God's feelings about sin were reflected in Hosea's raging anger against Gomer, mellowed by his amazing love and grace for her. Or it could be that Uzzah cursed the ark as it fell, or had some hidden heart position about it which led to God's wrath. And the lesson in that case would be that the innermost private thoughts of man are seen and judged by God and provoke His wrath as well as His pleasure.

1Ch 13:12 David was afraid of God that day saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?-

There is a similarity, surely intentional, with the situation in 1 Sam. 6:20: "The men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God?". These were now David's feelings when Uzzah was slain for also not being respectful to the ark. Circumstances repeated, and David failed to learn the lesson. We wonder if indeed David consciously repeated the words of the men of Beth Shemesh. I suspect he didn't, but rather his words are recorded in a similar way, to show to us readers the similarity. We are intended to learn from history, even though so few do. This is why so much of the Bible is history.

"How can I bring the ark to *me*?" surely reflects poor motivation. David wanted the ark to come to himself. He has no concept of going up to Yahweh at the ark. It was starting to get all about him. He clearly saw the ark as something he personally could possess ("to *me*... to *us*") and which centralized political power in him.

1Ch 13:13 So David didn't move the ark to him into the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite-

This was a huge showdown, for David had assembled a huge number of people to this ceremony; see on :1-5. And now he was revealed as a man who had not paid due

attention to the requirements of the God whom he had invited all Israel to come to worship. It was very humbling for him. We note he "carried it aside", having it carried on poles as the law required and not on a cart.

1Ch 13:14 The ark of God remained with the family of Obed-Edom in his house three months; and Yahweh blessed the house of Obed-Edom, and all that he had-
As it took David some months to realize his sin with Bathsheba, so here it took David three months to humble himself before God, and to perceive that His blessing is related to obedience and respect of Him, and not assuming we can serve Him on our terms and ride roughshod over His principles. David and his house had also been promised blessings, but he was being taught that these blessings were related to obedience and respect of God. And the fact a Philistine from Gath, perhaps an Edomite, indeed an Edomite servant [for so his name means] received these blessings... was to teach him that his pedigree counted for nothing compared to humble respect of Israel's God.

The care of the ark was given over to the Levites. But Obed-Edom wasn't a Levite nor was he a Hebrew, he was a Philistine or Edomite servant from Gath. And he was blessed for caring for the ark. This contrasts sharply with the striking of Uzzah. It serves to point up the fact that Uzzah was not necessarily slain because he wasn't a Levite, nor specifically one of the sons of Kohath who were to carry the ark. That breach of Divine law wasn't the issue; likewise David acts as a priest with an ephod when he too wasn't a Levite. Rather it was a matter of the heart and attitude, which is a persistent theme in the record. For David and Saul sinned in parallel ways, but David's heart attitude was different. 1 Chron. 15:18,24 lists Obededom amongst the Levites who were porters and "doorkeepers for the ark". But he wasn't a Levite. Just as David wasn't. But they could act as Levites because of their attitude of heart.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 14

1Ch 14:1 Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and masons, and carpenters, to build him a house-
The way Solomon also used him, or probably another Hiram, for the same trees reflects again how Solomon sought to live out his father. But he had no real spirituality, and over time he revealed that he had no personal faith, turning away to idols in his old age and coming to the nihilism of Ecclesiastes.

Psalm 30 was written at the dedication of a house by David, and we assume it was this house. But that Psalm reveals David had been very ill. He seems not to have had robust health although he was physically strong and lived a long life. There is ample evidence for a breakdown of his health after the sin with Bathsheba.

1Ch 14:2 David perceived that Yahweh had established him king over Israel; for his kingdom was exalted on high, for His people Israel's sake-
He realized that the promises of Samuel so long ago had finally come true, despite all the times when it had seemed they could not come true (see on 1 Sam. 27:1). But this sense of fulfilment led him to take yet more wives (:3), which is surely to be read negatively in spiritual terms. Yet he realized that his establishment was located in a wider context than just for himself; it was for the sake of His people Israel.

1Ch 14:3 David took more wives at Jerusalem; and David became the father of more sons and daughters-
See on :2. This is hard to read in a positive light spiritually; for Israel's king was not to multiply wives (Dt. 17:17). He seemed to feel the need to prove himself established by having more wives and children, but this was itself a failure to appreciate that Yahweh had established him (:2). He did perceive this, but only on one level.

1Ch 14:4 These are the names of the children whom he had in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon-
These were the sons of Bathsheba. We note that they had a son called Nathan, perhaps in respect of the prophet of that name who had rebuked David for his sin with Bathsheba. And it was through him that the Lord Jesus was descended back to David (Lk. 3:31).

The lists in 1 Chron. 3:5-8; 14:4-7 mention two more sons than we find in 2 Sam. 5:15, Eliphalet or Elpalet and Nogah. Perhaps they are omitted here because they died in infancy, and that the second Eliphalet was named after his dead brother.

1Ch 14:5 Ibhar, Elishua, Elpelet-
The lists in 1 Chron. 3:5-8; 14:4-7 also mention two more sons, Eliphalet or Elpelet and Nogah. Perhaps they are omitted here because they died in infancy, and that the second Eliphalet was named after his dead brother.

1Ch 14:6 Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia-
We know nothing of these sons, nor indeed or most of David's children. This would indicate perhaps that David was not a very good spiritual father to his children.

1Ch 14:7 Elishama, Beeliada and Eliphelet-
Tragically, we so often read of Yahweh's people carrying the names of Baal or other gods within their own names- e.g. Merib-baal (1 Chron. 8:34; 9:40); Ishbaal (1 Chron. 8:33;

9:39); Baal-yada (1 Chron. 14:7); and perhaps worst of all, Baal-Yah (1 Chron. 12:5). Is our 'name' or personality before God the same tragic mixture of flesh and spirit? We wonder whether the naming of Baal-yada ("Beeliada") was done by one of David's wives who worshipped Baal; we know that Michal his wife also had pagan images in their home.

1Ch 14:8 When the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David. David heard of it, and went out against them-
They must have felt bitterly betrayed by David. He had lived with them in Ziklag and Gath for some time and claimed he was on their side against Judah. His lack of integrity would have deeply riled them, and was a poor advertisement for the God of Israel. Yet David in his Psalms so often protests his own integrity, and how he wishes judgment upon those who lack integrity. He clearly failed to personalize the conviction of sin which is throughout God's word, and this is all the backdrop to his sin with Bathsheba.

2 Sam. 5:17 says that David "went down to the stronghold". The stronghold in view may have been the cave of Adullam (2 Sam. 23:13,14), where God had previously delivered David from Saul. Perhaps he went there to pray. It was at this time that he wished to drink of the water from the well in Bethlehem, and his men broke risked their lives to get it for him. We see the extent of their dominance, in that they had overrun Bethlehem, David's home village, and placed a garrison in it (2 Sam. 23:14).

1Ch 14:9 Now the Philistines had come and made a raid in the valley of Rephaim-
The record of David's battle with the Philistines here has certain similarities with the exploits of 1 Sam. 14:8-11; as if, years later, David replicated Jonathan's early adventure of faith. This would be understandable if he had been Jonathan's armourbearer in that incident. Situations repeat in our lives; what we learn in youth becomes tested later on in life.

They perhaps chose the valley of the giants as the battleground because they still recalled his victory over Goliath, and wanted to reverse it.

1Ch 14:10 David inquired of God saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand? Yahweh said to him, Go up; for I will deliver them into your hand-
This recalls how he asked Yahweh when Saul died whether he should go into Judah, and to which city there. A man of lesser humility and closeness to God would have just gone ahead with assumptions he was right. His questions also recall the questions he asked [and answers received] about the situation in Keilah (1 Sam. 23:11,12). He retained this desire for guidance, and showed he had learned from his previous experiences. He

overcame the natural tendency to assume that we are doing what seems the logical way at the time, and meaning his request: "Teach me Thy way" (Ps. 27:11 etc.). Yet this commendable humility before God was at the same time as his quite wrong taking of many wives in Jerusalem noted earlier in this chapter. This spiritual schizophrenia is surely in all men, apart from the Lord. And yet David realized the need to serve Yahweh with our whole heart, as he states so often in the Psalms. We surely can all identify with him... wanting to serve with our whole heart and yet our self examination revealing that we still have both flesh and spirit active within us.

1Ch 14:11 So they came up to Baal Perazim, and David struck them there; and David said, God has broken my enemies by my hand, like the breach of waters. Therefore they called the name of that place Baal Perazim-

This means the place of breaches. What happened has been explained as follows: "It was the rocky height on the north of the valley of Rephaim. David must, therefore, have stolen round the army of the Philistines, creeping, probably by night, up to this ridge of Ben-Hinnom, and thence at the dawn of day have rushed down upon the camp. And his onset was sudden and irresistible, like the rush of the waters of some mountain lake when, swollen with rains, it bursts through the opposing dam, and carries hasty destruction to everything that lies in its way". This means that just like the second attack, David circled around and came at the Philistines from behind (:14). But this is exactly how a dog attacks. David in his low moments had felt himself as a desert dog (1 Sam. 17:44 LXX; 24:14). When we are weak, then we are strong. Perhaps God played along with David's low feelings by saying that if he indeed felt as a dog, then He would use him to achieve victory as a dog does. This is not to justify David's view of himself, but to show rather how God interacts with man in a mutual way.

1Ch 14:12 They left their gods there; and David gave commandment, and they were burned with fire-

2 Sam. 5:21 adds: "They left their images there; and David and his men took them away". Chronicles seem to present a far more positive take on the history, omitting all reference to the Bathsheba incident. They should have destroyed them immediately, according to the law of Moses which David professed such love for in Ps. 119. Perhaps they justified it by saying they were doing to the Philistines as they had done to the ark; for the Philistines took the ark as a sign they had triumphed over Israel's God. But Yahweh clearly punished them for that, and David's men might have boasted that the Philistine gods didn't do that to them. Such is the quasi spiritual reasoning of our flesh. 1 Chron. 14:12 however explains that finally, they were burnt. Possibly what happened is that they did take the gods away but later pulled back and repented, and burnt them. It's so hard to pull back from a wrong path, and David is to be commended for doing so.

1Ch 14:13 The Philistines yet again made a raid in the valley-
This was soon afterwards, implying David's men hadn't slain that many of the Philistines.

1Ch 14:14 David inquired again of God; and God said to him, You shall not go up after them. Turn away from them, and come on them opposite the mulberry trees-
The Father and Son are constantly seeking to lead us in "new*ness* of life". David didn't get victory by the mulberry trees the same way each time. God changed the method. But as noted on :11, David was still to circle around and attack from behind, like a dog. "Mulberry" is Hebrew *baca*, and could refer to the valley of Baca, or weeping, of Ps. 84:6. Hence RV "valley of weeping". Perhaps David was in depression at this time, and was being comforted that his weeping was to be his strength. For God loves to use the weak to achieve His victories. According to the curses for disobedience to the law, turning backs to the enemy was a sign of curse. David was being asked to act as if he had sinned; and it was that recognition of sin that led to his victory. This is what is so necessary in spiritual life: acceptance of our sinfulness and desert only of condemnation.

1Ch 14:15 It shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then you shall go out to battle-
This sound was the marching of the Angels. They are called Yahweh's hosts or armies, and the idea was that David's army was a reflection on earth of the heavenly armies above him. This was necessary to teach that Israel were not winning these victories in their own strength, but by following the Angelic hosts above them.

"When thou (David) shalt hear a sound of going (like the noise of the Angel cherubim in Ezekiel 1?) in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then shalt thou go out to battle; for God (the Angels) is gone forth before thee to smite the host of the Philistines" (AV). So once the Angels had physically moved forward and David had heard them doing this, he too could move ahead in doing the human part in bringing God's purpose about. David alludes to this as a regular experience when he speaks of God 'going out' with the hosts / armies of Israel (Ps. 60:10 RV). His hosts were as the hosts of God (1 Chron. 11:22)- he walked in step with the Angel Cherubim above him, as Ezekiel was to do later. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10; Rev. 21:12. We too are to "walk in step with the Spirit".

For God has gone out before you to strike the army of the Philistines-
The people wanted a king to "go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20), but they were disappointed in Saul ultimately. For it was effectively David who went out before the people to fight their battles (s.w. 1 Sam. 18:13,16). And David was only successful because he recognized that it was Yahweh who 'went out before' to fight his battles (s.w. "gone out"), rather than any human king or leader.

1Ch 14:16 David did as God commanded him; and they struck the army of the Philistines from Gibeon even to Gezer-
Gibeon is directly on the road from the valley of Rephaim to Gaza. The continual consistency of the geographical references in the record is yet another reflection of the utter credibility of it as Divinely inspired. Any group of human writers would have made mistakes in this area, given the lack of detailed maps and geographical knowledge.

1Ch 14:17 The fame of David went out into all lands; and Yahweh brought the fear of him on all nations-
"Fame" is the word for "name". Names were reflective of achievement, life experience and developed character, with the Name of Yahweh being the parade example. They were developed, as God's Name is, both over human history and within the experience of individuals.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 15

1Ch 15:1 David made himself houses in the city of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it-
This uncomfortable parallel between building his own house, and simply pitching a tent for the dwelling of God... remained with David. And surely the thought began even at this stage to build a "house" for the ark, i.e. a temple. But that thought was not motivated so much by any sense of God's glory, but rather guilt at his own extravagance in building a house for himself which became effectively an entire citadel, "the city of David". And this wrong motivation led to God's disagreement with his suggestion.

1Ch 15:2 Then David said, No one ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for Yahweh has chosen them to carry the ark of God-
David had been "displeased" with God's judgment of Uzzah for steadying the ark, and according to 2 Samuel, it took him quite some time to come to want to deal again with the ark. He finally accepts that he had been wrong to allow the ark to be carried as *he* thought best, rather than as instructed in God's law.

And to minister to Him forever-
Perhaps David correctly reasoned that the Levitical priesthood had to end, and he liked to think that that time had already come, and therefore he could dispense with the commandments about the Levites carrying the ark. But now he accepts he had gone too far away from God's stated word, in seeking to justify doing things as he wished and effectively creation a religion on his own terms rather than God's.

1Ch 15:3 David assembled all Israel at Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of Yahweh to its place, which he had prepared for it-
David had done this before, and it had ended up as a showdown because Uzzah had been slain and God was clearly displeased rather than pleased. It had taken David a long time to live this down.

1Ch 15:4 David gathered together the sons of Aaron and the Levites-
The assembly of "all Israel" (:3) may have been in that the sons of Aaron represented "all Israel".

1Ch 15:5 of the sons of Kohath, Uriel the chief, and his brothers one hundred and twenty-
The differing numbers for each branch of the tribe may have been reflective of how responsive the families were to David's invitation.

1Ch 15:6 of the sons of Merari, Asaiah the chief, and his brothers two hundred and twenty-
We note how most of these numbers are to the nearest ten. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And here 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”. Surely this is to show that God is God, not man, and as such He’s not on the back foot, writing under the fear of criticism. His word is not contradictory, but on the other hand, God has more spiritual culture than to sink down to the level of a man who wanted to foresee all criticism in writing something which could stand all petty criticism. He has a spiritual culture much higher than this. And this is the answer to many of the petty objections about ‘Bible contradictions’ which are raised by critics. .

1Ch 15:7 of the sons of Gershom, Joel the chief, and his brothers one hundred and thirty-
"Gershon" means 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn. He is mentioned first in some lists as if he was the firstborn, but in terms of the priestly work Kohath is usually mentioned before him. This replacement of the firstborn is a big theme in scripture.

1Ch 15:8 of the sons of Elizaphan, Shemaiah the chief, and his brothers two hundred-
Elizaphan was son of Uzziel (:10; Ex. 6:22) and yet is mentioned before him. It seems

that this list is somehow graded in terms of importance, with Kohath mentioned first as the priestly division of the sons of Levi.

1Ch 15:9 of the sons of Hebron, Eliel the chief, and his brothers eighty-
Hebron and Uzziel (:10) were sons of Kohath, but are mentioned independently because of the importance attached to the priesthood. Therefore Kohath, although not the firstborn, is mentioned first in this list.

1Ch 15:10 of the sons of Uzziel, Amminadab the chief, and his brothers one hundred and twelve-
See on :9.

1Ch 15:11 David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab-
Zadok and Abiathar appear to have both been high priests at the same time, though Zadok and is always mentioned first and Abiathar was deposed by Solomon (2 Sam. 8:17; 15:29,35, 19:11; 20:25). To have more than one high priest was not in keeping with the spirit of the law of Moses but was not explicitly forbidden, and the dual priesthood shows how the law was open to a wide range of interpretation in practice.

1Ch 15:12 and said to them, You are the heads of the fathers' households of the Levites. Sanctify yourselves, both you and your brothers, that you may bring up the ark of Yahweh, the God of Israel, to the place that I have prepared for it-
David's bringing the ark to the place which he had prepared is the basis of the Lord's words in Jn. 14:1-3. Clearly the Lord saw David as Himself, and us as the ark. The 'bringing up' or 'lifting up' of the ark (1 Chron. 15:12,22 RVmg.) to a perpetual dwelling place has evident reference to the resurrection. And when the ark was finally brought or lifted up to Zion, David / Jesus dealt bread and wine to the people (1 Chron. 16:3). One practical encouragement from this typology is that the memorial feast is a celebration that in fact we, the ark, have in prospect already been brought or lifted up into the eternal place prepared for us in the Kingdom.

1Ch 15:13 For because you didn't carry it at first, Yahweh our God broke out against us, because we didn't seek Him according to the ordinance-
Because David omitted to enforce the Law's requirements concerning the transport of the tabernacle, a man died. His commission of good didn't outweigh his omission here (1 Chron. 15:13). To omit to hate evil is the same as to commit it (Ps. 36:4). The Jews were condemned by the Lord for building the sepulchres of the prophets without erecting a placard stating that their fathers had killed them.

The Old Testament body of Christ was based around Israel, and thus when the Lord made a breach upon Uzzah, David could say that the Lord "made a breach upon *us*" (1 Chron. 13:11; 15:13). Just as Saul's persecution of the body of Christ was persecuting the Lord Jesus personally.

1Ch 15:14 So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of Yahweh, the God of Israel-
The sanctification would have been in terms of sacrifices and abstaining from contact with things which could have made them unclean.

1Ch 15:15 The children of the Levites bore the ark of God with its poles on their

shoulders, as Moses commanded according to the word of Yahweh-
There were very specific laws about the transportation of the ark. It was to be carried on poles on the shoulders of not just Levites but specifically the sons of Kohath (Num. 4:15); and Abinadab's family were not the right people to carry it. David claims in Ps. 119 to have studied God's law all the day whilst on the run from Saul, reciting it to himself. Perhaps he forgot these details. But I suggest because he came to see that God wanted the spirit and not letter of the law to be followed, he came to totally place himself above Divine law. We face the same temptation. And it was this which led David into his sin with Bathsheba. Shaving off bits and pieces of God's laws and principles, on the basis that we are above His law, leads to the final catastrophe of David's sin with Bathsheba. Instead of following God's laws about the transportation of the ark, it seems David instead followed the pattern of the Philistines, who also transported the captured ark on a cart (s.w. 1 Sam. 6:10,11). And considered that having built a new cart, never used before, he was in his own way showing respect to it.

1Ch 15:16 David spoke to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brothers the singers, with instruments of music, stringed instruments and harps and cymbals, sounding aloud and lifting up the voice with joy-
Several of the Psalms (Ps. 96,105,106) and the text we have in 1 Chron. 16 would have been sung at this time. Those texts recount the failures of Israel and triumph in God's abiding presence and forgiveness. The "joy" was therefore the joy at forgiveness.

1Ch 15:17 So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel; and of his brothers, Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari their brothers, Ethan the son of Kushaiah-
These played some undefined role in the musical presentation of :16. The next verses define roles in more detail, so we assume that these names were those who led the service and procession, as the next in the list are "of the second degree" (:18).

Heman was Samuel's grandson (a Kohathite; 1 Chron. 2:6). Samuel was faithful, his sons weren't, but his grandson was. So often faith skips a generation.

1Ch 15:18 and with them their brothers of the second degree-
This could imply that the names of :17 were of a 'first degree' status, but "second" can also mean that they were a mirror image of those of :17, they may have been a 'double' of them.

Zechariah, Ben, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom and Jeiel, the doorkeepers-
Literally, the openers or dividers of the gates. The word is also translated "porters". The idea is that the ark was considered to represent an enthroned person. And that invisible person was Israel's God Yahweh. This was in stark contrast to the processions of other nations, who carried the idols representing their gods, enthroned on great decorated thrones. But Yahweh had just a throne, the humble small box known as the ark, which was carried. He Himself was to be imagined, by faith. This was the scene of Ps. 24:7 "Lift up your heads, O gates [gatekeepers]... you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in". But that King of glory was invisible and His glory only perceived in the minds of thoughtful believers, just as today.

1Ch 15:19 So the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were given cymbals of brass to sound aloud-
Ethan and Heman are mentioned together in 1 Kings 4:31 as men whom Solomon's wisdom exceeded; and in 1 Chron. 15:19 they are both singers whom David appointed. We can assume that they were famed for their wisdom; but Solomon's wisdom exceeded theirs. And their wisdom was here expressed in their music.

1Ch 15:20 and Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah and Benaiah, with stringed instruments set to Alamoth-
Alamoth is the music title of Ps. 46. It means literally "the girls", and may refer to soprano parts.

1Ch 15:21 and Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, Jeiel and Azaziah, with harps tuned to the eight-stringed lyre, to lead-
Or "on the sheminith" (as AV), which may have been a musical term as "alamoth" in :20.

1Ch 15:22 Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was over the song: he instructed about the song, because he was skilful-
"Instructed" implies to teach by repeated repetition. All this would have been rehearsed many times, and he led the rehearsals.

1Ch 15:23 Berechiah and Elkanah were doorkeepers for the ark-
"Doorkeepers" can also mean "porters", so perhaps these were those who carried the ark, and those of :18 opened the gates for the ark. See on :18.

1Ch 15:24 Shebaniah, and Joshaphat, and Nethanel, and Amasai, and Zechariah, and Benaiah, and Eliezer, the priests, blew the trumpets before the ark of God. Obed-Edom and Jehiah were doorkeepers for the ark-
See on :18,23. They may have been either the porters of the ark, or those who opened the gates.

1Ch 15:25 So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh out of the house of Obed-Edom with joy-
True joy can only come from repentance and humbling ourselves before God. A prouder man would have just given up with this apparently over sensitive, hard to please God of Israel. But Yahweh is not really like that; but He rightly requires our humility to Him and His principles. It was the Edomite servant, Obed Edom, who taught David this. Several of the Psalms (Ps. 96,105,106) and the text we have in 1 Chron. 16 would have been sung at this time. Those texts recount the failures of Israel and triumph in God's abiding presence and forgiveness. The "joy" was therefore the joy at forgiveness. .

1Ch 15:26 It happened, when God helped the Levites who bore the ark of the covenant of Yahweh-
GNB "They sacrificed seven bulls and seven sheep, to make sure that God would help the Levites who were carrying the Covenant Box".

That they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams-
If sacrifices were offered every six paces from the house of Obed Edom to Zion (2

Sam. 6:13), the road to Zion would have been a stream of sacrificial blood, looking ahead to the way to Golgotha. I suggest on 2 Sam. 6:17 that these were sin offerings. It demonstrated the deep sense of sin and need for atonement which David felt. It was this true repentance which was the basis for his ecstatic joy. 2 Sam. 6:13 LXX "And seven choruses accompanied him, bearing the ark, and a calf and lambs as a sacrifice".

1Ch 15:27 David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites who bore the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers; and David wore an ephod of linen-

I suggested on 1 Sam. 2:18,19 that the child Samuel, a non Levite from Ephraim, was doing the priestly work because Eli's family refused to do it, or perhaps just told him to do it. The Hebrew words for "robe" and "ephod" in there only occur together in the descriptions of the "robe of the ephod" worn by none other than the High Priest (Ex. 28:4,31; 29:5; 39:22). The young Samuel apparently did the work of the High Priest. His example and spiritual ambition inspired David, who he was to anoint, to likewise wear such a robe and ephod (s.w.).

As we go through the life of David, it is evident he went along roads few others have travelled. For example, who else would offer his sacrifice upon the altar and then start strumming his harp in praise as he watched the animal burn (Ps. 43:4 Heb.)? This was a new paradigm in Israelite worship. Like Job, David had no precedents in past spiritual history from which he could take comfort (Job 5:1). David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (2 Sam. 6:13-20; and 2 Sam. 19:21 = Ex.22:28), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David's sons, although not Levites, were "priests" (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not. He knew that the ideal standard for married life was one man: one woman, and yet he was somehow able to flout this and still be a man after God's own heart. He broke explicit Mosaic commandment by marrying Saul's wives and also his daughter, he airily waived the Mosaic law concerning bloodguiltiness (consider the implications of 2 Sam. 14:4-11), and the need to stone rapists (2 Sam. 13:21). When others tried to do these kind of things, they were severely punished by a God who insisted upon serious obedience to His Law. Consider how Saul was condemned for offering sacrifice instead of a priest (1 Sam. 13:10-13); and Uzziah likewise (2 Chron. 26:16-19). When the woman of Tekoah basically suggested that the Mosaic laws about the rights of the revenger of blood be repealed, David seems to have agreed. When Amnon seeks to rape his sister Tamar, she suggests that he ask David to allow them to marry- and surely, she says, he will agree. Yet this too would have been counter to the spirit of the Law about marriages to close relatives. Yet David went beyond the Law so often; and it is this which perhaps led him to commit the sin of presumption in his behaviour with Bathsheba. Right afterwards he comments about the man who stole his neighbour's sheep, that it must be restored fourfold; whereas the Law only stipulated double, David felt he so knew the spirit of the Law that he could break the letter of it- in any context. And this was his [temporary] downfall.

1Ch 15:28 Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals,

sounding aloud with stringed instruments and harps-
David is portrayed as in religious ecstasy before the God whom three months before he had been furiously angry with (see on 2 Sam. 6:8). This indeed reflects the almost bi-polar nature of David. But it also shows the power of true repentance and seeking to put things right with God (see on 2 Sam. 6:13), and the joy of good conscience resulting from that.

1Ch 15:29 As the ark of the covenant of Yahweh came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out at the window, and saw king David dancing and playing; and she despised him in her heart-
As Goliath despised David (1 Sam. 17:42), so did Michal. The same word is used here. God reads the heart and what He finds there is so significant to Him. That woman's silent thoughts have been recorded for millennia in the record, and they are still in God's memory. We have a parade example here of the huge significance God attaches to our thoughts. Despising others for their spirituality is especially abhorrent to Him. We recall that Michal had an idol in her home soon after her marriage to David, and we wonder if it was Yahweh whom she also despised. And all this made her no better than Goliath.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 16

1Ch 16:1 They brought in the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it. They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God-
The usual pattern for the offerings was sin offering, burnt offering [dedication to God on the basis of being reconciled from sin] and then peace offerings, celebrating the resultant peace with God. I suggested on 2 Sam. 6:13 that the mass of animals sacrificed on the road to Zion were sin offerings.

1Ch 16:2 When David had made an end of offering the burnt offering and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh-
As noted and discussed on 1 Chron. 15:27, this was again David acting as high priest, blessing the people in Yahweh's Name.

1Ch 16:3 He dealt to each one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, a portion of meat and a cake of raisins-
See on 1 Chron. 15:12. 1 Chron. 16:8-22 is the Psalm written by David when the ark was brought to Zion, but it reappears within Ps. 105:1-15, which is clearly an appeal for the exiles to repent so that God's salvation history might continue with them. So we see how David's original Psalms were reworked and reapplied in later contexts, under Divine inspiration. By the time of the exiles in Babylon, it seems the ark had been lost. But such external religious symbolism was unimportant; the essence was that the people of God were to come to Zion, just as the ark had done.

We see here an ancient anticipation of the bread and wine [raisins] of the breaking of bread meeting. That meeting is essentially a peace offering, a celebration of the peace with God achieved through the Lord's sin offering, our promise of dedication to Him in the burnt offering, and then the celebration of the resultant peace with God. See on :1.

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

1Ch 16:4 He appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of Yahweh, and to celebrate and to thank and praise Yahweh, the God of Israel-
The sense of the Hebrew behind "celebrate" is "to call to mind" or remember (1 Chron. 16:12). David wanted this occasion to be recorded. The production of psalms to be sung for perpetuity afterwards would be the equivalent of our taking photographs or video recordings of such an incident.

1Ch 16:5 Asaph the chief, and second to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom and Jeiel, with stringed instruments and with harps; and Asaph with cymbals, sounding aloud-
Asaph is particularly noted, although he was just one many recorded musicians in the company (1 Chron. 15:19). Perhaps special note is made of him because he was the author of some of the Psalms which the exiles were to sing at the restoration.

1Ch 16:6 and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests with trumpets continually, before the ark of the covenant of God-
Jahaziel is Eliezer of 1 Chron. 15:24. People had more than one name. Perhaps one of these was his birth name, and the other that by which he became known. Benaiah was also one of David's "mighty men". They would have had one trumpet each.

1Ch 16:7 Then on that day David led the giving of thanks to Yahweh, by the hand of Asaph and his brothers-
The idea is that David gave the following hymn into the hands of Asaph and his brothers to sing. Hence Adam Clarke: "David delivered first this psalm...".

1Ch 16:8 Oh give thanks to Yahweh! Call on His name. Make His deeds known among the peoples-

The first half of this song of praise (1 Chron. 16:8-22) recurs in Ps. 105:1-15, the second (1 Chron. 16:23-33) in Ps. 96:1-13, and the conclusion (1 Chron. 16:34-36) in Ps. 106:1; 106:47,48.

The Truth of the Gospel of the cross is the only way to come to salvation. All other religions apart from true Christianity will not give salvation nor a relationship with God. Realizing this, David pleads with his people to be a missionary nation: "Give thanks unto Yahweh, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people... for great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. *For* all the gods of the people are idols; but Yahweh made the heavens" (1 Chron. 16:8,25,26). The more we realize the pathetic fallacy of human religion, indeed the whole and utter vanity of life under this sun, the more we will preach Yahweh's Truth to a tragically wandering, aimless world.

This is an appeal to the Gentile "peoples" to hear about God's work and praise Him; and to praise a deity in those days meant to accept that deity. Not because they were forced to by military conquest, but because they had considered God's work which had now been told to them. 1 Chron. 16:8-22 is the Psalm written by David when the ark was brought to Zion, but it reappears within Ps. 105:1-15, which is clearly an appeal for the exiles to repent so that God's salvation history might continue with them. So we see how David's original Psalms were reworked and reapplied in later contexts, under Divine inspiration. By the time of the exiles in Babylon, it seems the ark had been lost. But such external religious symbolism was unimportant; the essence was that the people of God were to come to Zion, just as the ark had done. And David wants to use the presence of the ark in Zion as a reason to invite the Gentiles to come and worship Yahweh before it.

1Ch 16:9 Sing to Him, sing praises to Him. Tell of all His marvellous works-
Heb. 'His wonders'. Wonder leads to worship, to that flame of praise which is the worship "in spirit and in truth" which the Father seeks. But wonder adds awe and reverence to that worship. And we have to ask how much of that there is in much popular worship today, be it in starchy hymns or rock music. 1 Chron. 16:9 makes the connection between wonder and worship quite plain: "Sing unto him, sing praises unto him; talk of all his wonders". Likewise Ps. 9:1: "I will praise you O Lord; I will show forth all your wonders".

David was very much involved in Israel his people. He saw himself as their representative. When he sung Psalms, he invited them to come and sing along with him (Ps. 105:2; 107:22; 111:1). And yet this can also be read as an appeal to the Gentile peoples of :1 to hear of Yahweh's works, believe them, accept Him as their God, and then in turn tell others of "His marvellous works".

1Ch 16:10 Glory in His holy name. Let the heart of those who seek Yahweh rejoice-
The Bible continually stresses the critical importance of the heart, the mind. Our minds should glory in God's Name which is His characteristics, as articulated in His "works" (:9) in history. And this leads us to "seek" Him and His face, which I suggest on :11 refers to repentance. Worship is a matter of the heart rather than musical ability. It's tragic that "praise and worship" has been made equal to musical performance. Praise is not necessarily music; the essence of praise and worship is in the heart.

1Ch 16:11 Seek Yahweh and His strength. Seek His face for evermore-
To seek Yahweh's face is an idiom for repentance (Hos. 5:15), and is specifically used by Daniel in the context of the exiles (2 Chron. 7:14; Dan. 9:3). This is therefore an appeal for the exiles to repent, so that God may continue to lavish His saving grace upon them, as He had upon their forefathers.

To seek Yahweh's face is to seek the unattainable in this life; although the end is that we shall see God's face as Revelation concludes. We therefore die not having achieved peak spirituality. Seeking Yahweh's strength refers to seeking unto or worshipping the ark, which is called "the ark of Your might / strength" (Ps. 132:8). The captivity of the ark is spoken of as God's might / strength going into captivity (Ps. 78:61). So David seems to be veering towards worshipping the ark of itself just as Judah effectively did later. A sad contrast with his attitude that he was dwelling beneath the cherubim wings when in the wilderness, thus obviating the need for any physical ark. Likewise in :31, David seems to reason as if Yahweh is reigning in that the ark is now on Zion. And he likes to imagine that therefore all the Gentiles are rejoicing. This is logically questionable, for the rulership or dominion of Yahweh was not contingent upon the ark being in Zion. His idea was that they would come to the ark and worship.

1Ch 16:12 Remember His marvellous works that He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth-
The Hebrew idea of 'remembering' is not necessarily related to 'remembering' as opposed to 'forgetting'; rather does it have the flavour of celebrating, and thus being aware of in gratitude and praise. As God was "mindful" of David and thereby all men in Israel through the victory granted over Goliath, so David urged that in response, they should be "mindful" of God (Ps. 8:4 s.w. 1 Chron. 16:12,15).

1Ch 16:13 you seed of Israel His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones-
David was clearly the "chosen one... My servant" (Ps. 89:3), but these very terms are applied to Israel as a whole (Ps. 105:6,43; 106:5) and to the "servant" of later Isaiah, who refers to both Israel and their Messiah as their embodiment (Is. 42:1; 45:4). David's

path of sin, repentance and restoration was intended to be that of all God's people, as he himself recognizes in Ps. 32. But the exiles refused to repent and therefore their restoration was precluded. They were not therefore treated as His "chosen one".

1Ch 16:14 He is Yahweh our God. His judgments are in all the earth-
The exiles were to believe the prophetic word, that all the nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham were to experience God's judgments; the judgments of "our God", Yahweh, the God of Israel.

1Ch 16:15 Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations-
The parallel in Ps. 105:8 has "He has remembered". God remembers the covenant always and we are to always remember. This is the picture of relationship with God.

The real import of the covenant-relationship with God which we have is brought out by David in 1 Chron. 16:15-18: “Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; Even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; And hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance”. The covenant, the promise that God’s people really will inherit the land, becomes a law, a “word which he commanded”, something which should be thought about all the time. The sure promise of entering the Kingdom, the knowledge that by grace, according to the covenant, ‘we will be there’, cannot be accepted passively. The covenant-certainty of that great salvation becomes a command to action.

Jeremiah, Zechariah, Hosea and Ezekiel point out to Judah that they had broken the old covenant; their only basis of connection with God was therefore on the basis of the new covenant He was offering, which was based upon the promises to Abraham. That word of promise was unconditional, to all who wanted to believe it. It was therefore eternal, "to a thousand generations". It would therefore never be abrogated, unlike the old covenant based on the law of Moses.

1Ch 16:16 the covenant which He made with Abraham, His oath to Isaac-
The "oath to Isaac" must refer to the repetition of the promises to Abraham to Isaac in Gen. 26:3, where the same word for "oath" is used. But the context of that repetition of the covenant oath to Isaac was in commanding him not to seek material prosperity in Egypt, but rather to remain in the famished land of Israel, then experiencing famine. This was relevant to the exiles, many of whom preferred to remain in Babylon, seeing that Malachi, Ezra and others record serious famine in the land of Judah at that time.

1Ch 16:17 He confirmed the same to Jacob for a statute, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant-
The "statute" doesn't refer to the law of Moses, but to the covenant with Abraham of :16. The covenant with Abraham was an unconditional offer of eternal inheritance of the land; all that was and is required is that this great salvation be believed. But it became and becomes a "statute" or "law" in the same way as grace reigns or is a ruler over us (Rom. 5:21). If we believe in God's unconditional covenant of salvation, then this becomes a law of our lives, the guiding principle in all our thinking, worldviews and perceptions. It is in this sense that "the grace of God... teaches us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives" (Tit. 2:11,12). Grace is grace, but the wonder of it, when believed, is such that it naturally elicits changed behaviour, and in this sense is a "statute" or law.

God wanted to make a covenant with David, by His grace, rather than demand gifts and obedience for the sake of obedience. Yet grace of itself means that we cannot be passive to it. The covenants with Abraham and Isaac are spoken of by David as a law, in the sense that they required certain things of those within those covenants (1 Chron. 16:15-19). And those same covenants are binding upon all baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29), and the hope of the Kingdom which they bring likewise becomes a 'law' governing our behaviour. Ez. 20:37 speaks of "the bond of the covenant"- and "bond" is literally a fetter, a tie that binds, that restricts. To be in covenant relationship therefore means that we are not free to do as we like; there is an element of regulation in our lives, but of course it has a purpose- to bring us to God's Kingdom and keep us within the sphere of relationship with Him. But a covenant is a two way thing. This tie that binds applies to God too; hence the wonderful, oft-repeated idea of His chesed, His covenant faithfulness to us His people. He likewise carries a kind of responsibility to us.

1Ch 16:18 saying, 'I will give you the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance;'-
As discussed on :17, the promise of eternal inheritance of Canaan was unconditional, by grace. It just had to be believed.

1Ch 16:19 when you were but a few men in number, yes, very few, and foreigners were in it-
God rejoices to work with the small and feeble. The "few men" must refer to how Jacob's family only numbered about 70 people when they went into Egypt. The same phrase "few men in number" is exactly that used by Jacob in lamenting how very small his tribe was compared to the aggressive tribes amongst whom they lived in Canaan (Gen. 34:30). And it is the phrase used of how when Israel were to be judged for their sins in exile, they would be left "few men in number" (Dt. 4:27). The exiles are being

encouraged to see the similarities between them and Jacob's family in Egypt, the original 'Israel' at its first beginnings.

1Ch 16:20 They went about from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people-
This seems to refer, in the context, to the journeyings of the patriarchs amongst the peoples of Canaan, Philistia and Egypt. Although they suffered at the hands of those peoples, they were miraculously preserved; and so would God's people be despite their current exile in Babylon / Persia.

1Ch 16:21 He allowed no man to do them wrong. Yes, He reproved kings for their sakes-
In this we see God's absolute grace. For both Abraham and Isaac were rightly reproved by the Abimelech kings for lying about their wives, and yet God reproved those kings. He was openly showing His passionate love and preference for His people; they were rightly reproved by the kings (Gen. 20:16), but those kings were reproved by God for their sins of ignorance. And it was this same grace which was available to the exiles. "Wrong" was indeed done to the exiles (s.w. Jer. 50:33; Hos. 5:11), as it was done to the historical Jacob; but the point is being made that it was not ultimately allowed because there was the final restoration of Jacob's fortunes, as there would be ultimately for God's people- but in God's own way and time.

1Ch 16:22 Don't touch My anointed ones! Do My prophets no harm!-
This refers to how Abraham and Isaac were not harmed despite lying to Abimelech (see on :20). It definitely doesn't mean that God's visible public servants are beyond criticism*;* for Abraham and Isaac most definitely are reproved for their actions in the Biblical record. The point is that they, weak as they were and deserving of "harm", were preserved from ultimate harm by God's grace. And they are cited as an example to the exiles, who were all "anointed ones" (Lam. 4:21), they had a special purpose before God; just as all in Christ, the anointed one, are likewise "anointed ones" (2 Cor. 1:21). So this doesn't give pastors or church leaders special privilege of being beyond criticism, as this verse is misused to teach.

1Ch 16:23 Sing to Yahweh, all the earth! Display His salvation from day to day-
This is the outcome of believing we will be saved according to the promises to Abraham- to display that salvation to all the earth. This certainty of salvation is the bassis of our witness. The LXX uses the word *evangelion* concerning how daily we should "show forth his salvation" (here and in Ps. 96:2). Witness is therefore a daily feature in the life of those who have known salvation; it is not something done solely by attending an ecclesial gathering once per week. This explains why frequently Paul uses the word "Gospel" as meaning 'the preaching of the Gospel'; the Gospel is in itself something

which *must* be preached if we really have it (Rom. 1:1,9; 16:25; Phil. 1:5 (NIV),12; 2:22; 4:15; 1 Thess. 1:5; 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:8). The fact we have been given the Gospel is in itself an imperative to preach it.
Many of the Psalms reflect David's realization that confession of sin is the basis for powerful preaching. The LXX often uses the verb *euangelizesthai* to describe his preaching after the Bathsheba incident (Ps. 96:2). Because God has mercifully forgive His people and His face shines upon them in renewed fellowship, His way is thereby made known upon earth to all nations (Ps. 67:1,2). He utters forth the mighty acts of God with the preface: "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord, who can shew forth all his praise?" (Ps. 106:2)- and then proceeds to do just that. He did so with a clear recognition of his own inadequacy. The Psalms of praise are full of this theme. David exhorts all those who have been redeemed to show forth God's praise (Ps. 107:2,22,32). He wanted all Israel to be a joyful, witnessing people. And even though it seems God's people didn't respond, David went on undeterred. Time and again he fearlessly sets himself up as Israel's example. He speaks of how he trusts in the Lord's grace, and then appeals to Israel to do just the same (Ps. 62:7,8). The strength of his appeal was in the fact that his sin and experience of grace was the bridge between him and his audience.

1Ch 16:24 Declare His glory among the nations, and His marvellous works among all the peoples-
In Lk. 24:45-47 we read how Christ explained to the disciples that their preaching of the Gospel "among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" was foretold in the Psalms and prophets. So the Bible student asks: *Where* in the Psalms and prophets? The Lord spoke as if the prophecies about this were copious. There do not seem to be any specific prophecies which speak of the twelve spreading the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century. Instead we read of the Gospel being spread from Jerusalem *in the Kingdom*, and often the phrase "all nations" occurs in a Kingdom context, describing how "all nations" will come to worship Christ at Jerusalem (Ps. 22:27; 67:2; 72:11,17; 82:8; 86:9; 117:1; Is. 2:2; 66:18,20; Jer. 3:17; Dan. 7:14; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:23). This selection of "Psalms and prophets" is impressive. Yet the Lord Jesus clearly interpreted these future Kingdom passages as having relevance to the world-wide spreading of the Gospel. "All nations" also occurs in many passages exhorting us to praise Yahweh among all the nations of this world. The reason for this is that God's glory is so great it should be declared as far as possible by us. 1 Chron. 16:24,25 is typical of many such verses: "Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised… for all the gods of the people are idols".
World-wide preaching is therefore an aspect of our praise of Yahweh, and as such it is a spiritual work which is timeless.

A real sense of wonder becomes the base motivation for our witness. "Declare his glory among the gentiles, his wonders among the nations" (1 Chron. 16:24). And the Psalms

are full of this, once we appreciate that in their primary context many of them were David's preaching to the Gentile nations around him.

1Ch 16:25 For great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised. He also is to be feared above all gods-
David's focus of all his praises upon Yahweh as alone "worthy" (Heb.; Ps. 96:4) of praise was what he now wanted his people to follow (Ps. 18:3; 22:3). The implication of "worthy" could imply a contrast with other gods. This would confirm the hints we have that Saul had been an idolater (see on Ps. 12:8; 16:4), and that idolatry was prevalent in Israel at the time.

1Ch 16:26 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but Yahweh made the heavens-
The gods / idols aren't in so many words criticized as not existing, but rather, Yahweh is so exalted above them as creator of all that even if they do exist, they are so relatively powerless that they are show to have no effective existence. It's the same with how the language of demons is used in the New Testament; the Lord's miracles demonstrated that God's power was so infinitely greater, that effectively demons don't exist.

1Ch 16:27 Honor and majesty are before Him. Strength and gladness are in His place-
See on :28. This is a reference to the Most Holy Place; the reference to His "strength and beauty" going into captivity may refer to the ark (Ps. 78:61 s.w.). See on :28. David had now brought the ark to "His place" and was expecting the Gentiles to come to it, in line with the promises to Abraham.

1Ch 16:28 Ascribe to Yahweh, you relatives of the peoples, ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength!-
The very same Hebrew words used about how David personally felt he wanted to give glory and strength [honour] to the Lord (Ps. 62:7). "Families of nations" or "relatives of the peoples" recalls the promises made to Abraham of his seed. He wished for the whole world to share his relationship with God. The radical nature of what is being suggested here and in Ps. 96 and many similar Psalms can easily be overlooked. The Psalmist is urging Gentiles to come and worship with Israel, proceeding into the tabernacle courts and thence into "the beauty of holiness" (:27 Heb.), i.e. the Most Holy Place ['holiness' being read there as a noun rather than an adjective- it is the same Hebrew word elsewhere translated "sanctuary" and related to the Hebrew word used for "sanctuary"]. The Psalmist is inviting Gentiles to come in to the worship of Israel and proceed where only the High Priest could venture once / year. It was the equivalent of proclaiming an open table policy in the most exclusive of churches.

The common assumption of expositors is that the Psalmist has in view the Kingdom age, but this seems precluded by his appeal to the Gentiles to come and worship exactly because of the good news that the Lord is coming to judge the earth in righteousness (:33)- which is quoted about the return of Christ to earth in Acts 17:31. The holiness boundaries taught by the Law were only teaching mechanisms, which is why they were removed by the open Christ. David for one got to this point well before most other Israelites did, acting as the High Priest (1 Chron. 16:3), entering the sanctuary when not a Levite (Ps. 63:2) and experiencing forgiveness and salvation quite outside the Law rather than the Law's penalty of death.

David uses the words and spirit of this Psalm, especially about his vision of his outreach to the Gentiles, in the later Bathsheba Psalms, where he vows to tell the whole world of God's grace. It's not that the experience of sin and forgiveness makes a person somehow weak and wishy washy acceptant of anyone and anything. The experience of God's grace at close quarters leads us to realize how radical was His acceptance of us and thereby we should proactively seek to be acceptant of all those who are afar off. And so David perceived that God's Name (His characteristics, of which grace is uttermost) deserved glory to be given to it- simply for what it was (:29). And that glory is "due" from all, including the Gentiles- and so they should be invited across all holiness boundaries to come with their offerings to God. Thus Yahweh's greatness above all other gods was what led David to appeal to "all you gods" [perhaps put by metonymy for the idol worshipping peoples] to come and worship before Yahweh (Ps. 97:7).

The appeal was to be global and not just to Israel because David perceived that actually the truth of God is proclaimed by "the whole earth" and "heavens" (Ps. 97:5,6). Of course, the call is for the Gentile idolaters to "come" to Yahweh's sanctuary, and not for God's people to leave Yahweh and go to them. And they were to "bring an offering", to make a commitment to the God they were being invited to come close to (:29). Ps. 98:3-5 continues this radical appeal to the Gentile world, but it urges them to come and worship (which involved coming to the sanctuary in Israel) exactly because God has been so gracious to sinful Israel. Israel's extreme sin and God's radical grace and patience with them for not being good witnesses to the Gentiles... was to serve as encouragement for the Gentiles to come to Israel's God and praise Him, confident that their sins too could be forgiven.

The same idea is found in Ps. 99:1-5- because of God's grace to Jacob / Israel, an undefined group are bidden come to Zion, to the very cherubim (in the Most Holy Place) to exalt and praise God at His footstool. This group, in line with the preceding Psalms, are surely the Gentile world. "Let them praise Your great Name" (Ps. 99:3) would surely make most sense if it referred to the Gentiles, seeing that David or the Psalmist was Israelite. We see the same idea in Ps. 97:1; it begins with an appeal to the islands of the

Gentiles to 'rejoice' and 'be glad', but the same two Hebrew words are used in Ps. 97:8 about how Zion- those in the very temple mount- likewise rejoice and are glad. The very "ends of the earth" who saw God's salvation of His people are invited to praise Him for it (Ps. 98:3,4)- the invitation to join in praise was effectively an invitation to join in worship, and thereby to become part of God's covenant people.

1Ch 16:29 Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due to His name. Bring an offering, and come before Him. Worship Yahweh in holy array-
David is inviting the Gentile world to come to the ark and worship. See on :28. This and the next verses confidently anticipated the coming of Messiah there and then, with :33 quoted about the second coming of Jesus in Acts 17:31. But that was to be delayed; for Israel and the Gentile world weren't going to respond to David's invitation here. For he is asking the Gentiles to dress up as priests and come and worship Yahweh and even enter the most holy place (:28). David was way ahead of his time in thinking in these terms.

As it was God's intention that Israel were to be a nation of priests to the rest of the world, so the new Israel likewise are to *all* discharge the priestly functions of teaching their brethren (Ex. 19:6 cp. 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:9,10). Under the new covenant, we should all teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16). Indeed, God told Israel [unrecorded in the historical records]: "Ye are gods [*elohim*] and all of you are sons of the Most High" (Ps. 82:6 RV). Further, Ps. 96:9 makes the paradigm breaking statement that even the Gentiles could come before Yahweh of Israel in holy, priestly array- they too could aspire to the spirit of priesthood (Ps. 96:9 RVmg.). Moses spoke of how all Israel should pray that God would establish the work of their hands (Ps. 90:17)- but this was in fact his special request for the blessing of Levi, the priestly tribe (Dt. 33:11). Ps. 135:19,20 parallels all Israel with the priestly family: "Bless the Lord, O house of Israel: bless the Lord, O house of Aaron: bless the Lord, O house of Levi: ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord... praise *ye* the Lord". All Israel were to aspire to the spirit of priesthood. Indeed, the Psalms often parallel the house of Aaron (i.e. the priesthood) with the whole nation (Ps. 115:9,10,12; 118:2,3).

"Come before Him" in the parallel Ps. 96:8 becomes "come into His courts". Again David is moving towards seeing coming to God as coming into a religious place. He is moving away from his sense in the wilderness years of being in God's presence anywhere. Likewise "in holy array", AV "the beauty of holiness", becomes "in His glorious sanctuary" in the parallel 2 Chron. 20:21 and Ps. 96:9; again moving from the need for personal holiness to the need to come into a holy place.

1Ch 16:30 Tremble before Him, all the land. The world also is established that it can't be moved-
The invitation to the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham to "tremble before Him" is an

invitation for them to accept Yahweh as their God. The idea is that all of the planet, the sea representing the peoples (:32), would rejoice at the prospect of the coming of Israel's Lord in judgment (:33). This is not therefore speaking of the Kingdom; but rather of David's desire that before the Lord's coming, the Gentile peoples would come to such relationship with Him that they rejoiced at the prospect of His coming in judgment, knowing by faith that they would not be condemned. And yet as will be discussed on :31, he seems to think that the ark as God's throne meant that God was now king in Zion and the Gentile world should accept that. And he may be liking to think that this kingdom "can't be moved", when in fact it would be. For the kingdom was to be overturned. It was this wild over interpretation of the significance of his own kingdom which led him to wrongly assume that Solomon would be the promised Messianic king, and this led Solomon to have no sense of possible failure, so that he became proud and turned away from Yahweh.

1Ch 16:31 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice! Let them say among the nations, Yahweh reigns!-
This again is an invitation to the Gentiles to accept Yahweh as their king and thus become His 'kingdom' before His final, open manifestation in the earth. And that is likewise our call. However in the immediate context, David sees the ark as God's throne, and His reign as therefore now beginning in Jerusalem. It could be that David is seeing this as a foretaste of His future Kingdom coming on earth, based also in Jerusalem. But he could also be over interpreting, and seeing God's Kingdom as fully come in his kingdom, rather than recognizing that this was but a foretaste of that which was yet to come.

1Ch 16:32 Let the sea roar, and its fullness! Let the field exult, and all that is therein!-
The sea is again a symbol off the Gentiles, and David sees the coming of the ark to Zion as the enthronement of God in the earth (:31), and therefore he is inviting the Gentiles to come and worship there. But there is no evidence any Gentiles did come to the ark in Zion and do so. David was overly obsessed with the material, religious aspects of worship, as he went on to be in relation to the temple.

1Ch 16:33 Then the trees of the forest will sing for joy before Yahweh, for He comes to judge the earth-
All the trees of the world will be clapping their hands when Jesus returns. Yet trees are symbolic of Gentile nations. There will be, therefore, a remnant everywhere looking out for the Lord’s return. But perhaps there is an element of literalism here. David perhaps also foresees the joy of the natural and spiritual creation of the last days as they sense the approach of the Lord (as in Rom. 8:22).

But I suggest the reference to the trees is specifically to the ark, referring to the wood at Kirjath-jearim (the city of woods) where the ark was "found": "we found it in the fields of the wood" (Ps. 132:6). The coming of the ark to Zion wsa seen by David as God's coming in judgment, and the praise of God and His grace (:34) was initially referring to the coming of the ark to Zion. No wonder God made that little gold box disappear so that men would focus instead upon Him in His essence.

1Ch 16:34 Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good, for His grace endures forever-
Ps. 106:45 connects this eternal grace with God's covenant : "He remembered for them His covenant, and relented according to the multitude of His graces". The covenant in view is that with Abraham made in Gen. 15, which featured God making unilateral promises whilst Abraham was incapacitated and unable to do anything in response. Neither was there any clause added making it conditional upon his obedience. This is in sharp contrast with the law of Moses, the old covenant, and David seems to have seen beyond this. Jeremiah, Zechariah and Ezekiel all make the point to the exiles that they had broken the old covenant, and therefore they could only be saved by reaffirming their part in the new covenant. We take the cup of the new covenant to show how we have accepted this new covenant with us.

1Ch 16:35 Say, 'Save us, God of our salvation! Gather us together and deliver us from the nations, to give thanks to Your holy name, to triumph in Your praise'-
Verses 35 and 36 are quoted in Ps. 106:47,48. But the inspired Psalmist in Ps. 106:47 makes a slight change because he was using this Psalm in the context of the exiles wanting to be restored: "Gather us together and deliver us from the nations" is changed to "Gather us from among the nations". The ark was lost; it was the Jews themselves who were to come to Zion. The exile brought them to realize that the box called "the ark" was mere religion; the essence of it was that the dwelling place of God was no longer a box of acacia wood, but God's own repentant people.

1Ch 16:36 Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting. All the people said, 'Amen', and praised Yahweh-
See on :35. The people are asked to say "Amen!" to it all, recognizing their sinfulness as a people and as individuals; and yet with the confession, to also praise God for His abiding grace to His people. As noted on :35, these words are slightly adapted in Ps. 106:48. The people were asked to understand that *their* return to Zion was to be like the return of the ark after a period in Gentile captivity. The dwelling place of God was no longer to be over a box of acacia wood, but over God's own repentant people.

1Ch 16:37 So he left there, before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, Asaph and his

brothers, to minister before the ark continually, as every day's work required-
The idea is that Asaph and his brothers were now to be permanently stationed in Zion to perform the required rituals there every day. Although David presents as very spiritually minded, time and again we find within his worship aspects which are simply not Biblical. Deuteronomy had made it clear there should only have been one sanctuary. But he had one at Gibeon (:4, where Solomon is said to have later worshipped) and yet had the ark with him, in his back yard, at Jerusalem. It's hard not to think that the bringing of the ark to himself wasn't politically motivated, cementing both religious and political power in himself as king, as so many kings did. Hence David's use of linen garments in which to minister as a priest, when he wasn't a Levite- for linen garments were a symbol of royalty as well as being used by priests.

1Ch 16:38 and Obed-Edom with their brothers, sixty-eight; Obed-Edom also the son of Jeduthun and Hosah to be doorkeepers-
"Their brothers" may mean that Asaph and his brothers (:37) are in view. 1 Chron. 26:8 speaks of a group of 62 relatives of Obed-Edom, whereas 1 Chron. 16:38 speaks of 68. The extra six may refer to "Asaph and his brothers, who are referred to in the otherwise strange reference in 1 Chron. 16:38 to "Obed-Edom with their brothers". The preceding verse (1 Chron. 16:37) has spoken of "Asaph and his brothers".

1Ch 16:39 and Zadok the priest, and his brothers the priests, before the tabernacle of Yahweh in the high place that was at Gibeon-
Zadok cared for the tabernacle at Gibeon, which was "the great high place" (1 Chron. 16:39; 1 Kings 3:4), and so it is another example of correlation within the inspired records that he had access to that horn and the oil with which to anoint Solomon (1 Kings 1:39).

1Ch 16:40 to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh on the altar of burnt offering continually morning and evening, even according to all that is written in the law of Yahweh, which He commanded to Israel-
We wonder whether these regular daily offerings had been made at Gibeon before this time. We note that at this point, the ark is in Zion, but the altar of burnt offering is still at Gibeon (:39). This seems rather typical of how David perceived the spirit of the law to such an extent that he apparently broke the letter of the law by allowing this situation to continue. For surely he ought to have united the sanctuaries of Gibeon and Zion. Perhaps he allowed it to continue because of the political difficult in deciding which of the two high priests to appoint as singular high priest (Zadok or Ahimelech). And so he allowed the two sanctuaries to continue, although this was contrary to the law's insistence upon one sanctuary. Hence Solomon sacrificed both at Gibeon and before the ark at Jerusalem (2 Chron. 1:3,6). It was only when Ahimelech was deposed by

Solomon that he brought the brazen altar from Gibeon to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 1:5 AV; see note there). This suggests that David's operation of two sanctuaries was politically motivated.

1Ch 16:41 With them were Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest who were chosen, who were mentioned by name, to give thanks to Yahweh, because His grace endures forever-
These were to serve in Gibeon (:39), offering praise at the times the daily burnt offerings were made (:40), whilst Asaph and his group did this in Jerusalem (:37).

1Ch 16:42 and with them Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those that should sound aloud, and with instruments for the songs of God; and the sons of Jeduthun to be at the gate-
LXX omits "and with them Heman and Jeduthun", making it read more smoothly with :41.

1Ch 16:43 All the people departed each man to his family; and David returned to bless his family-
David is to be commended for not simply blessing Israel, but turning his attention privately to his own private household, and wanting to hold a private ceremony with them. But it was this which elicited the angry retort of Michal, whom I suggested on 2 Sam. 6:16 may still have been an idolater and despised not only David but also Yahweh.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 17

1Ch 17:1 It happened that as David lived in his house, David said to Nathan the prophet-
2 Sam. 7:1 adds: "It happened, when the king lived in his house, and Yahweh had given him rest from all his enemies all around". All his adult life, David had hardly slept more than a few nights in the same place. And he had always been surrounded by enemies who gave him no rest. Now finally he was living a stable life in his own house, with rest from his enemies. Instead of slumping into the mire of mediocrity in his spirituality, as many would have done, he reflects that he apparently has more than God, as it were. He has a nice house, whilst God's house was a tent. This desire to use a stable existence in God's service is a stellar example to God's children of all ages.

Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of Yahweh is under curtains-
Any disparity between our own life situation and that of the things of God... ought to concern us. David didn't stop living in a house and instead live in a tent. Instead he did

what he could to ensure that his abundance was not kept to himself. His motives were admirable throughout, and God saw that, but God was to use David's desires to teach that He doesn't need works, but just wants to share the abundance of His grace with others.

The reference to "curtains" doesn't mean that David was concerned that God's ark was under a tent, whilst he lived in a house. Rather is the reference to the ten curtains which comprised the tabernacle (Ex. 26:1). Although the tabernacle was at Gibeon and the ark in Zion, David had apparently made another tabernacle for the ark in Zion. David was assuming that he could change the Mosaic commandments about the tabernacle, and move God's purpose forward to something more permanent. We see here how he didn't consider the laws of Moses [of which the commands about the tabernacle were part] to be static. He saw them as open to interpretation and development. This was not a position he came to lightly, seeing he had been terribly punished for thinking he could flout the legislation about how the ark was to be transported.

Many of the commands within the "law of Moses" were clearly only intended for the wilderness generation, indeed they could only have been obeyed by them then; and David wondered whether the entire commands about the tabernacle were in that category. Those today who claim that Mosaic legislation is eternally binding need to give this due weight. It's not just that the Mosaic law was abrogated by the Lord's death; but the whole nature of that law was that it was never intended to all be literally applied to every subsequent generation. And that meant that it was the spirit of it which was to be discerned and followed.

1Ch 17:2 Nathan said to David, Do all that is in your heart; for God is with you-
Nathan wrongly assumed that Yahweh would naturally agree to David's proposition to move on from the Mosaic idea of a tabernacle. David didn't actually state what he intended to do (:1), but Nathan assumes he knows David's intentions, and assumes he knows God will agree. Such assumptions are typical of human beings, and further adds psychological verisimilitude to the record. Nathan of course should have had the humility to first ask of God rather than assuming he knows God's will. The assumption we know God's will is a common problem amongst God's people; effectively we are elevating our gut feeling to the level of God's word.

1Ch 17:3 It happened the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan saying-
David’s plan to build a great house was met with the word of the Lord coming unto him “the same night”, telling him not to do this. There seems to be some allusion to this by the Lord Jesus when He spoke of the rich fool who wanted to build a greater barn being

told the Lord's word "that same night". It could be that the Lord Jesus saw something material and very human in David's desire to build a house for the Lord. See on :6.

1Ch 17:4 Go and tell David My servant, 'Thus says Yahweh, You shall not build Me a house to dwell in-
This is very clear. David's insistence upon pushing ahead with what became an obsession, and Solomon likewise, was a studied disregard of these simple words. The emphasis was upon the words "you" and "Me". David had not given due thought to the magnitude and inappropriacy of what was in his mind; that he as a mere man could build a house for Yahweh to live in. He had failed to perceive the greatness of his God. Any idea of confining God within four walls was bizarre.

1Ch 17:5 for I have not lived in a house since the day that I brought up Israel to this day, but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tent to another-
Although this may primarily refer to the Angel, the point is that the God of the cosmos had intensely manifested Himself in the ark and the tabernacle / tent which enclosed it. This of itself revealed His humility. The idea is "I have walked continually"; like David up until this point (see on :1), He had been a wanderer. David had now ceased his years of wandering (see on :1), and was assuming that God was like himself, preferring a stable and sedentary life. But this assumption that God is like us at this moment and point of our lives is incorrect, and David later criticizes it (Ps. 50:21). He is who He is, and not a god made in our image, as we are at this moment; rather are we made in His image, and not the other way around. It is for us to hear His voice in His word and accept Him as He is, rather than assuming He will think how we do at this point in our development. David earlier had appreciated the idea of God being a wanderer when he was a wanderer, as his wilderness Psalms indicate. But now he was settled, he assumed that this was how God would like to be.

1Ch 17:6 In all places in which I have walked with all Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to be shepherd of My people saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?''-
David desired to build God a physical house. But God's response is in clear enough language: God did not want a physical house because

1. It was not really possible for man to build God a house ("Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?" in 2 Sam. 7:5 is surely rhetorical)

2. God had never asked Israel to build Him such a house before; indeed, it had been His expressed will that He should dwell among Israel in the temporary form of the tabernacle. God wanted a temporary abode to point forward to the fact that the reality

was in Christ; thus the Law of Moses had features built into it which were intrinsically temporal, to point men forward to the stability and finality of Messiah. By building a permanent temple, Solomon reflects his lack of focus on the Messiah to come.

3. He would only have a permanent physical house when His people were permanently settled, never to be moved again (2 Sam. 7:10), i.e. in the Kingdom. Yet Solomon perceived that his kingdom was in fact the final Kingdom of God. David made this mistake, in assuming in Ps. 72 that Solomon's Kingdom would undoubtedly be the Messianic one...and Solomon repeated the error, yet to a more tragic extent.

4. God plays on the confusion between 'house' in the sense of household, and 'house' in the sense of a physical building. He says: '*You* want to build *me* a physical house. But *I* am going to build *you* a *household* which will be my Kingdom'. The implication is that David's desire for a physical house was altogether too human, and that there is an opposition between what man thinks he can physically do for God, and the fact that God wishes to do things for men. Yet Solomon went ahead with his works rather than grappling with the reality of sheer grace. He so wanted to *do* something. He betrays this when he writes in Ecc. 9:7: "God now accepts your works". The Hebrew translated "accepts" means literally to satisfy a debt, and is elsewhere translated 'to reconcile self'. He saw works as reconciling man's debt to God, rather than perceiving that grace is paramount. He keeps on about David his father; and yet there was a crucial difference. David perceived the need for grace as the basis of man's reconciliation with God; whereas Solomon thought it was works. David wrote that God wants a broken heart and not thousands of sacrifices; yet Solomon offered the thousands of sacrifices, but didn't have the contrite heart of his father.

5. To desire a physical house for God is to overlook the promised Messiah- that was surely the implication of the promise of the Lord Jesus following right on from the statement that a physical house was not required. Is. 57:15 and Is. 66:2 explain why this is- because God does not live in what man builds, but will fully dwell in one man to whom He will look, one who would have a humble spirit towards Him. And this man was of course the Lord Jesus. Solomon's obsession with the temple therefore reflected his deeper problem- of not being focused upon the Christ to come.

So it ought to be clear from all this that God's response to the request to build a temple was negative; He did not want a physical temple. None of the four reasons for this listed above were just temporary considerations; they were reasons which were valid for all time. There can be no doubt that God's response here is at the basis of Is. 66:1,2: "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made... but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" . God is saying that it simply isn't possible to build Him a house; instead, He seeks to dwell in the hearts of men. Yet Solomon wasn't interested in the personal

spiritual mindedness which enables this to happen. This is the same spirit as God's response to David: 'You can't build me a physical house, I will build my own household of believers'.

These words of Is. 66 are twice quoted in the New Testament. "God that made the world and all things therein, *seeing that* He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands... as though He needed any thing" (Acts 17:24,25). The reason for God not dwelling in temples is that He is Lord of heaven and earth. This reason does not change with time; He was Lord of heaven and earth at David's time just as much as He is now.

1Ch 17:7 Now therefore, you shall tell My servant David, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies, I took you from the sheep pen, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over My people Israel-

David was asked to reflect that his wandering around as a shepherd as a child and teenager had been to prepare him for leading Israel. But leading a people likewise involves an element of mobility, and God as the ultimate leader of Israel was likewise moving on and never static. Hebrew shepherds usually lead their sheep, but here David is described as being moved from following sheep, to going ahead as a leader. Here we have an example of where language and imagery is used in a way we might consider opportunistic; but this is the nature of Semitic writing and reasoning. A failure to appreciate the Hebrew nature of the Bible has led to so many misinterpretations of it.

1Ch 17:8 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you-

David's continual wandering up until the point of :1 had always been with God's presence "with you wherever", as he often celebrates in his wilderness Psalms. This connects with God's own statement that He Himself had "walked continually" (:5,6; 2 Sam. 7:6). Those years had been in order to get David to appreciate God's own constant journeying. This is to be a feature of every believer's life. Even if we live and die in the house we were born in and never move 20 km. from our home village, life with God is a constant journey. And all within us will seek to turn it into the stability of mere religion, as David was seeking to do.

God encourages David to see himself as representative of Israel by saying this; they are words replete with reference to Israel in the wilderness and their establishment in the land. As David so loved his people and was their representative, for all they did to him, so with the Lord Jesus and His people. When God asked David "choose thee one of" three possible judgments, each of them involved the whole nation- e.g. "Shall seven years of famine come unto *thee*" (singular). David was their representative even in their time of failure.

I will make you a name, like the name of the great ones who are in the earth-
This is now developed by God into saying that He will make David a house / family. That family was to bear David's great name, but the "great name", the greatest in the earth [reading "great ones" as an intensive plural for a singular great name] was that of Yahweh. And this Name was to be carried by David's house and particularly by the Messianic seed who was now to be promised. 2 Sm. 7:9 AV "I have made thee a great name" shows the intentional confusion of tenses. David had been made a great name, but that was just a foretaste of how great his name was to become through his future descendant and house.

1Ch 17:9 I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more. Neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the first-
This connects with how David had just planted the ark in its "place" in Zion (2 Sam. 6:17). God is saying that His grace is such that He will do exceeding far above what we ever ask or think to do for Him. He would plant and place Israel in an eternal Kingdom, just as David had planted and placed the ark in Zion. As David personally had been given rest from his enemies (see on :1), so would Israel be granted rest.

These words would have been comforting to the exiles; ultimately they would not be afflicted as they had been by the Babylonians, and would return to their land permanently (2 Sam. 7:10 s.w. for "afflict" in Zech. 10:2; Zeph. 3:19; Lam. 3:33; 5:11). The word used in 1 Chron. 17:9, 'to waste', is also used of the Babylonian wasting of Judah (Lam. 3:4).

1Ch 17:10 and from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will subdue all your enemies-
The constant affliction Israel experienced at the time of the judges was because of their sins; they had no rest from their enemies because of their continual unfaithfulness to Yahweh. These promises are therefore tantamount to saying that God would somehow permanently establish His people, in a way not conditional upon their faithfulness because He would somehow make them faithful. This is the language of the new covenant offered to the exiles, and is achieved today through the work of the Holy Spirit keeping us from falling from the covenant. The "blessing" promised to Abraham is therefore interpreted in Acts 3:25,26 as the power of God turning away His people's hearts from sin. And the same is implied in these promises to David.

Moreover I tell you that Yahweh will build you a house-
To what was God referring to when He told David that David's son would build him a house? Firstly, we must bear in mind that in hundreds of places, the Hebrew word for

"house" means 'household'. The eternal house promised to David is paralleled with the Kingdom; and a Kingdom is comprised of people. This is what is in view, not the building of any literal temple at the Lord's return. The Kingdom is the house of Jacob (Lk. 1:33). That the house of David is the Kingdom is evident from 2 Sam. 7:13,16; 1 Chron. 17:14 (cp. Lk. 11:17). The Kingdom was taken from the house of Saul and given to the house of David (2 Sam. 3:10), but later the Kingdom was taken from the house of David because of Solomon's apostacy (1 Kings 14:8). This is proof enough that at best the promises to David had only a tiny fulfilment in Solomon's Kingdom.

The New Testament is very insistent that the true temple of God is the body of Christian believers (1 Cor. 9:13; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 10:21; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 3:12; 11:1,2; 1 Tim.3:15). This string of passages is quite some emphasis. Yet Christ was the temple; he spoke of the temple of his body (Jn. 2:19-21; Rev. 21:22). For this reason, the Gospels seem to stress the connection between Christ and the temple (Mk.11:11,15,16,27; 12:35; 13:1,3; 14:49; Lk. 2:46; 21:38). Christ's body was the temple of God. By being in Christ, we too are the temple (1 Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:21), *our* body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). Yet Solomon was not Christ centred; he didn't want to see this connection. And we too can have an over-physical view of the Kingdom, centred around a literal temple in Jerusalem etc., rather than perceiving that the Kingdom / reign of God is, in its essence, over the hearts of men and women like us. The future political Kingdom will be the concrete articulation of the essence of the Kingdom principles which are now being lived out in the hearts of the people who are under the Lord's present kingship.

In the person of Jesus, the essence of the Kingdom came nigh to men (Mt. 10:7; 11:4; 12:28)- and this was why one of His titles is "the Kingdom". The Kingdom of God is about joy, peace and righteousness more than the physicalities of eating and drinking. In this sense the Kingdom was "among" first century Israel. The Kingdom of God is not merely a carrot held out to us for good behaviour. It is a reality right now, in so far as God truly becomes our king. Even in the Old Testament, the word "temple" does not normally refer to the physical temple outside the records of Solomon's building of the temple. It is often stated that the house David's seed was to build would be for the Name of Yahweh. His Name refers to His mental attributes. A physical house is inappropriate to express these.

If the house refers to a household of righteous believers, all becomes plain. This explains why 2 Sam. 7:13,26 parallels God's eternal name with the eternal house and Kingdom which was promised to David. Building a house was a common Hebrew idiom for developing a household (Ruth 4:11; Dt. 25:9). God's promise to David about building him an eternal household was anticipated in His words to Eli: "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind (i.e. David, 1 Sam. 13:14): and I will build him a *sure house*", in contrast to God's destruction of Eli's household (1 Sam. 2:35). 1 Kings 11:38 clinches the idea that this refers to David:

"I will be with thee, and build thee a *sure house* as I built for David". In passing, note that these words to Solomon remind him that God will build *him* a house, in opposition to the way in which Solomon so frequently speaks about building God a house.

There is a play on words with the Hebrew word *bayith* ['house']. It is used about David's house / family (1 Chron. 17:10,16,17,23,24) and that of God (vv. 12,14). Our house is God's house. He is, therefore, to be at the centre of family life.

1Ch 17:11 It shall happen, when your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers-
There is a strong sense that God has determined a number of "days" for our mortal life (Ps. 23:6; 2 Sam. 7:12), and David like all of us wished to know how many those days were for him, in order that he might live an appropriately humble life in response to realizing his frailty (Ps. 39:4). But that predetermined number of days can be cut short (Ps. 102:4,23,24) or extended (1 Kings 3:14; Prov. 9:11). Hezekiah would be the parade example of this; his days were cut short (Is. 38:10), and then lengthened in response to prayer (2 Kings 20:6). God is open to dialogue, His timetable in our personal lives is flexible according to our prayers; and He is also responsive to human behaviour. Like Job we should perceive our life as "my days" (he uses this term multiple times), so that we might use each of them for Him.

That I will set up your seed after you, who shall be of your sons-
"Set up" has a similar meaning to "establish". It is tempting to note that the Hebrew word is often translated "arise", and to wonder if there is here a hint that this seed will experience a bodily resurrection. The possible fulfilment in David's family was precluded by his sin with Bathsheba and the resultant effects upon his "house"; the same word for "set up" is in 2 Sam. 12:11 of how God would "raise / set up evil out of your own house". His house "was not so with God", as he concluded at the end of his life; and so he with us look for a fulfilment in his Messianic seed, the Lord Jesus, and the house of people being built up / established in Him.

The promise to David concerning Christ precludes his physical existence at the time the promise was made: "I *will* set up your descendant [singular] *after* you, which *shall* proceed out of your body... I *will be* his father, and he *shall be* my son" (2 Sam. 7:12,14). Notice the future tense used here. Seeing that God *would be* Christ's Father, it is impossible that the Son of God could have already existed at that point in time when the promise was made. That this seed "*shall proceed out of your body"* shows that he was to be a literal, physical descendant of David. "The Lord has sworn in truth unto David... Of the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne" (Ps. 132:11). Solomon was the primary fulfilment of the promise, but as he was already physically in existence at the time of this promise (2 Sam. 5:14), the main fulfilment of this promise about David

having a physical descendant who would be God's son, must refer to Christ (Lk. 1:31-33).

And I will establish his kingdom-
"Prepared" or "established" is a major theme in the promises of the eternal establishment of David's throne (2 Sam. 7:12,13,16 etc.), and Solomon wrongly assumed that the conditional nature of the promises concerning the seed were just irrelevant to him as he had wisdom. Therefore he uses the word of how his kingdom has been "established" (1 Kings 2:24 s.w.). Solomon's contenders for the throne were all stopped by God, they tried to prepare or establish themselves but it never worked out (2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5); and so surely Solomon has the idea in mind that he has been established as the promised Messianic seed of David with an eternally "established" throne and kingdom. This leads him to the conclusion that the outcome of wisdom and folly is in this life, and he has no perspective of a final day of judgment and eternal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. This is why the simplistic dichotomies he presents in Proverbs between the blessed and wise, and the cursed and foolish, are not always true to observed experiences in this life. For it is the future Kingdom which puts them in ultimate perspective.

1Ch 17:12 He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever-
Ultimately, as shown above, this refers to the building up of the house of believers to be the throne of the seed's eternal kingdom. The Lord Jesus will reign upon us, "whose house are we" (Heb. 3:6); we are His throne, the basis of His Kingdom. And that house and throne are being built up now, although it will only be more materially and physically articulated at His second coming and the establishment of His literal Kingdom upon earth. This process of building up is achieved by the colossal work of the Lord Jesus through His Spirit, calling, converting and transforming His people to be His house. This is how the New Testament alludes to these ideas of building and establishing (Acts 20:32; Rom 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3; 1 Pet. 5:10). Ps. 89:4 says that this building up of the throne goes on in "all generations". The idea is that the house and throne of the seed is built up from people of all generations. The light never went out for God's Truth and true people. In every generation there were some. This has big implications for those who consider that a very specific theology, especially one based upon 19th century revelations of truth, is required for salvation and membership of God's people.

The fact is that God *did* dwell, temporarily, in Solomon's temple. His glory entered it, and later left it in Ezekiel's time. This is the classic example of the way in which God will go along with men in their mistaken enthusiasm, working with them, even though this is contrary to His preferred way of doing things. A similar example is found in the way God forbad Israel to have a human king, because to do so would be a denial of His

superiority and of their covenant relationship with Him. And yet Israel had a king. God did not turn a blind eye to this. Instead He worked through this system of human kingship. Or take marriage out of the faith. This is clearly contrary to God's ideal wishes. And yet in some cases He is prepared to work through this, in order to being about His purpose. There is even the possible suggestion in Acts 15:10 that God was 'tempted' to re-instate the law of Moses, or parts of it, in the first century, seeing that this was what so many of the early Christians desired to keep. That God is so eager to work with us should in itself be a great encouragement. Yet we must not come to presume upon God's patience, assuming that He will go along with us.

In any case, 2 Chron. 7:12 says that God accepted the temple only as a place of sacrifice, i.e. a glorified altar (cp. 2 Sam. 24:17,18). And yet- God didn't really want sacrifice (Ps. 40:6; Heb. 10:5). "Now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever" (2 Chron. 7:16) is a conditional promise, followed by five verses of conditions concerning Solomon's spirituality which he overlooked. Like Solomon, we too can fix upon promises without considering their conditionality. There is good reason to think that communally and individually we are increasingly shutting our eyes to the possibility of our spiritual failure and disaster. God constantly warned Solomon about the conditionality of the promises, before the building started (2 Sam. 7:14), during it (1 Kings 6:11-13) and immediately after completing it (1 Kings 9:2-9). Note, too, that Solomon had the idea that if sinful Israel prayed towards the temple, they would somehow be forgiven because of this. God's response was that if they sought *Him* wherever they were and repented, then He would hear them- the temple was not to be seen as the instrument or mediatrix of forgiveness which Solomon envisaged. Likewise, Solomon's implication that prayer offered in the temple would be especially acceptable was not upheld by God's reply to him about this (2 Chron. 6:24-26 cp. God's response in 2 Chron. 7:12,13).

1Ch 17:13 I will be his father, and he shall be My son. I will not take My sure mercies away from him, as I took it from him that was before you-
"The sure mercies of David" result in the wicked man forsaking his way (Is. 55:3,7). The description of the promises to David as "sure mercies" (1 Chron. 17:13) may perhaps be with a reference to his sin with Bathsheba; his forgiveness in that incident is typical of that which we all receive (Rom. 4:6-8). The very existence of the "mercies of / to David" therefore inspire us in forsaking sinful thoughts and wicked ways (Is. 55:7).

It was God's Spirit which departed from Saul and came upon David. Yet that Spirit is here called God's grace or loving kindness, and the New Testament makes the same connection between the grace / gift of God and the Holy Spirit. The formation of the seed, both collectively and individually in the Lord Jesus, was through the work of the Spirit. And that Spirit would abide fully and eternally upon the Lord Jesus (Jn. 3:34).

Often the promises about the seed in the singular (the Lord Jesus) are applied to us in the plural (e.g. 2 Sam. 7:14 cp. Ps. 89:30-35). Those seminal promises to Abraham hinged around what would be realized *in*, not "by", his seed. All that is true of the Lord Jesus is now true of us, in that we are in Him. Baptism is not an initiation into a church. It isn't something which just *seems* the right thing to do. And even if because of our environment and conscience, it was easier to get baptized than not- *now* this mustn't be the case. We really are *in* Christ, we are born again; now we exist, spiritually! And moreover, we have risen with Him, His resurrection life, His life and living that will eternally be, is now manifest in us, and will be articulated physically at the resurrection.

1Ch 17:14 but I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever. His throne shall be established forever'-
Solomon came to overlook the conditionality of the promises (which are more laboured in 2 Sam. 7) because his father had done the same. David on his deathbed speaks of how "God has given one to sit on my throne this day, my eyes even seeing it" (1 Kings 1:48). He forgot how those promises more essentially spoke of his house "for a great while to come", and how only after "you shall sleep with your fathers" would David see "your house and your kingdom established for ever *before you*" (2 Sam. 7:12,16), thus implying David's resurrection. He lost this focus in his enthusiasm for Solomon, and it seems that Solomon followed suite.

Abigail quotes the promise of a priest being raised up with a "sure house" (1 Sam. 2:35), imagining that David was to become a Messianic king-priest; and to have blood on his hands would preclude that. Abigail's phrase "a sure / established house" (1 Sam. 25:28) is used in the promises to David (2 Sam. 7:16; 1 Kings 11:38). It's as if she was so in tune with God's ways that she had some premonition of His intentions with David, although she saw these as conditional upon David not shedding the innocent blood of her family. Or perhaps the promise of 1 Sam. 2:35 about a priest with a "sure house" had already been developed by Samuel in relation with David, and Abigail was aware of that. The promises to David which mention a sure house for him would therefore only be confirming what had already been promised.

I suggested on :11,12 that this establishment of the throne was a process of building up and establishing God's people over the generations, coming to full term in the establishment of the Lord Jesus on David's revived throne in Jerusalem at His second coming. Ps. 89:4 says that this building up of the throne goes on in "all generations". The idea is that the house and throne of the seed is built up from people of all generations. The light never went out for God's Truth and true people.

1Ch 17:15 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David-

Nathan faithfully relayed the vision he received in these words to David. This is in contrast to how he had over hastily assumed to know God's word and will in the matter the day before.

1Ch 17:16 Then David the king went in and sat before Yahweh; and he said, Who am I, Yahweh God-
It was because David was truly humble that he could immediately respond in genuine humility to God's promises to him; whereas Solomon became proud because of them (1 Chron. 17:16: "David *the king* came and *sat* before the Lord, and said, Who am I...?"). Despite the openness with God which we see in the Psalms, despite being able to break explicit commandments because he so finely appreciated the spirit behind them, despite being a man after God's own heart, even in his true spiritual maturity towards the end of his life, David "could not go before (the altar) to enquire of God; for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the Lord" (1 Chron. 21:30). Now this seems an eloquent essay in the true spiritual humility of that man David.

The promises to David are described as the mercy of God (Is. 55:3; Ps. 89:33,34). God having a son is the sign of His love for us, and this must elicit a response in us. David himself marvelled that such mercy had been shown to him: "Who am I... and what is my house... You know Your servant" (2 Sam. 7:18-20). And yet in the very next chapters, we read of how David made a renewed attempt to show mercy to the house of Saul. Mephibosheth says that he is "thy servant... what is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such... as I am?" (2 Sam. 9:8 AV). Mephibosheth is using the very words which David used to God; David is showing mercy to Mephibosheth in the very way in which the promises of God to him were the "mercies" shown to David. Appreciating that the promises concern us personally, and that they reveal such loving grace from the Father, can only lead to a similar response in showing love and grace through entering into the lives and destinies of others.

And what is my house, that You have brought me thus far?-
"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant" (Gen. 32:10) was spoken by Jacob on that night of destiny, in recognition of how he was morally unworthy to receive the promises which God had given him (see context). David picked this up here, where he comments on his unworthiness to receive the promises to him, which were an extension of those Jacob received.

1Ch 17:17 This was a small thing in Your eyes, O God; but You have spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come, and have respected me according to the estate of a man of high degree, Yahweh God-
Such is the wonder of God's promise to us that we really have no excuse to sin. Every sin

is in a sense a denial of His promises. God told David that he had no excuse for what he did with Uriah and Bathsheba, because he had given him so much, “and if that had been too little, I would have added unto you…” (2 Sam. 12:8). “Too little” sends the mind back here, where the promises to David are described as a “little / small thing”; the promises were so wonderful that David should not have allowed himself to fall into such sin. And us likewise.

David is one of the major OT types of the Lord Jesus. The words of David in Ps. 16 are quoted in Acts 2:25,29 concerning Jesus: “I have set the Lord always before me…he is at my right hand…thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption”. These are words describing David’s feelings about his own death and resurrection; and yet so identified was he with the Messiah, that they are quoted as being directly true of Jesus. But Acts 2:29 also quotes these words with a slightly different spin- in that David saw the Lord *Jesus* always before him, and it was this sense that stabilized him. This could only have been true in that David understood all his feelings and present and future experiences [e.g. resurrection, not being suffered to corrupt eternally] as being typical of the Lord Jesus. He so understood himself as a type of the One to come that he saw this person as ever with him. This is the extent of the typology. 1 Chron. 17:17 in Young’s Literal has David saying: “Thou hast seen me as a type of the man on high” [i.e. Messiah]. David describes himself at ease with clearly Messianic titles such as ‘the Christ’, ‘the man raised on high’, and then goes on to speak of the Messiah who *is to come* on the “morning without clouds”, admitting that “verily *my* house is not so with God” (2 Sam. 23:1-5). This is only really understandable if we accept that David consciously saw himself as a type of the future Messiah.

1Ch 17:18 What can David say yet more to You concerning the honour which is done to Your servant?-
In view of all God had said to David, he had nothing to say to God, and the implication is that he would now not say to God his plans of building a house for God. His later desire and insistence upon doing so would suggest he lost this intensity of understanding and awareness.

For You know Your servant-
David is expressing what we often do to God; that we cannot express our gratitude enough in words or praise, we can only ask God to know us, and know how we feel.

1Ch 17:19 Yahweh, for Your servant’s sake, and according to Your own heart, You have worked all this greatness, to make known all these great things-
David spoke of how God’s word and “own heart” are parallel; God’s mind / spirit is expressed in His word, although David may here more understand the "word" as referring to God's purpose (as in Jn. 1:1) rather than the scriptures. David was sure the

promises would come true; he speaks in the past tense of how God had worked already these great things.

1Ch 17:20 Yahweh, there is none like You, neither is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears-
What characterizes Yahweh as the one and only God is His grace, which David has just experienced poured out. Divine grace is the defining feature of the one true faith; no other god, idol or religious system comes close to it.

1Ch 17:21 What single nation in the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem to Himself for a people, to make You a name by great and awesome things, in driving out nations from before Your people, whom You redeemed out of Egypt?-
Israel had been redeemed from the gods of Egypt. Yet they took those gods with them through the Red Sea, and carried the tabernacle of Moloch and Remphan through the wilderness along with that of Yahweh (Acts 7:43). The LXX here brings out this point: "so that thou shouldest cast out nations an their tabernacles from the presence of thy people, whom thou didst redeem for thyself out of Egypt". That Israel carried these tabernacles and gods with them suggests that this was a redemption refused. And David, having experienced the grace which can only come from Yahweh, is resolved to only serve Him and root out all such idolatry.

1Ch 17:22 For Your people Israel You made Your very own people forever; and You, Yahweh, became their God-
God had promised to establish David's seed, God's true people, as His throne and people for ever. David recognizes that what had been promised to him had already been offered to Israel; although as noted on :21, they had refused this through their idolatry and failure to be God's exclusive kingdom / people, rejecting Him as their God. It was similar to God's thought of rejecting His people and working instead through Moses and his seed. God had been persuaded against that, but now David perceives that God is going to work not through Israel as a whole but through him and his seed. The allusion is to Dt. 32:6 where Israel act as the most foolish nation in rejecting the God who established them as a nation.

1Ch 17:23 Now, Yahweh, let the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house be established forever, and do as You have spoken-
David seems to feel the need to show his agreement with God's plan (also in 2 Sam. 7:29). This may be because he perceived the similarity with Moses, who was also offered to have God working not with Israel but with him and his seed. And Moses hadn't agreed. But David agrees.

1Ch 17:24 Let Your name be established and magnified forever, saying, 'Yahweh of Armies is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel. The house of David Your servant is established before You'-
David believed in the fulfilment of these future promises, and so he expresses this in terms of them already having been fulfilled. For this is the essence of faith, to believe that we have receive that which is promised, even if it is not yet in our hands (Mk. 11:24). And his response was in prayerful praise, which must be our response to having received in essence the same promises.

1Ch 17:25 For You, my God, have revealed to Your servant that You will build him a house. Therefore Your servant has found courage to pray before You-
David was so humbled that he felt that even to pray a prayer of thanks was something which required courage. He, the courageous warrior, was so humbled that he found it a challenge to find courage to even thank God for these promises. So greatly was he awed by God's grace in these promises- promises which have in essence been made to us too, and which should elicit a similar response.

1Ch 17:26 Now, Yahweh, You are God, and have promised this good thing to Your servant-
The idea is "You are the one and only God". The context is Israel's idolatry, and how God is now working through David and his seed as His Kingdom, rather than through an Israel who rejected Him as the only true God.

1Ch 17:27 Now it has pleased You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You; for You, Yahweh, have blessed, and it is blessed forever-
David describes the promises as "blessing" (also 2 Sam. 7:28,29), a word normally used in the context of forgiveness. So David was aware of the grossness of sin, of the need for self-examination, to ensure that his technical breaches of the Law of Moses were truly a reflection of his friendship with God rather than an indication of spiritual weakness. For David's house to become God's eternal Kingdom would require their blessing with forgiveness in order to be immortalized.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 18

1Ch 18:1 After this-
"After this" may not be strictly chronological, because 2 Sam. 7:1 was at a time when David had rest from his enemies. 1 Chron. 17 is included where it is to continue the

theme of the ark and Zion which began before it. The promised king of Israel would save Israel from the Philistines and their other enemies; Saul had failed in this, but David succeeded as the truly intended king. The parallel 2 Sam. 8:1 LXX implies that until this time, Israel were still paying tribute to the Philistines: "David took the tribute from out of the hand of the Philistines".

It happened that David struck the Philistines and subdued them, and took Gath and its towns out of the hand of the Philistines-
After David received the promises about the future Messianic Kingdom, he went out and established his Kingdom, attacking Israel's enemies and driving them out of the land (1 Chron. 18:1-3). Our response to the future Hope of the Kingdom, which we too have through the very same promises, should be to try to live the Kingdom life now, as far as we can.

2 Sam. 8:1 says that "David took the bridle of the mother city out of the hand of the Philistines". But 1 Chron. 18:1 says that David took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines". Gath would be the 'mother-city', and the word translated "towns" literally means daughters. We note that David had earlier lived in Gath under the protection of Achish and had lied to the people how many Israelites he had slain in his apparent hatred of Saul. They would have considered him a hypocrite.

1Ch 18:2 He struck Moab; and the Moabites became servants to David, and brought tribute-
2 Sam. 8:2 gives more detail: "He struck Moab, and measured them with the line, making them to lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive. The Moabites became servants to David, and brought tribute". David made the captives lay down in three lines. He arbitrarily chose one line to keep alive, and killed the other two lines. This can't be justified as some careful obedience to some Mosaic law. It reads like something out of the Holocaust, an arbitrary slaying of some in order to exercise the whim of one's own power. No wonder David was barred from building the temple because of his attitude to bloodshed. And this was the worse because his parents had been given refuge there (1 Sam. 22:3,4). Perhaps the incident of 2 Sam. 23:20 occurred at this time.

Likewise when Rabbah is captured, David proudly puts the crown of the king on his head, grabs their spoil for himself (not following Abraham's example), "and he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon" (2 Sam. 12:31). Now all that is torture. It's one thing to obey Divine commands about slaying enemies; it's another to willfully torture them, Auschwitz-style. These incidents reveal David at his worst. And again- did he really have to ensure that every male in Edom was murdered (1 Kings 11:15,16)- was

that really necessary? What about the mums, wives, sisters left weeping, and the fatherless daughters, left to grow up in the dysfunction of a leaderless Middle Eastern home? Those men were all somebody's sons, brothers, fathers, grandfathers. Was David really obeying some Divine command here, or was this the dictate of his own anger and dysfunctional bloodlust? We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

1Ch 18:3 David struck Hadadezer king of Zobah to Hamath-
Hadadezer = 'helped by Hadad', the sun god. 2 Chron. 8 shows how Solomon sought to replicate what his father David did here. It describes the actions of Solomon in the very language which is used earlier about David.

2 Chron. 8:3 "Solomon went to Hamath Zobah" = 2 Sam. 8:3 "David smote also Hadadezer the son of Rehob king of Zobah"; 2 Chron. 8:3 "and *prevailed*" = same word 1 Sam. 17:30; 2 Chron. 8:8 Those "whom the children of Israel consumed not, did Solomon make to pay tribute" = 2 Sam. 8:6 "David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts"; 2 Chron. 8:14 "He appointed according to the ordinance of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges... for so had David commanded" = 1 Chron. 24:1; 2 Chron. 9:15,16 = 2 Sam.8:7 "David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem".

1 Kings 11:4,6 clearly states God's opinion that Solomon was not like David: "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father... (he) went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father". This double stress, bearing in mind inspiration's economic use of words, is really making a point. Yet the records of Solomon seem to be framed to show that externally, Solomon was indeed following David; he was obsessed with living out parental expectation, and perhaps the expectation of his society, rather than forging his own relationship with God.

As he went to establish his dominion by the river Euphrates-
Grammatically, the subject of the sentence is Hadadezer, and the reference is to the battle of 2 Sam. 10:15-19. Again we see that the records are not chronologically but thematically arranged.

1Ch 18:4 David took from him one thousand chariots, seven thousand horsemen and twenty thousand footmen; and David hamstrung all the chariot horses, but reserved of them enough for one hundred chariots-
See on :3. Notice how both David and Solomon dealt with the matter of chariots and horses. Solomon's weakness for horses was perhaps traceable to David's. Solomon unashamedly amassed horses and chariots, in direct disobedience to Divine command

(Dt. 17:16). When David his father had captured 1000 chariots and horses, he hamstrung 900 of them and retained 100 of them (2 Sam. 8:4). He had a conscience about the matter, but thought that 90% obedience wasn't bad. And the hamstrung horses were likely used for agricultural work and especially for breeding- breeding yet more chariot horses. David's 90% obedience lead to his son's 100% disobedience in this matter of chariot horses.

Solomon wished to imitate his father David in every sense; his own real personality only really came out in the Ecclesiastes years, when he took to drink, materialism, women and idolatry. It took the influence of his parents many years to wear off. David had weaknesses for horses (2 Sam. 8:4) and many wives; and Solomon followed in these steps too. Note that David had six sons in seven years by six different women, including Gentiles (1 Chron. 3:3). And in addition to these, David had children by "the concubines" (1 Chron. 3:9). Doubtless Solomon reasoned, albeit deep within his psyche, that such behaviour was legitimate because David his father had done it. David seems to have over interpreted the promises made to him about Solomon and the temple, and assumed that his interpretation was certainly correct. And Solomon did exactly the same. The weaknesses of the parents all too easily are repeated by the children to an even greater extent.

There are apparently different numbers given in 2 Sam. 8:4; 10:18 and 1 Chron. 19:18. I see no real problem here once we appreciate that the Hebrew word "thousand" used when giving numbers like this rarely means 1,000 as a number. It is also translated regiment, brigade, family, squadron etc. And to Israelites looking at the Syrian army, it could be described in various ways. There many regiments, families, groups, squadrons, but these subdivisions of an ancient army are all called a "thousand". Depending how one looks at the army and its subdivisions. A modern army would be subdivided into two to four corps, a corps has at least two divisions or legions, a division has two four brigades or regiments, a brigade has two or more regiments, a regiment has two or more battalions, a battalion has a number of companies, a company has a number of platoons, a platoon has a number of squads or fire teams. The problem is that the Hebrew Bible uses the same word for all such military subdivisions, and it is translated "thousand" in many Bibles. Hence the apparently contradictory numbers.

1Ch 18:5 When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck of the Syrians twenty-two thousand men-
Again we must note that "thousand" refers to regiments / families and is not necessarily to be taken as literally 1,000.

1Ch 18:6 Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought tribute. Yahweh gave victory to David wherever he went-

This was short-lived, because Solomon's adversary Rezon established himself at Damascus (1 Kings 11:23-25).

1Ch 18:7 David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem-
"Hadad" was the god of the sun, "Hadadezer" had not been 'helped by Hadad' as his name means, and so David brought these golden imitations of the sun to Yahweh's temple. It is perhaps questionable whether David should have brought idols into Jerusalem; we note that later Judah worshipped sun gods. David's actions here were not blessed, for the LXX adds “And Susakim [i.e. Shishak] king of Egypt took them, when he went up to Jerusalem in the days of Roboam the son of Solomon”. Likewise 1 Kings 14:26 LXX mentions that David took golden spears from Hadadezer: “And the golden spears which David took from the hand of the servants of Adraazar king of Soba and carried to Jerusalem, he took them all”. These would not have been used as real spears, but were part of the worship of the golden sun which was the main religion in Syria at the time. He would have been better destroying them, rather than bringing idol paraphernalia into Jerusalem. For it later contributed towards the freedom Judah felt to worship sun gods.

1Ch 18:8 From Tibhath and from Cun, cities of Hadadezer, David took very much brass, with which Solomon made the bronze laver, the pillars and the vessels of brass-
2 Sam. 8:8 "From Betah". LXX Tebah, a son of Nahor the Syrian (Gen. 22:24). As discussed on :7, these were likely brass [better, 'copper'] idols or idol paraphernalia which he would have been better destroying.

1Ch 18:9 When Tou king of Hamath heard that David had struck all the army of Hadadezer king of Zobah-
Hamath came under tribute to David (2 Sam. 8:10), and Solomon, ever seeking to re-live the work of his father David, made a point of building forts there (1 Kings 4:24; 2 Chron. 8:4). But this external imitation of the faith and works of his father wasn't the same as real spirituality; and this is a warning to all those raised as believers. For when he finally individuated as his own man, Solomon had no faith in Yahweh and turned to idols

1Ch 18:10 he sent Hadoram his son to king David to greet him and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and struck him (for Hadadezer had wars with Tou); and he had with him all kinds of vessels of gold and silver and brass-
These vessels were devoted to God's service by David and then Solomon dedicated them to the temple (1 Kings 7:51). The same phrase "of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass" is used of the vessels taken from Egypt and dedicated to the

tabernacle (Ex. 11:2; 12:35; Josh. 6:19; 2 Sam. 8:10; 1 Kings 7:51). The generosity of others in Biblical history, their right perspective on the wealth taken from this world, was to inspire other believers in later history. And this is how the body of Christ should function today, with members inspiring others to spirituality.

1Ch 18:11 King David also dedicated these to Yahweh, with the silver and the gold that he carried away from all the nations; from Edom, Moab, the children of Ammon, the Philistines and from Amalek-
See on :10. David "subdued" the nations, using the word often used of the command to subdue the nations of Canaan (Num. 32:22,29; Josh. 18:1). He is presented as a second Joshua, subduing the land as it ought to have been subdued, and therefore becoming what Adam ought to have been in Eden (Gen. 1:28 s.w.). This is another indication that the garden of Eden was effectively the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham. There is no record of David fighting Amalek again, so the spoil in view may be that taken in 1 Sam. 30:16.

1Ch 18:12 Moreover Abishai the son of Zeruiah struck of the Edomites in the Valley of Salt eighteen thousand-
2 Sam. 8:13 says that "David made himself a name when he returned from smiting the Syrians in the Valley of Salt, even eighteen thousand men". This demonstrates that a "name" in Hebrew thought is not just a lexical item. David made his name; it involves personal history, character, reputation etc. These are all what the Yahweh Name is all about. This is the reference of 2 Sam. 7:9, indicating that 1 Chron. 17 is actually referring to events after 2 Sam. 8 and is not in chronological sequence. Chronicles has "And Abishai the son of Zeruiah smote Edom in the valley of salt, (to the number of) eighteen thousand men". Perhaps Edom and Syria were confederate; or we should read with LXX, which had "Edom" here rather than "the Syrians". We note that :13 goes on to talk about Edom.

1Ch 18:13 He put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became servants to David. Yahweh gave victory to David wherever he went-
This is framed in such terms as to show that Esau / Edom was indeed now subject to Jacob as predicted in (Gen. 27:37-40), and Balaam's prophecy (Num. 24:17,18).

1Ch 18:14 David reigned over all Israel; and he executed justice and righteousness to all his people-
David was motivated in doing this by realizing that this is how Yahweh reigns (Ps. 33:5), and that by doing so he would help live out the spirit of the promises to him, that his throne would be eternally established; for that throne was all about justice and

righteousness (Ps. 89:14). And so David's throne or way of rulership becomes the basis for how his seed, the Lord Jesus, eternally reigns (Is. 9:7; 32:1; Jer. 23:5,6).

1Ch 18:15 Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder-

The men who had been faithful to David during his long wilderness years, when he seemed a lost cause with Saul certain to win against him (1 Sam. 27:1), were the very ones who were the rulers in his kingdom. Despite the very evident weaknesses of men like Joab. And in the type this looks ahead to we who shall be king-priests in the Lord's eternal kingdom (Rev. 5:10), having been loyal to Him and His cause in these apparently hopeless wilderness years.

1Ch 18:16 Zadok son of Ahitub and Abimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Shavsha was scribe-

We notice that no high priest is nominated. David effectively acted as the high priest; see on :17. The "scribe" or historian was a senior advisor in the Hebrew court (2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 2 Chron. 34:8) because of the huge value attached to history in the Hebrew mind, and as reflected in the Bible being largely history. Advice on how to act was to be based upon historical, or as we would now say, "Biblical", precedent.

1Ch 18:17 Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and the sons of David were chief around the king-

2 Sam. 8:18 has "David’s sons were chief ministers". David knew God well enough to act like the High Priest even when he was not a Levite (:17; 2 Sam. 6:13-20; and 2 Sam. 19:21 = Ex.22:28), he came to understand that God did not require sacrifices, he came to see that the Law was only a means to an end. David’s sons, although not Levites, were “priests” (2 Sam. 8:18 RV). He could say that the Lord was his inheritance [a reference to how he as the youngest son had lost his?], and how he refuses to offer the sacrifices of wicked men for them (Ps. 16:4,5; 119:57)- speaking as if he was a Levite, a priest, when he was not.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 19

1Ch 19:1 It happened after this, that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his place-

"After this" can signal a change of subject rather than being chronologically significant. The same phrase is used in 1 Chron. 18:1, although the preceding chapter refers to events after and not before that time.

1Ch 19:2 David said, I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father showed kindness to me. So David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father. David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon to Hanun, to comfort him-

This continues the theme discussed on 2 Sam. 9:1, where the same phrase is used. David was proactively seeking to show grace to all and sundry. It was as if he was looking for an excuse to show grace by saying that Nahash king of the Ammonites had been kind to David; for Saul and David had had conflict with them (2 Sam. 8:12). But he fails to maintain that intensity; for when his grace is now abused, he reacts very harshly. Whereas when he abused God's grace, e.g. over Bathsheba, God was gentle with him. We note that he likewise shows grace to Shimei, and then finally asks Solomon to ensure that Shimei is slain. It is one thing to show grace or forgiveness in a moment, but to maintain that position long term, or when it is abused and rejected, is far harder. But that is what imitating God's grace is all about it.

1Ch 19:3 But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, Do you think that David honours your father, in that he has sent comforters to you? Haven't his servants come to you to search, to overthrow, and to spy out the land?-

Again, as with Mephibosheth's struggle to believe David's grace, these men couldn't believe David's grace, just as struggle to believe that of the Lord Jesus. Their logic is presented here as being exactly that of Joab in his angry, suspicious interpretation of Abner's visit to David (2 Sam. 3:24,25). Joab was wrong in his interpretation, and so were these princes. It is quite a theme of the historical records that kings are badly advised by their courtiers. We think also of Rehoboam's advisers. Perhaps this is to highlight how the only true interpretation of events and advice for action comes from God and not men.

David sent messengers to Nabal meaning well to him, and they were rudely rebuffed, resulting in his anger which only Abigail's grace and wisdom saved him from (1 Sam. 25). And yet the same situation repeated in its essence when he sent messengers to Hanun who were likewise misinterpreted and rebuffed (2 Sam. 10:3). Again, David got angry- but there was no Abigail to restrain him, and he did get into an impossible fight... from which by grace God delivered him. Could it not be that David failed to learn from his previous experience...? Circumstances repeat within our lives and between our lives and those of others in Biblical history; that we might learn the lessons and take comfort from the scriptures, that man is not alone.

1Ch 19:4 So Hanun took David's servants, shaved them, cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away-

2 Sam. 10:4 says that half their beards were shaved. Having a beard was then seen as a sign of being a free man; to have a half shaved beard was a sign of servanthood. Doing this was a direct provocation and effective declaration of war, claiming the Hebrews were their servants.

1Ch 19:5 Then there went certain persons and told David how the men were served. He sent to meet them; for the men were greatly ashamed. The king said, Stay at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return-
We note David's ability to be very sensitive to the situation of others. And yet the same man shed blood abundantly, took no care for the feelings of Michal and Paltiel when he split their marriage up, let alone cared for Uriah... And yet this is the strange mixture of spirituality and unspirituality which we experience in ourselves and in others all the time.

1Ch 19:6 When the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent one thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Arammaacah, and out of Zobah-
For "thousand" see on 1 Chron. 18:4. This fearsome confederacy was all part of God's purpose, for the subsequent victories resulted in these smaller kings becoming subservient to David (see on 2 Sam. 10:19). And this is how God uses our worst crises, ultimately towards our blessing. 2 Sam. 23:36 speaks of a Syrian man from Zobah being one of David's loyalest men. Igal would have been a Syrian from Zobah, perhaps one of the soldiers who fought against David (2 Sam. 10:6) and then converted to him. The Gittites who followed David were likewise Philistines from Gath who were once his enemies but converted to his God, and devoted themselves zealously to Him. This is an incredible witness to the power of Yahweh to convert, because such willing defections of individuals to the people and God of their enemies, and being zealously committed to Him, was unheard of in their society.

1Ch 19:7 So they hired for themselves thirty-two thousand chariots, and the king of Maacah and his people, who came and encamped before Medeba. The children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle-
Numbers 32 describes how Reuben and Gad didn't want to venture West of Jordan, but wished to just wave goodbye to their brethren and settle on the land which looked good for their cattle on the East banks of Jordan. They asked permission to make booths for their cattle and towns for their children. God eventually agreed and made a compromise with them- but He repeats their words back to them in a different order. They were to make towns for their children, and booths for their cattle (Num. 32:16 cp.

24). Their order was cattle and kids; God's desire was kids then cattle. And time and again one sees the same nexus of thought playing itself out- people put their cattle, their materialism, before their children. And God wants it the other way around. Working mothers, late working fathers, kids in day care from babyhood- all so the family can live here and not there, have this car rather than that one, holiday here rather than stay at home, have the latest toys and gadgets... all, of course, in the name of 'for the sake of the kids'; when it's actually cattle before kids. Interestingly, the names of the towns which Reuben and Gad built, the territory they so desired, only occur in later Scripture in the context of their being part of Gentile territories (Is. 15:4; 16:8-9; Jer. 48:2, 45; 1 Chron. 19:7). So they never ultimately kept hold of that for which they sacrificed the promised inheritance of Canaan. God in His total love and grace was willing to go along with their weakness- He compromised, as it were, by saying they could have that coveted territory if they helped their brethren totally inherit their possessions West of Jordan. Ultimately this never happened, as not all the Canaanite territory was possessed; yet still God allowed Reuben and Gad to have their part of the deal which they never fully kept. And there's great grace in the way that Dt. 3:19 records God saying to them at this time: "I know that you have much cattle". God knew their weakness. He knew they'd never even seen the wonders of the promised land, which was far more fertile than the land East of Jordan. But He went along with them, so much did He thirst for relationship with them. And so it is with our cattle-before-kids materialism. God may not cast us off because of it in itself. His grace and love is too strong for that. But by permitting us the compromise, we find ourselves in a far harder situation and a path which long term won't lead to permanent inheritance of the promised land, just as it didn't for Reuben and Gad.

1Ch 19:8 When David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the army of the mighty men-
We wonder why David didn't go himself, although he does personally lead the army to the even greater battle with the Syrians which this one provoked. Perhaps this is to prepare us for the statement in 2 Sam. 11:1 that David's remaining in Jerusalem led to his sin with Bathsheba. And we wonder whether that relationship had not already started at this time, with Uriah away at the front so much.

1Ch 19:9 The children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the gate of the city. The kings who had come were by themselves in the field-
2 Sam. 10:8 adds: "The children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entrance of the gate: and the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob, and the men of Tob and Maacah, were by themselves in the field". "By themselves" could mean that they had planned to combine with the Ammonite forces at Medeba (1 Chron. 19:7), about 20 miles from Rabbah of the Ammonites. It seems Joab marched at top speed to engage

with them before the Ammonites and Syrians met up with each other as one large force. The Ammonites assembled their battle lines at the entrance to Rabbah, but it seems they didn't engage with the Israelites. They were waiting for the Syrians to arrive and combine their forces. When Joab makes the Syrians flee, the Ammonites fled back into their city gate.

1Ch 19:10 Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians-
He saw the Syrians as a greater strength than the Ammonites. He placed himself between the two armies before they had time to join up with each other. This meant the Israelites would be sandwiched between them. It was a daring but dangerous move, which could easily have led to the annihilation of the entire Israelite army.

1Ch 19:11 The rest of the people he committed into the hand of Abishai his brother; and they put themselves in array against the children of Ammon-
That Joab took the most dangerous part of the engagement speaks much of his bravery. But as we will note on :13, bravery and passing mention of God are not the same as faith and true wisdom.

1Ch 19:12 He said-
The idea is, that he planned or thought. The Bible continually stresses that the thought is the word spoken. And the essence of Biblical spirituality is upon the heart, the thinking.

If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you are to help me; but if the children of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will help you-
This is playing on the name "Hadadezer" (:16), which means 'Helped ['ezer'] by Hadad', the sun god. We might have preferred to see Joab alluding to Yahweh being their help; but instead he thinks of help in terms of human strength.

1Ch 19:13 Be courageous, and let us be strong for our people, and for the cities of our God. May Yahweh do that which seems good to Him-
As explained on :10, this was a very daring maneuver by Joab. We wonder whether he had real faith in Yahweh, or whether his words here express fatalism rather than faith. There is a significant difference, and often what appears to be faith can be mere fatalism.

We ask ourselves whether this was faith or fatalism. Joseph held no grudge against his brethren, and would not be vindictive to them, because he understood something of predestination: “You *meant* evil against me; but God *meant* it for good” (Gen. 50:20).

And because he understood that God's good intentions were worked out through the evil intentions of others, Joseph was content to leave all in God's hands, and on *this basis* he assures his brothers that given his understanding of this 'predestination', he wouldn't hit back at them for what they'd done to him. The Lord spoke of the coming of His 'hour' of death as if it were somehow predestined of the Father. But His appreciation of this didn't lead to a mere fatalism, but rather to a heightened sense of the importance of obedience, of playing His part in the Father's drama to the best of His ability (Jn. 7:6,8; 12:23,27). Joab likewise may have had the same understanding, and this bred not fatalism but rather a zealous attempt to fight for the Lord, which God blessed with victory.

1Ch 19:14 So Joab and the people who were with him drew near before the Syrians to the battle; and they fled before him-
So often the Israelite victories were humanly speaking achieved by surprise attack from an unexpected angle, using unexpected and unusual tactics. It could be that this was due to Divine guidance, telling them to do what was unusual and against secular wisdom. For this is always God's path to victory, thereby demonstrating that victory and success are of His grace rather than human strength.

1Ch 19:15 When the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians had fled, they likewise fled before Abishai his brother, and entered into the city. Then Joab came to Jerusalem-
We get the impression that Abishai didn't attack the Ammonites; the Syrians fled when Joab attacked them, and the Ammonites withdrew into Rabbah when they saw that.

1Ch 19:16 When the Syrians saw that they were defeated by Israel, they sent messengers, and drew forth the Syrians who were beyond the River, with Shophach the captain of the army of Hadadezer at their head-
They were mercenaries, and the fact they had failed to achieve what Ammon hoped for didn't require them to fight again. They did so, it seems, because of wounded pride. And this again (as noted on :13) is a feature of God's amazing victories. The pride of Gentile armies is brought down by smaller armies of Israelites using unusual, unexpected tactics because they were guided by Yahweh. Always pride is presented as the great weakness of man. To gather soldiers from beyond the river Euphrates was a huge effort; and now the best general, as they thought, was placed over them. And it all arose from hurt pride and the desire by all means to defeat Israel in vengeance for Joab and his small army putting their army to flight previously, when they had been paid money to defeat Israel.

1Ch 19:17 It was told David; and he gathered all Israel together, passed over the Jordan

and came on them, and set the battle in array against them. So when David had put the battle in array against the Syrians, they fought with him-
The parallel is drawn between the Syrians coming from the other side of the Euphrates (:16) led by Shobach, and David and his men coming from the other side of the Jordan.

1Ch 19:18 The Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed of the Syrians seven thousand charioteers, and forty thousand footmen, and killed Shophach the captain of the army-
There are apparently different numbers given in 2 Sam. 8:4; 10:18 and 1 Chron. 19:18. I see no real problem here once we appreciate that the Hebrew word "thousand" used when giving numbers like this rarely means 1,000 as a number. It is also translated regiment, brigade, family, squadron etc. And to Israelites looking at the Syrian army, it could be described in various ways. There many regiments, families, groups, squadrons, but these subdivisions of an ancient army are all called a "thousand". Depending how one looks at the army and its subdivisions. A modern army would be subdivided into two to four corps, a corps has at least two divisions or legions, a division has two four brigades or regiments, a brigade has two or more regiments, a regiment has two or more battalions, a battalion has a number of companies, a company has a number of platoons, a platoon has a number of squads or fire teams. The problem is that the Hebrew Bible uses the same word for all such military subdivisions, and it is translated "thousand" in many Bibles. Hence the apparently contradictory numbers.

1Ch 19:19 When the servants of Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with David, and served him. From then on, the Syrians would not help the children of Ammon-
This meant that the smaller kings like Tob, Rehob and Maacah now paid tribute to David rather than to Hadadezer.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 20

1Ch 20:1 At the time of the return of the year, at the time when kings go out, Joab led forth the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem-
The record, typical of Chronicles, doesn't record the shameful incident of David sinning with Bathsheba as a result of remaining in Jerusalem. This is the classic example of the devil finding work for idle hands; in 1 Chron. 19:8 David had already skipped one battle in this campaign. His remaining in Jerusalem was the set up for David's sin with Bathsheba. That he was lying down on his bed in the late afternoon rather than working would exemplify the same thing. He appears to recognize his attitude problem in Ps.

30:6: " In my prosperity I said, I shall never be (spiritually) moved" . In the lead up to the sin, God had given him victory after victory- leading him to think that he must therefore be spiritually OK because of his many physical blessings (1 Chron. 18:6 RV). His conscience had been blunted. David may have cleverly alluded to this when he comments that the ark was abiding in a *tent*, and therefore he would not go down to his *house* (2 Sam. 11:11). The tension between a tent and a house is surely intended to take David back to his words in 2 Sam. 7:2, where he laments as unacceptable the fact that he lives in a *house* but the ark is in a *tent*. And David was 'tarrying', living in a settled way, in a house in Jerusalem now.

David stayed [AV "tarried"] at Jerusalem. This uses a Hebrew word which does not mean to wait, but rather to permanently dwell. It is also translated 'to marry'. The next verse continues "And it came to pass...", indicating that his permanent residence at Jerusalem was connected with his sin. Are we to infer that David remained at Jerusalem because of his relationship with Bathsheba? Even though they had probably got nowhere near consummating it, subconsciously this was behind David's motive in remaining. The word for "tarried" being the same for 'marriage' could imply that David was still actively married to his other wives who were there in Jerusalem.

Joab struck Rabbah and overthrew it-
How the citadel fell is explained in 2 Sam. 12:27. I suggest that 2 Samuel is thematic rather than chronological. This really picks up from 2 Sam. 10, where Syrian support for Rabbah had been cut off, and Rabbah was besieged by Joab. It is unlikely that the siege could have been maintained for a year or so. I suggest therefore that what we read of here happened some time after the sin with Bathsheba, and before David's repentance. The harsh treatment of the captives and proud taking of the crown David hadn't fought for... is all the kind of behaviour to be associated with a man in bad conscience before God.

This may be alluded to in Prov. 16:32: "One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; one who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city". This may refer to the hot headed anger of Joab and the "sons of Zeruiah", who had opposed Solomon and sought the throne for themselves towards the end of David's life. It was Joab who had taken the citadel of Zion and also the city of Rabbah, but this is dismissed by Solomon as cancelled out, as it were, by his hot headed lack of mental self control.

1Ch 20:2 David took the crown of their king from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and there were precious stones in it; and it was set on David's head; and he brought forth the spoil of the city, a great amount-
As explained on Ps. 20:1; 21:1, Psalms 20 and 21 appear to be David's prayers before going into battle against Ammon, and Psalm 21 is his thanksgiving for the victory. The setting of the gold crown upon his head is specifically referenced in Ps. 21:3. This

however was straight after his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:30). So David's joy in God's salvation expressed in those Psalms was due to his sense that God had given him this victory by grace when he himself was a sinner. His thanks for giving him eternal life when he put the crown upon him (Ps. 21:4) was therefore in the sense that he believed that despite his sin, he would be eternally saved, and he saw the victory against Ammon as a foretaste of that.

But another take is possible. Soon after the sin with Bathsheba, but before David's repentance (see on 2 Sam. 12:26), David went to join Joab in the battle for Rabbah- perhaps to give an impression of zeal to Bathsheba and the rest of his people. 'If brave Uriah died there, why, I'm not afraid to be with the boys on the front line either'. After the victory, David proudly placed the crown of Rabbah's king on his own head, pillaging the spoil of the city rather than burning it, and then cruelly tortured the Ammonites; "he (David personally) brought out the people... and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes" (2 Chron. 20:2,3). How true it is that one sin leads to another. David's own bad conscience with God led him into this fit of bitterness, in which he so needlessly tortured people who at the most only warranted a quick death. One is left to imagine him making a great deal of how he was doing this in vengeance for the death of Uriah. Whenever we detect unreasonable behaviour, pride, materialism or bitterness within our own lives, we need to ask to what degree this is related to our own lack of good conscience with God.

The extent of David's fall at this time may be indicated by the way he crowns himself with the 70 pound gold crown of the Ammonite state god Milcom. Whilst retaining his allegiance to Yahweh, this personal association with a pagan god seems inappropriate. See on 2 Sam. 12:26.

1Ch 20:3 He brought forth the people who were therein, and cut them with saws, and with iron picks, and with axes. David did so to all the cities of the children of Ammon. David and all the people returned to Jerusalem-
See on 2 Sam. 12:26. This harsh torture and judgment of others is of the same nature as his harsh judgment of the person in Nabal's parable, demanding the death sentence for a man whom the law of Moses didn't punish with death for what he did. This is a classic case of transference. David is subconsciously transferring his sin and guilt onto others, and then punishing them heavily. This kind of psychological credibility of the narrative encourages us in our faith that it is indeed the inspired word of God.

It's one thing to obey Divine commands about slaying enemies; it's another to willfully torture them, Auschwitz-style. It was the same cruelty he showed in 2 Sam. 8:2. These incidents reveal David at his worst. And again- did he really have to ensure that every male in Edom was murdered (1 Kings 11:15,16)- was that really necessary? What about the mums, wives, sisters left weeping, and the fatherless daughters, left to grow up in

the dysfunction of a leaderless Middle Eastern home? Those men were all somebody's sons, brothers, fathers, grandfathers. Was David really obeying some Divine command here, or was this the dictate of his own anger and dysfunctional bloodlust? We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).

1Ch 20:4 After this, there arose war at Gezer with the Philistines. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sippai, of the sons of the giant; and they were subdued-
We note that the *rephaim* had children like other human beings (2 Sam. 21:16,18; Dt. 3:11), inhabiting an area known as the valley of Rephaim (Josh. 15:8). The "giants" of Gen. 6:2-4 were therefore humans and not celestial beings. Gezer or "Gob" (2 Sam. 21:18) is LXX Gath; see on :6 for the significance.

1Ch 20:5 There was again war with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam-
Elhanan was from the small village of Bethlehem, and therefore was likely a childhood friend of David's. He like us with the Lord Jesus was inspired by David's victory over Goliath. He saw what was potentially possible for man in faith, just as we are shown through the Lord's victory on the cross what is possible for men apparently saddled with human nature.

1Ch 20:6 There was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were twenty-four, six on each hand, and six on each foot; and he also was born to the giant-
David fought the Philistines at Gath (see on :4), and yet we note that he lived with Achish at Gath for over a year, and some of his most loyal followers were Philistines from Gath like Ittai. His victories over them therefore elicited humility and faith from some of the Philistines there. They realized that David and his men won their victories not in their own strength, but because of Yahweh. And they humbly came into covenant relationship with the God of their enemies, and fellowship with their one time enemies and murderers of their friends and families. It is humility which is the critical requirement in coming to the true God, and no amount of apparently high powered intellectual argument and slick presentation can replace that.

1Ch 20:7 When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea David's brother killed him-
Goliath's defiance of Israel is a major theme (1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). Later Philistine defiance is described with the same word (2 Sam. 21:21; 23:9). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross

should be to us. Jonathan was brother to the crafty Jonadab, who led Absalom into major sin by his subliminal suggestions. We see how faith and unbelief can exist within the same family.

1Ch 20:8 These were born to the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants-
David took five stones to kill Goliath but used only one. Was he faithless and doubting that the first one would hit home? Or did he aim to use the other four on Goliath's four giant sons (2 Sam. 21:16-22)? Do those five stones represent the five books of Moses which Ps. 119 tells us was Christ's study all the day, it being through the word that Jesus overcame the mind of sin? If he did aim to use the other four on Goliath's four giant sons, that shows supreme spiritual ambition. In reality those four were killed later by David's closest followers- and they must have their counterparts amongst us.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 21

1Ch 21:1 Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel-
2 Sam. 24:1 says that this happened because Yahweh was angry with Israel. This common phrase is typically used of God's anger with Israel for idolatry, which was clearly a problem amongst them even at David's time. He didn't want to punish them. The census gave them the opportunity to pay a half shekel each for "atonement money" (Ex. 30:12-15), lest they be struck with plague. It seems God worked through David's fear of an invasion or forthcoming battle with a 'satan" / adversary, so that he took a census and the people had the chance to pay that atonement money in loyalty to Yahweh. But they didn't- and so they were struck with plague. David's feeling of guilt over the matter is understandable, but I will argue later that it was more a case of false guilt.

The books of Samuel and Chronicles are parallel accounts of the same incidents, as the four gospels are records of the same events but using different language. 2 Sam. 24:1 records: “The Lord... moved David against Israel” in order to make him take a census of Israel. The parallel account in 1 Chron. 21:1 says that “Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David” to take the census. In one passage God does the ‘moving’, in the other Satan does it. The only conclusion is that God acted as a ‘Satan’ or adversary to David. He did the same to Job by bringing trials into his life, so that Job said about God: “With the strength of Your hand You oppose me” (Job 30:21); ‘You are acting as a Satan against me’, was what Job was basically saying. Or again, speaking of God: “I must appeal for mercy to my accuser (Satan)” (Job 9:15 NRSV). The idea is sometimes used to describe our greatest adversary, i.e. our own sin, and at times for whole systems or empires which stand opposed to the people of God and personify sinfulness and evil. But it seems obvious that it is a bizarre approach to Bible reading to insist that whenever we meet these words 'Satan' and 'Devil', we are to understand them as references to a personal, supernatural being.

Perhaps the satan which moved David to number Israel was a Satan-Angel, as in the case of the righteous Angel involved with Balaam, acting as a satan / adversary,

and with Job. The parallel with Balaam is that God sent a Satan-Angel against him because His anger was kindled against Balaam (Num. 22:22, the same phrase as in :1). The Angel may have acted directly on David's heart to bring about a trial for both David and Israel. This is one of the many indications that the numbering of the people was not David's sin. See on :10. But the adversaries to David and Israel were at that point the surrounding nations. Even if an Angel was involved, the immediate 'satan' would have been an approaching enemy army; and David wanted to know how many men he had to fight off that invasion. Or it could have been an extension of the gathering of troops made at the time of 2 Sam. 20:4, when David wanted to know how many soldiers he could really count on after Absalom's rebellion.

1Ch 21:2 David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring me word, so that I may know the sum of them-
The list of David's mighty men just given in 2 Sam. 23 included men literally from Dan to Beersheba. I suggested on :1 that the occasion of this census may have been when David wanted to know how many soldiers he could really count on after Absalom's rebellion. It's possible that although out of chronological sequence, the catalogue of mighty men in 2 Sam. 23 was the result of this census. This would explain Joab's comment in 1 Chron. 21:3 "Are they not all my Lord's servants?", as if to say 'Loyalty to you is not in question, taking a census won't prove loyalty to you'.

1Ch 21:3 Joab said, May Yahweh make His people a hundred times as many as they are; but, my lord the king, aren't they all my lord's servants? Why does my lord require this thing? Why will he be a cause of guilt for Israel?-
Joab is alluding to Dt. 1:11. For all his unspirituality, he did also have a spiritual side. He was not unaware of the scriptures, and seemed to want to do what was genuinely best for Israel. Men with deeply mixed motives is quite a theme of the Bible's historical records; and that is because they are true to life. For that is how people are.

The numbering of Israel was another weak moment for David (note 2 Sam. 24:3,4,10), leading to suffering for others. Yet this same David had written that "there is no king saved by the multitude of an host" (Ps. 33:16). Perhaps this was an expression of repentance after this incident; or, if written before it, an example of David being over confident of his faith. "Why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?" (1 Chron. 21:3 AV) suggests Joab suspected the people would not pay the half shekel required when a census was taken, and so would be led into sin. Although it was their fault, the situation was provoked by God Himself provoking David to take the census, because His anger was kindled against Israel (:1). This would then be an example of God confirming a sinful people in the way they wished to go.

1Ch 21:4 Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Therefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem-
2 Sam. 24:4 "and against the captains of the army". The army captains likewise agreed with Joab that the census was not a good idea. This incident is at a time when David's word prevails against Joab and the generals, and we get the impression that this would not have happened after his sin with Bathsheba, after which Joab speaks and acts towards David in a belligerent manner. So the incident may be not in chronological order; indeed none of the cameos of Davidic history at the end of 2 Samuel are in chronological order.

1Ch 21:5 Joab gave up the sum of the numbering of the people to David. All those of

Israel were one million one hundred thousand men who drew sword; and in Judah were four hundred and seventy thousand men who drew sword-
According to 1 Chron. 21:5, there were 1,100,000 “men that drew sword” in Israel. According to 2 Sam. 24:9, there were 800,000 “valiant men” in Israel, according to the same census. There is no contradiction- rather the Samuel record is perceiving that there was a higher level of commitment, as. There were the enthusiasts, and those who merely could draw a sword. They were all living on different levels.

The numbers are also difficult because the Hebrew word for "thousand" need not mean a literal 1,000, but it is at time used to refer to a military subdivision. And it can have different definitions in some areas and at some times and by some writers. That is likely the reason for the difference between the numbers presented in Samuel and Chronicles, rather than textual corruption. If taken literally, the numbers are unrealistic; nearly 2 million soldiers (according to Chronicles) in the combined kingdom would imply a huge total population. Even if there were six million population in the territory they then inhabited (about 11,000 square miles), this would give an average population density of 600 / square mile. It seems really doubtful that the country could have supported this.

"Drew the sword" is the same phrase used in 1 Chron. 21:16 of how the destroying Angel had a drawn sword in his hand. The idea seems to be that God's Angelic power was more than a match for thousands of Israelites with their drawn swords. This would be an argument in favour of the idea that David did indeed sin at this time by trusting in his own swords, although the greater sin appears to have been with the people.

1Ch 21:6 But he didn’t count Levi and Benjamin among them for the king’s word was abominable to Joab-
Perhaps Joab reasoned that the Levites were not numbered as they were exempt from military service (Num. 1:47). But that was just a cover for the fact he didn't want to obey the king's word, because he knew Israel would not pay the required temple tax and there would be plague because of it. And Benjamin, the tribe of Saul, were perhaps particularly opposed to being numbered by David.

1Ch 21:7 God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel-
Israel were struck as promised in the law, because they refused to pay the temple tax when they were numbered. We note therefore that God's anger was with Israel rather than David, who took false guilt in this matter.

1Ch 21:8 David said to God, I have sinned greatly, in that I have done this thing. But now, put away, I beg You, the iniquity of Your servant; for I have done very foolishly-
The response is similar to that to the sin with Bathsheba, again before a prophet. Balaam also said the same words (Num. 22:34), and again we find an Angel 'standing'. Although David did take false guilt, it seems there was some element of real failure. The allusion is to the foolishness of Saul (1 Sam. 13:13). He feels he is no better than Saul for his trust in human strength; see on :14. 1 Chron. 21:6,7 says that David's "word" of command of the census was "abominable" to Joab, and also God was "displeased" with "this thing", the same Hebrew translated "word". Unless this refers to His displeasure with Joab for despising David's word. Yahweh had likewise been "displeased" with David in the matter of Uriah (2 Sam. 11:27 s.w.). But although David's lack of faith wasn't good, it seems to me on balance that he was largely taking false guilt. Perhaps we are to read that God was displeased with Israel's lack of

response to the word of command about the census, seeing Israel didn't pay the half shekel required at the time. Indeed David's trust in human numbers would not have been pleasing to God, it was a slip backwards. But we wonder whether he took false guilt in this matter. For it was allowable to take a census of Israel, although there was to be a half shekel tax paid at the time, which if not paid would result in plague (Ex. 30:12-15). Joab perhaps guessed that those numbered would not pay this and therefore the census would lead Israel into sin. This is why God chose the punishment of plague; not upon David, but upon Israel. Yet David perhaps realized all that, but knew that his lack of faith in wanting a census, his lack of consideration for the weakness of others, would lead them into sin and punishment. And therefore he felt guilty. It could be argued that his sacrifice atoned for himself and for the people, but they still suffered for not having paid the required "atonement money". But then we must balance against this the comment that "David had done that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and didn't turn aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). No mention is made of the matter of the census. There is true guilt, the guilt we should take for our actual sins; and false guilt, the guilt put on us by others and the malfunctioning of the human conscience. In this matter of David's guilt about the census, we may have an example of a man taking false guilt. The fact Israel and not David were punished with plague would rather confirm this. It may be impossible for us to sort out within us what is true guilt or false guilt, at least not be any intellectual process. But we can rest assured that all our guilt, of whatever kind, is met in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the ultimate guilt offering.

1Ch 21:9 Yahweh spoke to Gad, David's prophet, saying-
Gad was to write his record of these things (1 Chron. 29:29), so maybe his record has been incorporated here.

1Ch 21:10 Go and speak to David saying, 'Thus says Yahweh, I offer you three things. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you'-
When given a choice, Ahaz declined to choose, and was condemned for it (Is. 7:11). David declines to choose, because he preferred to fall into God's hands of grace than decide himself; and is not condemned. The same actions can be committed with different motives, and therefore only God can judge. But the invitation to "choose one of them" was for David's education, to elicit his reflection as to whether it was appropriate that he were punished, or the people; or he be punished along with the people. God's choice of plague was in accordance with the teaching of Ex. 30:12-15, that if Israel didn't pay the atonement money at the time of a census, they would be punished with plague.

1Ch 21:11 So Gad came to David and said to him, Thus says Yahweh, 'Take your choice-
Although David was innocent, I suggest he was given the choices in order to develop his own self examination over the matter. Thus as king, famine would not have hurt David personally. He was asked to consider whether this was appropriate.

1Ch 21:12 either three years of famine; or three months to be consumed before your foes, while the sword of your enemies overtakes you; or else three days' suffering the sword of Yahweh, even plague in the land, and the angel of Yahweh destroying throughout all the borders of Israel'. Now therefore consider what answer I shall

return to Him who sent me-
Famine, war and plague are the three Divine judgments listed in Ez. 14:21 as coming upon Jerusalem at the time of the exile. David had already experienced war and famine (because of the Gibeonites, 2 Sam. 21). Now he was to experience plague. The lesson to the exiles was that these judgments had indeed come because of sin, but the experience of them could be cut short by intense prayer and repentance after the pattern of David. For Yahweh "relented" of the three days plague because of David's prayer and sacrifice. We see here the open ended nature of His purpose.

1Ch 21:13 David said to Gad, I am in distress-
The phrase is that used of Saul's great distress on the night of his final condemnation (1 Sam. 28:15). David felt he had been foolish as Saul had been (2 Sam. 24:10 = 1 Sam. 13:13). David had replaced Saul because of Saul's apostacy, but he was being made to realize through this experience (even if it was all false guilt), that he too was a sinner and saved by his acceptance of grace, and not because he was intrinsically better than Saul.

Let me fall, I pray, into the hand of Yahweh; for His mercies are very great. Let me not fall into the hand of man-
David appealed to God's mercy in the matter of Bathsheba (Ps. 51:1). Perhaps he learned from that, and chose to throw himself upon that same mercy. But the exact timing of this incident isn't clear. Perhaps it was because of learning about God's grace through this incident that he later learned to throw himself upon God's great mercy when he sinned with Bathsheba and against Uriah. David's experience of God's grace stayed with him when he faced up to the results of his errors in the future. From experience, he can ask to fall into the Lord's hand rather than man's, because "His *mercies* are *great*"- using the same two Hebrew words he had used when Nathan came to him in Ps. 51:1: "Have mercy upon me… according unto the *multitude* [Heb. 'greatness'] of thy *tender mercies*". And so the experience of God's gracious mercy over one sin fortifies us to believe in His grace when, sadly, we fall again; although, in passing, I think that here David himself didn't really do so much wrong. Yet he perceived himself to have sinned, so the point is still established.

Truly David is our example. David was very much involved in Israel his people. He saw himself as their representative. "The God of my rock is *my* shield... he is a shield to *all* them that trust in him" (2 Sam. 22:3,31). "*I* am in a great strait; let *us* fall now into the hand of the Lord" (2 Sam. 24:14) reflects this. When he sung Psalms, he invited them to come and sing along with him (Ps. 105:2; 107:22; 111:1). And many of these Psalms of praise seem to have their origin in his experience of forgiveness regarding Bathsheba. The Lord based His parables of the lost sheep and the man finding the treasure of the Gospel in a field on the statements of David (Ps. 119:162,176), as if He saw David as representative of all those who would truly come to Him. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Ps. 32:1), David wrote, after experiencing God's mercy in the matter of Bathsheba. But Paul sees this verse as David describing "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. 4:6). Each of us are in need of a like justification; therefore we find ourselves in David's position.

God is kinder than men. It's better to be punished by Him than by men. This puts paid to the Catholic conception of God as a merciless torturer of wicked men. Clearly the doctrine of eternal torments was invented by men, not God.

1Ch 21:14 So Yahweh sent a plague on Israel; and seventy thousand men of Israel

fell-
2 Sam 24:15 adds: "So Yahweh sent a plague on Israel from the morning even to the appointed time; and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men".
"The appointed time" could refer to the time of the evening sacrifice, which David was to offer on Araunah's property and not at the sanctuary. Or the idea may be that there was an "appointed time" of suffering but it was not defined, because it was open ended- the terminus depended upon the intensity of David's prayers and sacrifice. The three day period of plague was changed because "Yahweh relented" (:15)- because of David's prayer shortening the stipulated time period. This is why there can be no prescriptive chronology of events in the last days, nor date set for the Lord's return. The appointed time is variable, depending upon factors such as human prayer, repentance and taking the Gospel to all the world.

LXX "So David chose for himself the mortality: and they were the days of wheat-harvest; and the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from morning till noon, and the plague began among the people".

1Ch 21:15 God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was about to destroy, Yahweh saw, and He relented of the disaster, and said to the destroying angel, It is enough; now stay your hand. The angel of Yahweh was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite-
This could imply that Ornan's area was about to be destroyed. But it seems we have here an example of the summary being made, and then we read how that came about. Perhaps David was in Jerusalem, maybe praying at the sanctuary, and saw the Angel standing over the nearby hill of Jebus or Moriah. His prayer and obedient, urgent sacrifice then stopped the Angel right there. The Angel "stood" by the threshing floor (1 Chron. 21:15 AV), as if the Angel's path of destruction was stopped right there by the sacrifice offered in that place.

The encouragement for the later generation of Jews was that the evil planned upon Jerusalem could be relented from; if there was genuine repentance. God's hand here was "stayed", but the encouragement was that God would not "stay" His hand in His program of redemption; the same word is often translated "fail" in the assurance that God will not fail His people in ultimately restoring them.

This “destroying Angel” is surely “the destroyer” who operated in the wilderness. We see here one Angel having the ability to formulate a purpose and another blindly carrying it out until told not to- a scenario which we see repeated elsewhere (e. g. at the Passover and in Ez. 9). It was only David's prayer which lead to “the destroyer” ceasing. Notice how the Angel repented and then encouraged David to offer a sacrifice so the Angel would be "intreated for the land" (2 Sam. 24:19,25). Similarly, the Angel repented of punishing Israel and wanted to restore them, and to enable this to happen He encouraged the people through Ezra to be spiritual. Thus Angelic repentance has to be confirmed by human action.

1Ch 21:16 David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of Yahweh standing between earth and sky, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces-
This says that the Angel had a "drawn sword" in hand, the same words used of the Angel before Balaam (Num. 22:23,31). His donkey "turned aside", using the same word for "stretched out" here. The sin of Balaam was connected with idolatry, and I suggested on :1 that this was the reason for God's anger being kindled against Israel.

The sin of Balaam has connections with that of Israel, but not particularly with that of David. Again we get the impression the judgments were for the sake of the sins of the people, the anger of Yahweh was with them, rather than with David for wanting to take a census.

1Ch 21:17 David said to God, Isn't it I who commanded the people to be numbered? It is even I who have sinned and done very wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand, O Yahweh my God, be against me, and against my father's house; but not against Your people, that they should be plagued-
This was effectively asking God to abrogate the promises about his family of 1 Chron. 17. Thanks to David building an altar at his own expense and asking God to kill him and his family, God stopped the plague upon Israel (2 Sam. 24:16,17- the stretched out hand of God in destruction was what David asked to be upon him and his family). Israel were suffering the effect of their own sin, in not paying the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16); but in the spirit of Christ, David was willing to die for them. And his dominant desire was counted as if it had been done, and thanks to his self-sacrificial spirit, the people were saved when they personally were unworthy. The wrath of God can be turned away by the actions of those He is angry with (Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 4:4; 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (Ps. 106:23; Jer. 18:20; Job 42:7). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7). Through *our personal* dying to the flesh, the life of Christ is manifest not only in us, but is made available to others: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:10-12). The life that is even now made manifest *in us* is also made available to work in others because death to the flesh has worked in us personally.

1Ch 21:18 Then the angel of Yahweh commanded Gad to tell David that David should go up, and make an altar to Yahweh in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite-
2 Chron. 3:1 implies David assumed that the spot where the Angel appeared to him in 2 Sam. 24:17,18 was where he should build the temple. It is another example of David's tendency to wildly over interpret, which led him to a mistaken obsession about building the temple and assuming Solomon to be his Messianic seed.

1Ch 21:19 David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spoke in the name of Yahweh-
David went along with the elders of Israel (:16), clothed in sackcloth. David is always presented as totally obedient to the prophets in his life (Samuel, Nathan and Gad), unlike Saul who was consistently disobedient to God's word through Samuel.

1Ch 21:20 Ornan turned back-
2 Sam. 24:20 "Araunah looked out", i.e. from the place in the threshing area where he was threshing wheat, where he and his four sons had hidden from the presence of the Angel. The records in Chronicles and Samuel perfectly fit with each other, although clearly focusing upon different elements of the scene; just like the gospel records.

And saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat-
Chronicles has "saw the Angel". 2 Sam. 24:20 "saw the king". This may reflect the confusion between malak ["Angel"] and melek ["king"], especially as ancient Hebrew didn't add the vowel points and the consonants of the two words are the same, m-l-k. Or it could be that Ornan saw David and also at the same time saw the Angel behind him in some form.

1Ch 21:21 As David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshing floor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground-
Clearly Ornan respected David, even though it seems he was a Gentile Jebusite, whose relatives may have been slain when David and Joab took Jebus at the start of David's reign.

1Ch 21:22 Then David said to Ornan, Give me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build thereon an altar to Yahweh. You shall sell it to me for the full price-
The urgent thing required was sacrifice to God represented by the Angel hovering over the hill where both men were standing, about to slay the people of Jerusalem. We wonder why David firstly asks to buy the threshing floor, as this was a long process which Araunah may have needed to think carefully about as it was his home. Maybe this is a hint that Araunah was not a worshipper of Yahweh and therefore the land must be bought before an offering to another God could be made upon it. There is more evidence for that on :23. Or it may be that David wanted to offer the most genuine sacrifice, which was thought to be offered upon one's own property. He offered to buy the threshing floor "for the full price" (1 Chron. 21:22), the same phrase used of Abraham's purchase of property from the Canaanites in Gen. 23:9. This confirms the impression that Araunah was a Canaanite and not an Israelite.

That the plague may be stopped from afflicting the people-
This is the very phrase of Num. 16:48,50 and Num. 25:8; Ps. 106:30, where the people of Israel suffered from plague because of their idolatry, and Aaron stopped it, standing between the living and the dead. David was in an identical position to Aaron, again acting as the High Priest. And again we have evidence that the essential sin being punished was not David's taking of a census, but Israel's sin (see on :1).

1Ch 21:23 Ornan said to David, Take it for yourself, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes. Behold, I give the oxen for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meal offering. I give it all-
LXX "and the wheels and furniture of the oxen for wood". "The threshing instruments" may have referred to quite a major and expensive piece of equipment. But Ornan totally senses the urgency of the situation and is willing to offer even this as wood.

1Ch 21:24 King David said to Ornan, No; but I will most certainly buy it for the full price. For I will not take that which is yours for Yahweh, nor offer a burnt offering without cost-
I have suggested that the historical records were in places edited and made relevant for the exiles; and given their mean attitude to offerings in Mal. 1:10,13,14, David's example and principle would have been pertinent. And this is an abiding principle; sacrifice is to be costly, we are to be left "minus", rather than being without cost to us.

1Ch 21:25 So David gave to Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place-
1 Chron. 21:25 speaks of 600 shekels for "the place", whilst 2 Sam. 24:24 mentions 50 shekels for the threshing floor and oxen. The entire area was later bought, in order to build the temple on that site (1 Chron. 22:1; 2 Chron. 3:1).

1Ch 21:26 David built an altar to Yahweh there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on Yahweh; and He answered him from the sky by fire on the altar of burnt offering-
Elijah in 1 Kings 18:24 takes the language of God 'answering by fire' from this account of David's intercession for the plagued, sinful people (same Hebrew words). Elijah saw himself as David, interceding to gain the forgiveness of impenitent third parties as a result of his sacrifice. And indeed there was an element of that. And in the final synthesis and unknowable equation of salvation, there is still a great role played by third parties in our salvation. This is just the language of God justifying Himself over Baal at the time of Elijah. I have suggested throughout that the plague was essentially punishment for Israel's idolatry; see on :1.

1Ch 21:27 Yahweh commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into its sheath-
We have here a visual representation of God's sensitivity to human prayer and repentance.

1Ch 21:28 At that time, when David saw that Yahweh had answered him in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there-
Burnt offerings always precede peace offerings (2 Sam. 24:25), because sacrifice is the principle upon which we can have peace with God. But David remained traumatized by the incident, fearing the sword he had seen (1 Chron. 21:30). This was a similar reaction by him to how he feared association with the ark for some period after the slaying of Uzzah (1 Chron. 13:12,13). The similarity in reaction is another indication that the record is true and the character portrayals absolutely consistent, as could only be true of a Divinely inspired record.

1Ch 21:29 For the tabernacle of Yahweh, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering, were at that time in the high place at Gibeon-
The wrong and unsatisfactory nature of having two sanctuaries is commented upon on 1 Chron. 16:40.

1Ch 21:30 But David couldn't go before it to inquire of God; for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of Yahweh-
"Afraid" is the word used of how the evil spirit from Yahweh troubled Saul. We could therefore read this as a slip backwards for David; his wrongful fear of God was confirmed by God. For this is the way He works with His Spirit. I suggested on :28 that this means that David remained traumatized by the incident, fearing the sword he had seen.

There was no revelation from God that the temple must be built there. David assumes that because he saw that the Lord had answered him there, and because he could not go to Gibeon, where the tabernacle was standing, to seek the Lord there, on account of the sword of the angel, i.e., on account of the plague.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 22

1Ch 22:1 Then David said, This is the house of Yahweh God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel-

"Then..." suggests this was David's proclamation of the site he had just bought from Ornan as the only acceptable place for sacrifice. But this was David's own decision. The Law states that sacrifice would be offered at a location Yahweh would choose. David makes that choice for God; there is no word from God stating He had decided upon Jerusalem. David elsewhere claims God chose the place, but clearly it was his choice, and he was trying to railroad God into accepting it. Yet God graciously goes along with this without directly challenging it. His Son was later to teach that it was not in Jerusalem but in the hearts of men, in spirit and truth, that God sought worship. But that was in fact ever the case.

Or we could reason that the certainty of God's foreknowledge is reflected in the sureness of His word. Biblical Hebrew has a 'prophetic perfect' tense, which uses the past tense to describe future things which God has promised. Thus David said, "This *is* the house of the Lord God", when as yet the temple [as David understood it] was only promised by God. Such was his faith in that word of promise that David used the present tense to describe future things. Scripture abounds with examples of God's foreknowledge. God was so certain that He would fulfill the promises to Abraham, that He told him: "Unto your seed *have* I *given* this land..." (Gen. 15:18) at a time when Abraham did not even have a seed. During this same period before the seed (Isaac/Christ) was born, God further promised: "A father of many nations *have I made you*" (Gen. 17:5). Truly, God "calls those things which be not as though they were".

"Then" leads us to interpret the following chapters as following on from 1 Chron. 21 and 2 Sam. 24, David's disastrous numbering of Israel and his repentance for doing so. I have argued on 2 Sam. 24 that this was at the end of David's life. He is still wedded to his insistent desire to make the promises of 2 Sam. 7 come true in his building of a physical temple through Solomon, whom he has decided is the promised Messiah. He was seriously wrong on these things, and was in a way denying the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. His numbering of Israel was, I suggested, a result of his giving in to this 'satan' within him, confirmed by God pushing him down that bad path. He was seeking to establish his kingdom by human strength. But then like Balaam he is arrested in his ways, and repents- for the moment.

His last words in 2 Sam. 23 are, I argued there, his last prophetic words, the last words he spoke under direct Divine inspiration in the form of revelation. They cannot be his literal last words because the majority of David's recorded words are chronologically after that point, recorded in 1 Chron. 21-29. David in his last prophetic words was made

to say that "He who rules over men must be just", and that was not him... and the kingdom of God was not going to be established through him nor his son at that time. He again repents for a moment, "My house is [indeed] not so with God", and again he marvels at God's grace. His remaining recorded words are recorded by inspiration, but they were not of Divine revelation. They contradict God's own statements in 2 Sam. 7. These recorded words of David were not prophetic words, not spoken by Divine revelation. That's why his claims as to what God had actually said to him about Solomon and the temple contradict what God Himself said in 2 Sam. 7 / 1 Chron. 17. And yet God reluctantly went along with the temple cult, just as He did with the idea of human kingship.

What we see in 1 Chron. 22-29 is therefore a case of David imagining a narrative and then expanding its envelope to a quite wrong extent. He set Solomon up for spiritual failure. And finally God's wrath came to its climax in His furious destruction of the temple and ending of the Davidic line of kings in Zedekiah's time. In the prophecies about those things we sense God's wrath with the temple. 1 Chron. 22-29 just skim read gives the impression of a lot of numbering of Levites and others, and organizing them into a massive system of service- both to the temple, and to the Davidic kingdom based in Jerusalem. And a gathering together of massive resources to enable the building of the temple. All this was done in the very last months of David's life: "Of the Hebronites was Jerijah the chief, even of the Hebronites, according to their generations by fathers' households. In the fortieth year of the reign of David they were sought for / numbered, and there were found among them mighty men of valour at Jazer", and we go on to read how many (1 Chron. 26:31). This was all a studied denial of what David had learnt for a moment after the disastrous attempt to number Israel in 1 Chron. 21. The sin was not in the census of itself, but in his attitude. He realized that- at the time. He offered sacrifice, the three days plague was reduced to just a few hours... But now in 1 Chron. 22-29 he returns to the essence of those sinful attitudes. And dies like it, with the pathetic bedside scene of 1 Kings 1 as the close of a life not well lived at the end. He died unlamented. And yet for all this failure at the end, by grace will still be saved. Not only was David's failure in numbering everything... the numbers of Levites, how many sons the leaders of the shifts had, the weight of the temple vessels, ensuring there were ministers to count and manage the number of his animals, olive trees and other wealth sources. David's sin was also in trusting in all this human strength and supposing that it was required to worship God. The temple built was not that large, 90 ft. × 45 ft. × 30 ft. But he arranges thousands of people to serve it and a million talents of gold [so he claims] to overlay the walls with gold. This is all out of proportion, and quite against the spirit of the God who said He liked living in a goatskin tent.

1Ch 22:2 David gave orders to gather together the foreigners who were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to cut worked stones to build God's house-

It certainly looks appropriate in the type for us to see Gentiles working towards building up the house of God. But the reality was that this was a form of racism, using foreigners to do dogs body work; the more shameful if indeed they were as LXX "proselytes". It was repeated by Solomon. We also marvel at David's pointed disobedience to God's statement that "You shall not build Me a house to dwell in" (1 Chron. 17:4).

This marshalling of labour is the same essential sin David committed when he numbered Israel in the previous chapter. He repents, is forgiven, but slips from that level of intensity. And returns to the essence of the sin, and in this case, dies in that mindset. Yet will be ultimately saved! Solomon used 150,000 of these people as labourers and stone-cutters (1 Kings 5:15; 2 Chron. 2:16.). This reflects the ridiculous scale of David's self created narrative. This again shows how once we create and feed a false narrative, that narrative expands in size. The person who after twenty years saw their partner drunk on two occasions develops the narrative over the years to proclaim their partner an alcoholic... we see this going on all the time. As John's Gospel makes clear, the death of the Lord Jesus, His cross, His salvation and real forgiveness for us... is a call to absolute, radical truth. All the way through, David is living in denial of the actual commandment to him *not* to build a temple: ""Shall you build me a house for me to live in? (2 Sam 7:5)... You shall not build me the house to live in" (1 Chron. 17:4), and God's laboured redefinition of what a "house" for Him must be- a group of people, hearts indwelt by His Spirit. Not a building. And God's insistent grace, that *He* will build a house for *David*, and not David building for Him. David is simply trying to get around this by vicariously building the house through Solomon; he made the plans for it [wrongly claiming they were given by God], and makes huge efforts to virtually build it. And we see here the vicarious nature of so much modern sin; not murdering, fornicating or whatever, but doing these things vicariously through the experiences we choose in our screen life.

1Ch 22:3 David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the couplings; and brass in abundance without weight-
David prepared for the temple right down to the nails and hinges. He was obviously reasoning that he could 'get around' the prohibition against building a temple by getting Solomon to do it after his death. Or it could even be that David was planning to get Solomon to build it once Solomon was old enough to do so, even within David's lifetime. The reasons given as to why God didn't want a temple built were relevant for all time, and not just to David.

1Ch 22:4 and cedar trees without number; for the Sidonians and Tyrians brought cedar trees in abundance to David-
David's own house was built of cedar (1 Chron. 17:1), and there was a very good

spiritual reason God's dwelling place was not in cedar but beneath tents (1 Chron. 17:3-6). But David was driven by guilt because of his cedar house; and instead of trusting God to remove that guilt, he wanted to build God a cedar house. And the same kind of quasi spiritual psychologies go on in Christian minds today.

1Ch 22:5 David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be built for Yahweh must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all nations. I will therefore make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death-

*"*David said" may mean that he said this in his heart (as in 1 Sam. 27:1). He speaks of how "the house is to be built for Yahweh", but totally misses the point- that God rejected that and instead offered to build a house for him. But the grace of it all seemed too much, and he wanted to instead do works. God had promised that He would build up Israel, the faithful community, the house of David, to have "fame and glory" in the Gentile world (Dt. 26:19 s.w.). But David wanted to make a building of bricks and mortar which would have "fame and glory". He is totally missing the point. "Fame" is the word for "name"; and it was Yahweh's Name which was to be made glorious through His people's manifestation of that Name in their characters (s.w. Is. 63:12,14; Jer. 13:11). This was to be the witness to "all nations", and not a magnificent building in Jerusalem.

After conviction of his sin with Bathsheba, David had vowed to take the message of God's grace to the Gentile world, based on his example. He never did that. Instead now he focuses on the idea that a grandiose temple will attract the surrounding nations to Jerusalem. He has slipped from spirituality to mere religion, and died like that- to be saved ultimately by grace. God's promise was that He would build David a house. But David is now obsessed with building God a house. He shied away from the huge grace shown to him in the promises made to him.

1Ch 22:6 Then he called for Solomon his son, and commanded him to build a house for Yahweh, the God of Israel-

This sounds as if David asked Solomon to do this during David's lifetime. He was clearly seeking to 'get around' God's forbidding of himself to do it, by getting it done in Solomon's name. But that was to miss the point of all the reasons given as to why God didn't want a temple built.

1Ch 22:7 David said to Solomon his son, As for me, it was in my heart to build a house to the name of Yahweh my God-

God's response to this had been to tell David that He would build David a house for His Name to dwell in; the idea being of a community of people who would manifest the characteristics of that Name (2 Sam. 7:13). God's Name was already dwelling in the

sanctuary (Dt. 12:5), and David had been wrong to suggest that this Name would dwell in a physical building. But he ignores God's perspective on this, and claims that God was "for" his project, but just had some hang ups about David doing it. This is a misrepresentation of the reasons God gave for forbidding David to build the temple (1 Chron. 17:4-7).

1Ch 22:8 But the word of Yahweh came to me saying, 'You have shed blood abundantly, and have made great wars. You shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight-
Given the fact that David has willfully misrepresented God's response to him and the prohibition of 1 Chron. 17:4-7, I suspect this was not what God said. It was David's attempt to justify God's refusal of his plan. God had said that David would not build a house because *He* was going to build a house and place David and his Messianic Son in it, eternally- at some point after David had died, thereby implying resurrection at the last day. David has twisted that just as folk today, taking a word or two of a Bible verse out of context and building an entire narrative upon it. And that narrative directly contradicts the spirit and essence of God's revelation. In 1 Kings 5:3 Solomon tells Hiram that David couldn't build the temple because he was busy fighting Yahweh's wars. Again the envelope has expanded. Once you start a false narrative, others repeat it and take it as gospel truth, but in their turn add to it and twist and transform it. David falsely claims that God debarred him from temple building because he had shed much blood. There is no ethical reason why blood shedding of itself precluded from building a temple. David twists this narrative further to say that therefore no iron weapon or tool must be used on the stones of the house. His false assumptions led to more wrong and at best irrelevant thinking. Solomon in turn twists this narrative to say that it was because David had fought Yahweh's battles that he couldn't build a temple. False narratives always gets expanded, and the expansion is likewise false.

But taking what he said as being actually some unrecorded revelation of God to him, there does seem some appropriacy in the reasons given. Although in this case, it seems therefore inappropriate for David to tell Solomon from his deathbed to shed the blood of all his potential competitors. It seems that David's revelling in the blood of the condemned, as so often seen in his Psalms (e.g. Ps. 58:10) is out of step with the God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ez. 33:11). It was perhaps because of David's attitude to "blood" rather than simply his shedding of blood which disqualified him from building the temple; God was not pleased with this attitude. See on :9.Many have struggled to reconcile the statement that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) with the fact that his life contains many examples not only of failure, but of anger and a devaluing of human life. He was barred from building the temple because of the amount of blood he had shed (1 Chron. 22:8). The figure of 'shedding blood' takes us back to the incident with Nabal, where David three times is mentioned as intending

to “shed blood” (1 Sam. 25:26-33), only to be turned away from his sinful course by the wisdom, spirituality and charm of Abigail. David started out as the spiritually minded, humble shepherd, full of faith and zeal for his God. Hence Jehoshaphat is commended for walking “in the first ways of his father David” (2 Chron. 17:3). It seems to me that the comment that David was “a man after God’s own heart” refers to how he initially was, at the time God chose him and rejected Saul. But the trauma of his life, the betrayals, jealousies and hatred of others, led him to the kind of bitterness which so often surfaces in the Psalms and is reflected in several historical incidents where he lacks the value of others’ lives which we would otherwise expect from a man who walked so close with his God.

Consider the collective force of some of those incidents:
- When told to slay 100 Philistines, he slays 200 for good measure (1 Sam. 18:25,27)
- David’s eager taking of the sword of Goliath (1 Sam. 21:9- “There is none like that; give it me”) contrasts sadly with his earlier rejection of such weapons in order to slay Goliath. And David later reflects how he knew that his faithless taking of that sword and the shewbread would lead to the death of Abiathar’s family ((1 Sam. 22:22). But still he did it.
- His anger with Nabal and desire to slay all “that piss against the wall” who lived with “this fellow” ((1 Sam. 25:21,22 AV) is expressed in crude terms; and he later thanks Abigail for persuading him not to “shed blood” and “avenging myself with mine own hand” ((1 Sam. 25:33)- the very things he elsewhere condemns in his Psalms (e.g. Ps. 44:3). Time and again in the Psalms, David uses that Hebrew word translated “avenging myself” about how God and not man will revenge / save him against his enemies, for God saves / avenges the humble in spirit not by their strength and troops but by His. But in the anger of hot blood, David let go of all those fine ideas. He had some sort of an anger problem.
- David says that the servants of Saul are “worthy to die” because they fell asleep as a result of “a deep sleep from the Lord” which fell on them, and therefore didn’t protect Saul (1 Sam. 26:12,16). Were they really that guilty of death for this? There doesn’t appear to be any Biblical command David was quoting.
- “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul” is surely a collapse of faith (1 Sam. 27:1). And it led to the way in which David deceived Achish by pretending he was attacking Jewish towns, when in fact he was going out and attacking the Amalekite settlements, killing all men, women and children in them so that nobody was left alive to tell that it was David who had attacked them (1 Sam. 27:8-10). Innocent people were slain by David’s sword for the ‘political’ reason that he had to keep Achish ‘in the dark’ about what he was really up to. And so in case a 5 year old say something incriminating later, David simply killed the little boy. We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8). Indeed, when Achish later says that David would be best not to go with him to fight Saul, David hypocritically says:

“But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant so long as I have been with you unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies [i.e. Saul] of my lord the king?” (1 Sam. 29:8). This was hardly an example of the “integrity” and “uprightness” which David glorifies in his Psalms, and which he insisted he was full of (Ps. 25:21). Indeed he claims that his integrity is the basis of his acceptance by God (Ps. 26:1).

- It’s recorded that in the ethnic cleansing which David performed, he took the spoil of those settlements for himself (1 Sam. 27:9). Indeed when he destroyed Ziklag, he took away their herds “and said, This is David’s spoil” (1 Sam. 30:20). We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8).
- When Saul is killed, a young Amalekite hopeful comes to David with the story that he had killed Saul, trying to curry favour with David and secure his own release as a prisoner of war. David executed him (2 Sam. 1:15). It seems to me that this was an over the top reaction, and yet again betrays a lack of value and meaning attached to the human person. There was no attempt to convert the frightened young man to grace, to the God of Israel. The summary slaying of Rechab and Baanah has some similarities (2 Sam. 4:12).
- David made the captives lay down in three lines. He arbitrarily chose one line to keep alive, and killed the other two lines (2 Sam. 8:2). This can’t be justified as some careful obedience to some Mosaic law. It reads like something out of the Holocaust, an arbitrary slaying of some in order to exercise the whim of one’s own power. No wonder David was barred from building the temple because of his attitude to bloodshed. Likewise when Rabbah is captured, David proudly puts the crown of the king on his head, grabs their spoil for himself (not following Abraham's example), “and he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon” (2 Sam. 12:31). Now all that is torture. It’s one thing to obey Divine commands about slaying enemies; it’s another to willfully torture them, Auschwitz-style. These incidents reveal David at his worst. And again- did he really have to ensure that every male in Edom was murdered (1 Kings 11:15,16)- was that really necessary? What about the mums, wives, sisters left weeping, and the fatherless daughters, left to grow up in the dysfunction of a leaderless Middle Eastern home? Those men were all somebody’s sons, brothers, fathers, grandfathers. Was David really obeying some Divine command here, or was this the dictate of his own anger and dysfunctional bloodlust?
- David’s murder of Uriah and his sin with Bathsheba again reflects this same lack of value of the human person, even of his faithful friends.
- When David is asked to give seven men of the family of Saul as a blood sacrifice to appease the rain god who was not sending rain, David agrees. He doesn’t make the Biblical argument that rain being withheld indicates the need for repentance before Yahweh, and that sacrificing humans is wrong and won’t change anything in this context. He gives in to the false understanding of the Gibeonites, breaking his

undertakings to Saul and Jonathan by doing so, and selects seven men to be slain and hung up. We read of the mother of two of them, Rizpah, lovingly watching over the bodies of her sons day and night, with all the distraction of true love (2 Sam. 21:10). David didn't have to do this. But he did. We get the impression this was another example of his wrong attitude to the shedding of blood (1 Chron. 22:8). He doesn't seem to have cared for the mother's feelings, nor for the lives of her sons. And note that David makes up the total of seven men by having the five foster sons of his own estranged wife Michal slain. Was this not David somehow hitting back at Michal, who had mocked him for his style of worship in 2 Sam. 6? And how did Adriel, the father of those five sons, feel? He wasn't of the house of Saul, but because of David's desire to placate someone else, he lost all his sons, just because his wife had died and Saul's daughter had raised them. And yet this same David is recorded as saying soon afterwards: "I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his ordinances were before me; And as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also perfect toward him; And I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, According to my cleanness in his eyesight" (2 Sam. 22:22-25).

- David seems to glory in how he destroyed his enemies- "I might destroy them that hate me... then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the more of the street, and did spread them [i.e. their body parts] abroad" (2 Sam. 22:41-43). Can this really be justified as obedience to Divine commands? Is this not the expression of blood lust and anger? And isn't it therefore self-righteous to style himself "the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1)? Was he really "sweet"?
- David earlier forgave Shimei for cursing him. But he tells Solomon to bring down that old man's white hairs to the grave with blood on them- again, a crude image for the murder of an old man. And he uses the same awful turn of phrase to ask Solomon to do this also to his lifelong friend Joab (1 Kings 2:6,9). Surely grace would've found another way?

1 Chron. 22:8; 28:3 are reported speech by David. We wonder if he wasn't imagining this. Why should it be morally objectionable for David to build the temple because he was a man of war? Yahweh is a man of war, yet He was to build David's house. We only learn about God's objection to David building the temple from the passages where David reports what God apparently told him, and from Solomon repeating this. If God did actually say this, then there is a logical contradiction between this and His statements about not wanting a house at all. If He was saying 'I want a physical house, but not built by David', then this appears irreconcilable with the reasons He is actually recorded as giving David for not wanting a house (see on 2 Sam. 7:7-11). Either God wanted a house or He didn't. See on 1 Chron. 28:5,6.

Solomon's take on this is in 1 Kings 5:3: "You know how that David my father could not build a house for the name of Yahweh his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until Yahweh put his enemies under the soles of his feet". Solomon had a way of spinning things, even God's word, in his own selfish way. David had insisted that God had told him that he couldn't build the temple because he had shed so much blood in war (1 Chron. 22:8). But Solomon just slightly spins this when he asks Hiram to come and help him build the temple, because, he says, his father David hadn't had the time to get around to the job because of being busy fighting wars (1 Kings 5:3). He says nothing about David shedding blood; the moral aspect of it all is nicely ignored by Solomon.

1Ch 22:9 Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies all around; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days-

"Solomon" is what David and Bathsheba named him, seeking to make him a "man of peace" so that he might fulfill the promise that the Son of David would be a man of peace. But 2 Sam. 12:25 is clear that God named him not Solomon but Jedidiah: "The LORD loved the boy and commanded the prophet Nathan to name the boy Jedidiah, because the LORD loved him" (GNB, CEV; ISV "she [Bathsheba] bore a son whom he [David] named Solomon. The LORD loved him, and sent a message written by Nathan the prophet to call his name Jedidiah"). David named the child Solomon because he so itched for the promise to him to be fulfilled in his lifetime. God corrected him on this point, rather seeking to redirect David's attention to His love and grace to that child. But David had fed and nursed his own narrative and now he claims that God had commanded him to name the child Solomon- when in fact the opposite was the case. He named him Solomon and immediately afterwards he gets a message from Nathan to name the child not Solomon but Jedidiah- a name David never once used for the child. There was not peace in Solomon's reign- as the Kings record makes clear, there was much unrest from within and without his kingdom (1 Kings 11:14,23,26). And if indeed David is correct and Solomon was God's named fulfillment of the Messianic "man of peace"... how ever can it be explained that Solomon went so badly wrong and was not at all the Messiah figure? Solomon was really set up for spiritual failure by David. For he assumes that he is the Christ, the Messiah, "the anointed one" (O Lord God, do not reject Your anointed one", 2 Chron. 6:42).

David claimed about Solomon: "Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies". But these words are alluded to and applied to the Lord Jesus: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall

be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom" (Is. 9:6,7). Clearly God's view is that David was simply wrong to insist upon Solomon as the candidate for His begotten Son, according to His promise to David. The Son was to be the Lord Jesus; He was to be the man / prince of peace, the Son born and given. And David was intended to figure this out. But his obsession with his own narrative led him to depart from the things of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom.

I wonder whether God did in fact say :8,9, or whether they are David's assumptions of what he thought God had said. We are told in Is.66:1 that it is not possible to build God a house; and we have seen above that the house God wants is a household of believers, built by Himself through Christ. So we have to conclude that David was deeply puzzled as to why he couldn't build God a house, and he concluded that it must be because he had shed so much blood; and therefore he eventually came to the conclusion that God had actually said this to him. It is quite likely that David was paranoid about being guilty of the blood of Saul's house (2 Sam. 3:28,29; 4:11,12; 1:16 cp. 16:8); see how aware of this he felt in 1 Sam. 22:22; 24:5; 26:9. This would not be the first time Yahweh's servants have done this kind of thing- speculating upon what they wish God had said, until they come to the conclusion that this is actually what He wants. Nathan initially told David to build the temple, sure that this was what God would say- but not so. The sad thing is that Solomon took this as Scripture. David's immediate response to the promises to him says nothing about Solomon building the temple; rather does David praise God for His plan of salvation in Christ. One wonders how accurate was David's account of the promises in 1 Chron. 22:9: "A son shall be born to thee... I will give him rest from all his enemies [without mentioning any conditions]... his name shall be Solomon". Due to his apostacy, Solomon did *not* have rest from his enemies (1 Kings 5:4). Note that the fact the record is undoubtedly inspired does not mean that all inspired words are factually accurate- the speeches of Job's friends are recorded under inspiration, as are the claims of Sennacherib, but what they say is criticized within Scripture as being inaccurate.

1Ch 22:10 He shall build a house for My name; and he shall be My son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever'-
This again is a misrepresentation of what God said. He said that David need not build any physical temple, but He would build for David a house, and this would be achieved through a special Messianic descendant of David. But the record in 2 Sam. 7 was clear that the achievement of this was to be conditional upon the obedience of that special Davidic seed. The essential contradiction with the letter and spirit of the actual promises is such that I conclude that here we have David stating his assumptions as God's word. This is a basic human failure we see going on all the time.

"I will establish the throne of *his* kingdom" contrasts with what God said in 1 Chron. 17:14: "I will settle him in My house and in *My* kingdom forever". David is no longer focused upon the kingdom of God, because his narrative has conflated it with Solomon's kingdom.

1Ch 22:11 Now, my son, may Yahweh be with you and prosper you, and build the house of Yahweh your God, as He has spoken concerning you-
David liked to imagine that Solomon would "prosper" because he built the temple (1 Chron. 22:11); but such prosperity was conditional. The exiles wanted the "prosperity" of the Kingdom immediately (s.w. Ps. 118:25); but this prosperity was conditional upon their obedience to the covenant (s.w. Josh. 1:8); they would never "prosper" whilst disobeying it (s.w. Dt. 28:29), nor could they "prosper" to enter the land as intended whilst faithless (Num. 14:41 s.w.). The faithful minority amongst the exiles believed God would prosper them in rebuilding Solomon's temple (Neh. 2:20), and He was indeed eager to do so (Is. 55:11); but this was not to be, because the majority were faithless. This prosperity was to finally only be through the work of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:10), seeing Solomon and the later potential 'servant' figures of the restoration all failed (Is. 48:15).

1Ch 22:12 May Yahweh give you discretion and understanding, and put you in charge of Israel; that so you may keep the law of Yahweh your God-
The conditionality of the promises is rather skirted around here. David thinks that his prayer can result in God giving Solomon the wisdom required to be obedient to His law. Solomon's personal volition in that obedience doesn't seem to figure. And therefore God had to specifically appear to Solomon and warn him about this. He went wrong exactly because he assumed that as David's chosen son, he could not go morally wrong.

1Ch 22:13 Then you will prosper, if you observe to do the statutes and the ordinances which Yahweh gave Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid, neither be dismayed-
Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve nor observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his*

wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20). Being "afraid and dismayed" is the term used of how Israel generally were terrified of Goliath, whereas David by faith wasn't (1 Sam. 17:11). David in turn uses it to his son Solomon (1 Chron. 22:13; 28:20). He was thereby urging Solomon not to worry if he was out of step with all Israel; if they were dismayed and terrified, he was still to walk in faith as David had done at the time of the Goliath crisis. It is also used to urge the people toward the spirit of David rather than that of Israel in 2 Chron. 20:15,17. The same phrase is also used in urging the people of Judah in Hezekiah's time to consider the Assyrians to be as a Goliath which they like David could vanquish (2 Chron. 32:7). The exiles likewise were urged not to be dismayed and terrified at the reproach of men (Is. 51:7; Jer. 30:10), very clearly making the history with Goliath relevant to their times.

David's speech is filled with allusion to the need to keep the law of Moses (Dt. 7:11; 11:32); and the exhortation to be strong and of good courage alludes to God telling His people likewise in exhorting them to be faithful to the covenant (Dt. 31:6; Josh. 1:7,9). Again we see the wrong expansion of the envelope in David's thought- he came to see his own narrative as being that of God, and obedience to it was obedience to God's law. He hijacks Bible verses and pressgangs them into the service of his own narrative. Just as people do all the time.

1Ch 22:14 Now, behold, I have made a great effort in preparing for the house of Yahweh one hundred thousand talents of gold, one million talents of silver, and brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance. I have also prepared timber and stone; and you may add to them-

"Made a great effort" is RVmg. "in my low estate". David makes a juxtaposition between his own lowness, and the super abundance of wealth he has given for the temple. He makes an appropriate distinction between his wealth and himself personally. However the figures seem so exaggerated and not literal. The more wealthy Solomon only received 666 talents of gold / year (1 Kings 10:14), so 100,000 talents of gold is an unrealistic figure. Although if Chronicles was rewritten in exile, the talents may refer to Persian talents, which were far less than Hebrew talents. Again we get the impression David was obsessed with numbers and exaggerated them; as it seems he did later with the numbers of Levites, comparing his claimed numbers with those recorded in the book of Numbers. He reduced the age for counting them to 20 (1 Chron. 23:24) and possibly expanded the definition of a Levite. And it could be argued that the system David established effectively made all Levites able to serve as priests, whereas this was not at all the teaching of the Mosaic law; see on 1 Chron. 23:31.

1Ch 22:15 There are also workmen with you in abundance, cutters and workers of stone and timber, and all kinds of men who are skilful in every kind of work-
Solomon however didn't begin the work until after David's death. David had prepared the workmen at this stage but it seems they were not used, and so when Solomon began the work, he had to seek such workmen again (2 Chron. 2:7).

1Ch 22:16 of the gold, silver, brass and iron, there is no number. Arise and be doing, and may Yahweh be with you-
David makes no reference to how these things were to happen when he slept with his fathers (2 Sam. 7:12). Rather does he tell Solomon to get on and begin the building work immediately, now he had the commission. "Arise and be doing" is quoted in Ezra 10:4 about the work of the restoration of the temple.

1Ch 22:17 David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying-
This again sounds like David was asking them to give Solomon their immediate and instant support. David makes no reference to how these things were to happen when he slept with his fathers (2 Sam. 7:12).

1Ch 22:18 Isn't Yahweh your God with you? Hasn't He given you rest on every side? For He has delivered the inhabitants of the land into my hand; and the land is subdued before Yahweh and before His people-
David "subdued" the nations, using the word often used of the command to subdue the nations of Canaan (Num. 32:22,29; Josh. 18:1). He is presented as a second Joshua, subduing the land as it ought to have been subdued, and therefore becoming what Adam ought to have been in Eden (Gen. 1:28 s.w.). This is another indication that the garden of Eden was effectively the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham.

However, David's presentation of himself and his kingdom being at peace is hardly accurate. He suffered rebellions, revolution, putsch and betrayal right to his death bed, where with his last breath he has to try to put down Adonijah's power grab, and he just about lived to see lifelong supporters like Joab turn against him politically in his closing days. He has in his mind the idea that peace is required for the temple to be built, and so he assumes that situation has now come. Such was his obsession and desire to see things coming true.

1Ch 22:19 Now set your heart and your soul to seek after Yahweh your God. Arise therefore, and build the sanctuary of Yahweh God, to bring the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of

Yahweh-
Indeed it is the state of the human heart which is critical. But David wrongly sees the natural outcome of a heart focused upon Yahweh as wanting to build the temple. Although God had forbidden it. God had clearly stated that the ark was where He wanted it- in a tent, behind curtains. And He did not want a brick house around it. And yet David urges people to enable the very opposite- to build a sanctuary in terms of a physical building, and to place the ark within it. The whole land was seen by God as a sanctuary / holy place s.w. Ex. 15:17). "Let them make Me a sanctuary" (Ex. 25:8) uses a very general word for making / doing, whereas David is trying to localize and define the sanctuary / holy place and is implying God had no such holy place- until it had been built according to his plans. The Kohathites are described as carrying "the sanctuary" (s.w., Num. 10:21); it was the ark which was the essential sanctuary or holy place. But David speaks about the building he proposed around that ark as being the sanctuary. And so form had replaced content, the external the internal, as so often happens when the pole of religion overtakes that of spirituality.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 23

1Ch 23:1 Now David was old and full of days; and he made Solomon his son king over Israel-
The very language used of the death of the patriarchs, as if to show that David was directly their seed, and also in spirit. "Full of days" rather than full of years could mean that his days had been filled with significance, rather than living the same day over and over year after year. The term is clearly not the same as just meaning "old".

1Ch 23:2 He gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites-
We now have four chapters describing the Levites, the 24 orders of priests and singers, and the divisions of the gatekeepers / porters. David's idea was that the Levites were to be divided up to do tasks and hold offices according to the various families which are listed in these chapters. They are effectively genealogies, and the idea was that the descendants of those families were to have specific roles. This was a level of division of labour which was not found in the law of Moses.

1Ch 23:3 The Levites were numbered from thirty years old and over: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty-eight thousand-
Joab had refused to do this earlier, although he was specifically counting the Levite soldiers, whereas this was a general census of Levites available for religious service (1 Chron. 21:3-6). David numbered the Levites from 30 years old (1 Chron. 23:3), in

accordance with the law which said Levites were to serve between the ages of 30 and 50 (Num. 4:3,23,35,39). But in 1 Chron. 23:24 we are told that David numbered the Levites from 20 years old. We note in Num. 8:23 that there appeared some flexibility within the Mosaic law; the Levites could be numbered from 25 years old. This is one of many examples of how the Mosaic law was not set in stone. It was principle and spirit rather than letter of the law, and within it there are examples of where one law overrode another, or one principle overrode letter of the law. The law was not designed as a simple test of obedience, for it was far more detailed than that. It was designed to inculcate a spirit of living which looked forward to the spirit of the Lord Jesus. And so David felt free to number the Levites from 20 years old, even though we also read that he numbered 'the Levites from 30 years old', suggesting that this was a technical term rather than a literal description. This would go toward explaining why 38,000 Levites were numbered by David in 1 Chron. 23:3, although "thousand" may mean a division rather than a literal 1000. At the time of Num. 4:47,48 there were only 8,580. And Levite males from a month old were 22,000 in Num. 3:39 and 23,000 at the time of Num. 26:62. This suggests a great increase in the number of Levites by David's time; or perhaps he more generously counted who was a Levite, because he wanted to have as many as possible involved in his grandiose plans for the temple services. There was no need for such large numbers of Levites in order to serve God effectively, for there were far fewer Levites at the time of the figures given in the book of Numbers, and the sanctuary and Divine service still continued.

The fact David initially counted the Levites from 30 and then later reduced the age to 20 (1 Chron. 23:24) suggests that progressively, he was obsessed with numbers, wanting to have as many as possible serving his narrative about the temple.

1Ch 23:4 David said, Of these, twenty-four thousand are to oversee the work of the house of Yahweh; six thousand are to be officers and judges-
"Thousand" can not be a literal 1000 but rather a division. These 24 divisions may connect with the 24 orders of singers in 1 Chron. 25. Solomon taught that if the ants can be so zealous, well why can't the ecclesia of God be zealous [for it was 'believers' that he was teaching]. The ants scurry around, working as if there is no tomorrow, to build up something so precarious that is in any case so tragically short lived. Can't we be yet more zealous, with a like loving co-operation, building the eternal things that we are (Prov. 6:6,7)? And Solomon pressed the point further, in that ants are self-motivated; they need no "guide, overseer or ruler". This was surely a reference to the complex system of overseers which Solomon had to place over Israel in order to build the temple and build up the Kingdom. The same Hebrew word for "overseer" is found in 1 Chron. 23:4; 26:29. Yet ideally, he seems to be saying, every Israelite ought to be a zealous worker. Prov. 12:24 says the same: "The hand of the diligent [*whoever* he / she is] shall bear rule [in practice]" [s.w. Prov. 6:7 "ruler"]. And we must ask ourselves, whether for

whatever reason the new Israel hasn't slumped into the same problem, of lack of self-motivation, waiting to be asked to do something before we do it, over-relying upon our "overseers". The ants aren't like this. They see the job to be done, and naturally get on with it.

1Ch 23:5 four thousand are to be doorkeepers; and four thousand are to praise Yahweh with the instruments which I made for giving praise-
"Thousand" here may not be literally 1000, but may be a technical term for a division of people, similar to the "divisions" of :6. The "doorkeepers" were literally, the openers or dividers of the gates. The word is also translated "porters". To have so many suggests David envisaged his future temple as having many gates which were to be guarded. The instruments "made" can simply mean 'appointed', although note Am. 6:5, which implies David did indeed make the instruments. It all seems however rather narcissistic, the fantasy of an old man, all about himself and how he dreamed of things becoming in this temple complex.

The temple building was not that large. 4000 doorkeepers is another example of grandiose dreaming, reflecting how David's self narrative for the temple had spun out of control.

1Ch 23:6 David divided them into divisions according to the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari-
I suggested on 1 Chron. 22 that David arranged for everything to be ready for the temple to be built even during his lifetime, and urged Solomon and the princes of Israel to get on with it immediately, whilst he was still alive. Solomon however didn't begin the work until after David's death. David had prepared the workmen at this stage but it seems they were not used, and so when Solomon began the work, he had to seek such workmen again (1 Chron. 22:15 cp. 2 Chron. 2:7). And likewise it seems David had even prepared the Levites in great detail to actually start officiating in the new building. But it seems likely that all his careful plans regarding all the intended individuals weren't quite used by Solomon, or at least not for some time, by which time some of the individuals may have died. Solomon obeyed the general pattern, however (2 Chron. 8:14; 29:25).

1Ch 23:7 Of the Gershonites: Ladan and Shimei-
The idea was that those in David's time who were from these branches of the Gershonites were to serve in the new temple complex he had planned.

1Ch 23:8 The sons of Ladan: Jehiel the chief, Zetham and Joel, three-

Zethan and Joel were grandsons (1 Chron. 26:22), but "son of..." is a Hebrew phrase with very elastic meaning.

1Ch 23:9 The sons of Shimei: Shelomoth, Haziel and Haran, three. These were the heads of the fathers' households of Ladan-
As this Shimei was from Ladan, he is not the Shimei of :7 but some other descendant of Ladan. The Shimei of :10 is that of :7.

1Ch 23:10 The sons of Shimei: Jahath, Zina, Jeush and Beriah. These four were the sons of Shimei-
This is the Shimei of :7, not the one of :9.

1Ch 23:11 Jahath was the chief, and Zizah the second: but Jeush and Beriah didn't have many sons; therefore they combined to become a father's house-
Heb. 'in one reckoning' or 'office' (:18). The descendants of these branches of the family were to have the same 'office' in David's planned temple. This could imply that all the other 'father's houses' also had a specific 'office' planned for them by David. He certainly made very detailed plans, to the point of obsession.

1Ch 23:12 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, four-
"Gershon" can mean 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn [he is mentioned first as if he was the firstborn]. This is a theme of the Genesis record. But perhaps because of these weaknesses, the line to the high priest ran through Kohath.

1Ch 23:13 The sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses; and Aaron was sanctified, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons, forever, to burn incense before Yahweh, to minister to Him, and to bless in His name, forever-
This is alluded to by the Lord in Jn. 17:17: "Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth". The reference is to how the Levites were sanctified. The Levites were initially consecrated in God's eyes by their zeal to rid Israel of apostacy; this is what constituted them Yahweh's "holy (sanctified) one" (Dt. 33:8,9). They sanctified themselves to God, and He sanctified them. Through His allusions to this, the Lord was telling the disciples not to be frightened to stand alone from the Israelite community they knew; for it was deeply apostate. So often, the Lord is speaking of the development of a new Israel, with new Rabbis and Levites taken from the ranks of very ordinary and dysfunctional people who had believed in Him.

1Ch 23:14 But as for Moses the man of God, his sons were named among the tribe of Levi-
The sense is that the sons of Moses were not priests, but Levites, general servants of the priests. This was purposeful, because Moses was also descended from Amram and Kohath. His sons could have been priests, but God specifically didn't want any cult of pride or personality developing around the descendants of Moses, who was Israel's greatest leader. Perhaps the legendary meekness of Moses led he himself to insist upon this. He thereby showed his appreciation of servant leadership.

1Ch 23:15 The sons of Moses: Gershom and Eliezer-
In reading the genealogies we must be aware that people often had more than one name. They were given a birth name, reflecting their parents' hopes or situation at the time of the birth; and then later acquired a name which reflected their character and life experience. Some retained their birth name; "Gershom" was named by Moses in reflection of how he had been a stranger in a strange land. And his son apparently retained that name, as it would have also fitted his own life experience.

1Ch 23:16 The sons of Gershom: Shebuel the chief-
"Shebuel", 'returned of God', would be an appropriate name for a child born in the wilderness who entered Canaan.

1Ch 23:17 The sons of Eliezer were: Rehabiah the chief. Eliezer had no other sons; but the sons of Rehabiah were very many-
We note from 1 Chron. 23:15-17 that there were descendants of Moses through Gershom and Eliezer in Israel at David's time, who could demonstrate their pedigree. They were given designated roles of service within David's plans for the new temple system; which is why they are mentioned in 1 Chron. 23. So we can deduce from this that they did not remain in Midian but identified themselves with Israel. It seems that the marriage of Moses and Zipporah broke up, and she returned to her father in Midian with the two boys. But Jethro brought them all back to Moses (Ex. 18:2-4). He advises Moses not to work so hard and to delegate more- perhaps in order to have more time for his wife and family. Moses agrees, and then Jethro returns home alone (Ex. 18:27), the implication being that Zipporah and the boys now remained with Moses.

1Ch 23:18 The sons of Izhar: Shelomith the chief-
Six family groups emerged from Amram but only one from Izhar. This could have been because of lack of commitment to their priestly calling; or quite simply the genealogical records were lacking.

1Ch 23:19 The sons of Hebron: Jeriah the chief, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth-
These would have all been born in Egypt, and it is noteworthy that they all retain the Yahweh Name somewhere in their names. For it seems Israel generally turned away tot he gods of Egypt at that time, taking the gods of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20).

1Ch 23:20 The sons of Uzziel: Micah the chief, and Isshiah the second-
Micah, 'who is like Yah?', was an appropriate name for a child born in a faithful family whilst Israel was in Egypt, surrounded by false gods which they largely accepted.

1Ch 23:21 The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Mahli: Eleazar and Kish-
"Mahli" and "Mushi" mean 'sickly' and 'sensitive' respectively. This confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 23:22 Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters only; and their brothers the sons of Kish took them as wives-
The levirate law of Num. 36:5-12 was that a man should marry his relative's widow to raise up children to keep the inheritance through in dead man's name. But the Levites had no inheritance. So they were obeying the spirit rather than the letter of the law. To take extra wives and have extra children was a financial burden, so they did this in obedience to the spirit of the law and respect for Eleazar. And that is recorded and remembered in the record to this day. See on :23 for another example.

1Ch 23:23 The sons of Mushi: Mahli, and Eder, and Jeremoth, three-
Mushi has a son who has the same name as his brother, Mahli (:21); which meant 'sickly', so perhaps he died, and he raised up a son in his brother's name, seeing that Mahli's young son Eleazar died childless (1 Chron. 24:28). This may be as in the spirit of :22 (see note there).

1Ch 23:24 These were the sons of Levi after their fathers' houses, even the heads of the fathers' houses of those who were counted individually, in the number of names by their polls, who did the work for the service of the house of Yahweh, from twenty years old and over-
For the difference with :3 where they were apparently numbered from 30 years old, see

on :3. David was trying to increase the numbers of Levites, failing utterly to learn the lesson about not numbering Israel and not trusting in numbers. He now reduces the age Levites can serve, from 30 to 20. And the upper limit of 50 is apparently just ignored by David now. He dies obsessed with numbers and human strength, unilaterally deciding to change and ignore God's laws.

1Ch 23:25 For David said, Yahweh, the God of Israel, has given rest to His people; and He dwells in Jerusalem forever-
David had in his mind that he couldn't build the temple because he had been a man of war. But he wanted Solomon to build the temple, in his name, to get around God's prohibition of David building it. But this was all in David's mind. God's reasons for not wanting a temple were nothing to do with David's personal history. And so in line with this twisted thinking, David wishes to present Israel as being at rest. Even though the nation was in turmoil and David faced a putsch from his son Adonijah even on his deathbed. He also overlooks the conditional nature of God's promise to dwell "forever" in Jerusalem; as well as the fact God had said that instead of dwelling in a physical place, He would dwell in the hearts of His people, David's "house".

1Ch 23:26 Also the Levites will no longer need to carry the tabernacle and all its vessels for its service-
David was enthralled with the idea that the tabernacle would now not be carried but would have a permanent place. But this was at variance with God's explanation to him of why He didn't want such a permanent place; He was a God on a journey, as He always had been, mobile and forging forward. But David's religious pole quite blinded him to the spiritual pole of perceiving the dynamic nature of God. And we see that tendency in all His people.

1Ch 23:27 For by the last words of David the sons of Levi were numbered, from twenty years old and over-
This could be a different numbering from that of :3, which counted them from 30 years old. But see note there. Perhaps David was desperate to show he had an ever larger number of Levites, whom he could use in his various plans [fantasies?] for the new temple system. Even though the sanctuary had operated quite fine with a fraction of the numbers he was now claiming.

David's last words were in fact of disobedience in that he ordered the Levites to be numbered for service from 20 years old, when the law stated from 30 years old. He died obsessed with the need for numbers, for human strength, refusing to learn the lesson from his earlier recent disastrous numbering of Israel. His repentance at that time wasn't maintained until his final death, just as his forgiveness of Shimei wasn't. Perhaps

this is the force of the note that these were his "last ordinances".

1Ch 23:28 Their ministry was to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of Yahweh, in the courts, and in the rooms, and in the purifying of all holy things, even the work of the service of God's house-

See on :31. "Their ministry was to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of Yahweh" is strictly "was to be at the side of the sons of Aaron", as if all Levites were being elevated to the level of priests, equal with them. The translators have generally shied away from this. The number of Levites David claims as available for service was out of proportion to the number of priests. The whole scale of the new temple system was quite beyond the more humble set up of the tabernacle, which God's law had established. The danger was that the priests were elevated to a high position, effectively having thousands of servants, which was beyond what the law of Moses envisaged. The priests were to teach the people, but there is little evidence this happened in Solomon's temple. The focus was all upon offering far more sacrifices and doing far more rituals than the law of Moses stipulated. And David should have remembered the lesson taught through his sin with Bathsheba and his wilderness years away from the sanctuary- that sacrifice and offering were not really what God was looking for, but rather contrite hearts (Ps. 40:6,7). And Solomon therefore totally failed to understand this.

1Ch 23:29 for the showbread also, and for the fine flour for a meal offering, whether of unleavened wafers, or of that which is baked in the pan, or of that which is soaked, and for all kinds of measure and size-

These things were all required under the law of Moses, but David envisaged setting up thousands of Levites and priests to offer them in the temple- rather than being out in the provinces, teaching the people. He clearly thought God would be better served by offering the required offerings but on a far grander scale- rather than teaching simple village folks about God's ways. We sense that David rather lost his spirituality at the end of his life, although he still died in faith.

1Ch 23:30 And to stand every morning to thank and praise Yahweh, and likewise in the evening-

These regular offerings would have been made by just a fraction of the number of Levites and priests which David now had in mind. So he presumably wanted to bring in all this extra labour to the temple because he imagined huge numbers of offerings being made, far beyond those required by the law.

1Ch 23:31 and to offer all burnt offerings to Yahweh, on the Sabbaths, on the new moons, and on the set feasts, in number according to the ordinance concerning them,

continually before Yahweh-
"In number..." is misleading, because I have suggested above that the greater number of Levites and priests brought in to the temple was because David envisaged offering far greater numbers of sacrifices than stipulated. And Solomon began the temple dedication with huge numbers of offerings. The sense is rather as GNB "Rules were made specifying the number of Levites assigned to do this work each time".

"To offer all burnt offerings" raises the possibility that the Levites were now being allowed by David to act as priests. His own self created narrative of a huge temple system led him to reduce the service age of the Levites to 20 from 30 (1 Chron. 23:24). And now he reduces the qualification for priestly service- he allows any Levite to do priestly work. Whereas under the law of Moses, all priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests. "Their ministry was to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of Yahweh"(:28) is strictly "was to be at the side of the sons of Aaron", as if all Levites were being elevated to the level of priests, equal with them. The translators have generally shied away from this.

In :32, the Levites generally are told to "keep watch on the sanctuary", but this was specifically for the Kohathite priests to do (Num. 18:5). But David is now declaring, unilaterally and without any Divine word, that any Levite can do this. His splitting up of the temple duties, described in detail in Chronicles, do not specify which duties should be done by the Kohathites, Merarites and Gershonites. He overlooks that entirely. David had been taught in the incident of Uzzah that Divine commandment about who did priestly service was to be taken seriously. And he apparently repented and did things properly at the time. But now he throws all that Divine teaching to the winds... he who boasted of how he loved God's law and studied it all the day and hated his disobediences to it. This is what happens when narratives become so dominant in religious people. We think of William Golding's novel *The Spire*, where the bishop becomes obsessed with building a huge spire, subconsciously understanding it as a phallic symbol. The same is happening here with David.

It is clear from the usage of Persian terms like "Darics" that Chronicles was written or rewritten during the captivity to encourage the exiles to return and accept a Davidic Messiah, and reestablish his kingdom and temple. But the commands and laws in Ez. 40-48 about the temple are in many points at variance with the system of worship set up by David and described in such detail in Chronicles. Surely that is an implied criticism of David's system.

1Ch 23:32 and that they should keep the duty of the Tent of Meeting, and the duty of the holy place, and the duty of the sons of Aaron their brothers, for the service of the house of Yahweh-
See on :31. The allusion is to the commands about the Levites assisting the priests in

Num. 18:2-7. But those commands repeatedly state that they were to assist in "the service of the tent" (LXX), or tabernacle. But David purposefully replaces "tent" with "house". And that is exactly out of step with God's reasons for not wanting a temple. He wanted a tent, and not a house. David was really obsessed with his own vision, rather than faith in the grace offered to him in the promise to build him a house of redeemed people.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 24

1Ch 24:1 These were the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron: Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar-
This continues the major Biblical theme, that the firstborn is often not used by God and is replaced. This is His style, to exalt the under dogs.

1 Chron. 24:4 describes David carefully dividing up the priests according to their numbers, how many to each course etc. Again the impression is of a man obsessed with numbers. Or again in 1 Chron. 25:1 "The number of them that did the work was...", and the number of Heman's sons is noted as being 14 in 1 Chron. 25:5 and the whole of 1 Chron. 25 carefully records exact numbers... "The number of them was 288" (1 Chron. 25:7) etc. The exact numbers were clearly important to David as he was counting carefully.

The Levites who were numbered are called "valiant men" (1 Chron. 26:8), the same term used of how David had wrongly numbered the valiant men of Israel in 2 Sam. 24. He is repeating the same mistake which at the time he had repented of. 1 Chron. 27:1-15 lists the leaders of the military divisions David established, with 24000 different men serving every month. Clearly this was yet another attempt to in essence number Israel militarily. David in 1 Chron. 27:23 claims to have learnt from the mistake Joab made when numbering all Israel... But the error was clearly David's and Joab tried to stop him. David is rewriting even a recent narrative to exonerate himself, when at the time he took some responsibility, arguing with God that the sheep were innocent and only he was guilty. Then in 1 Chron. 28:1 we read David had appointed captains over hundreds and over thousands. This was another way of numbering Israel. Not to the last man, as he had attempted to earlier, but good enough so as to have an accurate rough idea of his numbers. He was repeating the essence of his sin... David also appointed officers over his donkeys, his fields, olive trees etc. This was another way of taking an account of his total wealth. And he does it in the last year of his life, probably in the last months. He is totally obsessed with counting his human strength even when he is facing his own death. So many men have done the same, rather than focusing on the things of God's future Kingdom and His Son. Yet still David will be saved...

And yet in 1 Chron. 28:9 David rightly says that God searches or seeks for every human heart and he has much to say about the need foe the right heart in 1 Chron. 29. He had searched and found David's heart. In the midst of all David's unspiritual numbering, he still had a heart for God. And that was what saved him. Yet right after saying that he tells Solomon to "be strong" and build the temple, wrongly speaking of spiritual strength as doing something which God had not commanded and was opposite to His stated plan. This is a classic example of religious men urging that fulfilling their wrong narrative is in fact spiritual strength. "Strong in the truth" is a phrase that has so often been

mispurposed. 1 Chron. 28:12 says David claimed the Spirit had given him a plan to build treasuries for the wealth of the temple. But God despises human wealth... The David who had once been a poor man who despised wealth ends his days demanding that all the gold and silver temple vessels be weighed, even the weight of the lamps separate from the candlesticks (1 Chron. 28:15 etc.). There is no such commandment in the law of Moses. He again is obsessed with numbers and miserably failed to learn the lesson of not numbering Israel. And all this was done by him in his last few months of life, as bizarre as the wealthy man dying in a hospice who is obsessed with counting up his wealth...

1Ch 24:2 But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children; therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office-
Despite having gone up Sinai and witnessing the theophany of Ex. 24:9, their desire to 'play God' for personal power had been stronger than their awe at God's presence and majesty. Visible acts of God are often desired by His servants, but they do not of themselves inculcate spirituality. The language here clearly alludes to Num. 3:4: "Nadab and Abihu died before Yahweh... and they had no children". But "Before Yahweh" is replaced with "before their father". Aaron was the manifestation of Yahweh and is thus spoken of as Him, just as the Lord Jesus can be spoken of likewise. The other references to their death repeatedly speak of it as being 'before Yahweh'. Why does Chronicles alone imply that Aaron was present with them when they made the offering? Perhaps it is to highlight the weakness of Aaron and indeed of the whole priesthood; for these genealogies were likely prepared whilst Judah were in captivity and the priesthood no longer functioned because of their sins.

"And had no children" may not be intended literally. The genealogy is speaking of the Levites who did Divine service, and the idea is that their children did not serve God. And so we see His perspective on family life over the generations of history- if our children don't enter into His service, it's as if we had no children.

1Ch 24:3 David with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to their ordering in their service-
"According to their duties" (GNB). We are the new priesthood; each of us have specific duties or ministries intended for us. Man is never better than when he perceives his calling before God, and does it. Pray earnestly that you will realize what were the good works before ordained for you to do (Eph. 2:10).

1Ch 24:4 There were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar. They were divided like this: of the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen, heads of fathers' houses; and of the sons of Ithamar, according to their fathers' houses, eight-

We must remember that we are reading here of how David wished to divide up the descendants of these family groups, so that they could perform certain duties in the new temple system he was planning. "There were... found" would therefore refer to how at his time, there were found more of Eleazar than Ithamar. Perhaps not all were willing to participate in his grandiose plans, or maybe simply the genealogical records had been lost for some.

1Ch 24:5 Thus were they divided impartially by drawing lots; for there were princes of the sanctuary, and princes of God, both of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar-
This may be one of several places in the Old Testament where the lines of Judah and Levi overlapped, so that these men were in fact king-priests. This is what we are designated in Rev. 5:10. The Lord Jesus, although directly in the line of Judah, was likewise a king-priest. These historical points of overlap between the two tribes were surely to psychologically prepare the people for the coming of their king-priest Messiah. Our sensitive Father likewise seeks to prepare the way for us to accept things.

1Ch 24:6 Shemaiah the son of Nethanel the scribe, who was of the Levites, wrote them in the presence of the king, and the princes, and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and the heads of the fathers' households of the priests and of the Levites; one father's house being taken for Eleazar, and one taken for Ithamar-
"The king" is David. He took this division of the Levites very seriously, because his planned grandiose temple system required a huge amount of labour. "The alternate drawing here described could have lasted only for the first sixteen lots; in the last eight drawings the descendants of Eleazar must have drawn against each other only".

1Ch 24:7 Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah-
According to Ezra 2:37, only four courses of priests returned from exile, when there were supposed to be 24 of them, namely Pashhur, Jedaiah, Immer, and Hardin (1 Chron. 24:7, 8,14). The priesthood had been deeply corrupt at the time of the exile, and it seems most of them preferred to remain in Babylon.

Joiarib was drawn to serve first in 1 Chron. 24:7, but presumably the lots came out differently when they were drawn at the restoration, and in Neh. 12:6 he was drawn 17th out of 22 orders.

1Ch 24:8 the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim-
The planned temple system required much labour, it was a glorification of works rather than faith, and so the Levites had to come and serve there for a certain amount of time each year. And the various jobs to be done likewise had to be split up. So there was a system of lots to arrange these things.

1Ch 24:9 the fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin-
"Malchijah", 'Yah is king', was the name of 10 separate Israelites. It reflected an awareness amongst the faithful that the human system of kingship was not at all what God really wanted, and Yahweh was Israel's true king. As the generations went by, it would have been hard to retain this awareness; although it was revived by the removal of the royal line of kings at the exile.

1Ch 24:10 the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah-
From whence came Zacharias, father of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:5). If the temple records of the genealogies drawn up by David (:6) were destroyed when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, then what we are reading here in Chronicles may have been an inspired replacement for them, and it was clearly in usage in the time of Jesus.

1Ch 24:11 the ninth to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah-
In Neh. 10:4; 12:14 “Shebaniah”. It is easy in written Hebrew to confuse B and C, so we have here an example of where there may have been slight copying errors in the Divinely inspired text.

1Ch 24:12 the eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim-
'God will restore' and 'God will raise up', names appropriate to the restoration.

1Ch 24:13 the thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab-
These names are completely secular in meaning, and are a tacit reflection of the fact that the priesthood and Levitical service was largely seen as a merely secular job for much of Israel's history. The nation's apostacy can largely be blamed upon the spiritual failure of the priesthood in practice.

1Ch 24:14 the fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer-
The descendants of Bilgah were some of the few faithful priests who returned at the time of Neh. 10:8; 12:5.

1Ch 24:15 the seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Happizzez-
AV "Aphses", an Egyptian name, hinting (as noted on :13) at the corruption of the priesthood.

1Ch 24:16 the nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezkel-

Or "Ezekiel". Perhaps these names of the orders were later changed when David's list was rewritten at the time of the restoration, to reflect faithful characters like Ezekiel.

1Ch 24:17 the twenty-first to Jachin, the twenty-second to Gamul-
"Gamul" means 'weaned' (s.w. Gen. 21:8). This was the name given at birth, and in this case it stuck. It confirms the suggestion I have often made, that sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 24:18 the twenty-third to Delaiah, the twenty-fourth to Maaziah-
'Yah has delivered' and 'Yah has rescued / saved', names appropriate to the restoration.

1Ch 24:19 This was their ordering in their service, to come into the house of Yahweh according to the ordinance given to them by Aaron their father, as Yahweh, the God of Israel, had commanded him-
It is not defined here for how long each order of priests served. 2 Kings 11:9 speaks of the priests 'coming in' and going out on the Sabbath, as if they served for a week at a time; Josephus supports this *(Antiquities* 7.14.7). Yet if there were 24 lots, perhaps they served for just over 2 weeks each. But the lots may also have been drawn with respect to what work they did, not only what time of the year they came to the temple to work.

1Ch 24:20 Of the rest of the sons of Levi: of the sons of Amram, Shubael; of the sons of Shubael, Jehdeiah-
Having listed the priests, we now read of the other Levites who were to support them in their work, although not themselves being priests. In 1 Chron. 25 we have listed the musicians, in 1 Chron. 26:1-19 the doorkeepers, and in 1 Chron. 26:20-32 the scribes and guards of the treasures.

1Ch 24:21 Of Rehabiah: of the sons of Rehabiah, Isshiah the chief-
"Isshiah", 'lent to Yah', was perhaps named after the influence of Hannah (who was not a Levite), who considered her giving of Samuel to the Levitical ministry as a lending of him to Yahweh (1 Sam. 1:28).

1Ch 24:22 Of the Izharites, Shelomoth; of the sons of Shelomoth, Jahath-
The four families arising from Kohath are listed in order, Amram (:20), Izhar (:22), Hebron (:23) and Uzziel (:24).

1Ch 24:23 The sons of Hebron: Jeriah, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third,

Jekameam the fourth-
I discussed on :13,15 how and why some of the names in this list are completely secular. But these all have the name of God in them.

1Ch 24:24 The sons of Uzziel, Micah; of the sons of Micah, Shamir-
Micah, 'who is like Yah?', was an appropriate name for a child born in a faithful family whilst Israel was in Egypt, surrounded by false gods which they largely accepted.

1Ch 24:25 The brother of Micah, Isshiah; of the sons of Isshiah, Zechariah-
"Isshiah", 'lent to Yah', was perhaps named after the influence of Hannah (who was not a Levite), who considered her giving of Samuel to the Levitical ministry as a lending of him to Yahweh (1 Sam. 1:28).

1Ch 24:26 The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Jaaziah: Beno-
"Mahli" and "Mushi" mean 'sickly' and 'sensitive' respectively. This confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 24:27 The sons of Merari: of Jaaziah, Beno, and Shoham, and Zaccur, and Ibri-
*"*Merari" means "bitter"; from these rather unpromising beginnings were to arise those who gave their lives to the service of God and His people. And we see similar transformation in the lives of so many.

1Ch 24:28 Of Mahli: Eleazar, who had no sons-
1 Chron. 23:23 says that Mushi, brother of Mahli, had a son who has the same name as his brother, Mahli (1 Chron. 23:21); which meant 'sickly', so perhaps he died, and he raised up a son in his brother's name, seeing that Mahli's young son Eleazar died childless (1 Chron. 24:28). This may be as in the spirit of 1 Chron. 23:22 (see note there). We marvel at how the huge amount of data given in these lists contains no contradictions; which would only be possible in a Divinely inspired account.

1Ch 24:29 Of Kish; the sons of Kish: Jerahmeel-
"Jerahmeel" means "God will be compassionate", and that was how Jerahmeel was, reflecting God's compassion in hi own compassion. For we read in 1 Chron. 23:22 that "Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters only; and their brothers the sons of Kish took them as wives". The levirate law of Num. 36:5-12 was that a man should marry his relative's widow to raise up children to keep the inheritance through in dead man's

name. But the Levites had no inheritance. So they were obeying the spirit rather than the letter of the law. To take extra wives and have extra children was a financial burden, so they did this in obedience to the spirit of the law and respect for Eleazar. And that is recorded and remembered in the record to this day.

1Ch 24:30 The sons of Mushi: Mahli, and Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the sons of the Levites after their fathers' houses-
Mushi seems to have had a son called "Mahli", the name of his brother, because the 'sickly' Mahli had died; see on :28.

1Ch 24:31 These likewise cast lots even as their brothers the sons of Aaron in the presence of David the king, and Zadok, and Ahimelech, and the heads of the fathers' households of the priests and of the Levites; the fathers' households of the chief even as those of his younger brother-
These lists have repeat the list of Levitical family groups found in 1 Chron. 23:6-23, but omitting the Gershonites (1 Chron. 23:6-11). "Gershon" can mean 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn [he is mentioned first as if he was the firstborn]. This is a theme of the Genesis record. Perhaps because of these weaknesses, the line to the high priest ran through Kohath.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 25

1Ch 25:1 Moreover, David and the captains of the army set apart for the service certain of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments and cymbals. The number of those who did the work according to their service was-
See on 1 Chron. 24:1. According to Ezra 2:41, of the singers, only 128 of the children of Asaph returned. This was very poor response. We note that apparently the famous singing families of Heman and Jeduthin didn't return (1 Chron. 25:1). "Captains of the army" could be "captains of the host", referring to the chiefs of the various family groupings now listed, and not referring to military captains. See on :2.

1Ch 25:2 Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah and Asharelah, the sons of Asaph, under the hand of Asaph, who prophesied after the order of the king-
'Prophecy' refers to speaking forth God's word, not necessarily predicting the future. But it would seem great presumption on David's part to arrange 'prophets' who would speak God's word through the music they sung (:1). This would be after the pattern of 1 Sam. 10:5 and 2 Kings 3:15: "While the minstrel played, the hand of the Lord [i.e., the spirit of

prophecy] was upon him". Perhaps the idea was that they would only sing music which had been already given by Divine inspiration in the gift of prophecy. But now we read that they were to prophesy "after the order of" David. This could mean they would take it in order to prophesy according to the sequence or order which David had prepared. Or it could mean they would prophecy at David's order, suggesting he imagined he would still be alive when this new temple system had been built by Solomon, thus getting around God's order for him not to build it himself. Even if the "order" is the 'sequence', we are still left with an unpleasant tension between prophesy being from God's instigation and initiative; and David considering that it was to be done according to his 'order', either the sequence he commanded, or his direct command. His spirituality is getting edged out by his evident love of religion. Just as David ordered men to prophesy / speak forth God's word, so it seems he pretty well made up God's word in his own mind...

1Ch 25:3 Of Jeduthun; the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiah, Hashabiah and Mattithiah, six, under the hands of their father Jeduthun with the harp, who prophesied in giving thanks and praising Yahweh-
They were known for prophesying in their praise. As discussed on :2, this could mean that the Spirit came upon them, and the songs they sung were directly inspired by God. But as discussed on :2, it was therefore inappropriate to demand that they did so only at a specific place in the program David had created. That was effectively trying to constrain the Spirit of God.

1Ch 25:4 Of Heman; the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir and Mahazioth-
The meanings of these names forms an appropriate sentence: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, have mercy upon me; I have magnified and exalted Your help; I spake of it sitting in affliction; grant us still Your visions". This would have been so relevant to the situation at the restoration, and perhaps the Divinely inspired editor of that time arranged the list in this order.

1Ch 25:5 All these were the sons of Heman the king's prophet of the words of God, to lift up the horn. God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters-
This probably doesn't refer to the use of a literal horn in worship, but rather is it to be connected to the preceding reference to the gift of a large family to Heman. To life up the horn was a Hebraism for power and ability. Heman wanted to fulfill his calling, and God gave him a large and musically gifted family to enable him to do so.

1Ch 25:6 All these were under the hands of their father for the singing ministry in the

house of Yahweh, with cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, for the service of God's house: Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman being under the order of the king-
This could mean they would take it in order to prophesy according to the sequence or order which David had prepared. Or it could mean they would prophecy at David's order, suggesting he imagined he would still be alive when this new temple system had been built by Solomon, thus getting around God's order for him not to build it himself. Even if the "order" is the 'sequence', we are still left with an unpleasant tension between prophesy being from God's instigation and initiative; and David considering that it was to be done according to his 'order', either the sequence he commanded, or his direct command. His spirituality is getting edged out by his evident love of religion.

1Ch 25:7 The number of them, with their brothers who were instructed in singing to Yahweh, even all who were skilful, was two hundred and eighty-eight-
They were supposed to be prophets, receiving God's word and expressing that divine input in the words they sung under the influence of prophesy. But here we read that they were singing "to Yahweh". It is the same confusion as when David wants to build God a house, but God replies by saying that He will build David a house.

1Ch 25:8 They cast lots for their offices, all alike, as well the small as the great, the teacher as the scholar-
These Levites were to support the 24 orders of priests listed in chapter 24. They weren't to chose which order they wanted to support or serve together with- that decision was taken by lot. Otherwise, the cliquey spirit which characterizes so many of God's servants would have developed, and this is often the church's greatest disadvertisment.

The Hebrew could be "Lots for attendance", as if they were asked to come up from the provinces and serve at the temple at the times of year which the lot defined. But the lots could refer to the order in which they presented their music, which would require all to be present in Jerusalem all the time.

Notice the stress on the equality of the priests and the studied irrelevance of their personal wealth (1 Chron. 24:31; 25:8; 26:12). The Law was geared around the assumption that the priests would be so caught up in Yahweh's work that they would never be rich (consider Dt. 14:29), and the wonder of doing His work would compensate for their lack of physical possessions (Num. 18:23). The early church began by having all things common, in imitation of how the priests had "like portions to eat" (Dt. 18:8). Yet the early church couldn't sustain the intensity of their initial realization of these things.

1Ch 25:9 Now the first lot of Asaph came forth to Joseph: the second to Gedaliah, he and his brothers and sons were twelve-

There were a total of 4000 Levites envisioned as making music (1 Chron. 23:5), so these would have been split up amongst these 24 orders.

1Ch 25:10 the third to Zaccur, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
The record reads as if the lots were cast at David's time. Yet this was before the temple had been built. But the scale of his grandiose plans for the temple required this huge number of Levites and singers. So we assume he was really running ahead of his time, as if quite obsessed, by working out the musical plans and actually drawing lots for who was going to serve when; although the temple hadn't been built.

1Ch 25:11 the fourth to Izri, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
None of the leaders of these 24 courses were firstborn sons. This confirms God's style of preferring to work with those whom man would place far down the list. 1. Joseph was the second son of Asaph. 2. Gedaliah the eldest son of Jeduthun. 3. Zaccur the eldest of Asaph. 4. Izri the second of Jeduthun. 5. Nethaniah the third of Asaph. 6. Bukkiah the eldest of Heman. 7. Jesharelah the youngest of Asaph. 8. Jeshaiah the third of Jeduthun. 9. Mattaniah the second of Heman. 10. Shimei the youngest of Jeduthun. 11. Azareel the third of Heman. 12. Hashabiah the fourth of Jeduthun. 13. Shubael the fourth of Heman. 14. Mattithiah the fifth of Jeduthun. 15. Jeremoth the fifth of Heman. 16. Hananiah the sixth of Heman. 17. Joshbekashah the eleventh of Heman. 18. Hanani the seventh of Heman. 19. Mallothi the twelfth of Heman. 20. Eliathah the eighth of Heman. 21. Hothir the thirteenth of Heman. 22. Giddalti the ninth of Heman. 23. Mehazioth the fourteenth of Heman. 24. Romamti-ezer, the tenth of Heman.

1Ch 25:12 the fifth to Nethaniah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
The groups of 12 relatives would have formed a small musical band, maybe a choir, or some instrumentalists and some choir.

1Ch 25:13 the sixth to Bukkiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
These names appear to refer to actual Levites living at the time of David who were chosen by lot to perform. We wonder what they did in the seven years [at least] between this time and the completion of the temple. Perhaps they did sing in the existing tabernacle in Zion.

1Ch 25:14 the seventh to Jesharelah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
Another name for Uzziel, son of Heman.

1Ch 25:15 the eighth to Jeshaiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-

'Yah saves'. The words 'Yahweh' and 'saved' occur so often in the life of David and in his Psalms, and so we wonder whether this child had been named in memory of that fact.

1Ch 25:16 the ninth to Mattaniah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
Nearly all these names have God's Name within them. They were clearly all committed followers of Yahweh, at least in name.

1Ch 25:17 the tenth to Shimei, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
Shimei isn't mentioned in :2-4 in the Hebrew, but his name occurs there in the LXX.

1Ch 25:18 the eleventh to Azarel, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
Uzziel of :4.

1Ch 25:19 the twelfth to Hashabiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'Yahweh has imputed', perhaps reflective of how someone had perceived the wonder of Yahweh's imputation of righteousness by grace, as the basis of salvation. This had been taught to Israel by God's response to David's sin with Bathsheba. See on :23.

1Ch 25:20 the thirteenth to Shubael, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
Shebuel of :4.

1Ch 25:21 the fourteenth, to Mattithiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'Gift of Yah', as in :16. This was the name given at birth, and in this case it stuck. It confirms the suggestion I have often made, that sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 25:22 the fifteenth to Jeremoth, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
Keil observes: "The order of succession was so determined by lot, that the four sons of Asaph (:3) received the first, third, fifth, and seventh places; the six sons of Jeduthun, the second, fourth, eighth, twelfth, and fourteenth; and finally, the four sons of Heman (first mentioned in :4), the sixth, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth places; while the remaining places, 15-24, fell to the other sons of Heman. From this we learn that the lots of the sons of the three chief musicians were not placed in separate urns, and one lot drawn from each alternately; but that, on the contrary, all the lots were placed in one urn, and in drawing the lots of Asaph and Jeduthun came out so, that after the fourteenth drawing only sons of Heman remained".

1Ch 25:23 the sixteenth to Hananiah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'The grace of Yah'. Grace was and is the distinctive feature of the one true faith and God. David's sin with Bathsheba would have underlined it to all that generation. See on :19,25.

1Ch 25:24 the seventeenth to Joshbekashah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
This name stands out from all the others- 'stiffnecked liver'. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. This was surely one of the latter. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

1Ch 25:25 the eighteenth to Hanani, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
I have noted on :19,23 the number of names from David's generation which allude to grace, and this is another one. God's grace to David would have gripped an entire generation of believers at that time.

1Ch 25:26 the nineteenth to Mallothi, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'Speaker forth', an appropriate name for one who was to be involved in speaking forth God's praises. It is s.w. Ps. 106:2 "Who can utter / speak forth the mighty acts of the Lord'. All those who perform public service, especially in the area of worship, should be in the grip of a deep sense of inadequacy for their task before the wondrous spiritual realities they seek to articulate. See on :27.

1Ch 25:27 the twentieth to Eliathah, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'For the God who consents' would continue the same idea as in :26; a sense of awe that God has allowed us to be involved in His service.

1Ch 25:28 the twenty-first to Hothir, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'Those caused to remain' would have been an appropriate name to speak to those at the time of the exile and restoration.

1Ch 25:29 the twenty-second to Giddalti, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'One made great' would perhaps reflect the repeated teaching of David from his own life, and which had affected that generation of believers, that it is God's grace / gentleness that makes any of us great (Ps. 18:35).

1Ch 25:30 the twenty- third to Mahazioth, his sons and his brothers, twelve-

'Receiver of visions', an appropriate name for one whose music was to express the visions of God (see on :2,3).

1Ch 25:31 the twenty-fourth to Romamti-Ezer, his sons and his brothers, twelve-
'Raised up from a heap', a name encouraging to the exiles, and perhaps reflecting Hannah's awareness when she gave Samuel over to Levitical service, that such service is performed in gratitude for having been raised up like Job from the heap (1 Sam. 2:8).

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 26

1Ch 26:1 For the divisions of the doorkeepers: of the Korahites, Meshelemiah the son of Kore, of the sons of Asaph-
This would have had special relevance for the returned exiles at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, who had to guard the gates and new walls of the temple. The list of the names of the families who were to do this work in Nehemiah contrasts sharply with the list we find here- the Levites simply didn't all do that work, which was so vital during the period of rebuilding. Ezra 2 says that the Gentile nethinim, probably the Gibeonites, were pressed into service as porters / doorkeepers. And so Nehemiah was glad to use anyone willing to do it. We see here the principle of 'The end justifies the means' being put to the test. That principle cannot be applied universally; but we see how by the same token, legalistic obedience to command cannot be allowed to stop the essence of His work being done.

1Ch 26:2 Meshelemiah had sons: Zechariah the firstborn Jediael the second, Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth-
1 Chron. 23:5 says that there were 4000 such porters or "gatekeepers". The Mosaic tabernacle had functioned without these huge numbers. But the scale of David's grandiose plans for the temple required this huge number of Levites and singers. He made the mistake which Solomon followed, in thinking that mere scale of worship was somehow pleasing to God; when instead David ought to have learned from his sin with Bathsheba that God looks upon the heart.

1Ch 26:3 Elam the fifth, Jehohanan the sixth, Eliehoenai the seventh-
The "porters and singers" at the restoration were Levites (Neh. 7:1). The use of Levites to guard the gates was a conscious attempt to restore the situation in Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 9:17-22; 26:12-19), suggesting these huge numbers were not just to be porters but also literal defenders of the gates. We should also remember that the Levites and priests accounted for about half the population of Jerusalem (Neh. 11:6-19 cp. 1 Chron.

9:9-22). According to Ez. 44:11-14, the repentant Levites were to be the gatekeepers in the restored temple. But there is no evidence they did repent, indeed the record in Nehemiah shows they were on the side of the Samaritan opposition, intermarrying with them; and so the Kingdom situation possible at the restoration was precluded.

1Ch 26:4 Obed-Edom had sons: Shemaiah the firstborn, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, Sacar the fourth, Nethanel the fifth-
Obed-Edom had faithfully cared for the ark when others, including David, didn't want to know about it and even considered it to bring cursing rather than blessing. But he is given no special reward for that spiritual maturity and all those years of quiet work. His family were made mere gatekeepers (Ps. 84:10). And recognition of our quiet service will likewise not be in this life.

1Ch 26:5 Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peullethai the eighth; for God blessed him-
Eight sons was seen as a special blessing. God made Obed-Edom a 'house' because he had truly cared for the ark. David had failed to learn from this point. For God had told him that He didn't want this temple, but rather wanted to make David a house of people.

1Ch 26:6 Also to Shemaiah his son were sons born, who ruled over the house of their father; for they were mighty men of valour-
The great blessing of Obed-Edom's "house" or family is stressed; they were "mighty men of valour", "capable men" (:7). But "just" gatekeepers (Ps. 88:10). As noted on :5, God blessed Obed-Edom by building him a house, just as He had promised to do to David. But David didn't seem interested in that, so fixated was he on his plan to build God the house which God didn't want.

1Ch 26:7 The sons of Shemaiah: Othni, Rephael, Obed and Elzabad, whose brothers were capable men, Elihu and Semachiah-
See on :6. We note all these names have God in them and are not at all secular. They reflect the abiding spirituality of Obed-Edom's family. And he himself was a mere Edomite ["Edom"] servant ["obed"].

1Ch 26:8 All these were of the sons of Obed-Edom: they and their sons and their brothers, able men in strength for the service; sixty-two of Obed-Edom-
1 Chron. 26:8 speaks of a group of 62 relatives of Obed-Edom, whereas 1 Chron. 16:38 speaks of 68. The extra six may refer to "Asaph and his brothers, who are referred to in the otherwise strange reference in 1 Chron. 16:38 to "Obed-Edom with their brothers".

The preceding verse (1 Chron. 16:37) has spoken of "Asaph and his brothers". See on 1 Chron. 24:1.

1Ch 26:9 Meshelemiah had sons and brothers, valiant men, eighteen-
The reference to "valiant men" suggests that the work of being a "gatekeeper" indeed focused upon the defence of the gates, although the Hebrew word can equally mean "porter".

1Ch 26:10 Also Hosah, of the children of Merari, had sons: Shimri the chief, (for though he was not the firstborn, yet his father made him chief)-
Again continues the theme so often noted in the Biblical record and these name lists, that the firstborn is rejected and others take his place.

1Ch 26:11 Hilkiah the second, Tebaliah the third, Zechariah the fourth. All the sons and brothers of Hosah were thirteen-
Hosah along with Obed-edom was one of those with the honour of carrying the ark (1 Chron. 16:38), but he is still made a humble gatekeeper (Ps. 88:10).

1Ch 26:12 Of these were the divisions of the doorkeepers, even of the chief men, having offices like their brothers, to minister in the house of Yahweh-
The idea is that the chief men as well as their [lesser] "brothers" were all still brethren, and the experience of serving God was to level them. Notice the stress on the equality of the priests and the studied irrelevance of their personal wealth (1 Chron. 24:31; 25:8; 26:12). The Law was geared around the assumption that the priests would be so caught up in Yahweh's work that they would never be rich (consider Dt. 14:29), and the wonder of doing His work would compensate for their lack of physical possessions (Num. 18:23). The early church began by having all things common, in imitation of how the priests had "like portions to eat" (Dt. 18:8). Yet the early church couldn't sustain the intensity of their initial realization of these things.

1Ch 26:13 They cast lots, the small as well as the great, according to their fathers' houses, for each gate-
This continues the theme discussed on :12, of all these men, of whatever secular standing, being united together in the Lord's service. And that is an abiding principle. True unity and brotherhood is found from serving together, and is never an outcome of merely theoretical agreement.

1Ch 26:14 The lot eastward fell to Shelemiah. Then for Zechariah his son, a wise

counsellor, they cast lots; and his lot came out northward-
David's temple envisaged the temple having four main gates, and presumably having a large square wall around it. For the gates he envisages are simply divided according to the points of the compass.

1Ch 26:15 To Obed-Edom southward; and to his sons, the storehouse-
"The gates of the stores", which apparently had two entrances to it (:17).

1Ch 26:16 To Shuppim and Hosah, westward, by the gate of Shallecheth, at the causeway that goes up, watch against watch-
'Shallecheth' means "sending or throwing down", and may mean that this was to be "the refuse gate". That is possibly the vision for the west gate behind Ez. 46:19,20. However :18 seems to describe this west gate as having a colonnade and causeway. It could be that this was "the entering in of the house of the Lord". See on :18. It would have led up to the Temple either from Ophel on the south, or from the Western part of the city across the Tyropoeon Valley. Archaeologists have discovered remnants of two such causeways "Wilson's Arch" and "Robinson's Arch".

1Ch 26:17 Eastward were six Levites, northward four a day, southward four a day, and for the storehouse two and two-
The storehouse gate was on the south (:15), so this refers to the south gate with two entrances, rather than the west gate, which is described in :18.

1Ch 26:18 For the colonnade on the west, four at the causeway, and two at the colonnade-
See on :16. It seems David envisaged the entrance as being from the west. But in fact in God's vision of the temple in Ez. 40-48, the east gate, the very opposite, is the entrance. The original word *parvaim* is Persian and means "lighted by the sun", explaining why later these precincts became a place for sun worship (2 Kings 13:11 s.w.). AV "Parbar westward" became the name of a 1980s Christadelphian rock band, named after what they considered was one of the Bible's obscurest verses.

1Ch 26:19 These were the divisions of the doorkeepers; of the sons of the Korahites, and of the sons of Merari-
"Merari" means "bitter"; from these rather unpromising beginnings were to arise those who gave their lives to the service of God and His people. And we see similar transformation in the lives of so many.

1Ch 26:20 Of the Levites, Ahijah was over the treasures of God's house, and over the treasures of the dedicated things-
We note from :26-28 that Samuel, Saul and Joab, as well as David, had dedicated spoils won in battle to the work of the sanctuary. Yet despite that generosity and all those victories, Joab and Saul apparently died unspiritual men and in condemnation. Saul certainly. So generous giving and victories for the Lord are no guarantee at all of true spirituality.

1Ch 26:21 The sons of Ladan, the sons of the Gershonites belonging to Ladan, the heads of the fathers' households belonging to Ladan the Gershonite: Jehieli-
We note that both Moses and Aaron had sons called Gershon (Ex. 2:22). Such repetition of names within families and in the same generation was quite common, and is one thing which makes the study of the genealogies difficult in places.

1Ch 26:22 The sons of Jehieli: Zetham and Joel his brother were over the treasures of the house of Yahweh-
These were "brothers" of Jehieli (1 Chron. 23:8), demonstrating how elastic are the Hebrew terms for "brothers" and "sons of".

1Ch 26:23 Of the Amramites, of the Izharites, of the Hebronites, of the Uzzielites-
That is, the Kohathites (1 Chron. 23:12).

1Ch 26:24 and Shebuel the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, was ruler over the treasures-
This is, I believe, the only reference to any direct descendant of Moses having any public role in the work and worship of Israel. The Bible is carefully against all nepotism, personality cults and inherited sense of spiritual leadership and worthiness. All are to serve God from their own experience and from forging their own personal relationships with Him.

1Ch 26:25 His brothers: of Eliezer, Rehabiah his son, Jeshaiah his son, Joram his son, Zichri his son and Shelomoth his son-
This could refer to four generations, but the idea was that the descendants of each of these families was to have a specific duty in the temple system. So probably these are all the sons of Rehabiah (1 Chron. 23:17).

1Ch 26:26 This Shelomoth and his brothers were over all the treasures of the dedicated

things, which David the king, and the heads of the fathers' households, the captains over thousands and hundreds, and the captains of the army, had dedicated-
The promises God makes involve a solemn commitment by Him to us- the serious, binding nature of His oath to us is easy to forget. God swore to David "by my holiness" (Ps. 89:35). The Hebrew for "holiness" is the very same word translated "dedication". David's response to God's dedication to him was to dedicate [s.w.] all the silver and gold which he had won from this world, to the service of God's house (1 Chron. 26:26; 2 Chron. 5:1). Our response to God's dedication to us should be a like dedication of what we have to Him. Covenant relationship with God requires much of both Him and us. The case of David is a nice illustration of the meaning of grace. David wanted to *do* something for God- build Him a house, spending his wealth to do so. God replied that no, He wanted to build *David* a house. And He started to, in the promises He gave David. And David's response to that grace is to still *do* something- to dedicate his wealth to God's house, as God had dedicated Himself to David's house. This is just how grace and works should be related in our experience.

1Ch 26:27 They dedicated some of the spoil won in battles to repair the house of Yahweh-
This could refer to a separate fund set up for the long term maintenance or repairing of the house. The fund was evidently empty by the time of 2 Chron. 24:5.

1Ch 26:28 All that Samuel the seer, Saul the son of Kish, Abner the son of Ner and Joab the son of Zeruiah had dedicated, whoever had dedicated anything, it was under the hand of Shelomoth, and of his brothers-
Samuel, Saul and Joab, as well as David, had dedicated spoils won in battle to the work of the sanctuary. Yet despite that generosity and all those victories, Joab and Saul apparently died unspiritual men and in condemnation. Saul certainly. So generous giving and victories for the Lord are no guarantee at all of true spirituality.

1Ch 26:29 Of the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons were for the outward business over Israel, for officers and judges-
Solomon taught that if the ants can be so zealous, well why can't the ecclesia of God be zealous [for it was 'believers' that he was teaching]. The ants scurry around, working as if there is no tomorrow, to build up something so precarious that is in any case so tragically short lived. Can't we be yet more zealous, with a like loving co-operation, building the eternal things that we are (Prov. 6:6,7)? And Solomon pressed the point further, in that ants are self-motivated; they need no "guide, overseer or ruler". This was surely a reference to the complex system of overseers which Solomon had to place over Israel in order to build the temple and build up the Kingdom. The same Hebrew word for

“overseer” is found in 1 Chron. 23:4; 26:29. Yet ideally, he seems to be saying, every Israelite ought to be a zealous worker. Prov. 12:24 says the same: “The hand of the diligent [*whoever* he / she is] shall bear rule [in practice]” [s.w. Prov. 6:7 “ruler”]. And we must ask ourselves, whether for whatever reason the new Israel hasn’t slumped into the same problem, of lack of self-motivation, waiting to be asked to do something before we do it, over-relying upon our “overseers”. The ants aren’t like this. They see the job to be done, and naturally get on with it.

1Ch 26:30 Of the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his brothers, men of valour, one thousand seven hundred, had the oversight of Israel beyond the Jordan westward, for all the business of Yahweh, and for the service of the king-
*"A*cross Jordan westward" suggests this was written from the perspective of being on the Persian side, suggesting this was a Divinely inspired edit carried out when Chronicles was written up or rewritten in captivity. The context is of the temple service, so perhaps these people were not mere administrative officials, but responsible for gathering the tithes from those areas.

1Ch 26:31 Of the Hebronites was Jerijah the chief, even of the Hebronites, according to their generations by fathers’ households. In the fortieth year of the reign of David they were sought for, and there were found among them mighty men of valour at Jazer of Gilead-
That is, at the very end of David's life. He was active in making his plans right up to the end of his life. Even if building a temple was a case of misplaced ideals and obsession, we have to give him credit for zealously working and planning for the Lord's work right to the end of his days, even when he knew he would not live to see it coming to reality. "There were found" could suggest the problem with finding people according to the genealogical system worked out. Working out who actually were the living descendants of ancient families would not have been easy.

1Ch 26:32 His brothers, men of valour, were two thousand seven hundred, heads of fathers’ households, whom king David made overseers over the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of the Manassites, for every matter pertaining to God, and for the affairs of the king-
David was clearly concerned that the tribes on the other side of Jordan might wander both spiritually and politically, and not pay their tithes to the temple. 2700 overseers in their territory was a lot. We note that their brief was to assist them *firstly* in things "pertaining to God". We can assume that as these were Levites, their duty was to teach these separatist tribes about God. We should be concerned firstly about the spiritual wellbeing of weaker, isolated brethren- and only secondly be concerned about their

identity with our particular community. Solomon however abused this system by using this system of overseers to eventually whip the people with heavy taxes, which all went to him; even when he had turned away from Yahweh worship.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 27

1Ch 27:1 Now the children of Israel after their number, the heads of fathers' households and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and their officers who served the king, in any matter of the divisions which came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year- of every division were twenty-four thousand-

See on 1 Chron. 24:1. Twelve groups of 24,000 men mean that David's total army numbered 288,000 men- probably the majority of the fit men of Israel. David's earlier desire to number the fighting men of Israel would rather suggest that this system didn't work that well in the longer term. If he could trust the leaders to rally their men, then he wouldn't have needed to number them. We have an idealized picture of David's Kingdom presented in Chronicles [hence the omission of his sin with Bathsheba]. This may be because it was understood by the time Chronicles was written that David was a prototype of Messiah. However it could be that the reference to David's numbering in :24 suggests that David sought to number all Israel- as if he felt the 288,000 soldiers weren't enough and wondered how many other men there were available in Israel. In this case he was acting like the wealthy man who counts up his investments and panics that he really needs more.

1Ch 27:2 Over the first division for the first month was Jashobeam the son of Zabdiel; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-

"Jashobeam" was one of David's followers in the wilderness (1 Chron. 11:11). Indeed, nearly all of those mentioned in the list of army commanders here were with him then. Those faithful in the wilderness years were exalted to leadership in David's kingdom, and that is how it shall be with the loyal servants of the Lord Jesus.

1Ch 27:3 He was of the children of Perez, the chief of all the captains of the army for the first month-

This massive system of rotating army service matched that described in previous chapters for serving in the temple. I am uncomfortable with the spiritual implications of all this. It was not envisioned in the Mosaic law, and smacks of the kind of centralized control which is political and religious, rather than spiritual. And as often mentioned, the tabernacle didn't require such huge amounts of labour; the whole temple system which did require it was of David's creation, not God's, although He worked through it.

1Ch 27:4 Over the division of the second month was Dodai the Ahohite, and his division; and Mikloth the ruler; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
"Thousand" is often used not of 1000 literal persons but of an administrative or military division, and that may be the case here.

1Ch 27:5 The third captain of the army for the third month was Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, chief; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
Those who followed David in his wilderness years became the senior officials in his Kingdom. There's a clear parallel with the Lord Jesus and we His followers. As a priest, he must have often been unable to fully achieve his priestly calling during the wilderness years. It could even be that Benaiah was not a priest (1 Chron. 4:36 suggests he was a Simeonite), but functioned as one during the years of exile from the sanctuary. This may have led David to himself act as a priest when the ark was brought to Zion.

1Ch 27:6 This is that Benaiah, who was the mighty man of the thirty, and over the thirty; and of his division was Ammizabad his son-
Benaiah was one of David's senior military commanders (2 Sam. 8:18; 1 Chron. 27:5), and the Hebrew of 2 Sam. 23:20 can be translated "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest, as head", i.e. of a group of David's mighty men. The Jehoiada in view as his father would therefore be Jehoiada the priest. The idea is that priests were also military leaders within David's army, indeed it seems there were a large group of them as ordinary soldiers in 1 Chron. 12:27. This shows how priesthood was not understood as abstract spirituality, but that spirituality was articulated in practice.

1Ch 27:7 The fourth captain for the fourth month was Asahel the brother of Joab, and Zebadiah his son after him; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
Asahel was long dead at this time (2 Sam. 2:23), so the names of these 'captains' may not refer to living men, but rather to symbolic heads. At the very end of David's life, Joab was disloyal to him and Solomon slew him. So we wonder to what extent these detailed plans of David were in fact fulfilled.

1Ch 27:8 The fifth captain for this fifth month was Shamhuth the Izrahite; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
Izrahite means from the family of Zerah (1 Chron. 2:4,6), meaning he was from the tribe of Judah.

1Ch 27:9 The sixth captain for the sixth month was Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite; and

in his division were twenty-four thousand-
He too was from Judah if from Tekoah; these army captains are not evenly spread out throughout the 12 tribes, but many of them were from Judah, thus retaining national control in the hands of David and his immediate tribal and social circle.

1Ch 27:10 The seventh captain for the seventh month was Helez the Pelonite, of the children of Ephraim: and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
He is called a man of Ephraim here, but Beth-Palet [he was a "Paltite", 2 Sam. 23:26] was a town in the tribe of Judah. See on :9.

1Ch 27:11 The eighth captain for the eighth month was Sibbecai the Hushathite, of the Zerahites; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
He too was from Judah, from the family of Zerah (1 Chron. 2:4,6); see on :9.

1Ch 27:12 The ninth captain for the ninth month was Abiezer the Anathothite, of the Benjamites: and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
Anathoth was a priestly town, so this may have been a faithful priest from Benjamin who would have been disillusioned with Saul's unspirituality.

1Ch 27:13 The tenth captain for the tenth month was Maharai the Netophathite, of the Zerahites; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
This is now the third person from the subdivision of Zerah in Judah. The choice of leaders was clearly not representative of all the tribes of Israel, but rather power was being concentrated in the hands of David's tribe and immediate circle.

1Ch 27:14 The eleventh captain for the eleventh month was Benaiah the Pirathonite, of the children of Ephraim; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
Pirathon was in Ephraim (Jud. 12:15), and there was always antipathy between Judah and Ephraim. So as noted on :12, here again was a man who stepped out from his surrounding cultural expectations in loyalty to David.

1Ch 27:15 The twelfth captain for the twelfth month was Heldai the Netophathite, of Othniel; and in his division were twenty-four thousand-
This was near Jerusalem and the Levitical singers lived there after the exile (Ezra 2:22; Neh. 11:28); so he too may have been a Levite living in Judah. See on :9.

1Ch 27:16 Furthermore over the tribes of Israel: of the Reubenites was Eliezer the son of

Zichri the ruler: of the Simeonites, Shephatiah the son of Maacah-
Gad and Asher are omitted here- perhaps because they were not that loyal to David?

1Ch 27:17 of Levi, Hashabiah the son of Kemuel: of Aaron, Zadok-
This suggests the Levites had two 'rulers', perhaps one over the priests and another over the soldiers, or for the other Levites.

1Ch 27:18 of Judah, Elihu, one of the brothers of David: of Issachar, Omri the son of Michael-
In 1 Chron. 2:15, David is placed seventh of seven sons, but elsewhere eighth of eight (1 Sam. 14:10,11; 17:12). Perhaps the eighth son was the Elihu of 1 Chron. 27:18. Or perhaps one of the sons died without children, and is therefore not included in 1 Chron. 2:15. LXX gives Eliab. Again we see the concentration of power in David's immediate circle (see on :9).

1Ch 27:19 of Zebulun, Ishmaiah the son of Obadiah: of Naphtali, Jeremoth the son of Azriel-
The only other mentions of Obadiah and Azriel in Chronicles refer to Levites. So these men may have been Levites from those areas. Which fits in with the suggestion on :9 that David was appointing a leadership which was loyal to him; for the priesthood was loyal to him, and so the Levites likely were too.

1Ch 27:20 of the children of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Azaziah: of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joel the son of Pedaiah-
"Hoshea" is s.w. Joshua, who was also of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8), and was likely named after him.

1Ch 27:21 of the half-tribe of Manasseh in Gilead, Iddo the son of Zechariah: of Benjamin, Jaasiel the son of Abner-
Jaasiel is the son of the Abner who was Saul's cousin (1 Chron. 9:36; 1 Sam. 14:50). This is a departure from the common theme in these lists of David concentrating power in his own circle (see on :9). It was perhaps a sign of David's abiding softness and kindness towards the house of Saul, which is all the more notable because David was an astute politician and was used to cementing his own power through political appointments.

1Ch 27:22 of Dan, Azarel the son of Jeroham. These were the captains of the tribes of Israel-

We note that many if not all of these leaders of the tribes, and their fathers, had Godly names.

1Ch 27:23 But David didn't take the number of them from twenty years old and under, because Yahweh had said He would increase Israel like the stars of the sky-
See on 1 Chron. 24:1. This certainly seeks to present David positively. For his desire to take a census of Israel at the time of 2 Sam. 24:1 was a result of his lack of faith, and David himself took guilt over what he had done. We have an example here of God yet again imputing righteousness to David, as He did over the sin with Bathsheba. Or it could be that his refusal to number Israel under the age of 20 was indeed because of his faith that God would multiply Israel, yet at the same time he lacked faith in taking the census of all the fighting men. This co-existence of faith and unbelief in a person is quite typical; how many of us have prayed "Lord I believe, help my unbelief" (Mk. 9:24).

1Ch 27:24 Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but didn't finish; and there came wrath for this upon Israel; neither was the number put into the account in the chronicles of king David-
See on :1. The wrath came "upon Israel" because they sinned by not paying the temple tax due when they were numbered. The sin is presented as theirs, which is why they were punished. David was unwise in leading them into that sin, but he seems to have taken false guilt upon himself over the matter. Which is why they and not he were punished by God.

1Ch 27:25 Over the king's treasures was Azmaveth the son of Adiel. Over the treasures in the fields, in the cities, and in the villages, and in the towers, was Jonathan the son of Uzziah-
This could imply that David had his own extensive personal wealth, including vineyards (:27), servants who worked the ground (:26). This was exactly what Samuel had warned Israel about; a human king would take Israel's men to till their ground, and would take their vineyards from them (1 Sam. 8:12,14). That all suggests that David slipped spiritually at the end of his life. For he came from a poor family, and to have all these things meant he had taken them for himself, and had ignored these warnings of his one time mentor Samuel.

1Ch 27:26 Over those who did the work of the field for tillage of the ground was Ezri the son of Chelub-
See on :24. This clearly alludes to the warning of the misbehaviour of Israel's king in 1 Sam. 8:12, so Ezri's job was to ensure that this work was done. We note that the overseers over this (Ezri, Shimei in :27 and Baal Hanan in :28) don't have Godly names

but rather secular names.

1Ch 27:27 And over the vineyards was Shimei the Ramathite. And over the increase of the vineyards for the winecellars was Zabdi the Shiphmite-
See on :25,26.

1Ch 27:28 And over the olive trees and the sycamore trees that were in the lowland was Baal Hanan the Gederite. And over the cellars of oil was Joash-
"The lowland" refers to the Shephelah, one of the five subdivisions of the territory of Judah. Baal Hanan may have been a Gentile (1 Chron. 1:49).

1Ch 27:29 And over the herds that fed in Sharon was Shitrai the Sharonite. and over the herds that were in the valleys was Shaphat the son of Adlai-
"Sharon" seems to refer to the pastureland between mount Carmel and Joppa.

1Ch 27:30 And over the camels was Obil the Ishmaelite. And over the donkeys was Jehdeiah the Meronothite. And over the flocks was Jaziz the Hagrite-
The Hagrites were Gentiles who had been defeated by Israelites (1 Chron. 5:18-22). There is quite a theme of the former enemies of David becoming converted to his God and firmly personally loyal to him. We think of the Gittites being so faithful to David, the very men of Gath whose champion he had killed. This kind of radical transformation of human relationships is a major testament to the real power of God in human lives.

1Ch 27:31 All these were the rulers of the substance which was king David's-
This may mean that there was a difference between David's personal wealth, and that of the Kingdom.

1Ch 27:32 Also Jonathan, David's uncle, was a counsellor, a man of understanding, and a scribe. Jehiel the son of Hachmoni was with the king's sons-
Again as noted on :9, we get the impression that David installed his own tribe and personal circle as the leaders of Israel. This list was presumably an older list, and not written at the time the lists of the temple orders were written, which was at the end of David's life. And here we have a mention of David's uncle. But he could be David's nephew, see 2 Sam. 21:21.

1Ch 27:33 Ahithophel was the king's counsellor. Hushai the Archite was the king's advisor-
2 Sam. 23:34 tells us that Bathsheba's father Eliam was "the son of Ahithophel the

Gilonite". And he and Uriah were both amongst David's "mighty men". Eliam was the father of Bathsheba, making Ahithophel her grandfather. We can more readily understand why he turned against David after his shameful behaviour with his granddaughter.

1Ch 27:34 and after Ahithophel was Jehoiada the son of Benaiah, and Abiathar. The captain of the king's army was Joab-
Joab was given this role but had it removed at least twice. So this list is a snapshot of David's kingdom at some particular point, perhaps taken earlier in his reign.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 28

1Ch 28:1 David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, the captains of the companies who served the king by division, the captains of thousands and hundreds, and the rulers over all the substance and possessions of the king and of his sons, with the officers and the mighty men, even all the mighty men of valour, to Jerusalem-
See on 1 Chron. 24:1. We note again that there was "all the substance and possessions of the king and of his sons". David came from poverty, but now at the end of his life he has personal ownership of substance and possessions. David had his own extensive personal wealth, including vineyards (1 Chron. 27:27) and servants who worked the ground (1 Chron. 27:26). This was exactly what Samuel had warned Israel about; a human king would take Israel's men to till their ground, and would take their vineyards from them (1 Sam. 8:12,14). That all suggests that David slipped spiritually at the end of his life. For he came from a poor family, and to have all these things meant he had taken them for himself, and had ignored these warnings of his one time mentor Samuel. We noted that the overseers over this (Ezri, Shimei in 1 Chron. 27:27 and Baal Hanan in 1 Chron. 27:28) don't have Godly names but rather secular names.

1Ch 28:2 Then David the king stood up on his feet-
As if standing was now difficult for him, with reduced strength and faculties in his old age.

And said, Hear me, my brothers and my people! As for me, it was in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, and for the footstool of our God; and I had prepared for the building-
See on Ps. 132:8. The ark is called both the throne of God and also His footstool (Ps. 94:5; 132:7,8; 1 Chron. 28:2). Above or sitting upon the cherubim, the pagan mind expected to see Israel's God. But there was (to their eyes) an empty throne. Yahweh had

to be believed in by faith. And His supreme manifestation was through the blood of sacrifice. Cassuto gives evidence that the Egyptians and Hittites placed their covenant contracts in a box beneath the throne of their gods; and the tables of the covenant were likewise placed beneath the throne of Yahweh. This similarity begged the comparison yet stronger- Israel's God was *not* seated there. He had to be believed in by faith. Such a concept of faith in an invisible god was quite foreign to the pagan mind; and yet the whole tabernacle plan was designed to have enough points of contact with the pagan tabernacles in order to elicit this point in very powerful form: the one true God is invisible and must be *believed in*.

Or it could be argued that Yahweh was enthroned upon the cherubim, and the ark was His footstool. It was to the ark that Israel came to worship, although it was invisible to them, only visible to the priesthood.

David again expands his narrative, now speaking of the temple as a "house of rest for the ark". But God's resting or abiding was never in anything physical, but always through the abiding / resting of His Spirit in the human spirit / heart.

1Ch 28:3 But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you are a man of war, and have shed blood'-
1 Chron. 22:8; 28:3 are reported speech by David. We wonder if David wasn't imagining this. Why should it be morally objectionable for David to build the temple because he was a man of war? Yahweh is a man of war, yet He was to build David's house. We only learn about God's objection to David building the temple from the passages where David reports what God apparently told him, and from Solomon repeating this. If God did actually say this, then there is a logical contradiction between this and His statements about not wanting a house at all. If He was saying 'I want a physical house, but not built by David', then this appears irreconcilable with the reasons He is actually recorded as giving David for not wanting a house (see on 2 Sam. 7:7-11). Either God wanted a house or He didn't. See on 1 Chron. 28:5,6.

Shimei called David a "bloodthirsty man" (2 Sam. 16:7,8 s.w.). And the same words are [supposedly] used by God about David. So we can wonder whether David was too quick in Ps. 5:6 to assume that the 'man of blood' was hated by God and was of course not him. But there is the possibility that God did say this, but it wasn't earlier recorded. So often in the psalms, David reveals a vicious desire for the blood of his enemies (see on Ps. 21:11). Perhaps it was because of this bloodlust that David was precluded from building the temple because he had been a man of wars and had shed blood (1 Chron. 28:3). Solomon also shed blood as did many of God's servants, so that alone seems no reason why David couldn't build the temple. Perhaps it was his bloodthirsty attitude, albeit tinged with moments of great grace, forgiveness and gentleness, which led to God's prohibition.

1Ch 28:4 However Yahweh, the God of Israel, chose me out of all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever. For He has chosen Judah to be prince; and in the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father He took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel-

David is arguing that Judah had been chosen as the kingly tribe, and then the family of Jesse chosen, and then David. But there is no evidence for these statements. God chose Saul of Benjamin, and worked to provide him every potential to be the king of Israel. It was only because of his failure that God removed him, and then chose not Judah nor Jesse's family, but David personally. That calling was by grace, and in personal response to the spiritual heart which David had at that time. But David now repositions all that, because he is leading up to arguing that therefore Solomon has likewise been "chosen" in a sovereign way by God. But that too was really a forcing of God to fit the narrative which David had decided upon. David here misrepresented God as having chosen David on the basis of lineal descent, when that wasn't at all the case. But David does so because he wants to thereby justify Solomon as the chosen son on the basis of lineal descent.

1Ch 28:5 Of all my sons (for Yahweh has given me many sons), He has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of Yahweh's kingdom over Israel-

David had many sons, but clearly Solomon was the favourite, the love child, effectively, of David's relationship with Bathsheba, the married woman he had become besotted with. It was this favouritism which no doubt provoked Absalom and his other sons to make the rebellions they did, no doubt deeply irked by prophecies like this in Ps. 72, which served the same function as Jacob's giving the priestly coat to Joseph. And it led Solomon to ultimate spiritual failure, because he came to assume that he would automatically fulfil the promises to David about a Messianic son. And so he came to consider himself spiritually inviolate, and came to live a life of debauchery rather than spirituality. David of course claimed that God had chosen Solomon out of all his sons (1 Chron. 28:5), but there is no record of that happening; rather do we suspect that David came to imagine that his own choice was in fact God's. Psalm 72 was David's declaration that he believed Solomon would be the Messianic ruler; but that was proven wrong, because Solomon did not reign with justice and turned away from Yahweh. The words will come true in the person of the Lord Jesus, but David was wrong to insist they must apply to Solomon.

So it was David who chose Solomon, but he is trying to make God be the one who preferred Solomon. As discussed on :4, David had misrepresented God as having chosen David on the basis of lineal descent, when that wasn't at all the case. But David does so because he wants to thereby justify Solomon as the chosen son on the basis of lineal descent. When Adonijah briefly seized power, David was forced to make a

statement in support of Solomon; but beyond the reference to a personal comment to Bathsheba that he wanted Solomon to succeed him, David had never made his position on Solomon clear before that time. And there was no recorded word from Yahweh saying that Solomon was to succeed him.

1Ch 28:6 He said to me, 'Solomon, your son, shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his father-

David specifically claims God has stated the promise of having a son would be fulfilled in Solomon. But the promise itself said this would happen after David slept with his fathers. And the NT specifically applies these words to Jesus and not Solomon.

There can be no doubt that David was proud about his sons; his soppy obsession with Absalom indicates that he cast both spirituality and rationality to the winds when it came to them. The words of 1 Chron. 28:5,6 indicate this: "Of all my sons (for the Lord hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of the Lord over Israel. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house *and my courts*: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father". We have to ask: Is this what God actually said? The records of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 and 1 Chron. 17 contain no specific reference to Solomon, nor do they speak of him building physical courts for God. The Davidic promise is fundamentally concerning David's greater household, rather than a physical house. So it seems that David became obsessed with the idea of Solomon being the Messiah, building a physical house for God, and being king over the eternal Messianic Kingdom. The words of Ps. 110:1 are applied by the NT to Jesus, but there is no reason to think that they were not primarily spoke by David with his eye on Solomon, whom he addresses as his Lord, such was his obsession: "The Lord saith unto my Lord..." (RV), and the rest of the Psalm goes on in the language of Ps. 72 to describe David's hopes for Solomon's Kingdom. 'Solomon' was actually called 'Jedidiah' by God through Nathan (2 Sam. 12:25). The 'beloved of God' was surely prophetic of God's beloved Son. When God said "This is my beloved Son", He was surely saying 'Now *this* is the Jedidiah, whom I wanted Solomon to typify'. But David calls him Solomon, the man who would bring peace. I suggest that David was so eager to see in Solomon the actual Messiah, that he chose not to use the name which God wanted- which made Solomon a type of a future Son of God / Messiah. And this led to Solomon himself being obsessed with being a Messiah figure and losing sight of the future Messiah.

1Ch 28:7 I will establish his kingdom forever, if he continues to do My commandments and My ordinances as he does at this time'-
It is clear from :8 that David didn't understand "forever" as meaning 'eternal life' but

rather passing on an inheritance down generations without end. But in his earlier Psalms, David had indeed understood the idea of life eternal at the resurrection of the body. He seems to have slipped from that in his old age. David recognizes the conditional nature of the promises to him about his seed, but then he seems to say that the condition of the seed's obedience will be met if the leaders are obedient (:8). All the time, David is wriggling out of the clear statements of God. He had told David not to build a temple for reasons quite other than David's personal history.

1Ch 28:8 Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of Yahweh, and in the audience of our God, observe and seek out all the commandments of Yahweh your God; that you may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children after you forever-

The phrase for "inherit good" is used by Solomon in Prov. 28:10, as the reward for the "blameless". But to describe the wise as "blameless" is an example of his over simplistic worldview. All have sinned, none are blameless (Rom. 3:23), as David reflected in his Bathsheba Psalms. But Solomon had whitewashed his parents' sin, and knew nothing of the grace David had discovered at that time. The Lord's parables of the lost in LK. 15 may be seeking to deconstruct Solomon's attitude. The self righteous older son, who considered himself blameless, connects with the 99 sheep who "need no repentance". But "all we like sheep have gone astray", those 99 only thought they needed no repentance, and being so snug in their sheepfold actually only enhanced their sense of self righteousness, and that they were not in fact the lost. The phrase "inherit good" is only found again here in 1 Chron. 28:8, where David says that this is to be the outcome for those who "seek" for obedience to God's ways. But 'seeking' is not being "blameless". None are blameless, but the spiritually minded seek for God's ways and will therefore "inherit good". Solomon totally lacked this humility and spiritual reality of David.

1Ch 28:9 You, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind;

To know God is to serve Him, and eternal life will be about knowing God, as it is now (Jn. 17:3). Despite evidence for a spiritual slip in his old age, David quite rightly emphasizes the place of a willing and united heart in serving God. Although we wonder whether he had in mind the idea that Solomon would be literally "perfect". Solomon seems to have assumed that, as he clearly had no conscience of personal sin or possibility of spiritual failure. And this pride led to his undoing.

For Yahweh searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever-

In :8, Solomon has directed the elders of Israel to seek God. And perhaps he is directing this sentence to them rather than Solomon, whom he liked to think would be "perfect" before God.

1Ch 28:10 Take heed now; for Yahweh has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary-

God had clearly stated that the ark was where He wanted it- in a tent, behind curtains. And He did not want a brick house around it. And yet David urges people to enable the very opposite- to build a sanctuary in terms of a physical building, and to place the ark within it (1 Chron. 22:19). The whole land was seen by God as a sanctuary / holy place s.w. Ex. 15:17). "Let them make Me a sanctuary" (Ex. 25:8) uses a very general word for making / doing, whereas David is trying to localize and define the sanctuary / holy place and is implying God had no such holy place- until it had been built according to his plans. The Kohathites are described as carrying "the sanctuary" (s.w., Num. 10:21); it was the ark which was the essential sanctuary or holy place. But David speaks about the building he proposed around that ark as being the sanctuary. And so form had replaced content, the external the internal, as so often happens when the pole of religion overtakes that of spirituality.

Be strong, and do it-

This is quoted in Ezra 10:4 about the work of the restoration of the temple.

1Ch 28:11 Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch of the temple, and of its houses, and of its treasuries, and of the upper rooms of it, and of the inner rooms of it, and of the place of the mercy seat-

This sounds as if David handed over to Solomon some architectural plans at this formal gathering, before all Israel (:1). The emphasis upon the porch must be noted. There was no such equivalent to this in the plan of the tabernacle; this was purely of David's grandiose device. Nor were there any "upper rooms" in the tabernacle. "The inner rooms" presumably refer to the holy and most holy places. Yet God had stressed that the ark, upon which was "the mercy seat", the lid of the ark where the cherubim were, was to dwell in "tents". This was His desire, but David speaks of "rooms" for it. If these plans were indeed from God, we would expect to read about the point when a prophet declared them by a "word of the Lord". But instead we have David presenting his plans and visions for the divisions of the Levites, and only then claiming that this was from God's revelation to him (:19).

1Ch 28:12 and the pattern of all that he had in mind for the courts of the house of Yahweh, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of God's house, and for the treasuries of the dedicated things-

See on 1 Chron. 24:1. The key phrase is that this was all that David "had in mind". He will later claim in :19 that God made him understand this. But that would require God to have totally reversed His reasons for not wanting a temple, which He clearly stated when David first had the idea. I suggest David wriggled around those reasons by assuming it was because he personally had shed much blood and Israel was not peaceful enough. He became obsessed with his plans, and assumed that these were in fact from God. When they were of his own device.

David seems to have become obsessed with preparing for the physical building of the temple in his old age. He truly commented: "The zeal of Your house has eaten me up" (Ps. 69:9). The RV margin of 1 Chron. 28:12 makes us wonder whether the dimensions of the temple were in fact made up within David's own mind: "David gave to Solomon his son the pattern... the pattern that he had in his spirit [AV "by the spirit"] for the... house of the Lord". There are several other examples of David wildly over-interpreting. See on 2 Chron. 3:1; 2 Sam. 16:10.

The "surrounding rooms" were chambers around the temple court where the holy vessels and tithes were to be stored (1 Chron. 28:12; 2 Chron. 31:5,11,12; Neh. 13:4-9). It could be to these rooms which the Lord Jesus alludes when He says that in God's house / temple, there are many such rooms and He will go to die on the cross to prepare them for our use (Jn. 14:1-3). He clearly has in view the temple as a spiritual house, comprised of people not bricks. The idea is that His death achieved for us not only salvation, but eternal service as priests within God's "house", being about God's work and business for the sake of others' salvation and implementing their relationship with God. This is what eternity will be about. And it is in this life which we develop our desire to do these things, so that the Kingdom will be a time when all the frustrations and barriers to such service are removed.

1Ch 28:13 also for the divisions of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of Yahweh, and for all the vessels of service in the house of Yahweh-

We have been reading of these divisions in the previous chapters, and David is going to claim in :19 that all this was from God's direct revelation. Yet throughout those chapters we noted David's preference for appointing leaders not from all Israel, but mainly from Judah and his own inner circle. And some of the people mentioned, such as Asahel and David's uncle, had already died. So the schema needed revision. Yet David claims this whole packet of documentation was all directly inspired and revealed by God (:19), when instead, as noted on :12, it was all from David's mind and spirit.

1Ch 28:14 of gold by weight for the gold, for all vessels of every kind of service; for all the vessels of silver by weight, for all vessels of every kind of service-

This was indeed a measure of David's obsession, calculating the exact weight of gold for each vessel. Even though this was not specified in the commands for building the tabernacle. 1 Kings 7:47 implies Solomon tried to calculate the total weight of all the vessels once they had been made, but the inventory was so huge that he left off. Yet so many vessels were not required by the tabernacle service. This was a completely different, grandiose religious system of David's own device; and in the end, all these vessels of mere religion were taken off into captivity (2 Kings 25:14-16 emphasizes this).

1Ch 28:15 by weight also for the lampstands of gold, and for its lamps, of gold, by weight for every lampstand and for its lamps; and for the lampstands of silver, by weight for every lampstand and for its lamps, according to the use of every lampstand-
See on :14. "The candlestick" or menorah is only ever spoken of in the law of Moses in the singular, but here David has decided there were to be multiple such candlesticks. By doing so, he ignored the symbolism of the one candlestick, such was his obsession with mere religion.

1Ch 28:16 and the gold by weight for the tables of show bread, for every table; and silver for the tables of silver-
The table of show bread was to be made of acacia wood (Ex. 25:23), but David planned to make it of pure gold, and even worked out the weight of gold required for it (1 Chron. 28:16). And Solomon indeed made it of gold (1 Kings 7:48), leading to it being known as "the pure table" (2 Chron. 13:11). Religion had overtaken spirituality, form had eclipsed content. Likewise the "tables of silver" David ordered to be made (1 Chron. 28:16) do not feature in the tabernacle. He was missing the point- that God wanted His holiest symbols made of common, weak things like acacia wood. For His strength and glory is made perfect in weakness. David claims these plans were from God (1 Chron. 28:19), although as discussed on 1 Chron. 28:12, they were in fact from his own mind. The way these things were taken into captivity, with no record of this golden table ever being returned, surely reflects God's judgment upon this kind of religious show. He prefers a humble house church in an inner city room, rather than a gold plated cathedral. The way some exclusive churches speak of 'maintaining a pure table' suggests they have made the same essential mistake as David did.

1Ch 28:17 and the forks, and the basins, and the cups, of pure gold; and for the golden bowls by weight for every bowl; and for the silver bowls by weight for every bowl-
There was little point in making forks and basins of pure gold, a soft metal. This was all for religious show, and not at all stipulated in the Divine design for the tabernacle.

1Ch 28:18 and for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of

the chariot, the cherubim, that spread out, and covered the ark of the covenant of Yahweh-
Here we have a clear association between the cherubim and the idea of a chariot. The idea of the cherubim is that this is God in motion. And so we behold the contradiction. David wants this cherubim chariot fixed in one place; whereas God had told David that He didn't want a temple, because He was a God on the move. His ark and the associated cherubim had always been moving and therefore the ark was to be portable. But David was seeking to tie down the ever moving God in one place. This is what religion ever seeks to do to spirituality.

1Ch 28:19 All this, said David, I have been made to understand in writing from the hand of Yahweh, even all the works of this pattern-
In the previous chapters, we have David presenting his plans and visions for the divisions of the Levites, and only now claiming that this was from God's revelation to him. See on :11,12. If these plans were indeed from God, we would expect to read about the point when a prophet declared them by a "word of the Lord". The "said David" is highly significant. Here we see the difference between inspiration and revelation. The record of the words is inspired, but this is not Divine revelation. LXX "David gave all to Solomon in the Lord's handwriting". This was David's claim, trying to make his plans equivalent to Yahweh's writing the ten commandments in His handwriting. But there is no record of this at all. David is desperate to make his narrative God's and even reasons that his handwriting is God's. And so all expanded narratives end up a playing God.

1Ch 28:20 David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and courageous, and do it. Don't be afraid, nor be dismayed; for Yahweh God, even my God, is with you. He will not fail you, nor forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of Yahweh is finished-
The "service" of Yahweh is never finished, and yet David speaks as if it will finish when the temple is built. This reflects his obsession with the project. But maybe the words of David to Solomon here came to the Lord's mind in Mt. 27:46: "My God (cp. "My God, My God") is with you... He will not... forsake you". Recognizing He had now been forsaken, the Lord Jesus agreed "It is finished". Indeed, from the moment He left the Upper Room the work was finished and therefore the presence of the Angel departed (Jn. 17:4 "I have finished the work...").

Being "dismayed and terrified" is the term used of how Israel generally were terrified of Goliath, whereas David by faith wasn't (1 Sam. 17:11). David in turn uses to his son Solomon (1 Chron. 22:13; 28:20). He was thereby urging Solomon not to worry if he was out of step with all Israel; if they were dismayed and terrified, he was still to walk in faith as David had done at the time of the Goliath crisis. It is also used to urge the people toward the spirit of David rather than that of Israel in 2 Chron. 20:15,17. The same

phrase is also used in urging the people of Judah in Hezekiah's time to consider the Assyrians to be as a Goliath which they like David could vanquish (2 Chron. 32:7). The exiles likewise were urged not to be dismayed and terrified at the reproach of men (Is. 51:7; Jer. 30:10), very clearly making the history with Goliath relevant to their times.

1Ch 28:21 Behold, there are the divisions of the priests and the Levites, for all the service of God's house. There shall be with you in all kinds of work every willing man who has skill, for any kind of service. Also the captains and all the people will be entirely at your command-
The language of willing men with skill recalls that of the building of the tabernacle by skilled workmen (Ex. 35:35), using materials supplied by willing hearts (Ex. 35:5,21). But David was wrong to imply that this temple he had conceived was some kind of tabernacle. For on point after point, he goes against both the letter and spirit of the directions regarding the tabernacle. But he is shrouding his whole project in the language of the tabernacle.

1 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 29

1Ch 29:1 David the king said to all the assembly, Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is yet young and tender-
"Whom alone..." is a political statement. David of course claimed that God had chosen Solomon out of all his sons (1 Chron. 28:5), but there is no record of that happening; rather do we suspect that David came to imagine that his own choice was in fact God's. Psalm 72 was David's declaration that he believed Solomon would be the Messianic ruler; but that was proven wrong, because Solomon did not reign with justice and turned away from Yahweh. The words will come true in the person of the Lord Jesus, but David was wrong to insist they must apply to Solomon.

So it was David who chose Solomon, but he is trying to make God be the one who preferred Solomon. As discussed on 1 Chron. 28:4, David had misrepresented God as having chosen David on the basis of lineal descent, when that wasn't at all the case. But David does so because he wants to thereby justify Solomon as the chosen son on the basis of lineal descent. When Adonijah briefly seized power, David was forced to make a statement in support of Solomon; but beyond the reference to a personal comment to Bathsheba that he wanted Solomon to succeed him, David had never made his position on Solomon clear before that time. And there was no recorded word from Yahweh saying that Solomon was to succeed him.

And the work is great; for the palace is not for man, but for Yahweh God-
This is true on one level, but not on another. The greatness of God is not necessarily

responded to by lavish decoration of buildings, as we see in the Orthodox churches. God dwells in the hearts of men and not in such buildings

1Ch 29:2 Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, the brass for the things of brass, the iron for the things of iron and wood for the things of wood; onyx stones and stones to be set, stones for inlaid work and of various colours, all kinds of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance-
The reference to precious stones would suggest that David was seeking to make new robes for the high priest, including a new breastplate. But the scale of the materials suggests David was going far beyond that, and instituting a new religious system with opulence everywhere, with "inlaid work" on fixtures which was not stipulated in the tabernacle plans. This was quite contrary to God's desire to live in the hearts of people; those hearts were precious stones to Him. And He specifically stated He wanted the ark to dwell in a tent. LXX "Parian marble"; the word is only used of the decadent palace of Esther 1:6. The spiritually minded amongst the exiles would have observed the parallels.

1Ch 29:3 In addition, because I have set my affection on the house of my God-
"Affection" here is s.w. :17 of God's "pleasure" in righteousness. David assumes that God has pleasure / affection towards him because he has this obsession with building a temple- which God had said He didn't want. The whole story here is a parade example of where religion overtakes spirituality, and form eclipses content. This is the same word David used in saying that God doesn't "delight" or set His affection upon sacrifices, but rather upon broken, contrite hearts of repentant sinners (Ps. 51:16 "You do not delight in / have affection to burnt offering, or I would give it"). But now David's delight is in burnt offerings and rituals, and a temple where they could be offered in larger number than in the tabernacle. He has slipped back from spirituality to religion at the very end of his journey; and yet still will be saved.

Since I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, I give it to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house-
What we have is not ours because we worked for it- although that, I know, is how it feels. It is ours on loan. Surely this of itself ought to mean that each of us leaves our property, if we own any, to the Lord's work, after the pattern of how David left all his personal wealth to the work of the temple, rather than to Solomon personally.

But as with Haman offering huge amounts of money, we wonder where exactly David acquired all this personal wealth from. David had his own extensive personal wealth, including vineyards (1 Chron. 27:27), servants who worked the ground (1 Chron. 27:26). This was exactly what Samuel had warned Israel about; a human king would take Israel's men to till their ground, and would take their vineyards from them (1 Sam.

8:12,14). That all suggests that David slipped spiritually at the end of his life. For he came from a poor family, and to have all these things meant he had taken them for himself, and had ignored these warnings of his one time mentor Samuel. See on :12.

1Ch 29:4 even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, with which to overlay the walls of the house-
This is a huge amount of wealth to now additionally offer, for the sake of rendering the temple with gold. This kind of opulence is quite opposed to the humble spirit of the tabernacle construction. The amount may be less if we recall that Chronicles was rewritten under Divine inspiration for the exiles, and "talents" may refer to Persian talents which were considerably less than Hebrew talents. But it may well be that David is wildly exaggerating, in order to elicit yet more such donations from other wealthy people. David boasts in 1 Chron. 29:4 that his gold is "of Ophir", whereas in reality Solomon covered the house with gold "of Parvaim" (2 Chron. 3:6). This suggests that David may not in fact have had in hand all the fantastic personal wealth he boasted of donating for the rendering of the house with gold. The figures also contradict David's claim in 1 Chron. 22:14 "I have made a great effort in preparing for the house of Yahweh one hundred thousand talents of gold, one million talents of silver, and brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance. I have also prepared timber and stone". The amount of gold and silver David claims to have donated to the temple is beyond credibility. At the height of Solomon's power he only received 666 talents / year. He is in fantasy about himself and the temple. In the same way he refers to Solomon as young and tender (29:1) when he was at least 30 years old. As always, this was the narrative David wanted to present and believe. Likewise his claim that God had chosen only Solomon out of all David's sons. Earlier, David clearly had ambitions for his sons Ammon and Absalom to be the Messianic son of David. But they messed up and we're dead. So the claim God had only chosen Solomon is false. All this confirms my suggestion that 2 Sam. 23 was indeed the last prophetic, Divinely inspired words of David. All the rest was said by him not by revelation, although the record of what he said is Divinely inspired. He is again caught up in his own narrative, about his own wealth and power, and how the temple will be so opulent. He has totally ignored God's words about preferring to dwell in a tent. Again we see the consequence of getting lost in a false narrative; it always expands. The David who has never previously presented as materialistic, now presents as obsessed with his own wealth and trumpeting his generosity to the narrative he has created- of the temple God never wanted.

1Ch 29:5 of gold for the things of gold, and of silver for the things of silver, and for all kinds of work to be made by the hands of artisans. Who then offers willingly to consecrate himself this day to Yahweh?-
David was almost covetous for the donations of others, and therefore appears to

overstate his own voluntary donation (see on :5). This is all an example of how he was obsessed with the project. What God required was willingly consecrated hearts, not consecration to God through impressive material donations towards a project God didn't want anyway.

To "consecrate" is literally to fill one's hand to the Lord, meaning to provide oneself with something which one brings to the Lord, as in Ex. 32:29. We note the paradox. To give something to God means your hand is full with it, you retain it in the spiritual sphere but not in the literal, material world. And yet whatever we thought was in our own hand was in fact in God's hand and is anyway in His hand: "From You came the riches and the glory ... and in Your hand it is" (:12,14,16).

1Ch 29:6 Then the princes of the fathers' households, and the princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers over the king's work, offered willingly-
As in :3, we wonder from where the leaders of Israel had such huge wealth. I noted on 1 Chron. 27 and elsewhere that David had appointed leaders who were largely from his own tribe and personal circle. The impression we get now is that they had all enriched themselves at others' expense. See on :3.

1Ch 29:7 and they gave for the service of God's house five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, and of silver ten thousand talents, of brass eighteen thousand talents and of iron a hundred thousand talents-
The mention of darics, a Persian measurement, suggests this record was rewritten [under inspiration] in exile. See on :4. This would mean that "talents" may refer to Persian talents, which were considerably less than Hebrew talents. "Darics" certainly shows Chronicles was written or rewritten in exile, encouraging the Jews to prepare for a Davidic Messiah to arise and to rebuild the temple. This is one reason why David is sanitized in the Chronicles record- to present him as a type of the Messiah they could potentially have had at the restoration.

But the sum of 5000 talents is still barely credible. (5000 talents equals about 150 tonnes, i.e. 150000 kilograms of gold). This is in addition to the 3000 talents which David supposedly gave. It is doubtful whether there was that amount of gold in one place anywhere in the ancient world. Again we get the impression that David is eagerly counting every penny, and more than that, exaggerating grossly. He ends his days totally failing to learn from the sin of numbering Israel and trying to establish God's Kingdom immediately by his human strength. And also he has an eye for material wealth and strength rather than the trust in Yahweh which had characterized his earlier, younger life. Yet he will still be saved.

1Ch 29:8 They with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of Yahweh, under the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite-
The only precious stones required were those for the breastplate and garments of the high priest. These were given by the rulers of the people (Ex. 35:9,27). But we have the impression that a huge amount of precious stones was gathered from the leaders. Far more than the 12 stones of the breastplate. Again, the simple, humble nature of the tabernacle was being subverted by a mistaken idea that God is honoured by opulence- a lesson Pentecostalism has failed to learn.

The language in this chapter clearly reflects that of Israel giving the required materials for building the tabernacle. The precious stones sound like those used in the High Priest's garments. David was not only wanting to build a temple but had expanded his narrative to create an entire worship system. None of us this was asked for by God. Once we begin down a path of our own creation, our narrative expands. None of this would have happened had David taken God at His word when God explained why He didn't want a temple and preferred a tent and to dwell on the hearts of the seed of His future Son. No lie remains alone, it expands, false narratives likewise expand. We are to love truth and hate untruth. Otherwise we will believe an ever expanding lie.

1Ch 29:9 Then the people rejoiced, because they offered willingly, because with a complete heart they offered willingly to Yahweh: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy-
It is true that even if all this opulence was a case of misplaced idealism, genuine giving to God rather than retaining for ourselves is a source of personal joy. We will note on :14,18 that this attitude of heart was also given by God. But we wonder whether the record here, although inspired by God in its recording, was really the summary of the narrative David wished to believe. Because the language of the people rejoicing for their willing giving recalls the descriptions of the people willingly offering for the building of the tabernacle (Ex. 25:2; 35:21,22,29). But David was not building or rebuilding the tabernacle; he was building a grandiose religious system which in letter and spirit was out of step with the tabernacle specifications. And although the people in the wilderness offered so willingly, they were far from God in their hearts and turned back to Egypt. They were not justified by their apparent generosity.

1Ch 29:10 Therefore David blessed Yahweh before all the assembly; and David said, You are blessed, Yahweh, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever-
This public praise of God "before all" appears out of step with the real spirit of praise and worship. This prayer ends with the people prostrating themselves before David, which all seems so spiritually inappropriate for the man who was initially loved as the

shepherd boy with a humble heart. See on :20.

1Ch 29:11 Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory and the majesty! For all that is in the heavens and in the earth is Yours. Yours is the kingdom, Yahweh, and You are exalted as head above all-
The common rubric found in the histories of the kings is that the "might" of a king was recorded at his death (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

David prayed "Yours is the Kingdom" when madly going about to build up his own kingdom with his son as the head of it. But this is the same easily made error that we can all make when praying the Lord's prayer.

1Ch 29:12 Both riches and honour come from You, and You rule over all; in Your hand is power and might; it is in Your hand to make great, and to give strength to all-
David appears to have himself in view, the one from a poor family who had been "made great" by God's gentleness and grace (Ps. 18:35). Yet I suggested on :3 that David had really made himself great by taking wealth not intended for him. And we hear the same today, people praising God for having blessed them with what in fact they blessed themselves with, often by unethical means.

1Ch 29:13 Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name-
David has used the same phrase in Ps. 66:2; but the following context of the Psalm is of his praise of God's grace in redeeming and saving His unspiritual people. But now, David appears to be praising God for the works which he himself is able to do. This is the

inverse image of how God had told David that He didn't want a temple built, but rather wanted to build David a house of people whom He had redeemed by grace.

1Ch 29:14 But who am I-
This was David's response when God first told him that He didn't want a temple, but rather would build a house for David from his descendants. David has totally misrepresented God's response as saying that He did in fact welcome the idea of a grandiose physical temple, and so by repeating his response at the time, he is surely guilty of a false humility.

And what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this?-
The idea is that even the desire to offer willingly was given by God, as well as the actual materials given. As will be noted on :18, God can give desires and motives to people, working directly on the human heart. And He can do so today, in the hearts of those open to the working of the Holy Spirit.

For all things come from You, and of Your own have we given You-
God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God?* Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, *in this life*, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him. The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'. When Eli and his sons kept part of God's sacrifices for themselves, he was condemned: "You trample upon My sacrifice and My offering" (1 Sam. 2:29 RVmg.). This is what we are doing by considering that anything that is God's is in fact ours- we are trampling upon that which is His.

1Ch 29:15 For we are strangers before You, and foreigners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no remaining-
Foreigners were sometimes allowed to reside in the capital city of another nation under the immediate protection of the king or of the heads of the state (cp. 1 Sam. 22:3,4; 27:3; 15:19). David appeals to God on the ground that Israel is likewise living in His city and therefore under God's protection (Cp. Ps. 39:12). The idea anyway is of usufruct, not owning the land, but allowed to eat what grows upon it. And that should be the spirit of our living on this earth at this time.

David uses the language of Gentiles, appreciating that their Hebrew roots, in ethnic terms, were of no real value in achieving their salvation. Their inherent mortality as men, of whatever ethnic background, meant that they were saved by grace and not because

of their ethnicity. Because we brought nothing into the world and can carry nothing out, i.e. because of our very nature, we shouldn't be materialistic and should be content (1 Tim. 6:7,8). In saying this, Paul is alluding to how Job faced up to the reality of our condition by saying that we entered this world naked and return naked (Job 1:21). Paul is saying that we are all in Job's position, facing up to the loss of all things, and should count it a blessing to have even clothing. David said that just because "our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" , therefore he wanted to be as generous as possible in providing for the work of God's house (1 Chron. 29:14-16).

1Ch 29:16 Yahweh our God, all this store that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name comes from Your hand, and is all Your own-
David sees the wealth which he and the leaders of Israel had offered as having come from God. But I explained on :3 that in fact they appear to have acquired that huge wealth by unGodly means. This kind of thing goes on often. Men build up wealth in their own strength, often by unGodly means; and then piously claim it is all God's blessing, and they are giving it back to God. This is far from just the tendency of the very wealthy; it applies to people on all levels of wealth.

1Ch 29:17 I know also, my God, that You try the heart, and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things. Now have I seen with joy Your people, that are present here, offer willingly to You-
But David clearly advertised his own huge giving in order to elicit such donations from other wealthy people. So to then praise God for their willing hearts is somewhat less than truthful.

"Willingly offered" is LXX "with a single eye". Speaking in the context of serving *either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered some difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness...how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye"- and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or "mean". A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of "generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness.

1Ch 29:18 Yahweh, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Israel our fathers, keep this

forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and prepare their heart for You-
NET: "Maintain the motives of your people and keep them devoted to you". This is a clear example of how God through His Spirit can work directly on the human heart, giving motivations and preparing minds. And this is really what we so earnestly need in our spiritual lives.

1Ch 29:19 Give to Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep Your commandments, Your testimonies and Your statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for which I have made provision-

As in 1 Chron. 28:9 we marvel that David has so little insight into the state of the human heart. David's heart was on balance with God, but as with every man apart from the Lord, his human heart was very corrupt as well. But David refuses to see this, preferring a simplistic binary division of men into being either sinners or having perfect hearts. Whilst we can argue that perfect reflects the Hebrew sense of complete, David imagines his son will be God's Son and therefore perfect morally.

As noted on :18, David understood God to have the ability to work directly upon the human heart, and to make people obedient. This is the function of the Holy Spirit today. But as with Solomon, God will never force a person to be obedient if this is not in fact what they themselves truly want.

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve nor observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon would be given a heart to observe them. It seems David assumed his prayer was answered, and Solomon was somehow made righteous and even perfect. This would account for Solomon's lack of personal conscience of sin and possible failure, which was to be his spiritual undoing. We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

Solomon keeps saying that his zealous work for the temple was the result of God's promise to David having fulfillment in him (1 Kings 8:24-26), and to some extent this was true. David earnestly prayed for Solomon to be the Messianic King (e.g. Ps. 72), and therefore David asked for Solomon to be given a truly wise heart (1 Chron. 29:19). These

prayers were answered in a very limited sense- in that Solomon was given great wisdom, and his Kingdom was one of the greatest types of Christ's future Kingdom. Our prayers for others really can have an effect upon them, otherwise there would be no point in the concept of praying for others. But of course each individual has an element of spiritual freewill; we can't force others to be spiritual by our prayers; yet on the other hand, our prayers can influence their spirituality. David's prayers for Solomon is the classic example of this. Those prayers were heard most definitely, in that God helped Solomon marvellously, giving him every opportunity to develop a superb spirituality; but he failed to have the genuine personal desire to be like this in his heart, in his heart he was back in Egypt, and therefore ultimately David's desire for Solomon to be the wondrous Messianic King of his dreams had to go unfulfilled.

1Ch 29:20 David said to all the assembly, Now bless Yahweh your God! All the assembly blessed Yahweh, the God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and prostrated themselves before Yahweh and the king-
Such prostration before David was surely inappropriate. David was really playing God, and the whole scene, although it includes many spiritual words and ideas, smacks of pride and inappropriate opulence.

1Ch 29:21 They sacrificed sacrifices to Yahweh, and offered burnt offerings to Yahweh, on the next day after that day, even one thousand bulls, one thousand rams and one thousand lambs, with their drink offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel-
This was clearly out of step with what David had earlier been taught after his sin with Bathsheba; that God did not want thousands of sacrifices, but rather broken, contrite hearts (Ps. 40:6-8). And Solomon repeats David's failure in this, by again offering such huge numbers of sacrifices. Which, like the temple, God didn't want.

1Ch 29:22 and ate and drink before Yahweh on that day with great gladness. They made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and anointed him to Yahweh to be prince, and Zadok to be priest-
It seems that this was "that day" when David had made his public prayer. So Solomon was made king shortly before David actually died. "The second time" refers to how the first time, David had hurriedly pronounced Solomon king at the time of Adonijah's rebellion. We note that *they* anointed him to be king, whereas Saul and David were anointed by God to be king. Zadok was made high priest because the other high priest Abiathar had supported Adonijah's rebellion and had been demoted.

1Ch 29:23 Then Solomon sat on the throne of Yahweh as king instead of David his father,

and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him-
Solomon would only prosper if he was obedient to the Divine commandments (s.w. 1 Chron. 22:13). But he didn't do so, and so his prospering was in appearance.

1Ch 29:24 All the princes, the mighty men, and also all the sons of king David submitted themselves to Solomon the king-
Again the record appears to be reflecting the narrative which David and Solomon wanted to believe. For Solomon slew his brother Adonijah and any other potential competitors for his throne. Those who remained presumably only submitted themselves out of fear.

1Ch 29:25 Yahweh magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed on him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel-
Despite all the unspirituality of this situation, God was willing to work with what He had. He likewise worked through a human kingship system, although it was a rejection of Him; and He was to inhabit the temple, although He never wanted it built in the first place. Solomon, like Saul, was set up with the potential for being the Messianic seed / king; but he failed to use the huge potential given him.

1Ch 29:26 Now David the son of Jesse had reigned over all Israel-
"All Israel" is stressed. The exiles for whom Chronicles was rewritten were commanded to participate in a renewed Davidic kingdom, which was intended to comprise the repentant remnants of both Judah and the ten tribes.

1Ch 29:27 The time that he reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem-
Solomon, David and Saul are all stated to have reigned 40 years, and it may be a non literal number. If Saul reigned 40 years (Acts 13:21), this creates various chronological problems. Paul's argument in Acts 13:21 seems to be seeking to draw a parallel between Israel's 40 years in the desert and Saul's reign. Numbers are simply not used in Semitic literature in the literalistic way that they are in the writings of other cultures. To this day an Arab may describe a hot day as being 100 degrees C, when it is not that literally. But the Arab is not lying nor deceiving; it's a case of using numbers within a different context of language usage. David beginning his reign at 30 may be intended to recall how the Levites began serving at 30 (Num. 4:3), because David was set up to be the priest-king who would replace the high priesthood according to Hannah's song. And at times he clearly did act like this, although his failures meant that the potential was reapplied and reframed to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

1Ch 29:28 He died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour; and Solomon his son reigned in his place-
This again presents David from a very idealistic viewpoint, part of the narrative which David and Solomon wished to believe. For I discussed on :3 how his wealth was perhaps wrongly acquired. And he hardly died with universal honour, for the last years of his life, right up to Adonijah's rebellion when he was on his death bed, were characterized by discontent with him. The record of the words is inspired, but that is not to say that we are not reading a history written by someone who wished to justify the David-Solomon narrative.

1Ch 29:29 Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the history of Samuel the seer, in the history of Nathan the prophet and in the history of Gad the seer-
"The history" is literally 'the words'. The reference may not be to the books of Samuel; the Hebrew title for The Books of Chronicles is "The words (or the acts) of the days". And that book may well be a compilation of the three sources listed here.

1Ch 29:30 with accounts of all his reign and his might, and the circumstances which he and all Israel experienced, and those of all the kingdoms of the surrounding countries-
"Circumstances" is "the times". But this history or "times" needs to be interpreted, as it was by those of 1 Chron. 12:32. It seems from this that the histories of :29 included histories of the nations surrounding Israel, and it would appear that these are being referenced as if they existed somewhere. It seems that when Chronicles was rewritten under inspiration in exile, there developed a body of such literature, although the texts of :29 are not all preserved.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: 2 CHRONICLES

2 CHRONICLES

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 1

2Ch 1:1 Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and Yahweh his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly-
Despite all the unspirituality of this situation, God was willing to work with what He had. He likewise worked through a human kingship system, although it was a rejection of Him; and He was to inhabit the temple, although He never wanted it built in the first place. Solomon, like Saul, was set up with the potential for being the Messianic seed / king; but he failed to use the huge potential given him.

2Ch 1:2 Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every prince in all Israel, the heads of the fathers' households-
Solomon sought to establish himself as king, so he invited all the leaders of the nation to come to a special sacrifice in Gibeon, a kind of inauguration ceremony. It seems they came to Jerusalem, and then travelled with him to Gibeon (:3) and then returned with him from there to Jerusalem (:13).

2Ch 1:3 So Solomon, and all the assembly with him, went to the high place that was at

Gibeon; for there was the Tent of Meeting of God, which Moses the servant of Yahweh had made in the wilderness-
Solomon was fully representative of Israel (1 Kings 11:1,5-7 cp. 33; 8:52; and note the ye... thee confusion of 1 Kings 9:4-7); his prayer was their prayer (2 Chron. 6:21); his worship was theirs (2 Chron. 1:3,5).

Zadok cared for the tabernacle at Gibeon, which was "the great high place" (1 Chron. 16:39; 1 Kings 3:4), and so it is another example of correlation within the inspired records that he had access to that horn and the oil with which to anoint Solomon (1 Kings 1:39). Solomon had replaced Abiathar with Zadok as chief priest, so perhaps his worship to Gibeon rather than Jerusalem [where Abiathar had officiated] was a nod towards Zadok.

2Ch 1:4 But David had brought the ark of God up from Kiriath Jearim to the place that David had prepared for it; for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem-
The point is that the ark was not in the tabernacle at Gibeon (:3). The force of "But..." could be an implied criticism of this. I suggest on :5 that this was for political reasons, but the reality was that the sanctuary at Gibeon was without God's presence, for the ark was not there. It was spiritually hollow.

2Ch 1:5 Moreover the bronze altar, that Bezalel the son of Uri the son of Hur had made, was there before the tabernacle of Yahweh; and Solomon and the assembly were seeking counsel there-
AV reads differently: "Moreover the brazen altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it". This may be read as an aside; at this point, Solomon went to Gibeon and sacrificed at the altar there, but this is as it were in brackets, telling us that in fact later, Solomon was to move the brazen altar from Gibeon to Jerusalem. We note that at this point, the ark is in Zion, but the altar of burnt offering is still at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39-42). This seems rather typical of how David perceived the spirit of the law to such an extent that he apparently broke the letter of the law by allowing this situation to continue. For surely he ought to have united the sanctuaries of Gibeon and Zion. Perhaps he allowed it to continue because of the political difficult in deciding which of the two high priests to appoint as singular high priest (Zadok or Ahimelech). And so he allowed the two sanctuaries to continue, although this was contrary to the law's insistence upon one sanctuary. Hence Solomon sacrificed both at Gibeon and before the ark at Jerusalem. It was only when Ahimelech was deposed by Solomon that he brought the brazen altar from Gibeon to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 1:5 AV). This suggests that David's operation of two sanctuaries was politically motivated.

2Ch 1:6 Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before Yahweh which was at the Tent

of Meeting and offered one thousand burnt offerings on it-
Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar-
This was clearly out of step with what David had earlier been taught after his sin with Bathsheba; that God did not want thousands of sacrifices, but rather broken, contrite hearts (Ps. 40:6-8). And Solomon repeats David's failure in this, by again offering such huge numbers of sacrifices. Which, like the temple, God didn't want.

2Ch 1:7 In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, Ask what I shall give you-
Godly men usually asked or enquired of God on their initiative, as David did (s.w. 1 Sam. 22:10; 23:4; 2 Sam. 5:19). But Solomon had apparently merely offered ritual sacrifices, and had not engaged with God in personal relationship. Now he is encouraged to do so.

I have argued that Ecclesiastes is Solomon's self reflection, a kind of autobiography. It is also a rejection and renunciation of his faith, because he wrote it at the end of his life, when his heart had been turned aside from God (1 Kings 11:3). I suggest it is this dream which is the reference of Ecc. 5:3: "For as a dream comes with a multitude of cares, so a fool's speech with a multitude of words". If we enquire what reference a "dream" may have to Solomon's historical life, we naturally think of this dream at the start of his life when he was offered whatever he wanted, and he chose wisdom. Several times in Ecclesiastes he appears to regret that choice, as he considers there to be no ultimate advantage to wisdom or going God's way because death ends it all, and God, Solomon thinks, cannot resurrect the dead to judgment (Ecc. 3:22). And so in Ecc. 5:3 Solomon seems to be saying that that dream was simply self induced, an outcome of his "multitude of cares", and the "multitude of words" of wisdom he had written in response to it was but "a fool's speech". Like many who have had the direct involvement of God in their lives in youth, he came to rationalize it as nothing at all Divine, considering his dream had just been some Freudian reflection of his own internal "cares". And this kind of rationalizing of the Divine over time is absolutely true to observed experience in those who turn away from God.

2Ch 1:8 Solomon said to God, You have shown great grace to David my father, and have made me king in his place-
Solomon has it all the wrong way around in saying that Yahweh had showed grace to David because he had walked before Yahweh in truth (1 Kings 3:6), and therefore Solomon had been made king. Solomon totally misunderstood grace. It is a pure gift from God, and not at all granted in response to our righteous walk.

These words are doubtless an allusion to the grace God showed David in his relationship with Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. But Solomon makes no mention of

David's great faith in God's grace, and his subsequent appreciation that animal sacrifices were meaningless. These were David's real strong points, but Solomon is obsessed with David's public life of obedience ("according as he walked", 1 Kings 3:6). He evidently saw his father as the epitome of spiritual good, faultless in God's sight. "Mercy" and "truth" both occur in 1 Kings 3:6, and they often refer to the promises. Solomon seems to have seen the promises to David as a reward for David's good life, rather than an expression of God's unwarranted grace. David's reaction was "Who am I...?" to receive such an honour. Solomon's feeling was that David deserved them because of his righteousness. So here is a feature of many parent : child relationships in the Lord. The children love and respect their parents spiritually, but often for the wrong reasons; they actually misunderstand their forefathers' spirituality. This is why their understanding of parental and community expectation is often wrong in the first place.

2Ch 1:9 Now, Yahweh God, let your promise to David my father be established-
So very often does Solomon speak of "David my father", and that God had made him king "instead of David my father" (e.g. 1 Kings 3:7). Thus he asks Hiram to deal with him just as he had done with David his father (1 Kings 5:2-7; and cp. 1 Kings 5:1 with 2 Sam. 5:11). The number of times these phrases occur in the records is so large that we simply have to recognize that God is pointing something out to us about the relationship between Solomon and David (1 Kings 2:24,26,32,44; 3:6,7,14; 5:3,5; 6:12; 8:15,17,18,20,24,25,26; 9:4; 11:33; 2 Chron. 1:8,9; 2:3,7,14; 6:4,7,8,10,15,16; 7:17). Solomon was raised a believer, and he lived out parental expectation; but in later life, he himself was revealed as having no real faith at all, and he turned away from Yahweh to idolatry. So often in his prayers to God does Solomon make reference to David; for example: "Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit upon his throne" (1 Kings 3:6).

For you have made me king-
Solomon speaks about him being King in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:1,12; Prov. 1:1) as if this was the ultimate fulfilment of the Davidic promises. Consider the implications of 2 Chron. 1:9: "O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth... give me now wisdom, that I may go out and come in before (i.e. lead) this people". Solomon was asking for wisdom because he thought that he was the Messiah, and he saw wisdom as a Messianic characteristic. He failed to realize that the promises to Abraham and David were only being primarily fulfilled in him (e.g. 1 Kings 4:20); he thought that he was the ultimate fulfilment of them (1 Kings 8:20 states this in so many words). His lack of faith and vision

of the future Kingdom lead him to this proud and arrogant conclusion (cp. building up our own 'Kingdom' in this life through our lack of vision of the Kingdom of God).

Over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude-
Solomon assumes that the promises to Abraham of an innumerable seed had been fulfilled in his kingdom, just as he assumes the promises to David of the seed were fulfilled in him. He has no perspective of the future Kingdom of God, nor does he factor in the conditional nature of those promises.

And so Solomon 'had the truth', he knew so deeply the true principles of Yahweh worship and the promises which formed the basis of the covenant. But like us, he scarcely considered the enormity of the gap between the theory he knew and the practice of it in his own heart and living. We too have a tendency to build up masses of Biblical and spiritual knowledge, and to let the mere acquisition of it stop us from practicing it. He flouted the explicit commandments not to get horses from Egypt, not to marry Gentile women, and not to multiply silver and gold (Dt. 17:17,18 cp. 1 Kings 10:21-29). At the end of his days, he recognized that although he had loved the theory of wisdom, the image of a spiritual life, the wisdom of God had never really impacted his soul: "I said, I will be wise (referring back to his request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3); but it was far from me" (Ecc. 7:23). His request for wisdom had only been so that he could do the job of leading Israel, living out the parental expectation of his father, whom he admits in Proverbs 4 had taught him to ask for wisdom. In Prov. 19:12 he speaks as if his own wisdom was like the dew coming down- as if he felt that the mere possession of wisdom made him the Messiah figure which his father had so hoped for him to be in Ps. 72:6). And he says as much in Prov. 29:3: “Whoso loveth wisdom [exactly what Solomon was commended for doing] rejoiceth his father”. He saw his wisdom and knowledge as some sort of a reward in themselves: “the prudent are crowned with knowledge” (Prov. 14:18). This is of course true in a sense, as all the Proverbs are. But Solomon surely had the idea that he, who was so renowned for his knowledge, was somehow thereby rewarded by having it. This assumption by Solomon was likely behind each of the many references he makes to the value of wisdom and the blessedness of the man who has it. It is rather like feeling that ‘we have the truth’ because somehow our correct understanding of doctrines is a reward for our righteousness, and mere possession of doctrinal truth means that we are acceptable to God.

2Ch 1:10 Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this your people, that is so great?-
I suggest on Ps. 119:169 that David asked for the word of promise that he would become king to be fulfilled; and in that context he asked for "wisdom / understanding" in how to rule Israel. And this was likewise the prayer of Solomon when he became king; but his

motives were less than pure because he was consciously seeking to imitate his father in this request.

Solomon in Proverbs presents wisdom as of great personal benefit, indeed it is "for yourself"; and folly likewise is to your loss. But this presents a somewhat selfish view of wisdom. Solomon had been granted wisdom not for himself, but because he wanted to know how best to rule God's great people. But once he has the wisdom, he becomes exalted by it, and concludes that wisdom is essentially for the personal benefit of those who have it, "you are wise for yourself" (Prov. 9:12). Whatever truths are revealed to us are so that we might use them to the glory of God with others, and not to merely keep them for our own personal benefit.

2Ch 1:11 God said to Solomon, Because this was in your heart-
Prayer is largely carried out in the mind – how we 'speak in the heart' is effectively read as our prayer to God. We find the phrase used about how Abraham's servant prayed, 'speaking in his heart' (Gen. 24:45). Thus our self-talk merges into prayer; Hannah's "prayer" appears to have been the same (1 Sam. 2:1). Solomon's prayer for wisdom is described by God as "in your heart" (2 Chron. 1:11). This close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: "Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them". Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfillment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit 'send' on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

And you have not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of those who hate you-
This was in contrast to David, whose imprecatory Psalms certainly ask for that. And he asked for it at the end of his life, and Solomon operationalized it for David. So God is being very gracious here in commending Solomon for not asking for the lives of those who hate him. And He appears to be indirectly critical of David's desire for just this.

God may be alluding to how David had asked long life and been given it (Ps. 21:8). This allusion was seeking to show Solomon that he was not to merely live out the image of his father David, but to think independently and forge his own relationship with God. Likewise Solomon had not taken literally the invitation of Ps. 2:8 to Messiah to "ask of Me (s.w. :5) and I will give you the Gentiles". Instead he had asked for wisdom.

Neither yet have asked long life; but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge my people, over whom I have made you king-
Prayer is largely carried out in the mind – how we 'speak in the heart' is effectively read as our prayer to God. We find the phrase used about how Abraham's servant prayed,

‘speaking in his heart’ (Gen. 24:45). Thus our self-talk merges into prayer; Hannah’s “prayer” appears to have been the same (1 Sam. 2:1). Solomon’s prayer for wisdom is described by God as “in your heart”. This close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord’s teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: “Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them”. Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfillment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit ‘send’ on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

2Ch 1:12 wisdom and knowledge is granted to you-
1 Kings 3:12 "Behold, I have already given you a wise and an understanding heart; so that there has been none like you before you, neither after you shall any arise like you". Solomon asked God for a wise heart- but he was told that God had already given him this. The process of educating Solomon in wisdom would have started long before; but it was released, as it were, by Solomon’s specific prayer. We likewise are to ask in faith believing that we already have the things we ask for. 1 Kings 3:13: "I have also given you that which you have not asked". We are not merely reading history here. God's word is living and engages with us in all generations. We too are given exceeding abundantly above all we ask (Eph. 3:20 alludes here)- if we put first the wisdom of achieving God's glory.

I will give you riches, wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had who have been before you; neither shall there any after you have the like-
"Riches" is s.w. Prov. 14:24 "The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly".
It was Solomon who was the king and wore the ultimate crown in his society. And he implies that his fantastic riches were a result of his wisdom, and that his pattern should be followed by others. But he fails to remember that his desire for wisdom was recognized by God in that He gave Solomon riches. Those riches were a gift from God, by grace, and not acquired or generated by his own application of wisdom. He therefore misused his possession of wisdom and experience of grace to justify himself, and present himself as a self made man; when he was not that at all.

Solomon knew and warned that a little folly can destroy the man who is in reputation for wisdom and honour (Ecc. 10:1). Solomon had “honour” [s.w.] to an unprecedented extent (1 Kings 3:13). But in the same book he admits that he, the man famed world-wide for wisdom, gave himself to folly (Ecc. 2:3). He knew so well the error and folly of his ways, but he could only preach the lesson but not heed it. He “saw that wisdom exceedeth folly” (Ecc. 2:13)- but so what…

2Ch 1:13 So Solomon came from the high place that was at Gibeon, from before the Tent of Meeting, to Jerusalem; and he reigned over Israel-
It seems the elders of Israel (:1,2) came to Jerusalem, and then travelled with Solomon to Gibeon (:3) and then returned with him from there to Jerusalem (:13).

2Ch 1:14 Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen: and he had one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, that he placed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem-
1 Kings 4:26 "Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen".
Solomon's enthusiasm for Egyptian horses is clearly chronicled (1 Kings 4:26-28), although this was studied disobedience to Dt. 17:16. There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

Solomon had obsessive tendencies. We know that he became addicted to finding pleasure in women, and Ecc. 2 shows him racing down the road of obsession with architecture, alcohol, food, gold etc. The historical narratives so often mention his gold and silver (e.g. 2 Chron. 9:13-21,24,27). This repetition reflects Solomon's obsession. The same fact explains the record's repetition of Solomon's enthusiasm for horses (1 Kings 10:25-29; 4:26,28; 9:19,22; 2 Chron. 1:14,16,17; 8:6,9; 9:24,25,28).

2Ch 1:15 The king made silver and gold to be in Jerusalem as stones-
Yet amassing of gold, silver and horses was explicitly forbidden for the King of Israel (Dt. 17:17). There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

And cedars made he to be as abundant as the sycamore trees that are in the lowland-
This could mean that he planted cedars in Israel, perhaps transplanting them from Lebanon; for his wisdom included being given wisdom about plants. And that wisdom was for the sake of the blessing and wise leadership of God's people Israel.

2Ch 1:16 The horses which Solomon had were brought out of Egypt and from Kue; the king's merchants purchased them from Kue-
Solomon had obsessive tendencies. We know that he became addicted to finding pleasure in women, and Ecc. 2 shows him racing down the road of obsession with architecture, alcohol, food, gold etc. The historical narratives so often mention his gold

and silver (e.g. 2 Chron. 9:13-21,24,27). This repetition reflects Solomon's obsession. The same fact explains the record's repetition of Solomon's enthusiasm for horses (1 Kings 10:25-29; 4:26,28; 9:19,22; 2 Chron. 1:14,16,17; 8:6,9; 9:24,25,28). Yet amassing of gold, silver and horses was explicitly forbidden for the King of Israel (Dt. 17:17). There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

Solomon started off as a middleman in the horse trade, buying horses from Egypt and selling them to the Hittite and Syrian kings (2 Chron. 1:16,17; 1 Kings 10:25,29); but he was playing with fire, and he soon came to flout the spirit of the command not to buy horses from Egypt. It's rather like the brother who works in a video store starting to watch the blue movies which he handles daily. Solomon would have justified it initially by saying that the horses were not for himself; just as we saw he justified his Egyptian wife by the thought that Joseph also married an Egyptian girl.

2Ch 1:17 They brought out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred pieces of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty. They also brought them out for all the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of Syria-

The description of Solomon's trading with Egypt is described with an unusual phrase- he brought forth chariots and horses out of Egypt by his hand (1 Kings 10:29). But the Hebrew phrase 'to bring forth by the hand' is used so very often to described how God's might hand brought forth His people from Egypt- destroying the horses and chariots of Egypt in the process (Ex. 7:4,5; 13:3,14,16; 14:8; 32:11 and so often). This is such a major theme in Biblical history that the inspired choice of words is surely intentional and allusive in 1 Kings 10:29- for Solomon did the very opposite to what God did for His people. Solomon's hand brought forth and glorified the chariots and horses of Egypt, bringing them all the way from Egypt to Canaan. Solomon is thus being subtly set up as an anti-God figure- although apparently, all was well, the promises of blessing were being fulfilled etc.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 2

2Ch 2:1 Now Solomon purposed to build a house for the name of Yahweh, and a house for his kingdom-

"The royal house" of Esther 1:9 is literally "the house of the kingdom", the term used for the temple in 2 Chron. 2:1,12. This extends the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have here a fake, imitation temple of Yahweh. Remember that Chronicles is history written up for the encouragement of the exiles. The perceptive amongst the exiles would have seen the similarity between Solomon's buildings and those of their captors.

Solomon states these words as his own in 1 Kings 5:5. Again this is a spin; because it was David who had purposed to build the temple, and had prepared for it. And again we see Solomon assuming that the promises of 2 Sam. 7 were totally fulfilled in him; whereas being the Messianic son of David was conditional. And the house to be built was more essentially the house of God's family which God was to build for David rather than any physical temple. But Solomon totally missed all this.

2Ch 2:2 Solomon counted out seventy thousand men to bear burdens, and eighty thousand men who were stone cutters in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred to oversee them-

1 Kings 5:13-16 reveals that Solomon had 153,000 full time and 90,000 part time male servants. Israel's complaint that Solomon had whipped them implies that he treated them like slaves, with himself as the slave-driver. 600,000 adults came out of Egypt (Ex. 12:37), and assuming the population only rose slightly over the next 550 years, we have the picture of an Israel where almost half the males (i.e. probably the majority of the working population) were pressganged into slavery to a despotic King Solomon.

This huge number of men involved in quarrying and transportation of the stones was because of the obsession with building projects which Solomon admits he had in Ecclesiastes. Just as Solomon's abundance of wives led to having a few thousand mouths to feed, and Israel needed to provide for that; so his obsession with thousands of horses meant that there was a need for a huge amount of fodder for them (1 Kings 4:28). And all Israel had to provide this- all for the sake of Solomon's obsessive desires. That he reigned for as long as he did was truly a sign of God's grace to him for the sake of his father David, and is a tacit reflection of how much God loved David despite all his failures.

The huge amount of labour required- 80,000 men hewing stone alone- was nothing more than Solomon acting like Pharaoh, using taskmasters to trample down / rule over the people to achieve his quotas and enable his building fantasies to become reality. The Hebrew word translated "bear rule over' (Heb. 'to trample down') in 1 Kings 5:16 is that which we find in the Law's prohibition of this in Lev. 25:46: "But over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule over one another with rigour". Solomon knew the Law, and he rambles on in Proverbs about the need to read, love and obey that law. And yet he thought that he could give that one a miss, 'because I am doing God's work and building His house'. And how many a believer has ended up missing the entire point of God's law, the very essence of Christianity, because of their obsession with serving God in a form which is effectively merely serving themselves, excusing their fantasies in the name of doing God service. It's the *process* of Solomon's apostacy which is so instructive; for he justified himself by saying that he was doing God's work. He didn't simply quit on God.

2Ch 2:3 Solomon sent to Huram the king of Tyre saying, As you dealt with David my father, and sent him cedars to build him a house in which to dwell, so deal with me-

Solomon was obsessed with living out the image of his father. As Hiram had sent messengers to David (2 Sam. 5:11), so Solomon sends to Hiram.

2Ch 2:4 Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of Yahweh my God, to dedicate it to Him, and to burn before Him incense of sweet spices, and for the continual showbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the set feasts of Yahweh our God. This is an

ordinance forever to Israel-
Solomon reasons as if all these Mosaic rituals required a temple in which to perform them. But the Mosaic laws about the tabernacle required just a tent, and not at all the grandiose religious system which David had become so obsessed with designing. It could be that Hiram was some kind of proselyte, and therefore all the information about the Mosaic rituals was meaningful to him.

Solomon is alluding [as always] to the words of his father David, in Ps. 135:5: "For I am certain that Yahweh is great and great is our Lord beyond all gods". It is Yahweh who is great. But Solomon turns this into a statement that therefore the temple he builds must be "great" and greater than any temple built to other gods. This explains why the style of the temple is so similar to that of other temples from the time- it's just bigger and more lavish. Solomon reduces the greatness of Yahweh, and His infinite superiority over the other gods, to the simple term of having a greater temple than the other gods. Any purely religious approach to God diminishes His true greatness, which is in His grace. Solomon reduces the unique greatness of Yahweh to the uniqueness of the temple he is going to build Him. A temple Yahweh never wanted anyway. He fails to see Yahweh's greatness as being in terms of His grace and eternal salvation, which He had demonstrated for all time in His salvation of David regarding his affair with Solomon's mother Bathsheba. David made the same mistake in confusing the greatness of his projected temple with the greatness of Yahweh Himself. He says in 1 Chron. 29:11 "To you, Yahweh, belong the utmost greatness, might, distinction, eminence, and splendor- yes all that is in heaven and on earth" but then in 1 Chron. 22:5 "The temple I am about to build for Yahweh must become utterly great, for fame and distinction throughout all lands".

2Ch 2:5 The house which I build is great; for our God is great above all gods-
The deeper our realization of God's greatness, the higher our response. "My utmost for His highest". Thus Solomon built a "great" house for Yahweh, "for great is our God above all gods" (2 Chron. 2:5 AV). Israel prayed to God but without meaning, "though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7). They theoretically knew Him as "the most High" but in their hearts they failed to exalt Him. And so their prayers remained as empty words. And Solomon missed entirely the response of God to David's original desire to build this temple. God didn't want human works, but rather faith in His gracious desire to build David a house, through the work of His Spirit in human hearts.

2Ch 2:6 But who is able to build Him a house, since heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a house, except just to burn incense before Him?-
"Who am I?" is a quotation of David's words about the temple in 1 Chron. 29:14: "But who am I..?". But this in turn had been David's response when God first told him that He didn't want a temple, but rather would build a house for David from his descendants. David totally misrepresented God's response as saying that He did in fact welcome the idea of a grandiose physical temple, and so by repeating his response at the time, he is surely guilty of a false humility. Solomon quotes these words of apparent humility and applies them to himself. But just as we cannot sing words of humility in a Christian song or hymn and thereby be humble, Solomon failed to realize that humility is not a bought or inherited position. It has to come from the heart. And he had no sense of personal sin or possibility of failure, and therefore no humility. Solomon claims that he solely wanted to build a temple in order to offer incense and sacrifice. But the obvious counter to that is that God only asked for an

altar roughly made of earth or at best, unhewn stones, in order for man to offer sacrifice. A grandiose temple wasn't required for sacrifice.

2Ch 2:7 Now therefore send me a man talented to work in gold, silver, brass, iron, purple, crimson and blue, and who knows how to produce engravings, to be with the talented men who are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father provided-
The impression David had given in his closing speech to Israel was that he had provided absolutely every resource, human and material, required to realize his temple plans. But this was evidently not the case, as Solomon has to order more materials and skilled labour to complete it. I noted on 1 Chron. 28,29 the hollowness and exaggeration in David's words at that point.

2Ch 2:8 Send me also cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees, out of Lebanon; for I know that your servants know how to cut timber in Lebanon. My servants shall be with your servants-
Perhaps this was connected with the Divine wisdom about cedar trees which God had given Solomon (1 Kings 4:33). "Fir" is LXX "pine", which would have created a pleasant smell in the temple.

2Ch 2:9 even to prepare me timber in abundance; for the house which I am about to build shall be great and wonderful-
The greatness and wonder of the house was a big theme with David and Solomon. But God's response to David's initial suggestion of a temple was that He is a humble God, and doesn't like grandiose structures; rather does He wish above all for men to allow Him to work according to His grace in building a house for His glory made out of contrite, responsive hearts. Form eclipsed content for Solomon, religion overtook spirituality, as has happened constantly in the history of God's people. "Great and wonderful" is a Hebrew phrase consistently used about what God does for men by His grace; and not what man can do for God (Job 5:9; 9:10; 37:5; Ps. 86:10; 136:4; Jer. 32:17). In a time of greater humility, David had vowed not to exercise himself in this great and wonderful (s.w. Ps. 131:1). But now, Solomon is seeking to build a great and wonderful place for God, rather than allowing God to build that great and wonderful house of humbled human hearts.

2Ch 2:10 Behold, I will give to your servants, the cutters who cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil-
The different figures in 1 Kings 5:11 cp. 2 Chron. 2:10 could be because part of the amount was for Tyre generally, and part for Hiram's personal household. Twenty measure of pure oil (1 Kings 5:11) appears relatively small; but it is the same word used for the oil of the tabernacle rituals (Ex. 27:20), and as a proselyte Hiram may well have built his own kind of tabernacle system. I suggest on Ez. 28:14 that he indeed did so, but it turned into apostacy.

2Ch 2:11 Then Huram the king of Tyre answered in a writing which he sent to Solomon, Because Yahweh loves His people, therefore He has made you king over them-
These are identical words as in 1 Kings 10:9, of the queen of Sheba's response. We are given the impression that they became proselytes because they used the Yahweh

Name; although polytheists could take the name of other gods, such as Yahweh, without it meaning they had accepted them as their own gods.

2Ch 2:12 Huram continued, Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel that made heaven and earth, Who has given to David the king a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, that should build a house for Yahweh, and a house for His kingdom-
This statement of faith that Yahweh was creator of heaven and earth would imply Hiram truly was a proselyte. For all the other nations had their various theories as to how their gods created heaven and earth. Hiram is repeating what Solomon had told him, in saying that this temple was a "house for Yahweh, and... His Kingdom". God had made it clear that He could not be contained in a house, and His Kingdom "rules over all" and was not so geographically and spatially limited. The temple obsession was really bringing God down to a very human, limited level.

2Ch 2:13 Now I have sent a talented man endowed with understanding, of Huram my fathers-
This shows that there was more than one Hiram; it was likely a generic kingly name, like Pharaoh. However, we must compare this with 1 Kings 7:13: "King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre". This contrasts with how Solomon's communications with Hiram regarding the temple had been by messenger. But for the matters of building his own house, he wants him present in person. Again we see how more effort was put into Solomon's own house than God's house.

However I suggest that the actual Hiram king of Tyre is not necessarily in view, but a man called Huram (2 Chron. 4:11), of similar spelling, who is described as a "father" to Hiram the king (2 Chron. 2:13); in the sense in which Joseph was a father to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), his leading official. Thus we read in 2 Chron. 4:16 that "the vessels thereof did Huram his father make for king Solomon". However the point is established that a leading political figure within Tyre, who was known for his craftsmanship, was summoned personally to work on Solomon's own house, whereas this wasn't done for the work of God's house.

Another possibility is that this craftsman was Hiram's own representative, and is therefore spoken of as being "Hiram".

2Ch 2:14 the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan; and his father was a man of Tyre, talented to work in gold, silver, brass, iron, stone, timber, purple, blue, fine linen and crimson, also to engrave any kind of engraving, and to devise any device. Let there be a place appointed to him with your talented men, and with the talented men of my lord David your father-
2 Chron. 2:14 says "Hiram" was "son of a woman of the daughters of Dan", whereas 1 King 7:14 says he was "the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali". Dan may refer to the town called Dan or Laish which was in the territory of Naphtali, but inhabited by Danites (Josh. 18:27; 19:47; Jud. 18:7). Here we see how an apparent discrepancy on a surface level reveals a deep evidence of the way the records do not contradict but dovetail perfectly, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired writing. But this is only apparent to those who respectfully search the entire scriptures, rather than bandying around a surface level contradiction with an eagerness which speaks more of their own fears the Bible is inspired than of deep factual persuasion.

2Ch 2:15 Now therefore the wheat and the barley, the oil and the wine, which my lord has spoken of, let him send to his servants-

Tyre as a small island state had a major problem in obtaining enough food for their affluent population, so these basic food supplies were valuable to them.

2Ch 2:16 and we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as you shall need. We will bring it to you in floats by sea to Joppa; and you shall carry it up to Jerusalem-
1 Kings 5 says it was "fir", or LXX "pine", which would have created a pleasant smell throughout the temple.

2Ch 2:17 Solomon numbered all the foreigners who were in the land of Israel, after the numbering with which David his father had numbered them; and they were found one hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred-
This may connect with the 153 fishes which were caught in Jn. 21:11, representing the ingathering of the Gentiles to the people of God (see note there). But despite the typical significance, Solomon was clearly abusing Gentile labour in order to satisfy his own obsession for architecture and building work. He admits in Ecc. 2 that he had such an obsession, and indulged it in his search for meaning in his own life. But it was at a terrible cost to those thousands of individuals made to serve it. Instead of Israel being a blessing to the Gentiles, Solomon made them a huge disadvertisment for Israel's God. See on :18. David claimed to have already prepared all the resources necessary for the building of the temple. So this massive number of men involved in quarrying (:18) was an outcome of Solomon's obsession with architecture and building, rather than a genuine desire to glorify God.

2Ch 2:18 He set seventy thousand of them to bear burdens, and eighty thousand to be stone cutters in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred overseers to set the people to work-
1 Kings 5:16 has "three thousand and three hundred". The word for three in Hebrew, 'sls', can easily be confused with that for "six" ['ss']. The same confusion is found in 2 Chron. 8:10 cp. 1 Kings 9:23. This would appear to be one of the copying errors in these Divinely inspired records.

This levy of labour was evidently one of the reasons which led the next generation to complain that Solomon had chastised the people with whips (1 Kings 12:11; the happiness of the people which the Queen of Sheba observed in 1 Kings 10:8 was therefore just an impression Solomon arranged for her to receive). Yet "this is the reason of the levy which king Solomon raised: in order to build the house of the Lord, and his own house..." (1 Kings 9:15). Solomon justified his zest for power and control by saying it was in order to do the Lord's work, to build His house... and yet had he listened to God's word more carefully, he would have realized that the true house of Yahweh was in fact people... yet Solomon abused people in order to build a visible house for God. And so very often religious people have gone down the same path- devaluing the meaning and value of persons, because they want to be seen as achieving something visible for God, no matter how many people they abuse on the way. The ends simply don't justify the means; Solomon told himself that they did, and he ended up as bad as Saul and Pharaoh, who are alluded to in the records of his levy of slaves from Israel. And yet the 1 Kings record gives the impression of all happily working together to create a great temple for God. When we probe deeper, we find this was far from the case.

David had prophesied that his great son would "have dominion from sea to sea" (Ps. 72:8). 'Have dominion' is the Hebrew word translated 'oversee' here, or 'rule over' in 1 Kings 5:15. David's vision of his Messianic son having a world-wide Kingdom,

in which all people blessed him for his grace and beneficence, was abused by Solomon into justifying 'having dominion' over people as his personal slaves; and they certainly didn't bless him for it but rather complained (1 Kings 12:11). It's as if Solomon grabbed the word 'rule over / have dominion', wrenched it out of context, and used it to justify his actions, giving a quasi-Biblical justification to his pure selfishness. This is where knowledge of God's word can be a dangerous thing; leading people into a stronger self-justification than they would otherwise have had if they were guided by self-recognized greed alone.

This suggests that Solomon made the same mistake as Israel in earlier days- he was a satisficer, he himself married into those tribes, and he wasn't obedient to the clear covenant of the land which was binding upon him. Solomon's motivation for now bringing the Canaanites into servitude was not spiritual. Rather, as with his borrowing of money from Hiram (see on 2 Chron. 8:2), his obsession with his building plans was such that he needed huge amounts of money and resources to carry them through. And so he colonized the Canaanite areas and made them send him slaves to work on his quarrying and building projects (2 Chron. 8:2).

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 3

2Ch 3:1 Then Solomon began to build the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Yahweh appeared to David his father, which he prepared in the place that David had appointed, in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite-
This implies David assumed that the spot where the Angel appeared to him in 2 Sam. 24:17,18 was where he should build the temple. It is another example of David's tendency to wildly over interpret, which led him to a mistaken obsession about building the temple and assuming Solomon to be his Messianic seed. It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was offered on or near the hill of Calvary, one of the hills (Heb.) near Jerusalem, in the ancient "land of Moriah" (cp. 2 Chron. 3:1). The name given to the place, Yahweh-Yireh, means 'in this mount I have seen Yahweh'. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord which Isaac's experience pointed forward to were therefore the prophesied 'seeing' of Yahweh.

2Ch 3:2 He began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign-
1 Kings says it was in the 480th year after the exodus. If it took Solomon four years to prepare all the materials, the claims of David to have prepared all the materials in advance are surely exaggeration. This is indicative of the obsession he had with the project in his mind; and it was zeal for an image of his own creation, rather than doing God's will. For God was clear that He didn't want the temple built.

2Ch 3:3 Now these are the foundations which Solomon laid for the building of God's house-
Or, "these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed".

The length by cubits after the first measure-
This alludes to the way there were two measurements of a cubit; that of about 17½ inches is called in Dt. 3:11 "the cubit of a man"; and then later the cubit was a measure of about 21½ inches, a handbreadth longer than "the first measure" (Ez. 40:5).

Was sixty cubits and the breadth twenty cubits-
This was twice the size of the tabernacle. Psalm 127 is prefaced with the information

that it is a Psalm for Solomon- perhaps given by some nameless prophet (Gad? Nathan?) to warn him of where he was going. Verse 1 reminds him that God must be the builder of any house, or else the builders labour in vain. There is good reason to think that Solomon utterly failed to appreciate this. The records stress time and again that *Solomon* built the temple (1 Kings 6:2,14; 9:10,25; 10:4; 1 Chron.6:10,32; 2 Chron. 8:1,12; 9:3; Acts 7:47); yet the house referred to in the Davidic promises was to be built by God, through David's Messianic Son, the Lord Jesus. Zechariah prophesied at the time of the rebuilding of the physical temple. It is significant, in this context, that Zech. 6:12 reminds Israel that the true temple of God will be built by the Branch, the Lord Jesus.

2Ch 3:4 The porch that was in front, its length, according to the breadth of the house, was twenty cubits, and the height one hundred and twenty; and he overlaid it within with pure gold-
The height of the porch was 120 cubits, or 180 feet (2 Chron. 3:4). This is out of proportion to the length and breadth. Perhaps what is meant is that the height of each of the four walls has been added together, which would give a height of 30 cubits. See on :11. It's hard to know which kind of cubit is in view. If that of 18 inches, this would be a height of 180 feet; if 21 inches, then 210 feet. This would make the porch a kind of tower, probably in the form of a pyramid. The porch functioned as a kind of gateway to the temple. Layard's excavations of the palace of Khorsabad unearthed a gateway of very similar size and proportion. It's hard to know who copied who, but it could well be that far from these being Divinely given specifications, David and Solomon were imitating the architecture of the surrounding nations.

2Ch 3:5 The greater house he made with a ceiling of fir wood which he overlaid with fine gold, and ornamented it with palm trees and chains-
"Fir" is LXX "pine", which along with the huge amount of cedar would all have been brought from Hiram. Perhaps the reference was to David's imagery of the righteous flourishing like the palm tree (Ps. 92:12). But Solomon had likened his Egyptian lover to a palm (Song 7:7,8), and the palm and open flowers feature in Egyptian architecture. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence, although mixing it with the imagery of the cherubim of Yahweh's manifestation. And that was to be a sad theme of this temple until its destruction. There are observable similarities with the decoration of Egyptian holy places. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence. And that was to be a theme of this temple until its destruction.

2Ch 3:6 He garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim-
David boasts in 1 Chron. 29:4 that his gold is "of Ophir", whereas in reality Solomon covered the house with gold "of Parvaim" (2 Chron. 3:6). This suggests that David may not in fact have had in hand all the fantastic personal wealth he boasted of donating for the rendering of the house with gold.

2Ch 3:7 He overlaid also the house, the beams, the thresholds and its walls and its doors, with gold; and engraved cherubim on the walls-

The idea was that the glory and presence of God represented by the cherubim was not only in the most holy place, but extended beyond it. David had often perceived this in his Psalms whilst on the run from Saul. And yet I suggested on :5 that Solomon was influenced by the architecture of the surrounding nations. In this connection, we can note that there appears a connection with the winged bull of the Assyrian sculptures, called *kirubu* in Akkadian. And perhaps the precursors of this were known in the surrounding nations, and Solomon was imitating them, rather than solely giving glory to Yahweh.

2Ch 3:8 He made the most holy place: its length, according to the breadth of the house, was twenty cubits, and its breadth twenty cubits; and he overlaid it with fine gold, amounting to six hundred talents-
One talent is 26 kilograms (57 pounds). 1 kilogram of gold is currently worth about 40,000 US$ [2020], meaning the value was around 625 million US$ in current terms. But in the poor, subsistence farming economy of those times, this sum was far greater in real terms. But this was not even all the gold which came to Solomon in the course of one year (1 Kings 13:18), so it was not particularly generous.

2Ch 3:9 The weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. He overlaid the upper rooms with gold-
Gold is hardly the best material for nails or "pegs" (Heb.). This is an example of practical function being overlooked in favour of external image and opulence. That same basic tension is there in all God's people and their organizations. It is the tension between spirituality and religion, form and content. David had prepared iron nails (1 Chron. 22:3 s.w.), but Solomon replaced them with golden nails, in a bid to excel his father in religious opulence.

2Ch 3:10 In the most holy place he made two cherubim of wood; and they overlaid them with gold-
1 Kings 6:23: "Of olive wood, each ten cubits high". "Olive" is s.w. "pine", and may also have been brought from Gentile Hiram- to be worked into God's glory.

2Ch 3:11 The wings of the cherubim were twenty cubits long. The wing of the one was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing was five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub-
This style of recording dimensions is to be found in :4. The length of the wings of the cherubim is given as 20 cubits, but this was a way of saying that each of the four wings was five cubits long. We have another example in the way that the two pillars are said to be 18 cubits high (1 Kings 7:15), but in 2 Chron. 3:15 they are 35 cubits high. What that means is that there were two cubits of 17.5 cubits high each, summarized as 18 cubits high in 1 Kings 7:15.

2Ch 3:12 The wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing was five cubits, joining to the wing of the other cherub-
This means that the wings of the cherubim touched each other. There was a complete covering over the mercy seat, or top of the ark where the blood of atonement was sprinkled each year, and above that but below the wings of the cherubim the shekinah glory of God was seen. The ark and mercy seat were placed under the cherubic wings (2 Chron. 8:6). It was only a relatively small space.

2Ch 3:13 The wings of these cherubim spread themselves forth twenty cubits. They stood on their feet, and their faces were toward the house-
See on :11. In the tabernacle the wings were "spread out on high" (Ex. 25:20; 27:9), but here their wings touch each other. Although Solomon claims he built everything according to Divine revelation, we wonder whether in fact he felt free to liberally reinterpret the tabernacle features. And he changes wings uplifted to God's glory to wings which are closed in upon each other; the mercy seat, or cover of the ark, is no longer exposed to Heaven, as it were, but now closed over.

The ark and mercy seat were placed under the cherubic wings (2 Chron. 8:6). The ark was one and a half cubits high (Ex. 25:10) and the cherubim were ten cubits high (1 Kings 6:26). In this relatively small space, the shekinah glory of God was manifest. For God doesn't need much space in which to reveal Himself; which is an abiding principle.

2Ch 3:14 He made the veil of blue, purple, crimson and fine linen, and decorated it with cherubim-
It could be argued that 1 Chron. 6:31,32 implies there were door of olive wood, engraved with cherubim, which divided the holy place and most holy. In this case we wonder whether the veil was draped over that structure, which would have been contrary to the spirit of the tabernacle. The veil represented the flesh of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 10:20), and also the fact that the way into the most holy place, representing God Himself in Heaven, was somehow barred. But when the Lord died, the veil was torn from top [by God] to bottom (Mt. 27:51), and thus the way into direct personal fellowship with God was opened (Heb. 9:8,24; 10:19). This understanding was so radical for Jewish minds. For the high priest could only nervously enter the most holy place briefly, once every year on the day of atonement. But now the believer in Christ can enter into full and permanent fellowship with God Himself. This was all achieved through the Lord's flesh being torn. The fine linen speaks of His righteousness (Rev. 19:8), the blue of His association with God in Heaven, the crimson of His blood, and the purple of His Kingship (Jn. 19:2). All this was worked into the veil, and the overall product of it was glory to God, represented by the image of cherubim superimposed upon all this.

2Ch 3:15 Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty-five cubits high-
The two pillars are said to be 18 cubits high (1 Kings 7:15), but in 2 Chron. 3:15 they are 35 cubits high. What that means is that there were two cubits of 17.5 cubits high each, summarized as 18 cubits high in 1 Kings 7:15. We have another example of this kind of reckoning in the way that the height of the porch was 120 cubits, or 180 feet (2 Chron. 3:4). This is out of proportion to the length and breadth. Perhaps what is meant is that the height of each of the four walls has been added together, which would give a height of 30 cubits. This style is to be found in 2 Chron. 3:11, where the length of the wings of the cherubim is given as 20 cubits, but this was a way of saying that each of the four wings was five cubits long.

They were "fashioned" (1 Kings 7:15), or as AV "cast", and reflects Egyptian influence. The paintings of Thebes show this casting being done in Egypt, and it clearly was copied by Solomon. In connection with his wife being Pharaoh's daughter, he likely visited Egypt several times.

The two pillars with their pomegranates and lily-work seem to have matched the open flowers of the temple, and they have ominous connections with Absalom's pillar of self-glorification (2 Sam. 18:18). Worst of all, Solomon's throne seems to have

been built with allusion to Yahweh's enthronement upon the praises of Israel in the Most Holy.

And the capital that was on the top of each of them was five cubits-

The capitals were placed on the tops of the pillars, as in 1 Kings 7:16. "Tops" is "heads", and the Hebrew for "capitals" suggests "crown". The height of the capitals is given as three cubits in 2 Kings 25:17, but five cubits in 2 Chron. 3:15. The difference would be whether the crowns ["capitals"] were measured to the peak of the highest spike of the crown, or the top of the rim of the crown. But the idea is that everywhere in his house, Solomon was glorifying his own kingship; forgetting that it was by grace, and conditional upon his obedience.

2Ch 3:16 He made chains in the oracle, and put them on the tops of the pillars; and he made one hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains-

I consider that any attempt to find spiritual significance in the pomegranates used in Solomon's building is misplaced, because I don't think he was at all thinking in that way. Rather is this another example of his simply copying what he had seen in Egypt, from where his queen came from. For such pomegranate designs are common in Egyptian architecture of the time, and Egypt was famed for pomegranates (Num. 20:5).

2Ch 3:17 He set up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left-

Comparing with 1 Kings, I suggest there were two sets of pillars, one before Solomon's house and another before the temple. But pillars before a temple was a reflection of pagan influence. "The Phoenicians used isolated metal columns as sacred ornaments, so that Hiram would be familiar with such a mode of ornamentation" (Rawlinson). "Whenever in coins or histories we get a representation of a Phoenician temple, it always has a pillar or pillars standing within or before it" (Stanley). It seems that the contact with Tyre had resulted in their religion coming to influence Solomon's design of the temple. And so it happens when we claim to serve God according to the religious ideas of pagans. This is another reason why I query whether in fact he did receive the designs of the temple from God as he claimed.

And called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz-

"Jachin" means "He will establish", and Boaz "in Him [God] is strength", which is the idea in Is. 45:24. They were a statement that God would establish the line of Solomon, and perhaps Boaz is also a reference to his ancestor of that name. But that establishment of the Kingdom was conditional upon Solomon's obedience, according to the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7. But Solomon liked to think that by building these pillars, he had himself established his dynasty, and shown it to be established. Putting the two names together, we have 'He will establish by strength', and this seems to be deconstructed by the restoration prophecy of Zech. 4:6, given after these two pillars had been removed, never to be restored.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 4

2Ch 4:1 Then he made an altar of brass, twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and ten cubits in height-

An altar of 15 feet high and 30 feet square was impractical for use, just as the molten

sea / laver was too huge to ever be used. Again we have the impression Solomon was simply into religious showmanship rather than encouraging spirituality. This was far larger than the altar of the tabernacle, which was 5 x 5 x 3. Clearly the idea was that far more animals were going to be offered. And yet David and Solomon were forgetting the lesson taught through the sin with Bathsheba, Solomon's mother; God doesn't want sacrifice, but rather broken, contrite hearts (Ps. 40:6-8). Just as God didn't want a physical house built to Him, but rather wanted to build a house of people with humble hearts open to the working of His Spirit. The altar was of brass, whereas that of the tabernacle was of common, weak acacia wood (Ex. 27:1,2). This taught that the basis of acceptable sacrifice and approach to God is the recognition of our common weak humanity, and sacrifice is offered to God upon that basis. But Solomon had no recognition of his own moral frailty and humanity, and was convinced that as David's son and the Messianic seed [as he imagined], he was therefore perfect. And it seems David too somehow rationalized his sin with Bathsheba by the end of his life, and lacked grace and humility.

2Ch 4:2 Also he made the molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass; and its height was five cubits; and a line of thirty cubits encircled it-
This gives the circumference of the laver as “thirty cubits”, although it was ten cubits broad. Taking ‘pi’ to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, “thirty”. Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). This is not how we are used to history being written; but we are reading the Hebrew genre of history, not our own.

2Ch 4:3 Under it was the likeness of oxen which encircled it for ten cubits, encircling the sea. The oxen were in two rows, cast when it was cast-
There is no record of this huge laver ever being used in practice. The urgent requirement for true cleansing was turned into mere external ritualism, something which was to be seen and admired rather than personally participated it.

2Ch 4:4 It stood on twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south and three looking toward the east. The sea was set on them above, and all their back parts were inward-
This massive laver was therefore a political statement, implying the twelve tribes of

Israel were only to be cleansed by this huge laver. I discussed on 1 Kings 4 how Solomon sought to bring all Israel under his personal control. He constantly mixes spiritual appearance with his own unspiritual agendas.

2Ch 4:5 It was a handbreadth thick; and its brim was worked like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily. It received and held three thousand baths-
"Shushan" is the Hebrew word for "lily", which was iconicly associated with the Jerusalem temple (s.w. 1 Kings 7:19,22,26). Shushan was where the palace of Persia was (Esther 1:2), and sets the scene for the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have there a fake, imitation kingdom and temple of Yahweh. Remember that Chronicles was history written up especially for the exiles. But the spiritually minded exiles would have perceived that Solomon's temple had been designed as a secular architectural masterpiece, similar to the palace of their captors. We several times read of the lily motif in Solomon's building. But the word can as well refer to the lotus. And "the lotus was the religious flower of the Indian and Egyptian religions". So we have a case of Solomon allowing himself to be influenced by the pagan religions of his wives and those he traded with, and importing it into his own version of Yahweh worship.

The size of this laver was unrealistic if it were to be useful. The huge size was therefore for show, and not because Solomon really wished there to be cleansing in practice. Beneath the rim it has "buds", or AV "knops" (1 Kings 7:24). "Buds" is a guess at translation, for the Hebrew word is very obscure, literally "wild gourds", a poisonous plant (s.w. 2 Kings 4:39). It is unlikely this plant is in view. But there are observable similarities with the decoration of Egyptian holy places. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence. And that was to be a theme of this temple until its destruction. .

1 Kings 7:26 says it held 2000 baths, perhaps describing the quantity of water actually used, although it had the capacity to hold 3000.

2Ch 4:6 He made also ten basins, and put five on the right hand and five on the left, to wash in them. Such things as related to the burnt offering they washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in-
The massive laver described above was for show, it was too large to realistically be used for ritual cleansing; in practice, the ten smaller lavers would have to be used. But even they were far more than the single laver of the original tabernacle. This was because David and Solomon envisaged offering huge numbers of animals for offerings, requiring far more priests than did the tabernacle system of worship. David and Solomon were

forgetting the lesson taught through the sin with Bathsheba, Solomon's mother; God doesn't want sacrifice, but rather broken, contrite hearts (Ps. 40:6-8).

2Ch 4:7 He made the ten lampstands of gold according to the command concerning them; and he set them in the temple, five on the right hand and five on the left-
"The candlestick" or menorah is only ever spoken of in the law of Moses in the singular, but in 1 Chron. 28:15 David had decided there were to be multiple such candlesticks. By doing so, he ignored the symbolism of the one candlestick, such was his obsession with mere religion. "According to the command" may therefore refer to David's command rather than God's. Or perhaps Solomon carefully made each of the ten lampstands according to the specification for the one lampstand.

2Ch 4:8 He made also ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right side and five on the left. He made one hundred basins of gold-
The table of show bread was to be made of acacia wood (Ex. 25:23), but David planned to make it of pure gold, and even worked out the weight of gold required for it (1 Chron. 28:16). And Solomon indeed made it of gold (1 Kings 7:48), leading to it being known as "the pure table" (2 Chron. 13:11). And he made "tables" plural, as he made candlesticks (:7), although the law only required one candlestick. See on :19. Religion had overtaken spirituality, form had eclipsed content. Likewise the "tables of silver" David ordered to be made (1 Chron. 28:16) do not feature in the tabernacle. He was missing the point- that God wanted His holiest symbols made of common, weak things like acacia wood. For His strength and glory is made perfect in weakness. David claims these plans were from God (1 Chron. 28:19), although as discussed on 1 Chron. 28:12, they were in fact from his own mind. The way these things were taken into captivity, with no record of this golden table ever being returned, surely reflects God's judgment upon this kind of religious show. He prefers a humble house church in an inner city room, rather than a gold plated cathedral. The way some exclusive churches speak of 'maintaining a pure table' suggests they have made the same essential mistake as David did.

So many vessels were not required by the tabernacle service. This was a completely different, grandiose religious system of David's own device; and in the end, all these vessels of mere religion were taken off into captivity (2 Kings 25:14-16 emphasizes this).

2Ch 4:9 Furthermore he made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court, and overlaid their doors with brass-
The "court of the priests" is that of 1 Kings 6:36; 7:12: "He built the inner court with three courses of cut stone, and a course of cedar beams". This would be the "higher court" of Jer. 36:10. Perhaps it was made "higher" by the three layers of stone and the cedar decking placed upon it. Perhaps the idea was that the people in the outer court could

see what the priests were doing. We wonder however what exactly was the “middle court” (2 Kings 20:4). The brass doors contrast with the "hangings for the court of fine twined linen" (Ex. 27:9), representing righteousness (Rev. 19:8). Yet brass can represent the flesh. The desire to make the temple solid and permanent meant that the fine symbolism of the tabernacle was crudely overlooked.

2Ch 4:10 He set the sea on the right side of the house eastward, toward the south-
This confirms that the right side was the south. The description is as of a person standing facing the temple from the west side of it. But this was not where the entrance was. Solomon was describing it from his perspective and not that of a worshipper entering the temple from the east.

2Ch 4:11 Huram made the pots, the shovels and the basins. So Huram made an end of doing the work that he did for king Solomon in God’s house-
This gives the lie to David's confident statements that he had all the human and material resources prepared for the temple. He was in the grip of obsession, and convinced he had empowered and resourced the temple to go ahead. But in reality, Solomon needed more materials and the workmen provided by David, or those he had in mind, were in fact apparently not used in making the finer work for the temple.

2Ch 4:12 the two pillars, and the bowls, and the two capitals which were on the top of the pillars, and the two networks to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the top of the pillars-
We now have a summary of all the work done, as if Solomon itemized it all and boasted in the inventory. This glorification of human works and achievement revealed so much about his lack of true spiritual perception; see on :14.

2Ch 4:13 and the four hundred pomegranates for the two networks; two rows of pomegranates for each network, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars-
There were 100 in each row (1 Kings 7:20), but on one row there were 96 facing the courts, meaning the other four were at the corners (Jer. 52:23). The internal corroboration between records written hundreds of years apart is impressive, and reflects Divine inspiration of the entire Old Testament.

I consider that any attempt to find spiritual significance in the pomegranates used in Solomon's building is misplaced, because I don't think he was at all thinking in that way. Rather is this another example of his simply copying what he had seen in Egypt, from

where his queen came from. For such pomegranate designs are common in Egyptian architecture of the time, and Egypt was famed for pomegranates (Num. 20:5).

2Ch 4:14 He made also the bases, and the basins he made on the bases-
There is much stress upon all the 'making' of things and the "work" done (1 Kings 7:40,51). Solomon had quite missed the lessons learned by his father David [and his mother Bathsheba], that God wants broken, contrite hearts more than works and sacrifices. He wanted to build a house of people, rather than have a house built for Him.

2Ch 4:15 one sea, and the twelve oxen under it-
We wonder whether David and Solomon saw in this huge laver some kind of representation of their power, with all twelve tribes of Israel subservient to them. There was no equivalent of this huge laver in the tabernacle, and in practical terms, the ten smaller lavers would have been used. In 18 out of 21 occurrences, the Hebrew word translated "scaffold" in 2 Chron. 6:13 is translated "laver". The huge podium or "laver" from which Solomon proudly addressed Israel was perhaps basin shaped. This confirms the suggestion here that the laver with the 12 oxen beneath it was really a statement of Solomon's power over the 12 tribes of Israel, with them serving him and being his power base. Spiritual functionality was therefore replaced by a political, religious agenda- as happens so often in the history of God's people.

2Ch 4:16 Huram his father also made the pots, the shovels, the forks, and all its vessels for king Solomon for the house of Yahweh of bright brass-
The idea is of polished copper.

2Ch 4:17 The king cast them in the plain of the Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredah-
"The king cast them" suggests Solomon's personal involvement with the work. This reflects how he admits in Ecclesiastes that he followed his obsession with building and architecture to a degree not possible for most men. His zeal was therefore more an expression of his own personality type and personal interests, than true love for God.

Zarethan where Solomon cast the lavers for the temple with their pagan motifs (1 Kings 7:46) is called Zaredathah in 2 Chron. 4:17, which is a form of Zeredah (1 Kings 11:26), the birthplace of Jeroboam son of Nebat. It doesn't therefore have good connections. We wonder if the golden calves were cast there too.

2Ch 4:18 Thus Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance; for the weight of the brass could not be estimated-
As noted on :12, Solomon itemized his work and boasted in the inventory. But he gave

up weighing all the brass vessels. This glorification of human works and achievement revealed so much about his lack of true spiritual perception.

2Ch 4:19 Solomon made all the vessels that were in God's house, the golden altar also, and the tables with the showbread on them-
This confirms that there was no longer one table for the showbread but in fact ten tables. There were therefore presumably also more loaves of showbread used than stipulated under the Mosaic law for the tabernacle. See on :8. Religion had overtaken spirituality, form had eclipsed content.

2Ch 4:20 and the lampstands with their lamps, to burn before the oracle according to the commandment, of pure gold-
"The candlestick" or menorah is only ever spoken of in the law of Moses in the singular, but in 1 Chron. 28:15 David had decided there were to be multiple such candlesticks. By doing so, he ignored the symbolism of the one candlestick, such was his obsession with mere religion. "According to the command" may therefore refer to David's command rather than God's. Or perhaps Solomon carefully made each of the ten lampstands according to the specification for the one lampstand.

2Ch 4:21 and the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs, of gold (perfect gold)-
Pure gold as a soft metal was not the right metal for tongs, but the concern was clearly religious show and opulence, rather than functionality in the true service of God. The "flowers" may refer to the "knops" of 1 Kings 7:24 and elsewhere, called "buds" in the NEV. "Buds" is a guess at translation, for the Hebrew word is very obscure, literally "wild gourds", a poisonous plant (s.w. 2 Kings 4:39). It is unlikely this plant is in view. But there are observable similarities with the decoration of Egyptian holy places. Seeing that Solomon had married an Egyptian, and the Song of Solomon reflects Solomon's deep admiration for things Egyptian, it seems likely that even in the temple, Solomon allowed Gentile influence. And that was to be a theme of this temple until its destruction. .

2Ch 4:22 and the snuffers, basins, spoons and fire pans, of pure gold. As for the entry of the house, the inner doors of it for the most holy place, and the doors of the main hall of the temple were of gold-
The inventory here is similar in style to that of the vessels of the tabernacle on Ex. 25-30. It seems Solomon wished to present what he had done in terms of building a new tabernacle, with himself thereby presented as Moses. And yet we have seen hints throughout the record that he built it with pagan influences throughout it.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 5

2Ch 5:1 Thus all the work that Solomon did for the house of Yahweh was finished. Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, even the silver and the gold, and all the vessels, and put them in the treasuries of the house of God-
There is much stress upon all the "work" done (:40,51). Solomon had quite missed the lessons learned by his father David [and his mother Bathsheba], that God wants broken, contrite hearts more than works and sacrifices.

These vessels were those taken in 2 Sam. 8:10. They were devoted to God's service by David and then Solomon dedicated them to the temple. The same phrase "of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass" is used of the vessels taken from Egypt and dedicated to the tabernacle (Ex. 11:2; 12:35; Josh. 6:19; 2 Sam. 8:10; 1 Kings 7:51). The generosity of others in Biblical history, their right perspective on the wealth taken from this world, was to inspire other believers in later history. And this is how the body of Christ should function today, with members inspiring others to spirituality.

The promises God makes involve a solemn commitment by Him to us- the serious, binding nature of His oath to us is easy to forget. God swore to David “by my holiness” (Ps. 89:35). The Hebrew for “holiness” is the very same word translated “dedication”. David’s response to God’s dedication to him was to dedicate [s.w.] all the silver and gold which he had won from this world, to the service of God’s house (1 Chron. 26:26; 2 Chron. 5:1). Our response to God’s dedication to us should be a like dedication of what we have to Him. Covenant relationship with God requires much of both Him and us. The case of David is a nice illustration of the meaning of grace. David wanted to *do* something for God- build Him a house, spending his wealth to do so. God replied that no, He wanted to build *David* a house. And He started to, in the promises He gave David. And David’s response to that grace is to still *do* something- to dedicate his wealth to God’s house, as God had dedicated Himself to David’s house. This is just how grace and works should be related in our experience.

Ex. 40:33 is perhaps the clearest basis for the words of Jn. 17:4. This describes how Moses "reared up" the tabernacle, representing us (2 Cor. 6:16); "So Moses finished the work" God had given him to do. Dt. 31:24 likewise speaks of Moses finishing the work. The Hebrew for "reared up" is also used in the context of resurrection and glorification / exaltation. As our Lord sensed His final, ultimate achievement of the Father's glory in His own character, He could look ahead to our resurrection and glorification. He adopted God's timeless perspective, and died with the vision of our certain glorification in the Kingdom. This fits in with the way Psalms 22 and 69 (which evidently portray the thoughts of our dying Lord) conclude with visions of Christ's "seed" being glorified in the

Kingdom. There are a number of passages which also speak of the temple (also representative of the ecclesia) being a *work* which was *finished* (e.g. 2 Chron. 5:1). In His moment of agonized triumph as He died, the Lord Jesus saw us as if we were perfect.

2Ch 5:2 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the princes of the fathers' households of the children of Israel, to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh out of the city of David, which is Zion-
Solomon imitated David's bringing up of the ark to Zion (2 Sam. 6:2). He lived out his father's faith and devotion, but only on an external level. He in due course was to turn away from Yahweh to idols, and descend into the nihilism of Ecclesiastes. "The city of David which is Zion" refers not to Jerusalem but to David's palace or citadel which was within Jerusalem. The ark had been as it were in David's back yard, and was now brought probably a short distance into the temple. David had earlier claimed that Yahweh had chosen Zion as His dwelling place. But it seems that Solomon now readjusts that, because the ark is now brought from that place into the temple he had built.

2Ch 5:3 And all the men of Israel assembled themselves to the king at the feast, which was in the seventh month-
This would have been the feast of tabernacles, which began on the 15th day of the seventh month and lasted seven days (Lev. 23:34). The building finished in the eighth month of Solomon's 11th year of reigning (1 Kings 6:37), so he waited almost a year before this ceremony of dedication. Perhaps for some reason he wanted to combine it specifically with the feast of tabernacles. The irony is that the feast of tabernacles alludes to how God dwelt in a tent / tabernacle. David had offered to build God a house, but God's reply had been that He preferred dwelling in a tent to any house built by human hands. Now Solomon has built Him a house- and dedicates it on the feast of tents / tabernacles.

The feast of tabernacles coincided with the second week of Solomon's two week dedication feast. But the feast of tabernacles was only five days after the day of atonement. It seems Solomon was so obsessed with dedicating the temple that he omitted to celebrate the day of atonement, and this would reflect his general lack of awareness of grace and the problem of sin.

1 Kings 6:37 says that the actual building was finished in the eighth month of the eleventh year. The seventh month must have been in the year following. Indeed the LXX in :1 suggests this dedication took place at the end of the 20 years required to build the entire palace-temple complex. This delay in dedicating the temple again reflects how Solomon was unconcerned with being practically useful to God's people. The hint

seems to be in 2 Chron. 7:11 that the dedication of the temple and the completion of Solomon's house was at the same time: "Thus Solomon finished the house of Yahweh, and the king's house. He successfully completed all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of Yahweh, and in his own house". This was after twenty years. Clearly Solomon saw his temple-palace complex as one building. The fact he waited so long to dedicate the temple shows it was all mere religion from his side, he had no genuine desire for the temple to be used by his people to draw closer to God.

2Ch 5:4 All the elders of Israel came. The Levites took up the ark-
2 Chron. 5:4 says that the Levites took up the ark, whereas 1 Kings 8:3 says that the priests did. Both were true; for Levites weren't allowed into the most holy place (Num. 4:20). So the Levites did carry it, according to the law; but the priests carried it into the most holy place. Here we see how an apparent discrepancy on a surface level reveals a deep evidence of the way the records do not contradict but dovetail perfectly, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired writing. But this is only apparent to those who respectfully search the entire scriptures, rather than bandying around a surface level contradiction with an eagerness which speaks more of their own fears the Bible is inspired than of deep factual persuasion.

2Ch 5:5 and they brought up the ark, and the Tent of Meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent; these the priests the Levites brought up-
The priests took these things on the final part of their journey, into the most holy place; as the Levites were forbidden from doing so (Num. 4:20). But the Levites took them the first part of their journey; see on :4. We note the irony- God had clearly stated He preferred to live in a tent and not in a building. And Solomon now arranges for the tent to be taken into the building he had made, contrary to God's wishes. There is no further mention of the tent within the temple, so we assume this was a purely symbolic act and the tent was destroyed. He thereby went directly against God's statements about His preference for a tent over a temple.

2Ch 5:6 King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled to him, we re before the ark, sacrificing sheep and cattle, that could not be counted nor numbered for multitude-
He offered huge numbers of sacrifices when the ark was brought into the temple (1 Kings 8:63), just as David had sacrificed as the ark was brought to Zion (2 Sam. 6:13). Yet he failed to feel and know the truth of David's conclusion that God doesn't essentially want sacrifice (Ps. 40:6). David had been forced to learn that lesson through the shame of his sin with Bathsheba- Solomon was so sure of his own righteousness

that he never was driven to see the inadequacy of animal sacrifice in itself, and the need in the end for the direct receipt of God's grace.

Solomon offered sacrifices "that could not be told nor numbered for multitude". This is evidently to be connected with the language of the promises to Abraham about the multiplication of the seed of Israel. It could be that Solomon thought that his generosity in giving of his wealth was what had brought about the fulfilment of these promises- he almost forced God to fulfil them, at least in his own mind, by his generosity.

2Ch 5:7 The priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to its place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim-
See on :5,8.

2Ch 5:8 For the cherubim spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered the ark and its poles-
In the tabernacle the wings were "spread out on high" (Ex. 25:20; 27:9), but here their wings touch each other. Although Solomon claims he built everything according to Divine revelation, we wonder whether in fact he felt free to liberally reinterpret the tabernacle features. And he changes wings uplifted to God's glory to wings which are closed in upon each other; the mercy seat, or cover of the ark, is no longer exposed to Heaven, as it were, but now closed over.

2Ch 5:9 The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen outside-
This may reflect a design fault in the lengths of the staves. Although we are assured that a person looking from the outer sanctuary would not have seen them even when the entrance to the holy place was open. This kind of design fault would not have been present if indeed, as Solomon claimed, the specifications were given by God. I suggest this was just his claim, and he built the temple according to his own desire to have a go at architecture and building- which he admits in Ecclesiastes had been his passion and obsession, for a time. See on :64 for another possible design fault.

It is there to this day-
This indicates that this record was written some time before the exile ["to this day"]. But other parts of the history suggest it was written after the exile. This means that some parts were rewritten or edited, under Divine inspiration, but others weren't.

2Ch 5:10 There was nothing in the ark except the two tables which Moses put in it at Horeb, when Yahweh made a covenant with the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt-
Inside the ark was intended to be "the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that

budded" (Heb. 9:4; Ex. 16:34; Num. 17:10). They had apparently been lost; so although they remained with the symbols of the covenant, they were lacking in the things which spoke of new spiritual life and the resurrection.

2Ch 5:11 The priests came out of the holy place, (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, and didn't keep their divisions-
These divisions are the courses of the priests (1 Chron. 24). but the work was so great, as there were so many sacrifices, that the division on duty that day or week couldn't cope, so all the priestly divisions sanctified themselves and did the work. This may be a hint that David's careful plans had some design faults within them, as noted on :9. Because they were all of man and not God.

2Ch 5:12 also the Levites who were the singers, all of them, even Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brothers, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them one hundred twenty priests sounding with trumpets)-
Clearly in imitation of David's praise when the ark was brought to Zion in 2 Sam. 6:5. As noted on :2, Solomon lived out his father's faith and devotion, but only on an external level. He in due course was to turn away from Yahweh to idols, and descend into the nihilism of Ecclesiastes. For personal faith is not the same as living out parental expectation.

It could be argued that standing "at" the east end may mean facing toward the east. In this case they were looking toward Solomon to impress him, and turning their backs on the sanctuary, which is the huge sin of Ez. 8:16.

2Ch 5:13 The trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Yahweh; and they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised Yahweh, saying, For He is good; for His loving kindness endures forever! Then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of Yahweh-
Ex. 40:34,35 uses the same terms for God's acceptance of and dwelling in the tabernacle. For all the pagan undertones in the temple, and Solomon's unspirituality, God was eager to still dwell within this structure; even though it was not what He wanted. Just as He had used the human kingship, when it was deeply offensive to Him. Later the Chronicles record states that fire came down from Heaven and consumed the sacrifices- and yet their huge number was of itself a reflection of Solomon's refusal to accept what his parents had once learnt, that God doesn't want huge numbers of sacrifices but just a broken contrite heart. Yet God still accepts this lower level of spirituality, even misunderstanding of His grace. Just as He works with His people today who likewise forget or misunderstand His grace.

2Ch 5:14 so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of Yahweh filled God's house-

This was as at the erection of the tabernacle. The idea was that Yahweh's glory was far above the mere religion of the temple system. His glory was not just between the cherubim over the ark, but everywhere in His house. This was as if to downplay the importance attached to the ark. The allusion is to Lev. 16:3, where God says that "I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat". But the cloud was now filling the entire house. God came to Moses "in a thick cloud" (Ex. 19:9; 20:21) but now all the people were being treated as if they were Moses. The promise of 2 Samuel 7 was that God's Name would be in a new house of people; and his glory and His Name are closely connected. By doing this, God was seeking to nudge the people away from Solomon's religious approach towards a spiritual one. The record in 2 Chron. 5-7 describes praise, the interruption of the glory filling the temple, and then resumed praise. God as it were interrupted their religious ritual with a powerful reminder of His glory. We marvel that God did miraculously respond to such a prayer, full of misplaced ideals, willful misunderstandings of God's word by Solomon and his repetition and further spinning of David's similar willful misunderstandings, pride, political overtones of centralizing all spiritual power beneath Solomon in his palace-temple complex... and so forth. Just as God sees all this in the hearts, lives, thinking, churches... of His people. Yet still His presence is there, however reluctantly, however much His reservations, anger and displeasure with it all... yet still He so thirsts for relationship with man. And He as it were ran a risk by accepting the temple and sending His glory into it- the risk that He would appear to be thereby in agreement with Solomon's various misunderstandings and wrong attitudes. Any Divine acceptance of man has to run that risk. But it is only a risk for the superficial; because the Solomon record is clearly written in such a way as to beg comparison with other scriptures. The comparisons indicate so powerfully how wrong he was.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 6

2Ch 6:1 Then Solomon said, Yahweh has said that He would dwell in the thick darkness-

I noted on 1 Kings 6 and 7 that Solomon's temple had plenty of windows allowing natural light, as if to suggest God had now re-thought this dwelling darkness. Solomon like David (see on 2 Chron. 3:1; 2 Sam. 16:10) came to assume things about God in order to justify his passion for building a temple. He claims that God "said that He would dwell in the thick darkness", perhaps alluding to the darkness of the most holy place in which there was no natural light; but actually there's no record God ever said that. What He said was that He would dwell in the hearts of men and not in a house.

What we say to the Lord Jesus in His ear in the bedroom in the darkness, will be openly spoken by Christ at the judgment (Lk. 12:2,3). God dwells in darkness (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12). Speaking in the bedroom in secret with the knowledge we will be openly rewarded is the language of prayer (Mt. 6:6). Our private relationship with the Lord now, praying to Him in our bedroom, meditating about Him there, will then be spoken out loud.

2Ch 6:2 But I have built You a house of habitation, and a place for You to dwell in forever-

Solomon totally misses the point of God's response to David's desire to build Him a house; God would build David a house, involving Him dwelling in the "place" of the humble human heart. And "forever" was conditional upon the obedience of David's son / seed. But here Solomon effectively dictates to God that those promises are now fulfilled in him- because he has built a temple for God.

Ps. 127 is "For Solomon" (v.2 "beloved" = Heb. Jedidah), and warns him that his labour for the temple will be in vain unless *God* builds it. The Psalm basically says that God will build Solomon a house in the sense of a family centred in the beloved seed who would die [“sleep”] to enable it; and therefore Solomon should not be so sweating himself day and night to build God a house / temple. This is the very message which God had given David earlier. David and Solomon evidently shelved their knowledge of the fact that Heaven is God's dwelling place. It would seem that Solomon particularly was guilty of a false humility; there is a gross contradiction within his words of 2 Chron. 6:2,18: "I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling *for ever*... But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built?". This is one of several hints that Solomon felt that the full fulfilment of the Davidic promises was to be found in him (cp. 2 Chron. 6:10). He failed to look forward to the spirit of Christ, instead becoming obsessed with the achievement of his own works. He was largely encouraged in this by David, who seems to have felt that Solomon was the Messiah figure the promises spoke about. Thus Ps.72 is dedicated to Solomon, and yet it speaks clearly of the messianic Kingdom. In the same way as David came to misquote and misapply the promises God made to him, Solomon did likewise. God told David that He did not want a physical house, because He had never commanded this to be done at any time in the past. Solomon misquotes this in 2 Chron. 6:5,6 to mean that God had never asked for a physical house in the past, but now he had asked David's son to build such a house in Jerusalem.

2Ch 6:3 The king turned his face-

From God to the people. The rest of this chapter is therefore Solomon praying facing the people rather than God. He was effectively praying to himself, praying to be seen of men. The Lord's criticism of such prayers seems to have in mind Solomon's example here. I suggest that here we have another example of the record making implicit criticism of Solomon rather than being specific, at least not until 1 Kings 11. Solomon was praying with his back to the sanctuary, and this is exactly what was condemned later in Ez. 8:16. The record there seems to allude to Solomon's position: "At the inner court of Yahweh’s house... there, at the door of Yahweh’s temple, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs toward Yahweh’s temple, and their faces toward the east".

And blessed all the assembly of Israel; and all the assembly of Israel stood-
This blessing of Israel suggests Solomon was acting as the high priest, although he was not of the tribe of Levi. David had done this kind of thing, but from careful reflection upon the spirit of the law, whose letter he says in Ps. 119 he studied constantly. And David came to this sense through careful reflection upon God's grace to him, and through the experience of Uzzah's death as a result of taking 'living the spirit of the law' too far. Solomon's blessing of the people seems to be in his subsequent statements that the temple would bring them blessing. He ignored the connections between blessing and forgiveness by grace which his father had been forced to, after his sin with Solomon's mother ["blessed are they whose sins are forgiven... blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity"]. He sees the 'blessing' of external religion rather than internal peace with God by grace.

2Ch 6:4 He said, Blessed be Yahweh the God of Israel, Who spoke with His mouth to David my father and has with His hands fulfilled it saying-
As discussed above, the promises to David were not at all totally fulfilled at that point, just because Solomon had built a temple. They were conditional upon Solomon's obedience to the law, which from a young man he had not shown. We think of his marriage to Rehoboam's Ammonitess mother, and to Pharaoh's daughter .

As we will see on :5,6, what Solomon claims God said was not what He said; Solomon twists God's words. And that highlights the blasphemy of his claim here that God actually spoke the words Solomon claimed "with His mouth". God did not say those words.

2Ch 6:5 Since the day that I brought forth My people out of the land of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house in, that My name might be there; neither chose I any man to be prince over My people Israel-
This is a typical misrepresentation of God's word. What God had said through Nathan was that He had not chosen anywhere for a temple to be built, but had lived as it were a mobile life in the tent of the tabernacle. And therefore, God would build David a house in the sense of a family of believers sharing David's faith.

2Ch 6:6 But I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name might be there; and have chosen David to be over My people Israel-

Solomon claims that God said: “I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there”. God had chosen no resting place, although it would have been politically convenient for Solomon if the city of Jerusalem as a city was where God had chosen to dwell. And so he kept thinking that way until he persuaded himself that in fact this was what God had said. David had charged Solomon with the words which God had spoken to him about Solomon: “If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul” (1 Kings 2:4). But Solomon subtly changes this when he reminds God of how He had supposedly told David: “There shall not fail thee a man to sit on the throne of Israel; so that they children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me” (1 Kings 8:25). Two things become apparent here:

- The conditionality of the promise to David about Solomon is totally overlooked. “*If* thy children…” becomes “so that…”, with the implication that David would always have descendants on the throne who would walk obediently before God. The possibility of personal failure had been removed by Solomon from his own perception of God.

- God's desire that Solomon should "walk before me in truth" was changed to "walk before me as thou [David] hast walked before me". This defined walking before God personally as having the relationship with God which your father had. And so often we have made the same mistake. The call to personally follow the Lord has become displaced by a following Him through others.

Notice how Solomon says these words to God Himself. Solomon had persuaded himself that this truly was what God had asked of David and himself, and so he comes out with these words to God.

Solomon frequently references the exodus from Egypt with the implication that the completion of the temple meant that their journeys were over (1 Kings 8:16,21,51,53). But there is no Divine word to this effect. When they entered Canaan, there was no special ceremony to celebrate the end of their journeys. There are allusions to the wilderness journeys throughout the Bible, suggesting God sees His people like Abraham, on a journey that will only end in the establishment of His Kingdom on earth at the last day. Solomon claims God spoke of how "I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house that My name might be there". But what He said was that He was always a God on the move. That is why Ex. 20:24 speaks as if God would have various places where He put His Name: "In every place where I record My name I will come down to you and I will bless you".

The implication is that God "chose no city" for a temple apart from Jerusalem. But this is Solomon's twisting of God's words to David. He stated that He would not need a temple because His manner had always been that He "moved around in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7:6). He would appoint a place not for the ark but for His people- in the future Messianic Kingdom which His begotten Son would establish: "I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place" (2 Sam. 7:10). And the One chosen to be over His 'house' or people would be David's future Messianic son, God's begotten Son, to be born well after David had died.

2Ch 6:7 Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel-

This much was true, but it is sandwiched between various untruths and misrepresentations. But he misses the point of God's response, that His Name, His personality and character, dwells in persons and not buildings. The house God promised to build David would manifest Yahweh's Name in the sense of His characteristics, the fruit of the Spirit, as the NT would put it. For God's Name in this sense cannot be in a physical building or city.

2Ch 6:8 But Yahweh said to David my father, Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart-

This is not recorded in the historical account, and given Solomon's tendency to misrepresent God's word we wonder whether this was said by God at all. Because God's response had been that He didn't want a house. He wanted to build a non physical house for David. Those reasons He gave for declining David's offer are not at all in the spirit of what God is now reported to have said.

2Ch 6:9 *Nevertheless you shall not build the house; but your son who shall come forth out of your body, he shall build the house for My name-*

As noted above, this would have been contrary to the spirit of the reasons God gave for declining David's offer. He had explained that He had never asked for any permanent sanctuary to be built for Him, and tent life was His style, as He doesn't live

in buildings but in hearts. And instead of building a house for Yahweh, David was instead to focus upon the wonderful grace of Yahweh's plan to turn his Messianic seed and all "in him" into an eternal spiritual house for His abode. Yet Solomon presents God as having been in eager agreement with the idea, but simply had some reservations about David doing it, and instead asked Solomon to build it. That would have been a contradiction of the reasoning God gave for saying He didn't want a physical house built for Him.

2Ch 6:10 Yahweh has performed His word that He spoke; for I have risen up in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as Yahweh promised, and have built the house for the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel-

The establishment of the promises to David was to be conditional upon David's son walking in God's ways. But now Solomon wrongly presents the promises to David as having come to total fulfilment in him, just because he had built a temple for God.

Solomon speaks about him being King in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:1,12; Prov. 1:1) as if this was the ultimate fulfilment of the Davidic promises. Consider the implications of 2 Chron. 1:9: "O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth... give me now wisdom, that I may go out and come in before (i.e. lead) this people". Solomon was asking for wisdom because he thought that he was the Messiah, and he saw wisdom as a Messianic characteristic. He failed to realize that the promises to Abraham and David were only being primarily fulfilled in him (e.g. 1 Kings 4:20); he thought that he was the ultimate fulfilment of them (1 Kings 8:20 states this in so many words). His lack of faith and vision of the future Kingdom lead him to this proud and arrogant conclusion (cp. building up our own 'Kingdom' in this life through our lack of vision of the Kingdom of God).

2Ch 6:11 Therein I have set the ark, in which is the covenant of Yahweh, which He made with the children of Israel-

By saying this, Solomon was careful to omit mentioning that the pit of manna and Aaron's rod were now no longer within the ark. “There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb ... the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:9,21). Those tablets, on which were the ten commandments, were the covenant. The old covenant is therefore the ten commandments, including the Sabbath- and this has been replaced by the new covenant, which does not require Sabbath keeping.

He reasons as if he has built a place for the ark, which was as it were homeless. But the ark was designed to be kept in the tabernacle, a tent. There was no need for a temple for it. And the ark didn't remain permanently in the temple; for many years later Josiah commanded "the Levites... Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built" (2 Chron. 35:3). And God emphasizes that in the restoration and the true Messianic kingdom, the ark will no longer be important: "people will no longer talk about my ark. They will no longer think about it or remember it; they will not even need it, nor will they make another one. When that time comes, Jerusalem will be called 'The Throne of the LORD,' and all nations will gather there to worship me" (Jer. 3:16,17). God's plans for a rebuilt temple in Ez. 40-48 make no mention of an ark, nor is the ark listed in the inventory of things taken into captivity in Babylon (2 Kings 25:13-17; Ezra 1:7-11).

2Ch 6:12 He stood before the altar of Yahweh in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands-

Solomon was hardly praying in his closet! It seems the Lord was alluding to Solomon

in Mt. 6:6, interpreting what he does here in a very negative light, and a reflection of Solomon's pride rather than his spirituality.

2Ch 6:13 (for Solomon had made a bronze scaffold, five cubits long, five cubits broad and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and on it he stood, and kneeled down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven)-
18 out of 21 occurrences, the Hebrew word translated "scaffold" is translated "laver". The huge podium was perhaps basin shaped. This confirms the suggestion on 2 Chron. 4:15 that the laver with the 12 oxen beneath it was really a statement of Solomon's power over the 12 tribes of Israel, with them serving him and being his power base.

2Ch 6:14 He said, Yahweh, the God of Israel, there is no God like You, in heaven or on earth; You Who keep covenant and loving kindness with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart-
David spoke of *seeking and praising God's grace* with his "whole heart" (Ps. 9:1; 119:58; 138:1). Solomon uses the phrase, but speaks of *being obedient* with the "whole heart" (1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chron. 6:14) and applying the "whole heart" to the intellectual search for God (Ecc. 1:13; 8:9). There is a difference. The idea of whole hearted devotion to God was picked up by Solomon, but instead of giving the whole heart to the praise of God's grace, he instead advocated giving the whole heart to ritualistic obedience and intellectual search for God. This has been the trap fallen into by many Protestant groups whose obsession with "truth" has obscured the wonder of God's grace.

2Ch 6:15 Who has kept with Your servant David my father that which You promised him: yes, You spoke with Your mouth, and have fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day-
Again we note the blasphemy of Solomon claiming God had spoken things with His mouth about Solomon and his temple, which He never said. Solomon misses the conditional nature of God keeping covenant grace with His people; He kept it if they were obedient (Dt. 7:9,12), which David was not. Yet God still kept His word with David. That was by grace, but the grace of it is missed by Solomon.

He failed to meditate upon the promises beyond what they seemed to offer him in the here and now; and the result was that he felt they were *totally* fulfilled in him (1 Kings 8:20,24). He dogmatically declared to Shimei: “And King Solomon shall be blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the Lord for ever” (1 Kings 2:45). And in all this, of course, we see our warning.

2Ch 6:16 Now therefore, Yahweh the God of Israel, keep with Your servant David my father that which You promised him saying, There shall not fail you a man in My sight to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children take heed to their way, to walk in My law as you have walked before Me-
This is a twist on what God actually promised David. He spoke of a singular seed, to be born after David "slept with [his] fathers". The phrase "man to be ruler in Israel" is applied to Messiah individually in Mic. 5:2 ("But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come forth to Me the man that is to be the ruler in Israel"). But Solomon has expanded this into "your children".

He overlooks the condition as being that he personally must be obedient. But he just slightly twists this, to make the conditionality dependent upon Israel's obedience rather than his personal obedience. The promises to David originally focused upon one individual, whom the New Testament interprets as the Lord Jesus. But David in Ps. 89:30; 132:12 and Solomon here and in 1 Kings 8:25 chose to understand the "seed" as the Davidic dynasty down the generations. This loss of focus upon the future Lord Jesus was what led David and Solomon to focus instead upon their own dynasty, rather than upon the future individual son of David who would reign eternally upon David's throne. His personal immortality came to be interpreted as the eternal continuance of the Davidic dynasty as kings of Israel throughout future generations.

Notice how Solomon says these words to God Himself. Solomon had persuaded himself that this truly was what God had asked of David and himself, and so he comes out with these words to God.

2Ch 6:17 Now therefore, Yahweh the God of Israel, let Your word be verified which You spoke to Your servant David-

Solomon keeps saying that his zealous work for the temple was the result of God's promise to David having fulfillment in him (1 Kings 8:24-26), and to some extent this was true. David earnestly prayed for Solomon to be the Messianic King (e.g. Ps. 72), and therefore David asked for Solomon to be given a truly wise heart (1 Chron. 29:19). These prayers were answered in a very limited sense- in that Solomon was given great wisdom, and his Kingdom was one of the greatest types of Christ's future Kingdom. Our prayers for others really can have an effect upon them, otherwise there would be no point in the concept of praying for others. But of course each individual has an element of spiritual freewill; we can't force others to be spiritual by our prayers; yet on the other hand, our prayers can influence their spirituality. David's prayers for Solomon is the classic example of this.

Those prayers were heard most definitely, in that God helped Solomon marvellously, giving him every opportunity to develop a superb spirituality; but he failed to have the genuine personal desire to be like this in his heart, in his heart he was back in Egypt, and therefore ultimately David's desire for Solomon to be the wondrous Messianic King of his dreams had to go unfulfilled.

2Ch 6:18 But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain You; how much less this house which I have built!-

It was exactly because of this that God didn't want a physical house built for Him. Yet Solomon has misrepresented God as saying He *did* want such a house. So these words are fake humility from Solomon, seeking to cover his proud obsession with building projects beneath an appearance of humility.

This statement of Solomon's is not in fact quite as humble as it may seem- for his argument is that God lives in Heaven, but Heaven cannot contain Him. And so he has built a house for God, but even that cannot contain Him. He totally misses God's redefinition of a "house" as a family of people manifesting His Name, made possible through the work of His future begotten Son.

2Ch 6:19 Yet have respect for the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, Yahweh my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You-

I noted on :3 that Solomon is praying all this facing the people, to be seen of men.

This prayer would have been better said facing toward God. His showmanship is apparent.

2Ch 6:20 that Your eyes may be open toward this house day and night, even toward the place where you have said that You would put Your name; to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place-
God never said that. It is Solomon's twist of the word of promise to David, that if his son / seed were obedient, then "He shall build an house for My Name". But that house was to be built up from persons, and had no reference to any physical building; indeed, the very opposite. God's eyes are open upon His children wherever they are, as David had learned whilst far from the sanctuary and on the run from Saul. Nehemiah felt God's eyes were open upon him even when the temple was in ruins (Neh. 1:6).

"The place" of God's Name was never intended to be a physical building. Solomon is forcing his own interpretation of Dt. 12:10,11 as referring to the temple he had built: "When you go over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which Yahweh your God causes you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you, so that you dwell in safety, then to the place which Yahweh your God shall choose, to cause His name to dwell there, you must bring all that I command you". The Hebrew *maqom* translated 'place' can mean simply a locality, yet Solomon likes to insist that it means a 'place' as in a building. Yet *maqom* in its 400 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible usually refers simply to a locality and not some 'holy place'. And God has used the term in describing the situation which would come about through David's future son who would be God's begotten son: "I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more. Neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the first" (1 Chron. 17:9). That future appointed "place" was not the temple; for God in this context says He doesn't want a temple, but will instead give His future people a "place" in eternity through the great Son. It is this "place" which the Lord has in view when He says that His death on the cross is "to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14:2,3). "I will appoint a place" is the same Hebrew as in God's 'appointing a place' for the innocent murderer to flee to for refuge (Ex. 21:13), and that "place" was a city of refuge not a temple. And again, that "place" is understood in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus. The place appointed was one where Yahweh's Name would be placed (Dt. 12:21; 14:24 etc.). It is far too literalistic to assume that the letters YHWH would be placed in a physical place. Surely we are to understand the Name as His characteristics, to be placed supremely in the "place" of His Son, through whom a family / house of people would arise bearing that Name.

2Ch 6:21 Listen to the petitions of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they shall pray toward this place. Yes, hear from Your dwelling place, even from heaven; and when You hear, forgive-
The temple and ark are sometimes referred to as the heavens (2 Sam. 15:25 cp. 1 Kings 8:30; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20:2,6; 11:4; Heb. 7:26). The church is the new temple, and is therefore at times referred to as the heavenlies in the New Testament. But Solomon was not reasoning on this level at this point. Rather was he claiming that the temple building would somehow make prayer more powerful before God. But that is simply untrue; no physical building can act as some kind of mediator between God and man. This is not to say that the faithful did not later pray toward the temple; for both Daniel and Jonah did. But it was not because they thought the temple somehow

gave their prayers more power and standing before God because of its existence. For in Daniel's time, and perhaps Jonah's, the temple was in ruins.

Or we can simply see this as Divine accommodation to man. There was no need to pray towards the temple neither did it add anything to the efficacy of prayer. But Jonah and Daniel did it and God accepted that. Just as He may accept some who reverence a cross and place it above their bed, even though that may not be God's ideal intention.

2Ch 6:22 If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath is laid on him to cause him to swear, and he comes and swears before your altar in this house-

The following verses contain seven possible cases of sin for which the temple could bring forgiveness; and seven cases of possible Divine judgment. The number seven suggests Solomon saw all sin and all possible judgment as being dealt with through the temple. Whereas his parents ought to have learnt for all time that forgiveness doesn't depend upon ritual but God's grace alone and the contrite hearts of sinners.

The rabbis interpret this verse as specifically concerning a man who is suspected of sinning against his neighbour through adultery with the man's wife. Solomon is asking God to judge the man if guilty and swearing by the temple was to be some kind of way of forcing truth to come out. Given the background of Solomon's parents, we marvel at how Solomon just didn't "get" the huge grace shown to his father. Who had not been judged according to his just deserts in this matter.

God's awareness of who was telling the truth was not, however, predicated upon the altar being situated within a physical building. God's presence and omniscience was not somehow from then on conditional upon the temple.

2Ch 6:23 then hear from heaven, and do, and judge your servants, bringing retribution to the wicked, to bring his way on his own head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness-

"Hear in heaven" is repeated throughout these seven possible cases of sin and judgment. Solomon seemed to think that Yahweh would hear in Heaven because of the temple. He thereby introduces a level between God and man- the temple. This is a classic case of religion rather than personal spirituality. In Prov. 24:24 and other Proverbs, Solomon teaches that this is how men should judge, lest they be cursed. He says that God condemns the wicked but justifies the righteous, and so should we. But by having this position, he shows his total lack of appreciation of God's grace to his father David. For David was worthy of condemnation, but by grace, he the wicked was justified, counted righteous, when he was not (Ps. 32:2 cp. Rom. 4:4-6). This lack of appreciation of grace arose from how it seems Solomon totally whitewashed the sin of his father David with his mother Bathsheba. And it resulted in his lack of grace, and failure throughout Proverbs to appreciate that human behaviour is nuanced, and is not simply divided between spotlessly righteous behaviour and terrible sinfulness.

2Ch 6:24 If Your people Israel be struck down before the enemy because they have sinned against You, and shall turn again and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this house-

Again, Solomon devalues the power of prayerful repentance and confession of God's Name; for he implies that this is made somehow more powerful through praying to the God "in this house". But Solomon is as it were bringing God down from heaven to earth by suggesting He is somehow located "in this house". Whereas He is in heaven, as he contradictorily admits in :25. It was because of this mindset that there was such

a collapse of faith in Judah when they saw the temple in ruins. It meant, according to Solomon's logic, the death of God.

Who God is, as expressed in His Name, is an imperative to prepare ourselves to meet Him in judgment. The confession of the Name is paralleled with repentance here. If Israel sin and repent "and confess Your Name", they will be forgiven. But instead of "confess thy name" we expect "confess their sins: the point being that to confess the name is effectively to confess sins. The name is the characteristics of Yahweh. The more we meditate upon them, the more we will naturally be lead to a confession of our sins, the deeper we will sense the gap between those principles and our own character. Likewise in 2 Chron. 12:6 the statement that "the Lord is righteous" is effectively a confession of sin. And thus we are not to bear or take the Name of Yahweh called upon us at baptism in vain- the realty of the implications of the name are not to be lost upon us.

2Ch 6:25 then hear from heaven, and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land which You gave to them and to their fathers-
See on :24. The restoration to their land was to be because they, or those who remained in the land, would pray to God in the temple (:24). Solomon is hereby assuming that even if Israel sin and go into captivity, the temple will be an eternal house for God which will always be there. He is so very wrong. The temple was not eternal and was destroyed; but the exiles could still pray to God, quite independently of the existence of the temple. The destruction of the temple was for multiple reasons, but perhaps one of them was to rid God's people of these wrong ideas about God's presence in the temple building. And God answers this idea that the temple was to be eternal in 1 Kings 9:7,8.

2Ch 6:26 When the sky is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You; if they pray toward this place, and confess Your name and turn from their sin, when You afflict them-
Solomon inserts parts of his father's Bathsheba psalms in his prayers for how all Israel could be forgiven if they "confess thy name... when thou afflictest them... saying, We have sinned... forgive thy people... and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed" (1 Kings 8:35,47,50 = Ps. 32:5 etc.). On the basis of David's pattern, all God's people can find forgiveness, if they make a like confession. Indeed, this has long been recognized by Jewish commentators; and many of the Psalms understood by them as relevant to the Nazi holocaust are Bathsheba Psalms. "Out of the depths" they cried like David; and at the entrance to Bergen-Belsen it stands written: "My sorrow is continually before me" (Ps. 38:17), in recognition of having received punishment for sin [note how these kind of plaques contain no trace of hatred or calling for Divine retribution upon the persecutors].

But Solomon, as ever, is mixing truth with error. Because the turning again to God was not dependent upon praying towards the temple building. It was to be destroyed, and the direction of their prayers was to be towards "the God of heaven" and not some ghost in a ruined temple. This phrase "the God of heaven" or similar is often found in the restoration histories, indicating that God's people had been forced to learn this lesson.

2Ch 6:27 then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, when You teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land, which You have given to Your people for an inheritance-

The reference to rain was appropriate in the immediate context because as explained on 2 Chron. 5:3, Solomon was speaking in the seventh month of Ethanim, literally, the rain month, and likely the latter rains were pouring down at this time as he was speaking. His implication would be that this rain was part of the promised blessing for obedience because of the temple. Perhaps this was why, as noted on :2, Solomon had purposefully arranged the dedication festival at this time.

2Ch 6:28 If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight or mildew, locust or caterpillar; if their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is-
These things clearly allude to the curses for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28. But those curses were to be lifted by repentance and renewed faithfulness to the covenant, and their lifting was not predicated upon the existence of the physical temple and praying in it or towards it.

2Ch 6:29 whatever prayer and supplication be made by any man, or by all Your people Israel who shall know every man his own plague and his own sorrow of heart, and shall spread forth his hands toward this house-
As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). She would be "Condemned with the world...". But the phrase 'spread forth hands' is used often in the Bible, but followed by 'to the Lord'. Solomon is praying with hands spread forth towards heaven; but he is confusing prayer towards God with prayer towards the temple. He is drawing an inappropriate parallel between God and the temple.

Solomon, the man with every available pleasure, laments that his days are full of sorrow and grief and he can't sleep peacefully at night (Ecc. 2:23). Yet Solomon had prayed that when God's people were in grief and sorrow because of their sins, they could pray to God using his temple, and be forgiven and have their grief assuaged. Yet in Ecc. 2:23, Solomon laments that all his days are spent in grief and sorrows (s.w.). The way out of the depression with which he ended his days was repentance and acceptance of God's free grace and forgiveness. But he refused to do this, and turned his heart away from Yahweh.

We are forgiven on account of the fact we truly sorrow for our sins, knowing them as our own sore and our own grief (2 Chron. 6:29,30). The Lord carried our sorrows, i.e. our sins. It is only *these* sins, for which we have sorrowed, that He carried. *This* is why we need to appreciate that sin is serious.

2Ch 6:30 then hear from heaven Your dwelling place and forgive, and render to each man according to all his ways, whose heart You know; (for You, even You only, know the hearts of the children of men;)-
This reference to God dwelling in heaven makes a nonsense of the idea of building a house for God to inhabit on earth. And this was exactly why God had not wanted David to build the temple. So Solomon is here merely giving lip service to these ideas.

Descriptions of God's dwelling place clearly indicate that He has a personal location: "God is in heaven" (Ecc. 5:2); "He has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth" (Ps. 102:19,20); "Hear in heaven your dwelling place". Yet more specifically than this, we read that God has a

"throne" (2 Chron. 9:8; Ps. 11:4; Is. 6:1; 66:1). Such language is hard to apply to an undefined essence which exists somewhere in heavenly realms.

Rabshakeh confirmed the threatened destruction of Jerusalem with a letter which Hezekiah took "before the Lord". His first response was not to turn to Egypt; he'd learnt the wrongness of that. He went to the house of the Lord. Whilst we are always in God's presence, there is surely a sense in which coming into His presence through prayer is drawing yet closer to Him. And so it was with the special presence of YHWH in the temple at that time. Hezekiah was aware that YHWH 'dwells between the cherubim" (2 Kings 19:15). Presumably standing before the ark, Hezekiah "spread out" the letter (2 Kings 19:14). The Hebrew word translated 'spread out' is the same as that usually used about how the wings of the cherubim were 'spread out' over the ark (Ex. 25:20; 37:9). It's also the word used in Solomon's prophecy of how repentant people would spread out their hands in the temple at the time of the punishment for their sins, and receive forgiveness and help: "Whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow and stretching out his hands in this house, then hear from heaven your dwelling place and forgive" (2 Chron. 6:29,30). And Hezekiah would also have been only too aware of Isaiah's judgment against Judah of a few years earlier: "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen" (Is. 1:15). But Hezekiah summoned his faith in God's forgiveness, and spread out his hands as he spread out the letter. He showed his deep repentance, and his faith in forgiveness to such an extent that he was bold enough to ask God for deliverance. Faith in forgiveness of our sins is perhaps one of the hardest things to believe in- strangely enough, seeing that God delights in forgiveness.

2Ch 6:31 that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways, so long as they live in the land which You gave to our fathers-

This is repeating the idea of Ps. 130:4: "There is forgiveness with You, that You mayest be feared". Solomon reasons that the experience of forgiveness [on behalf of his temple] will make the people fear Yahweh. And that is so; if we realize the awesome nature of forgiveness, we will fear / respect the God who grants it on a scale and of a nature so beyond our forgiveness of others. "All the days that they live in the land" could hint that Solomon wrongly thought that the people would live eternally in the land, because he was the Messianic king and the temple had now been built.

2Ch 6:32 Moreover concerning the foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, when he shall come from a far country for Your great name's sake and because of Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm; when they shall come and pray toward this house-

The acceptance of the Gentile within the community of Israel was not simply predicated upon the existence of the temple. Ruth was the classic case of coming out of a Gentile country for the sake of Yahweh's Name. And her acceptance was not at all predicated upon any temple building, because there was none in existence at her time. There seems implicit in the reasoning here that the fame of Yahweh's temple would spread to the surrounding nations, and some would wish to come and worship in it. But proselytes were not to be attracted to Yahweh because of any physical temple, but because of who He is- the things implicit in His Name. No matter how cool and slick the external presentation, this is not what legitimately converts people to the true God.

2Ch 6:33 then hear from heaven, even from Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to You for; that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as does Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name-

As discussed on :32, God's response to Gentile proselytes, and their turning to Him, is not predicated upon the existence of a physical building. Solomon asks God to answer prayers of Gentiles made toward the temple so that the Gentiles would know that Yahweh's Name was really there- in "this house which I have built". The agenda of Solomon's pride is evident. God had told David that He didn't need a temple for His Name because His intention was that David's descendant, Messiah, would create a house of people who would bear God's Name, His characteristics, the fruits of His Spirit.

His prayer speaks as if the heavens where God lived were actually the temple; he bid men pray towards the temple where God lived, rather than to God in Heaven. Theoretically he recognized the magnitude of God (2 Chron.6:18); yet the vastness of God, both in power and Spirituality, meant little to him; it failed to humble him as it should have done. It is a feature of human nature to be able to perceive truth and yet act the very opposite. His enthusiasm for his own works lead him to lose a true relationship with God. The idea of salvation by grace became lost on him, loving response to God's forgiveness was not on his agenda, true humility was unnecessary for him, given his certainty that he was King as God intended. He reasoned that God would hear his prayers because they were uttered in the temple of his own hands, rather than because of any personal faith (1 Kings 8:52). Indeed, Solomon legalistically demands that God maintain [as in a court of law] the legal cause or "right" of His people if they pray towards the temple (1 Kings 8:45,49). Legalism and faith are opposed to each other, and Solomon's usage and conception of the temple was legalistic rather than faith based. When dedicating the temple, Solomon asks God to incline the hearts of Israel to be obedient to His commandments (1 Kings 8:57); and whilst God can and does do this, Solomon's implication seems to be that any disobedience would therefore effectively be God's fault for not making His people obedient. He failed to see the need for personal election to obey God's ways.

God said that He accepted the temple not so much as a place to dwell in (as Solomon assumed it was) but as a place facilitating sacrifice, prayer etc., for the glorification of His Name through these things; He emphasized that He dwelt amongst *His people* (1 Kings 6:13; 2 Chron. 7:12-16). There are several other places where God's response to Solomon's words seems to be corrective rather than affirmatory. Thus Solomon says that God will hear the prayers of His people because *the temple* is called by God's Name; but God's response is that "my people, which are called by my name" would pray to Him themselves and be heard, quite apart from the temple (2 Chron. 6:33 cp. 7:14). He sees them as bearing His Name rather than the temple building, as Solomon perceived it. God goes on to parallel the temple and His people in 2 Chron. 7:21,22, saying that if He punishes the temple He will punish the people. Solomon seems to have thought that the temple would still stand favourably in God's eyes even if the people were punished. The record records that the temple was "perfected" whereas Solomon's heart wasn't perfect [s.w.] (1 Kings 11:4 cp. 2 Chron. 8:16).

2Ch 6:34 If Your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen, and the

house which I have built for your name-
Solomon is alluding to Dt. 20:1, but Israel were told that when they went out to battle (s.w.), they were to remember that Yahweh was present with them. Solomon has distorted this idea, by suggesting that Yahweh's presence was specifically in the temple, and the people were to pray towards it there. When in reality, His presence was with His people on the battle front and in their hearts.

Under the old covenant, victory against enemies was predicated upon obedience to and faith in the covenant; whereas here Solomon suggests that mere prayer to the temple will as it were do the trick. Again and again, we see form eclipsing content, the religious displacing the spiritual.

Literally, if they pray with their face toward... the house. The hypocrisy was that Solomon was praying facing Israel and with his face away from the temple. But he reasons that prayer must be made facing towards the temple.

2Ch 6:35 then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and uphold their case-
"Maintain their cause" is the same phrase translated "do judgment / justice". But Israel were to do justice (Lev. 18:4 and often, as David did, 2 Sam. 8:15), and in response, Yahweh would do justice for them (Dt. 10:18). But Solomon overlooks this conditional aspect in Israel's relationship with God, as he did in his own life. He thought that merely praying to a temple would somehow obligate God to 'do judgment' for His people. This is the mentality of mere religion, and not of relationship with God.

2Ch 6:36 If they sin against You (for there is no man who sins not) and You are angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captive to a land far off or near-
Solomon often emphasized the importance of keeping ones' heart (Prov. 2:10-16; 3:5,6; 4:23-5:5; 6:23-26); he had foreseen that the essential sin of God's people was "the plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:46), and he imagined how for this sin God's people would later pray towards the temple. And yet his wives turned away *his* heart, for all this awareness that the heart must be kept. It was as if the more he knew the truth of something, the more he wanted to do the very opposite. And this is exactly true of our natures. Perhaps with Solomon he reasoned that in *his* case, foreign wives wouldn't turn away *his* heart. Just as our flesh thinks 'Yes, but it can't happen to *me*'. Perhaps too he reasoned that if the temple somehow could bring forgiveness for the plague of the heart, his heart was incorruptible because of the temple.

2Ch 6:37 yet if they shall repent themselves in the land where they are carried captive, and turn again, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity saying, We have sinned, we have done perversely, and have dealt wickedly-
Again, Solomon assumes that even if Israel were to go into captivity, the temple would still stand, and prayer toward it would bring the restoration. But the temple was destroyed, so that they would be forced to quit this kind of religious tokenism and turn to God in Heaven with their hearts and souls. Daniel prayed these words (Dan. 9:5), but there was no temple then standing to add efficacy to them. And they were prayed in Ps. 106:6 before any temple stood.

2Ch 6:38 if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity to where they have carried them captive, and pray toward their land

which You gave to their fathers and to the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name-
The old covenant clearly taught that all Israel would be exiled from their land if they broke the covenant. Solomon's dedication of the temple seemed to assume that only the wicked would be exiled from the land, and the temple would stand eternally; to express repentance in exile, they just needed to pray towards it. But all Israel were sent into exile, and his temple was razed to the ground. But Solomon's belief that "The upright will dwell in the land; the perfect will eternally remain in it" (Prov. 2:21) meant that he totally refused to accept the extent of judgment predicted in the curses of Dt. 28. All Israel would be exiled from their land. He liked to assume that his Kingdom would eternally endure; because of his lack of faith in the nature of the future Kingdom, and his mistaken imagination that he was the eternal Messianic king. He refused to recognize that his father David in Ps. 72 had wrongly imagined that he would be that eternal king, and disregarded the conditionality of the promises made to him. And God answers this idea that the temple was to be eternal in 1 Kings 9:7,8.

Daniel understood that after 70 years Jerusalem must be restored; but he earnestly prayed for their forgiveness *so that* this would happen (Dan. 9:2 cp. 19). Perhaps he opened his window and prayed towards Jerusalem exactly because he wanted to fulfil 2 Chron. 6:37,38: "If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn, and pray unto thee… toward their land… and toward the city which thou hast chosen". He knew that repentance was a precondition for the promised restoration to occur.

2Ch 6:39 then hear from heaven, even from Your dwelling place, their prayer and their petitions, and uphold their case and forgive Your people who have sinned against You-
When exiled from Absalom, David had prayed toward God's "holy hill" of Zion, and had been regathered there (Ps. 3:4). David had fled Jerusalem and the "holy hill" of the temple mount, which was now under Absalom's control. But he believes Yahweh is still there, present as it were in the temple, and answering his prayer. He perhaps alludes to the promises that if Israel sinned and were exiled, they could always pray to God and hope for regathering to His holy hill (Dt. 30:1-4; Neh. 1:9). Solomon now develops these thoughts further, in teaching that Israel in their dispersion were to pray to God toward Jerusalem, His "holy hill" of Zion (1 Kings 8:48,49). We see therefore how Solomon would have reflected upon his father David's experience; David had prayed towards God's "holy hill" when in exile from it, and had been heard. Solomon may well have been in David's retinue at the time, and would have experienced the wonder of return to Zion because of his father's prayer towards God in Zion.

1 Kings 8:50 adds: "and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions in which they have transgressed against You; and give them compassion before those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them". God's giving of compassion to His people depended upon their holiness before Him (s.w. Dt. 13:17). But Solomon implies that it will be predicated upon the temple he had built. Form was replacing content, external religion was trumping true spirituality, physical symbolism was obscuring true repentance. The irony is that when Judah were in exile God gave them this compassion in the eyes of their captors. But they were not very penitent, nor was there any temple standing for them to pray towards. This fairly obvious observation is surely to highlight the bankruptcy of Solomon's thoughts here. He has no understanding of grace.

2Ch 6:40 Now, my God, let, I beg You, Your eyes be open, and let Your ears be attentive, to the prayer that is made in this place-

God's eyes are open upon His children wherever they are, as David had learned whilst far from the sanctuary and on the run from Saul. Nehemiah felt God's eyes were open upon him even when the temple was in ruins (Neh. 1:6). "Attentive" is the word used by Nehemiah in Neh. 1:11 "Lord, I beg You, let Your ear be attentive now to the prayer of Your servant". "Attentive" is s.w. 2 Chron. 6:40; 7:15, where we read of God being "attentive" to prayers offered in the temple. But Nehemiah was praying in exile, not in the temple. The desperation of the situation made him learn a lesson- that God wasn't only accessible in the temple. This may sound obvious to us, but it wasn't for those used to the temple cult. The lesson is that God uses punishments for sin, hard situations, to break our paradigms and lead us to a greater spirituality- if we will follow. S.w. also Neh. 9:34- Israel weren't "attentive" to God's word, but in their time of need they hoped He would be "attentive" to their word of prayer. And He was. His grace isn't 'measure for measure'; He treats us out of proportion to our attentiveness to Him. We must show the same grace.

2Ch 6:41 Now therefore arise, Yahweh God, into Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength-

The same root word for "Noah" is found here, where the ark of God 'rested' or 'Noah-ed' in the tabernacle. When the ark 'rested' on Ararat ['holy hill'] the same word is used (Gen. 8:4). A case can be made that Ararat was in fact Mount Zion, where the ark was later to 'rest' in the temple. The 'resting' of the ark was therefore the fulfilment of God's intention in Noah- God's salvation is described as a "promised rest" (Heb. 4:10,11), and it was prefigured in the final resting of the ark. Thus the final salvation of God is to be understood in terms of God 'resting' with us, in us, within His ark. He labours and struggles too... for us. And those struggles will only be at rest when we are saved in the last day; a Father's eternal struggle for His children. The 'rest' spoken of in Noah's name was thus a rest for God. Noah's going out of the ark into a cleansed, pristine world was therefore symbolic of our going forth into the Kingdom at Christ's return.

Solomon liked to think that the building of the temple meant that this was the promised time of "rest" for Israel. But the whole point made of the response made to David's temple project was that He is not a God at rest and neither are His people. The people suffered under Solomon's taskmasters building his treasure cities just as they did under Pharaoh; they hardly found rest under his reign let alone through the building of a temple on the backs of their labour and taxation sacrifices. The people were drafted into labour gangs, whereas the building of the tabernacle and resourcing of it was purely voluntary (Ex. 25). And God's Name was to be in a house of people, for a Name / personality / characteristics cannot dwell in a house of stone and cedar and gold.

It was this misunderstanding that led the Jews to lament how the destruction of the temple had actually destroyed the dwelling place of God's Name: "They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground, they have profaned the dwelling place of Your Name" (Ps. 74:7). The truth was that God's Name dwelt in the hearts and personalities of His true people. And it was God who destroyed the physical temple to try to get them to realize this (Lam. 2:6,7).

Solomon likes to think that he has given rest to Israel, and this is reflected in the ark entering a resting place. But the record is clear that Solomon did not have total

"rest". Damascus was taken from him and he never regained it; he was surrounded by 'adversaries', his people were restless and groaning under his abusive taxing of them for labour and harvests... And he is forcing his own interpretation of Dt. 12:10,11 as referring to the temple he had built: "When you go over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which Yahweh your God causes you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you, so that you dwell in safety, then to the place which Yahweh your God shall choose, to cause His name to dwell there, you must bring all that I command you". The Hebrew *maqom* translated 'place' can mean simply a locality, yet Solomon likes to insist that it means a 'place' as in a building. Yet *maqom* in its 400 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible usually refers simply to a locality and not some 'holy place'. And God has used the term in describing the situation which would come about through David's future son who would be God's begotten son: "I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be moved no more. Neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the first" (1 Chron. 17:9). That future appointed "place" was not the temple; for God in this context says He doesn't want a temple, but will instead give His future people a "place" in eternity through the great Son. It is this "place" which the Lord has in view when He says that His death on the cross is "to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14:2,3). "I will appoint a place" is the same Hebrew as in God's 'appointing a place' for the innocent murderer to flee to for refuge (Ex. 21:13), and that "place" was a city of refuge not a temple. And again, that "place" is understood in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus. The place appointed was one where Yahweh's Name would be placed (Dt. 12:21; 14:24 etc.). It is far too literalistic to assume that the letters YHWH would be placed in a physical place. Surely we are to understand the Name as His characteristics, to be placed supremely in the "place" of His Son, through whom a family / house of people would arise bearing that Name. God's response to David's plan to build a temple had been to state that through His Son, He would "plant" Israel never to be moved again, and this language is repeated about the Lord in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Is. 66:1,2 is crystal clear that God's Name can never "rest" in a physical place, but in humbled hearts after the pattern of David after his sin with Bathsheba: "And what place shall be My rest? For all these things has My hand made, and so all these things came to be, says Yahweh: but to this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word". However, there are references to God's Name dwelling in Zion in the Kingdom age. It will be then "the place of the name of Yahweh of Armies, Mount Zion" (Is. 18:7), "for Yahweh dwells in Zion" (Joel 3:21), in that His Name is supremely in the Lord Jesus who will rule from Zion. Isaiah uses the term in his personal speech, perhaps reflecting his own misadjusted perspective that somehow Yahweh was physically dwelling in Zion: "I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Yahweh of Armies, who dwells in Mount Zion" (Is. 8:18).

Let Your priests, Yahweh God, be clothed with salvation, and let Your saints rejoice in goodness-

Solomon prayed to God in the terms and language of his father (2 Chron. 6:41,42 cp. Ps. 132:1,8,9). He was familiar with his father's Psalms- after all, all Israel sung them. It must have been like being the son of a world-famous singer. The words were even in Solomon's subconscious it seems, for when he tells his son "Give not sleep to thine eyes nor slumber to thine eyelids" (Prov. 6:4) he is alluding unconsciously, it seems (in that it is out of context) to David's promise not to give sleep to his eyes until he had found a resting place for the ark (Ps. 132:4). Verses 41 and 42 are quoting from

Ps. 132. But there is a slight change. Ps. 132:9 has "Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness / justice". This is replaced with "salvation". One of the marvels of salvation by grace, as Paul brings out in Romans, is that it is achieved with justice and integrity on God's part. He upends all human views of justice, whereby there has to be measure for measure and sin must be punished with death. Or we could argue that Solomon likes to imagine that instead of the appeal for the priests to be just, rather does he imagine them as now 'saved' and immortalized. When they weren't.

2Ch 6:42 Yahweh God, don't turn away the face of Your anointed. Remember Your graces to David Your servant-

Solomon's zealous organization of the temple worship was an exact fulfillment of the order laid down by his father David (1 Kings 7:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; 8:14). Solomon wanted God to bless the temple as a sign of His pleasure with David his father (e.g. 2 Chron. 6:42). Solomon's personal enthusiasm for service to God became subsumed by the huge psychological spiritual dominance of his parents. His zeal for the temple was almost purely a result of living out his father's expectation; he almost admits as much in 1 Kings 8:20: "I am risen up in the room of David my father... and have (therefore, in the context) built an house for the name of the Lord".

Ps. 132:10,11 makes a play on the phrase "turn away": "For Your servant David's sake, don't *turn away* the face of Your anointed one. Yahweh has sworn to David in truth, He will *not turn away* from it: I will set the fruit of your body on your throne", literally "from the fruit of your womb". Solomon is asking God not to turn away from him because God had promised never to turn from His promise that from David's body / womb would come an eternal king. But that promise was to be fulfilled through a descendant born after David slept with his fathers, who would also be God's begotten son- through a woman in David's line. Hence the otherwise strange term "from the fruit of your womb". Solomon was twisting God's words yet again, and then on that basis pleading for God to never turn from Him because he was David's son. And it was this wrong assumption that resulted in Solomon himself turning away from Yahweh to idols; for the Divine comment is that his foreign wives turned his heart away from Yahweh.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 7

2Ch 7:1 Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of Yahweh filled the house-

Fire coming down from Heaven (e.g. 2 Chron. 7:1) to consume acceptable sacrifices probably refers to the Angels being made a flame of fire (Ps. 104:4) to consume the sacrifice. In 2 Chron. 7:1 this would be by the Angel dwelling in the temple. The same scenario was probably seen in Eden, when the Angel cherubim consumed the sacrifices. God accepted the temple. Even though this wasn't His ideal path with man, just as He accepted a human kingship. He works with man on a sub optimal level, just as the Lord Jesus would have accepted the one talant man putting his talant into a bank to get interest which was forbidden under the law. There are different levels of service, resulting in one star differing from another in glory; for different people make different amounts from God's truth, the seed on the good ground brings forth different levels of fruit. The Lord's sacrifice achieved salvation "to the uttermost", "that great salvation". And we likewise should naturally seek the highest level and not be minimalists.

2Ch 7:2 The priests could not enter into the house of Yahweh, because the glory of Yahweh filled Yahweh's house-
This was as at the erection of the tabernacle. The idea was that Yahweh's glory was far above the mere religion of the temple system. The glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle when it was erected (Ex. 40:34), as it would later fill the temple (2 Chron. 7:1). But it was God's intention that His glory should fill all the earth; the same words are used in Num. 14:21. The apparently intense manifestation of Himself in a specific place was only a foretaste of what He wished to bring about in "all the earth". And yet Judaism misread this as meaning that His glory was there alone in a specific holy place. They failed to perceive that it was merely a localized foretaste of His intention to make this a universal experience, and the tearing down of the veil at the Lord's death was evidence enough of the progression of this plan. When exiled from the sanctuary, David in his Psalms often perceives that God's glory fills and shall fill all the earth (Ps. 72:19; Hab. 2:14).

2Ch 7:3 All the children of Israel looked on, when the fire came down, and the glory of Yahweh was on the house; and they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshipped and gave thanks to Yahweh saying, For He is good; for His grace endures for ever-
Comparing with 1 Kings 8, it seems that the cloud of glory had already come down, and now fire came down to consume the sacrifices. The grace of it was that God was counting them righteous, sanctifying them, and coming to live amongst an unclean people. They sacrificed in response to that grace (:4). And this is to be our response, as the temple in which He now dwells by His Spirit.

2Ch 7:4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before Yahweh-
We again see the connection between Solomon and "all Israel", whom he considered to be as perfect as he was; see on 1 Kings 8:61. Kings says that these were peace offerings. The peace offering was to be eaten the same day it was killed, and nothing of it was to left until the morning (Lev. 7:15). There is no way Solomon could have personally eaten this massive amount of meat, and so again we see his interest being merely in external religion rather than personal spirituality. And a peace offering was a personal statement between the offerer and God, celebrating their peace with God. There is no way Solomon could legitimately do this for the people.

2Ch 7:5 King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated God's house-
The usual pattern of sacrifice was sin offering (obtaining forgiveness), burnt offering (promising complete dedication to God) and then peace offering, celebrating the resultant peace with God then experienced. But Solomon has no sense of personal sin, and considered himself dedicated to Yahweh by reason of being David's son. And so he only offers the peace offerings. The huge numbers of sacrifices were not at all what God wanted. But unlike David, he had not been brought to realize that God wants broken, repentant hearts and not offerings (Ps. 51:16). Mic. 6:7 perhaps references Solomon's huge numbers of offerings, again commenting that God doesn't want them; just as He didn't want a physical temple. And yet God went along with Solomon, as He does with us so often, even on the basis of our misplaced idealism. For His glory appeared within the temple and He in that sense agreed to dwell there, just as He

agreed to work through a human kingship, even though it meant a degree of rejection of Him as Israel's king.

22,000 oxen are 16.5 million pounds of steak, worth about 90 million US dollars in 2024. And 12 million pounds of mutton. Slaying these animals would have created a literal river of blood.

2Ch 7:6 The priests stood, according to their positions, the Levites also with instruments of music of Yahweh, which David the king had made to give thanks to Yahweh, when David praised by their ministry saying, For His grace endures forever. The priests sounded trumpets before them; and all Israel stood-

Compare Neh. 12:9 "Also Bakbukiah and Unno, their brothers, were over against them". This is the same Hebrew in 2 Chron. 7:6, "The priests sounded trumpets before them", the idea perhaps being that they answered the Levites in choral praise (see Neh. 12:24).

There is a link between the name Yahweh, and praise- because the Name epitomizes the characteristics of God. Halle-lu-YAH is saying that for the sake of the Name Yah, *therefore* praise Him. David sat down and designed musical instruments because of the Name (2 Chron. 7:6). The Psalms often make the link explicit, e.g. "...give thanks unto Your holy name, and to triumph in Your praise" (Ps. 106:47). The Name and praise are paralleled.

Solomon's zealous organization of the temple worship was an exact fulfillment of the order laid down by his father David (1 Kings 7:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; 8:14). Solomon wanted God to bless the temple as a sign of His pleasure with David his father (e.g. 2 Chron. 6:42). Solomon's personal enthusiasm for service to God became subsumed by the huge psychological spiritual dominance of his parents. His zeal for the temple was almost purely a result of living out his father's expectation; he almost admits as much in 1 Kings 8:20: "I am risen up in the room of David my father... and have (therefore, in the context) built an house for the name of the Lord".

2Ch 7:7 Moreover Solomon made the middle of the court holy that was before the house of Yahweh; for there he offered the burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offering, and the meal offering, and the fat-

The huge numbers of animals required more altars, which were presumably placed in the middle court. Although we wonder on what basis Solomon as a non-Levite had the right to declare the court holy. We also wonder as to whether the huge laver, and the ten smaller lavers, were only built with a view to this opening dedication. For the huge laver was too large for normal usage, and there was surely no need for 10 lavers when the tabernacle had only had one. We wonder whether this sudden erection of more altars was also as it were a design fault, and indicates that what he was doing was not according to God's command, but rather his flawed human initiative. See on :8 for another possible design fault.

2Ch 7:8 So Solomon held the feast at that time seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt-

The dedication coincided with the seven day feast of tabernacles (see on 2 Chron. 5:3), and to that was added this seven day feast of dedication (:9). God's law is not a chain, a leash, for man is not a dog. Legalism teaches minimalism. But God's law is rather a springboard to deeper dedication. Rather like Boaz redeeming Ruth and allowing gleaners to glean not at the edge of the fields but in the middle of them, among the ears of grain. There were representatives from the very borders of the land

promised to Abraham, implying these areas had been settled by Israelites; or perhaps those who attended from those places were Gentile proselytes.

2Ch 7:9 On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly; for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days-
As explained on 2 Chron. 5:3, the dedication of the temple had been made to coincide with the feast of tabernacles. The dedication of the temple is called here "the dedication of the altar". As discussed on 1 Kings 9:3, God was willing to accept the temple as a "house of sacrifice", as an altar; but didn't necessarily go along with all the other projections Solomon placed upon the temple. There is reason to think that some kind of altar remained operative on the temple site after the temple was destroyed. Perhaps this is why Chronicles, written for the exiles, calls the temple "the altar".

The dedication coincided with the seven day feast of tabernacles (see on 1 Kings 8:1), and to that was added this seven day feast of dedication. There were representatives from the very borders of the land promised to Abraham, implying these areas had been settled by Israelites; or perhaps those who attended from those places were Gentile proselytes. However if "the feast" was the latter seven days, then we observe that the day of Atonement wasn't kept, as this was only a few days before the feast of tabernacles. Indeed they ate and drank joyfully on Yom Kippur when they should have been afflicting their souls for their sins. Again we see Solomon assuming that personal confession of sin could be eclipsed by focus upon merely external religion.

2Ch 7:10 On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the grace that Yahweh had shown to David, and to Solomon, and to Israel His people-
Israel's blessing was dependent on Solomon's obedience (1 Kings 6:12,13); their joy was because of the honour God had given Solomon (2 Chron. 7:10). The blessing of others can be dependent upon a third party (e.g. Mk. 2:5). 1 Kings 8:66: "For all the goodness that Yahweh had shown to David His servant, and to Israel His people". The people rejoiced that the promises to David had been fulfilled in the temple and in the prosperity of the nation. But they had only uncritically accepted Solomon's narrative. For this was not at all the fulfilment of the promises to David. They "blessed the king" because they assumed it was Solomon who had brought about this fulfilment; and that was exactly what he thought. And they had bought into that false narrative.

2Ch 7:11 Thus Solomon finished the house of Yahweh, and the king's house. He successfully completed all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of Yahweh, and in his own house-
The hint seems to be in 2 Chron. 7:11 that the dedication of the temple and the completion of Solomon's house was at the same time. This was after twenty years. Clearly Solomon saw his temple-palace complex as one building. The fact he waited so long to dedicate the temple shows it was all mere religion from his side, he had no genuine desire for the temple to be used by his people to draw closer to God. The way the record of Solomon's house follows straight on from that of God's house (1 Kings 6,7) seems to highlight the similarity between them. The house of Yahweh and Solomon's house are often spoke of together (e.g. 2 Chron. 7:11; 8:1; 9:11).The Temple was smaller than Solomon's house' he took nearly twice as long to build it.

Clearly he spent more effort at housing his own glory than he did housing God's. The comparisons are intended to show this. They are listed on 2 Chron. 9:11.

His building of the temple was "all that came into his heart", or "all *Solomon's* desire which he was pleased to do" (1 Kings 9:1). He later admits in Ecc. 2 that he did these building projects from a desire to indulge his fantasies about architecture and building. At this point, he served God in ways that were convenient to him and reinforced his own natural interests. There is a semantic connection between the Hebrew words for "desire" and "pleased" - the point of which is to emphasize that Solomon's work for God was only an expression of his own zest for self-fulfilment; he served God in ways which only confirmed his own natural inclinations. Appreciating the spirit and blood of Christ, his own weakness, the grace of God, and the subsequent desire to live a life of self sacrifice, of carrying a cross in ways we wouldn't naturally chose- this was all foreign to Solomon. And is it so foreign to us? Solomon's materialism and self-fulfilment are sure warnings to our age.

2Ch 7:12 Yahweh appeared to Solomon by night and said to him, I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for a house of sacrifice-
Clearly God was aware that Solomon was going wrong, refusing to realize the conditional nature of the promises made to David about his son, and not personally applying the wisdom given to him in the first vision. So God's response to Solomon's arrogant, mistaken prayer of 1 Kings 8 was in fact to appear to him and warn him that he needed to be obedient, or else the promises would not in fact apply to him. The clear implication was that Solomon's statements in his prayer that the promises were fulfilled in him... were wrong.

God said that He accepted the temple not so much as a place to dwell in (as Solomon assumed it was) but as a place facilitating sacrifice, prayer etc., for the glorification of His Name through these things; He emphasized that He dwelt amongst *His people* (1 Kings 6:13; 2 Chron. 7:12-16). There are several other places where God's response to Solomon's words seems to be corrective rather than affirmatory. See on :14.

Chronicles is clear that the temple was not God's original intention. But He went along with David and Solomon's insistence on building it, just as He does with so many misplaced ideals. "Shall you build me a house for me to live in?" (2 Sam. 7:5) is turned by Chronicles into the indicative, "You shall not build me the house to live in" (1 Chron. 17:4). "I declare to you YHWH shall build a house for you" (1 Chron. 17:1O). This grace was as it were unwanted by David and Solomon; they insisted upon doing the works, and glorying in them. And God in the end gives man what he really wants, as in the Father giving so much to the prodigal son, surely knowing what he would do. And if our heart desire is for the Kingdom, He will grant it.

2Ch 7:13 If I shut up the sky so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send plague among My people-
These things clearly allude to the curses for breaking the covenant in Dt. 28. But those curses were to be lifted by repentance and renewed faithfulness to the covenant, and their lifting was not predicated upon the existence of the physical temple and praying in it or towards it. This is now made clear by God in :14.

2Ch 7:14 if My people who are called by My name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land-

We could argue that the people called by God's Name were not all the people of Israel, but only those who had His Name on their hearts, the faithful minority. And indeed at the exile, it was the prayers of this group [Daniel etc.] that led to God's restoration of the people. God says that the people were to "seek / search for My face"- not pray towards Jerusalem or a temple, but go through the struggle of searching for God after sin. They were to seek personal encounter and relationship with God- His face. They were to "humble themselves", literally 'bow the knee' before Him- not turn their bodies in the direction of Jerusalem. They should "turn from their wicked ways" and not turn their bodies towards the temple.

Solomon says that God will hear the prayers of His people because *the temple* is called by God's Name; but God's response is that "my people, which are called by my name" would pray to Him themselves and be heard, quite apart from the temple (2 Chron. 6:33 cp. 7:14). He sees them as bearing His Name rather than the temple building, as Solomon perceived it. See on :12 for another example of God now correcting Solomon's assumptions.

Solomon had asked that God forgive His people for their sins if they prayed in or toward the temple: "If Your people Israel be struck down before the enemy because they have sinned against You, and shall turn again and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You *in this house*; then hear from heaven, and forgive the sin of your people Israel... because they have sinned against You; if they pray *toward this place*, and confess Your name and turn from their sin, when You afflict them; then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants... [hear] their prayer from this place" (2 Chron. 6:24-27,40). But God is careful to respond that He will forgive them if they pray- and carefully omits reference to the temple, "in this house". Solomon says 'If they do [ABC] and then [DEF] happens and they pray *in / towards this place,* then please do [GHI]'. God responds according to the same rubric, repeating what Solomon says, but carefully omitting the central point- if they pray in / towards the temple. The omission is glaring. And it is tantamount to ignoring what was for Solomon the central object of his prayer- to legitimize the temple as the source of efficacy for prayer. His 'religion' was replaced by God's focus on personal spirituality and His response to that.

Jonah learnt this- in the belly of a great fish, he needed forgiveness. He had no access to the temple and didn't know which direction to pray towards. Rather like a navigation system telling you at night to "head north" when you have no idea of where north is. He says that he prayed towards the temple, following Solomon's words rather than God's correction of them. But the grace of it all is that God heard him anyway.

There soon follows a worked example of this. 2 Chron. 12:6,7 records that Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was attacked by Shishak of Egypt: "Then the princes of Israel and the king *humbled themselves*; and they said, Yahweh is righteous. When Yahweh saw that they *humbled themselves*, the word of Yahweh came to Shemaiah, saying, They have *humbled themselves*. I will not destroy them; but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak". The allusion is to God's words in 2 Chron. 7:14, which is His reply to Solomon's claim that if Israel prayed to the temple, then God would save them in battle. He says simply that if Israel humble themselves in battle [He makes no mention of the temple], then He will save them. And the situation with Shishak was an example of that. We note that even at that stage, God had in mind to destroy the temple and Zion / Jerusalem. Solomon and David's dogmatism that it would last eternally are thus shown to be misplaced right from the start of the temple's 430 year

history [the same period of time as Israel were in Egypt, Ex. 12:40,41; Gal. 3:17]. Ezekiel foretold 430 years of judgment upon Israel and Judah (Ez. 4:1-6).

2Ch 7:15 Now My eyes shall be open and My ears sensitive to the prayer that is made in this place-

"Now" may have the idea of 'For now'. For now, at that time, God would hear the prayers made in the temple- if Solomon remained obedient, and until He destroyed the temple.

"Sensitive / attentive" is the word used by Nehemiah in Neh. 1:11 "Lord, I beg You, let Your ear be attentive now to the prayer of Your servant". "Attentive" is s.w. 2 Chron. 6:40; 7:15, where we read of God being "attentive" to prayers offered in the temple. But Nehemiah was praying in exile, not in the temple. The desperation of the situation made him learn a lesson- that God wasn't only accessible in the temple. This may sound obvious to us, but it wasn't for those used to the temple cult. The lesson is that God uses punishments for sin, hard situations, to break our paradigms and lead us to a greater spirituality- if we will follow. S.w. also Neh. 9:34- Israel weren't "attentive" to God's word, but in their time of need they hoped He would be "attentive" to their word of prayer. And He was. His grace isn't 'measure for measure'; He treats us out of proportion to our attentiveness to Him. We must show the same grace.

2Ch 7:16 For now have I chosen and made this house holy, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually-

I would translate and paraphrase 1 Kings 9:3-6 as follows: "I have hallowed this house, which you have built in order that I would put My Name there for ever. My eyes and heart will be there all the days that you walk before Me as David your father walked... [If you swlerve Me with totally perfect obedience to Me] then I will establish you [as the Messianic son I promised to David]... but if you turn from following Me [which God foreknew Solomon would] then... [I will destroy this place and My Name and presence won't be there any more]". Remember that God said these words furiously angry that Solomon had built the temple; Jeremiah records that God was furiously angry with it from the day it was built until the day He tore it down.

God's Name was there for ever in the sense that naming something with your name means ownership. God agreed to accept Jerusalem as His special place, despite His position that He is a God on the move. 2 Chron. 7 could imply that God was willing to go along with it as part of His plan to lead the people towards His Kingdom in the future, when He would etetnally dwell there: "I have chosen and sanctified this house that my name may be there for ever". "That" doesn't mean His Name was there for ever from that point. Because He destroyed the dwelling place of His Name, as later lamented. Or we can allow :7 to explain this. If Solomon turned away from God, then the Name would not dwell there for ever. If he was perfectly obedient, as God's envisaged future Son would be, then it would. Solomon's response should have been that he could not be perfectly obedient, and his focus should have been on the promised future seed who would have an eternal Kingdom.

Solomon prayed that God’s eyes [in Heaven] might be open toward the house; God responds that His eyes and heart are there in the house. The distance Solomon presupposes between earth and heaven is hereby deconstructed by God's reply.

It has been argued that the Hebrew *olahm*, "forever", really means 'a period'. But I am unpersuaded of that argument in every case. Rather I would think that the context in this case requires that we understand God to be saying that He would indeed dwell in the temple "forever", and His particular sensitivity would be found in that place, His eyes and heart. But as He makes clear in 1 Kings 9:4-7, that was all conditional upon obedience. This highlights the tragedy- that eternity was at stake. So much depends upon human freewill decisions; for that is how much He respects us and our freedom of choice.

God's Name, eyes and heart were not for ever focused upon the physical temple. In :20 He states that He can cast the temple out of His sight and special awareness. The temple was destroyed, and the possibility of that is mentioned in :21. But He also says here that His intense presence and sensitivity will always be there. One resolution of this is to recall that God's response to the desire to build the house / temple was to say that He would build a house / temple for David. And that temple was His Son and all in Him. For both the Lord Jesus and all in Him are described as God's temple. The Divine promise here remains true- through His definition of the temple. His special awareness and sensitivity is not now focused upon a small plot of land in Jerusalem, but upon us. Whoever touches us, touches the apple of His eye. His presence and involvement in the temple could only be because He had chosen and "made this house holy", He had sanctified it, counted it as holy / righteous. And this is exactly what Paul says He has done to us His people- elected / chosen us, unto sanctification by Him. The ideas of choosing and sanctification run together in Paul's thought. We are the temple. "God has from the beginning *chosen* you to salvation through *sanctification* of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). "According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy/ sanctified" (Eph. 1:4). Peter likewise: "Elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:2). And the Lord Himself: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained / sanctified you" (Jn. 15:16).

2Ch 7:17 As for you, if you will walk before Me as David your father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances-

This was a hard act to follow, for David was chosen as being a man after God's own heart. Solomon considered that he was acceptable with God just because of his father, whereas Go wanted him to personally attain his father's spirituality. We note in passing God's high estimation of David, despite David's serious but out of character failings. God constantly warned Solomon about the conditionality of the promises, before the building started (2 Sam. 7:14), during it (1 Kings 6:11-13) and immediately after completing it (1 Kings 9:2-9). Solomon reinterprets this conditional promise in Prov. 20:7: "A righteous man walks in integrity; blessed are his children after him". Solomon has here his own agenda of self justification in view. The man who 'walked in integrity' is without doubt David (s.w. 1 Kings 9:4; Ps. 26:1,11; 101:2). Solomon assumed that because his father had walked in integrity, then he as his child would automatically be blessed. But he was choosing to misunderstand the conditional nature of the promises to him in 1 Kings 9:4; if he walked himself in integrity "as David your father walked", then he would be the prophetically blessed son of David.

Solomon's prophetic sonship of David was conditional upon him preserving or observing Yahweh's ways (1 Kings 2:4; 1 Chron. 22:13; 2 Chron. 7:17); but he didn't preserve of observe them (1 Kings 11:10,11); despite David praying that Solomon

would be given a heart to observe them (1 Chron. 29:19). We can pray for God to work upon the hearts of others, but He will not force people against their own deepest will and heart position. Solomon stresses overmuch how God would keep or preserve the righteous (Prov. 2:8; 3:26), without recognizing the conditional aspect of this. Why did Solomon go wrong? His Proverbs are true enough, but he stresses that obedience to *his* wisdom and teaching would preserve his hearers (Prov. 4:4; 6:22; 7:1; 8:32; 15:5), preservation was through following the example of the wise (Prov. 2:20); rather than stressing obedience to *God's* ways, and replacing David his father's simple love of God with a love of academic wisdom: "Yahweh preserves all those who love Him" (Ps. 145:20).

2Ch 7:18 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, according as I covenanted with David your father saying, There shall not fail you a man to be ruler in Israel- This is the same quotation made in Ps. 132:12. But God is picking up on Solomon's claims in 1 Kings 8:24 that God had already fulfilled this. He is pointing out that this promise was conditional, and Solomon had overlooked that. The promise of "a man" suggests one individual; but Solomon was wrong in assuming this referred to himself. He could potentially have been the Messiah, just as various individuals could have been. Indeed the Old Testament is littered with failed Messiahs- all building up to the wonderful climax of the one true Messiah.

David and Solomon had twisted what God actually promised David. He spoke of a singular seed, to be born after David "slept with [his] fathers". The phrase "man to be ruler in Israel" is applied to Messiah individually in Mic. 5:2 ("But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come forth to Me the man that is to be the ruler in Israel"). But Solomon has expanded this into "your children" (2 Chron. 6:16), in line with how David had wanted to interpret God's words as not referring to Messiah, God's begotten Son, but to an unbroken line of kings ruling on his throne. God now seems to agree, reluctantly, to this desire. He says that if Solomon is perfectly obedient (:17), and if the subsequent kings are, then He can also interpret His words of promise as meaning that "There shall not fail you a man to be ruler in Israel". But of course they were not perfectly obedient, the Davidic line of kings ended, and God Himself overthrew Zion. God by all means tried to go along with their desired path of fulfilment, and this is repeated later in 2 Chron. 23:3 ["Let him reign, as the Lord spoke concerning the sons of David"] and 2 Chron. 21:7: "Yet the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant which he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons for ever". That promise was however conditional upon their following His ways perfectly. The eternal lamp for David was to be fulfilled in the Messianic King, God's begotten Son. We see in all this how God will go along with human misunderstanding, in a desperate if reluctant bid to retain relationship with man. This is not to be taken as a minimizing of His requirements nor of His word. But we do marvel at the extent to which He is willing to compromise with man. And so we see Christian people with all manner of stubborn, even intentional misunderstandings, still being used by God and God retaining relationship with them. Just as He sent the shekinah into the temple- when so much in the temple was not of His will and indeed He had stated that He did not want a temple. Despite God's reasoning in 2 Samuel 7 as to why He didn't want a temple, He still gave the exiles the plans for a temple in Ez. 40-48, again amending and adjusting the terms of His encounter with man according to what He knew man wanted. Although still man refused to obey those plans in that the exiles didn't build that temple. Just as He worked through a kingship,

which He made clear through Samuel He did not want. He gave them a king in His anger and took him away in His wrath; He was angry with the temple from the day it was built until the day He destroyed it. This 'going along' with the idea of an unbroken line of kings and His physical presence in Zion was what led to the huge disillusionment of Lamentations and other passages- when God Himself ended the line of kings and furiously ripped Zion apart. He was thereby seeking to revert His people to His promise of a future Kingdom and Messiah as the fulfilment of the covenant with David. Which was in essence the same as His covenant with Abraham and the fathers.

2Ch 7:19 But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them-
This is what Solomon did finally do, and already at this stage he had married Gentile women, whom the law of Moses had warned would lead his heart away from Yahweh to "other gods". But that apparently inevitable process could still be arrested- if Solomon responded in humility to this appeal. We wait with eager ears to hear Solomon's response when the appeal ends in :22. But there is silence; see on :22. This verse is addressed to Solomon personally. If he fell away, then Israel would suffer and the temple would be destroyed (:20). This is the nature of sin- that it affects others. Men can to some degree be saved by third parties (Mk. 2:5) but they can also suffer and lose relationship with God because of third party behaviour. This highlights the huge importance and significance of how we live life. For no man is an island, no man lives or dies unto himself. Despite the claims of the individualistic, postmodern culture in which we live.

2Ch 7:20 then I will pluck them up by the roots out of My land which I have given them; and this house, which I have made holy for My name, I will cast out of My sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples-
Solomon had wrongly reasoned in 2 Chron. 6 that the grandeur of the temple would attract Gentiles to become proselytes to Yahweh. But God warns him that the very opposite could happen, and the ruined temple would become the biggest possible disadvertisment for Yahweh and His people. Solomon had prayed, and in that prayer taught Israel, that if they sinned even in captivity, then all they had to do was pray towards the temple and they would be forgiven. He saw in that building some kind of atonement for sins. He lost sight of the importance of the blood that made atonement; he replaced the blood of Christ with a work of his own hands. God's response to the dedication of the temple here corrects what Solomon has just said. He says that if Israel sin then He will cast the temple too out of His sight; which is rather different to how Solomon instructed the people to gain forgiveness for the sake of the temple if they were in dispersion. He saw the temple as a talisman- the need for real, meaningful change and repentance and spiritual mindedness to enable the dwelling of God went unperceived. He failed to perceive the real possibility of the eternal potential he and Israel could miss. They really could be cast out of God's sight in condemnation. Jonah recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jon. 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at his time (2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15).

2Ch 7:21 This house, which is so high, everyone who passes by it shall be astonished, and shall say, 'Why has Yahweh done thus to this land, and to this house?'-
God parallels the temple and His people in 2 Chron. 7:21,22, saying that if He punishes the temple He will punish the people. Solomon seems to have thought that

the temple would still stand favourably in God's eyes even if the people were punished. The record records that the temple was "perfected" whereas Solomon's heart wasn't perfect [s.w.] (1 Kings 11:4 cp. 2 Chron. 8:16).

This is God's commentary upon the implications in Solomon's prayer that the temple and God's presence within it was to be eternal. Solomon had willfully misinterpreted the promises to David to mean that the temple was the fulfilment of the promise that the seed would build an eternal house. That house David had built was not the house in view, and could easily be destroyed and even become a curse rather than a blessing- if Solomon were disobedient.

2Ch 7:22 They shall answer, 'Because they abandoned Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and took other gods, worshipped them, and served them. Therefore He has brought all this evil on them'-
We wait with eager ears to hear Solomon's response when the appeal ends; but there is silence. Solomon had blanked out from his perception any idea that he might fail or was less than perfect. His narrative was that he was the son of David, and the promises about David's son were now fulfilled in him. And he refused to allow anything, not even an appeal from God, disturb that internal narrative.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 8

2Ch 8:1 It happened at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the house of Yahweh and his own house-
The way the record of Solomon's house follows straight on from that of God's house (1 Kings 6,7) seems to highlight the similarity between them. The house of Yahweh and Solomon's house are often spoke of together (e.g. 2 Chron. 7:11; 8:1; 9:11).The Temple was smaller than Solomon's house' he took nearly twice as long to build it. Clearly he spent more effort at housing his own glory than he did housing God's. The comparisons are intended to show this. They are listed on 2 Chron. 9:11.

Psalm 127 is prefaced with the information that it is a Psalm for Solomon- perhaps given by some nameless prophet (Gad? Nathan?) to warn him of where he was going. Verse 1 reminds him that God must be the builder of any house, or else the builders labour in vain. There is good reason to think that Solomon utterly failed to appreciate this. The records stress time and again that *Solomon* built the temple (1 Kings 6:2,14; 9:10,25; 10:4; 1 Chron.6:10,32; 2 Chron. 8:1,12; 9:3; Acts 7:47); yet the house referred to in the Davidic promises was to be built by God, through David's Messianic Son, the Lord Jesus. Zechariah prophesied at the time of the rebuilding of the physical temple. It is significant, in this context, that Zech. 6:12 reminds Israel that the true temple of God will be built by the Branch, the Lord Jesus.

The question is whether all these building projects happened chronologically, one after another, or whether they in fact were all going on at the same time. If chronologically, we would expect a note to that effect at this point. Instead we are left to conclude that the building of the temple, of his own house, of "the house of the forest of Lebanon" and the "house for Pharaoh's daughter (whom Solomon had taken as wife)" (:8) all happened at the same time. We could conclude that he was distracted from building God's house by his other building projects, and that's why the building of the temple took seven years. This may appear to be contradicted by the statements in 1 Kings 9:10 and 2 Chron. 8:1: "It happened at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of Yahweh and the king's house...". However the context of those verses goes on to state that Solomon had given twenty

cities to Hiram in return for his labour and materials for the building of the houses. So we could legitimately read those passages as meaning that at the end of the twenty year period over which the two houses had been built and twenty cities given to Hiram... that Hiram became dissatisfied. The recurrence of the number twenty could hint that he was paid one city a year for twenty years.

2Ch 8:2 that the cities which Huram had given to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there-
The record of this is explained in 1 Kings 9:14 as being in the context of how "Hiram sent to the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold". It seems Solomon became so obsessed with his building projects that he borrowed this money to finance them, and then tried to pay off the debt by giving Hiram the worthless cities of Cabul which were not at all any recompense. We see therefore that all was not quite as opulent and prosperous in Solomon's kingdom as may appear. Solomon had given Hiram these 20 cities in Galilee (1 Kings 9:11), but Hiram had returned them to Solomon. The gift of Israelite cities to a Gentile was not what a true king of Israel should have done, who valued the promises of Israel's eternal inheritance of the promised land. Solomon had come to see all God's promises as fulfilled in him and his amazing city and temple in Jerusalem. And so he devalued the rest of the promises, especially their future, eternal dimension. These cities were inhabited by Canaanites whom Israel hadn't subdued at the time of this 'gift' (2 Sam. 24:7; 2 Chron. 8:2), and so Solomon was giving to Hiram a bunch of problems. These cities were not really under Solomon's authority anyway, he had not subdued the Canaanites there, so passing them to Hiram was giving him a noose around his neck rather than a true present. He called them "Cabul" (1 Kings 9:13). "Cabul" can mean 'pawned', and the idea may be that although in some sense they did belong to Solomon, effectively they didn't because they were inhabited by Canaanites. Hence Hiram returned them to Solomon, with all the damage in relationship that goes with returning a rejected gift. Hence we read here that after this Solomon colonized the cities and sent Israelites to live there. But this was not particularly in obedience to the Divine commands to subjugate the Canaanites, but rather than Solomon was desperate for huge amounts of slave labour with which to fulfil his building projects (see on 1 Kings 9:21). .

2Ch 8:3 Solomon went to Hamath Zobah, and prevailed against it-
1 Kings 11:4,6 clearly states God's opinion that Solomon was not like David: "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father... (he) went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father". This double stress, bearing in mind inspiration's economic use of words, is really making a point. Yet the records of Solomon seem to be framed to show that externally, Solomon was indeed following David; he was obsessed with living out parental expectation, and perhaps the expectation of his society, rather than forging his own relationship with God. 2 Chron. 8 is a passage which especially makes this point, in that it describes the actions of Solomon in the very language which is used earlier about David.

2 Chron. 8:3 “Solomon went to Hamath Zobah” = 2 Sam. 8:3 “David smote also Hadadezer the son of Rehob king of Zobah”; 2 Chron. 8:3 "and *prevailed*" = Same word 1 Sam. 17:30; 2 Chron. 8:8 Those “whom the children of Israel consumed not, did Solomon make to pay tribute” = 2 Sam. 8:6 “David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts”; 2 Chron. 8:14 “He appointed according to the ordinance of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges… for so had David

commanded" = 1 Chron. 24:1; 2 Chron. 9:15,16 = 2 Sam.8:7 "David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem".

Yet notice too how both David and Solomon dealt with the matter of chariots and horses. Solomon's weakness for horses was perhaps traceable to David's. Solomon unashamedly amassed horses and chariots, in direct disobedience to Divine command (Dt. 17:16). When David his father had captured 1000 chariots and horses, he hamstrung 900 of them and retained 100 of them (2 Sam. 8:4). He had a conscience about the matter, but thought that 90% obedience wasn't bad. And the hamstrung horses were likely used for agricultural work and especially for breeding- breeding yet more chariot horses. David's 90% obedience lead to his son's 100% disobedience in this matter of chariot horses.

2Ch 8:4 He built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the storage cities which he built in Hamath-

Israel was at its largest extent in Solomon's Kingdom; lost land was restored, and the borders re-established (2 Chron. 9:26; 8:4 cp. Josh. 16:3,5); it was also at its political strongest; nations submitted to Solomon (1 Kings 4:20); Israel was the chief of the nations (1 Kings 4:21). Baalath was in Dan near Gezer (Josh. 19:44), and was built and then populated by Israelites for defensive reasons. Tadmor (AV) is now an oasis in the Syrian desert, on the caravan route from Damascus to the Euphrates. There was no point in building it as a city unless it was to be inhabited by Israelites. But this would have been unpopular, as it meant uprooting Israelites out of their homes and tribal areas and sending them to live in remote outpost. This would have meant Solomon again despised the tribal allotments, which to God were significant. He did the same in his arrangement of the tax administration of the nation, as explained on 1 Kings 4.

2Ch 8:5 Also he built Beth Horon the upper, and Beth Horon the lower, fortified cities, with walls, gates, and bars-

Solomon loved building and architecture (Ecc. 2:4-6; 2 Chron. 8:4-6), therefore his building of God's temple was something he revelled in. But when it came to obeying the clear commands concerning not multiplying horses or wives, Solomon simply disregarded them. Likewise Israel were so sad to lose the temple because "Our holy and our beautiful house... is burned... and all our pleasant things are laid waste" (Is. 64:11). It was God's house, not theirs. They only mourned for the loss of it insofar as it was a reflection of what they revelled in anyway, as an expression of themselves, rather than a means of worshipping God. By contrast, Paul says that the proof that he had been given a command to preach the Gospel was in the fact that he preached against his own will; he says that if he did it willingly, i.e. because it coincided with his own will, then he had his reward in this life (this is a paraphrase of 1 Cor. 9:17 and context).

2Ch 8:6 and Baalath, and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and all the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build for his pleasure in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion-

The building of store cities by slave labour is exactly what Pharaoh did to the Israelites (Ex. 1:11). The impression is given that he followed Egypt in this way, as well as marrying Pharaoh's daughter and incorporating Egyptian stylism into the temple building, as noted on 1 Kings 8. His love of horses and chariots likewise reflects his love of Egypt, despite it being forbidden for Israel's king in Deuteronomy.

Solomon's lack of sensitivity to God's word led him to be tragically insensitive to people; in short, he showed no love. The way Solomon raised a "levy" or tribute from Israel, whereby the men of Israel had to serve him one month out of three and 'bear burdens', with 3,300 taskmasters over them (1 Kings 5:13-15), who 'bore rule' over (Heb. 'trampled down') the people (1 Kings 5:16)... is all reminiscent of Samuel's warning about the kind of King which Israel would have. And the language also recalls their bondage in Egypt; note that the levy was also in order to build treasure cities for Solomon, just as Pharaoh did. The Hebrew word for "levy" in 1 Kings 5:13 strictly means 'a burden causing to faint', and is rendered "taskmaster" in the record of Israel's suffering in Egypt (Ex. 1:11). One even wonders if Solomon's father-in-law- who also happened to be a Pharaoh of Egypt- influenced him (consciously or unconsciously) to act like the Exodus Pharaoh.

Solomon figuratively chastised the people with whips in the form of the excessive tax he raised in order to build store cities (1 Kings 9:15,19), in which to store all his accumulation. Surely this is behind the Lord's parable of the rich fool, devoid of wisdom in practice, who built ever bigger barns because of his lack of understanding about the future Kingdom. The Hebrew for "*store* cities" (2 Chron. 8:6) is also translated "to heap up", strengthening the connection with the rich fool (Lk. 12:15-28). That parable stresses the self-centeredness of the fool- just circle all the occurrences of the word "I". A similar over-use of personal pronouns in Ecc. 2:4-8 makes the same point. Ecc. 2:26 records how Solomon reflected that the sinner "heaped up" treasures- using the same word as for his "*store* cities". He saw his error, but wasn't bothered to do anything about it.

Solomon *loved* building (Ecc. 2:4-6)- he built cities and buildings because it was “the desire of Solomon which he desired” (1 Kings 9:19 AVmg.), i.e. one of his dominant desires. So when we read that it was the desire of Solomon to build the temple (1 Kings 9:1,11), he was merely serving God in a way that naturally appealed to him anyway. And when he had finished that desire when the temple was completed (1 Kings 9:1), he was in the same position as when in Ecclesiastes he describes how he indulged every desire up to the very end, and then was left with the emptiness of vanity.

The fortification of Lebanon was because of the threat from Rezin in Damascus (1 Kings 11:24).

2Ch 8:7 As for all the people who were left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of Israel-
Of the seven nations earlier listed as inhabiting Canaan, only these five had apparently survived. Two had been absorbed into the Israelite population or destroyed. They were clearly distinct from the "children of Israel". Instead of trying to absorb them into Israel or destroy them, Solomon was so desperate for workers that he capitalized on that situation and demanded they provide him with slaves for his building works, as opposed to the Israelite labour which was classified as 'servants' (:9).

2Ch 8:8 of their children who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel didn’t consume, of them Solomon conscripted forced labour to this day-
This suggests that Solomon made the same mistake as Israel in earlier days- he was a satisficer, he himself married into those tribes, and he wasn’t obedient to the clear covenant of the land which was binding upon him. Solomon's motivation for now bringing the Canaanites into servitude was not spiritual. Rather, as with his borrowing of money from Hiram (see on :2), his obsession with his building plans was such that

he needed huge amounts of money and resources to carry them through. And so he colonized the Canaanite areas and made them send him slaves to work on his quarrying and building projects; and this was why, as noted on :2, he was keen to colonize the area of 'Cabul', in order to also provide more dogs body workers for his architectural obsessions.

2Ch 8:9 But of the children of Israel, Solomon made no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and rulers of his chariots and of his horsemen-

This sounds very much like the fulfilment of Samuel's warning as to how a human king would abuse the Israelites. He made the Canaanites slaves (:2,8), but he made the Israelites his servants, to the point of whipping them with whips, as they later complained after his death. The difference between being his slaves and his servants was therefore not that significant.

Solomon had obsessive tendencies. We know that he became addicted to finding pleasure in women, and Ecc. 2 shows him racing down the road of obsession with architecture, alcohol, food, gold etc. The historical narratives so often mention his gold and silver (e.g. 2 Chron. 9:13-21,24,27). This repetition reflects Solomon's obsession. The same fact explains the record's repetition of Solomon's enthusiasm for horses (1 Kings 10:25-29; 4:26,28; 9:19,22; 2 Chron. 1:14,16,17; 8:6,9; 9:24,25,28). Yet amassing of gold, silver and horses was explicitly forbidden for the King of Israel (Dt. 17:17). There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

2Ch 8:10 These were the chief officers of king Solomon, even two-hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people-

The difference with 1 Kings 9:23 may be because the word for "three" in Hebrew, 'sls', can easily be confused with that for "six" ['ss']. The same confusion is found in 2 Chron. 2:18 cp. 1 Kings 5:16. This would appear to be one of the copying errors in these Divinely inspired records.

But another approach is possible. The number of these overseers varies from 3,300 when the temple was being built (1 Kings 5:16) to 550 in 1 Kings 9:23 and then 250 in the Chronicles record. I suggested on 1 Kings 9:14,21 that all was not well in Solomon's apparently opulent kingdom. His building obsessions had led him to borrow money from Hiram to find it, and to excessively tax both Israel and the Canaanites amongst them to provide workers. And so the decreasing numbers of overseers may reflect his declining human resources, despite making every effort to try to pressgang more labourers he got fewer and fewer on the jobs in practice.

2Ch 8:11 Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David to the house that he had built for her; for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places where the ark of Yahweh has come are holy-

If this is the woman of the Song of Solomon, then we can deduce they had a stormy relationship. It apparently ends at the end of Song 8 (see notes there), and yet with the hints of resumption. So perhaps it was not a blessed marriage, and Solomon ended up building her a separate house to live in outside his immediate citadel.

Solomon's lack of self examination and confidence that he could not spiritually fail is reflected in 1 Kings 11:2,3, where we are reminded that God had said that foreign wives would "surely... turn away your heart after their gods". How "surely"

this would happen was not believed by Solomon. "He had seven hundred wives... and his wives turned away his heart". He started marrying these foreign wives when he was young; presumably he reasoned that they could never turn away *his* heart because he was the Son of David, the Messianic King. In Prov. 6:27 he soberly warns against the strange (i.e. Gentile) woman, observing that a man cannot take this kind of fire into his bosom and not be burned by it. Yet this is exactly what he was doing at the time he wrote that. His public removal of his Egyptian wife from the house of David "because the places are holy" (2 Chron. 8:11) is therefore to be seen as spiritual pride, appearing to do the right thing, when his heart was far from it.

2Ch 8:12 Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to Yahweh on the altar of Yahweh, which he had built before the porch-
"Three times a year" in :13 surely refers to the three main feasts, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. No longer were the "high places" like Gibeon used, but worship was centralized in Jerusalem. This was indeed as the law of Moses intended, but Solomon appears to have used this as part of his policy of centralization of power in Jerusalem which we discussed on 1 Kings 4. We note that Solomon seems to have officiated as a priest as David did. David had done this kind of thing, but from careful reflection upon the spirit of the law, whose letter he says in Ps. 119 he studied constantly. And David came to this sense through careful reflection upon God's grace to him, and through the experience of Uzzah's death as a result of taking 'living the spirit of the law' too far. But Solomon does it from a wrong assumption that he is the Messianic king-priest.

2Ch 8:13 even as the duty of every day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the Sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the set feasts, three times in the year, in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tents-
The idea is "sacrificing at the daily rate, according to the direction of Moses". And yet the scale of the arrangements for the priests, the altar, multiples tables, lavers etc. all implied that the whole structure was built to facilitate sacrifice on a far larger scale than in the tabernacle. If indeed they offered the number of sacrifices stipulated in the law of Moses, then all the grand scale was mere opulence and religious show.

2Ch 8:14 He appointed, according to the ordinance of David his father, the divisions of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their offices, to praise, and to minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required; the doorkeepers also by their divisions at every gate; for so had David the man of God commanded-
The language here reflects how Solomon had effectively replaced God's word through Moses with the obsessive fantasy of his father David. Things were appointed not according to ordinance of Moses, but of David.

Solomon's zealous organization of the temple worship was an exact fulfillment of the order laid down by his father David (1 Kings 7:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; 8:14). Solomon wanted God to bless the temple as a sign of His pleasure with David his father (e.g. 2 Chron. 6:42). Solomon's personal enthusiasm for service to God became subsumed by the huge psychological spiritual dominance of his parents. His zeal for the temple was almost purely a result of living out his father's expectation; he almost admits as much in 1 Kings 8:20: "I am risen up in the room of David my father... and have (therefore, in the context) built an house for the name of the Lord".

2Ch 8:15 They didn't depart from the commandment of the king to the priests and Levites concerning any matter, or concerning the treasures-
As noted on :14, the obedience was to David and his vision, rather than to the word of God through Moses.

2Ch 8:16 Now all the work of Solomon was prepared to the day of the foundation of the house of Yahweh, and until it was finished. So the house of Yahweh was completed-
God said that He accepted the temple not so much as a place to dwell in (as Solomon assumed it was) but as a place facilitating sacrifice, prayer etc., for the glorification of His Name through these things; He emphasized that He dwelt amongst *His people* (1 Kings 6:13; 2 Chron. 7:12-16). There are several other places where God's response to Solomon's words seems to be corrective rather than affirmatory. Thus Solomon says that God will hear the prayers of His people because *the temple* is called by God's Name; but God's response is that "my people, which are called by my name" would pray to Him themselves and be heard, quite apart from the temple (2 Chron. 6:33 cp. 7:14). He sees them as bearing His Name rather than the temple building, as Solomon perceived it. God goes on to parallel the temple and His people in 2 Chron. 7:21,22, saying that if He punishes the temple He will punish the people. Solomon seems to have thought that the temple would still stand favourably in God's eyes even if the people were punished. The record records that the temple was "perfected" whereas Solomon's heart wasn't perfect [s.w.] (1 Kings 11:4 cp. 2 Chron. 8:16).

2Ch 8:17 Then went Solomon to Ezion Geber, and to Eloth, on the seashore in the land of Edom-
Transporting ships overland was relatively common; there are several accounts of Alexander the Great doing so. Perhaps Hiram had transported his ships there overland through Israel, and Solomon decided to have them build ships for him at their port of departure, so that his traders could accompany the men of Tyre. The ships were perhaps "sent" (:18) in the form of wooden structures which were then assembled at the port.

2Ch 8:18 Huram sent him ships and servants who had knowledge of the sea by the hands of his servants; and they came with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and fetched from there four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon-
1 Kings 9:28 says 420, but perhaps the 30 talents difference were paid to Hiram for his transport services, as the navy appears to have either been owned by Hiram or at least included his ships. "Ophir" may have been a generic name for areas to the east, including southern Arabia (famed for gold in Ps. 72:15; Ez. 27:22) and India; Ophir was in Arabia according to Gen. 10:29. Sheba was nearby and was famed for gold, so it was through this trading that the Queen of Sheba heard of the wisdom of Solomon. The next verse (2 Chron. 9:1) goes on to speak of her, connecting her with this gold trade with Ophir.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 9

2Ch 9:1 When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to prove Solomon with hard questions, with a very great train, and camels

that bore spices, and gold in abundance and precious stones. When she had come to Solomon, she talked with him of all that was in her heart-
As explained on 2 Chron. 8:18, she would have first encountered Solomon's servants when they came to Sheba in search of gold, for which Sheba was famous. "Hard questions" is the word for "riddle". And it seems Solomon answered her riddles using his book of Proverbs. For he uses the word in Prov. 1:5,6 about how his Divinely inspired Proverbs were the answers to such "riddles" of the wise: "These proverbs can even add to the knowledge of the wise and give guidance to the educated, so that they can understand the hidden meanings of proverbs and the problems [s.w. "riddles", "hard questions"] that the wise raise" (GNB). He may have this wise queen of Sheba in mind, as it was her who raised these "riddles" / "problems" with him. The Hebrew idea seems to be of trick questions. She came to "prove" him- what we read of in this chapter is the conversion of a sceptic, but she ws converted not so much by the ideas, the intellectual gymnastics, but what she saw with her own eyes of the effect of that wisdom. "No more spirit in her" (:4) could imply a giving up in a mental fight against Solomon. She initially didn't believe the words about Solomon (:6).

2Ch 9:2 Solomon told her all her questions; and there was not anything hidden from Solomon which he didn't tell her-
"Questions" is a poor translation. Literally, her 'words', s.w. "communed" in :1. He told her the words she had in her mind before she said them. This is the way good conversation goes, this is how people are won for Christ- when you tell them things which they were about to say. Paul uses this method when he foresees and answers questions which he foresees, e.g. "Some man will say, How are the dead raised up?" (1 Cor. 15:35). "Told her" translates the word used for solving riddles (Jud. 14:13) and interpreting dreams (Gen. 41:24; Dan. 5:12).

2Ch 9:3 When the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built-
The next verse suggests the "house" she was amazed at was not so much the temple, as his own house which had taken nearly twice as long to build and was of a grander nature than the temple. Yet he had prayed in 1 Kings 8 that the temple would be the source of wonder for the Gentile world, and would of itself bring about the creation of proselytes for Yahweh. But in reality it was replaced by his own house. We note how she was impressed by 'seeing' his wisdom; she had heard it in theory (:1), but it is the word made flesh which has the power of personal conversion in practice.

"Seen the wisdom" shows how wisdom and truth are seen in practice, not just heard with the ear. Only as the word becomes flesh in us will our witness of that word be ultimately persuasive to our audience.

2Ch 9:4 and the food of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers and their clothing, his cup bearers also and their clothing, and his ascent by which he went up to the house of Yahweh; there was no more spirit in her-
See on :1. Clearly 'spirit' here means something other than the life force, it refers to something mental and emotional. The way the Queen of Sheba was given a guided tour of Solomon's wealth makes ominous connection with Hezekiah's proud parading of his blessings to the Babylonian ambassadors. The "ascent" was the king's personal entry into the temple (2 Kings 16:18) and Hezekiah is also associated with this in that he wrote the songs of degrees after his healing. They allude to how the sun went back

on the sundial of Ahaz, which appears to have been a development of these grandiose steps of the king's entrance to the temple into a sundial. See on :11.

2Ch 9:5 She said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in my own land of your acts and of your wisdom-
"Report" is s.w. 'word', see note on :3. Hearing reports, wisdom in mere words, is not persuasive of itself until it is seen in practice. The actual content of Solomon's wisdom, perhaps in the form of the writings we now have as the book of Proverbs, had already been taken to her. She had heard the words by "report", but "didn't believe the words" (:6) until she actually saw the word made flesh. And this is typical of so many people. It is why God speaks His word to us now "in His Son", and why our witness will be the more effective if we make the word flesh in our lives.

2Ch 9:6 However I didn't believe their words until I came, and my eyes had seen it; and behold, the half of the greatness of your wisdom wasn't told me: you exceed the fame that I heard-
As explained on :5, it is hard for people to believe mere words. They have to see the word made flesh. This is why simply distributing propositional truths on various media will not of itself convert many people. The word must be made flesh, and then it is believed. This is why the person of the Lord Jesus, the word made flesh, must be absolutely and utterly paramount in our teaching of the Gospel. And it is why public lecturing about various Gospel truths will never convert as many people as witnessing that word in the flesh. It is encounter with real persons which converts real persons, rather than encounter with words and ideas. That is not to say God's word is not alive and powerful of itself. But people are people, they are weak, and often they have lacked access to God's word in its written form. It is the word made flesh in believers of that word which will be the most powerful witness in practice. By seeing the theory turned into practice, the word made flesh, she was converted.

2Ch 9:7 Happy are your men-
It is as if she wishes to see David's words about the blessedness or happiness of the righteous nation and people being fulfilled, or perhaps it was Solomon trying to fulfil those words (Ps. 1:1; 33:12 etc.). But it seems this was all an impression Solomon was giving her, for many things were "rotten in the state of Denmark" as noted throughout 1 Kings 8,9. LXX gives "wives" for "men", as if she was struck by the happiness of the wives in his harem, which was unusual. But surely this too was only an appearance, because Ecclesiastes betrays an unhappy family life in Solomon's experience.

And happy are these your servants who stand continually before you, and hear your wisdom-
Joy / happiness is a proof of wisdom in practice. Acts records constant joy amongst those who accepted Christ, and Heb. 3:6 implies that to stop rejoicing in the hope means we have lost the spiritual plot completely. Joy is therefore a necessary hallmark of those who are truly secured in Christ. The next generation were to complain that Solomon had chastised the people with whips (1 Kings 12:11). The happiness of the people which the Queen of Sheba observed was therefore just an impression Solomon arranged for her to receive.

2Ch 9:8 Blessed be Yahweh your God, who delighted in you to set you on His throne, to be king for Yahweh your God: because your God loved Israel to establish them

forever, therefore He made you king over them, to do justice and righteousness-
These are identical words as in 1 Kings 5:7, of Hiram's response. We are given the impression that they became proselytes because they used the Yahweh Name; although polytheists could take the name of other gods, such as Yahweh, without it meaning they had accepted them as their own gods.

Because of God's enthusiasm for human response to His ways, the exalted language in which He describes believers, even in their weakness, is a further essay in His humility. The way the Father runs to the prodigal and falls on his neck in tears is a superb essay in this (Lk. 15:20). Thus God "delighted" in Solomon- translating a Hebrew word meaning literally 'to bend down to'. It's used about men in love (Gen. 34:19; Dt. 21:14; 25:7), and about Jonathan's deferential attitude to David (1 Sam. 19:2).

Although Israel's desire for a human king was a rejection of God as king, yet God worked through that situation rather than reject them as they had rejected Him. He accepted the human kingdom of Israel as His Kingdom on earth. It was God's wish that Israel would not have a human king; hence His sorrow when they did (1 Sam. 10:19-21). Yet in the Law, God foresaw that they would want a human king, and so He gave commandments concerning how he should behave (Dt. 17:14,15). These passages speak of how Israel would choose to set a King over themselves, and would do so. Yet God worked through this system of human kings; hence the Queen of Sheba speaks of how *God* had set Solomon over Israel as King, and how he was king on God's behalf (2 Chron. 9:8). Israel set a king over themselves; but God worked with this, so that in a sense *He* set the King over them.

"To establish them forever" shows that she perceived that God's intention was that Solomon's kingdom should be eternal, that he should be the full fulfilment of the Messianic Kingdom and King promised to David. But Israel later complained of how Solomon abused them, and his happy servants of :7 turned against his son, complaining of how harshly Solomon abused them. The great potential wasn't achieved, and so God's prophetic word was delayed and fulfilled a different way in Jesus.

2Ch 9:9 She gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, and spices in great abundance, and precious stones. Neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon-
This was about one third of his annual income (:13), which could imply she was more wealthy than he was. This note seems to imply that spices were never again imported into Israel, the implication being as Josephus states (*Antiquities,* 8.6.6), "that the cultivation of the balsam in Palestine dates from this visit; the plant having been one of the queen's gifts".

2Ch 9:10 The servants also of Huram, and the servants of Solomon, who brought gold from Ophir, brought algum trees and precious stones-
"Almug" appears to refer to sandalwood, "the Hebraized form of the Deccan word for sandal". This points to "Ophir" as being in the east, possibly as far as the Indian coast where these trees grow.

2Ch 9:11 The king made of the algum trees terraces for the house of Yahweh and for the king's house, and harps and stringed instruments for the singers. There were none like these seen before in the land of Judah-

The idea is of a magnificent staircase with elaborate banisters. This appears to be the king's "ascent" into the temple which so amazed the queen of Sheba (:4). This verse is referring back before her visit, because the almug trees were brought for the temple and for the king's house, which were already built by the time she visited.

The way the record of Solomon's house follows straight on from that of God's house (1 Kings 6,7) seems to highlight the similarity between them. The house of Yahweh and Solomon's house are often spoke of together (e.g. 2 Chron. 7:11; 8:1; 9:11).The Temple was smaller than Solomon's house' he took nearly twice as long to build it. Clearly he spent more effort at housing his own glory than he did housing God's. The comparisons are intended to show this. The following comparisons put the temple first, and then Solomon's house.

Length: 60 cubits, breadth 20, height 30 (1 Kings 6:2) cp.Length: 100 cubits, breadth 50, height 30 (1 Kings 7:2)

Used cedar pillars and beams (1 Kings 6:9,10) cp.1 Kings 7:2

Inner court built with three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams (1 Kings 6:36 RV) cp. “The great court round about had three rows of hewn stones, and a row of cedar beams, like as the inner court of the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 7:12)

Hiram called in to build it (1 Kings 5:1-5) cp.1 Kings 7:13

The Most Holy within God's house (1 Kings 7:8) cp.The "another court within the porch" in his house seems to have been a replica of the Most Holy within God's house. Here Solomon’s wives worshipped their idols.

Built on large foundation stones cp. The record of the foundation stones (7:10) is similar to that of the temple foundations.

The temple had a “porch” (Ez. 8:7,16) cp. The porch of Solomon's house matches that of the temple (Ez. 8:7,16), which in Ezekiel's time was a place of apostacy.

Open flowers design of the temple cp. The two pillars with their pomegranates and lily-work seem to have matched the open flowers of the temple, and they have ominous connections with Absalom's pillar of self-glorification (2 Sam. 18:18).

2Ch 9:12 King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatever she asked, besides that which she had brought to the king. So she returned to her own land, she and her servants-

"She returned" is s.w. 'to be converted'. She became a proselyte. It is unclear whether this was a genuine gift, or whether it was part of a trade deal. For she had brought a huge caravan of gifts, and in return Solomon gave her what she asked for, as well as his own presents ("his royal bounty"). According to Ethiopian tradition, Solomon slept with the queen of Sheba and she bore Solomon a son called Melimelek. It is possible to interpret Ps. 45 as a reference to Solomon's relationship with the Queen of Sheba.

2Ch 9:13 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold-

This number occurs in the description of the number and mark of the beast in Rev. 13:18. It is one of the biggest hints that in fact Solomon's kingdom was the kingdom of the flesh, and not at all God's Kingdom as had been promised to David. The apostate religious system called "Babylon" in Revelation is evidently presented in the language of Solomon - at the time his kingdom was apparently flourishing, due to his righteousness. 1 Kings 10:14 = Rev. 13:17,18; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev. 18:11,12,15; 1 Kings 11:1,2 = Rev. 17:1,2; 1 Kings 10:22 = Rev. 18:17,19; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev.

18:3,17; 1 Kings 10:21,22 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:11 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:22 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:10,25 = Rev. 18:13; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev. 18:3,9; 1 Kings 10:28 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 9:22 = Rev. 18:13. These allusions of themselves suggest Solomon's spirituality was a mere appearance. The latter day system which his kingdom looked ahead to may therefore be Jewish or Jerusalem based, with elements of apparent obedience to God.

2 Chron. 3:8 says that Solomon used 600 talents of gold on the temple. Seeing he received 666 talents / year, plus the large income from :16, this means that it was not particularly generous. One talent is 26 kilograms (57 pounds). 1 kilogram of gold is currently worth about 40,000 US$ [2020].

2Ch 9:14 besides that which the traders and merchants brought. All the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon-
LXX understand this as tribute, the taxes he charged on trading with his ships or through his territory; and in addition there was the income from the taxation system described in 1 Kings 4.

2Ch 9:15 King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold; six hundred shekels of beaten gold went to one large shield-
The apostate religious system called "Babylon" in Revelation is evidently presented in the language of Solomon - at the time his kingdom was apparently flourishing, due to his righteousness. 1 Kings 10:14 = Rev. 13:17,18; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev. 18:11,12,15; 1 Kings 11:1,2 = Rev. 17:1,2; 1 Kings 10:22 = Rev. 18:17,19; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev. 18:3,17; 1 Kings 10:21,22 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:11 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:22 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 10:10,25 = Rev. 18:13; 1 Kings 10:23 = Rev. 18:3,9; 1 Kings 10:28 = Rev. 18:12; 1 Kings 9:22 = Rev. 18:13; 2 Chron. 9:15 (666) = Rev. 13:18. These allusions of themselves suggest Solomon was fairly wrotten from the start, and his spirituality a mere appearance.

2Ch 9:16 He made three hundred other shields of beaten gold; three hundred shekels of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon-
1 Kings 10:17 says that "three minas of gold went to one shield". 2 Chron. 9:16 says they weighed 300 shekels each, meaning that one mina was 100 shekels; although the definitions seemed to vary over time (Ez. 45:12). There were 60 shekels to one talent. But this hanging of shields on the walls was exactly what was done in Tyre (Ez. 27:11,12), so as noted earlier, it seems Solomon was copying Tyre as well as other Gentiles. Song 4:4 speaks of 1000 shields hanging "on the tower of David". This may be an exaggerated number, or it could be that these shields combined with those David had taken (see on :16) were 1000 in number.

Is. 2:6-13 condemns Israel for their pride whilst making many allusions to Solomon: "Full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures... full of horses... chariots... idols... the work of their own hands... the cedars of Lebanon" (i.e. Solomon's armoury of 1 Kings 7:2,3; 10:17). The amount of cedar used for Solomon's house as well as the temple would have probably resulted in the deforestation of parts of Lebanon in order to provide this number of mature cedar trees. To cover an area of 100 x 50 cubits (1 Kings 7:2) with a roof of cedar (1 Kings 7:3) would have required 5000 square cubits of cedar wood if it were a flat roof, and more if the roof was angled; although it could be that not all the area was covered, i.e. there may have been

a courtyard. But if it was, then we can better understand why it was called "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 10:17; Is. 22:8). About a whole forest of Lebanon would have been felled and transported to Jerusalem for all this building work.

2Ch 9:17 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold-

"Ivory" is literally "tooth". It was likely made of wood overlaid with ivory and then gold, just as the 'house of ivory' (1 Kings 22:39) and 'bed of ivory' (Am. 6:4) were likewise not made of solid ivory. Ivory thrones were typical of the kings of Assyria, and we wonder if again this is evidence of pagan influence upon Solomon. God had promised to establish David's throne for ever, and Solomon wrongly assumed this was fulfilled in him and therefore he glorified his literal throne. This is typical of his total lack of spiritual perspective.

2Ch 9:18 And there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne, and stays on either side by the place of the seat, and two lions standing beside the stays-

The six steps stressed the elevation of the throne. It is God′s throne which alone is exalted (Is. 6:1). But Solomon justified his self exaltation on the basis that he had been exalted by God, and his throne was God's throne. He repeatedly refused to accept the conditionality of what had been promised to him. The two lions were surely part of the 12 lions of :20. Clearly two of the 12 lions [tribes of Israel] were seen as more exalted. This implies the supremacy of Judah over the ten tribes- and yet this kind of human point scoring was built in to what was supposed to be a replica of God's throne. Solomon was quite unawed by God's glory. For if he had been, he would have realized that before Him, all the tribes were equal.

Here Solomon starts to play God, because the idea of having a throne over the 12 tribes of Israel with a footstool is the language of God's throne. The porch of Solomon's house matches that of the temple (Ez. 8:7,16), which in Ezekiel's time was a place of apostacy. Solomon's own house was undeniably larger than God's, although built with the same layout (e.g. 1 Kings 6:2 cp. 7:2; 6:36 cp. 7:12; 5:1-5 cp. 7:13). The "another court within the porch" in his house seems to have been a replica of the Most Holy within God's house (1 Kings 7:8), yet it was here that Solomon's wives worshipped their idols. Likewise the record of the foundation stones (7:10) is similar to that of the temple foundations. The two pillars with their pomegranates and lily-work seem to have matched the open flowers of the temple, and they have ominous connections with Absalom's pillar of self-glorification (2 Sam. 18:18). Worst of all, Solomon's throne seems to have been built with allusion to Yahweh's enthronement upon the praises of Israel in the Most Holy. The temple steps are mentioned in the context of the steps to Solomon's throne (2 Chron. 9:4,18).

2Ch 9:19 Twelve lions stood there on both sides of the six steps: there was nothing like it made in any kingdom-

This extraordinary throne received so much attention from Solomon because he was convinced that the promises about David's throne being eternal were fulfilled in him. And so he effectively portrayed it as God's throne, with the 12 lions representing the tribes of Israel ruled over by him. After the division of the kingdom, the throne would have been a sad piece of furniture. But the 12 lions were found on each side of the steps, making 24. This is a number associated with the throne room of God, with 24 elders or division of Angels before it (Rev. 4:4; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4). Perhaps Solomon was aware of this, and so he was making his throne an imitation of God's. The lion

was specifically the symbol of Judah (Gen. 49:9); again, Solomon was inserting a subtext of Judah's domination of the rest of Israel. All Israel were to fall under the overall characterization of Judah.

If there were 12 lions on each side of the throne on each of the six steps then we have a total of 144 lions. The 144,000 before *God's* throne was an allusion to how royalty considered 144 a significant number. Solomon was acting as God, assuming his kingdom was the Kingdom of God, that he was the promised Messiah son of David, yet without the spirituality required for that. When have we played God?

The way Solomon built a huge physical throne, defended by impressive lions of his own creation (1 Kings 10:19,20), rather indicates how he missed the entire point- of ruling on *God's* throne, over a dynasty or 'throne' which God would perpetuate by grace; rather than establishing or creating the throne himself.

2Ch 9:20 All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. Silver was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon-

However, Solomon only received 666 talents of gold / year (:13); and Alexander's pillage of Ectabana was estimated at 120,000 talents of gold. So Solomon's wealth was not so great, relatively speaking. But it appeared like that, relative to the earlier poverty of a subsistence farming economy like Israel had been before Solomon.

"He that loves silver (as Solomon did, Ecc. 2:8; 1 Kings 10:21-29) shall not be satisfied with silver (as he wasn't- see Ecc. 2); nor he that loves abundance (s.w. used about the abundance of Solomon's wives, 2 Chron. 11:23) with increase. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them (cp. the large numbers at his table, 1 Kings 4:27)" (Ecc. 5:10,11). The Hebrew word translated "not be satisfied" occurs around 25 times in the Proverbs, with Solomon warning of how the way of the flesh couldn't satisfy. Solomon said all this with an eye on himself. He preached it to others, he felt deeply the truth of it, but he saw no personal way out of it. All he had was the accurate knowledge of his situation, but no real motivation to change- like the alcoholic or drug abuser who knows every aspect of the harm of his habit.

2Ch 9:21 For the king had ships that went to Tarshish with the servants of Huram; once every three years came the ships of Tarshish, bringing gold, silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks-

The abundance of gold and silver is explained on the basis of the fact that Solomon had a "navy of Tarshish" along with that of Hiram. And along with the gold and silver therefore came ivory, apes and peacocks. The association of these five items together points to trading with areas to the south and east of Israel. There is no way that "Tarshish" can refer to Britain because these items are simply not found there in abundance, and apes and elephants [for the ivory] are hardly natives of Britain. The word for "peacocks" appears to be a Hebraized form of an Indian word. The location of the trading partners is consistently areas to the south and east of Israel, not to the west. "Tarshish" may not in this context refer to a particular location. Rather is it a play on the meaning of the word, 'endurance / long distance', and refers to long distance trading vessels; just as in the 19th century, such vessels were known as "Indiamen", even if they were not bound for India. Likewise minibuses in the USSR were known as "Latvias" but that didn't mean they were located in Latvia nor were going there. Comparing 2 Chron. 8:18 and 1 Kings 9:26, it seems that the navy of Solomon was initially based around the navy of Hiram. Hiram had transported his ships to the sea overland through Israel, and Solomon decided to have them build

ships for him at their port of departure, so that his traders could accompany the men of Tyre. The ships were perhaps "sent" in the form of wooden structures which were then assembled at the port. But then Solomon began to have the men of Tyre build him his own ships, so that his navy was separate to that of Hiram. But they journeyed together, trading up and down the gulf and as far as India; returning every three years to port and transporting their valuable profits overland back to Israel and thence to Tyre. Each visit to a port would have taken some time, and they would have gained the gold, silver etc. through trading rather than thieving. So they would have bought good from one place and sold them at another, and after three years they had accumulated boats full of gold and silver which amounted to their profits.

2Ch 9:22 So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom-
These are the kings of the earth / land promised to Abraham, which is the same reference of :23. These are the kings of :25 LXX "and he ruled over all the kings from the river to the land of the Philistines, and to the borders of Egypt". The river Euphrates and the borders of Egypt were the *eretz* promised to Abraham.

2Ch 9:23 All the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart-
This refers to the earth / land promised to Abraham, the *eretz* of :22. As with the queen of Sheba, we note that they wanted to hear his wisdom from his actual mouth, in his presence; rather than just hear the ideas, which could easily enough have been relayed by word of mouth or even in writing. But for most people, the word has to become flesh to be persuasive. And so it is that God speaks to us in His Son, having earlier spoken solely through His written word. And our preaching of the word is likewise so far more effective through it being made flesh in us, as it was in the Lord, rather than being solely communicated through the written medium.

2Ch 9:24 They brought each man his tribute, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and clothing, armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year-
The nations traded their material wealth for spiritual instruction, coming annually to Jerusalem for instruction (2 Chron. 9:23,24). "A rate" would suggest Solomon began to charge for his wisdom- when it was God's wisdom. Even if it is argued that the gifts were totally voluntary, we recall how Daniel and others despised the gifts of kings offered in return for their having shared God's wisdom with them. Should wisdom ever really be paid for?

The first mention of mules in the Bible is associated with Absalom's murder of Amnon his brother (2 Sam. 13:29). They were cross bred in disobedience to Lev. 19:19. We get the impression that a generally slack attitude to what might have been considered minor matters of the law was associated with the major sin of murder. This is the problem when we start to think that some parts of God's laws can just be ignored. David was fond of them, having his own mule (1 Kings 1:33), and Solomon was willing to receive them as tribute (1 Kings 10:25).

2Ch 9:25 Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen that he stationed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem-
All in total disobedience to Dt. 17:16-20. When have we been blind to clear commandments, whilst preaching God's wisdom so well to others? Solomon had obsessive tendencies. We know that he became addicted to finding pleasure in

women, and Ecc. 2 shows him racing down the road of obsession with architecture, alcohol, food, gold etc. The historical narratives so often mention his gold and silver (e.g. 2 Chron. 9:13-21,24,27). This repetition reflects Solomon's obsession. The same fact explains the record's repetition of Solomon's enthusiasm for horses (1 Kings 10:25-29; 4:26,28; 9:19,22; 2 Chron. 1:14,16,17; 8:6,9; 9:24,25,28). Yet amassing of gold, silver and horses was explicitly forbidden for the King of Israel (Dt. 17:17). There is a powerful point to be made here: we can deceive ourselves that God is blessing us, when actually we are breaching explicit commands. Would Solomon had understood the concept of self-examination.

2Ch 9:26 He ruled over all the kings from the River even to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt-
Israel was at its largest extent in Solomon's Kingdom; lost land was restored, and the borders re-established (2 Chron. 9:26; 8:4 cp. Josh. 16:3,5); it was also at its political strongest; nations submitted to Solomon (1 Kings 4:20); Israel was the chief of the nations (1 Kings 4:21).

2Ch 9:27 The king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars to be as the sycamore trees that are in the lowland, for abundance-
All typical of the future Kingdom of God. This could mean that he planted cedars in Israel, perhaps transplanting them from Lebanon; for his wisdom included being given wisdom about plants. And that wisdom was for the sake of the blessing and wise leadership of God's people Israel.

2Ch 9:28 They brought horses for Solomon out of Egypt, and out of all lands-
Solomon started off as a middleman in the horse trade, buying horses from Egypt and selling them to the Hittite and Syrian kings (2 Chron. 1:16,17; 1 Kings 10:25,29); but he was playing with fire, and he soon came to flout the spirit of the command not to buy horses from Egypt. It's rather like the brother who works in a video store starting to watch the blue movies which he handles daily. Solomon would have justified it initially by saying that the horses were not for himself; just as we saw he justified his Egyptian wife by the thought that Joseph also married an Egyptian girl.

2Ch 9:29 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, aren't they written in the history of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?_
We can imagine that all of these prophets would have been critical of Solomon. He was therefore mentioned in the judgments against Jeroboam.

2Ch 9:30 Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years-
Saul, David and Solomon are all said to have reigned for "forty years", but the similarity is such that we wonder whether this isn't a symbolic period. For numbers were not used in Semitic literature in the precise way which we are accustomed to. Thus three consecutive kings of Babylon, Saosduchinus, Chiniladanus, and Nabopolassar are each recorded as having reigned 21 years.

2Ch 9:31 Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father. Rehoboam his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as

a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 10

2Ch 10:1 Rehoboam went to Shechem; for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king-
The LXX addition adds: "And Jeroboam went to Shechem in mount Ephraim, and assembled there the tribes of Israel; and Roboam the son of Solomon went up thither". This would explain why this gathering to instate Rehoboam as king was held in Shechem and not in Jerusalem. And yet although Jeroboam was present with supporters, it appears that "all Israel" favoured the idea of Rehoboam as king. The old men truly advised him that if he would only ease the taxation, all Israel would remain loyal to him. It could even be that the ten tribes had invited Rehoboam from Jerusalem to their great meeting place in Shechem specifically because they wanted him to be king. But this had to change, according to God's judgment upon Solomon- the ten tribes had to be removed from the control of his dynasty.

2Ch 10:2 When Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of king Solomon), then Jeroboam returned out of Egypt-
It seems this verse and :3 should follow 2 Chron. 9:31 as in LXX and some Hebrew manuscripts.

2Ch 10:3 They sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all Israel came, and they spoke to Rehoboam saying-
See on 2 Chron. 24:2. We note that Jeroboam didn't immediately begin by demanding the throne, but rather led the people in asking Rehoboam to reduce his father's excessive taxation system. But his return from Egypt, and his awareness of the prophecy about him ruling over Israel, surely meant he had in view the possibility of Rehoboam rejecting the request.

In a distorted way, Jeroboam was almost a type of Christ; for as made clear at the end of 1 Kings 11, he could have been the Messianic ruler over Israel had he chosen Yahweh's way. I'd suggest that many wicked Old Testament characters *could* have been types of Christ if they had lived righteously, and the record indirectly indicates this. Jeroboam fled to Egypt because of the persecution of Solomon, as did the Lord. When Solomon died, "they sent and called him", connecting with the record of the Lord Jesus going to Egypt and coming back after Herod's death. Jeroboam came back on the third day (:12) and offered freedom from bondage to Israel, as did Christ on his resurrection. In 1 Kings 13:10 we read of the prophet who came to prophesy about Jeroboam; we are told that he didn't return the way he came, but went back another way. That's an echo of the wise men, who came to see Jesus, and returned another way.

2Ch 10:4 Your father made our yoke grievous. Now therefore make lighter the grievous service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you-
Ephraim had been specifically targetted as a provider of labour and tax revenues (1 Kings 11:28). The influence of Egypt upon Solomon is reflected by the way in which

he is described as making the people serve him with "hard bondage" (2 Chron. 10:4; 1 Kings 12:4). This is the very Hebrew phrase used to describe what the Egyptians did to Israel (Ex. 1:14; 6:9; Dt. 26:6). Solomon put his people under a yoke (2 Chron. 10:4), just as Egypt did to them (Lev. 26:13). And so we see the progression. Solomon loved an Egyptian woman, came to serve her gods, traded with Egypt... and the attitude of Egypt to God's people became Solomon's attitude to them. There is something unique about God's people; and yet the closer we come to the world, the more we come to see our own community, God's special family, just as this world sees us. The world's attitude to us can so easily become our attitude to our brethren- no longer seeing them as the specially chosen little children of God, sensitive to them as our very own brothers and sisters.

The very possession of wisdom and teaching of it to others can of itself make a man or woman demotivated to personally apply it. He foretold that the people would sign when a wicked man ruled them (Prov. 29:2 RV)- and they did "sigh" because of the heavy burdens he placed upon them (1 Kings 12:4). He imposed the "yoke" of tribute upon the people (2 Chron. 10:4), whereas he himself had warned that a king that imposes tribute on his people "overthrows" a country (Prov. 29:4 RV mg.). He saw it all as true- and yet it was far from him personally.

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2Ch 10:5 He said to them, Come again to me after three days. The people departed-

The three days may have been in order to allow the advisers to be summoned from Jerusalem.

2Ch 10:6 King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men who had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What advice do you give me to return answer to this people?-

If Solomon was 41 at this time and the "young men" were those who had grown up with him, these men would have been really quite "old", old enough to have lived through much of David's reign and to have been influenced by his spirituality. Or the word may be used here to simply refer to the elders, whereas Rehoboam had also surrounded himself with his own peer group as advisers.

In this context, we may consider Solomon's frequent proverbs about the wisdom of having advisors, and his words in Prov. 20:18: "Plans are established by advice". Solomon's advice to his son sounds all well and good; but Rehoboam was given two different paths of advice by his advisors. Again, Solomon's words are true, but simplistic. Because as Rehoboam's case shows, the issue is not so much having advisors *per se*, but deciding which advisors to listen to. Solomon too had advisors, but did what he wanted, making this Proverb somewhat hollow when applied to himself.

2Ch 10:7 They spoke to him saying, 'If you are kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever'-
See on :1. The general will of Israel was for Rehoboam and not Jeroboam, but the taxation issue was crucial.

The paradox of servant leadership is found here- if Rehoboam had been a servant of his people, then he would have ruled over them. In all ways, the Lord is our pattern. He was a servant of all, and so should we be. His servanthood dominated His consciousness. He said that He came not [so much as] to be ministered unto, but so as to minister, with the end that He gave His life for others (Mk. 10:45).

2Ch 10:8 But he forsook the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him-
It is true that as we go through life, we ought to realize that harsh responses and demands upon others are not really the way to go. These "young men" were perhaps the boys he had grown up with in Solomon's harem, his half brothers. They, like him, would not have been pure Israelites as their mothers were Gentiles, and they didn't have the long term well being of the nation at heart. Rehoboam was 41 at this stage. Perhaps then we can understand this as meaning that he had appointed young men as his advisers, who had been raised near him (the Hebrew *eth* translated "with" is a very wide word). They were young, but the Hebrew doesn't have to mean he had grown up with them. Rather they were young men who had been raised as he had been, in the same harem, which would hardly have been much of a place of wisdom.

2Ch 10:9 He said to them, What advice do you give, that we may return answer to this people who have spoken to me saying, 'Make the yoke that your father put on us lighter?'-
He had written in his Proverbs that the ruler who lacks wisdom will oppress his people (Prov. 28:16); and although his wisdom remained with him right to the end, in terms of knowledge (Ecc. 2:9; 12:10), yet at the end of his reign Solomon was the ruler who did oppress his people. And he had gone on in Prov. 28:16 to warn against covetousness in a ruler, even though he went ahead with practicing every conceivable form of it in Ecc. 2. "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh" (Ecc. 11:10) Solomon taught- and yet Solomon in Ecclesiastes is the very picture of such a person. Like the experienced pilot who takes off with frozen wings and then crashes, so Solomon's very wisdom somehow disinclined him to living it out in practice. This is the perversity of our nature- the higher we may rise, the deeper we are inclined to fall.

2Ch 10:10 The young men who had grown up with him spoke to him saying, Thus you shall tell the people who spoke to you saying, Your father made our yoke heavy, but make it lighter on us; thus you shall say to them, My little finger is thicker than my father's waist-

The Lord appears to allude to this when He invites all those burdened and heavy laden to come to Him because His yoke is easy and the burden light (Mt. 11:28). It could be argued that He is thereby acknowledging that Jeroboam, who offered the easier burden, could have been as Him, a fulfilment of the promise of the Messianic king (1 Kings 11:38). He saw in those people abused by Solomon the religiously abused people who were suffering under the burdens placed upon them by their religious leaders; and He saw those Jews as represented by Solomon, whom He continually reads in a bad light.

2Ch 10:11 Now whereas my father burdened you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions- The contrast is not between whips and scorpions, but the idea is rather than he would use a far heavier whip known as a scorpion. The Romans had a whip called a "scorpio", used for punishment.

We have an insight into why Solomon was like this in Prov. 10:13 LXX: "He that brings forth wisdom from his lips smites the fool with a rod". Solomon has himself in view, but now instead of attributing wisdom to Divine inspiration, he starts to consider that it emanated from himself. When he died, the people complained that he had whipped [Heb. 'beaten'] them unreasonably. It was Solomon's false view of his wisdom which led him to do this. He assumed that he must be right, he was infallible, because of his possession of Divine truths. He justified indulging his natural human tendency to be overly harsh on others because he claimed he was the source of all wisdom. And again we see a parallel in fundamentalist Christian groups; where the more dogmatic are the claimants to possession of absolute truth about everything, the more they tend to abuse others and show no mercy to any who fail to attain to their supposed wisdom. Prov. 26:3 is also relevant, in the LXX "As a whip for a horse, and a goad for an ass, so is a rod for a simple nation". It was this attitude which led Solomon to beat his own people. Like many who hold God's truth, the mere holding of it lifted Solomon up in pride, and he came to despise all others who didn't accept his wisdom.

Despite having such knowledge and wisdom with which to rule Israel (for this was the primary purpose of the gift of wisdom to him), Solomon oppressed his people. With evident reference to himself, he commented: “Because the king’s word has power, who may say unto him, What doest thou?” (Ecc. 8:4 RV). It is only God who cannot be questioned in this way. But Solomon felt that because he possessed God’s wisdom, he could therefore act as God: “I counsel you, Keep the King’s command, and that in regard of the oath of God” (Ecc. 8:2) could suggest that he thought that his commandments were in fact God’s. So the possession of Truth, which we too have, can lead to an incredible arrogance, a lack of openness to others’ comments upon us, and a certainty that *we* are right in all that we do and are beyond criticism. The hardness of a man is changed by true wisdom (Ecc. 8:1 RV), but knowing this, Solomon became hard hearted. He had the wisdom- but as he said, it was far from him personally.

“Surely oppression maketh a wise man foolish” (Ecc. 7:7 RV), he commented at the end of his life- even though *right then* he was chastising the people with whips, oppressing them (1 Kings 12:11). He knew the true wisdom, he saw his reflection so accurately in the mirror, but resigned from its personal implications. He could even write that “I returned and considered all the oppression that are done under the sun

[by himself!]: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power [Solomon was king and had set up the tax system in a clever and biased way]; but they had no comforter" (Ecc. 4:1; 5:8). It was a real case of spiritual schizophrenia- he sorrowed for the people he oppressed.

2Ch 10:12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king asked, saying, Come to me again the third day-
We the readers are drawn into a sense of expectation; we ourselves know what Rehoboam is going to say, but we are placed in the position of the suffering people, who didn't yet know what Rehoboam was going to answer.

2Ch 10:13 The king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the advice of the old men-
"Roughly" is the word used of how the Egyptians treated the Israelites in whipping them and giving them heavy burdens to carry (Ex. 1:14). This was how he was behaving. It is the word the people have just used when they complained that Solomon had treated them 'grievously' (:4); and Rehoboam confirms that he is going to do the same. Solomon had frequently warned against forsaking the advice of elders (s.w. Prov. 2:17; 4:2 and especially the warning of Prov. 27:10 not to forsake the advice of your father's friend). But Rehoboam had probably not even read or heard all these Proverbs, as Solomon himself had ignored his own Proverbs and lived quite opposite to them. And so did his son.

2Ch 10:14 and spoke to them after the advice of the young men saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions-
Solomon has so much to say about 'chastisement' / "correction" / "instruction" coming from the possession of wisdom (Prov. 8:10,33; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1,24; 15:5,10,32; 16:22; 19:20,27; 22:15; 23:12,13). But in the end he chastised or corrected his people by whipping them (s.w. 1 Kings 12:11,14). Solomon initially asked for wisdom in order to guide his people, but he ended up whipping / physically chastising them into conformity with his wishes rather than allowing wisdom to correct. Again, he was playing God; for it is God through His wisdom who chastises, and not man. But Solomon thought he was effectively God to his people. This is why Solomon argues that servants cannot be corrected by words (Prov. 29:19 s.w.), and a child must be physically chastised (s.w. Prov. 19:18; 29:17 cp. Prov. 13:24; 23:13), regardless of his screams of pain. This kind of thing is a denial of his claims elsewhere that it is Divine wisdom which chastises / corrects, and such correction is from God and not man. Solomon's final description of himself as an old and foolish king who refuses to be admonished says it all (Ecc. 4:13); he admonishes others (s.w. Ecc. 12:12), but refuses to be admonished or corrected by his own wisdom. He failed to personalize it.

2Ch 10:15 So the king didn't listen to the people; for it was brought about of God, that Yahweh might establish His word, which He spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat-
There are times when God has influenced men not to respond to the evidently wise words of other men, in order to fulfill His purpose (e.g. 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 25:20). There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which

He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

I suggest that the events predicted by Ahijah the Shilonite (the family of David and the tribe of Judah losing kingship over all Israel) are the fulfilment of Gen. 49:10 "The scepter will not depart from Judah" [he will not be banished from his kingdom] "until he comes to Shiloh". When Judah came to Shiloh to crown Rehoboam there, and there the "peoples [of Israel] will gather to him" to crown him, there the kingship or scepter over the ten tribes was lost. Shechem and Shiloh are close to each other and mentioned together twice: "Behold, there is a sacrifice before the Lord in Shiloh... on the east side of the highway that goes up from Beth-El to Shechem" (Jud. 21:19). Likewise in Jer. 41:5: "from Shechem (and) from Shiloh". The one who comes to Shiloh, the one from Shiloh, may refer not to Messiah but to Ahijah the Shilonite, the one from Shiloh, who prophesied how the kingship would depart from Judah. Ahijah is called "the Shilonite", the man from Shiloh, five times in the record. Quite some emphasis. If "until Shiloh come" refers to the Lord Jesus, it is hard to understand how the kingship departs from Judah when He comes, seeing He Himself is the lion from Judah. And it is hard to understand why He should be called "Shiloh" and the passage never apparently applied to Him in later scripture. The diadem / sceptre did depart from Judah, as Ezekiel 21:25-27 makes clear- and well before the Lord Jesus came. So to make "Shiloh" simply equal to Messiah just doesn't work.

2Ch 10:16 When all Israel saw that the king didn't listen to them, the people answered the king saying, What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse! Every man to your tents, Israel! Now see to your own house, David. So all Israel departed to their tents-

This was the cry of Sheba in 2 Sam. 20:1. But the promises of 2 Sam. 7 were to David and his seed / house. By resigning from any association with that house, they were walking out of the hope of Israel which was in those promises. This has been done so many times by those who [understandably] become disillusioned with the family of believers, but their break with them develops into a break with the things of God's Kingdom.

2Ch 10:17 But as for the children of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them-

This means that there were people from the ten tribes living in Judah, particularly those who had been transported there by Solomon to live in the various defensive outpost towns he had built in southern Judah. And they remained under Rehoboam.

2Ch 10:18 Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who was over the men subject to forced labour; and the children of Israel stoned him to death with stones. King Rehoboam made speed to get himself up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem-

If the forced labour quotas of Solomon were to now be multiplied, life would literally be impossible for the ten tribes. It is no surprise therefore that Adoram was stoned and Rehoboam had to flee for his life back to Jerusalem- reflecting on the folly of his young advisors.

2Ch 10:19 So Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day-
The same phrase used of Edom in 2 Kings 8:22. The word for "rebelled" is also translated "transgressed". Their division from the house of David was a division away from the promises about the eternal establishment of that house, as noted on :16. In this sense it was therefore sinful.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 11

2Ch 11:1 When Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight against Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam-
Benjamin was a small tribe (1 Sam. 9:21; Ps. 68:27). 18 years later, there were 400,000 warriors in Judah (2 Chron. 13:3), so this was a very significant proportion of warriors.

2Ch 11:2 But the word of Yahweh came to Shemaiah the man of God saying-
This may be now a quotation from the history written by Shemaiah about Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:15).

2Ch 11:3 Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin saying-
"The rest of the people" presumably refers to those of the ten tribes who lived in Judah and were loyal to Rehoboam (2 Chron. 10:17). The records dovetail so perfectly, as we would expect of a history written ultimately under Divine inspiration.

2Ch 11:4 Thus says Yahweh, 'You shall not go up nor fight against your brothers! Return every man to his house; for this thing is of Me'. So they listened to the words of Yahweh, and returned from going against Jeroboam-
This was significant humility, involving a recognition that what had happened was "of God", in judgment for Solomon's sins. To fight against our brothers can never be justified. 1 Kings 14:30 "There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually" would indicate disobedience to this command to Rehoboam not to fight the ten tribes.

At this point, LXX adds to the record: "Roboam his son reigned in his stead in Jerusalem, being sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twelve years... And there was a man of mount Ephraim, a servant to Solomon, and his name was Jeroboam: and the name of his mother was Sarira, a harlot: and Solomon made him head of the levies of the house of Joseph: and he built for Solomon Sarira in mount Ephraim; and he had three hundred chariots of horses: he built the citadel with the levies of the house of Ephraim; he fortified the city of David, and aspired to the kingdom... ".

2Ch 11:5 Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah-
1 Kings 12:25 fleshes out the detail: "Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived in it; and he went out from there, and built Penuel". Shechem was ideally centrally situated within his territory. Penuel was on the east side of Jordan, and would consolidate his power there, as well as controlling the fords of Jordan.

2Ch 11:6 He built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa-

All quite near to each other. The idea is that he rebuilt or fortified them. Etam is the one in Judah, not the town belonging to Simeon (1 Chron. 4:32).

2Ch 11:7 Beth Zur, Soco, Adullam-
These were all strategically positioned to defend the approaches to Jerusalem. But we read in 2 Chron. 12:4 that when he turned away from Yahweh, Shishak "took the fortified cities which pertained to Judah and came to Jerusalem".

2Ch 11:8 Gath, Mareshah, Ziph-
This is surely not the Gath in Dan, as this wasn't under Rehoboam's control. If it is the Gath of the Philistines, from which David had won the hearts of several former Philistine enemies, we wonder at how a town once so against David now becomes a core part of God's people of Judah.

2Ch 11:9 Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah-
Inscriptions on the wall of the temple at Karnak list many cities in Palestine which Shishak of Egypt conquered, including three of the "cities for defence" which Rehoboam had built, Shoco, Adoraim and Aijalon (2 Chron. 11:7-10). The list also includes many cities within the ten tribes, suggesting that if Jeroboam got Shishak to invade Judah, Shishak then turned against his one time protégé Jeroboam and invaded the ten tribes also.

2Ch 11:10 Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin, fortified cities-
Zorah was in Dan, so it seems there were pockets of support for Judah even within the ten tribes.

2Ch 11:11 He fortified the strongholds, and put captains in them, and stores of food, and oil and wine-
This sounds like he expected a siege, and was very much on the defensive, in a kind of bunker mentality. He had inherited a political situation from Solomon which was far from peaceful; Judah faced threats not only from Israel, but from the surrounding nations.

2Ch 11:12 He put shields and spears in every city, and made them exceedingly strong. Judah and Benjamin belonged to him-
The idea seems to be that both tribes were solidly behind him We note that Benjamin, Saul's tribe, had initially been the tribe most disloyal to Judah just a generation before. We see the fickleness of people, and also how people can genuinely change. Just as Philistines of Gath became David's most loyal followers.

2Ch 11:13 The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their border-
This could indeed imply a mass migration of them to Judah (:14). But Heb. "took their stand by him" suggests there may have been individuals within the ten tribes who were loyal to Judah and the Davidic line. Both books of Kings reference several such individuals.

2Ch 11:14 For the Levites left their suburbs and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem; for Jeroboam and his sons cast them off, that they should not execute the priests' office to Yahweh-

And yet Jeroboam claimed to be worshipping Yahweh, through worshipping the golden calves. But he changed the priesthood.

2Ch 11:15 He appointed priests for the high places, and for the male goats, and for the calves which he had made-
Jeroboam allowed the ordinary people to be priests; in Ex. 32 we learn that the ordinary people offered the sacrifices to the golden calf, not the priests. Again, it seems that Jeroboam was trying to consciously mimic the golden calf apostasy, perhaps arguing that Israel were a nation of priests. It is no accident that Josiah stamped his calves to powder, just as Moses did to the golden calf. Now *why* did Jeroboam so consciously lead Israel into the same apostasy which brought them as it were within a hairs breadth of national rejection in Ex. 32? Jeroboam wasn't ignorant. Perhaps he had gone down a path of contorted exposition which made out that Israel didn't really sin by worshipping the calf. Or perhaps he got so carried away with the idea that he was like Aaron, the priest, that he thought (like some modern Rabbis) that Aaron couldn't have done anything wrong, and therefore he consciously copied Aaron, as he did David, Solomon, Jacob and Samuel. Again, we see Jeroboam having a familiarity with Scripture, but not pausing to really meditate upon his actions or upon the real spirit of the word. We see him failing to analyze why Aaron acted as he did, failing to see that Aaron acted politically, failing to deeply analyze his own motives. The character of Jeroboam shines through here. Jeroboam named his sons Abijah [Abihu] and Nadab- the very names of Aaron's sons. It seems Jeroboam tried to model himself upon Aaron, and justify the building of the calves by interpreting what Aaron did as a positive, righteous thing (as some Jewish expositors do today). He politely overlooked the fact that Aaron was condemned for making the calf, and that Nadab and Abihu were slain for unacceptable worship (Lev. 10:1,2). We too can justify outright wrong behaviour in the name of superficial allusion to Scripture, willfully failing to see the similarities between our actions and those of men who were condemned for doing in essence the things which we seek to justify.

The "male goats" are AV "devils" or demons (Lev. 17:7). Clearly demons were originally images to idols, and in this context Paul says that idols have no real existence. And therefore, neither do demons.

2Ch 11:16 After them, out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to Yahweh, the God of their fathers-
This suggests there may have been individuals within the ten tribes who were loyal to Judah and the Davidic line. Both books of Kings reference several such individuals.

2Ch 11:17 So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years; for they walked three years in the way of David and Solomon-
1 Kings 11:4-6 is clear that the way of Solomon was not that of David. So although the record here in inspired in its recording, this doesn't cancel out the bias of the historian, who wishes to whitewash the house of David. Likewise personal preference for various words and images is found in inspired writings; the process of inspiration didn't necessarily destroy the personal perspectives and style of the authors.

2Ch 11:18 Rehoboam took him a wife, Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David and of Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse-

Contrary to AV, this speaks of only one wife, Mahalath, whose parents were Jerimoth and Abihail. Rehoboam was well connected to the Davidic line.

2Ch 11:19 She bore him sons: Jeush, and Shemariah, and Zaham-
"Zaham", loathing', is surely not the name given to the child at birth. It confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

2Ch 11:20 After her he took Maacah the daughter of Absalom. She bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza and Shelomith-
"Daughter" may be grand daughter, as she was the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah (2 Chron. 13:2 LXX, which gives "Maacah" rather than "Michaiah"). 2 Sam. 18:18 says that Absalom had no son, so presumably he had this daughter who married Uriel and became mother to Maacah. Maachah his beloved wife (2 Chron. 11:20-22) was an idolater (2 Chron. 15:16).

2Ch 11:21 Rehoboam loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and his concubines. (He took eighteen wives, and sixty concubines, and became the father of twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.)-
We note that the sons he had by Maacah had secular names, apart from Abijah. Two of the three sons by his other wife had the Name of God in them. And yet Abijah was chosen by Rehoboam to succeed him.

2Ch 11:22 Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah to be chief, the prince among his brothers; for he intended to make him king-
This would be another case of the firstborn being replaced by another. For Abijah wasn't the firstborn of Rehoboam. This is such a huge theme, it reflects how passionate God is for the outsiders.

2Ch 11:23 He dealt wisely, and settled some of his sons throughout all the lands of Judah and Benjamin, to every fortified city: and he gave them food in abundance. He sought for them many wives-
Rehoboam should have learned from his father Solomon's mistakes but his taking many wives shows that he didn't. "He that loveth silver (as Solomon did, Ecc. 2:8; 1 Kings 10:21-29) shall not be satisfied with silver (as he wasn't- see Ecc. 2); nor he that loveth abundance (s.w. used about the abundance of Rehoboam's wives, 2 Chron. 11:23) with increase. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them (cp. the large numbers at his table, 1 Kings 4:27)" (Ecc. 5:10,11). The Hebrew word translated "not be satisfied" occurs around 25 times in the Proverbs, with Solomon warning of how the way of the flesh couldn't satisfy. Solomon said all this with an eye on himself. And Rehoboam surely must have realized his father's hypocrisy. Solomon preached it to others, he felt deeply the truth of it, but he saw no personal way out of it. All he had was the accurate knowledge of his situation, but no real motivation to change- like the alcoholic or drug abuser who knows every aspect of the harm of his habit.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 12

2Ch 12:1 When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and he had made himself strong, he forsook the law of Yahweh, and all Israel with him-
Yahweh was no longer apparently needed by them, and so they turned to other gods. Maachah his beloved second wife (2 Chron. 11:20-22) was an idolater (2 Chron. 15:16). The simple truth is that those who perceive how powerless they are... turn to God for strength. And those who refuse to are those who turn away from Him to idols.

2Ch 12:2 It happened in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had trespassed against Yahweh-
Shishak had given refuge to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:40), so it could be that he urged Shishak to attack Judah once Rehoboam became established as king of Judah. "A monument of this king, the first of the 22nd dynasty, has been discovered at Karnak in Upper Egypt, recording his conquests and the names of certain towns which he had taken in Palestine". Inscriptions on the wall of the temple at Karnak list many conquered cities, including three of the "cities for defence" which Rehoboam had built, Shoco, Adoraim and Aijalon (2 Chron. 11:7-10). The list also includes many cities within the ten tribes, suggesting that if Jeroboam got Shishak to invade Judah, Shishak then turned against his one time protégé Jeroboam and invaded the ten tribes also.

2Ch 12:3 with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen. The people were without number who came with him out of Egypt: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians-
Rehoboam's father Solomon had sold his soul to the Egyptians, and married the daughter of Pharaoh. But now Egypt turned against his son, just as the world does. We note that "hundred" and "thousand" are often used to denote military divisions, rather than literally 100 or 1000.

2Ch 12:4 He took the fortified cities which pertained to Judah and came to Jerusalem-
I noted on 2 Chron. 11:6,7 that Rehoboam's carefully fortified cities were all strategically positioned to defend the approaches to Jerusalem. But this was all human strength, and without God on his side it all came to nothing.

2Ch 12:5 Now Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, Thus says Yahweh, You have forsaken Me, therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak-
This may be now a quotation from the history written by Shemaiah about Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:15). "Forsaken" is the same word as "left you". But 'You forsake Me, I'll forsake you' is not the conclusion we should take too easily. For God only forsook sinners after years of patience with them. And it is doubtful whether Rehoboam ever had much spirituality, as his father was Solomon and his mother an Ammonitess pagan. Yet he was generously counted as 'with Yahweh'.

2Ch 12:6 Then the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, Yahweh is righteous-
Who God is, as expressed in His Name, is an imperative to prepare ourselves to meet

Him in judgment. The confession of the Name is paralleled with repentance in 2 Chron. 6:24. There we read that if Israel sin and repent "and confess Your name" they will be forgiven. But instead of "confess Your name" we expect "confess their sins": the point being that to confess the name is effectively to confess sins. The name is the characteristics of Yahweh. The more we meditate upon them, the more we will naturally be lead to a confession of our sins, the deeper we will sense the gap between those principles and our own character. Likewise here, the statement that "the Lord is righteous" is effectively a confession of sin. And thus we are not to bear or take the Name of Yahweh called upon us at baptism in vain- the realty of the implications of the name are not to be lost upon us. But we note that Solomon had envisaged Israel sinning, repenting and being saved by reason of the temple. But here, humility was what was required. Solomon had been wrong in assuming that the temple would be a kind of mediatrix of forgiveness.

2Ch 12:7 When Yahweh saw that they humbled themselves, the word of Yahweh came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them; but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak-

The theme of humbling themselves alludes to God's words in 2 Chron. 7:14, which is His reply to Solomon's claim that if Israel prayed to the temple, then God would save them in battle. He says simply that if Israel humble themselves in battle [He makes no mention of the temple], then He will save them. And the situation with Shishak was an example of that. We note that even at that stage, God had in mind to destroy the temple and Zion / Jerusalem. Solomon and David's dogmatism that it would last eternally are thus shown to be misplaced right from the start of the temple's 430 year history.

"Shemaiah", 'Yah has heard', gave them the message that He had heard their humility, as if that itself was reckoned as prayer. And indeed, character and situation are often effectively reckoned as prayer. We have the impression that God had intended the destruction of Jerusalem at this point; but He relented, in response to their repentance. Just as He did with Nineveh. There is a gap between His statement of judgment, and its fulfilment. During that gap, we can change the outcome by prayer and repentance.

"They have humbled themselves" could be an expression of pleasant surprise. Scripture repeatedly speaks as if God notices things and is then hurt or encouraged by what He sees (Jonah 3:10; Gen. 29:31; Ex. 3:4; Dt. 32:19; 2 Kings 14:26; 2 Chron. 12:7; Ez. 23:13; Is. 59:15 cp. Lk. 7:13). If He knew in advance what they were going to do, this language is hard for me to understand. But God is therefore hurt and 'surprised' at sin- He saw Israel as the firstripe grapes, but they were worshipping Baal even then (Hos. 9:9). Thus God can allow Himself to feel an element of surprise- and this was a shock to Jeremiah, who queried: "Why are You like a man who is caught by surprise...?" (Jer. 14:9).

The wrath of God can be turned away by the actions of those He is angry with (Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 4:4; 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (Ps. 106:23; Jer. 18:20; Job 42:7). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God’s Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7).

2Ch 12:8 Nevertheless they shall be his servants, that they may know My service, and

the service of the kingdoms of the countries-
They were to perceive in their servitude to this man what servitude to Yahweh ought to be like. They were therefore to serve him "as unto the Lord", and Col. 3:23 taught Christian slaves to serve their masters as if they were serving the Lord Jesus. This, therefore, is an abiding theme in God's dealings with His people, and has enabled so many in positions of awful subservience to be able to live out their lives with the dignity of knowing that their lives are counted as serving God.

2Ch 12:9 So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king's house. He took it all away. He also took away the shields of gold which Solomon had made-
LXX mentions that David took golden spears from Hadadezer: "And the golden spears which David took from the hand of the servants of Adraazar king of Soba and carried to Jerusalem, he took them all". These would not have been used as real spears, but were part of the worship of the golden sun which was the main religion in Syria at the time. David would have been better destroying them, rather than bringing idol paraphernalia into Jerusalem. For it later contributed towards the freedom Judah felt to worship sun gods. These spears would have been taken at the time of 2 Sam. 8:7: "David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem". "Hadad" was the god of the sun, "Hadadezer" had not been 'helped by Hadad' as his name means, and so David brought these golden imitations of the sun to Yahweh's temple. It is perhaps questionable whether David should have brought idols into Jerusalem; we note that later Judah worshipped sun gods. David's actions here were not blessed, for the LXX adds "And Susakim [i.e. Shishak] king of Egypt took them, when he went up to Jerusalem in the days of Roboam the son of Solomon".

Shishak is usually identified as Shoshenq I. But as always with Egyptology, there are other claims. Immanuel Velikovsky in *Ages in Chaos* has him as Thutmose III of the 18th dynasty; David Rohl as Ramesses II of the 19th dynasty, and Peter James as Ramesses III of the 20th dynasty.

2Ch 12:10 King Rehoboam made in their place shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard who kept the door of the king's house-
Gold being downgraded to brass reflects the decline of faith in Rehoboam, for gold is a symbol of faith (1 Pet. 1:7).

2Ch 12:11 It was so, that as often as the king entered into the house of Yahweh, the guard came and carried them back into the guard room-
This indicates that there was a very low level of security even in the Jerusalem temple. Rehoboam wished by all means to imitate the worship of his father Solomon, but it was on a pathetically lower level. Despite all his idolatry, he still entered the temple for public worship of Yahweh. This was Israel's recurrent problem, to worship both Yahweh and the idols.

2Ch 12:12 When he humbled himself-
"Humbled himself" is the word also used for being "subdued under" military powers. When Israel didn't subdue themselves under God, they were subdued beneath their enemies. So it was a case of humility one way or the other. And the same logic applies to us. Flesh must be humbled, either by our willing choice in this life, or in the condemnation of the last day.

The wrath of Yahweh turned from him, so as not to destroy him altogether. Moreover, in Judah there were good things found-
Ps. 78:38; 85:3 seem to suggest God Himself controlled His anger, Himself turning that anger away, rather than being like a pagan deity whose anger was appeased by blood sacrifice. God turned from His anger due to Moses' intercession (Ex. 32:12 s.w.), but this is not to say that He cannot in any case turn away His anger, simply by His grace. Just as we may control our anger from within ourselves, or at other times we may do this because of the appeal of another to us, or because there is repentance from the one who provoked us. And there were times when this was the case with God (s.w. Num. 25:4; Josh. 7:26; 2 Chron. 12:12; 29:10; 30:8).

2Ch 12:13 So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which Yahweh had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess-
1 Kings 14:21; 2 Chron. 12:13 says Rehoboam was 41 when he became king. But he was "young and tender hearted" (2 Chron. 13:7). The LXX addition at 1 Kings 12:24 says he was 16 when he began to reign. He was surrounded by young men who had grown up with him. I suggest on balance that he was indeed 41 and the "young men" were "young" in comparison to the older men present. The description "young and tender hearted" could simply be a purposeful repetition of the description of his father Solomon when he ascended the throne; or it could mean that he was a rather weak and child like man.

2Ch 12:14 He did that which was evil, because he didn't set his heart to seek Yahweh-
Constantly, the Bible stresses the importance of the heart, and of conscious 'setting' of the heart, of directing the thoughts toward God. And doing evil is the result of failing to do this.

2Ch 12:15 Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, aren't they written in the histories of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer, after the way of genealogies?-
The priests who wrote those records in Chronicles were writing down the result of their national self-examination. This was the record of their lessons from Chronicles. Each of the genealogies say something about the people they are concerned with; and thus 2 Chron. 12:15 RVmg. speaks of how the acts of Rehoboam are reflected in the reckoning of the genealogies.
There were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually-
This would indicate disobedience to the command to Rehoboam not to fight the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:24).

2Ch 12:16 Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David; and Abijah his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 13

2Ch 13:1 In the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah-

Called Abijam in 1 Kings 15:1, which means "father of the sea", but 'father of' can mean 'worshipper of', as 'Abijah' means 'father / worshipper of Yah'. The sea god was worshipped, and so we conclude this was reflective of pagan devotions. He is called Abijah in 2 Chronicles, 'worshipper of Yah'. Having both a pagan and Yahwistic name was typical of the times, and Maacah / Michaiah his mother had a similar two names (see on :2). 2 Chron. 11:20-22 shows that Rehoboam had 28 sons. Abijam wasn't the firstborn, but rather the firstborn son of the favoured wife. Abijam had 38 children (2 Chron. 13:21), so he must have been a reasonable age when he came to the throne.

2Ch 13:2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Micaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam-

LXX gives Maacah for Micaiah, "the daughter of Absalom" (2 Chron. 11:20). "Daughter" may be grand daughter, as she was the daughter of Uriel. 2 Sam. 18:18 says that Absalom had no son, so presumably he had this daughter who married Uriel and became mother to Maacah. Michaiah, "Who is like Jehovah?", was known by her more pagan name Maachah, "oppression". The records of the kings so often mention their mothers, in reflection of the huge spiritual influence of a mother upon her children. The three years is a figure inclusive of parts of years, as he became king in the 18th year of Jeroboam's reign in Israel and died in his 20th year. "Three days / years" is often not a literal figure, and this must be recalled when considering the chronology of the Lord's three days in the tomb

2Ch 13:3 Abijah joined battle with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men. Jeroboam set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, who were mighty men of valour-

We note that "hundred" and "thousand" are often used to denote military divisions, rather than literally 100 or 1000. This would indicate disobedience to the command to Rehoboam not to fight the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:24). The terrible sin and tragedy of fighting ones own brethren is noted twice (also in 1 Kings 14:30).

2Ch 13:4 Abijah stood up on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel-

Zemaraim was in the territory assigned to Benjamin (Josh. 18:22), but is located "in the hill country of Ephraim" in 2 Chron. 13:4. Clearly the inheritances were flexible in practice. Zemaraim was on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim, so this was an appropriate place for Israel and Judah to meet in battle.

2Ch 13:5 Ought you not to know that Yahweh, the God of Israel, gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?-

This was true only to an extent. The Davidic covenant was very clearly conditional upon obedience and faithfulness, and the wording clearly envisaged that the seed of David might not be that. And therefore Jeroboam himself had been offered the possibility of being the Messianic king, even though he was not of the line of David. Salt made a sacrifice meaningful (Lev. 2:13), and therefore a "covenant of salt" meant a sure covenant confirmed by sacrifice (Num. 18:19). David and Solomon had both dedicated the plans for the temple with abundant sacrifices, claiming that the covenant

with David was fulfilled in Solomon and confirmed through the building of the temple. But that was on their initiative and suggestion, and in reality Solomon had broken that covenant.

2Ch 13:6 Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up, and rebelled against his lord-
This again was true but only to an extent. The kingdom was rent away from the house of David for their apostacy, and Jeroboam had potentially been enabled to be a new Messianic king. He failed in that, but to blame the division solely upon Jeroboam merely being a rebellious servant was Abijah's biased narrative.

2Ch 13:7 There were gathered to him vain men, base fellows, who strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them-
Rehoboam was 41 when he became king, so again Abijah is spinning narrative according to his own bias.

2Ch 13:8 Now you think to withstand the kingdom of Yahweh in the hand of the sons of David. You are a great multitude, and there are with you the golden calves which Jeroboam made you for gods-
Abijah recognizes they are double his strength, but he seeks to touch their conscience about the golden calves, as if they are as it were pitting themselves against Yahweh. Even though his own wife was an idolater and he likely was too. He is leading up to the argument that they are fighting against God (:12). See on :21. He overlooks how God Himself withstood the line of David and had torn away the ten tribes and given them to Jeroboam, with the potential to make a Messianic kingdom out of them.

2Ch 13:9 Haven't you driven out the priests of Yahweh, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made priests for yourselves after the ways of the peoples of other lands? So that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams, the same may be a priest of those who are not gods-
Yahweh's priests were consecrated with a young bull and two rams (Ex. 29:1). Again we see how Jeroboam crafted a false religious system on the basis of the true one, and that is typical of all our apostacy. And whilst perhaps they did drive out Yahweh's Levitical priests, it's likely many left the apostacy of their own accord. Although they would've arrived in a Judah also given over to idolatry, with the queen Maacah an idolater; hence God's wrath with Judah through Shishak's invasion.

2Ch 13:10 But as for us, Yahweh is our God, and we have not forsaken Him. We have priests ministering to Yahweh, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites in their work-
This was untrue, they had forsaken Yahweh and been seriously punished for it by Shishak, and the queen was an idolater. Abijah, like many in the orthodox churches, reasoned that because he had a priesthood obeying Mosaic commands, therefore and thereby they had not forsaken Yahweh. He thought that religious structure alone defined his faith in and loyalty to Yahweh.

2Ch 13:11 and they burn to Yahweh every morning and every evening burnt offerings and sweet incense. They also set the showbread in order on the pure table; and the lampstand of gold with its lamps, to burn every evening. We keep the instruction of Yahweh our God; but you have forsaken Him-

Shishak's invasion had perhaps taken away the plural "gold tables" for the showbread, and forced them to return to the Godly, Mosaic pattern of just one table for the showbread.

The table of show bread was to be made of acacia wood (Ex. 25:23), but David planned to make it of pure gold, and even worked out the weight of gold required for it (1 Chron. 28:16). And Solomon indeed made it of gold (1 Kings 7:48), leading to it being known as "the pure table" (2 Chron. 13:11). Religion had overtaken spirituality, form had eclipsed content. Likewise the "tables of silver" David ordered to be made (1 Chron. 28:16) do not feature in the tabernacle. He was missing the point- that God wanted His holiest symbols made of common, weak things like acacia wood. For His strength and glory is made perfect in weakness. David claims these plans were from God (1 Chron. 28:19), although as discussed on 1 Chron. 28:12, they were in fact from his own mind. The way these things were taken into captivity, with no record of this golden table ever being returned, surely reflects God's judgment upon this kind of religious show. He prefers a humble house church in an inner city room, rather than a gold plated cathedral. The way some exclusive churches speak of 'maintaining a pure table' suggests they have made the same essential mistake as David did.

2Ch 13:12 Behold, God is with us at our head, and His priests with the trumpets of alarm to sound an alarm against you. Children of Israel-
We read here of Abijah's apparent devotion. The comment of 1 Kings 15:3 is that his heart wasn't perfect with Yahweh as David's was. David clearly sinned and seems to have suffered a decline in his ethics and spirituality as he got older. But he was judged on the overall dominant desire of his heart, to the point that having a heart perfect with Yahweh seems to effectively mean 'He was wholeheartedly devoted to Yahweh and never worshipped other gods'. Whereas Abijah, despite peaks of spirituality and an appearance of loyalty to Him, did not have that total devotion to Yahweh as the dominant position of his heart throughout his life. Whatever peaks of obedience and devotion we may attain at points in our lives, it is the overall core position of our heart which is judged. Men like David may sin terribly at some points, those like Abijah may achieve wonderful levels of devotion at some points. But those high or low points play no major part in the final, unknowable equilibrium of Divine judgment. We need to remember this, as we encounter our brethren and ponder what to make of them, in their pits of sin and heights of devotion. Those points on their graph ought not to unduly weight our overall position on them.

The reference to trumpets alludes to Num. 10:9, and Abijah thought that by merely blowing trumpets he would have Yahweh's help. This is why he was driven to a desperate situation in the battle with Jeroboam, so that he really called to Yahweh with all his heart, and not through mere ritualism.

Don't fight against Yahweh, the God of your fathers; for you shall not prosper-
Acts 5:39; 23:9 appear to allude to this. But as pointed out on :8, Abijah himself was associated with idolatry, and as with the context of the Acts allusions, this is a rather twisted argument. 'If you fight me you're fighting God' has been an oft deployed argument that often lacks full integrity. See on :21.

2Ch 13:13 But Jeroboam caused an ambush to come about behind them: so they were before Judah, and the ambush was behind them-
As discussed on :14, this was meant by God to put Judah into a hopeless situation. I have shown above that Judah were not much better than Israel and their claims to be

faithful to Yahweh were hypocritical. But they were put into a situation which forced them to realize that, and to truly repent and cry to Yahweh from their hearts.

2Ch 13:14 When Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind them; and they cried to Yahweh, and the priests sounded with the trumpets-
The reference to trumpets alludes to Num. 10:9, and Abijah thought that by merely blowing trumpets he would have Yahweh's help. This is why he was driven to a desperate situation in the battle with Jeroboam, so that he really called to Yahweh with all his heart, and not through mere ritualism. The "shout" of :15 was their cry from the heart to God, and He responded to that. We all tend to repeat the same words in prayer, until prayer becomes little more than ritualism, the blowing of trumpets which Abijah had practiced. But then situations are brought into our lives when we "shout" to God from the heart, praying as we ought to- and then He responds.

2Ch 13:15 Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted, it happened, that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah-
As explained on :14, this "shout" was a cry from the heart to Yahweh, well beyond the mere ritualism of blowing trumpets. Judah were not much better than Israel, as demonstrated above. But they cried from the heart to Yahweh, whereas Israel didn't. And so God gave them victory, and used them to punish Jeroboam for his impenitent apostacy.

2Ch 13:16 The children of Israel fled before Judah; and God delivered them into their hand-
Judah weren't much better than Israel. But God so respects faith and repentance, even if in extremity, such as on a deathbed- that He responds. .

2Ch 13:17 Abijah and his people killed them with a great slaughter; so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men-
"Thousand" is not to be read literally; the term often refers to a military division of some sort. And they didn't fall in the same day, as the fighting continued for some time (:19).

2Ch 13:18 Thus the children of Israel were overcome at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on Yahweh, the God of their fathers-
They relied on Him at one point, and were rewarded for it. But not generally. This reflects God's extreme sensitivity to faith in Him, even if He knows the surrounding context of a man's life is not of faith in Him. "Relied" is the word used in 2 Chron. 14:11; 16:8 in a similar context.

2Ch 13:19 Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took cities from him: Bethel with its suburbs, Jeshanah with its suburbs and Ephron with its suburbs-
These victories were short-lived, because Bethel soon returned to the northern kingdom, and the golden calf there was not destroyed by Judah as it should have been (2 Kings 10:29).

2Ch 13:20 Jeroboam didn't recover strength again in the days of Abijah. Yahweh struck him, and he died-
This implies special judgment from God (1 Sam. 25:38; Acts 12:13).

2Ch 13:21 But Abijah grew mighty, and took to himself fourteen wives, and became the father of twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughters-
"Grew mighty" is the same word Abijah has twice used in :7,8, claiming in :8 that Jeroboam was withstanding or growing mighty against Yahweh. Perhaps the hint is that Abijah was really no better (see on :8,12), because he too withstood Yahweh in marrying so many wives, at least one of whom [the favourite] was an unashamed idolater.

2Ch 13:22 The rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways and his sayings, are written in the commentary of the prophet Iddo-
Neither the sayings of Abijah nor the book of Iddo have been preserved. There are many writings referenced within scripture which are not now available. The book of the prophet Iddo may well have been inspired by God, but was only useful for its time. The scriptures we have are therefore the result of careful Divine selection, and all of them are somehow relevant to us, even the Chronicles genealogies, in a way these other writings aren't.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 14

2Ch 14:1 So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet ten years-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

The land itself was quiet but that didn't mean Judah were not at war. There was 20 years peace later on (2 Chron. 15:10, 19). The impression is given that Asa's [partial] faithfulness to Yahweh meant there was peace, and peace is a fruit of loyalty to Yahweh. Baasha became king of Israel in the third year of Asa (1 Kings 15:28,33) and “there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days” (1 Kings 15:32).

2Ch 14:2 Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of Yahweh his God-
This is the phrase specifically used in appeal to Israel as they approached the promised land; their inheritance of it was conditional upon this (Dt. 6:18; 12:28). This connects with the idea of the land being at peace whilst Asa was obedient (see on :1; 2 Chron. 15:19). One meaning of "Asa" is "physician", and he ended his days trusting physicians rather than Yahweh. Perhaps he trained as a physician and ended up therefore having more faith in science than in Yahweh. The statement therefore may refer to his initial state of loyalty to Yahweh. But this could refer to God's judgment upon his whole life, and 1 Kings 15:11 says that ″he did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, as did David his father".
Asa is recorded as serving God just as well as David, when actually this wasn't the case; but God counted him as righteous. The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). Asa was not perfect, nor was David; but God's overall judgment was that he "did right", despite doing wrong at specific points in his life. Indeed as noted on 2 Chron. 16:12, Asa died at a low point for him spiritually. But the judgment overall was that he "did right" and that "nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect with Yahweh all his days" (1 Kings

15:14). We must learn therefore not to judge a person too harshly if they die at a weak spiritual point, e.g. through suicide.

2Ch 14:3 He took away the foreign altars, and the high places, and broke down the pillars, and cut down the Asherim-
Chronicles typically seeks to sanitize the record and present the kings as positively as possible. The truth is that Asa didn't remove the high places (1 Kings 15:14), and soon afterwards, the worship of foreign gods revived. So Asa's reforms were not that thorough, and in any case, the people generally remained in idolatry.

2Ch 14:4 and commanded Judah to seek Yahweh, the God of their fathers, and to obey the law and the commandment-
Perfection is simply not achieved by God's people. Therefore the idiom of 'seeking Yahweh' is used, and is made parallel with obedience to His laws (2 Chron. 14:4) and not forsaking Him, just holding on to Him in faith, 'being with Him' (2 Chron. 15:2).

2Ch 14:5 Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the sun images-
Asa and Jehoshaphat removed the high places, but in a sense they didn't (1 Kings 15:14 cp. 2 Chron. 14:5; 17:6 cp. 20:33). We read of how the land was purged of Baal, Sodomites etc.; but in a very short time, we read of another purge being necessary. Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah all made major purges within a space of 80 years. Jeremiah therefore condemns the Jews who lived at the time of Josiah's reformation for not *knowing* God in their hearts. Asa gathered the gold and silver vessels back into the temple- and then went and used them to make a political treaty. He *apparently* treated them as God's riches, but then in reality he used them as his own (1 Kings 15:18, 15). Many a Western Christian has this very same tendency. We too must ask ourselves whether our spirituality is really just a product of the crowd mentality; as the crowd shouted one day "Hosanna to the Son of David", a few days later they wanted Jesus to be delivered rather than Barabbas, but within minutes they were persuaded to cry for the crucifixion of the Son of God. Church life, Bible studies, the breaking of bread... inevitably, there is a crowd mentality developed here. There is a feeling of devotion which wells up within us as a community, as an audience, as we sit there, as we stand in praise and worship together. But the *real* spirituality is far deeper than this. We must seriously ask whether our spirituality, our feelings of devotion, our true repentance, are *only* stimulated by these meetings?

The kingdom was quiet before him-
See on :1; 2 Chron. 15:19.

2Ch 14:6 He built fortified cities in Judah; for the land was quiet, and he had no war in those years, because Yahweh had given him rest-
This seems a major theme in the record; see on :1; 2 Chron. 15:19. We note how circumstances repeated. Rehoboam had built fortified cities in Judah, especially on the approaches to Jerusalem. But they were all overwhelmed by Shishak, and he took Jerusalem. The lesson was that human strength alone would not save Judah. He was intended to learn from Rehoboam's history, as we are.

2Ch 14:7 For he said to Judah, Let us build these cities, and make walls around them, with towers, gates, and bars. The land is yet before us, because we have sought

Yahweh our God. We have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered-
It is unlikely that all Israel were solidly seeking Yahweh, as Asa himself had weak aspects, the high places weren't removed and the population revived the idolatry after his death. So this seems a rather self congratulatory attitude. See on :12. After the victory against the Ethiopians, Asa purges Judah of idols (2 Chron. 15:8); and there is ample evidence from what is said after the victory that Asa and Judah were not so totally devoted to Yahweh at the time of 2 Chron. 14 (see on 2 Chron. 15:1,3,5,8).

2Ch 14:8 Asa had an army that carried shields and spears: out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bore shields and drew bows, two hundred and eighty thousand. All these were mighty men of valour-
We note the relatively large number of Benjamites. "Little Benjamin" were far smaller than Judah but committed more soldiers in relative terms. The loyalty of Benjamin to Judah is a theme of the records, and yet we recall that relatively recently, they as the tribe of Saul had been the least loyal to Judah. Just as Philistines of Gath became David's most loyal followers, so Benjamin became solidly united with Judah. God has a way of turning people around completely.

There is a significant increase in numbers in his son's time, when the army was exactly double the size of that recorded in this section (2 Chron. 14:8 cp. 2 Chron. 17:14-18). The total here was 580,000; but there it is exactly double (1,160,000; Judah 780,000, Benjamin 380,000). This suggests that again, numbers are not being used in the literal sense which modern readers are accustimed to.

2Ch 14:9 There came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an army of a million troops, and three hundred chariots; and he came to Mareshah-
The apparent problem of large numbers in the records are largely resolved by understanding the terms 'hundred' and 'thousand' not literally, but as referring to military subdivisions. A "Zerah" is mentioned as a descendant of Esau, and the name refers to at least four different people, all within the Abraham family. So this individual could have been a descendant of Esau who was exercising "the old hatred" against Jacob, although he was now located in "Ethiopia", a vague term applicable to anywhere around Egypt.

2Ch 14:10 Then Asa went out to meet him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah-
Zephathah is the Zephath of Jud. 1:17, where Judah won a great victory against the Canaanites, and was afterward renamed to Hormah, also a site of victory (Num. 21:3). Perhaps the usage of the old name is to draw attention to the victory won there historically.

2Ch 14:11 Asa cried to Yahweh his God and said, Yahweh, there is none apart from You to help, between the mighty and him who has no strength. Help us, Yahweh our God; for we rely on You, and in Your name are we come against this multitude. Yahweh, You are our God. Don't let man prevail against You-
This is a similar situation to that in 2 Chron. 13:18, where an otherwise unspiritual and idolatrous Judah "relied" on Yahweh in desperation. They relied on Him at that one point, and were rewarded for it. But not generally. This reflects God's extreme

sensitivity to faith in Him, even if He knows the surrounding context of a man's life is not of faith in Him.

Our faith will be strengthened by knowing that because we bear the Name, all that happens to us happens to our Lord and His Father. Thus Asa prayed: "Help us… in Your Name we go against this multitude…let not man prevail against *You*". It is absurd that man should prevail against God; and yet Asa believed that because His people carried His Name, therefore it was just as impossible that man should prevail against *them*.

This is a feature of many spiritual prayers: not to crudely, directly ask for the obvious; but to simply inform the Almighty of the situation, in faith. Other examples include: Gen. 19:24; Ps. 3:1-4; 142:1,2; Jn. 11:21,22; 1 Kings 19:10 cp. Rom. 11:2,3; Ps. 106:44 cp. Is. 64:3.

There is only one God, one source of help and power- and thus the oneness of God inspires our faith in Him. This motivated Asa to cry unto Yahweh in faith: "There is none beside You to help…". James 2:14-18 speaks of the connection between *faith* (believing) in the one God and *works* (doing). It is no co-incidence that James 2:19 then says in this context: "Thou *believest* that God is one; thou *doest* well" (RV). To have *faith* in the unity of God will lead to *works*, 'doing well'.

2Ch 14:12 So Yahweh struck the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled-

Enemies fleeing before God's people was the sign of obedience to the covenant. But as noted on :7, Judah generally were not particularly obedient. We continually marvel at God's grace toward His people, ever eager to impute righteousness, and to be impressed by any sign of faith and obedience. After the victory against the Ethiopians, Asa purges Judah of idols (2 Chron. 15:8); and there is ample evidence from what is said after the victory that Asa and Judah were not so totally devoted to Yahweh at the time of 2 Chron. 14 (see on 2 Chron. 15:1,3,5,8).

2Ch 14:13 Asa and the people who were with him pursued them to Gerar. There fell of the Ethiopians so many that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before Yahweh and before His army; and they carried away very much booty-

Yahweh's army is paralleled with that of Judah. Yahweh of hosts, of Angelic armies, is manifested in His people upon earth. David was taught this when he was told to advance his army only in accordance to the noise of the heavenly armies above him (see on 2 Sam. 5:24). We too are not alone; we are the manifestation of our guardian Angels above us, and collectively, the hosts of God's people reflect Yahweh of hosts above them.

2Ch 14:14 They struck all the cities around Gerar; for the fear of Yahweh came on them. They despoiled all the cities; for there was much spoil in them-

A similar situation repeated itself in 2 Chron. 17:10. The record constantly stresses that the victory was from God. The fear of Yahweh coming upon those cities was the promised reward for obedience (Dt. 11:25), and recalls the terror which fell upon the cities around Jacob at the time of Gen. 35:5. But that terror didn't come because Israel were righteous at that time; in fact the opposite. For they had just massacred Shechem. Likewise here, these blessings were by grace, for Judah were not so righteous at this time; and reflected Yahweh's extreme sensitivity to any faith and obedience toward Him. The Hebrew word here used for "spoil" is found only in

Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah and Daniel- evidence that this part of Chronicles was Divinely rewritten in the captivity.

2Ch 14:15 They struck also the tents of the herdsmen, and carried away sheep in abundance, and camels, and returned to Jerusalem-
This phrase in the LXX is used in Lk. 24:52 and Acts 1:12 of the disciples returning after a far greater victory. The Bible is continually seeing deeper meaning and application of all the wealth of history recorded in it. Although it is debatable whether such pillaging as recorded here was really God's will.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 15

2Ch 15:1 The Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded-
I hinted throughout 2 Chron. 14 that things were not quite as spiritually rosy with Asa and Judah as Asa liked to present. And so this message from God was to warn Asa of the conditionality of God's help, implying Asa was tempted to forsake Him. "Azariah", 'Yah has helped', was the son of Oded, 'repetition'; it was as if the message that God had helped win the victory of 2 Chron. 14 needed to be repeated. It seems from :2 that Azariah went out to meet Asa as he returned to Jerusalem from the victory of 2 Chron. 14:15.

2Ch 15:2 and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin! Yahweh is with you, while you are with Him; and if you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you-
The whole way of life of the righteous man is described as seeking God, knowing we will eventually find Him when the Lord returns to change our natures. So many times does David parallel those who seek God with those who keep His word (e.g. Ps. 119:2). We will never achieve perfect obedience; but seeking it is paralleled with it. Perfection is simply not achieved by God's people. Therefore the idiom of 'seeking Yahweh' is used, and is made parallel with obedience to His laws (2 Chron. 14:4) and not forsaking Him, just holding on to Him in faith, 'being with Him'.

The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). We can therefore conclude that His desperate “Why have You forsaken me?” was because He was so intensely identified with our sins that in the crisis of the cross, He indeed felt forsaken because of sin. He did not sin, but felt like a sinner; He thereby knows how sinners feel.

Asa had a wife called Azubah, who was the mother of the generally righteous Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:42). The mother may be mentioned because of her great influence upon the spiritual path of her children. However, there is also the theme that believers arise from unbelieving backgrounds. "Azubah" means "forsaken". It is the same word used here in 2 Chron. 15:2, where Jehoshaphat's father Asa was told of God "If you forsake Him, He will forsake you". It could be that Asa forsook Azubah and she was effectively a divorced woman; or perhaps the wife was renamed this

because Asa felt she had forsaken Yahweh, which is how the word "forsaken" ('Azubah') is usually used.

2Ch 15:3 Now for a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law-
Although this can be read as a general comment upon Israel's history at the time of the judges (:4), it clearly has relevance to the time of Asa (see on 2 Chron. 17:9). It would also have been perceived by the exiles as relevant to them. This again suggests that the spiritual picture of Asa and Judah in 2 Chron. 14 was presented there in a very rosy way. Things were not spiritually so wonderful. The main priestly duty was to teach God's word to the people. A whole string of texts make this point: Dt. 24:8; 2 Kings 17:27; 2 Chron. 15:3; Neh. 8:9; Mic. 3:11. Note too the common partnership between priests and prophets. Because of their role as *teachers*, it is understandable that the anger of the first century priesthood was always associated with Christ and the apostles *teaching* the people: Mt. 21:33; Lk. 19:47; 20:1; Acts 5:21. The priests felt that their role was being challenged. As part of the priesthood, our duty is to *all* teach or communicate the word of God to each other. It was God's intention that natural Israel should obey the spirit of this, so that they would "teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord" (Heb. 8:11). That was how God intended Israel of old to fulfil this idea of being a priestly nation.

2Ch 15:4 But when in their distress they turned to Yahweh the God of Israel and sought Him, He was found by them-
The point was that Asa must learn the lesson from the history of God's people at the time of the judges, and continue seeking God in distress as he had done in the conflict of 2 Chron. 14. Sadly at the end of his life, Asa in his distress didn't turn to Yahweh (2 Chron. 16:12).

2Ch 15:5 In those times there was no peace to him who went out, nor to him who came in; but great troubles were on all the inhabitants of the lands-
This clearly describes how things were at the time of the judges. But Asa is being bidden see parallels between that period and his time. And this invitation surely reveals that things were not well with Judah spiritually, and Asa was being set up as similar to the judges who revived God's people.

2Ch 15:6 They were broken in pieces, nation against nation, and city against city; for God troubled them with all adversity-
This may be a reference to the fighting within Israel which went on in the period of the judges (e.g. Jud. 9:44-47; 20:35-45). Asa is being bidden understand that circumstances repeat, exactly because we are intended to learn from Biblical history. He was to see that his conflict with the ten tribes was a repeat of those situations. And to act as the Godly judges did, in faith.

2Ch 15:7 But you be strong, and don't let your hands be slack; for your work shall be rewarded-
"Work" here is put for "faith". For it is faith and not works which is being appealed for from Asa (:2). This continues the purposeful confusion between faith and works which is found in James.

2Ch 15:8 When Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he

took courage, and put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from the hill country of Ephraim; and he renewed the altar of Yahweh that was before the porch of Yahweh-
This purging of idolatry which took place *after* the victory against the Ethiopians in 2 Chron. 14 shows that Asa's claims that Judah were totally loyal to Yahweh, and therefore as it were deserved victory, were somewhat hollow. But he was given the victory, and in fact that elicited from him an awareness that this was by grace, and his claims to total devotion to Yahweh in 2 Chron. 14:7,11 had been exaggerated. We too are sometimes given blessing and victory which is inappropriate to our faith, and the experience elicits in us self examination and repentance.

2Ch 15:9 He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who lived with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon; for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that Yahweh his God was with him-
AV "And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon". "The strangers" reflects how religious division soon leads to those divided from being considered as foreigners. This makes the account absolutely psychological reality, and is true to observed experience in Christian divisions. Simeon had inheritance within Judah (Josh. 19:1), so it is unsurprising that people from there came over to Judah.

2Ch 15:10 So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa-
The feast of weeks began on the sixth day of the third month.

2Ch 15:11 They sacrificed to Yahweh in that day, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep-
Remember that 'hundred' and 'thousand' are not always to be taken as literal numbers, but can refer to groups. The sacrifices often feature offerings in groups of seven (Num. 29:32; 1 Chron. 15:26). Presumably these were offered as peace offerings, although there is no evidence of the burnt offerings and sin offerings which were intended to precede peace offerings.

2Ch 15:12 They entered into the covenant to seek Yahweh the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul-
2 Chron. 15:12,15 parallels seeking God with having our whole desire for Him, giving all our heart and soul to Him. God judges a man's life with regard to where the essential, dominant desire of his heart is focused. This is why some of the kings of Judah are introduced with the comment that they did right in God's sight- even though it becomes apparent that they did many wrong things, and sometimes died committing wrong acts. But surely they were judged on their dominant desire, where their heart was, and not on their specific acts of failure. For David, the salvation promised to him through Christ was "all my desire" (2 Sam. 23:5). The direction of his life was towards that end.

2Ch 15:13 and that whoever would not seek Yahweh the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman-
This smacks of hypocrisy and a commitment made on the cusp of religious extremism, rather than humble spirituality. For as noted throughout 2 Chron. 14 and 2 Chron. 15:3,5,8, they themselves had not wholly sought Yahweh. And now they

condemn such persons to death. But not so many years later they needed to be brought back to Yahweh (2 Chron. 19:4). See on :14.

2Ch 15:14 They swore to Yahweh with a loud voice, and with shouting, trumpets and cornets-
The loudness of their voice corroborates the impression noted on :13, that this was unspiritual religious extremism.

2Ch 15:15 All Judah rejoiced at the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought Him with their whole desire; and He was found of them: and Yahweh gave them rest all around-
This joy was at an oath which threatened death against anyone who didn't worship Yahweh (:13), when they themselves had not been wholeheartedly for Him. And yet despite the hypocrisy, Yahweh "was found of them". Again, we see His sensitivity to any faith and spirituality. This is not to say that He accepts just whatever we give Him, and that, by extension, we can serve God on our own terms. But it is also so that God is very sensitive to all movements towards Him and for Him.

2Ch 15:16 Also Maacah, the mother of Asa the king, he removed from being queen, because she had made an abominable image for an Asherah. Asa cut down her image, and made dust of it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron-
This would have been difficult for him, given it was his mother. The Lord may have thought of this as He crossed the same brook, the night before His death.

2Ch 15:17 But the high places were not taken away out of Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect all his days-
As discussed on :15, this is not to say that we are free to serve God on our own terms, picking and choosing our issues of obedience and compliance. Rather does this reflect how human external behaviour, even if it is sinful, is not always a reflection of the basic, core position of the human heart. Human behaviour is so complex in its motivation, and there is often a connection between the heart and external behaviour which is very indirect and can even at times be inverse. In other words, we may act the opposite of what we really think. But God alone can know and judge these complexities. This is why we must not judge; because we cannot judge. We do not see the heart.

Asa and Jehoshaphat removed the high places, but in a sense they didn't (1 Kings 15:14 cp. 2 Chron. 14:5; 17:6 cp. 20:33). We read of how the land was purged of Baal, Sodomites etc.; but in a very short time, we read of another purge being necessary. Partial cleansing of idolatry amounted to no cleansing. Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah all made major purges within a space of 80 years. Jeremiah therefore condemns the Jews who lived at the time of Josiah's reformation for not *knowing* God in their hearts. Many a Western Christian has this very same tendency. We too must ask ourselves whether our spirituality is really just a product of the crowd mentality; as the crowd shouted one day "Hosanna to the Son of David", a few days later they wanted Jesus to be delivered rather than Barabbas, but within minutes they were persuaded to cry for the crucifixion of the Son of God. Church life, Bible studies, the breaking of bread... inevitably, there is a crowd mentality developed here. There is a feeling of devotion which wells up within us as a community, as an audience, as we sit there, as we stand in praise and worship together. But the *real*

spirituality is far deeper than this. We must seriously ask whether our spirituality, our feelings of devotion, our true repentance, are *only* stimulated by these meetings?

As discussed on 1 Kings 15:3, Asa like David clearly sinned and seems to have suffered a decline in his faith as he got older, as the Chronicles record shows. But he was judged on the overall dominant desire of his heart, to the point that having a heart perfect with Yahweh seems to effectively mean 'He was wholeheartedly devoted to Yahweh and never worshipped other gods'. Despite all the ups and downs, of which his final faith in doctors rather than Yahweh was one of the down points (2 Kings 16:12), his overall deepest heart was for Yahweh.

2Ch 15:18 He brought into God's house the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels-
The reference is to what he captured from the Ethiopians and looted from the tribesmen around Gerar (2 Chron. 14:14,15); and to what his father Abijah had taken from Jeroboam (2 Chron. 13:16). We note that Abijah dedicated things to God, but despite that, "he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; and his heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God" (1 Kings 15:3). External generosity isn't anywhere near as valuable as a heart totally given over to God.

2Ch 15:19 There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa-
1 Chron. 14:1 likewise notes that Asa's reign began with 10 years of peace. The land itself was at peace but that didn't mean Judah were not at war. For Baasha became king of Israel in the third year of Asa (1 Kings 15:28,33) and "there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days" (1 Kings 15:32). Then there was then this 20 years peace later on (2 Chron. 15:10, 19). The impression is given that Asa's [partial] faithfulness to Yahweh meant there was peace, and peace is a fruit of loyalty to Yahweh. See on 2 Chron. 16:1.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 16

2Ch 16:1 In the thirty sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah-
But Baasha died in the 26th year of Asa's rulership (1 Kings 16:8,10). The 35th year in 2 Chron. 15:19 refers to the point of division with Israel, when Judah became a separate entity. And this may be the same case here. However, the Hebrew characters used for 30 and 10 are very similar, and this may be an example of a coping error. If we read 15 and 16 in 2 Chron. 15:19 and 2 Chron. 16:1, then the chronological problem disappears.

And built Ramah, that he might not allow anyone to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah-
There was such a flow of Israelites to Judah that Baasha tried to stop it, by building Ramah as an effective border control point on the approach road to Jerusalem- only about six miles from city. Ramah was in Benjamin, and clearly Asa had failed to retain it within Judah.

2Ch 16:2 Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of

Yahweh and of the king's house, and sent to Ben Hadad king of Syria, who lived at Damascus saying-
Benhadad was the grandson of Hezion, a name which uses similar characters to Rezon who led the first attempted revival of Zobah and Damascus (1 Kings 11:23) after David's victories against them in 2 Sam. 8:3-8. Asa gathered the gold and silver vessels back into the temple- and then went and used them to make a political treaty. He *apparently* treated them as God's riches, but then in reality he used them as his own (1 Kings 15:18, 15).

2Ch 16:3 Let there be a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you silver and gold. Go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me-
The intent of the treaty, however, was that Benhadad would attack Baasha (:4). Perhaps this was not stated specifically because Asa wanted to give lip service obedience to the command not to fight with his own brethren in (1 Kings 12:24. So the Lord's money was spent on effectively getting others to fight their own brethren; and in essence the same can happen today in church politics. We also see how fickle are relationships when not governed by Divine principle; Benhadad's treaty with Baasha was broken when money was received from a third party, and he not only trashed the treaty but attacked him.

We must balance this lack of faith against the Divine assessment in 2 Chron. 15:17: "The high places were not taken away out of Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect all his days".

2Ch 16:4 Ben Hadad listened to king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they struck Ijon, and Dan, and Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali-
These cities were in the far north of Israel. It was an invasion of the border area rather than of all Israel.

2Ch 16:5 It happened, when Baasha heard of it, that he left off building Ramah, and let his work cease-
Asa's plan appeared to have worked. Baasha stopped the attempted blockade of Jerusalem. Even though Asa did wrong in how he used the Lord's money / wealth, that isn't commented upon. It all seemed to work out. But we are left, naturally, with the question as to whether this was right or not.

2Ch 16:6 Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and its timber, with which Baasha had built; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah-
We see here the value of stones and timber and the huge amount of labour needed to

move them. This corroborates the way that Solomon's huge demand for these things led him into debt financially (see on 1 Kings 9:14) and into abusing his people for labour.

2Ch 16:7 At that time Hanani the seer of visions came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on Yahweh your God, therefore is the army of the king of Syria escaped out of your hand-
A lack of spiritual ambition is in fact a sin. When Asa was threatened by his enemies, he hired the Syrians to drive them away- and he was condemned for this, being told that he should instead have had the ambition to ask God to deliver the mighty Syrians into his hand, as well as his enemies (2 Chron. 16:7). He was reminded that the Angelic eyes of the Lord are running to and fro in our support (2 Chron. 16:9), as Asa would have theoretically acknowledged. But his sin of omission, his lack of an ambitious vision, incited the Father's anger. We need to meditate carefully upon this, because it surely has many similarities with modern life, where money and 'hiring' worldly help is so easy...

2Ch 16:8 Weren't the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge army, with exceeding many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on Yahweh, He delivered them into your hand-
This is a similar situation to that in 2 Chron. 13:18, where an otherwise unspiritual and idolatrous Judah "relied" on Yahweh in desperation. They relied on Him at that one point, and were rewarded for it. But not generally. This reflects God's extreme sensitivity to faith in Him, even if He knows the surrounding context of a man's life is not of faith in Him.

Asa's faith was rewarded when he faced a massive Ethiopian army; but some years later, God repeated the situation. A huge Israelite army faced him; and instead of trusting in Yahweh, he gave the temple treasures to Syria so that they would come and fight the battle for him. And God wasn't slow to point out how circumstances had repeated, but this time Asa had failed the test: " Were not the Ethiopians and Lubims a huge host...? Yet because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand... herein you have done foolishly: therefore from henceforth you shall have wars" (2 Chron. 16:8.9). The "wars" God brought upon Asa weren't merely punishments; they were yet further opportunities for Asa to face the same situations, and overcome them with faith. And God likewise works in our lives.

2Ch 16:9 For the eyes of Yahweh run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him-
The Biblical record seems to very frequently seek to deconstruct popular ideas about sin and evil. One of the most widespread notions was the "evil eye", whereby it was

believed that some people had an "evil eye" which could bring distress into the eyes of those upon whom they looked in jealousy or anger. This concept is alive and well in many areas to this day. The idea entered Judaism very strongly after the Babylonian captivity; the Babylonian Talmud is full of references to it. The sage Rav attributed many illnesses to the evil eye, and the Talmud even claimed that 99 out of 100 people died prematurely from this (*Bava Metzia* 107b). The Biblical deconstruction of this is through stressing that *God's* eye is all powerful in the destiny of His people (Dt. 11:12; Ps. 33:18); and that "an evil eye" refers to an *internal* attitude of mean spiritedness *within* people- e.g. an "evil eye" is understood as an ungenerous spirit in Dt. 15:9; Mt. 6:23; 20:15; or pure selfishness in Dt. 28:54,56; Prov. 23:6; 28:22. We must remember that the people of Biblical times understood an "evil eye" as an *external* ability to look at someone and bring curses upon them. But the Bible redefines an "evil eye" as a purely *internal* attitude; and cosmic evil, even if it were to exist, need hold no fear for us- seeing the eyes of the only true God are running around the earth *for* us and not against us (2 Chron. 16:9).

Herein you have done foolishly; for from henceforth you shall have wars-
"Done foolishly" alludes to the failures of Saul (1 Sam. 13:13) and David (2 Sam. 24:10), both also connected with trust in human rather than Divine strength.

2Ch 16:10 Then Asa was angry with the seer of visions, and put him in the prison; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time-
If true guilt is not faced up to, there will be anger, the anger that comes from refusing to acknowledge subconscious guilt. Balaam's angry striking of his donkey is an obvious Biblical example, and we are surrounded by so many others. Another classic example would be Asa's "rage" with Hanani the prophet when he rebuked Asa for trusting in the Syrian army rather than in Yahweh. And Asa's anger was then taken out upon the people- for "Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time" (2 Chron. 16:10).

The harsh treatment of the Ammonites, torturing them under harrows, is indication enough of David's bad conscience before God being shown in his harsh treatment of others. Likewise Asa oppressed the people when he was guilty in his conscience (2 Chron. 16:10). And the wicked Kings of Israel usually died "without being desired" by their people, presumably because their broken relationship with God had led to a broken relationship between them and their brethren (e.g. 2 Chron. 21:20).

When Israel played traitor to their brethren, by doing so they broke their marriage covenant with God (Mal. 2:10); their attitude to their brethren was essentially their attitude to their Heavenly Father. Our God and our brethren simply can't be separated.

Asa's broken relationship with God resulted in him 'crushing' the people at the same time (2 Chron. 16:10 Avmg.).

2Ch 16:11 Behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel-
This may not necessarily be the book of Kings as we know it.

2Ch 16:12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa was diseased in his feet. His disease was exceeding great; yet in his disease he didn't turn to Yahweh, but to the physicians-
One meaning of "Asa" is "physician", and he ended his days trusting physicians rather than Yahweh. Perhaps he trained as a physician and ended up therefore having more faith in science than in Yahweh. 1 Kings 15:11 says that "he did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, as did David his father". 2 Chron. 14:2 is likewise positive: "Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of Yahweh his God".
Asa is recorded as serving God just as well as David, when actually this wasn't the case; but God counted him as righteous. The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). Asa was not perfect, nor was David; but God's overall judgment was that he "did right", despite doing wrong at specific points in his life. Yet we learn here that Asa died at a low point for him spiritually. But the judgment overall was that he "did right" and that "nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect with Yahweh all his days" (1 Kings 15:14). We must learn therefore not to judge a person too harshly if they die at a weak spiritual point, e.g. through suicide.

2Ch 16:13 Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the forty-first year of his reign-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ch 16:14 They buried him in his own tombs, which he had dug out for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great burning for him-
"The bed" may refer to that on which he laid at the end of his life (:12). It seems he was buried in his own bed, which recalls the style of burial for the Pharaohs and other Gentile kings. This would be another indication that Asa died spiritually weak, and yet as discussed on :12, he was still reckoned as righteous according to his core heart positions.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 17

2Ch 17:1 Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place-
Jehoshaphat means 'whom Jehovah judges'. And this is largely the point of his life. He made major mistakes in his relationships with Israel, incited the wrath of God against him (2 Chron. 19:2), died without removing the high places, and yet overall was judged as having a faithful *heart* before God (1 Kings 22:43; 2 Chron. 19:3). And so we have a parade example of how indeed 'Jehovah judges', factoring in the various dimensions of a man's life in a way in which we cannot. The lesson is indeed that we cannot judge, nor should we be tempted to judge a person according to the high and low points on their spiritual graph, nor upon the fact they may die with unconquered weaknesses.

And strengthened himself against Israel-
Yet 1 Kings 22:44 commends him that: "Jehoshaphat made peace with the king[s] of Israel". But the way to that peace was by clarifying boundaries.

2Ch 17:2 He placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had taken-
This building or rebuilding of fortified cities at the start of a reign is a continuity between Asa, Jehoshaphat and Rehoboam. But in each case, those strengthened cities failed to protect them as they intended, but rather God's strength was needed. The later kings were clearly intended to learn from history as recorded, as we are.

2Ch 17:3 Yahweh was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and didn't seek the Baals-
Many have struggled to reconcile the statement that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) with the fact that his life contains many examples not only of failure, but of anger and a devaluing of human life. He was barred from building the temple because of the amount of blood he had shed (1 Chron. 22:8). The figure of 'shedding blood' takes us back to the incident with Nabal, where David three times is mentioned as intending to "shed blood" (1 Sam. 25:26-33), only to be turned away from his sinful course by the wisdom, spirituality and charm of Abigail. David started out as the spiritually minded, humble shepherd, full of faith and zeal for his God. Hence Jehoshaphat is commended for walking "in the first ways of his father David" (2 Chron. 17:3). It seems to me that the comment that David was "a man after God's own heart" refers to how he initially was, at the time God chose him and rejected Saul. But the trauma of his life, the betrayals, jealousies and hatred of others, led him to the kind of bitterness which so often surfaces in the Psalms and is reflected in several historical incidents where he lacks the value of others' lives which we would otherwise expect from a man who walked so close with his God.

2Ch 17:4 but sought to the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not after the doings of Israel-
Yet Jehoshaphat allowed his son to marry Ahab's daughter (2 Chron. 18:1), and repeatedly failed in being as separate from Israel as he ought to have been. He nearly lost his life as a result of it. Yet God's overall judgment is that for all his social contact

with Israel and failure to separate from them, he still did not himself 'walk' in their evil doings.

2Ch 17:5 Therefore Yahweh established the kingdom in his hand. All Judah brought to Jehoshaphat tribute; and he had riches and honour in abundance-
The tribute may refer to a revival of the taxation system of Solomon described in 1 Kings 4. Or possibly the reference may be to the tithes being brought to Jehoshaphat, as if he were a king-priest; see on :7. Or the reference may simply be to presents, brought to him when he ascended the throne as in 1 Sam. 10:27. In this case, the entire description of Jehoshaphat in :2-6 would specifically refer to the beginning of his reign.

2Ch 17:6 His heart was lifted up in the ways of Yahweh-
The phrase "lifted up" is nearly always used in a negative sense about pride. The idea was that he was proud of Yahweh and His ways.

Furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherim out of Judah-
Asa and Jehoshaphat removed the high places, but in a sense they didn't (1 Kings 15:14 cp. 2 Chron. 14:5; 17:6 cp. 20:33). We read of how the land was purged of Baal, Sodomites etc.; but in a very short time, we read of another purge being necessary. Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah all made major purges within a space of 80 years. Jeremiah therefore condemns the Jews who lived at the time of Josiah's reformation for not *knowing* God in their hearts. Asa gathered the gold and silver vessels back into the temple- and then went and used them to make a political treaty. He *apparently* treated them as God's riches, but then in reality he used them as his own (1 Kings 15:18, 15). Many a Western Christian has this very same tendency. We too must ask ourselves whether our spirituality is really just a product of the crowd mentality; as the crowd shouted one day "Hosanna to the Son of David", a few days later they wanted Jesus to be delivered rather than Barabbas, but within minutes they were persuaded to cry for the crucifixion of the Son of God. Church life, Bible studies, the breaking of bread... inevitably, there is a crowd mentality developed here. There is a feeling of devotion which wells up within us as a community, as an audience, as we sit there, as we stand in praise and worship together. But the *real* spirituality is far deeper than this. We must seriously ask whether our spirituality, our feelings of devotion, our true repentance, are *only* stimulated by these meetings?

2Ch 17:7 Also in the third year of his reign he sent his princes, even Ben Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah-
The sending of princes along with Levites (:8) could imply some idea of a joint king-priesthood, which we saw possibly hinted at in :5, if we understand the "tribute" given to Jehoshaphat as king as being the tithes due to the Levites.

2Ch 17:8 and with them the Levites, even Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tobadonijah the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests-
The idea was that the two priests were sent to teach Judah the law (:9), for that was the function of the priests. But in practical terms they were assisted by a group of Levites and princes (:7). We would rather imagine the priests as being listed first, and then those subservient to them coming afterwards. But the priests were true servant leaders and are listed last, as being "with the Levites" [the servants of the priests] rather than the other way around.

2Ch 17:9 They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of Yahweh with them. They went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught among the people-
This is a tacit admission that the local priests were not teaching the people. 2 Chron. 15:3 had reminded Asa of the similarity of his times with those of the judges: "Now for a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law". It seems that sad situation continued. The statements about Judah's faithfulness and loyalty to Yahweh were therefore very generous; for in an illiterate society, they would have been unaware of the majority of details in the Mosaic law if they weren't taught it by the local priests. Although priests from the ten tribes had emigrated to Judah, it seems they were not teaching the people as intended. Their identity with Yahweh religion was therefore more cultural than based upon accurate awareness of His ways. But despite this lack of knowledge, God still counted them as loyal to Him, just as He counted weak kings like Asa as loyal to Him in their hearts. Yahweh's generosity in judgment of His people is one of the themes which comes through in the historical records.

2Ch 17:10 The fear of Yahweh fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat-
A similar situation repeated itself in 2 Chron. 14:14. The record constantly stresses that the victory was from God. The fear of Yahweh coming upon Gentiles was the promised reward for obedience (Dt. 11:25), and recalls the terror which fell upon the cities around Jacob at the time of Gen. 35:5, "so that they made no war against" Jacob. But that terror didn't come because Israel were righteous at that time; in fact the opposite. For they had just massacred Shechem. Likewise here, these blessings were by grace, for Judah were not so righteous at this time; and reflected Yahweh's extreme sensitivity to any faith and obedience toward Him. And it was surely the same in Jehoshaphat's time.

2Ch 17:11 Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute. The Arabians also brought him flocks, seven thousand seven hundred rams, and seven thousand seven hundred male goats-
Remember that 'hundred' and 'thousand' are not always to be taken as literal numbers, but can refer to groups. It was these same groups of Philistines and Arabians whose spirit Yahweh stirred up (for He can work directly upon the human mind) to break away from Judah in Jehoram's time (2 Chron. 21:16).

2Ch 17:12 Jehoshaphat grew great exceedingly; and he built in Judah fortified and store cities-
See on :2. "Store cities" implies he anticipated the possibility of a siege from enemies.

2Ch 17:13 He had many works in the cities of Judah; and men of war, mighty men of valour, in Jerusalem-
"Many works" is unclear. GNB for :12,13 offers: "Throughout Judah he built fortifications and cities, where supplies were stored in huge amounts. In Jerusalem he stationed outstanding officers".

2Ch 17:14 This was the numbering of them according to their fathers' houses. Of Judah, the captains of thousands: Adnah the captain, and with him mighty men of valour three hundred thousand-

Remember that 'hundred' and 'thousand' are not always to be taken as literal numbers, but can refer to groups. The "them" could refer specifically to the officers or soldiers quartered in Jerusalem (:13).

2Ch 17:15 and next to him Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and eighty thousand-
We note that the names of all the captains in this section include God's Name.

2Ch 17:16 and next to him Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself to Yahweh; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valour-
His being so willing to offer himself to Yahweh was noted, as in Jud. 5:9. Human initiative in serving God is indeed valuable to Him; not because He saves according to works, but because He recognizes and values freewill human expressions of love toward Him.

2Ch 17:17 Of Benjamin: Eliada a mighty man of valour, and with him two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield-
There is a significant increase in numbers from his father's time, when the army was exactly half the size of that recorded in this section (2 Chron. 14:8). The total then was 580,000; but here in :14-18 it is exactly double (1,160,000), Judah 780,000, Benjamin 380,000. This suggests that again, numbers are not being used in the literal sense which modern readers are accustomed to.

2Ch 17:18 and next to him Jehozabad; and with him one hundred and eighty thousand prepared for war-
This group were ready for immediate deployment.

2Ch 17:19 These were those who waited on the king, besides those whom the king put in the fortified cities throughout all Judah-
This is a very large number to continually serve the king. The same phrase is used in 1 Chron. 27:1, where they served their king through a rotation system of monthly service.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 18

2Ch 18:1 Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance; and he joined affinity with Ahab-
The Chronicles record clearly shows that he was too close to Israel. His son married a daughter of Ahab, and his insistence on supporting Ahab was seen as loving those who hated Yahweh, and the wrath of God was upon him because of it (2 Chron. 19:2). And yet he is commended for having peace with the kings of Israel (1 Kings 22:44), even though that desire for peace with them led him into major sin. But he was judged as having a heart right with God (2 Chron. 19:3). We sense God weighting Jehoshaphat's sins with his relations with Israel against his genuine desire for peace within God's people. And overall, as he was judged on the state of his heart, his desire for unity and peace was judged as his dominant desire. We simply cannot factor in or weight all the dimensions in a man's heart. Only God can. And the reason we are not to judge is because in fact we cannot judge, in that we don't have access to human hearts.

2Ch 18:2 After certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. Ahab killed sheep and cattle for him in abundance, and for the people who were with him, and moved him to go up with him to Ramoth Gilead-
Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had wrongly married Ahab's daughter, Athaliah; probably under some false mantra of 'unity amongst God's people'. The visit was likely in connection with this. Had Jehoshaphat not fraternized with wicked Ahab, the possibility of the doomed venture which follows wouldn't have arisen. And if Ahab had slain Benhadad as commanded, Ramoth Gilead would have been returned to Israel. And indeed if Benhadad kept his covenant, it should have been returned anyway (1 Kings 20:34).

"Moved" is 'persuaded'. "Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead", just as Jezebel persuaded Ahab to do wickedness (1 Kings 21:25 Heb.). It is a story of sin leading to sin, and sinful attitudes and behaviour spreading through wrong and unwise associations.

2Ch 18:3 Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Will you go with me to Ramoth Gilead? He answered him, I am as you are, and my people as your people. We will be with you in the war-
We note they both have "horses", which were forbidden for the kings of Israel under the law of Moses. Jehoshaphat likely reasoned that a weak Syria on the east bank of Jordan was good for Judah, but he was also caught up in the false mantra of "unity" which had led his son to marry Ahab's daughter.

2Ch 18:4 Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Please inquire first for the word of Yahweh-
Ahab responded to the request for a word from Yahweh by summoning the group of 400 false prophets (:5). He had so mixed Yahweh worship with paganism that he considered their word to be that of Yahweh. And he gathered such a huge group in order to argue that the majority must surely be right. And the Bible consistently teaches that in these situations, the majority is usually wrong.

2Ch 18:5 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said to them, Shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I desist?
Ahab had 400 false prophets earlier in his reign (1 Kings 18:19), who were slain on Carmel. So it seems that he didn't learn his lesson, and raised up another such group. This fits with the common theme of purges and repentances at the time of the kings needing to be repeated. For the purges were only surface level, despite all the evidence for them at the time. "Forbear" means 'to cease'. Ahab, like us at times, had already started the project without asking God's guidance, and his request for guidance in the project was compromised in integrity by the fact he had already begun it.

They said, Go up; for God will deliver it into the hand of the king-
This recalls the instant answer of Nathan when David enquired about building a temple for Yahweh. Too easily we assume we know the will of God, and speak and act as if we have His blessing on our endeavours already.

2Ch 18:6 But Jehoshaphat said, Isn't there here a prophet of Yahweh besides, that we may inquire of him?-
Ahab had provided the 400 prophets of Baal in response to the request for a word from Yahweh. Jehoshaphat realized this; and ought to have immediately pulled out of

working with someone who was presenting Baal worship as Yahweh worship. He means of course 'an old time, old school prophet of Yahweh who is not also a prophet of Baal and repudiates Baal'.

2Ch 18:7 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Yahweh-
The idea is, "one more man". He considered that the 400 prophets of Baal were also in touch with Yahweh (see on :5), and Micaiah was just one more who could do that, although he repudiated Baal worship.

But I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil-
Again we sense the pouting, spoilt kid characteristics of Ahab. His characterization in the records is absolutely consistent and credible, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired history. We have here a parade example of how men come to God's word having already decided what they want to hear. Indeed there is a tendency to have "itching ears", heaping up teachers to confirm us in our own desires, lusts and hunches (2 Tim. 4:3; maybe a reference to Ahab heaping up 400 such teachers to tell him what he wanted to hear). This is why there are so many different interpretations of the Bible. Because readers / hearers like to hear only what confirms that which they already had a hunch about. To achieve a second naivety as we come to God's word, to be a born again virgin, is hard indeed. Jehoshaphat realized what Ahab was doing, and asked him not to talk like that- but to accept Yahweh's word. The fact Jehoshaphat himself still went into battle shows how he himself perceived the truth of all this, but didn't do accordingly. The "evil" prophesied was presumably of Ahab's condemnation, confirming Elijah's words.

He is Micaiah the son of Imla. Jehoshaphat said, Don't let the king say so-
Again we are introduced to a true prophet of Yahweh who existed at the time of Elijah. His claim to be the only prophet of Yahweh is continually demonstrated to be false. Presumably Elijah knew these other prophets, but considered that they had all gone wrong on this or that point of doctrine or practice. And perhaps they had, but God still counted them as His prophets, and used them as such. And it was Elijah who was removed from the prophetic ministry because of his arrogance in considering none of them genuine, and he alone being the true representative of Yahweh. Micaiah had previously spoken critical things to Ahab in Yahweh's Name, hence Ahab says that this prophet only says "evil" about him and he doesn't want to consult him. Elijah was quite wrong to discount all these brave prophets as somehow not genuine.

2Ch 18:8 Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, Get Micaiah the son of Imla quickly-
"Who is like Yah?" was a direct challenge to the idea that Yahweh could be worshipped through Baal worship (see on :4). According to :26, Micaiah was imprisoned at this time. The 'quick' summoning from prison by an officer to speak God's word would have recalled to Micaiah the example of faithful Joseph.

2Ch 18:9 Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, arrayed in their robes. They were sitting in an open place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them-
This was an impressive sight, and the area had clearly been especially prepared so that so many prophets could prophesy together. It was designed to sway Jehoshaphat according to the false maxim that the majority must be right, and how could so many be wrong. See on Ez. 10:5

2Ch 18:10 Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron and said, Thus says Yahweh, 'With these you shall push the Syrians, until they are consumed'-
Zedekiah, like a typical apostate, is mixing the truth of God out of context with wrong ideas. He alludes to Moses' blessing of Joseph in Dt. 33:17 to the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh: "Buffalo horns are his (Joseph's) horns, with them he thrusts down nations". But of course he overlooked the fact that the blessings of Moses were predicated upon obedience to the covenant. He probably made the horns and held them on his forehead. Micaiah's response is to also quote from the law of Moses, but about the judgment for disobedience to the covenant (:16).

2Ch 18:11 All the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth Gilead, and prosper; for Yahweh will deliver it into the hand of the king-
These 400 prophets of Baal [for they were the equivalent of the 400 executed on Mount Carmel] still used the name of Yahweh. Their position was that they conducted Yahweh worship through Baal worship. Perhaps their usage of the Hebrew word for "prosper" alluded to how the word is four times used of the prospering of Abraham's servant on his journey and mission (Gen. 24:21,40,42,56). And this is probably our most common temptation as believers; to mix the flesh and the spirit, to justify sin in the name of serving God. But Ahab had broken the covenant, and would not prosper (s.w. Dt. 28:29). Jehoshaphat later learnt this lesson, for he uses the word in saying that only those who hear Yahweh's prophets will "prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20).

2Ch 18:12 The messenger who went to call Micaiah spoke to him saying, Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one mouth. Let your word therefore, please be like one of theirs, and speak good-
We sense the build up of pressure upon Micaiah. He was imprisoned for having spoken God's word against Ahab (see on :8,25), and would be under huge pressure from the presence of the 400 prophets and the audience watching (:27 "all you people"). And as the officer led him from prison towards the huge crowd of people gathered before the two kings, he too added his pressure. The request of the officer was perhaps because he actually liked Micaiah and could foresee the death sentence being given if he again "spoke evil" and not "good" to Ahab, and he didn't want to have to carry that out. But he still totally fails to perceive that God's word cannot be changed or controlled by man.

2Ch 18:13 Micaiah said, As Yahweh lives, what my God says, that will I speak-
If Micaiah was at that time imprisoned for prophesying evil against Ahab (see on :8,25), bearing in mind Naboth had been slain for allegedly cursing the king, he would have been sorely tempted to now buy his freedom by saying what Ahab wanted to hear. And despite his determination not to do so, I suggest on :14 that he did temporarily fail. The pressure on him was intense. Micaiah uses the words and ideas of Balaam when pressured to not say Yahweh's word. He was clearly a spiritually minded man who was deeply aware of Biblical precedent for his situation, as we ought to be.

2Ch 18:14 When he had come to the king, the king said to him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I desist? He said, Go up, and prosper. They shall be delivered into your hand-
It could be argued that by repeating the very words of the false prophets, Micaiah was

just repeating them sarcastically, with the tone of his voice indicating that. But I prefer to conclude that this faithful man, who had gone to prison for his witness of God's word to Ahab, now faltered under the pressure of the presence of the 400 false prophets. He acted like Nathan when David enquired about building a temple for Yahweh, who gave the answer that his enquirer wanted to hear. Such failure of a moment would be absolutely true to human experience and would be psychologically and spiritually credible. See on :13.

2Ch 18:15 The king said to him, How many times shall I adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of Yahweh?-
See on :14. We are left to speculate which singular "king" it was who said this, Ahab or Jehoshaphat. The Biblical record is intentionally open ended at some points, to encourage us to think ourselves into the situation. The king sensed that Micaiah was cowed by the situation, and really wanted to know what Yahweh thought. So we sense "the king" in view was Jehoshaphat.

2Ch 18:16 He said, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. Yahweh said, These have no master. Let them return every man to his house in peace-
As explained on :10, Zedekiah had quoted Moses' blessings of the tribes as justification for a successful battle- which were conditional upon obedience to the covenant. Micaiah responds by quoting the curses for disobedience to the covenant (Num. 27:16,17). The removal of the master / shepherd implies that the shepherd or king of Israel is to be slain, and the sheep would return to their homes once the shepherd was slain. And that is just what happened when it was recognized that Ahab had been slain.

2Ch 18:17 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Didn't I tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?-
Ahab intuitively sensed what Yahweh's true word was even before Micaiah pronounced it. His insistence on going ahead was therefore the more culpable. And God's word is often intuitively recognized as "truth" even by those who reject it, which is why they tend towards anger and other psychological reactions appropriate to denial.

2Ch 18:18 Micaiah said, Therefore hear the word of Yahweh-
There does not follow a "Thus says the Lord", but rather a description of the vision Micaiah had seen, a peek into the heavenly throne room, the court of heaven. Discerning the vision was perhaps the essential "word of Yahweh" which the kings were to "hear".

I saw Yahweh sitting on His throne, and all the army of heaven standing on His right hand and on His left-
It seems there are two groups of Angels- Angels of evil (Ps. 78:49) and of good. Thus God creates both good and evil- and Isaiah 45:5-7 emphasizes that He makes a distinct creation of both- using these separate groups of Angels. However we stress that the Angels of evil are not sinful Angels. We think of the Angel called "the destroyer" at Passover time, who was restrained by the Passover Angel from destroying the Israelite firstborn. And so one wonders whether "the destroyer" was one of those on the left hand side, and the Passover Angel one of those on the right hand. This division is perhaps hinted at here, where "all the host of Heaven" are seen

standing around the throne of God himself "on His right and on His left". The exact way in which these two groups of Angels work is unclear, and this perhaps explains the difficulty all Bible students face in understanding the undefined "power of darkness", hints of which lurk throughout Scripture (e.g. evil spirits, the forces of evil unleashed at the end of Revelation etc.), and also in defining the apparently super-human power of righteousness which the Psalms and New Testament especially speak of. At present these topics seem to defy close definition- until we appreciate the Angelic basis behind them?

The visions of Isaiah 6 and Rev. 4 also show God seated on a throne with Angels before Him, bringing information and requests to Him and departing with commands to obey; the idea of a council in Heaven is clearly hinted at in Job 1; Gen. 1:26; Ps. 89:7. God sitting on a throne implies that each request or piece of information presented is 'judged' and an appropriate decision made. The 'case' of the adversaries to God is presented by a 'satan' Angel in Job.

We have here perhaps the most detailed picture of the Heavenly council. God told them His desire- for Ahab to die at Ramoth-Gilead. He then asked which Angel wanted to effect this. We thus learn that like us, on hearing God's desire the *elohim* all have different ways of trying to fulfil it. One "Spirit" (Angel) suggested that He would put a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, and this was the suggestion chosen and enabled by God. This shows that the Angels do not all automatically know the best way of bringing about God's purpose, and therefore they need to seek His advice and perhaps discuss things amongst themselves first before acting. Note that "*all* the host of Heaven" were there around the throne of God participating in this decision. And so all the Angels are involved in the decisions God and the Angels make about us. Lk. 15:6 implies the same.

2Ch 18:19 Yahweh said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? One spoke saying this way, and another saying that way-
"Entice" is the word elsewhere translated 'deceive'. Clearly God does deceive; for He confirms men in the mental path in which they themselves wish to go. Ez. 14:9 uses the word very clearly in this connection (see commentary there); and the teaching is confirmed in 2 Thess. 2:11.

In Revelation we see the incense of human prayers arising into Heaven, resulting in Angels coming to earth, pouring out bowls, blowing trumpets, and major events happening on earth (Rev. 5:8; 8:3). Prayer is noticed; it brings forth quite out of proportion responses. The Angels discuss their plans for us in the court of Heaven, coming up with various possibilities of how to act in our lives, discussing them with God (1 Kings 22:20-22). They play some part in the whole process of our prayers. When we read that “Surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (Am. 3:7), we might tend to take that as a statement of absolute principle that is obvious to all the Angels. But we find an Angel discussing with others: “Shall I hide from Abraham [who was a prophet] what I am about to do?” (Gen. 18:17). The Angels have more debate, expend more mental and physical energy than we surely realize, in order to operationalize things which we might consider to be standard and automatic in God’s work with men. In our context, what this means is that when men reject the machinations and schemings of God’s love, they reject an awful lot; and it grieves and disappoints Him, and appears tragic to those like the prophets who see things from His viewpoint.

2Ch 18:20 A spirit-
God makes His Angels "spirits" (Ps. 104:4), and Angels are in view here. But the word 'spirit' has a wide range of meaning. It can refer to power, but also to the thought which is then expressed through the power of action. The Angel is here called a "spirit" because the idea was to place a thought in the mind or spirit of the false prophets, and thereby Ahab.

Came out-
This is the same word as in :21 "I will go forth". The Angel was as it were demonstrating how he intended acting.

Stood before Yahweh and said-
It was the true prophets who stood before Yahweh (1 Kings 17:1). The connection is to show that the true prophets were represented by the Angels in the court of heaven, and this Angel was as it were on their side.

I will entice him. Yahweh said to him, How?-
Ahab had been persuaded or enticed to do evil by Jezebel, and had enticed or persuaded Jehoshaphat to go to battle. But this was because he had himself been persuaded or enticed by God.

2Ch 18:21 He said, I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. He said, You will entice him, and will prevail also-
God deceived prophets to speak things in His Name which were actually false (1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 14:9). He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them (Is. 66:3,4). Jeremiah feared God had deceived *him* (Jer. 20:7)- showing he knew such a thing was possible. Dt. 13:1-3 warns Israel not to believe prophets whose prophecies came true although they taught false doctrines, because they may have been raised up to test their obedience. God deceived Israel by telling them about the peace which would come on Jerusalem in the future Kingdom; they didn't consider the other prophecies *which were given at the same time* concerning their imminent judgment, and therefore they thought that God was pleased with them and was about to establish the Messianic Kingdom; when actually the very opposite was about to happen (Jer. 4:10). This is why the Bible is confusing to those who aren't humble to God's word.

Go forth, and do so-
This describes the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do God's word. So when we read of God sending lions (2 Kings 17:25,26), sending wild beasts and famine (Lev. 26:22; Ez. 5:17; Dt. 32:24), sending locusts (Joel 2:25), it would seem that Angels are sent forth from God's throne in order to command animals to obey God's word. And moreover, He sends an evil spirit between men (Jud. 9:23) and stubborn hearts are also sent from God (Ps. 81:13). The same Angels who are sent to control the animals can also therefore work to give men certain attitudes of mind.

2Ch 18:22 Now therefore, behold, Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; and Yahweh has spoken evil concerning you-
This was exactly what Micaiah had said before about Ahab, and Ahab intuitively knew that this was coming.

2Ch 18:23 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near, and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way did the spirit of Yahweh go from me to speak to you?-
"Cheek" can be "ear". The idea was that Zedekiah implied Micaiah was saying that the spirit had left him and entered Micaiah through his ear. And so he smote that ear.

To strike on the cheek was the punishment for a heretic, and was applied to the Lord Jesus (Mic. 5:1).

2Ch 18:24 Micaiah said, Behold, you shall see on that day, when you shall go into an inner room to hide yourself-
When Ahab was defeated and slain, everyone in Samaria would be looking for the false prophets to kill them. Not least Jezebel. For the defeat would have been blamed upon them. So Zedekiah would have hid from shame and fear of being killed. There is a connection between Benhadad going into an inner room to hide when Ahab was given victory against him (1 Kings 20:30), and the false prophet Zedekiah going into an inner room to hide when Ahab was defeated (1 Kings 22:25). The same Hebrew words are used, and the connection becomes more apparent if we accept that 1 Kings 20 and 21 should be placed the other way around, as in LXX. This would mean that the hiding of Benhadad is recorded just a short time before that of Zedekiah. The connection would be to show that the false prophets were in fact bracketed together by God with Israel's enemies; whereas they had claimed that they were nationalists on Israel's side, proclaiming Israel's certain victory against their enemies. God sees not as man sees, and the real spiritual realities are often the very opposite of what appears.

2Ch 18:25 The king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son-
These men were those who ran the prison, for "carry him *back*" means Micaiah was already in prison. See on :8. Again we see how wrong Elijah had been to claim that no prophet of Yahweh existed apart from himself. Micaiah had gone to prison for speaking God's word to Ahab. But Elijah presumably considered there was some curious point of theology or matter of legal practice which enabled Elijah to rubbish Micaiah as not sincere and not a true prophet. It reminds us of how truly committed Christians who have gone to jail or even death for their witness... are trashed by others as somehow not the real Christians. And only they the critics are in fellowship with God. They really need to learn the lesson of Elijah. For he was ejected from his ministry because of those attitudes.

2Ch 18:26 Say, 'Thus says the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace'-
I suggest on :8,25 that he was already in prison for his faithful witness against Ahab. So the idea here seems to be that he was to be put in the inner prison and given a very tough regime.

2Ch 18:27 Micaiah said, If you return at all in peace, Yahweh has not spoken by me. He said, Listen, you peoples, all of you!-
If I were Micaiah, I think I would have just shrugged and remained silent, fearing the harsh regime of punishment in :26 could easily be changed into the death sentence. For Naboth had been slain for 'cursing the king'. But Micaiah bravely invites the large audience to listen and take note, because he seeks their conversion.

2Ch 18:28 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead-
The record is intentionally silent about the utter folly of Jehoshaphat in going ahead with this. He was keenly interested to 'know the truth' from God's word, and didn't want to hear false teaching. But when the truth was presented, he didn't follow it. We

can take a huge lesson from this. He allowed the intense pressure of the crowd of prophets, and his family relationship with Ahab as the in-law of his son, to lead him to walk right against the 'truth' he had sought. And there are many who seem to rejoice more in 'searching for the truth' than in actually following it when they are find it or have it presented to them.

2Ch 18:29 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and go into the battle; but you put on your robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went into the battle-
LXX even suggests that Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to wear Ahab's robes. The next verse describes why this was; Ahab was aware of the king of Syria's desire to resolve the issue by capturing or killing Ahab. The incident is a parade example of 'bad friends'. We marvel at Jehoshaphat's stupidity in agreeing. For surely he must have foreseen what could happen. This was the pressure he felt from Ahab and Jezebel, the in-laws of his son. And so often family pressure leads otherwise solid believers into uncharacteristic actions, seriously unwise behaviour and positions which are utterly the opposite of all they stand for. Because quite simply, they do not really commit to following God's word, even if they stand with their backs to the world.

2Ch 18:30 Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots saying, Fight neither with small nor great, except only with the king of Israel-
Only three years previously (see on 1 Kings 22:1), the king of Syria had been foolishly spared by Ahab. Perhaps he couldn't live down that humiliation, and wanted to kill the man who had shown him so much mercy. That again is absolutely true to observed human experience, and the record time and again is absolutely psychologically credible.

2Ch 18:31 It happened that when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, It is the king of Israel! Therefore they turned around to fight against him. But Jehoshaphat cried out, and Yahweh helped him; and God moved them to depart from him-
The Hebrew implies that they surrounded him. He was clearly "lucky" to escape with his life. It was only by Divine grace that he did. His 'crying out' was surely to God to save him from his foolishness; "and Yahweh helped him". We note that God's grace was shown through His acting directly upon the hearts of men to "move" them to an otherwise unnatural course of action. And so the grace of His Spirit works upon human hearts today.

2Ch 18:32 It happened, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him-
This was in response to his crying out to God for salvation in :31. And yet he was strongly rebuked by God in 2 Chron. 19:2. His actions provoked "the wrath of Yahweh", but God saved a man by grace whilst at the same time having great wrath against him. This is so different to human wrath and attempts to show grace, which seem usually to be displayed without any other pole of feeling in mind. But God had both in perfect balance at the same time. This is the wonder of His Name, which includes all these poles of feeling toward men within His personality.

2Ch 18:33 A certain man drew his bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armour. Therefore he said to the driver of the chariot, Turn

your hand, and carry me out of the army; for I am severely wounded-
The gaps in armour around vital organs would have been relatively small. This is evidence for all time that there is no such thing as "random". This was so clearly of God.

2Ch 18:34 The battle increased that day. However the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the evening. About the time of the going down of the sun, he died-
The weak minded Ahab genuinely wanted to do the best for his troops, and therefore remained in his chariot, propped up. Presumably Israelite soldiers knew where and who he was. It was this policy of not being removed from his chariot which resulted in the blood accumulating within it, which was required for the fulfilment of the prophecies about his blood (see on 1 Kings 22:38).

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 19

2Ch 19:1 Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem-
After the very close shave with death recorded in 2 Chron. 18, we can assume he returned shaking. But at peace with God.

2Ch 19:2 Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Should you help the wicked, and love those who hate Yahweh? Because of this, wrath is on you from before Yahweh-
This was major criticism. And yet when he dies, we read that "He walked in all the way of Asa his father; he didn't turn aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh" (1 Kings 22:43). Again we marvel at God's positive overall opinion of Jehoshaphat. For he rejected Yahweh's word in going to fight at Ramoth Gilead, and was condemned by God for working together with those who hated Him, and "therefore is wrath on you from before Yahweh". A man may fail repeatedly, as Jehoshaphat did in his relations with Ahab and allowing his son to marry Jezebel's daughter, and even experience God's wrath. And yet finally be judged as having done what was right in God's eyes. That doing of right may refer therefore not to a spotless track record of behaviour, but rather to a basic faith in God, repentance and what the New Testament calls "abiding in Him". It is not the dramatic ups and downs on the graph of human spirituality over time which are significant to God. It is the overall state of the heart. And we can take courage from this in our own lives, and be guided therefore not to think too highly of those who at specific points show great commitment, nor to think too lowly of those who fail in specific points of their journey. We also learn that some men die with weaknesses, such as not taking away the high places. But this does not necessarily tip the balance towards their condemnation. This needs to be factored in to our thinking about the spiritual fate of those who die committing suicide.

He was too close to Israel. His son married a daughter of Ahab (2 Chron. 18:1), and his insistence on supporting Ahab was seen as loving those who hated Yahweh, and the wrath of God was upon him because of it. And yet he is commended for having peace with the kings of Israel (1 Kings 22:44), even though that desire for peace with them led him into major sin. But he was judged as having a heart right with God (2 Chron. 19:3). We sense God weighting Jehoshaphat's sins with his relations with Israel against his genuine desire for peace within God's people. And

overall, as he was judged on the state of his heart, his desire for unity and peace was judged as his dominant desire. We simply cannot factor in or weight all the dimensions in a man's heart. Only God can. And the reason we are not to judge is because in fact we cannot judge, in that we don't have access to human hearts. See on :10.

2Ch 19:3 Nevertheless there are good things found in you, in that you have put away Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God-
This is the basis upon which he was judged positively at the end of his life (1 Kings 22:43). For all the ups and downs of his spiritual graph (see on :3), his heart basically was with God. His "set" or 'prepared' heart could be seen as a fulfilment of Solomon's prayer in 1 Chron. 29:18, where He asks God to keep the hearts of His people focused upon the temple, keeping it "in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and prepare their heart unto You". We see how God weighs up human hearts and actions. It is not that some "good things" outweigh bad things. That would be too simplistic, and ends up giving undue weight to works. So the emphasis is that good things were "found in you", within him, in his heart; and this is paralleled with setting his heart to seek God. It was this state of heart which more than counterbalanced his external sins of weakness in connection with Ahab.

2Ch 19:4 Jehoshaphat lived at Jerusalem. He went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and brought them back to Yahweh, the God of their fathers-
We recall how not so long ago, the people were rejoicing in giving the death sentence to any who didn't seek Yahweh (2 Chron. 15:13). I suggested this was on the cusp of religious extremism, and they were hypocritically uncommitted themselves. We note that he went out personally to appeal to the people, which is the best way of appeal. We note "Mount Ephraim" was the northern border of Judah, with Beersheba forming the southern border. However, Mount Ephraim was in Ephraim, and it could be that Jehoshaphat went there too, appealing even to the ten tribes.

2Ch 19:5 He set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city-
David had planned for 6000 Levitical "officers and judges" throughout Israel (1 Chron. 23:4). But clearly the Levites had failed to be as they should have been, and the system of judges had failed; this is another indication that David's final plans for the new religious system based around the temple never really worked out in practice.

2Ch 19:6 and said to the judges, Consider what you do. You don't judge for man, but for Yahweh; and He is with you in the judgment-
This suggests that Jehoshaphat was installing new judges; it's not that there were no judges before this time. Priests were to represent God, and to come before them was to come "before the Lord" (Dt. 19:17). The Lord Jesus was presented as a baby "before the Lord" (Lk. 2:22)- i.e. before the priest. Yahweh was "with" them in the judgment in that their judgments were to be guided by His revealed word, which was a source of His presence amongst them- as it is now.

2Ch 19:7 Now therefore let the fear of Yahweh be upon you. Be careful and do so; for there is no iniquity with Yahweh our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes-

This had presumably been a problem with the previous judges whom Jehoshaphat was now replacing (see on :6). This setting up of judges may have been in obedience to Dt. 16:18, whereas before this perhaps the judgment was done as in most primitive societies, by the heads of families. But that was bound to be open to "respect of persons" and bribes.

2Ch 19:8 Moreover in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed Levites and priests, and of the heads of the fathers' households of Israel, for the judgment of Yahweh, and for controversies-
The idea was that they judged cases which were handed up to them by the system of local judges described in :5-7. But LXX "And to judge the inhabitants of Jerusalem". "The judgment of Yahweh" may refer to interpretation of the Mosaic law, and "controversies" to interpersonal disputes. We note that "Levites" were to be part of this higher system of judges, and they are here differentiated from the priests. Levites were servants to the priests, but here they are invested with high authority. Those of the servant class were elevated to positions of senior judgment, and Paul has the same spirit in view in 1 Cor. 6:4. See on 2 Chron. 20:14.

David (2 Sam. 14:4; 15:3) and Solomon (1 Kings 3:16) appear to have concentrated all judgment in themselves, setting themselves up effectively as both king and priest, for the "judge" was to be a priest. Jehoshaphat reformed this by placing the power of judgment in the hands of a group of Levites, priests and heads of families as the higher court in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 19:7). But still Jehoshaphat didn't appoint a singular senior judge, as required in Dt. 17:9. We note from Dt. 19:17 that this singular priestly supreme judge is called "Yahweh", because he was to be Yahweh's supreme representative when it came to judgment. But it seems even the best kings of Judah preferred to keep that office in their own power.

They returned to Jerusalem-
LXX "And to judge the inhabitants of Jerusalem". If we follow the AV, then this was after Jehoshaphat's reforming tour of his land which began in :4.

2Ch 19:9 He commanded them saying, Thus you shall do in the fear of Yahweh, faithfully, and with a perfect heart-
"Perfect heart" may mean as in 1 Chron. 12:38, a united heart amongst all the judges.

2Ch 19:10 Whenever any controversy shall come to you from your brothers who dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and ordinances-
Judging between "blood and blood" (Dt. 17:8) may refer to judging whether between murder and manslaughter. Judgment between "law and commandment" may mean deciding which particular Mosaic law was appropriate in a given case.

You shall warn them, that they not be guilty towards Yahweh, and so wrath come on you and on your brothers-
We have just read this phrase in :2, where wrath came upon Jehoshaphat for his actions. Perhaps in humility because of this, he now hands over the judiciary to a system of judges rather than continuing to be the personal judge of Israel, as previous kings had been (see on :8).

Do this, and you shall not be guilty-
The idea seems to be that the judges would not be guilty if they judged according to information given which was in fact false. But those who made false testimony would have been warned that doing so meant facing Yahweh's judgment.

2Ch 19:11 Behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of Yahweh-
This may refer to Amariah, "Yah has spoken", who was to finally judge over all matters of interpretation of the Mosaic law.

And Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, in all the king's matters. The Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and may Yahweh be with the good-
Levites were servants to the priests, but here they are invested with high authority. Those of the servant class were elevated to positions of senior judgment, and Paul has the same spirit in view in 1 Cor. 6:4. Although the idea may be that they were waiting to operationalize the judgments handed down.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 20

2Ch 20:1 It happened after this that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the other Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle-
For "Ammonites", LXX and some texts read "the Mehunim", of 2 Chron. 26:7; 1 Chron. 4:41.

2Ch 20:2 Then some came who told Jehoshaphat saying, A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea from Syria. Behold, they are in Hazazon Tamar (that is, En Gedi)-
Some manuscripts read "from Edom", called "mount Seir" in :10, which would make better sense of them coming from En Gedi, with "the sea" then referring to the Dead Sea.. G.A. Smith explains that En Gedi was "on the west coast of the Dead Sea at a point where a rugged pass leads up into the hill country of Judah".

2Ch 20:3 Jehoshaphat was alarmed, and set himself to seek to Yahweh. He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah-
Fasts were typically proclaimed to call for repentance, as a result of calamity convicting people of sin. Jehoshaphat recognized that his reforms had not touched the soul of most of his people, and saw this invasion as a result of that. See on :10.

2Ch 20:4 Judah gathered themselves together to seek help from Yahweh. They came out of all the cities of Judah to seek Yahweh-
The people came to "seek help", but as explained on :3, Jehoshaphat realized that what was essentially needed was repentance.

2Ch 20:5 Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of Yahweh, before the new court-
Jehoshaphat stood not "in" but "before" this court, so it may refer to the court of the priests which had been rebuilt recently. Hence "new".

2Ch 20:6 and he said, Yahweh, the God of our fathers, aren't You God in heaven? Aren't You ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand, so that no one is able to stand against You-
To "stand against" is s.w. "stand with" or "before". Jehoshaphat 'stood' "before" Yahweh (:5). He feels his unworthiness to do this, and yet is aware that all the world likewise stands before Him, and cannot stand against Him. We note that God was

king of the Gentile world even then. For them to become His 'kingdom', as today, required a recognition that He is king, and to accept His position as their king and they as His subjects. In other words, to accept what is already potentially the situation. This aspect of the call of the Gospel of the Kingdom is often felt by those who truly respond to it, having previously known nothing of His ways.

2Ch 20:7 Didn't You, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and give it to the seed of Abraham Your friend forever?-
"Drive out" is s.w. "inherit" in :11. It is not the usual word for "drive out". If as suggested on :2 the invaders were from Edom, Ammon and Moab (:10), they too were the seed of Abraham. And it is all of them whom Jehoshaphat has in view here. They were called to be part of God's kingdom (see on :6). The idea is not, therefore. 'You drove out the Canaanites, do drive out these invaders now'. For the Canaanites were not the seed of Abraham. But these invaders were. These descendants of Abraham were to be defeated, Jehoshaphat argues, because they were trying to drive Judah out of the land which they too had been given to inherit (:11). So the grounds of their condemnation were not that they were Canaanites, but rather that they were forbidding other members of the seed a place in the inheritance. And there is a lesson for that in the warring members of the true seed of Abraham today.

2Ch 20:8 They lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name saying-
Jehoshaphat has great spirituality and faith at this point. But he retains the misunderstanding of David and Solomon, that the sanctuary or temple built was somehow a guarantee that God would always protect His people. God had explained that He didn't want them to build it, but rather wanted to build them a 'house' or family of humbled hearts, open to the operation of His Spirit. See on :28.

2Ch 20:9 If evil comes on us- the sword, judgment, plague or famine- we will stand before this house and before You, (for Your name is in this house), and cry to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save-
He is repeating the prayer of Solomon. But he also repeats the same misunderstanding, that the physical temple was some kind of talisman which would nudge God into saving His people from judgment even when they sinned. This was not the case. And the final destruction of the temple and captivity of the people was evidence enough of that.

2Ch 20:10 Now, consider the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned aside from them, and didn't destroy them-
This is starting to put the blame on God for allowing these people to still exist. But the reason for their invasion was because Judah had sinned, and Jehoshaphat realized that when he called for a fast (see on :3). But like us, he soon drifted away from that initial realization of sin and the need for repentance and salvation by grace. For from that height, he slips down into considering the temple as a physical talisman which would bring help (:8,9), and now he tries to rationalize the situation by even blaming God. Rather than retaining his sense of sin.

2Ch 20:11 See how they reward us, to come to cast us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit-
As discussed on :7, their behaviour was obnoxious because they too were the seed of

Abraham, but refused to allow Judah to have a place in the land promised to Abraham.

2Ch 20:12 Our God, will You not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that comes against us; neither know we what to do, but our eyes are toward You-
As discussed on :10, Jehoshaphat has slipped down from his initial sense that Judah have sinned and must desperately, urgently repent (:3). Now he is saying that those sent to judge Judah are sinners worthy of judgment. And yet he recognizes that he has no might against that judgment. And yet the history of Israel is full of faithful individuals and armies winning victories, with Yahweh's help, against far larger and stronger armies. Yet Jehoshaphat seems to lack that level of faith, and is simply "dismayed", which we will note on :15 seems to imply a lack of faith.

2Ch 20:13 All Judah stood before Yahweh, with their little ones, their wives and their children-
We see here how "all" in the Bible isn't always to be read literally. Representatives from a community are counted as "all" of it. "Little ones" seems here to mean babies.

2Ch 20:14 Then the Spirit of Yahweh came on Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, the Levite, of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly-
"Jahaziel", 'he who sees visions of God', is an example of a person having a name which was acquired due to later life experience, and was likely not the birth name. We note he was a Levite not from the priestly line, continuing the theme we saw developed in 2 Chron. 19:8,11 of Levites being chosen for exalted work. Levites were servants to the priests, but here they are invested with high authority.

2Ch 20:15 He said, Listen, all Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, king Jehoshaphat. Thus says Yahweh to you, 'Don't be afraid, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's-
I noted on :12 that Jehoshaphat's faith was rather weak and he appeared almost fatalistic. "The battle is... God's" is a quotation of David's words to Goliath in 1 Sam. 17:47. Being "dismayed and terrified" is the term used of how Israel generally were terrified of Goliath, whereas David by faith wasn't (1 Sam. 17:11). David in turn uses to his son Solomon (1 Chron. 22:13; 28:20). He was thereby urging Solomon not to worry if he was out of step with all Israel; if they were dismayed and terrified, he was still to walk in faith as David had done at the time of the Goliath crisis. It is also used to urge the people toward the spirit of David rather than that of Israel in 2 Chron. 20:15,17. The same phrase is also used in urging the people of Judah in Hezekiah's time to consider the Assyrians to be as a Goliath which they like David could vanquish (2 Chron. 32:7). The exiles likewise were urged not to be dismayed and terrified at the reproach of men (Is. 51:7; Jer. 30:10), very clearly making the history with Goliath relevant to their times.

2Ch 20:16 Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they are coming up by the ascent of Ziz. You shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel-
The valley refers to one of the ravines leading from the Dead Sea; see on :2.

2Ch 20:17 You will not need to fight this battle. Set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of Yahweh with you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Don't be afraid, nor be dismayed. Go out against them tomorrow, for Yahweh is with you'-
To "stand still and see" was the language of the invitation to behold the miracle of the salvation at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13, cp. 1 Sam. 12:16 and see note there). Yahweh was "with you" whilst they were with Him (2 Chron. 15:2), and yet it seems the faith of the people was weak, and they had been called to radical repentance in :3. But by grace, Yahweh was with them despite this. Just as they had stood still and seen His salvation at the Red Sea whilst they were still clutching the idols of Egypt (according to Ez. 20). And Jehoshaphat grasped that, saying that the victory was to be by grace (:21).

2Ch 20:18 Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before Yahweh, worshipping Yahweh-
This was an act of great faith in the prophetic word. For at that point there was no visible evidence that this victory would happen.

2Ch 20:19 The Levites, of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites, stood up to praise Yahweh, the God of Israel, with an exceeding loud voice-
This again, as noted on :19, was the joy of deep faith. For there was no evidence that the victory would happen. That had to be taken on absolute faith. They didn't just 'wait and see', they proactively rejoiced.

2Ch 20:20 They rose early in the morning and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa. As they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Listen to me, Judah, and you inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in Yahweh your God, so you shall be established!-
The word was and is God. Dt. 4:12 [Heb.] says that Israel heard God's voice and saw no similitude *save* a voice. To hear the word is to in that sense see God; for the word was and is God. There are other connections between seeing God and hearing His word in Ex. 20:21 and 1 Kings 19:12-14. Observe the parallelism in 2 Chron. 20:20: "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper". Our attitude to God is our attitude to His word. Because the word is so pure, *therefore* we love it (Ps. 119:140). John Carter rightly observed: "Upon our understanding of what the Bible is, our attitude to it will be determined".

Believe His prophets, so you shall prosper-
The false prophets had told Ahab and Jehoshaphat to go up and fight at Ramoth Gilead, "for Yahweh will deliver it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:12). But Jehoshaphat had nearly lost his life, because he had refused to hear the voice of the one true prophet of Yahweh. So the emphasis is upon believing Yahweh's prophets, and not false prophets. By saying this, Jehoshaphat shows he had learned from his mistake.

2Ch 20:21 When he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who should sing to Yahweh and give praise in holy array, as they went out before the army, and say, Give thanks to Yahweh; for His grace endures forever-
This is really a parade example of believing that you receive what you ask for, before the answer arrives. And feeling you have received it. It seems they sung Ps. 136, glorying in the victory which was not then theirs. The vanguard were singing Levites,

as in the victory over Jericho. Indeed "before the army" appears to allude to Josh. 6:7,9.

2Ch 20:22 When they began to sing and to praise, Yahweh set ambushers against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were struck-
It was exactly at the moment that they began to praise God for a victory which seemed impossible, that Yahweh began to destroy them. The ambushers could have been Angels appearing as men. Or more likely, the people of Esau / Edom (see on :2) began fighting amongst themselves (:23). It could be however that as in Josh. 8:2, God told Jehoshaphat to set an ambush against the enemy, which resulted in them fighting each other.

2Ch 20:23 For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to kill and destroy them. When they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, each one helped to destroy another-
This is typical of how God so often destroyed Israel's enemies (e.g. Jud. 7:22), and how He will work in the last days. They destroy each other, just as men bring about their own judgment rather than being simply judged by God.

2Ch 20:24 When Judah came to the place overlooking the wilderness, they looked at the multitude which were now dead bodies fallen to the earth, and there were none who escaped-
As they came to the edge of the cliff, down which they had to descend in full view of the enemy they expected, their faith was at maximum stretch. We wonder whether the singers of confident praise for the promised victory... just slightly quavered as they approached it. But faith was rewarded. AV "came toward the watchtower" may refer to one of the castles built by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:12).

2Ch 20:25 When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found among them in abundance both riches and dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away. They were three days in taking the spoil, it was so much-
The presence of so much wealth amongst the attackers was doubtless a reason they fought each other.

2Ch 20:26 On the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Beracah; for there they blessed Yahweh. Therefore the name of that place is called The valley of Beracah to this day-
This may be the "valley of Jehoshaphat" which will feature in the latter day destruction of Israel's enemies (Joel 3:2,12).

2Ch 20:27 Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in their forefront, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for Yahweh had made them to rejoice over their enemies-
God's psychological influencing of people is a parade example of how His Spirit works upon the human spirit. They rejoiced before the battle with the same joy they experienced after it. Truly they believed they had already received what they had asked for (Mk. 11:24).

2Ch 20:28 They came to Jerusalem with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets to the house of Yahweh-
This returning to Jerusalem recalls how Jehoshaphat had earlier returned to Jerusalem in shame after the conflict at Ramoth Gilead. He ought to have learned that without association with the ten tribes, he would return to Jerusalem with joy. However we note that they came to the temple with their praise. On one hand this was appropriate, but we sense that for all their faith, they had still not learned the lesson that the temple was not in fact the source of their victory. See on :8.9.

2Ch 20:29 The fear of God was on all the kingdoms of the countries, when they heard that Yahweh fought against the enemies of Israel-
The fear of Yahweh coming upon those cities was the promised reward for obedience (Dt. 11:25), and recalls the terror which fell upon the cities around Jacob at the time of Gen. 35:5. But that terror didn't come because Israel were righteous at that time; in fact the opposite. For they had just massacred Shechem. Likewise here, these blessings were by grace, for Judah were not so righteous at this time (:33); and reflected Yahweh's extreme sensitivity to any faith and obedience toward Him.

2Ch 20:30 So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; for his God gave him rest all around-
As in 2 Chron. 15;15, peace with the surrounding nations is seen as a result of spiritual blessing. This also implies that the invasion they had just experienced was indeed due to their serious sins (see on :3).

2Ch 20:31 Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah: he was thirty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi-
Kings notes that he "began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel", but Chronicles seems to not mention Ahab, nor use the apostate kings of Israel as a time marker for the reigns of the kings of Judah. Perhaps in exile, when Chronicles was written or rewritten, they realized that it was thanks to the influence of the kings of Israel that Judah had fallen away from Yahweh. "Azubah" means 'forsaking' and may mean that although his mother forsook Yahweh, Jehoshaphat in the end was loyal to Him in his heart.

2Ch 20:32 He walked in the way of Asa his father, and didn't turn aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh-
Jehoshaphat did externally turn aside, in his trust in Ahab and association with the apostate ten tribes. His behaviour incited the wrath of God against him- serious language. See on 2 Chron. 19:2. But God saw that in his heart, he didn't swerve from Him; and He considered those heart positions as being the 'doing' which is all important to Him. This idea is continued in :33, where we learn God's overall judgment upon Judah at this time was that their hearts were not with Him- despite their great faith shown in the conflict earlier in this chapter. Peaks of faith and works are not the same as a core heart position.

2Ch 20:33 However the high places were not taken away; neither as yet had the people set their hearts to the God of their fathers-
Israel never really wholeheartedly committed themselves to Yahweh, and yet 2

Chron. 20:33 AV positively and hopefully says: "*As yet* the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers". They never did. Especially in the preaching of the word of salvation to those who they knew wouldn't respond, the Father and Son show their hopeful spirit. We therefore conclude that the apparent blessings upon the people for obedience were by grace, or perhaps from Divine respect for Jehoshaphat's faithful heart. For their hearts were not set upon their God.

Asa and Jehoshaphat removed the high places, but in a sense they didn't (1 Kings 15:14 cp. 2 Chron. 14:5; 17:6 cp. 20:33). We read of how the land was purged of Baal, Sodomites etc.; but in a very short time, we read of another purge being necessary. Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah all made major purges within a space of 80 years. Jeremiah therefore condemns the Jews who lived at the time of Josiah's reformation for not *knowing* God in their hearts. Asa gathered the gold and silver vessels back into the temple- and then went and used them to make a political treaty. He *apparently* treated them as God's riches, but then in reality he used them as his own (1 Kings 15:18, 15). Many a Western Christian has this very same tendency. We too must ask ourselves whether our spirituality is really just a product of the crowd mentality; as the crowd shouted one day "Hosanna to the Son of David", a few days later they wanted Jesus to be delivered rather than Barabbas, but within minutes they were persuaded to cry for the crucifixion of the Son of God. Church life, Bible studies, the breaking of bread... inevitably, there is a crowd mentality developed here. There is a feeling of devotion which wells up within us as a community, as an audience, as we sit there, as we stand in praise and worship together. But the *real* spirituality is far deeper than this. We must seriously ask whether our spirituality, our feelings of devotion, our true repentance, are *only* stimulated by these meetings?

2Ch 20:34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the history of Jehu the son of Hanani, which is inserted in the book of the kings of Israel-

The prophet Jehu rebuked Baasha (1 Kings 16:1) and yet he also wrote a history of Jehoshaphat's reign (2 Chron. 20:34), implying that he outlived Jehoshaphat. This means that Jehu must have been a young man at the time of his rebuke of Baasha. It's hard to keep on keeping on in ministry over a long lifetime, and those who do should be deeply respected.

2Ch 20:35 After this, Jehoshaphat king of Judah joined himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly-

He was so slow to learn the lesson that he should not work together with the apostate ten tribe kingdom. He had almost lost his life because of this whilst fighting at Ramoth Gilead. And like us, the situations were repeated, but he was so slow to learn.

2Ch 20:36 He joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish; and they made the ships in Ezion Geber-

1 Kings 22:48 "*to go to Ophir for gold*". Despite the wealth God gave Jehoshaphat, even he was tempted by the desire for more. This has to be a warning to all generations.

"Ships of Tarshish" is clearly a technical term for a long distance trading vessel. "Tarshish" appears to have been the source of gold, peacocks, silver etc., which are only found together in southern India. But a ship of Tarshish wasn't necessarily a ship which went to Tarshish. "Tarshish" means 'endurance' and refers to vessels which had

a capacity for long distance trading. At that time, India was the end of the earth for someone living in Israel. There is an analogous situation with how 19th century long distance trading vessels were known as "Indiamen", not because they necessarily sailed the routes to India, but because they were long distance vessels of the kind which had sailed to India. This is why 'going to Tarshish' in 2 Chron. 20:36,37 is paralleled with 'going to Ophir in ships of Tarshish' in 1 Kings 22:48.

"Ophir" may have been a generic name for areas to the east, including southern Arabia (famed for gold in Ps. 72:15; Ez. 27:22) and India; Ophir was in Arabia according to Gen. 10:29. Sheba was nearby and was famed for gold, so it was through this trading that the Queen of Sheba heard of the wisdom of Solomon. 1 Kings 10:1 goes on to speak of her after mentioning gold of Ophir in 1 Kings 9:28, connecting her with this gold trade with Ophir. But 1 Kings 10:11 connects Ophir with "almug trees and precious stones". "Almug" appears to refer to sandalwood, "the Hebraized form of the Deccan word for sandal". This points to "Ophir" as being in the east, possibly as far as the Indian coast where these trees grow.

2Ch 20:37 Then Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat saying, Because you have joined yourself with Ahaziah, Yahweh has destroyed your works. The ships were broken, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish-

"Broken" is literally 'broken forth'. It is used of God as it were lashing out in sudden judgment (1 Chron. 13:11). He was so patient with Jehoshaphat regarding his abiding weakness of association with wicked people, even though his core heart position was with Yahweh. 1 Kings 22:49 suggests that the ships were broken because Jehoshaphat refused Ahaziah's offer of more experienced sailors. So perhaps the ships were destroyed by a storm as soon as they left, which Ahaziah blamed upon inexperienced sailors from Judah. The ships had to be broken by the wind / storm of God's wrath, perhaps in the form of a gale. But according to 1 Kings, when Ahaziah proposes another join venture, Jehoshaphat apparently learns the lesson. I say apparently, because after Ahaziah dies, Jehoshaphat again repeats the same mistake with Ahab's other son Jehoram (2 Kings 3:7). And yet he was finally counted righteous with God because his basic state of heart was for Him. We marvel again at God's patience with men. This means that we are to continue seeking the repentance of men and never cut them off, as is typically done by small minded churches 'disfellowshipping' people.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 21

2Ch 21:1 Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Jehoram his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ch 21:2 He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael and Shephatiah. All these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel-

They all God's Name in their names, but it seems it was spirituality in name only. Jehoshaphat himself held on in faith, but his wrong association with the ten tribes led to the spiritual destruction of his family.

2Ch 21:3 Their father gave them great gifts, of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn-
We could infer from this that they were perhaps spoilt. Wealth never brought blessing to this family. His careful arrangements to try to split things up fairly were presumably because he thought this would stop them arguing amongst themselves. But it didn't work out at all; Jehoram killed all his brothers (:4).

2Ch 21:4 Now when Jehoram was risen up over the kingdom of his father, and had strengthened himself, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and various also of the princes of Israel-
See on :3. This continues a theme, of the kings of Judah strengthening or fortifying themselves, often when they first became king; but then having that human strength tested by God or removed. The same word is used repeatedly (1 Chron. 11:10; 2 Chron. 11:11,17; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 23:1; 25:3,11; 26:8,15; 29:3; 32:5). The lesson of course was that it is God's Angelic eyes who run to and fro in the land promised to Abraham, "to shew Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

2Ch 21:5 Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem-
Putting together 2 Kings 1:17; 3:1; 8:3,16;2 Chron. 21:5,20, it seems Jehoram became king as regent about two years before Jehoshaphat died.

2Ch 21:6 He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab as wife: and he did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh-
His wife was Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri (2 Chron. 22:2; 2 Kings 8:26). "Athaliah", 'Yah has constrained', may mean that she was bitter that Yahweh had as it were limited her; the same groundless complaint as in 2 Cor. 6:12.

2Ch 21:7 However Yahweh would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and as He promised to give a lamp to him and to his children always-
That promise was understood by God at this stage as meaning that a descendant of David would continue to reign on David's throne "always", and therefore He did not destroy Judah. However, He did eventually. He reinterpreted and reapplied His words of promise. And He does this often with the various possible futures prophesied. His word is not proven false but He reapplies it, as He continues His purpose with respect for the freewill decisions of man.

2Ch 21:8 In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves-
A sad decline from the situation in his father's time (2 Chron. 17:10).

2Ch 21:9 Then Jehoram passed over with his captains, and all his chariots with him. He rose up by night, and struck the Edomites who surrounded him, along with the captains of the chariots-
We note that horses and chariots were forbidden to Israel's king (Dt. 17:17,18). Yet it seems that his chariots and captains prevailed against those of Edom, even when he

was surrounded and about to be defeated. Perhaps this was a repeat of the situations of 2 Chron. 13:15; 18:31, where weak believers in their time of need called to God when surrounded by enemies, and were heard. This reflects God's deep sensitivity to faith in Him, even in time of desperation. And yet His final judgment is of the state of a person's heart. 2 Kings 8:21 locates the battle as being at Zair.

2Ch 21:10 So Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time from under his hand, because he had forsaken Yahweh, the God of his fathers-
Libnah was a priestly city (1 Chron. 6:47), but the tribes seem to have given the Levites towns which were not particularly valuable to them, or which were exposed to attack. Contrary to the spirit of David, they offered to God that which cost them nothing. And we must take a lesson from that. Some manuscripts read “Then did the Edomites who dwelt in Libnah revolt”. So Libnah had been taken over by Edomites and was formerly only technically under Israelite control.

2Ch 21:11 Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and made the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the prostitute, and led Judah astray-
What a contrast with Ps. 125:2 "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds His people from this time forth and forever". The hills around Jerusalem are not huge mountains. They are small hills, and this is the picture of God's protection; not hugely visible, but there. But the mountains around Jerusalem became the "high places" of idolatry (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13; 2 Chron. 21:11); what should have been the symbols of Yahweh's protection became perverted.

2Ch 21:12 A letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says Yahweh, the God of David your father, ‘You have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah-
This confirms our position elsewhere that Elijah was dramatically snatched away into the sky as a sign that Elisha had now replaced him as Yahweh's lead prophet. But that didn't mean that he died or was taken to heaven (cp. Jn. 3:13). He returned to earth, as the sons of the prophets expected him to. Now, as an old man, perhaps still living in the ten tribes, he continued his ministry although on a more low key level. He didn't visit Judah but rather sent the Divine message as a letter. The style of the words recorded here is absolutely that of Elijah the Tishbite, although it is conceivable that this could refer to another prophet called Elijah.

2Ch 21:13 but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the prostitute like the house of Ahab did, and also have slain your brothers of your father’s house, who were better than yourself-
Clearly enough, we can make others sin. Even though their sin is their responsibility before God, those who lead people into sin are particularly culpable before Him. This is a very common Biblical theme, and we need to analyze our behaviour very carefully in this respect.

2Ch 21:14 Therefore, Yahweh will strike with a great plague your people and your children and your wives, and all your substance-
This continues the theme of :13, that human actions have huge impact upon others. This is a repeated Biblical teaching, and the fact God has structured human experience like this is in order that we should be highly sensitive in our actions towards others.

We all have far more influence over others than we might imagine, and will be accountable for it.

2Ch 21:15 and you shall have great sickness by disease of your bowels, until your bowels fall out by reason of the sickness, day by day'-
This description of his sickness, although not medically correct, implied that what was within his innermost being ["bowels" is at times used by metonymy for the heart] will come out, resulting in death. And consistently in these biographies of the kings, it is their hearts which are the basis of their judgment.

2Ch 21:16 Yahweh stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians who are beside the Ethiopians-
This is the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers today, and it was and will be seen in the revival of the dead bones of Israel. Not visible miracles, but internal mental working. And that Spirit can be resisted, as it was by many of the exiles; for we are not mere puppets in God's hand. Yet grace means that God takes the initiative; "He first loved us". That initiative is seen through His working on the human heart in calling us to action (s.w. 2 Chron. 21:16; Is. 13:17; Jer. 50:41; Joel 3:9) and Cyrus was a parade example of this (Is. 41:2,25, 45:13). The hearts of the returnees were likewise stirred up. But this was not some irresistible manipulation of the human person; Zion was called to be stirred up ["awake"], but she refused to be stirred up (Is. 51:17; 52:1 cp. Is. 64:7). Zerubbabel had his mind or "spirit" stirred up to be the king-priest Messianic figure (Hag. 1:14); but he let the baton drop.

2Ch 21:17 They came up against Judah and broke into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also and his wives; so that there was no son left him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons-
Ahaziah is Jehoahaz (2 Chron. 21:17), Azariah (2 Chron. 22:6) and Ahaziah (1 Chron. 3:11); a reminder that people carried multiple names, which explains many of the so called contradictions in the genealogies.

2Ch 21:18 After all this Yahweh struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease-
The great "plague" of :14. The claim of Solomon that prayer to or in the temple would cure such plagues (2 Chron. 6:28,29) is therefore again proven to be wrong. His idea that the temple was a kind of talisman was so wrong.

2Ch 21:19 It happened, in process of time, at the end of two years, that his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness, and he died of severe diseases. His people made no burning for him, like the burning for his fathers-
See on :15. Perhaps those two years of sickness were in order to give him the opportunity to repent. For God makes a statement of judgment, but in the gap between that and its fulfilment, there is the possibility of repentance. And then the outcome will be changed. We could take the lesson that God by all means works to try to elicit repentance in the most apparently hopeless of cases. For the good shepherd searches until he finds the lost. We likewise are never to give up with people.

2Ch 21:20 Thirty-two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He departed without being desired; and they buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings-
"But not in the tombs of the kings" (2 Chron. 21:20) contrasts with the Kings record

that he “was buried with his fathers”. But this shows that to be 'buried with ones fathers' was an idiom for death, and not a literal statement that a person was buried near the remains of their ancestors.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 22

2Ch 22:1 The inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place; for the band of men who came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the older ones. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned-
It could be that this band of men had preserved Ahaziah and were seeking for him to be a puppet king for them. LXX "the Arabians of Mazin". The usual rubric "and X his son was king in his place” is not quite followed here. It seems the succession was somehow questionable. And the fact his mother immediately took the throne after his death hints again at this.

2Ch 22:2 Forty-two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Athaliah the daughter of Omri-
In fact the granddaughter of Omri. "Athaliah", 'Yah has constrained', may mean that she was bitter that Yahweh had as it were limited her; the same groundless complaint as in 2 Cor. 6:12. Ahaziah was 22 years old when he began to reign (2 Kings 8:26), but 42 in 2 Chron. 22:2. LXX has 20. But in Biblical Hebrew, numbers were expressed by single letters, and *mem,* forty, is very similar in orthography to *caph*, twenty. And that difference is even more probable in ancient Hebrew or 'Samaritan'. So this appears to be a case of where there were indeed slight errors in copying the Divinely inspired text.

2Ch 22:3 He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly-
His father had done the same (2 Chron. 21:6). So much sin and spiritual failure is due to a refusal to individuate from parental influence and be an independent person before God. "Counsellor" suggests she specifically instructed him in the ways of idolatry; and it was by listening to the wrong counsel that Rehoboam went wrong when the kingdom of Judah first began (s.w. 2 Chron. 10:8,9).

2Ch 22:4 He did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, as did the house of Ahab; for they were his counsellors after the death of his father, to his destruction-
The word for "counsellor" is associated with rulership and kingship; a king's counsellors were effectively the kings (Is. 1:26; 9:6; Ezra 7:28; 8:25; Job 3:14), and often in the Bible, the counsel of men is contrasted with that of God. We feel this tension too; for the counsel of God is so often different and opposed to the counsel of the majority of those looked up to for secular advice and counsel. See on 2 Chron. 25:16.

2Ch 22:5 He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram-
Ahaziah was clearly intended to have learned from the experience of Jehoshaphat, who also went to war with Syria at Ramoth Gilead and was nearly slain there. He was only saved by grace, and afterwards experienced God's wrath for going there (2 Chron. 16:2). Circumstances and similarities repeat within our lives, and between our

lives and those of people in the Biblical histories, in order that we might learn. Jehoram is called "Joram" within this same verse, perhaps because the name of God was no longer part of his name in practice.

2Ch 22:6 He returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which they had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick-
As noted on :5, Ahaziah failed to perceive the similarities with the situation of Jehoshaphat.

2Ch 22:7 Now the destruction of Ahaziah was of God, in that he went to Joram; for when he had come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom Yahweh had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab-
There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

Ahaziah was Ahab's grandson because of the intermarriage between the rulers of Israel and Judah. So Jehu did have a commission to kill him. But it would seem that Ahaziah could have avoided this had he not shown unity with Joram by visiting him when he was sick. Such is the flexibility of God's purpose, with so many potentials built into it, ever respecting the possibility of human repentance.

2Ch 22:8 It happened, when Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, that he found the princes of Judah, and the sons of the brothers of Ahaziah, ministering to Ahaziah, and killed them-
These were the very men who gave Ahaziah the wrong counsel to go and fight at Ramoth Gilead, and to worship the idols of Israel. There is no guilt by association taught in the Bible, but there is the fairly obvious teaching that we must be separate from the ways of those who are under Divine judgment. We are to come out of Babylon lest we be consumed in the judgment for her sins, we are to be separate from those whose bad company will corrupt us (1 Cor. 15:33).

2Ch 22:9 He sought Ahaziah, and they caught him (now he was hiding in Samaria), and they brought him to Jehu, and killed him-
Putting the records together, it seems that Ahaziah fled in his chariot through the garden house road (2 Kings 9:27), avoiding Jehu's call to slay him in his chariot. He got to Samaria and hid somewhere, Jehu's men searched for him and found him (2 Chron. 22:9), brought him to Jehu who was then "by Ibleam" (2 Kings 9:27), who struck him so hard that he eventually died of it, but he managed to again escape in his chariot to Megiddo, where he died of the wounds inflicted by Jehu.

They buried him, for they said, He is the descendant of Jehoshaphat, who sought Yahweh with all his heart. The house of Ahaziah had no power to hold the kingdom-
They perceived the truth of God's overall judgment of Jehoshaphat, that his heart was

with Yahweh, but it was his wrong associations with Israel which led to all this judgment upon his descendants.

2Ch 22:10 Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal seed of the house of Judah-
So obsessed was she with personal power that she killed her own relatives, perhaps her own children, in order to establish herself as the only living heir to David's throne. The royal family had already been depleted because of the murders of 2 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 21:4,17. She saw the significance of the promises to David, but twisted them into mere religion. For she was an idolater, Jezebel's daughter.

2Ch 22:11 But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were slain, and put him and his nurse in the bedroom. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from Athaliah, so that she didn't kill him-
In a sense, God's entire purpose through the line and seed of David depended upon the quick thinking of a young woman, and was concentrated in this small baby. For "all the royal seed" had been slain (:10). Her name means 'sworn to Jehovah', and this likely represents her later character rather than her birth name. She came from a bad background, but was married to the high priest (although we note Jehoiada is not listed in the list of high priests in 1 Chron. 6). "The bedroom" is better "the chamber of the beds", perhaps a room in the temple (:12) used for the storage of old beds and furniture. Or maybe this was where he was temporarily hidden, before being moved to somewhere in the temple (:12). We marvel at how Jehoiada kept his own faith in Yahweh strong (2 Chron. 23:1), although surely he must have been somewhat of an underground believer at this time.

2Ch 22:12 He was with them hidden in God's house six years; and Athaliah reigned over the land-
The temple was likely relatively disused, as Athaliah was such a strong worshipper of Baal. Therefore Joash later had to majorly repair it. However in 2 Chron. 23:1-8 we do read of its usage, but perhaps not as it was before. It could be inferred from 2 Chron. 23:18 that the burnt offerings were not offered during Athaliah's dictatorship. And 2 Chron. 24:7 is clear: "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up God's house". See on 2 Chron. 24:13 for the extent of the damage done. So they hid the child in one of the disused chambers for the priests of Yahweh, who likely were not regularly officiating any more at that time. We note how Jehoshabeath and her husband Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron. 22:11) would have had access to both the palace and the temple because of their positions. And although they must have been underground believers to some extent, they used their connections well, to keep alive the line of David. Joash became king at seven, so he was a one year old baby when saved from Athaliah.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 23

2Ch 23:1 In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him-

The five men and their followers of 2 Chron. 23:1 match the description of three "third parts" and another "two parts" in 2 Kings 11:5-7. The corroboration between the records, clearly written by different hands, reflects the Divine inspiration of the record. The names of all these men include the name of God. To overthrow Athaliah was a risky undertaking and their faith and commitment to the Davidic line was very strong. 2 Kings 11:4 says Jehoiada was supported by the "Carites", the Cherethites of 2 Sam. 20:23.

2Ch 23:2 They went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the heads of fathers' households of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem-
This must have all been arranged secretly and without Athaliah's knowledge. The use of both terms "Judah" and "Israel" would suggest there was support for this spiritual revival even amongst the ten tribes. Although Jehoiada and his wife Jehoshabeath (2 Chron. 22:11) would have been underground believers to some extent, they used their connections well to create a wide groundswell of support for the putsch, even amongst the ten tribes. For Jehoshabeath was related to the house of Ahab and had connections there. And so many believers in otherwise very worldly situations have quietly used their connections likewise to forward God's true way upon earth.

2Ch 23:3 All the assembly made a covenant with the king in God's house. He said to them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as Yahweh has spoken concerning the sons of David-
The promise that David would not want a man to sit upon his throne (2 Chron. 6:16; 7:18 etc.) was understood as requiring human faith and action to fulfil. Jehoiada could have reasoned that God would fulfil His promise in His own way, without the help of man. But His purpose is not deterministic, nor is it imposed upon man. The promise that Abraham's seed should eternally inherit the earth requires individual faith and the exercise of freewill from the members of that seed. Paul likewise understood the promise that Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles as requiring him to take that light to the Gentiles.

2Ch 23:4 This is the thing that you shall do. A third part of you, who come in on the Sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters at the thresholds-
Chronicles stresses the role of the Levites (2 Chron. 23:2,4) whereas Kings hardly mentions them in the record. Clearly Chronicles is largely a history of the priesthood and Levites, written up in captivity to encourage the Levites to return to Judah and revive Yahweh worship there. Comparing with :8, the idea is that the Levites had a changeover of shifts that Sabbath. Those who were going off shift were to remain, so that there would be a larger number of them present.

It seems that the Kings records speaks of three battalions of royal guards, one of which was on duty, and the others later brought into the temple by Jehoiada (2 Chron. 23:7). Whereas Chronicles has three battalions of Levitical temple guards / doorkeepers. They could be the same groups, but it seems easier to read them as separate. This would mean that somehow Jehoiada had persuaded even Athaliah's own bodyguards to betray her.

2Ch 23:5 A third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation. All the people shall be in the courts of Yahweh's house-
"The king's house" isn't the royal palace; for in any case, Athaliah was a queen and not a king. It refers to the place where the king Joash was hiding. The Gate of the

Foundation was apparently near the valley separating Moriah from the hill opposite it, literally "the gate of Sur", mentioned in 2 Kings 11:6. But "Svr" may be "Svs", the horse gate, which is that of 2 Chron. 23:15; 2 Kings 11:16.

2Ch 23:6 But let no one come into the house of Yahweh, except the priests, and those who minister of the Levites. They shall come in, for they are holy, but all the people shall follow Yahweh's instructions-
It would have been tempting to plan this putsch through all the people being within the temple, but Jehoiada refused to allow military and political expediency to take away from the need to "follow Yahweh's instructions" and respect His holiness. And that is a lesson for us. See on :9. yet Kings says that the royal guards, apparently non Levites, did enter the temple. This would be one reason for considering the three groups of royal guards to be the same as the three groups of Levitical guards.

2Ch 23:7 The Levites shall surround the king, every man with his weapons in his hand. Whoever comes into the house, let him be slain. Be with the king when he comes in, and when he goes out-
The whole putsch was a risky undertaking, and Jehoiada was aware of the possibility of armed opposition from Athaliah's loyalists. The Levites were armed, presumably with weapons like knives or whatever they could get hold of. Perhaps this command foresaw how Athaliah would come running into the temple (:12) and should therefore be slain.

2Ch 23:8 So the Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. They took every man his men, those who were to come in on the Sabbath, with those who were to go out on the Sabbath; for Jehoiada the priest didn't dismiss the shift-
Comparing with :4, the idea is that the Levites had a changeover of shifts that Sabbath. Those who were going off shift were to remain, so that there would be a larger number of them present. "All Judah" refers to the representatives of all Judah who were present (:2). "All" in the Bible often refers not to literally everybody but to representatives of the "all". The taking of the Gospel to "all the world" must surely be understood in that way. "The Levites and all Judah" is therefore matched in 2 Kings 11 by "the captains over the hundreds".

2Ch 23:9 Jehoiada the priest delivered to the captains of hundreds the spears, large shields and shields that had been king David's, which were in God's house-
Possibly the shields of gold David had taken and dedicated at the time of 2 Sam. 8:7,11. Gold represents faith, and they were probably not very functional for combat. But this whole putsch was on the basis of faith and not secular strength and wisdom. See on :6.

2Ch 23:10 He set all the people, each man with his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, along by the altar and the house, surrounding the king-
This would be the altar of burnt offering in the outer court. "All the people" refers to those other than the priests and Levites who had agreed to help in the putsch.

2Ch 23:11 Then they brought out the king's son and put the crown on him, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. Jehoiada and his sons anointed him; and they

said, Long live the king!-
"The testimony" was a copy of the law the king was supposed to write out when he became king, but it had presumably been written out for him (Dt. 17:18-20).

2Ch 23:12 When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of Yahweh-
See on :7. Any who came into the temple were to be slain, and it seems Jehoiada set her up to do just what she did. That this was all pulled off right under her nose was quite an achievement.

2Ch 23:13 She looked, and, behold, the king stood by his pillar at the entrance-
Heb. 'pedestal', a kind of podium, considering he was only seven years old and small.

And the captains and the trumpets by the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew trumpets. The singers also played musical instruments, and led the singing of praise. Then Athaliah tore her clothes, and said, Treason! Treason!-
"Treason" is literally "conspiracy". She realized all too late that a huge conspiracy had been going on under her nose.

2Ch 23:14 Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds who were set over the army and said to them, Bring her out between the ranks; and whoever follows her, let him be slain with the sword. For the priest said, Don't kill her in Yahweh's house-
This confirms the suggestion that the command in :7 to slay whoever entered Yahweh's house was planned with Athaliah in view. "The ranks" would likely refer to the ranks of soldiers; or possibly to the temple precincts.

2Ch 23:15 So they made way for her. She went to the entrance of the horse gate to the king's house; and they killed her there-
Making way for her suggests they all restrained themselves from touching her, the unclean, until she was outside the temple. It would have been an awful last walk to her death. I suggested on 2 Chron. 23:5 that "the horse gate" is the same as the "gate of the foundation".

2Ch 23:16 Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people, and the king, that they should be Yahweh's people-
"Between himself" (2 Chron. 23:16) suggests Jehoiada was absolutely representing Yahweh; 2 Kings says the covenant was between Yahweh and the people. The Bible is full of examples of where men function as God and functionally represent Him to man. But this didn't make them God Himself in person. And it is within this context that we must read the passages which likewise speak of the Lord Jesus as functioning as God- without being God Himself.

2Ch 23:17 All the people went to the house of Baal and broke it down, and broke his altars and his images in pieces, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars-
The allusion is to how "all the people" were to put to death those who incited others to idolatry (Dt. 13:9). It seems that the temple of Baal had been built near the temple, just as Solomon had built such idol temples near to the temple.

2Ch 23:18 Jehoiada appointed the officers of the house of Yahweh under the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of Yahweh, to offer

the burnt offerings of Yahweh, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David-
This was really a case of reappointing officers to fulfil the original intentions of David for the temple. It could be inferred that the burnt offerings had not been offered during Athaliah's dictatorship.

2Ch 23:19 He set the porters at the gates of the house of Yahweh, that no one who was unclean in any matter should enter in-
The porters would refer to the arrangements David made in 1 Chron. 16. The word can mean porters or gatekeepers. ecclesia is the temple of God. In the past, gatekeepers checked who came in. Yet as time went by, the gatekeepers let Gentiles in, people who were not in God's covenant: and this was the basis of their condemnation (Ez. 44:7,8). Probably they did so in a misguided conception of "love" towards the surrounding world.

2Ch 23:20 He took the captains of hundreds, and the nobles, and the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought down the king from the house of Yahweh. They came through the upper gate to the king's house, and set the king on the throne of the kingdom-
"The upper gate" of 2 Chron. 23:20 is in Kings "the gate of the guard".

2Ch 23:21 So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet. Athaliah they had slain with the sword-
Quietness or peace is often associated with obedience. We read of this at least twice during Jehoshaphat's reign. Going God's way is the only way to true peace; although that peace is juxtaposed against the violent slaying of Athaliah which had been necessary to bring it about.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 24

2Ch 24:1 Joash was seven years old when he began to reign; and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba-
He had been hidden six years in the temple (2 Chron. 22:12), and so it follows that he was grabbed to safety when he was a one year old baby. That was how frail was the line of descent from David, for the rest of the male line had been slain by Athaliah (2 Chron. 22:10). The royal family had already been depleted because of the murders of 2 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 21:4,17. Beersheba was famed for idolatry at this time (Am. 5:5; 8:14), and the mother's name, meaning 'gazelle', has no mention of God's Name in it.

2Ch 24:2 Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh all the days of Jehoiada the priest-
Joash did right before God whilst the priest Jehoiada was alive, and then apostatized; Uzziah did likewise, with Zechariah the priest (2 Chron. 24:2; 26:5). He didn't reflect upon the personal implications of Divine history. And we too must appreciate that there

are Bible characters whose experiences are framed in terms directly relevant to us- for our learning. Interestingly, straight after Jehoiada died, the princes of the land came to Joash with a request, which he wrongly listened to. This has great similarities with the tragic mistake made by Rehoboam after Solomon died (2 Chron. 10:3,4 cp. 24:17). So Joash was given chance after chance to be directed back to previous examples and be instructed by them- but he went on in his own way.

But when Jehoiada died, Joash listened to, and was influenced by, the wicked princes of Judah (:17). It is clear that for all his apparent strength of character and zeal for God, Joash was simply a product of those he was with. And so it can be that our generation especially, can tend to be people with no real character, their very personalities influenced by others rather than being real, credible people. Insofar as we can break free from all these moulding influences, we will be real, credible persons. And our independence, our realness, is what will attract others to the message of Divine influence which we preach. Those raised in Christian homes need to pay especial attention to the possibility that they are where they are spiritually because of the good influence of others upon them. There is no harm in this; but we need to strive to have a faith that is not merely the faith of our fathers, but a real and personal response to the love of God which we have for ourselves perceived in the man Christ.

2Ch 24:3 Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he fathered sons and daughters-
We wonder why Jehoiada led Joash into polygamy; even though it was not outlawed, it was clearly against God's ideal standards. Perhaps Jehoiada was desperate to see the line of David continue, and given high infant mortality rates and the possibility that the first wife was barren, he took Joash a second wife. Instead of having faith that that the promised seed would come, as Isaac did during the twenty years of Rebekah's barrenness. 2 Kings 12:3 adds that the high places were not taken away, so we get the hint that despite all this initial zeal, things were not spiritually solid with Joash even from the start.

2Ch 24:4 It happened after this that Joash intended to restore the house of Yahweh-
Joash started to take his own initiative in serving God once he was old enough. He had a personal emotional attachment to the temple, seeing that he had grown up hiding in one of its disused side rooms (2 Chron. 22:12). The temple was in a serious state of disrepair at Athaliah's time; she was an idolater, and the daily sacrifices weren't offered (2 Chron. 23:18). The way Joash later desecrates the temple with idolatry is therefore a tragic example of turning away from the faith. No amount of devotion to the things of God's house, or emotional, sentimental feelings towards them, is a guarantee that true faith will be retained in the long term. This restoration of the temple would have been

programmatic for the exiles, for whose benefits these historical records were originally written.

2Ch 24:5 He gathered together the priests and the Levites and said to them, Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather money to repair the house of your God from all Israel from year to year. See that you hasten this matter. However the Levites didn't do it right away-
This presumably meant that the half shekel temple tax had not been paid for some time. So Joash urged that it be paid, although unsurprisingly there was reluctance. Plague was threatened for not paying it, but there is no record that this happened.

2Ch 24:6 The king called for Jehoiada the chief and said to him, Why haven't you required of the Levites to bring in the tax of Moses the servant of Yahweh, and of the assembly of Israel, out of Judah and out of Jerusalem, for the tent of the testimony?-
God had never wanted a temple to be built, and had stressed instead that He preferred to live in a tent on the move, rather than in a house of bricks. Such was Jehoiada's spirituality that he had perceived this, and taught Joash to refer to the temple as a tent. And likewise the essence of the ark, Jehoiada had taught him, was the "testimony" within it. For at that time "there was nothing in the ark except the two tables" of stone (2 Chron. 5:10). And it was "the testimony" which Joash had been given by Jehoiada at seven years old when crowned king. Joash was given the best spiritual upbringing imaginable by Jehoiada; and yet he turned away from it. It is mythical to imagine that parents can in some ways eternally save their children by diligently raising them. All they can do is give their children the basis upon which they must themselves build. Another possibility is that the ark itself had been removed, and within the "tent" of the most holy place there was simply the stones of the covenant. For in :8 Joash commands an ark to be made.

2Ch 24:7 For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up God's house; and they also gave all the dedicated things of the house of Yahweh to the Baals-
And yet it was through the temple being in such a state of disrepair, that Joash could be hidden in it for six years, living as if the child of some homeless woman squatting in one of the disused side rooms (see on 2 Chron. 22:11).

2Ch 24:8 So the king commanded, and they made a chest, and set it outside at the gate of the house of Yahweh-
"Chest" is the Hebrew word usually used for "ark". I suggested on :6 that the ark may have gone missing or even been destroyed by Athaliah, resulting in the rather strange term "tent of the testimony" [the tables of stone] being used for the most holy place. Kings says it was in the court opposite the porch, by the side of the altar of burnt

offering. But "outside" may also mean outside of the most holy place. It could be that the chest was stored by the altar, but in the day time was taken to the gate of the temple to receive contributions (see on 2 Chron. 24:11).

2Ch 24:9 They made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in for Yahweh the tax that Moses the servant of God laid on Israel in the wilderness-
GNB "the tax which Moses, God's servant, had first collected in the wilderness". The idea may be that that was the only time they ever really obeyed the law of giving the half shekel. Israel's collective disobedience to the law is quite stunning.

2Ch 24:10 All the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end-
"An end" may mean that whenever the chest was full, it was emptied (see on :11).

2Ch 24:11 It was so, that whenever the chest was brought to the king's officers by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the chief priests' officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to its place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance-
"Day by day" can mean 'from time to time', suggesting it was done whenever the chest was full. Thus 2 Kings 12:10 "It was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest...".

2Ch 24:12 The king and Jehoiada gave it to those who did the work of the service of the house of Yahweh. They hired masons and carpenters to restore the house of Yahweh, and also those who worked iron and brass, so as to repair the house of Yahweh-
The language is rather similar to that used of building the tabernacle, as if this rebuilding was really major, seeing Athaliah had consciously "broken up" the temple (:7). 2 Kings 12:15 adds: "Moreover they didn't demand an accounting from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to give to those who did the work; for they dealt faithfully".

2Ch 24:13 So the workmen worked, and the work of repairing advanced in their hands, and they restored God's house to its proper condition and strengthened it-
Heb. "the work was perfected", a phrase used mainly in the context of the restoration of Zion (Neh. 4:7; Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The Chronicles record was written or rewritten in exile to inspire the exiles with historical precedents for their work. "Proper condition" suggests 'proper size'. The breaking up of the temple by Athaliah had apparently

involved the demolition of major parts of the temple, to the point of it needing to be rebuilt to return it to its original size.

2Ch 24:14 When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, from which were made vessels for the house of Yahweh, even vessels with which to minister and to offer, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. They offered burnt offerings in the house of Yahweh continually all the days of Jehoiada-
Athaliah's destruction had involved taking away the vessels, probably giving them to the Baal sanctuaries (:7). We note a theme in Israel's history; that whenever there was an appeal for money for the temple, they were always more generous than was needed. And yet they were far from God in their hearts. Generous donation towards religious buildings are not the same as true spirituality.

2Ch 24:15 But Jehoiada grew old and was full of days, and he died. He was one hundred and thirty years old when he died-
Numbers are often not used literally in the Hebrew Bible. The language here is similar to that used of the death of Jacob, who died at the same age (Gen. 47:9). The idea may be that Jehoiada too had potentially begun a new Israel. Although Joash must go down in history as a man who wasted huge potential and abused such a good spiritual upbringing. Jehoiada was buried as a king (:16).

2Ch 24:16 They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and His house-
Despite the apostacy of the people, they recognized the good he had done. I noted on :15 the similarities between himself and Jacob, as if he had potentially enabled the founding of a new Israel.

2Ch 24:17 Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king listened to them-
The impression given is that Joash was swayed by their obeisance to him. The requests he granted them were related to forsaking the temple and instead serving idols (:18). Joash was easily flattered, and that reflects deeply upon how his earlier apparent zeal for the temple had been but a living out of the expectations of his spiritual father [and uncle] Jehoiada.

2Ch 24:18 They forsook the house of Yahweh, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. Wrath came on Judah and Jerusalem for this their guiltiness-
Joash had grown up hidden until age seven in a disused storage room in the temple, at the very time that Athaliah was breaking up the building; as noted on :7,13. Jehoiada

and his wife, who were his aunty and uncle, had saved his life and cared for him there. And he had followed Jehoiada's example in rebuilding it after what Athaliah had done there. And now, after the flattery of the princes (:17), he desecrates it. The very building which we would have thought had at least sentimental value to him. And this is how fickle human beings can be, and how surface level human faith can be. It could be that the dishonesty of the priests regarding Joash's appeal for the temple tax to be paid led him to skepticism about the priesthood and religious system based around the temple. And that was a more powerful influence upon him than the Godly example of his uncle Jehoiada.

2Ch 24:19 Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again to Yahweh; and they testified against them. But they would not listen-
There were a number of prophets around, Elijah was likely still alive, as Elisha and Micah; there was also Jehu, Jahaziel (2 Chron. 20:14) and Eliezer (2 Chron. 20:37). The apostacy of the people was not a sudden change of heart. The reality was that great reformers and spiritual people like Jehoiada were in reality lonely people, who at times managed to get reforms passed. But the hearts of the people didn't change. That is the point. And that is why as soon as the reformer is off the scene, the people openly "return" to idolatry. But their hearts were always with the idols. The impression we get is that there was only a very small minority amongst the people of God who were truly spiritually minded. This is likely the same today, no matter how we define the "people of God". Whether we take them as all baptized into Jesus, all the Christian movement, our own denomination, our own local church... it is likely the same today. For Paul reasons that we dare not say that we are spiritually better than natural Israel.

2Ch 24:20 The spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, Thus says God, 'Why do you disobey the commandments of Yahweh, so that you can't prosper? Because you have forsaken Yahweh, He has also forsaken you'-
Standing above the people was because he was in the "higher court" of Jer. 36:10. This was the inner court of the temple, above the outer court where the ordinary people were gathered. Neh. 8:4 has a similar scene. Such major judgment was not because of the failure of a moment. As explained on :19, the people were far from God even whilst Jehoiada was effectively leading them.

2Ch 24:21 They conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of Yahweh-
The conspiracy was likely of the same kind used to give Naboth the death penalty (1 Kings 21:9,10), claiming he had committed blasphemy and apostacy, which merited being stoned to death. They did so "in the court". Possibly the priests and Levites did

this, in the same higher court in view of the people from which he had spoken (:20). Or perhaps the ordinary people stoned him in the outer court. See on :25.

2Ch 24:22 Thus Joash the king didn't remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son-
The Jews murdered Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, according to Jewish tradition; Ahab and Jezebel slew Yahweh's prophets (1 Kings 18:4); Joah murdered Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:22). And the Lord alludes to this in Mt. 23:37 and Lk. 11:47. The idea is that despite being given the blessings of obedience to the covenant when they were disobedient to that covenant, they abused that grace and rebelled against Yahweh just as they had done in the wilderness, when they lived under the same grace. And Nehemiah in Neh. 9:26 is accusing the people of his time of despising and abusing Divine grace in just the same way. Chronicles was written for the exiles, and they failed to learn this lesson.

This is a parade example of the human tendency towards ingratitude, in this case, toward the family who had saved him as a fragile one year old baby from the murderous idol worshipper Athaliah.

When he died, he said, May Yahweh witness it, and require it-
This contrasts with the last words of the Lord Jesus and of Stephen, who wished for forgiveness of their murderers rather than judgment. Zechariah will surely be saved, but he attained a lower level of spirituality and appreciation of grace than that of the Lord and Stephen (Acts 7:60). The parable of the sower shows that the good ground brings forth various degrees of fruitfulness. Some will make more of God's truth than others. The trading of talents leads to more increase in the hands of some believers than others. But they are all saved. This recognition of differing degrees of response is critical to being able to live together in the body of believers. All will not achieve the same levels. And that is implicitly recognized within Bible teaching.

2Ch 24:23 It happened at the end of the year, that the army of the Syrians came up against him. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus-
The princes were those who had encouraged Joash to idolatry. We wonder why they spared Joash. Perhaps his extra bit of life was in order to give him the chance of repentance. But he turned it down.

2Ch 24:24 For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men; and Yahweh delivered a very great army into their hand, because they had forsaken Yahweh, the God of their fathers. So they executed judgment on Joash-
This is expressed in the terms of what would happen to Israel if they were disobedient to the covenant. 2 Kings 12:17,18 says that Joash bought off the Syrians with all the

hallowed things of the temple. It could be that this effectively means that he saved his life by paying them off, after they had already entered Jerusalem and slain the princes (:23).

2Ch 24:25 When they had departed from him (for they left him very sick), his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed, and he died; and they buried him in the city of David, but they didn't bury him in the tombs of the kings-
We wonder whether his servants were so loyal to Yahweh that they killed him for what he had done to the sons of Jehoiada. "Sons" means that he murdered more than just Zechariah. Although these servants were apparently secular Gentiles (:25), perhaps even they were disgusted at his deep ingratitude. Or it could mean that their conspiracy against Joash was meant by God as punishment for his conspiracy against Zechariah (:21). Joash was killed on his bed, probably his sick bed, "at the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla" (2 Kings 12:20). This may have been the equivalent of a hospital.

2Ch 24:26 These are those who conspired against him: Zabad the son of Shimeath the Ammonitess and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabitess-
We wonder whether these servants were in fact his sons by Gentile wives. If so, then even before the death of Jehoiada he had shown his unspirituality by marrying Gentiles, for all his avowed devotion to the rebuilding of the temple. This is why there was specific commentary written about "his sons" (:27).

2Ch 24:27 Now concerning his sons, and the greatness of the burdens laid on him, and the rebuilding of God's house, behold, they are written in the commentary of the book of the kings. Amaziah his son reigned in his place-
This "commentary" may not necessarily be the same as the books of Kings which we have in our Bibles. "The burdens" refer to the prophecies made against him in :19. Hence RVmg. "the burdens uttered against him".

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 25

2Ch 25:1 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem-
Amaziah's father Joash died at 47, so Joash would have been 22 when Amaziah was born. His mother, 'pleasing to Jehovah', was one of the wives chosen for Joash by his Godly uncle Jehoiada. He would have lived under the Godly influence of Jehoiada for

some time, and witnessed his father's apostacy and gross ingratitude to Jehoiada shown by murdering his sons.

2Ch 25:2 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, but not with a complete heart-

There is a common phrase in the record of the Kings of Judah which I admit to being unable to conclusively interpret: "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord". Many of the men of whom this was said were not very righteous, and some were punished for their later apostasy. Possible explanations are that they repented at the end, although unrecorded; or that they were initially righteous; or that God counted them as righteous although they did wrong things. I find problems with each of these alternatives. So I am left with the possibility that a man can *do* (and perhaps this is the word that needs emphasis) what is right in God's eyes, but still ultimately be condemned because his *heart* is far from God; which is the teaching of 1 Cor. 13; Mk. 7:6-9 and many other Scriptures. Amaziah "*did* that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like (i.e. he didn't do his works like) David his father" (2 Kings 14:3) must be paralleled with 2 Chron. 25:2: "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart". Working for God as David did, therefore involved doing the works with a perfect heart, the open conscience which David so often displayed in the Psalms. But Amaziah was deceived by the fact he was doing good works, and the real essence of his relationship with God was thereby overlooked. And we too can project a shadow-self to others, an image of spirituality, which eventually we come to believe ourselves; when our heart is far from God. This feature of human nature explains why a man or woman can reach such heights of devotion and then turn round and walk away from it all, out into the darkness of the world.

2Ch 25:3 Now it happened that when the kingdom was established to him, he killed his servants who had killed the king his father-

This continues a theme, of the kings of Judah strengthening or establishing themselves, often when they first became king; but then having that human strength tested by God or removed. The same word is used repeatedly (1 Chron. 11:10; 2 Chron. 11:11,17; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 23:1; 25:3,11; 26:8,15; 29:3; 32:5). The lesson of course was that it is God's Angelic eyes who run to and fro in the land promised to Abraham, "to shew Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

2Ch 25:4 But he didn't put their children to death, but did according to that which is written in the law in the book of Moses, as Yahweh commanded saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin-

Overall this man appears to have spiritually failed. But he as it were grabs hold of one commandment and religiously obeys it. We see this kind of thing all the time in 'religious' approaches to Christianity. But it is the heart which God is looking at, and it was in this that Amaziah failed, ultimately. Chronicles was written for the exiles, and perhaps they needed reminding of this principle (as in Ez. 18:20) because of their wrong idea that they were being unjustly punished for the sins of their fathers.

2Ch 25:5 Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and ordered them according to their fathers houses, under captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, even all Judah and Benjamin. He numbered them from twenty years old and upward, and found them three hundred thousand chosen men, able to go forth to war, who could handle spear and shield-

After the humiliating defeat by a small army of Syrians, which led to his father's sickness and death, Amaziah wished to strengthen the military might of Judah. But he rather misses the point; his father had more soldiers than Syria, but a small Syrian army defeated Judah's military might because they were not devoted to Yahweh (2 Chron. 24:24). He failed to appreciate that an Israel obedient to the covenant would win victories against far superior forces. His strength numerically was that in Asa's time (2 Chron. 14:8).

2Ch 25:6 He hired also one hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for one hundred talents of silver-

"Thousand" often means a kind of military division, and not literally 1000. He failed to recognize that faith in Yahweh rather than numbers was significant (see on :5). He failed to learn the lessons of Biblical history, that military cooperation with the ten tribes had never brought anything but disaster.

2Ch 25:7 A man of God came to him, saying, O king, don't let the army of Israel go with you; for Yahweh is not with Israel, with all the children of Ephraim-

The implication was that Yahweh was "with" Judah, but would be with them if Israelite forces were with them. Yet this being "with" Judah was by grace alone, for all the evidence is that the mass of the people were not at all with Him but had forsaken Him. But God perhaps wished to give them just this simple test of obedience regarding not taking the Israelite forces with them, without tackling the myriad other spiritual issues they had. We marvel that He did not turn away from them, seeing they had forsaken Him, but instead worked so patiently to reform them, one baby step at a time. See on :11.

2Ch 25:8 But if you will go, go and take action, be strong for the battle. God will

overthrow you before the enemy; for God has power to help, and to overthrow-
There are times when God has influenced men not to respond to the evidently wise words of other men, in order to fulfill His purpose (e.g. 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 25:20). God was willing to confirm and even encourage Amaziah in a wrong way- if this was Amaziah's choice. Therefore God has the power to influence the minds of men in this way, and He uses it. "He takes away the heart of the chief of the people, and causes them to wander" (Job 12:24 cp. 42:7). And God uses this ability to make men refuse to respond to the evident Truth of His word (e.g. 1 Sam. 2:25). Yet in all this, God is only confirming men in the path they choose to tread.

2Ch 25:9 Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? The man of God answered, Yahweh is able to give you much more than this-
I suggest on :17 that this test was repeated when these mercenaries sacked some cities of Judah, and Amaziah then demands compensation from Israel for this. This abiding desire for compensation reflects his lack of faith in the prophetic words to him. We may apparently respond rightly to a test, but not from the heart. And so it is repeated, and we fail. The situation also repeated at the time of 2 Chron. 28:13,14, where the victorious Israelites were told to release the captives they had apparently legitimately taken in war.

2Ch 25:10 Then Amaziah separated them, the army that had come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again. Therefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in fierce anger-
This was on one hand great obedience to the prophetic word. And yet their anger may reflect the fact that Amaziah actually demanded the payment be returned. For that would explain why they pillaged Judah in revenge (:13). His obedience was therefore partial, and so he was tested again in this matter (see on :17) and failed.

2Ch 25:11 Amaziah took courage, and led forth his people, and went to the Valley of Salt, and struck ten thousand of the children of Seir-
This was where David had won a great victory (1 Chron. 18:12). Amaziah was being guided to follow in David's footsteps. This, as noted on :7, was another baby step taken to try to reform him.

2Ch 25:12 The children of Judah carried away ten thousand alive, and brought them to the top of the rock, and threw them down from the top of the rock, so that they all were broken in pieces-
Comparing with the Kings record, we learn that these people were from the fortress

garrison of Sela, which Amaziah captured after the victory of :11. Sela may well be Petra, the apparently impregnable rock top of Jer. 49:16.

2Ch 25:13 But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell on the cities of Judah, from Samaria even to Beth Horon, and struck of them three thousand, and took much spoil-
Samaria and Beth Horon may instead be read as the border cities of Zemaraim (2 Chron. 13:4; Josh. 18:22) or Ephrain / Ephron (2 Chron. 13:19 cp. Josh. 15:9). I suggested on :10 that they did this because perhaps Amaziah didn't in fact pay them or demanded his payment be returned.

2Ch 25:14 Now it happened, after that Amaziah had come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense to them-
The imperfect tense suggests he continued this bowing down to them. This is a common Biblical theme; that men worship the very gods which have been proven powerless, and which God has demonstrated to them to be so, through observed experience. But we have the same human nature. For example, we all learn by observed experience that wealth doesn't bring happiness, and we lament families ruined by the possession of wealth. But many still eagerly worship the idol of wealth.

2Ch 25:15 Therefore the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Amaziah, and He sent to him a prophet who said to him, Why have you sought after the gods of the people, which have not delivered their own people out of your hand?-
GNB "from your power". "Amaziah" means 'power of Yah'. The word play is intentional. The prophet is saying that Amaziah has denied his own name, the personality and character which was potentially to be his. There is likewise a personal path mapped out for each of us, which we can deny by our lack of faith and apostacy.

2Ch 25:16 It happened, as he talked with him, that the king said to him, Have we made you one of the king's counsellors? Stop! Why should you be struck down? Then the prophet stopped, and said, I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this, and have not listened to my counsel-
"Counsellors" is the same Hebrew word translated "determined". It occurs again in :17 ("consulted"). The word for "counsellor" is associated with rulership and kingship; a king's counsellors were effectively the kings (Is. 1:26; 9:6; Ezra 7:28; 8:25; Job 3:14), and often in the Bible, the counsel of men is contrasted with that of God. We feel this tension too; for the counsel of God is so often different and opposed to the counsel of the majority of those looked up to for secular advice and counsel. Amaziah wanted a

prophet who counselled as he wished it to be (as did Ahab before him). He was not humble to God's word. We too need to somehow clear ourselves of all preconceptions and come to God's word with a second naiveté, willing to be counselled by it; rather than wanting to appoint our own counsel.

2Ch 25:17 Then Amaziah king of Judah consulted his advisers, and sent to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us face off against each other-

The soldiers he had hired were apparently mercenaries. They had been paid, but not used in the battle. And so they had gotten offended and sacked cities of Judah (:13). And Amaziah was demanding compensation for this. By so doing he demonstrated that his apparent willingness to lose the money paid for them was not a decision taken from the heart. He was still after compensation for his losses, rather than believing that God could give him all riches (see on :9).

2Ch 25:18 Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon saying, Give your daughter to my son as his wife. Then a wild animal that was in Lebanon passed by, and trampled down the thistle-

This is similar to the parable of the trees in Jud. 9:7-15, which also talks of the land of Israel as "Lebanon" (Jud. 9:15). The king of Israel presents himself and Amaziah as both living in the same land, and considered himself to be the glorious cedar and Amaziah merely a thistle. It was quite inappropriate, he felt, for Amaziah to provoke him over the fact mercenaries from his country had ransacked towns in Judah over an argument about money and payment. He is saying that it as inappropriate as a poor man asking a wealthy man to give him his daughter to marry the poor man's son. And he threatens to act not just as an elegant cedar, but to morph into a wild beast who would trample down Amaziah. Perhaps Amaziah had indeed provoked Joash by making a marriage proposal which he knew Joash would turn down.

2Ch 25:19 You say to yourself that you have struck Edom; and your heart lifts you up to boast. Now stay at home. Why should you meddle with trouble, that you should fall, even you, and Judah with you?-

Literally, "You say", but he meant as interpreted by NEV, "to yourself". The importance of self talk is repeatedly emphasized in the Bible. For this is the basis of true spirituality. The victory against Edom was from God, but by accepting the vanquished gods of Edom, Amaziah shows that he trusted in his own strength rather than that of Yahweh. So often the victories God gives, be it passing an exam or military victory, lead to pride and boasting.

2Ch 25:20 But Amaziah would not listen; for it was of God, that He might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought after the gods of Edom-
See on :8. There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. The fact a man does something "of the Lord" doesn't mean that he is guiltless. In the same context of God's deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, men who did things "of the Lord" were punished for what they did (Dt. 2:30; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Chron. 22:7; 25:20). God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

2Ch 25:21 So Joash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah confronted each other at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah-
This was on the border of Judah and Dan, the frontier of Judah. The pagan name, "house of the sun", had not been changed; and reflects Judah's abiding penchant for idolatry.

2Ch 25:22 Judah was defeated by Israel; and they fled every man to his tent-
This was not because Israel were more spiritual or faithful, but because God has a special interest in judging pride. Victories of secular people must be understood in this context. The giving of victory by God (in whatever context) is multi factorial and is not simply a reflection of His pleasure with the victor.

2Ch 25:23 Joash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash the son of Jehoahaz-
"Jehoahaz" is also called Ahaziah (2 Chron. 21:17).

At Beth Shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits-
This is s.w. Neh. 1:3; 4:7, and would have helped remind the exiles how the walls of Jerusalem had come to be so broken down. It would seem by the implication of Jer. 31:38; Zech. 14:10 that this gate was on the north of Jerusalem. Depending how we define a cubit, this would have been between 600 and 700 feet.

2Ch 25:24 He took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in God's house with Obed-Edom, and the treasures of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria-

This faithful family who had cared for the ark had been entrusted with caring for the gold and silver in the temple. But Joash had given much of this to the Syrians previously.

2Ch 25:25 Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years-
The implication may be that he was given ample opportunity to repent; and we have noticed that in the lives of other kings.

2Ch 25:26 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, first and last, behold, aren't they written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel?-
This may not necessarily be the same books of Kings which we have in our Bible.

2Ch 25:27 Now from the time that Amaziah turned away from following Yahweh, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem-
Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah each died due to a conspiracy. Surely Amaziah was intended to learn from the deaths of his predecessors, but the great theme of Biblical history is that so few learn from it. And that is the challenge to us. The planning of the conspiracy apparently took at least 15 years (:25).

He fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and killed him there-
Perhaps he was trying to flee to Egypt, ever representative of human strength which fails. For Lachish was on the road there.

2Ch 25:28 They brought him on horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of David-
Horses were forbidden to the kings of Israel (Dt. 17:16) so this is an appropriate end for an unfaithful man who trusted in human strength.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 26

2Ch 26:1 All the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah-
Those who conspired against Amaziah were apparently stopped by the people from taking power. And they insisted upon the line of David continuing, through Uzziah. Despite their general unspirituality. "Uzziah", 'strength of Jehovah', has a very similar meaning to the name of his father Amaziah, 'power of Jehovah'. Yet Amaziah had not lived up to that (see on 2 Chron. 25:15. He may have named his son similarly in a hope that he would succeed where he failed.

2Ch 26:2 He built Eloth and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers-
Amaziah his father had defeated Edom, and Eloth was in Edom. This explains the comment that Uzziah did this after his father died. But in doing so he was really living out the ghost of his father and fulfilling parental expectation; for he repeated the works for Yahweh which his father had done (:4). Those raised in believing families must ever probe the degree to which their faith and works are possibly just living out parental expectation.

2Ch 26:3 Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jechiliah of Jerusalem-
This means that he was born about the time that his father Amaziah turned away from Yahweh (2 Chron. 25:25-27). His spirituality may therefore have been due to his mother, 'Yah will enable'.

2Ch 26:4 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that his father Amaziah had done-
God's judgment of Amaziah was that he *did* what was right, but his heart was not consistently with God. So the meaning of this may be that Uzziah likewise *did* what was right, he did something which were right, as Amaziah did. But there is no comment at this point about the all important judgment of God about his state of heart. And I suggested on :2 that be began by simply living out parental expectation. See on :16. We note from 2 Kings 15:4 that "the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places". "Taken away" is the same word as 'depart from' in 2 Kings 15:9. The way of Jeroboam was not departed from, and so the high places were not departed from. The suggestion is that they were associated with the calf worship.

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

2Ch 26:6 He went forth and warred against the Philistines, and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod; and he built cities in the country of Ashdod and among the Philistines-

In Amaziah's time, the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down, and Uzziah would have remembered growing up with this shameful reminder every day of his youth, as he surveyed the broken down walls which represented his father's humiliation (2 Chron. 25:23). His apparent zeal against the Philistines and breaking down of their walls must surely be read in this light. And we must ask to what degree our works for the Lord are merely psychological reactions and responses to our experiences, and to what degree they are purely motivated by faith.

2Ch 26:7 God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians who lived in Gur Baal and the Meunim-

Gur Baal is 'the abode of Baal' and we wonder whether this reflected Uzziah's zeal for Yahweh as opposed to Baal. The Angelic *elohim* "helped" Uzziah in his battles; and yet within the same context we read that his human armies "helped" him (2 Chron. 26:7,13). The Angelic armies in Heaven are seen reflected in the human armies of Israel upon earth. The human armies are described as helping Uzziah with "mighty power", a phrase elsewhere used about the mighty power which God alone gives (the same two words occur in this context in Dt. 8:18; Zech. 4:6). The allusion is to the meaning of Uzziah's name, 'strength of Yah'. And David learnt all this in practice, when he reflected how human armies *alone* lack this 'mighty power'- all human strength is not strength at all unless it's operating in tandem with God's Angelic strength: "There is no king saved by the multitude of a host: A mighty man is not delivered by great strength" (Ps. 33:16).

2Ch 26:8 The Ammonites gave tribute to Uzziah. His name spread abroad even to the entrance of Egypt; for he grew extremely strong-

Ammon was far east of Jordan, and to control them as far as Egypt was very considerable influence and power.

2Ch 26:9 Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate and the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them-

This would have been to try to permanently reverse the shameful breaking down of the walls of Jerusalem which he had grown up beholding (2 Chron. 25:23; see on :6). But as discussed on :6, we wonder whether his apparent zeal in doing this was true zeal for God, or rather merely psychological reaction and response to his earlier shame based experiences. And we must enquire of our own motives in the same way.

2Ch 26:10 He built towers in the wilderness, and dug out many cisterns, for he had much livestock; in the lowland also, and in the plain. He had farmers and vineyard keepers in the mountains and in the fruitful fields; for he loved farming-
We see similarities with Solomon's descriptions of all the things he tried doing in Ecclesiastes. But like Solomon, Uzziah did all these things because he loved doing them, serving God in so far as it reinforced his own personality type and interests. And again we must enquire of the motives for our works, and to what extent we are truly carrying a cross for the Lord Jesus rather than serving Him in ways convenient to us.

2Ch 26:11 Moreover Uzziah had an army of fighting men, who went out to war by bands, according to the number of their reckoning made by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the officer, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains-
All these men had God's Name in their names, but there was a total lack of understanding that an Israel obedient to the covenant would defeat far greater forces despite their small numbers. And again, they had failed to learn the lesson from David's numbering of Israel's fighting men.

2Ch 26:12 The whole number of the heads of fathers' households, even the mighty men of valour, was two thousand six hundred-
We get the impression of a highly organized army with wonderful military technology. But all this was to be revealed as ultimately the opposite of true spirituality.

2Ch 26:13 Under their hand was an army, three hundred and seven thousand five hundred, who made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy-
Uzziah was forgetting the meaning of his name, 'power of Yah'. Be aware that 'thousand' often refers to a military division rather than a literal 1000.

2Ch 26:14 Uzziah prepared for them, even for all the army, shields, spears, helmets, coats of armour, bows and stones for slinging-
Here and in :15 we get the impression that Uzziah loved technology and science, and perhaps invented new weaponry which was previously unknown in the area. But this was all revelling in human strength. It was a denial of his name which reflected his intended spiritual achievement, 'power of 'Yah'.

2Ch 26:15 He made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skilful men, to be on the towers and on the battlements, with which to shoot arrows and great stones. His name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, until he was strong-

This continues a theme, of the kings of Judah strengthening or fortifying themselves, often when they first became king; but then having that human strength tested by God or removed. The same word is used repeatedly (1 Chron. 11:10; 2 Chron. 11:11,17; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 23:1; 25:3,11; 26:8,15; 29:3; 32:5). The lesson of course was that it is God's Angelic eyes who run to and fro in the land promised to Abraham, "to shew Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

2Ch 26:16 But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up, so that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against Yahweh his God; for he went into Yahweh's temple to burn incense on the altar of incense-
After several verses describing his strength, we come to this intended anticlimax. Although he did right things (:4), it is faith and the state of a man's inner heart which are the critical issues in God's judgments of a person. And pride in the heart is a sin which no number of good works can somehow compensate for.

2Ch 26:17 Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him eighty priests of Yahweh, who were valiant men-
To resist a proud and very powerful king was a brave act. It is perhaps because of this that they are called "valiant". They "resisted Uzziah" (18), literally they withstood him, physically barring his access to the incense altar.

2Ch 26:18 They resisted Uzziah the king, and said to him, It isn't for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to Yahweh, but for the priests the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary; for you have trespassed; neither shall it be for your honour from Yahweh God-
We observe that David acted as a priest, and was blessed for it. He saw beyond the veil of mere legislation, to the spirit of things. But Uzziah's motives were pride, self glorification rather than glorifying God. And so the same external actions were judged so differently by God. And we are not to judge because we cannot judge, seeing we see only the outward actions and not the heart. It seems as noted on :17 that Uzziah didn't actually get to the incense altar, although he had the censer in his hand (:19). But he was still counted as having committed the sin. Because intentions are counted as the sin, as the Lord makes clear in Mt. 5-7.

2Ch 26:19 Then Uzziah was angry; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was angry with the priests, the leprosy broke forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of Yahweh, beside the altar of incense-
The idea of him being beside the altar but before the priests confirms the suggestion on :17 that they literally blocked his access to the altar. The leprosy in his forehead

represented the disease of his mind. It broke forth as his anger broke forth. This was the anger of hurt pride, and revealed that he had no spiritual sincerity at all. If he had truly wanted God's glory through offering incense, if he truly saw in it a symbol of acceptable prayer to Him, then it would have made no difference who placed the censer on the altar.

2Ch 26:20 Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked on him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly from there. Yes, he himself hurried also to go out, because Yahweh had struck him-
Death was the prescribed penalty for a non priest coming to the altar (Num. 18:7). And he was refusing to give any weight to the Biblical precedent of the destruction of the rebels who offered incense (Num. 16:35). We wonder whether there was also an earthquake at this time. Isaiah was contemporary with him (Is. 1:1), and we wonder whether this earthquake is the scene of Is. 6:1.

2Ch 26:21 Uzziah the king was a leper to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of Yahweh; and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land-
This living in a separate house indicates obedience to God's law. For Naaman was a leper and yet had an active place in Syrian society, and Uzziah and Judah might have adopted their attitude to leprosy. The fact Uzziah didn't seek to get around this could perhaps indicate that he accepted his judgment and may have repented. But see on :23.

2Ch 26:22 Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, wrote-
We wonder why the record of such a book is retained in the inspired text, when we don't have access to the book. We can conclude that this was written for the exiles, who maybe did have access to this book.

2Ch 26:23 So Uzziah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the field of burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper. Jotham his son reigned in his place-
They were hyper sensitive to the Mosaic legislation about leprosy (see on :21), and yet Isaiah says that Judah at that time were spiritually so leprous, and they didn't even realize it. They focused upon external obedience to the law when it concerned others, but failed to see that they in essence were just as bad as those whom they were carefully separate from. And this again is an abiding lesson for us. We note that sleeping with fathers doesn't have to mean being buried next to them.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 27

2Ch 27:1 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok-
Zadok, righteousness, is a typical priestly name; so we wonder whether this was another example of the kingly and priestly lines uniting.

2Ch 27:2 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that his father Uzziah had done. However he didn't enter into Yahweh's temple. The people still did corruptly-
Isaiah prophesied at this time (Is. 1:1), and condemns the people and their leadership as being deeply corrupt and spiritually leprous. The same word is used of the corruption of the land in the lead up to the flood (Gen. 6:11,12), so we are being set up to expect the coming of judgment. The same word is that used for 'destruction' (2 Chron. 26:16). Corruption was its own judgment, it was self destruction. And this is the nature of human sin; it is its own judgment. Jotham did good works as his father did, but there is no commentary about God's judgment of the state of his heart. And this is the all important factor.

2Ch 27:3 He built the upper gate of the house of Yahweh, and on the wall of Ophel he built much-
This was the gate which led from the king's palace to the temple. The fact the king rebuilt it would reflect his desire for access to the temple and a wish to show solidarity with the temple. "Ophel" is "the swelling ground", referring to the land between the Kidron and the Tyropean valley.

2Ch 27:4 Moreover he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers-
Many of the kings are described as opening their reigns by doing similar things to those done by their fathers. In this case, replicating the building passion of his father. We are therefore invited to ponder whether this was simply a function of psychological response to his father, or from a motive of personally wanting to serve God. We note the absence of any Divine comment upon the state of his heart (:2). This is to make us ponder, but not judge, what it might have been.

2Ch 27:5 He fought also with the king of the children of Ammon, and prevailed against them. The children of Ammon gave him the same year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand measures of wheat and ten thousand of barley. The children of Ammon gave that much to him in the second year also, and in the third-
His father Uzziah had also fought with Ammon and got tribute out of them (2 Chron. 26:8). And Jotham surely seeks to replicate the actions of his father, as discussed on :4. We notice he did these things immediately after his father died, which is the usual psychological response of a son after a father dies. But this raises the question as to whether our motivations for Divine service are simply psychological reactions, or motivated by personal devotion toward God.

2Ch 27:6 So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before Yahweh his

God-
If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way chosen. His power might appear to have been because of bravery in military action and hard work, but it was rather from preparing his paths before God. We read this word for preparing or establishing in the context of the heart. Perhaps his "ways" refer to the ways of his heart. Or it could be that reference to the heart is purposefully omitted, and instead we are told that he prepared his ways before Yahweh, aware of His presence and observation in absolutely all he planned.

2Ch 27:7 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah-
This may not necessarily refer to the books of Kings which we now have in our Bibles.

2Ch 27:8 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem-
He died at 41, which is a number which repeats at least three other times in the history of the kings (1 Kings 14:21; 15:10; 2 Kings 14:23). We can only ponder whether this is all some kind of Divinely arranged program, the exact function of which we cannot understand although we perceive it as existent.

2Ch 27:9 Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Ahaz his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 28

2Ch 28:1 Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: and he didn't do that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, as David his father did-
Isaiah, Hosea and Micah all prophesied during his evil reign and provide more details about the awful nature of his sins.

2Ch 28:2 but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and additionally made molten images for the Baals-
Although Israel is often described as the source of Judah's apostacy, we must give due weight to Ezekiel's word that Judah was in fact more wicked than Israel. This could have been because Judah fell further, from greater spiritual potential. Or maybe because sinners can provoke people to sin worse than they do.

2Ch 28:3 Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his

children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel-
Hezekiah his son somehow survived this, but may have reacted to his father's murder of his brothers by turning right against such idolatry. This means that his apparent zeal for Yahweh [remembering that he turned away from Him in the end and raised Manasseh] was partly due to a psychological reaction against his father and traumatic childhood experiences. For he would have lived in constant fear that he would also be offered, at the whim of the gods of his father. It was common to make children pass through fire as a kind of dedication ceremony; but he actually burnt his children in the fire, such was his obsession.

The valley of Hinnom, Ge Hinnom, was to later be known as Gehenna, and became a symbol used by the Lord for complete destruction (Mt. 5:22). As they burnt their children there, to destruction, so sinners would be burnt to destruction in that same place.

2Ch 28:4 He sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places and on the hills, and under every green tree-
Large, flourishing green trees weren't so common in the landscape, and they therefore came to be seen as the presence of fertility gods. This is the huge significance of the old covenant promising fertility from Yahweh- for most of the pagan gods were seen as fertility gods, and this is why they were worshipped by largely agricultural people.

2Ch 28:5 Therefore Yahweh his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they struck him, and carried away from him a great multitude of captives, and brought them to Damascus. He was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with a great slaughter-
Heb. 11:16 says that God was not ashamed to be called the God of His faithful people. The implication is that He has been ashamed of some who call Him their God, and Ahaz would be a parade example. The problem with Israelite idolatry was that they still considered Yahweh as their God. But Yahweh wanted his reformation, and repeated situations twice in this area- He "delivered" him to his enemies, who "struck" him. But still he didn't learn. "He", Ahaz, was "struck with a great slaughter". But he didn't die himself; other people did. Lots of them. We see here the nature of sin; that it brings suffering to others. Although in this case it is confirmed that "they" who were struck in this great slaughter had themselves forsaken Yahweh (:6). This would explain why R.V. has the correct but otherwise strange rendering: "carried away of his a great multitude of captives". If we enquire why Ahaz himself wasn't struck down, the answer surely is that God wanted him to repent; but he didn't. See on :7. Kings adds that the Syrians took Elath, and also shut up Ahaz in Jerusalem, presumably by siege.

2Ch 28:6 For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed in Judah one hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all of them valiant men; because they had forsaken Yahweh, the God of their fathers-
The large numbers we read of are nearly all in the context of military men being slain. This is because a "thousand" was not a literal 1000, but a name for some kind of military unit, even quite a small one, perhaps the size of a modern 'fire team' of up to five men.

2Ch 28:7 Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the ruler of the house, and Elkanah who was next to the king-
As pondered on :5, we wonder why Ahaz somehow escaped. The reason ultimately was that through this salvation by grace, when he was not at all believing, Ahaz was being appealed to. Just as Manasseh was. It worked with him, eventually, but not with Ahaz. Truly God took the initiative with that man, time and again, over many years.

2Ch 28:8 The children of Israel carried away captive of their brothers two hundred thousand, women, sons and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria-
Again, "thousand" may mean something like 'families' or some group definition, and not literally 1000. This was in studied disobedience to 2 Chron. 11:4: "You shall not... fight against your brothers". Yet God empowered them to defeat Judah, because that was part of His agenda. We see here just something of the amazingly multi factorial manner in which God operates in human affairs.

2Ch 28:9 But a prophet of Yahweh was there, whose name was Oded. He went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, Behold, because Yahweh, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, He has delivered them into your hand, and you have slain them in a rage which has reached up to heaven-
The allusion is how the blood of Abel, slain by his brother, was a vice which reached to heaven (Gen. 4:10). As noted on :8, God works in a very complex manner with people. He empowered Israel to defeat Judah, but then He was angry with them for murdering their brothers and now abusing their families as slaves. Just as Assyria was used by God to punish Judah but was then punished for doing so. It would be a willfully simplistic person who accuses God of injustice here. This kind of multi factorial judgment and action is going to be typical of a Divine being, and it is obvious that tiny man, seeing only some fragments of His operations on earth, is not going to get the full picture nor completely understand. Those who vent against the supposed injustice of God are really guilty of arrogance before the court of Heaven.

2Ch 28:10 Now you purpose to oppress the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondservants and bondmaids for yourselves. Aren't there even with you trespasses of your own against Yahweh your God?-
The implication was that they were justifying oppression of their brethren because those brethren had sinned against Yahweh. But they had themselves done so, indeed it is Israel who are represented as having led Judah into sin. All oppression and abuse of brethren arises from this failure to realize that we are all sinners. "Oppress" is s.w. "bring into bondage" in Neh. 5:5. Chronicles was written from the exiles, and they had failed to learn from this historical example that they were not to "oppress" their brethren.

2Ch 28:11 Now hear me therefore, and send back the captives, that you have taken captive from your brothers; for the fierce wrath of Yahweh is on you-
As discussed on :8,9, Israel were used by God to punish Judah, but they went too far, as did Assyria. And the fierce wrath of God is upon all those who abuse people. The idea of taking the families captive "from your brothers" could be arguing that they were effectively breaking up families; although it could be pointing out the inappropriacy of having our brother in captivity to us in any sense.

2Ch 28:12 Then some of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who came back from the war-
They were brave and humble to do this, because in their culture, killing the men and taking the families captive was the done thing. And so they had to 'stand up against' men returning from the battlefield in triumph. When they who withstood them had not been on the front line. But this is the kind of bravery we have to show in standing up against abuse of brethren.

2Ch 28:13 They said to them, You shall not bring in the captives here; for you purpose that which will bring on us a trespass against Yahweh, to add to our sins and to our trespass; for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel-
The basis of the appeal was that, as Oded had told them, they were serious sinners. And there would be fierce wrath, indeed that wrath was already against them, unless they immediately dropped their plans. The situation recalls how Amaziah paid money for Israelite mercenaries, but was told not to use them, and lose his money (2 Chron. 25:9). So often, spiritual argument means apparent loss of what is legitimately ours, in secular terms. We notice that sin can be 'added to'. There are degrees of sin, and God is sensitive to every sin, even in the lives of those who appear far gone in sin.

2Ch 28:14 So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly-
"The armed men" are mentioned because it would have been so difficult for all concerned, to just allow the loss of war booty won in armed combat. The soldiers were being told by those who had not fought at the front to now resign their booty; and the soldiers agreed. Even though Israel were idolatrous, there was a conscience within them about their own sins. And this should encourage us in our witness to apparently conscienceless people. In fact, somewhere, everyone has a conscience which we can appeal to.

2Ch 28:15 The men mentioned by name rose up and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all who were naked among them, dressed them, gave them sandals, and gave them something to eat and to drink, anointed them, carried all the feeble of them on donkeys, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brothers. Then they returned to Samaria-
Jericho was apparently a border town between Israel and Judah. The war booty which was to be resigned was not just the captives, but the clothes they had taken. And clothing was valuable in those times, being a form of wealth (2 Kings 5:5,22). The giving of food to captives and sending them back is exactly what happened in 2 Kings 6:23. The Israelites of 2 Chron. 28:15 were intended to learn from the grace which had been shown to the Syrian captives. This is a great theme of the historical books; that situations in essence repeated, because God's people are expected to learn from Biblical history. And that is the relevance of these records for us today.

2Ch 28:16 At that time king Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria to help him-
To Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kings 16:7). "Kings" therefore may be an intensive plural for 'the one great king'. 2 Kings 16:7-9 says that he paid Assyria with the gold stripped from the temple. 2 Kings 16:7 "Syria" is LXX "Edom". Although Kings then records the Assyrian attack upon Syria. So perhaps the idea is that the Edomites of :17 were in fact under the control of Syria.

2Ch 28:17 For again the Edomites had come and struck Judah, and carried away captives-
As explained on :16, it seems Edom was under the control of Syria. And so Ahaz paid Assyria to attack Syria. Or it could be [putting the Kings record together with this] that Ahaz paid Assyria to help him against Edom, but Assyria instead attacked Syria, claiming that was good enough work done for the money. Even though Assyria had their own agenda for attacking Syria (Aram).

2Ch 28:18 The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the lowland, and of the South of Judah, and had taken Beth Shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its towns, Timnah with its towns, Gimzo also and its towns; and settled there-
The continual experience of attack and loss of people and territory was surely intended to teach Ahaz something. It kept on happening, and he kept on in his sins, stubbornly refusing to accept these things as God's knocking on his personal door. The achievements of others in subjugating Edom (2 Chron. 25:11,14) and the Philistines (2 Chron. 26:6,7) was all undone due to the stubbornness of Ahaz. One man brought so much suffering to so many. And yet God allowed him to continue, because He was so intent on searching for the lost sheep until He found him. Which He did not, in the end.

2Ch 28:19 For Yahweh brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he had dealt wantonly in Judah, and trespassed severely against Yahweh-
Ahaz king of Judah is called king of Israel, perhaps because he followed their idolatry. And yet the term is also used of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 21:2), and may reflect how God ultimately did not recognize the division of His people into Judah and Israel; just as He doesn't recognize the artificial divisions of His true people today, thanks to the sin of denominationalism.

Flesh must be humbled- either we do it now, we humble ourselves that we may be exalted in due time; or it will have to be done to us through the terror of rejection. Time and again 'bringing low' or 'humiliation' is the result of condemnation (Dt. 28:43; 2 Chron. 28:19; Job 40:12; Ps. 106:43).

2Ch 28:20 Tilgath Pilneser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, but didn't strengthen him-
Giving God's money to Gentile powers never achieved anything but only ever made matters worse (2 Chron. 16:2; 2 Kings 12:18; 18:15). But even Hezekiah refused to learn this clearly taught theme in the history of God's people.

2Ch 28:21 For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of Yahweh, and out of the house of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria: but it didn't help him-
"It didn't help him" was to be Judah's later experience in seeking help from Egypt against Babylon (s.w. Is. 31:1; Lam. 4:17). Again, they failed to learn the lessons from history, unwilling to see that these historical situations spoke directly to their own situations and lives. We too can fail to perceive this. In fact the choice of histories and biographies we have in the Bible have been carefully selected in order that man need never feel alone; in essence, every life situation has been met at some point and time in the past.

2Ch 28:22 In the time of his distress, he trespassed yet more against Yahweh, this same king Ahaz-
The "time of distress" is the phrase used in Neh. 9:27; but there the point is made that in the time of distress, a sinful Judah had called to God and He had answered them. So the even worse trespass of Ahaz was that in his distress he did not repent and turn to Yahweh, but rather devoted himself even more to idolatry (:23).

2Ch 28:23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which struck him. He said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, so I will sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel-
As discussed on :22, the increasing distress upon Ahaz was intended to elicit his repentance and turning to Yahweh. But instead he turned even more to idolatry. This mad obsession with idolatry is described in Ezekiel and Hosea as like a kind of sexual addiction, whereby the more partners a sex addict has, the more they require. Most nations had a set of national gods, and they only changed them if they were conquered by other nations and forced to accept their gods. But God's people had an obsession with every kind of god, until the Jerusalem temple was filled with all manner of shrines to various gods at the time of its destruction. And the bizarre thing was that Syria was to fall at this time to Assyria (2 Kings 16:9); their gods didn't ultimately help them, and in fact Ahaz had paid money to Assyria to attack the Syrians.

"And of all Israel" may be an example of where God calls Judah "Israel" because He never recognized the division amongst His people, as He doesn't today. Or the idea could be that Ahaz of Judah did what Israel had done, and worshipped the gods of Syria.

2Ch 28:24 Ahaz gathered together the vessels of God's house, cut in pieces the vessels of God's house, and shut up the doors of the house of Yahweh; and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem-
The destruction of the vessels was not complete as some were retained, perhaps for worshipping Yahweh in the name of the idols (2 Chron. 29:18,19). The cutting in pieces perhaps solely referred to the cutting off of the bases of the laver (2 Kings 16:17). This closure of the temple was presumably because he thought that the other gods wouldn't like the idea of a huge temple devoted to another god. But perhaps 2 Kings 16:18 helps understand this as meaning that he shut up one door or gate of the temple and devoted it to the idols of Assyria; without meaning that all the doors or gates of the temple were closed. It's doubtful Ahaz resigned all belief in Yahweh, but rather wanted to treat all his gods equally. Lest he offend any of them. The fundamental teaching that Yahweh is one, the one and only God, was ignored. The 'gathering together' of the vessels may mean he melted them down. However 2 Kings 16:17 implies this was only done to the huge

supports of the laver. I suggest Ahaz retained some level of belief in Yahweh, for the temple services continued on some level (2 Kings 16:13,15), although Ahaz had brought idols into the holy place of the temple (2 Chron. 29:5). He had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry, which in essence is the temptation we all have. Scientific atheism, a total rejection of our God, is likely not our biggest temptation; rather is it to mix His ways with those of the flesh and the secular world.

2Ch 28:25 In every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger Yahweh, the God of his fathers-
This was the situation which continued until Jer. 2:28, and led to their final destruction. God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ch 28:26 Now the rest of his acts, and all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel-
His "last" ways were so significant, for God had set him up to repent- but he didn't. Manasseh is an example of a similarly evil man, who at the end of his life did repent. Clearly it had been God's hope that Ahaz would be a similar case.

2Ch 28:27 Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem; for they didn't bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel; and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place-
Kings says Ahaz was "buried with his fathers", but 2 Chron. 28:27 says he was not brought into the tombs of the kings of Israel. This suggests that sleeping or being buried with ones' fathers was therefore an idiom for death, which should not be taken literally.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 29

2Ch 29:1 Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah-
Hezekiah reigned 29 years, and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year or his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 38:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence.

2Ch 29:2 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that David his father had done-
Hezekiah fell away from Yahweh in the last 15 years of his life. This rubric about doing what was right as David had done is used in the records about men who were ultimately evil. For the righteous kings, there is usually a comment that he held to Yahweh *in his heart*. But there is no such comment at this point, when we would expect it. All we learn from this is that he did some things which were right, as David. But the emphasis is upon his *doing* deeds; there is no comment at this point upon his overall heart and faith, which is the critical issue as far as God's ultimate judgment is concerned.

2Ch 29:3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of Yahweh, and repaired them-
"Repaired" is "strengthened". This continues a theme, of the kings of Judah strengthening or fortifying themselves, often when they first became king; but then having that human strength tested by God or removed. The same word is used repeatedly (1 Chron. 11:10; 2 Chron. 11:11,17; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 23:1; 25:3,11; 26:8,15; 29:3; 32:5). The lesson of course was that it is God's Angelic eyes who run to and fro in the land promised to Abraham, "to shew Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

2Ch 29:4 He brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them together into the broad place on the east-
The same large space near the entrance to the temple of 2 Chron. 32:6.

2Ch 29:5 and said to them, Listen to me, you Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and carry all the abominations out of the holy place-
It seems that Ahaz had set up idols even within the holy place of the temple. Ahaz didn't totally reject Yahweh worship(see on 2 Chron. 28:24). He had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry, which in essence is the temptation we all have. Scientific atheism, a total rejection of our God, is likely not our biggest temptation; rather is it to mix His ways with those of the flesh and the secular world.

2Ch 29:6 For our fathers have trespassed and done that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh our God, and have forsaken Him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of Yahweh, and turned their backs-
"Our fathers..." suggests Hezekiah admits that what he is doing is in reaction to how deeply he detested his own father, who had burnt his own siblings to his idols. See on :17. Ezekiel was to soon see the men of Judah in the sanctuary likewise with their backs towards the sanctuary, worshipping the sun. All this zealous reformation was to be very short-lived, and that fact confirms the suggestion on :17 that an element of the motivation in it may have been a psychological reaction to the way their fathers had sacrificed their siblings to idols. Rather than a deep, core heart devotion to Yahweh. For that never comes overnight, or "suddenly" (:36).

2Ch 29:7 Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel-
I suggest that offerings were offered there, but to Yahweh through the pagan gods.

But this was not therefore offering to the God of Israel, who demands totally devotion to Himself as the only true God. For the temple services continued on some level (2 Kings 16:14-16), although Ahaz had brought idols into the holy place of the temple (2 Chron. 29:5). 2 Kings 16:18 helps understand this shutting the porch doors as meaning that he shut up one door or gate of the temple and devoted it to the idols of Assyria; without meaning that all the doors or gates of the temple were closed.

2Ch 29:8 Therefore the wrath of Yahweh was on Judah and Jerusalem, and He has delivered them to be tossed back and forth, to be an astonishment and a hissing, as you see with your eyes-

I suggest that 2 Chron. 32:25 refers to the reason why wrath came upon Judah, Jerusalem and Hezekiah himself. That wrath wasn't just threatened, it actually "came"(AV), there "was wrath" (NEV). For wrath to 'come' means that it was experienced- not just threatened. And we are specifically told there, with the same Hebrew phrase used, that the Assyrians came up against Hezekiah, Judah and Jerusalem because "God's wrath" was upon them, and Hezekiah's generations were seeing that "with your eyes" (2 Chron. 29:8). And there in 2 Chron. 32:25 we are told that this happened because of Hezekiah's pride and not returning to God what had been given him. That pride, therefore, doesn't apply to the time of the Babylonian ambassadors.

The idea of deferral of fulfilment is common enough in Scripture once you look for it. “The wrath of the Lord was upon Judah” in Hezekiah’s time; but he made a covenant with God and cleansed the temple “that his fierce wrath may turn away from us” (2 Chron. 29:8,10). But this day of the Lord’s wrath was in fact not removed entirely, as Hezekiah fell away; but it was deferred until 90 years later (Zeph. 1:18; 2:2).

2Ch 29:9 For, behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this-

We have read in 2 Chron. 28 of a series of captivities, by Israel, Edom, the Philistines and Assyria. Clearly this verse would have rung a bell with the exiles, who were likewise in captivity for these same reasons.

2Ch 29:10 Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel, that His fierce anger may turn away from us-

Ps. 78:38; 85:3 seem to suggest God Himself controlled His anger, Himself turning that anger away, rather than being like a pagan deity whose anger was appeased by blood sacrifice. God turned from His anger due to Moses' intercession (Ex. 32:12 s.w.), but this is not to say that He cannot in any case turn away His anger, simply by His grace. Just as we may control our anger from within ourselves, or at other times we may do this because of the appeal of another to us, or because there is repentance from the one who provoked us. And there were times when this was the case with God (s.w. Num. 25:4; Josh. 7:26; 2 Chron. 12:12; 29:10; 30:8). For we are made in His image.

2Ch 29:11 My sons, don’t be negligent now; for Yahweh has chosen you to stand before Him to minister to Him, and that you should be His ministers, and burn incense-

Although only 25 (:1), Hezekiah addresses the Levites and priests as if he is their elder. They had been lacking in fatherly spiritual guidance and so he attempts to fill

that role, as many young people have been forced to. For the need is the call. The emphasis may be upon "His" ministers; for the priests of Yahweh had been used to burn incense to false gods, under the program of mixing Yahweh worship with paganism practiced by Ahaz.

2Ch 29:12 Then the Levites arose, Mahath son of Amasai, and Joel son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish son of Abdi and Azariah son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah son of Zimmah and Eden son of Joah-
The 14 Levites now to be mentioned represent the complete family of Levites; two from each of the three sons of Levi; two from the Kohathite family of Elizaphan; and two from each of the three divisions of the singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (1 Chron. 25:1).

2Ch 29:13 and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeuel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah-
This may be the Elizaphan of Ex. 6:22. As with "Asaph", we are reading of their descendants, rather than any statement that men called Asaph and Elizaphan existed at Hezekiah's time.

2Ch 29:14 and of the sons of Heman, Jehuel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel-
These were the chiefs of the singers and musicians. They were not so taken up with the eclectic wonder of music that they were not also practical.

2Ch 29:15 They gathered their brothers and sanctified themselves, and went in, according to the commandment of the king by the words of Yahweh, to cleanse the house of Yahweh-
"By the words of Yahweh" could mean the implications of His previously recorded words, or some special revelation from a prophet. Hezekiah’s zealous cleansing of the temple (2 Chron. 29:12-16) would have been a conscious attempt Ps. 69:9 “The zeal of Your house has eaten me up”- and yet these words are applied to the Lord’s cleansing of the temple and His death in the first century. Hezekiah failed to be the Messianic figure he potentially could have been, and so they became true of the Lord Jesus. Could it not be that He cleansed the temple fully understanding these things, and seeking like Hezekiah to defer God’s wrath upon Judah, to give them a chance to repent? And it was delayed- in that there was no immediate wrath from Heaven against the Jews for murdering the Son of God. And yet the days were shortened as well as deferred for the elect’s sake. An amazing Father somehow builds all these various factors into His time periods. Truly everything happens in our lives at the ‘right’ time!

2Ch 29:16 The priests went in to the inner part of the house of Yahweh to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in Yahweh’s temple into the court of the house of Yahweh. The Levites took it, to carry it out abroad to the brook Kidron-
"The inner part" could refer to the most holy place where Ahaz had placed idols. Perhaps the extent of the blasphemy was so great the record prefers not to state it was the most holy place, but rather refers to the "inner part of the house". The Levites weren't allowed in to the most holy place, but were allowed into the court. Hence the priests carried these idols from the most holy place to the court, and their servants the

Levites carried them from there to the Kidron. This shows that despite the desecration of the most holy place by Ahaz, they still considered that spot to be holy, and the laws of sanctity concerning it were still to be obeyed by them so far as they could.

2Ch 29:17 Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of Yahweh. They sanctified the house of Yahweh in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end-
Eight days were spent sanctifying the court, and eight days the temple itself. LXX has "on the thirteenth day of the first month". If that is correct, then this was done in time for Passover, and the cleansing was done in the spirit of searching the home for leaven before keeping the Passover. See on :20.

We may well enquire as to Hezekiah's motives in this outburst of sudden zeal the moment his father died. Bearing in mind that he was to turn away from Yahweh in the end. Hezekiah had somehow survived Ahaz burning his children to idols (2 Chron. 28:3). So he may have reacted to his father's murder of his brothers by turning right against such idolatry. This means that his apparent zeal for Yahweh [remembering that he turned away from Him in the end and raised Manasseh] was partly due to a psychological reaction against his father and traumatic childhood experiences. For he would have lived in constant fear that he would also be offered, at the whim of the gods of his father.

2Ch 29:18 Then they went in to Hezekiah the king within the palace and said, We have cleansed all the house of Yahweh, and the altar of burnt offering, with all its vessels, and the table of showbread, with all its vessels-
The destruction of the vessels by Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:24) was not complete as some were retained, perhaps for worshipping Yahweh in the name of the idols. For this mixture of true and false worship was his characteristic failure, as it has always been for God's people. The cleansing may have been through sprinkling of water (from the reestablished laver, see on :19), and a prayer rededicating them to Yahweh's service. For they had apparently been used in worshipping idols through adapting Yahweh's rituals to those of idolatry. We must learn the lesson; that we cannot serve God through doing our own sinful thing, which is essentially idolatry.

2Ch 29:19 Moreover all the vessels which king Ahaz in his reign threw away when he trespassed, have we prepared and sanctified; and behold, they are before the altar of Yahweh-
"Prepared" is literally 'set up', perhaps referring to how Ahaz had cut off the bases of the laver (2 Kings 16:17). Some of the vessels were thrown away, others cut up or melted down (2 Chron. 28:24), and others, it seems, were used for the worship of idols and needed to therefore be cleansed. The specific desecration of the laver by Ahaz shows how he despised the whole idea of having to be cleansed in order to come before Yahweh; and perhaps that is why now there was so much emphasis upon cleansing. Perhaps the reestablished laver was used to cleanse the items desecrated by Ahaz.

2Ch 29:20 Then Hezekiah the king arose early, and gathered the princes of the city, and went up to the house of Yahweh-
This particular day when he rose early may have been the 14th day of the first month, Passover. See on :17.

There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:12); David (1 Sam. 17:20; 29:11); Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 29:20). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

2Ch 29:21 They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. He commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer them-
I suggested on :17 that this may have been the time of Passover. But Hezekiah alters the rituals, although retaining the offering of lambs, because of the deep sense of sin which was felt. The offering "for the kingdom" refers to the royal family.

On the altar of Yahweh-
Rather than on the new idol altar of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:11).

2Ch 29:22 So they killed the bulls, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar. They killed the rams, and sprinkled the blood on the altar: they killed also the lambs, and sprinkled the blood on the altar-
I suggested on :17 that this may have been the time of Passover. And this would explain why the Hebrew word translated "sprinkled" doesn't mean that; it is the word for "dashed", as the blood of the Passover lamb was to be dashed upon the door posts on Passover night. Clearly Hezekiah was adapting the Passover rituals to the situation before him at the time. There is indeed a spirit of the law which is far more important than the letter.

2Ch 29:23 They brought near the male goats for the sin offering before the king and the assembly; and they laid their hands on them-
The "they" who laid hands on the animals were the representatives of the people, the princes of :20. They were identifying the people with the sin offerings, placing the sins of the people upon them. This was all a modification of Mosaic ritual, and a big modification of the Passover rituals. But the spirit of it was absolutely correct. For the Passover could hardly be kept, celebrating deliverance from pagan Egypt, with such a weight of sin hanging over the people.

2Ch 29:24 and the priests killed them, and they made a sin offering with their blood on the altar, to make atonement for all Israel; for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel-
Literally, "they made a reconciliation". This collective forgiveness of a whole people, some of whom may not have been at all repentant, raises questions as to what degree we can attain forgiveness for others. Within invisible limits, there is a sense in which

this is possible even today (Mk. 2:5; James 5:15). But there is to be individual response to this experience of group forgiveness; see on :31.

2Ch 29:25 He set the Levites in the house of Yahweh with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was of Yahweh by His prophets-
I discussed on 1 Chron. 28:19 the possibility that not all that David claimed to have received by Divine commandment in relation to the temple ordinances was in fact from God. Some of it was of his own device and design. This is the first we hear of Gad and Nathan giving prophecies about these things. But there is the possibility that the commandments of David, and apparently Gad and Nathan, were just that- their commandments. Not inspired by God. But now the commandment to "set the Levites in the house of Yahweh" was given by Yahweh through His prophets at the time of Hezekiah. We noted on :15 the possibility that there were such prophets in operation at this time, guiding Hezekiah in the cleansing process.

2Ch 29:26 The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets-
This could refer to the instruments David had ordered to be used, or to actual musical instruments made by him (1 Chron. 23:5; Am. 6:5).

2Ch 29:27 Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song of Yahweh began also, and the trumpets, together with the instruments of David king of Israel-
Praise and sacrifice are often connected. The noise of the songs would have risen up as the smoke of the offerings did. They began at the same time. True praise is not merely musical performance enjoyed and indulged in for its own eclectic sake, but a form of "the sacrifice of praise" (Ps. 54;6; Jer. 33:11; Heb. 13:15). And we are asked to offer this sacrifice (Heb. 13:15). The allusion must surely be to this dramatic time when sacrifice and praise were so visibly connected together.

2Ch 29:28 All the assembly worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished-
The praise was exactly timed to start and finish with the burning of the animals. It started when the animals first began to burn, and ended precisely when the carcass was pronounced consumed. See on :27.

2Ch 29:29 When they had made an end of offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshipped-
The musical accompaniment ended as soon as the offering was consumed (:28). And now came the real worship. People with bowed heads, suggesting confession of sin, worshipping God through that contrite repentance. For that is the essence of worship.

2Ch 29:30 Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises to Yahweh with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. They sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped-
After the musical presentation which coincided with the offering (see on :27,28), there was the time of bowed heads in personal confession of sin which was also the true worship (:29). And now the singers sing joyful praise in the words of David and

Asaph. And with the gladness which can only come from true contrition and confession of sin. Joy in worship cannot just be switched on and off at will. It must have a basis, and ultimately that basis is in the experience of repentance and forgiveness.

2Ch 29:31 Then Hezekiah answered, Now you have consecrated yourselves to Yahweh; come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of Yahweh. The assembly brought in sacrifices and thank offerings; and as many as were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings-
Although forgiveness and reconciliation were achieved on a group basis (see on :24), there was to be individual response.

Ps. 51:11,12 speaks of God's "free spirit" [or 'willing spirit' ASV], paralleling it with God's Spirit, His "presence", the "joy of thy salvation". All those terms are parallel. The spirit of God is His presence, His salvation, joy, freedom. The Hebrew translated "free" really means 'generous'- the generosity of God's Spirit / mind / ways is shown in His forgiveness and saving of us. If God's spirit is His character, then, it is free, joyous, generous etc. Human beings can also have a "free heart" - the same Hebrew word appears translated like this in 2 Chron. 29:31 etc.- i.e. a spirit of generosity. When we have this, we are reflecting the "free spirit" / attitude of God. Whenever we are generous, His Spirit, with all its generosity, dwells in us and becomes our spirit. It is in this sense that I see a window into understanding the gift of God's spirit into the heart / mind / attitude of the believer. If God's spirit is free / generous, then so is ours to be; if His Spirit is joyous, just, true etc., then so is ours to be. In this sense we receive of His Spirit by reflecting His free and generous mind to others.

Realizing that what we appear to own in life is not actually ours but God's brings with it a great sense of freedom. No longer is there the endless anxiety about what is 'ours', and the need to keep it for ourselves. As noted above, the Hebrew word translated "free" is also that translated "liberal" or "generous". Hence in 2 Chron. 29:31 we find that "as many as were of a free heart [offered] burnt offerings". Actually that Hebrew word is usually translated "prince", the idea being that princes were wealthy enough to be 'free' and therefore generous if they wished. But *any* of us can have this noble / free heart, we can act like wealthy people whatever our poverty, in that we are free from the ties of materialism which bind so tightly.

2Ch 29:32 The number of the burnt offerings which the assembly brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, and two hundred lambs. All these were for a burnt offering to Yahweh-
I will suggest on :32 that in addition to these, there were then afterwards a larger number of animals offered as peace offerings. For the usual order is sin offering, burnt offering [a promise of dedication] and then the peace offerings which celebrated the peace with God achieved through following the path of forgiveness and dedication leading to peace and fellowship with God. It could be argued that this was not a large number, although if :33 is the tithe of the peace offerings, then the total number of sacrifices was significant.

2Ch 29:33 The consecrated things were six hundred head of cattle and three thousand sheep-
This could refer to the sacrifices which were to be given to the priests to eat (Lev. 21:22; 22:2,3,15); but their number is far greater than the number of cattle offered in

:32. Perhaps there were additional offerings in addition to those of :32, and this was the tithe of them. It could be that these were the tithe of the thank offerings / peace offerings which were offered separately to the burnt offerings of :32. In which case there was far more celebration of peace with God than there was attention to dedication to Him. In this case, we have a warning against celebrating peace with God in worship without due attention to the dedication required to get to that point. Much modern worship is severely lacking in this.

2Ch 29:34 But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings. Therefore their brothers the Levites helped them, until the work was ended, and until the priests had sanctified themselves; for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests-
As noted several times already in this chapter, the letter of the law had to be broken by the spirit of the whole situation. The implication is that "the priests were too few" in that too few of them had sanctified themselves, whereas the servant Levites had more amongst them who had sanctified themselves.

2Ch 29:35 Also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings, and with the drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of Yahweh was set in order-
This would have required a large amount of wine (Num. 15:5-10). There is no mention of this being offered when Solomon offered his huge numbers of burnt offerings. "So the service... was set in order" is a phrase used only of the time of Hezekiah's reformation (2 Chron. 29:35) and of that of Josiah (2 Chron. 35:10,15,16). It seems Josiah was inspired by the record of Hezekiah's reformation, and sought to follow it. Just as we too in our own contexts are to be inspired by the spirit of these reformers.

2Ch 29:36 Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, because of that which God had prepared for the people; for this was done suddenly-
I suggested on :17 that this very sudden outburst of devotion to Yahweh was partly a psychological reaction of Hezekiah to the death of his father. And it was not necessarily a sign of a heart devoted to Yahweh. We need to consider to what extent our apparent devotion to the Lord is the outworking of psychological factors in our earlier lives or childhood.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 30

2Ch 30:1 Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to Yahweh, the God of Israel-
I suggested on 2 Chron. 29:17,18 that in fact Hezekiah did keep a kind of Passover on the 14th day of the first month, but majorly modified. The weight of sin hanging over everything needed to be dealt with before they could all rejoice in remembering God's great deliverance of them from pagan Egypt. We note Hezekiah's vision of uniting Judah and Israel in this Passover. He had no fear of guilt by association or contamination by communion. For the ten tribes were deeply apostate, and had influenced Judah into apostacy. He makes no attempt to apply some test of doctrinal

or practical purity, but simply offered an open table welcome. And those who accepted it showed thereby their basic commitment to what the Passover represented. And that is the basis upon which I advocate an open table at the Lord's supper. Acceptance of the invitation to partake is the only requirement.

2Ch 30:2 For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the assembly in Jerusalem, to keep the Passover in the second month-
"The assembly in Jerusalem" presumably refers to the group in 2 Chron. 29 who had assembled at the time of the Passover in the first month. Numbers 9 allowed for those who were distant or travelling to keep the Passover a month later. But that legislation doesn't cover the eventuality here- that the priests were unclean. Likewise in 2 Chron. 30:18, "yet they ate the Passover otherwise than it is written". So we see how God's laws were not seen as a leash, as a letter that had to be literalistically obeyed. By contrast, contemporary Hittite laws condemned any failure to keep a festival on its specified day. The law of Moses is hereby shown to be open to interpretation and obedience according to spirit and not letter. Perhaps it was this perception of Divine flexibility that led Hezekiah to reason with God to change His plan that Hezekiah should die.

2Ch 30:3 For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem-
The implication of 2 Chron. 29:34 is that "the priests were too few" in that too few of them had sanctified themselves, whereas the servant Levites had more amongst them who had sanctified themselves. The priesthood had been used by Ahaz to combine the worship of Yahweh with that of idols, and so they perhaps didn't immediately change to a sole commitment to Yahweh. It was not the constraint of either time nor numbers which meant they were not of "sufficient number". See on :15.

The context is the cleansing of the temple recorded in the previous chapter: "The priests went in to the inner part of the house of Yahweh to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in Yahweh’s temple into the court of the house of Yahweh. The Levites took it, to carry it out abroad to the brook Kidron. Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of Yahweh. They sanctified the house of Yahweh in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end. Then they went in to Hezekiah the king within the palace and said, We have cleansed all the house of Yahweh, and the altar of burnt offering, with all its vessels, and the table of showbread, with all its vessels" (2 Chron. 29:16-18). Passover was on the 14th day of the first month, but the sanctification process continued until the 16th day. They missed it by two days, as it were. Hezekiah must have been urging them on to get the job done, but it seems there were too few priests and Levites willing to work in clearing out the idols. Hezekiah had various possibilities before him. He could have just kept the Passover in homes, or on an altar made of earth. The fact he didn't rather indicates that he over valued the temple building. There was nothing in the original Passover legislation that required the Passover to be kept in the temple. Rather the intention was that each family should sacrifice it. But rather as many prefer a Cathedral to a house church, so Hezekiah veered the way of religion. Had he not done so, all the angst about the temple being unclean would have been unnecessary.

Or Hezekiah could have just changed the day. But instead he chose, in line with Num. 9, to keep the Passover still on the 14th, but, in the second month. Time and

again in the account of his Passover, the letter of the law was not kept and Hezekiah felt confident enough of his relationship with Yahweh to ammend things and to believe that God was open to dialogue. This came to full term 14 years later when he felt able to reason with God about his terminal illness- and God changed His plan. We too are led through such steps of experience to intimacy with God.

There is a telling allusion to the provision of Numbers 9 in 2 Chron. 30:3, which states that the majority of people came to keep Passover in the second month "because they could not perform it at that time". This is repeating the essence of Num. 9:6, "and they could not perform the Passover on that day" because they were unclean from touching a dead body. But Hezekiah extrapolates further, and prays that those who were actually unclean could still acceptably partake of the Passover. This is not to say that we can extrapolate the essence of things to allow anything. But clearly we are meant to see that even being unclean doesn't stop fellowship with God, and His desire to fellowship the unclean. His beloved Son likewise broke His bread with the unclean.

2Ch 30:4 The thing was right in the eyes of the king and of all the assembly-
This "assembly" may refer to the assembled elders, but likely it specifically refers to the group in 2 Chron. 29 who had assembled at the time of the Passover in the first month. I suggested on :3 that God's way of keeping Passover was not the way that Hezekiah was going about things. He was obsessed with his plan for a very "religious", central point obedience to commandments intended to be obeyed by individual families. Perhaps this is the implication behind the statement that he did what seemed right to him and to the people- not necessarily what was right in God's eyes.

2Ch 30:5 So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to Yahweh, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not kept it in great numbers in the manner that is written-
Israel's general lack of obedience to the Mosaic law is quite stunning. This verse seems to imply that they had never actually kept the Passover "in great numbers", neither "in the manner that is written". And yet God still fellowshipped with them and sought their reformation. To disfellowship people for "long continued absence from the Lord's table" was obviously not something God practiced nor approved of. He remained actively seeking relationship with Israel.

2Ch 30:6 So the couriers went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king saying, You children of Israel, turn again to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that He may return to the remnant that have escaped of you out of the hand of the kings of Assyria-
This implies that the majority had gone into captivity. The "remnant" were intended to become the spiritual remnant through whom the Kingdom could be reestablished on earth. "Return" is the word for "repent". Their repentance, or returning, would lead to God's returning to them. Again we note that Hezekiah had no parochial interest in merely reforming Judah, but his vision was of a reunited people of God, unified through the common experience of repentance and forgiveness. And in practice, that is the only true basis for unity amongst God's people, rather than any written statement of theological propositions and positions.

2Ch 30:7 Don't be like your fathers, and like your brothers, who trespassed against Yahweh, the God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to destruction, as you see-
It was critical in their culture to defend the tradition of the male relatives, fathers and brothers. To break with them was some kind of social suicide. But the call to repentance demanded just that from them, as it does today. The phrase 'given up to destruction' has just been used about Judah specifically (2 Chron. 29:8). And this is what God would finally do to Judah (s.w. Jer. 25:18; 29:18). The exiles for whom Chronicles was written were intended to realize that the tragedy which had happened to them had been so avoidable.

2Ch 30:8 Now don't be stiff-necked, as your fathers were-
Hebrew thought and language tends not to use abstract terms but rather uses language which alludes to physical body parts- e.g. 'look' becomes 'to lift up the eyes' (Gen. 22:4), anger is 'to burn in the nostrils' (Ex. 4:14), to reveal something is to 'unstop someone's ears' (Ruth 4:4), to be without compassion is to be 'hard hearted' (1 Sam. 6:6), stubbornness is to be 'stiff necked' (2 Chron. 30:8), to prepare oneself is to 'gird up the loins' (Jer. 1:17), to determine to go somewhere is 'to set one's face' (Jer. 42:15; Lk. 9:51).

But yield yourselves to Yahweh, and enter into His sanctuary which He has sanctified forever-
"Yield yourselves" is literally 'give your hand to'. And the same phrase is used in :12 of how God's hand gave them a heart to obey His commandments. This was in response to their giving their hands to Him.

Serve Yahweh your God, that His fierce anger may turn away from you-
Ps. 78:38 seems to suggest God Himself controlled His anger, Himself turning that anger away, rather than being like a pagan deity whose anger was appeased by blood sacrifice: "He, being merciful, forgave iniquity, and didn't destroy them. Yes, many times He turned His anger away, and didn't stir up all His wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes away, and doesn't come again". His turning away of His anger isn't solely because of His people turning to Him. He wishes for that. But at times He turns away legitimate wrath in the hope His people therefore might turn to Him: "You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin. Selah. You have taken away all Your wrath, You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger. Turn us, God of our salvation" (Ps. 85:2-4).

God turned from His anger due to Moses' intercession (Ex. 32:12 s.w.), but this is not to say that He cannot in any case turn away His anger, simply by His grace. Just as we may control our anger from within ourselves, or at other times we may do this because of the appeal of another to us, or because there is repentance from the one who provoked us. And there were times when this was the case with God (s.w. Num. 25:4; Josh. 7:26; 2 Chron. 12:12; 29:10; 30:8).

2Ch 30:9 For if you turn again to Yahweh, your brothers and your children shall find compassion before those who led them captive, and shall come again into this land: for Yahweh your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you if you return to Him-
The majority of the ten tribes had not gone into formal captivity at this point, but many had already been taken. The predicted destruction of Samaria by Assyria could have been averted had the Passover been kept properly by the ten tribes at this point. Will some be in the Kingdom only due to the efforts of a third party? The husband

can save his wife… Noah saved his family. The spirituality of those in the land could affect the fate of the others in captivity (2 Chron. 30:9- and these words are applied to us in James 4:8). Indeed, if *Judah* had turned back to the Lord fully, then the 10 tribes who about 10 years previously had been taken into captivity in Assyria, they would have found "compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land" (2 Chron. 30:9). But they became 'the lost 10 tribes' because Judah didn't respond as fully to Hezekiah's reformation as they should have done.

The exiles particularly were shown "pity" by the powers of their day, allowing them to return to Zion and rebuild it (s.w. Neh. 1:11 "mercy"). This "pity" or "mercy before them that lead you captive" was specifically predicated upon their repentance (s.w. 2 Chron. 30:9). But they didn't repent; and yet they were shown this mercy / pity. That was the grace of it all. This "pity" was the pity of God who would according to that pity / mercy regather them (s.w. Is. 54:7; Zech. 1:16). He showed them that pity despite their impenitence; and yet most of them preferred to spurn it by remaining in exile.

2Ch 30:10 So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even to Zebulun; but there they were ridiculed and despised-
The Lord uses this idea in His parable of the vineyard, where God's servants the prophets are ridiculed when they come asking for fruit from the vineyard (Mt. 21:34-36). Zebulun was now effectively the northern border because north of there had been desolated by the Assyrians.

2Ch 30:11 Nevertheless certain men of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem-
These "certain men" are the "many" of :18. Perhaps the idea is that only a few came, relative to the population invited. But they were "many" to God. It's the same paradox with the path and gate to eternity being found by "few", with "many" not finding it; and yet those "few" are as many as the stars of the sky, such is the wonder of salvation.

2Ch 30:12 Also on Judah came the hand of God to give them one heart, to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the word of Yahweh-
"Yield yourselves" in :8 is literally 'give your hand to'. And the same phrase is used here of how God's hand gave them a heart to obey His commandments. This was in response to their giving their hands to Him. This experience of an acceptive mutuality between God and man is surely at the very core of our spirituality; it should be part of an inner spiritual shell that nothing, *nothing* can shake: aggression from our brethren, disillusion with other Christians, persecution from the world, painful personal relationships... Israel were to give their hand to God, and His hand in turn would give them a heart to follow Him further.

Those who turn from Him and put His word into second place in their lives are confirmed in this, until they are progressively caught up in a downward spiral of declension. On the other hand, those who try to be lead by God's word are progressively lead ever higher in an upward spiral of spirituality, whereby God eases the way to obedience, shields them from temptation, and opens their minds to the Truth of His word (e.g. 2 Chron. 30:12; Ps. 119:173; Prov. 16:3; 2 Thess. 2:17).

Hezekiah's insistence that the Passover must be slain by ritually clean Levites in the temple was not according to God's law. But He accepted Hezekiah's project of a Passover kept by all Israel and thus it became His word. We see how open God is to

working with men, even if they go off at a religious tangent and become obsessed with their own project. We are left with impression that He is eager to work with the few who want to do something for Him. Even if is His Plan D.

2Ch 30:13 Many people assembled at Jerusalem to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great assembly-
As discussed on :13,18, they were "many" compared to the wonder of what they were doing. But "few" relative to the overall population.

2Ch 30:14 They arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron-
The large mass of people (:13) inspired each other to further purge the results of Ahaz's apostacy. The temple had been cleansed, but the crowd now purged the city of Jerusalem of the altars which were apparently everywhere. And yet we have to note that this was done under the influence of a group psychology, for it was only once the great crowd formed to keep the Passover that this was done. And relatively soon afterwards, the people of Jerusalem were to return to their idolatry. For true spiritual reformation must be in individual hearts, and not the result of a group psychology. This may have inspired Josiah, who likewise destroyed idolatry in the Kidron and then called for the Passover to be celebrated.

2Ch 30:15 Then they killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought burnt offerings into the house of Yahweh-
The implication of 2 Chron. 29:34 is that "the priests were too few" in that too few of them had sanctified themselves. See on :3. We wonder why they were only now ashamed and sanctified themselves, whereas a month previously they had not done so. I suggest it was the presence of the large crowd of people who had come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover (:13,14) which made them ashamed that they could not help them because they were not cleansed. And so it was the presence of the crowd of apparently zealous worshippers who shamed them into sanctifying themselves. I read it this way because we know that very soon, both priesthood and people were to return to idolatry. And so I see in this revival and reformation a large element of group psychology, getting caught up in the spirit of the crowd, rather than on an individual level, heart by heart, each person repenting and remaining changed.

2Ch 30:16 They stood in their place after their order, according to the law of Moses the man of God, and the priests sprinkled the blood which they received of the hand of the Levites-
The sprinkling of blood at Passover was upon the door posts, and was a reminder of their salvation from death at the exodus. It was each family group who were to do this, not priests. The law never required that. But the ritual was modified here, just as the date of Passover had been modified. The blood was sprinkled upon the people to symbolize their cleansing.

2Ch 30:17 There were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves: therefore the Levites were in charge of killing the Passovers for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to Yahweh-
The unclean nature of the people may be a reference to their not having observed the commands about avoiding leaven or contact with unclean things (Num. 9:6). They

perhaps were ignorant of the Passover regulations. Or the uncleanness may refer to idolatry; hence the note that they were now to be sanctified "to Yahweh". And so they were cleansed by the sprinkling of blood in :16. This looked forward to how the blood of Christ saves from both wilful and ignorant disobedience to the letter of the law.

There is no commandment that a man must be ritually clean to keep the Passover. But the people assumed this were the case, and so they wanted Levites to keep the Passover for them. Num. 9:10,11 seems to see uncleannsess as a barrier to eating the Passover only if there had been contact with a dead body: "Say to the children of Israel, 'If any man of you or of your generations is unclean by reason of a dead body, or is on a journey far away, he shall still keep the Passover to Yahweh. In the second month, on the fourteenth day at evening they shall keep it". Yet Hezekiah appears to have extrapolated from this to consider any contact with idols as making unclean, even though he had declared the bronze serpent idol merely Nehushtan, a piece of brass. On one level he got it, but then his religiosity took over and he ended up burdening the people and the Levites with a sense of guilt for uncleanness which they need not have taken.

Although it was God's original intention that each family leader sanctified themselves and slew the Passover lamb personally, they came to delegate this to their priests (so 2 Chron. 30:17 implies). Israel totally failed to live up to God's desire that they should be a *Kingdom* of priests. They left it all to their priests. They *didn't* teach every man his neighbour and his brother, saying, Know the Lord (Heb. 8:11; even though when He re-accepts them, God will count them as if they did). Had Hezekiah kept the spirit of the Passover, without such insistence upon the Levites and priests killing it, and doing so in the temple rather than at home, then all the angst over priests being ritually unclean would not have arisen. The original Passover legislation said nothing about the need for ritual cleanliness when eating it. Nor were Levites required to kill the lambs. And yet despite burdening himself with all this religiosity and legalism, Hezekiah still comes over as a man of integrity who did his best to live rightly before God despite those self imposed burdens. And we see this in so many "religious" people who are all the same believers.

2Ch 30:18 For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun-

They were many compared to the wonder of God's acceptance of them, but relatively few in another sense; see on :11.

Had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than it is written. For Hezekiah had prayed for them saying, May the good Yahweh pardon everyone-

See on :17. Their being unclean may not only refer to a lack of obedience to the commands about yeast, but to the uncleanness of the immediate context at this time- which was idolatry. The people who attended would have been idolaters as well as worshippers of Yahweh. Hezekiah obtained forgiveness and acceptance for those who kept the Passover "otherwise than it was written"- thanks to his prayer. The spirituality of third parties can save people who wish to be saved, within invisible limits (Mk. 2:5; James 5:15). All Israel had to repent to avert total destruction- but even though they didn't, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation (Jer. 26:13,19). And later, all of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed judgment, after the pattern of Phinehas (Jer. 5:1- or is this a reference to Messiah?).

"The good Yahweh" may be better rendered "The Lord pardon the good" (as in 2 Chron. 19:11), and this then leads on smoothly in thought to the next verse which defines 'goodness'.

2Ch 30:19 who sets his heart to seek God, Yahweh, the God of his fathers, even if they aren't clean according to the purification of the sanctuary-
The 'goodness' of :18 (Heb. "Yahweh pardon the good") is defined as a matter of having a heart set upon God. And the state of the heart trumped ritual, legalistic purity. Seeking God, wanting to get to Him, is seen as the critical thing. And the Sermon on the Mount likewise pronounces blessedness upon those who hunger after righteousness, who weep for their sins... those who haven't made it, but want to.

2Ch 30:20 Yahweh listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people-
The reference may be to the threat of destruction, perhaps by plague, for those who defiled the sanctuary by their uncleanness (Lev. 15:31 "so they will not die in their uncleanness, when they defile my tabernacle that is in their midst'"). But all this could have been avoided if Hezekiah had quit his religiosity and allowed the people to keep the Passover at home, well away from the temple. For there was no Mosaic requirement to eat Passover at the sanctuary. The people were laded with false guilt by Hezekiah's desire to go the way of religion rather than personal spirituality; and this happens so often. Hezekiah was not wrong to want to have a collective Passover in one place, but there again we see him considering God's law open to human negotiation. And this stood him in good stead when 14 years later he asked for his sentence of death to be lifted or delayed, and God responded. As discussed on :18, the prayer and spirituality of one person can affect outcomes for others. This is a huge inspiration to continue earnestly in prayer, knowing that prayer makes a real difference for those prayed for. The language of healing could imply that plague began to break out. Although so much had been done within the spirit of the law, the danger was that there would be the impression given that God was simply not serious about His law. And so perhaps plague did begin, but was halted by Hezekiah's prayer. See on :27. An alternative is to understand 'healing' as simply meaning forgiveness as in Jer. 3:22 ["I will heal your backsliding"], Hos. 14:4 ["I will heal their waywardness"], Ps. 41:4 ["Yahweh, have mercy on me! Heal me, for I have sinned against You"]. Because there was no plague threatened for keeping the Passover unclean, so it is hard to understand 'healing' as referring to physical plague being healed. In which case, we have an example of prayer resulting in the sin of third parties being forgiven as in Mk. 2:5.

Hezekiah here prayed for those who kept the Passover whilst unclean, and they were "healed" according to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:20 "Yahweh listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people"). Hezekiah is later "healed" (s.w. 2 Kings 20:5,8) but he never requests that healing. We wonder why he doesn't specifically request his own healing? Perhaps he was too depressed. Or just willing to accept God's will. Or perhaps it was that the peoples' plague was due to infringement of Divine law, whereas he wrongly felt he had not sinned. He therefore felt he didn't deserve his death, and pleads with God to remember his spotless life. Something is clearly wrong here in his thinking, as it is in the thinking of all who consider death to be somehow unfair.

2Ch 30:21 The children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised Yahweh day by day, singing with loud instruments to Yahweh-

We note how the Levites [servants of the priests] are mentioned before the priests. This may be because they were more truly committed to Yahweh (see on 2 Chron. 29:34), or to show that in God's service, all are equal and the servant is as significant as his master.

2Ch 30:22 Hezekiah spoke to the heart of all the Levites who had good understanding in the service of Yahweh. So they ate throughout the feast for the seven days, offering sacrifices of peace offerings, and making confession to Yahweh, the God of their fathers-

We note the continued emphasis upon the work of the Levites, rather than the priests. It could be that many priests were still not willing to separate from their old roles of being priests to the idols as well as Yahweh (see on 2 Chron. 29:34). The mention of peace offerings shows how again the original Passover feast was being expanded, showing how Hezekiah perceived the openness of God.

2Ch 30:23 The whole assembly took counsel to keep another seven days; and they kept another seven days with gladness-

This is of course commendable, but given how soon the people reverted to idolatry, we have to consider that there was a large factor of group psychology in all this. We are wired as social creatures, taking energy and direction from each other, and therefore like sheep going astray; and also being led to better ways if that is where the group is headed. So we get the sense here that they were on a huge roll, and were feeding off each other. Again we see how spirit triumphs over the letter of the law. The joy from knowing that they as unclean people had been accepted... led them to go beyond the letter of the law and go further. Truly Divine law is not a chain, but rather a springboard to independent freewill service of God. The whole of Hezekiah's Passover could be described as a "rush". It was forced through quickly, the people from the ten tribes were invited last minute, requiring them to quit what they were doing and come immediately. And then the decision to keep another seven days was made on the cusp of the moment. Such enthusiasm to serve Yahweh is presented here as commendable, and contrasts with the caution of conservative approaches- which would've said "Let's plan to do this next year...".

2Ch 30:24 For Hezekiah king of Judah gave to the assembly for offerings one thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep-

These huge numbers of sacrifices seem intended to imitate Solomon's dedication of the temple. But this was not a good example to follow. For God did not want rivers of blood and thousands of sacrifices, but rather, broken and contrite hearts. There were no bulls offered as part of the Passover, and yet 2000 were now offered. It all seems to have tended towards the pole of religious mania rather than spirituality. And again we note that offering bulls was not required for the Passover ritual.

And a great number of priests sanctified themselves-

As noted on :3,15, the priests were slow to sanctify themselves, to dedicate themselves slowly to Yahweh; although their servants the Levites were quicker to do so. It seems that now we have another group of priests who did this, swept along in the group psychology of the situation. But that is not to say that their sanctification to Yahweh alone was insincere or unacceptable. For this phrase is quoted in Acts 6:7 "a great number of priests were obedient to the faith" in Christ. They too were likely caught up in group psychology, as are Sunday School students and others when they

accept baptism as a group, seeing their friends and relations all doing it. But this doesn't make their conversion of itself invalid. But it is the long run which decides who is sincere, and that was to be the case with this fervour for Yahweh which was progressively engulfing the priests at this time.

Is. 10:9-11 speaks specifically of Rabshakeh's taunts: "Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?". It is clear that Hezekiah's reforms and the idol smashing of 2 Chron. 30, 14 years earlier, were all of a surface level. The Jerusalem under siege by Assyria in Hezekiah's time was full of idols. And Is. 2 lamented that the land of Judah was "full of idols".

2Ch 30:25 All the assembly of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the assembly who came out of Israel, and the foreigners who came out of the land of Israel, and who lived in Judah, rejoiced-
"Foreigners" could refer to Gentiles. The fact they are mentioned separately shows that they were not fully absorbed into Israelite society, and I see this as another example of where after the first Passover in Egypt, Gentiles were welcome to participate in the Passover. It was an open table, as it is in liberal Judaism today. Although it seems the majority of the ten tribes refused the invitation to come to Jerusalem and keep the Passover, maybe some of the other nations whom the Assyrians had transplanted to Israel now responded, as it were instead of Israel. This would be unsurprising, and would be looking ahead to the Gentiles accepting the crumbs of the Messianic feast which the Jews rejected at the Lord's time. But "foreigners" may also be a technical term which Judah had come to apply to the ten tribes.

2Ch 30:26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem-
There is no reference to Solomon keeping Passover, but rather to his offering huge numbers of animals at the dedication of the temple. This itself was not what God wanted; He wanted broken hearts rather than thousands of animals. But the religious verve caught up everybody, and they rejoiced together. Although given their later apostacy, we must enquire how well motivated was this "great joy", and whether it was not partly the result of a psychological reaction against the misery of Ahaz's reign.

2Ch 30:27 Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, even to heaven-
"Their prayer came up..." suggests the idea of human words ascending all the way up to the very habitation of God. The words that ascended were seeking blessing, or forgiveness, upon others. And God is really sensitive to this. The temple and ark are sometimes referred to as the heavens (2 Sam. 15:25 cp. 1 Kings 8:30; Ps. 20:2,6; 11:4; Heb. 7:26). The church is the new temple, and is therefore at times referred to as the heavenlies in the New Testament. However this continues the theme discussed on :18,20- that the prayer of one party can save and bring eternal blessing upon other parties. This is a wonderful feature of God's system of working with men; for it inspires us to true prayer and deep pastoral effort for others, knowing that we can make an eternal difference.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 31

2Ch 31:1 Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah, and broke in pieces the pillars, and cut down the Asherim, and broke down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned each man to his possession, into their own cities-

we see the progression. Firstly the temple had been cleansed and the idols taken out of it and broken. Then, the crowd of fired up worshippers at Passover had done the same to the idols in the streets of Jerusalem. And now the people went out into the cities of the provinces and did the same. We note the usage of the phrase "all Israel", celebrating the fact that some from the ten tribes had attended the Passover and were united with Judah in a revulsion at Ahaz's idolatry. But the language is exaggerated. For only a few from the ten tribes had attended, with the majority mocking the invitation to keep a Passover to Yahweh (2 Chron. 30:10,11). And it is unlikely that all the altars in "Ephraim and Manasseh" as well as Judah were destroyed. We don't get the impression king Hoshea of Israel joined in with this For idolatry returned to Judah very soon after this. Judah reached a new low of idolatry at the time of their next king Manasseh. The impression that "all" Israel did this is the same usage of language noted on 2 Chron. 30:11,18, whereby only a few came from Israel to the Passover, but they are called "many", relative to the wonder and significance of their coming. And likewise here, the wonder of what was done by some in breaking down the high places and idols is talked up as if it was larger than it was. But in understanding the nature of how Semitic language functions, we see no unethical exaggeration nor factual error.

Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48;25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice. God will conquer sin, ultimately.

2Ch 31:2 Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites after their divisions, each man according to his service, both the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister, to give thanks and to praise in the gates of the camp of Yahweh-

This speaks of Jerusalem and especially the temple as the city of the hosts or military camp of Yahweh- as if the Angelic hosts were especially present in the temple. See on Ps. 78:60.

2Ch 31:3 He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the

Sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of Yahweh-
Hezekiah was keen to lead by example, with a public, visible offering of sacrifices specifically in his name.

2Ch 31:4 Moreover he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the law of Yahweh-
We note this was just in Jerusalem, and we wonder whether in fact there was not so much commitment in the rest of the land. Or perhaps Hezekiah wanted the literate priests in Jerusalem to specifically make a study of the law, and to not have to worry about where their food was coming from.

2Ch 31:5 As soon as the commandment was published, the children of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, new wine, oil and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly-
See on :10. The idea is that they generously interpreted the tithe and brought all they could for the priests and Levites, far beyond the requirements of Num. 18:8,9. A theme of the Hezekiah narrative is that of living by the spirit and not the letter of the law. And this was something helpful for the exiles, whose situation precluded them from keeping the letter of the law.

2Ch 31:6 The children of Israel and Judah, who lived in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of dedicated things which were consecrated to Yahweh their God, and laid them by heaps-
The command for tithes to be brought had been specifically made in the context of supporting the Jerusalem priesthood (:4). This is why the people from other towns now brought their tithes to Jerusalem. We note that people from "Israel and Judah... lived in the cities of Judah". Continually in the Hezekiah narrative we get the impression of unity between the faithful in both Israel and Judah, based around a common experience of repentance, forgiveness and restoration. This was to be the pattern for the exiles. There was likewise a prophetic vision of a new people of God being formed, from both Israel and Judah, as well as repentant Gentiles. Chronicles was written for the exiles, and so it is being stressed that something like this did [briefly] happen in Hezekiah's time. It was not unthinkable nor impossible.

2Ch 31:7 In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month-
The idea may be that these piles of food grew over those four months. But we wonder why they stopped after that; and we naturally wonder whether the enthusiasm for tithing waned. Although it may be that after that they began tithing to their local priests and Levites in their own provincial areas. But it should be noted that the grain harvest was in the third month (Pentecost), and harvest continued until the end of the fruit harvest in the seventh month (Tabernacles / ingathering). So the idea may be that they had a good harvest that year and generously tithed it to the Levites.

2Ch 31:8 When Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed Yahweh and His people Israel-
The praise of Israel for their generosity is understandable; note how again the united faithful of Israel and Judah are called "Israel", even though most of the donors were

likely from Judah. A new, united Israel was being potentially formed. But why praise Yahweh for the generosity of His people? I conclude that this was because He through His Spirit had given them this desire to be generous and obedient. So again we see God's direct action upon the human heart, leading us to spirituality- if we are open to it.

2Ch 31:9 Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps-
The size of the heaps was such that Hezekiah wondered why the Levites and priests hadn't used them (:10); and the answer was that they had well eaten, but there was far too much food donated. The exiles were to have a different experience with "heaps" (s.w. Hag. 2:16), and to be rebuked for not being generous with tithes and offerings.

2Ch 31:10 Azariah the chief priest, of the house of Zadok, answered him and said, Since people began to bring the offerings into the house of Yahweh, we have eaten and had enough, and have left plenty; for Yahweh has blessed His people. That which is left is this great store-
Whenever Israel were specifically asked for contributions, they always responded very generously. But their hearts were often very far from God. Ez. 20 says that Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea; and yet when asked to donate towards the building of the tabernacle, they responded with stellar generosity. We simply learn that generous giving is not necessarily the same as spirituality.

2Ch 31:11 Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare rooms in the house of Yahweh; and they prepared them-
These chambers around the temple court were where the holy vessels and tithes were stored (1 Chron. 28:12; 2 Chron. 31:5,11,12; Neh. 13:4-9). It could be to these rooms which the Lord Jesus alludes when He says that in God's house / temple, there are many such rooms and He will go to die on the cross to prepare them for our use, as Hezekiah prepared them here (Jn. 14:1-3). He clearly has in view the temple as a spiritual house, comprised of people not bricks. The idea is that His death achieved for us not only salvation, but eternal service as priests within God's "house", being about God's work and business for the sake of others' salvation and implementing their relationship with God. This is what eternity will be about. And it is in this life which we develop our desire to do these things, so that the Kingdom will be a time when all the frustrations and barriers to such service are removed.

2Ch 31:12 They brought in the offerings, the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully. Conaniah the Levite was ruler over them, and Shimei his brother was second-
Again we see the prominence of a Levite; for rather than a priest, a Levite was the manager of this work. Not only were the servant class exalted in God's eyes, but it seems the Levites were more committed than the priests (2 Chron. 29:34).

2Ch 31:13 Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath and Benaiah were overseers under the hand of Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah the king, and Azariah the ruler of God's house-
Most of these names have God's name in them or have some spiritual meaning. Yet they would all have been born in the time of Ahaz. Perhaps these are not their birth names, but names they came to have in reflection of their faith and hope in Yahweh

subsequently. In total, there were 12 such overseers- again hinting at the desire to unite all 12 tribes of Israel in this new, reformed and revived kingdom.

2Ch 31:14 Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the porter at the east gate, was over the freewill offerings of God, to distribute the offerings of Yahweh and the most holy things-
The freewill offerings were tithed to the Levites, but the question was always as to who got what. And so a Levite, not a priest, a humble porter or gatekeeper (Ps. 84:10), was chosen to oversee this. And the spirit of it continues in the charge to appoint the least esteemed to judge in the church (1 Cor. 6:4).

2Ch 31:15 Under him were Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priests, in their office of trust, to give to their brothers by divisions, both to the great and small-
We too have been entrusted with the Gospel, Paul says. The Father and Son have turned over the mission of saving men to the church; and they have truly turned it over. This means that if men and women reject Him because we are the face of Jesus to them, and they don't think much of it…then this is solely our fault. There is no indication that God will rush in and save us from the mess we have made of His work. He has delegated to us genuine authority and meaningful independence, just as the Levites were given a "trust" to do the Lord's work (2 Chron. 31:15,18 RVmg.). He is prepared to work with us in assistance, but we are entrusted with the work (Gal. 2:7 RV)- just as a naughty pupil may be given a responsible job to do by a teacher, and the sheer wonder of having been thus entrusted makes him perform the duty reliably. This is a thought so demanding and unnerving; for we would all prefer to think that we are just insignificant pawns in a game that is being played out by God against this world, whether or not we chose to participate.

2Ch 31:16 Also under him were those who were reckoned by genealogy of males, from three years old and upward, even each one who entered into the house of Yahweh, as the duty of every day required, for their service in their offices according to their divisions-
It seems another record of the priests was made, along with the schedule according to which they went up to the temple to serve; so that there would be a just distribution of the tithes amongst them all.

2Ch 31:17 and those who were reckoned by genealogy of the priests by their fathers' houses; and the Levites from twenty years old and upward, in their offices by their divisions-
See on :16. Some of the tithes could only be eaten by the priests in the holy place, so it seems this was factored in to the distribution of the tithes amongst the Levites.

2Ch 31:18 and those who were reckoned by genealogy of all their little ones, their wives, their sons and their daughters, through all the congregation. In their office of trust they sanctified themselves in holiness-
As noted on :16, a list of all Levites and their children was drawn up, to ensure the fair distribution of the tithes amongst them according to the sizes of their families. We could infer that unjust distribution of tithes was a reason why the priesthood had become so dysfunctional.

2Ch 31:19 Also for the sons of Aaron the priests, who were in the fields of the suburbs of their cities, in every city, there were men who were mentioned by name, to give portions to all the males among the priests, and to all who were reckoned by genealogy among the Levites-
The arrangements for justly sharing out the tithes, considering the number of people in each family, how many of them ate tithes in the holy place when on duty in Jerusalem etc., is described here somewhat repetitively (:16-19). It is a major emphasis. And yet after some centuries of supposed obedience to the Mosaic law, this seems the first time that this question of equal distribution of tithes amongst the Levites had been considered. It is another indication that the people were so very far from obedience to God's law, although that was the basis of their covenant relationship with Yahweh. And yet despite that disobedience, He patiently remained their God. Such was and is His earnest desire to build covenant relationship even with a people who didn't really want to respond to it.

2Ch 31:20 Hezekiah did so throughout all Judah; and he worked that which was good and right and faithful before Yahweh his God-
He did 'truth' (Heb.). To commit violence to others' persons is to live a lie (Hos. 12:1). Truth is not therefore merely a set of doctrines; it refers to an obedient life, and covenant relationship with God. The LXX uses the phrase 'to do truth', which John uses in the NT, in passages like 2 Chron. 31:20 (about Hezekiah's obedience to commandments), or in Gen. 47:29; Is. 26:10 to describe simply doing and living what is right. The fact truth must be *done* indicates it is *not* merely correct academic interpretation of doctrine.

2Ch 31:21 In every work that he began in the service of God's house, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered-
Again, the state of the heart is the basis of God's judgment of him. The reference to the work "that he began" could hint that all this was just at the beginning of his reign; for it seems in his last 15 years he turned away from God.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 32

2Ch 32:1 After these things, and this faithfulness-
A parade example of how faithfulness to God doesn't necessarily result in an easy, problem free life- contrary to Pentecostal teaching.
Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fortified cities, and thought to win them for himself-
He succeeded in taking all of Judah apart from Jerusalem. Isaiah describes the invasion as a flood of waters which engulfed Judah "up to the neck", the surviving head referring to Jerusalem and Hezekiah.

2Ch 32:2 When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that he was set to fight against Jerusalem-
The fall of Jerusalem at this time in judgment for Judah's sins at the time had been clearly foretold (Is. 22:14-19; 29:2-4). That this didn't happen was only because of God's willingness to change His timetable of judgment in response to human faith and

repentance, as happened with Nineveh. Hezekiah had tried to buy off the Assyrians with money, even cutting off the gold of the temple to give them (2 Kings 18:14-16). But now he sees / realizes that this had all been in vain. Sennacherib intended to take Jerusalem.

2Ch 32:3 he took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the springs which were outside of the city-
Hezekiah's attempts to resist the fall of Jerusalem which had been prophesied (:2) were surely taken in faith that God would ammend those prophecies of judgment. Or we could read this as one more attempt by Hezekiah to bring about salvation by human strength and wit. He is mocked for trusting in such "counsel and strength" (2 Kings 18:20). Isaiah had earlier warned against trust in human "counsel" (s.w. Is. 5:19; 19:3). Woe was pronounced upon those (like Hezekiah?) who took counsel from men rather than God (Is. 30:1 s.w.). Prov. 25:28 LXX advises doing things with "counsel". As explained on Prov. 25:1, this may be a justification of Hezekiah, who dealt with the Assyrian crisis by saying he trusted in God's counsel to overcome the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:20 AV). Like Solomon, Hezekiah's Proverbs are all Divinely inspired and true, but he seems to insert into them a subtext of self justification.

And they helped him-
But Hezekiah's name means strengthened / helped by Yah. So we may get the impression that he was still trying to achieve salvation in his own strength rather than Yahweh's.

2Ch 32:4 So many people gathered together, and they stopped all the springs, and the brook that flowed through the midst of the land saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?-
LXX "Through the midst of the city". These attempts to defend Jerusalem in his own strength, by the work of "many people", are condemned in Is. 22:9-11 as a lack of faith in Yahweh. There appears now to be no such stream, the topography having changed over the centuries.

2Ch 32:5 He took courage-
AV "strengthened himself", rather than living out the truth of his own name 'Hezekiah', 'Yah will strengthen'. This continues a theme, of the kings of Judah strengthening or fortifying themselves, often when they first became king; but then having that human strength tested by God or removed. The same word is used repeatedly (1 Chron. 11:10; 2 Chron. 11:11,17; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 23:1; 25:3,11; 26:8,15; 29:3; 32:5). The lesson of course was that it is God's Angelic eyes who run to and fro in the land promised to Abraham, "to shew Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

And built up all the wall that was broken down, and raised it up to the towers, and the other wall outside, and strengthened Millo in the city of David-
Is. 22:9-11 specifically condemns this work for being done without looking to Yahweh in faith. The RV of that passage says that two walls were built up [here "the wall that was broken down... and the other wall outside"] with a reservoir for water in between them.

And made weapons and shields in abundance-
Is. 22:8 says that the people "looked to the armour in the house of the forest" [of Lebanon], but not Yahweh; and when called [by Isaiah?] to repent and fast, instead they feasted (Is. 22:9-14).

2Ch 32:6 He set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the broad place at the gate of the city, and spoke to their hearts saying-
Presumably the reference is to the gate facing the Assyrian army, perhaps "the gate of Ephraim" or maybe "the comer gate".

2Ch 32:7 Be strong and courageous, don't be afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude who is with him; for there is a greater One with us than with him-
There is a marked contrast between this call to faith in Yahweh (and the people trusting Hezekiah's words, :8) and the condemnation of the people for their lack of faith at this time (Is. 22:9-14). But this is no contradiction. For faith and unbelief can all too easily be present in the human mind. Being "dismayed and terrified" is the term used of how Israel generally were terrified of Goliath, whereas David by faith wasn't (1 Sam. 17:11). The same phrase is also used in urging the people of Judah in Hezekiah's time to consider the Assyrians to be as a Goliath which they like David could vanquish (2 Chron. 32:7). The exiles likewise were urged not to be dismayed and terrified at the reproach of men (Is. 51:7; Jer. 30:10), very clearly making the history with Goliath relevant to their times.

2Ch 32:8 With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is Yahweh our God to help us, and to fight our battles. The people rested themselves on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah-
As discussed on :7, this was said when the people generally were not at all really believing in Yahweh but rather in their own strength (Is. 22:9-14). Perhaps having finished all the defensive work, Hezekiah's conscience smote him for not having done it in faith, and now he openly appeals to the people to simply believe in Yahweh to save them.

Hezekiah's confident assurance that the Assyrians were an arm of flesh compared to Yahweh (2 Chron. 32:7,8) is hard to square with his own apparent lack of faith at this time. One solution is to recognize that faith and unbelief can co-exist in a "believer", and yet when speaking to others, we may give a stronger exhortation to faith than we personally believe ourselves.

2Ch 32:9 After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem, (now he was before Lachish, and all his power with him), to Hezekiah king of Judah, and to all Judah who were at Jerusalem saying-
*"*All his power" sets us up for the conflict between human strength and Divine power. We have just read and discussed how Hezekiah had matched this with *his* human strength, although perhaps observing the superior strength of Assyria, he has just urged the people to throw themselves in faith upon Yahweh alone.

2Ch 32:10 Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, In whom do you trust, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem?-
Sennacherib knew full well the very difficult living conditions they were enduring under siege. Is. 36:5 adds: "Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me?". That Hezekiah was trusting in someone or something else apart from his own strength was so obvious; and there may have been a genuine element of curiosity in the question, as well as it being a rhetorical question. Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria was because of his trust in Yahweh; Zedekiah rebelled later against Babylon and yet Jerusalem fell (s.w. Jer. 52:3). Zedekiah attempted to copy the external

behaviour of Hezekiah but without trust in Yahweh, and so it didn't work out. And so there abides a lesson for all of us who are tempted to imitate the external faith and action of others without having the same internal faith and trust.

2Ch 32:11 Doesn't Hezekiah persuade you-
It seems Hezekiah was singlehandedly seeking to persuade the people to totally trust in Yahweh.

To give you over to die by famine and by thirst by saying, 'Yahweh our God will deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria?'-
2 Kings 18:26,27 explain how this appeal was made directly to the ordinary people. Rabshakeh spoke in Hebrew and appears to have been an apostate Jew, for he was well aware of the situation within Jerusalem, and the words of Hezekiah about Yahweh. The Assyrian invasion is used as a basis upon which Jerusalem's latter day invasion will happen, and perhaps Rabshakeh will have his equivalent in the last days.

Hezekiah's faith that the city wouldn't fall was presumably based upon Isaiah's prophetic words; and yet Isaiah also speaks as if the city would fall, unless there was repentance in Judah. Perhaps Hezekiah really believed that the repentance of a minority would be counted by God as enough, and that their prayers would ensure the salvation of Zion. And this huge faith in Divine grace was rewarded.

Is. 36:14 adds: "Thus says the king, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you". This was part of his narrative, that the gods of the nations were "not able to deliver" them from the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:15). He encouraged them to see the one true God as just another god, another source of secular strength as good as anything else. Yahweh the one true God is not, however, just another religious system. There is something awesomely and radically different. Rabshakeh's words recognize that Hezekiah alone was seeking to lead the people to totally trust in Yahweh. His influence was considered hugely significant. As we noted on Is. 1:1, the reforms of Hezekiah were largely ineffective in encouraging the general populace towards spirituality. In accordance with that, Rabshakeh perceived Hezekiah as effectively seeking alone to persuade the people to trust Yahweh.

2Ch 32:12 Hasn't the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, You shall worship before one altar, and on it you shall burn incense?-
Rabshakeh argues as if the high places and altars to the idols were actually used for Yahweh worship. And that was true. Judah justified their idol worship by claiming it was a form of Yahweh worship; and that is an abiding temptation for God's people of all ages. Rabshakeh mocked at the idea of a religion which had only one altar and high place; although that was indeed appropriate to the worship of the one true God who had given one specific way of approach to Him.

2Ch 32:13 Don't you know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands in any way able to deliver their land out of my hand?-
The historical account emphasizes that Rabshakeh continually reminded them of the strength of the hand of the Assyrians; the phrase occurs six times in 2 Chron. 32:13-15 alone. The hand of *Yahweh* is an Angelic title; as if he was really mocking the Angel of Israel. There are also many references in Isaiah to the arm of the Lord delivering Israel at this time, which is again an Angelic title. Similarly, the latter day

Assyrian will be destroyed by the arm of the Lord, as manifest in Christ and the Angels with Him.

2Ch 32:14 Who was there among all the gods of those nations which my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of my hand?-
The point of course was made: Who or what indeed were any of those gods compared to Yahweh. And the true Israel of God were unlike any other nation.

2Ch 32:15 Now therefore don't let Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you in this way, neither believe him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of my hand, and out of the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand?-
Is. 36:19 gives more detail: "Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand?". Rabshakeh, knowing the prophecies of Isaiah, may be alluding to the common prophetic theme that Judah were in fact no better than Israel, and would face the same judgment. And he knew that Samaria, the ten tribes, had trusted in the gods of the surrounding nations. Hamath and Arpad were in Syria, and so probably Sepharvaim was likewise. Is. 8 and Is. 10:9-11 had condemned Israel for their trust in Syria against Assyria, and clearly their covenant with Syria had involved taking on the worship of their gods.

2Ch 32:16 His servants spoke yet more against Yahweh God, and against His servant Hezekiah-
Hezekiah as Yahweh's servant is contrasted with Rabshakeh and his gang who were Sennacherib's servants. The whole scene is a showdown between Yahweh and Sennacherib, who was playing God.

2Ch 32:17 He also wrote letters insulting Yahweh, the God of Israel, and to speak against Him saying, As the gods of the nations of the lands, which have not delivered their people out of my hand, so shall the God of Hezekiah not deliver His people out of my hand-
Goliath's defiance of Israel is a major theme (s.w. 1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross should be to us. The history of Goliath would have been inspirational when the Assyrians likewise insulted or defied the living God, and again this is a theme of the record (2 Kings 19:4,16,22,23; 2 Chron. 32:17 s.w.). But I suggest the equivalent to David in all this was not Hezekiah but Isaiah. It was his faith and prayers which won the day.

2Ch 32:18 They cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city-
This very loud voice becomes the prototype for the great voice of Babylon (Jer. 51:55), akin to the great voice of Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian, which is to be answered by the far greater voice of Yahweh in the last days commanding the Angels to unleash judgment upon the latter day Assyrian confederacy (Joel 2:11; Rev. 16:1; 18:2). But in the immediate context, this "loud voice" is that of Is. 29:6 bringing destruction and judgment upon Jerusalem; they were condemned, but were saved by grace and God's respect of the prayers and repentance of a small minority. The loud

voice of the "great king" of Assyria (Is. 36:13) is being set up as a parody of that of Yahweh, who is the supreme "great king" (s.w. Ps. 47:2; 95:3; Mal. 1:14).

2Ch 32:19 They spoke of the God of Jerusalem, as of the gods of the peoples of the earth-
This is the classic challenge to faith; no other god achieved anything, therefore, the one true God can't either. But the point is that the gods of this world didn't achieve anything precisely because they are not God. The 'utter destruction' of conquered lands by Assyria is historically well attested. But the word has the sense of 'sanctified' in a religious sense; like the latter day "king of the north", the invader thought that they were serving their God by destroying people, and the barbarity of the destruction was a sign of how far they had devoted people and lands to their God. Jihadist Islam exactly fits this scenario.

Which are the work of men's hands-
Passages like this almost define God by reason of His being uncreate. Whatever is created, is not God. And it follows that if we think that we have truly created anything, or that we are anything that God didn't create, then we are in fact playing God. Understanding God as creator, in its true, deep and thought-through sense, leads to an understanding of grace. That all we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Likewise, to take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God.

2Ch 32:20 Hezekiah the king, and Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz, prayed because of this, and cried to heaven-
Is. 37 records the prayer in more detail; see notes there.

2Ch 32:21 Yahweh sent an angel-
Is. 37:36 "The angel of Yahweh went out". He went out from the throne room of heaven, where the case had been as it were considered; see on Is. 37:4. Isaiah 37 is shot through with allusions to the Angel cherubim destroying the Assyrian host. The Angel went out- perhaps referring to Him physically going forth out of the temple where He dwelt to slay the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem. This phrase 'went out' is nearly always used about literal physical movement, which we have seen is what Angels literally do. Thus in the Ezekiel visions of the cherubim, they and the lightnings "went forth", physically and literally, in performing God's work. "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence (Angelic language); let Thine eyes (Angels) behold the things that are equal", seeing they are involved with the 'coming forth', according to the parallelism of this verse. Similarly Job's satan Angel "went forth" from the presence of the Lord (Job 1:12). And so it happened that there were Angels on earth, as it were. Zech. 2:3 also has an Angel going forth to answer the prayers concerning restoring the fortunes of Jerusalem (see Zech. 5:5 too). Ps. 81:5 describes the Angel going out through the land of Egypt in order to "remove (Israel's) shoulder from the burden". Ps. 81 is 'Angelic', following Ps. 80, which is another such Psalm. Heb. 1:14 also offers support: the Angels are "sent forth" to minister to us- by answering prayers offered in the spirit of Hezekiah's prayer here?

Who cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains, in the camp of the king of Assyria-
Not all were destroyed. The bodies of those who were, were spoiled by the Jerusalem Jews (Is. 33:4). The agent of destruction appears to have been fire and hail (Is. 29:6; 30:30), both of which may be used in the last days too.

So he returned with shame of face to his own land-
This was because "I will put a spirit in him" (Is. 37:7). Sennacherib retreated because God "put a spirit in him". The AV has: "I will send a blast / spirit upon him". Was it not that the Angel who later destroyed his army came upon him and put a spirit / disposition of mind within him that made him want to retreat? We see how God can directly affect the human spirit / mind. He can give a holy spirit, or an evil spirit. The Old Testament sets us up to understand that God can work directly on the human spirit, and then the New Testament says that He can give us a holy spirit, working again directly on the human mind and perception.

Is. 37:7 says that "He will hear news, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land". The "news" could have been of the destruction of Rabshakeh's army; or of the approach of Tirhakah, or some other threat to his empire. The situation points ahead to how the latter day "king of the north" will likewise hear "news" (s.w. Dan. 11:44 "tidings"). The Lord 'caused' Sennacherib to fall by the sword in that He put a spirit of jealousy in his sons, resulting in his murder.

When he had come into the house of his god, those who came forth from his own bowels killed him there with the sword-
He was killed as he was worshipping (Is. 37:38), about 20 years later; worshipping a god who had spectacularly failed him. We see here the terrible power of religion in blinding men to spiritual reality.

2Ch 32:22 Thus Yahweh saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side-
LXX "gave them rest" from all the surrounding nations (as in 2 Chron. 20:30). Assyria had not been Hezekiah's only enemy (2 Kings 18:7,8). The idea is of the "rest" of the Kingdom of God. There was perhaps the potential possibility for Isaiah's kingdom prophecies to have had fulfilment, just as the destruction of the latter day Assyrian will presage the establishment of the Kingdom of God. But this didn't happen, because Hezekiah turned away from faith to pride.

2Ch 32:23 Many brought gifts to Yahweh to Jerusalem, and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah; so that He was exalted in the sight of all nations from thenceforth-
The Kingdom prophecies of Ps. 68:29; Is. 18:7; Hag. 2:7,8 could now have had their fulfilment; but Hezekiah became lifted up in pride and precluded it, leaving them to have their major fulfilment in the last days.

2Ch 32:24 In those days Hezekiah was sick even to death. He prayed to Yahweh; and He spoke to him, and gave him a sign-
This was in the same year as the invasion, but not necessarily at the same time. In this section we are reading a Divine summary of His take on Hezekiah. See on :25,56. It seems that unlike his father Ahaz, Hezekiah had asked for this sign (2 Kings 20:8). It is apparent that the experiences of believers are often suggestive of those of other believers. Insofar as we appreciate this, we will find strength to go the right way. Consider how Hezekiah was intended to see the similarities between himself and the earlier king Ahaz his father, and learn the lessons. They were both threatened by invasion and tempted to turn to human help (Is. 7:2; 37:1); Visited by Isaiah and told to not fear (Is. 7:4-9; 37:6,7). Ahaz was unfaithful by "the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field" (Is. 7:3); and in just the same place Hezekiah's

faith was tested and he learnt the lessons of Ahaz' failure (Is. 36:2). Both were given a sign by God and promised deliverance (Is. 7:14; 37:30). Ahaz refused to ask for a sign when offered one (Is. 7:11); whereas Hezekiah learnt, and asked for a sign (Is. 38:7,22). Thus his asking for a sign was not a sign of faithlessness but rather his seeking to not be like Ahaz. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it" was spoken to both Ahaz (Is. 9:6) and Hezekiah (Is. 37:32).

2Ch 32:25 But Hezekiah didn't render again according to the grace done to him. His heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath on him, and on Judah and Jerusalem- This is a similar idea to Ps. 40:5: "Many, Yahweh my God, are the wonderful works which You have done, and Your thoughts which are toward us. They can't be declared back to You. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered". Yet through the Bathsheba Psalms, David is indeed declaring God's grace to him (see on Ps. 40:10). But he says he does so with a great sense of inadequacy; for he cannot render back to God according to the grace shown him. Hezekiah is criticized for this here. And yet David admits this is how man is, faced with the extent of God's grace to him. We have here another example of how two men may do the same thing [here, not rendering back according to God's grace], and yet be judged differently according to their attitude of mind.

The standard approach in interpretation is to assume that this lifting up with pride was the situation which occurred after the Babylonian ambassadors visited Hezekiah (Is. 39). Hezekiah was threatened with God's wrath, but humbled himself, and so it was delayed until the next generation. Is. 39:8 is then meant to mean that Hezekiah accepted the truth of God's word of judgment upon him as "good", but rejoiced that there would be peace and truth in his own days: "Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, Yahweh's word which you have spoken is good. He said moreover, For there will be peace and truth in my days".

But I suggest that a bit of deeper thought will find this unsatisfactory, and I have suggested throughout Is. 39 that Hezekiah 'lost it' spiritually at the time of the visit of the ambassadors. The awful apostasy of his own son Manasseh would then corroborate that. The "But..." with which the verse opens is not in the Hebrew. Translators added it in a mistaken effort to connect with the previous verse. The material here in these concluding thoughts about Hezekiah isn't chronological. Thus 2 Chron. 32:24 is clearly about a time *before* that of 2 Chron. 32:23. So I suggest that :25 refers to the reason why wrath came upon Judah, Jerusalem and himself. That wrath wasn't just threatened, it actually "came"(AV), there "was wrath" (NEV). For wrath to 'come' means that it was experienced- not just threatened. And we are specifically told, with the same Hebrew phrase used, that the Assyrians came up against Hezekiah, Judah and Jerusalem because "God's wrath" was upon them, and Hezekiah's generations were seeing that "with your own eyes" (2 Chron. 29:8). And here in 2 Chron. 32:25 we are told that this happened because of Hezekiah's pride and not returning to God what had been given him. That pride, therefore, doesn't apply to the time of the Babylonian ambassadors, but rather his pride in his own strength and devices to defend Jerusalem, as commented upon on :3-6. See on :26. The grace done to Hezekiah was his healing, for the sickness was in the same year as the invasion, but not necessarily at the same time. Because of his lack of adequate response to it, he had to be humbled by the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem. And this elicited the appropriate humility. But when the ambassadors came afterwards, his heart was again lifted up in pride.

"Render again" is the common Hebrew word for 'repent'. Hezekiah was shown grace, but didn't repent. God shows grace in order to lead us to repentance; but some just take the grace and don't repent. Hezekiah had been told he would die, he arrogantly protested his innocence, but God gave him 15 years. And he then thanks God for casting his sins behind His back. But he still doesn't come to repentance.

2Ch 32:26 Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Yahweh didn't come on them in the days of Hezekiah-

As discussed on :25, I suggest that this pride of heart was before the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem. Hezekiah's dressing in sackcloth when Jerusalem is surrounded (2 Kings 19:1) was a sign of repentance. He humbled himself at that point. Therefore Jerusalem was surrounded, but Hezekiah's repentance, along with that of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem", meant that the intended "wrath" was deferred. This approach also explains why it was specifically "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" who repented along with Hezekiah. If the reference is to proud attitudes towards the Babylonian ambassadors, then we would rather expect Hezekiah personally to be the one who needed to repent. And if the people needed to repent, then we would expect to read of all Judah repenting, rather than specifically "the inhabitants of Jerusalem".

The same language of God relenting of disaster is found in the context of Hezekiah's repentance averting the Assyrian destruction of Jerusalem at that time- and not about any repentance concerning his pride afterwards: "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah and he said to all the people of Judah: "Thus says Yahweh of hosts, 'Zion will be plowed as a field; Jerusalem will be a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house as a wooded height.' Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear Yahweh and entreat the favor of Yahweh, and did not Yahweh relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring disaster upon ourselves" (Jer. 26:18,19).

2Ch 32:27 Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour and he set up treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all kinds of goodly vessels-

The same terms "spices... gold... precious stones" is used of what the queen of Sheba brought to Solomon, and what was brought to Hezekiah after his healing (2 Chron. 32:27). Perhaps the conversion of the queen of Sheba to Israel's God meant that her people continued to be sympathetic to Judah even in Hezekiah's time, and they were the source of these things in his time. But the similarity sets us up to expect that Hezekiah like Solomon would then turn away from God, disallowing the potential of being the king of God's gloriously established kingdom in Israel; and this is what happened.

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had stripped the Temple of all its silver and gold, as well as all the gold and silver in the palace treasury, and sent it to Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 16:8,9). But only 30 years later, Hezekiah was able to give 30 talents (or 900 kg) of gold and 800 talents (or 24,000 kg) of silver to Sennacherib. He had built up considerable wealth quite quickly- especially bearing in mind he is recorded as undertaking huge building and fortification projects, repairing the Temple, providing huge numbers of sacrifical animals for the Passover, funding a campaign against the Philistines and having enough wealth to try to buy Egyptian military support against Assyria.

This suggests Hezekiah was materialistic and on the look out for wealth. He believed his wealth could save him- he offered money to Egypt to help him, and paid a huge amount to Assyria to leave him alone. All of which was criticized by God through Isaiah. When his wealth revived after the Assyrian defeat, again it was his undoing- because he boasted of it to the Babylonians, who clearly were covetous and thence planned to come and take it by force. Which Isaiah says, God would empower them to do because of Hezekiah's pride. That pride arose from his great and sudden wealth, which was given to him by God: "Hezekiah enjoyed immense riches and honour. He built himself treasuries for gold, silver, precious stones, spices, jewels and every kind of desirable object, as well as storehouses for his returns of grain, new wine and olive oil, and stalls for all kinds of cattle and pens for the flocks. He also provided himself with donkeys in addition to his immense wealth of flocks and herds, since God had made him immensely wealthy" (2 Chron. 32:27-29). The promised blessing upon the land, producing "of itself", seems to have been responsible for the agricultural prosperity. The lands around him had been ravaged by the Assyrian scorched earth policy. They perhaps traded their wealth for food. But we note that this wealth led him to proudly show it off to the Babylonians, who came to find out about "the wonder that was done in the land" (2 Chron. 32:31, i.e. the amazing agricultural blessing). We now understand better why God is careful about giving wealth; because it typically leads to pride and loss of spirituality.

2Ch 32:28 storehouses also for the increase of grain and new wine and oil; and stalls for all kinds of animals, and flocks in folds-
This recalls the language of Solomon's building store cities for his wealth (see on :27 for another allusion to Solomon). But the connection with Solomon is not a good one; for all this wealth of his was not associated with his spirituality, but rather with his apostacy. And so it was to be with Hezekiah.

2Ch 32:29 Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very much substance-
This continues the allusion to Solomon, who likewise built store cities for his wealth; but see on :28.

2Ch 32:30 This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works-
Some manuscripts read "the east side". The current Pool of Siloam is to the South East of modern Jerusalem, but it could have been south west of the old "city of David". "Prospered" is yet another allusion to Solomon's prospering (s.w. 1 Chron. 29:23; 2 Chron. 7:11); but see on :28.

2Ch 32:31 However concerning the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land-
Hezekiah's positive comment in his Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1) about faithful ambassadors must be read in the context of the fact that Prov. 25:13 was one of the Proverbs rewritten in Hezekiah's time. He sinned with regard to the ambassadors of Babylon (2 Chron. 32:31), but perhaps he was led into this by willfully misreading this Proverb of Solomon, or at least getting it rewritten with the subtext of justifying what he did. "The wonder done in the land" was I suggest the sun being eclipsed by a greater light, which made the shadow go back. This offered the possibility of

fulfilment for Isaiah's prophecies about a great light arising in Zion, to which the Gentiles would come.

God left him-

This is the word for 'forsaking', and is used about God forsaking those who turn away from Him (Dt. 31:17). We are left to wonder whether this was in response to Hezekiah forsaking Him. Or perhaps it makes him a type of the Lord Jesus, who was also apparently forsaken by God in order to reveal what was in His heart (Mt. 27:46). There are times when God's presence does apparently leave us, and He no longer holds us back from sin as He does at other times- in order to reveal to ourselves what is truly in our deepest hearts.

To try him, that He might know all that was in his heart-

Hezekiah asks for a sign "to prove" [s.w. test / try] that God's predicted cure of him was going to happen. And when given the option of the shadow of the sun jumping forward by ten degrees, he almost mocks that as too 'easy'. Yet this is the man with the accolade that no King believed in God like he did. Perhaps he reached his heights of faith through having these low moments. 'Putting God to the test' as it seems Hezekiah did is seen in Scripture as not fully believing in Him (Num. 14:20-24; Dt. 6:16; Is. 7:12; Lk. 11:33-36). Maybe God left Hezekiah to test him in the matter of the ambassadors from Babylon as a kind of response- 'You put me to the test, I'll put you to the test'.

2Ch 32:32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz, in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel-

This may refer to some writing of Isaiah which we don't have, and the "book of the kings" may not refer to the books of Kings we have in our Bibles. Or it could mean that the historical record of Isaiah in Is. 36-39 is incorporated in the record we have in 2 Kings.

2Ch 32:33 Hezekiah slept with his fathers-

This repeated phrase indicates death is unconsciousness, like sleep; and the idiom surely requires a resurrection of the body to judgment at some future date, which we know to be the time of the Lord's return to earth. If the Bible taught reward at death or an immortal soul [which it doesn't], then this idiom would not be used.

And they buried him in the ascent of the tombs of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. Manasseh his son reigned in his place-

That Hezekiah raised such an evil son in the last 15 years of his life is another hint that he would have been better dying when he was intended to, without a descendant, rather than getting more life with which he turned away from God and raised an evil son.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 33

2Ch 33:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem-

"Causing to forget" is a strange name for a child unless the father [like Joseph] had a previous life he wanted to forget. Manasseh was born three years into Hezekiah's final 15 years of life in which he turned away from God. So I suggest that his name reflects

Hezekiah's desire to 'forget all that God stuff' and get on with 'enjoying' his last 15 years without God. And this was naturally reflected in the way he raised a son who was one of Israel's most evil rulers.

2Ch 33:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, after the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel-
We may wonder why God let such an evil man live and reign for 55 years (:1), the longest reigning of any king. Surely if he had been slain for his wickedness, as other men were, then he would have led fewer people astray? I suggest the answer is that God worked for decades towards this evil man's repentance- and it paid off. He did repent in the end. And we can look forward to eternity together with him. We see in this the huge meaning and value God places upon the individual person, and how He will not give up searching for the lost until He finds them. Manasseh would be the parade example of that.

2Ch 33:3 For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; and he reared up altars for the Baals, and made Asheroth, and worshipped all the army of the sky, and served them-
This revival of idolatry would not have been possible unless the people generally were eager and willing for it. I suggested previously that Hezekiah's reforms were largely on the cusp of his becoming king. They were partly a psychological reaction against the misery of Ahaz's reign, and the reforms of 2 Chron. 31 were often a result of group psychology rather than personal reformation of the heart. They were all too sudden and spontaneous, at the same moment, to have been the outcome of all the concerned individuals having the same heart response. There was a group psychology there, a going with the crowd. And so it is unsurprising that they all turned away relatively soon afterwards.

2Ch 33:4 He built altars in the house of Yahweh, of which Yahweh said, My name shall be in Jerusalem forever-
This was precisely the behaviour of his grandfather Ahaz. I suggest that this was only done by persuading themselves that these altars were in fact a form of Yahweh worship. For there is never any specific statement that Judah formally renounced Yahweh. And this continues to be the abiding weakness of God's people; to justify wrongdoing by claiming it is part of worshipping God. Such as justifying luxury homes and goods in the name of needing them to serve God with.

2Ch 33:5 He built altars for all the army of the sky in the two courts of the house of Yahweh-
These were the court of the priests, and the court of the common people (2 Chron. 4:9). The priesthood were surely complicit in this. For when Uzziah had tried to offer incense himself, 80 faithful priests resisted him. But there is no record of any such resistance to Manasseh. The priests in Hezekiah's time had been reticent to devote themselves solely to Yahweh (1 Chron. 29:34). I suggested that this was because they were accustomed to being priests both of Yahweh and of the pagan gods. This means that they took a cut from all the offerings to all the gods.

2Ch 33:6 He also made his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom-
This would have meant that his surviving children would have hated him for slaying

their siblings; although passing through the fire may have been a dedication ceremony rather than actually burning them to death. 2 Kings 21:6 has "his son", 2 Chron. 33:6 has "his children". As he had more than one son, we are to infer surely that this focus upon "his son" meant that one of his sons in particular passed through the fire, and that could imply that he sacrificed his son [maybe his firstborn]. Israel should have removed from amongst them a man who did this (Dt. 18:10), and the fact they didn't suggests they therefore passively supported him in his apostacy.

The valley of Hinnom, Ge Hinnom, was to later be known as Gehenna, and became a symbol used by the Lord for complete destruction (Mt. 5:22). As they burnt their children there, to destruction, so sinners would be burnt to destruction in that same place.

And he practised sorcery and used enchantments, and practised witchcraft and dealt with those who had familiar spirits, and with wizards-

AV "a familiar spirit" is misleading, and many of the modern versions give something like "witch" or [ESV, GNB] "a medium". LXX has "a divining spirit". It doesn't mean she did actually have any such spirit; but that she was considered as having this. Such people were thought to be able to be possessed by the spirit of dead people, and to therefore speak in their name. But the Bible clearly teaches that the "spirit returns to God" (Ps. 146:4; Ecc. 12:7), and that death is unconsciousness. The spirit of dead persons don't enter other people. I would go so far as to say that the record of the witch at Endor, who supposedly had a "familiar spirit", is deconstructing this belief. For Samuel himself appears, and speaks directly to Saul, and not through the "medium". The woman therefore screamed in shock when Samuel actually appeared. He was resurrected, briefly, in order to give God's final message to Saul. The people claiming to have "familiar spirits" lay on the ground and mumbled hard to understand words in a voice seeking to imitate the dead person (Is. 29:4) but Samuel appeared in person and spoke clearly to Saul, directly. We also note that Samuel appeared to Saul standing upright, because Saul bowed before him: "Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and showed respect" (1 Sam. 28:14). This was quite different to how the mediums lay on the ground and mumbled words into the dust.

He worked much evil in the sight of Yahweh, to provoke Him to anger-

God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ch 33:7 He set the engraved image of the idol, which he had made, in God's house, of which God said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name forever-

Manasseh is criticized for placing an idol in the very place where God's Name of Yahweh was meant to dwell, "the graven image of Asherah" (2 Kings 21:7 RV). He replaced the invisible things- the more abstract things of the characteristics of God which the Name speaks of- by something material and visible. We make the same mistake when we turn away from true spirituality and become lost in physical works. If Judah had not forgotten the Name [and this must refer to their lack of appreciation of it rather than forgetting the letters JHVH], then they wouldn't have served Baal and other gods (Jer. 23:27). It is this particular idol which it seems was returned to the

temple just prior to the destruction of the temple (Ez. 8:3), despite Manasseh himself removing it on his repentance.

2Ch 33:8 neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from off the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them, even all the law and the statutes and the ordinances given by Moses-

This is apparently (:7) a quotation from what God said to David and Solomon. But it appears to be an adaptation about the promises to the singular seed, that he must continue in obedience if the promises were to be fulfilled through him. But just as Abraham's seed is both the Lord Jesus and all those in Him, the true Israel of God, so the promises about David's seed also have a collective dimension.

2Ch 33:9 Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations did whom Yahweh had destroyed before the children of Israel-

God's tolerance of Judah in His land was therefore by grace, and in hope of their repentance. Their doing "more evil" than the Gentiles could refer to the fact that as in covenant relationship with God, they were the more responsible for their sins. Or the idea may be that most Gentiles were faithful to their set of gods, only changing them if that was enforced upon them by the military dominance of a neighbour. But Judah went running madly to every god they could, described by Hosea under the figure of sexual addiction.

2Ch 33:10 Yahweh spoke to Manasseh, and to his people; but they gave no heed-

"They gave no heed", or 'did not listen', is a phrase used in the later prophets as they appeal to the exiles (Neh. 9:34; Zech. 1:4). The sins of Manasseh in 'not listening' to God's word are cited as the main reason for the exile. We note that refusing to listen to God's word is the essence of all the sins of idolatry etc. It is the spurning of relationship with God which appears to hurt Him even more than the list of sins which Manasseh was also guilty of.

2Ch 33:11 Therefore Yahweh brought on them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh in chains, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon-

Literally, "in thorns", but the idea is of rings or hooks, probably in his nose. For it was like this that Assyria was to be treated by God, and the latter day Assyrian led by Gog will likewise effectively be Yahweh's captive servant with rings in his nose (2 Kings 19:28; Ez. 38:4). Or it could be that Manasseh was taken "in the thorns", hiding in a thorn bush.

Albert Barnes notes: "Esarhaddon mentions Manasseh among his tributaries; and he was the only king of Assyria who, from time to time, held his court at Babylon".

2Ch 33:12 When he was in distress, he begged Yahweh his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers-

There is no lack of evidence that later Bible characters found inspiration in Samson, especially in their weakness. Manasseh is an example (2 Chron. 33:12,13 = Jud. 16:19,28). The intensity of Samson's repentance was quite something. It must have inspired Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:11), who like Samson was bound (Jud. 16:21) and humbled (Jud. 16:5,16,19 AVmg.)- and then repented with a like intensity. And Zedekiah went through the same basic experience, of capture by his enemies, having

his eyes put out, his capture attributed to false gods; and he likewise repented (2 Kings 25:7).

2Ch 33:13 He prayed to Him; and He was entreated by him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Yahweh was God-
Manasseh's repentance and forgiveness was associated with his knowing Yahweh. He prayed to Yahweh, but only on experiencing forgiveness did he come to know Him (2 Chron. 33:13). To really know the Name elicits forgiveness, and the experience of that forgiveness leads to knowing the Name yet further. Job went through the same; when he truly saw / perceived God, he repented and 'loathed his words' (Job 42:6 RVmg.).

Humanly speaking, the return of Manasseh to Judah would have been because Assyria wanted to turn Judah into a vassal, buffer state between them and the mighty power of Egypt, which they feared. But this coincided with Manasseh's repentance.

2Ch 33:14 Now after this he built an outer wall to the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entrance at the fish gate; and he encircled Ophel with it, and raised it up to a very great height; and he put valiant captains in all the fortified cities of Judah-
This wall seems to have been on the north east of the city, from the modern Damascus gate across the Gihon valley to the “fish gate” at the north east of the “city of David”. These defensive actions suggest he started to break away from servitude to Assyria, even though that was probably the basis of his return from exile (see on :13). Building projects like these were typically recorded as being done at the beginning of the reigns of kings of Judah, and so it's as if he was born again, and was trying to start out afresh.

2Ch 33:15 He took away the foreign gods, and the idol out of the house of Yahweh, and all the altars that he had built in the mountain of the house of Yahweh, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city-
This seems largely to have been his personal repentance, because the people continued their idolatry (:17) and were clearly devoted to idols in their hearts. The idols were apparently not destroyed, for in Josiah's time they had to be destroyed. To undo damage caused is a key feature of repentance, and truly Manasseh had fruits appropriate for repentance. He is really a stellar example of repentance. For his sin is repeatedly stated as being of leading Judah to idolatry. To so openly admit he had been wrong was truly a sign of abiding humility.

2Ch 33:16 He built up the altar of Yahweh, and offered thereon sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving, and commanded Judah to serve Yahweh, the God of Israel-
This would imply he had at least partially destroyed the altar of Yahweh, in favour of altars to other gods. There are a number of other Old Testament examples of preaching the word after becoming aware of the depth of one's own sins. Consider Jonah preaching the second time, with the marks in his body after three days in the whale, admitting his rebellion against Yahweh, pleading with them to respond to His word. Reflect how when his head was wrapped around with seaweed, at the bottom of the sea at the absolute end of mortal life, he made a vow to God, which he then fulfilled, presumably in going back to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 2:9). His response to

having confessed his sins and daring to believe in God's forgiveness, turning again towards His temple even from underwater, was to resolve to preach to others if he was spared his life. And this he did, although as with so many of us, the pureness of his initial evangelical zeal soon flaked. Or consider Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19:3 cp. 18:31; 19:2; Josiah, 2 Chron. 34:29,32; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3:29; 4:2.

2Ch 33:17 Nevertheless the people sacrificed still in the high places, but only to Yahweh their God-
The essence of Judah's apostacy, then and now, was to combine service of Yahweh with that of idols. And so this is not a good comment. For sacrifice should have been made in the temple, and not in the idol shrines. We need to constantly ask ourselves whether we are serving our own idolatry in the name of serving God. This mixture of truth and error is seen not only in practical ways but also in the way so many Christian doctrines such as the trinity are in fact a mixture of paganism with truth.

2Ch 33:18 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, behold, they are written among the acts of the kings of Israel-
Manasseh's prayer is recorded in various uninspired writings. But it is not in the volumes we know as 1 and 2 Kings. I have therefore cautioned that the common concluding statement that the deeds of a king are "written in the book of the kings" should not be taken as necessarily referring to the books of Kings in our Bibles.

The words of the prophets who appealed to him are recorded in 2 Kings 21:11-15.

2Ch 33:19 His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sin and his trespass, and the places in which he built high places, and set up the Asherim and the engraved images, before he humbled himself: they are written in the history of Hozai-
This history, presumably written by a prophet called Hozai, isn't preserved. The LXX stresses that this included a geographical inventory of "the spots on which he built the high places, and set there groves and graven images". This list was presumably produced by Manasseh as part of his repentance, and would have been the basis of his practical attempt to put right what he had done wrong. Writing an inventory of people we've hurt or the ways in which others have suffered from our sins is something used in counseling alcoholics in the 12 step program, and it has value for all repentance.

2Ch 33:20 So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house; and Amon his son reigned in his place-
LXX "in the garden of his house".

2Ch 33:21 Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Jerusalem-
He had been raised in the spirit of his father's apostacy, and was apparently unimpressed by Manasseh's amazing repentance.

2Ch 33:22 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did Manasseh his father; and Amon sacrificed to all the engraved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them-
Manasseh had removed the images, but not apparently destroyed them. The history of the kings abounds with such references to idolatry being reformed, and then so

quickly revived. The speed of its revival reflects the fact that the heart of the people generally was with the idols. And we must assess our own episodes of apparent repentance in this light. Manasseh had repaired the temple (:16), but by Josiah's time it needed repairing again; so it could be that Amon also desecrated and damaged the temple yet further.

2Ch 33:23 He didn't humble himself before Yahweh, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but this same Amon trespassed more and more-
Manasseh goes down in the record as the parade example of a man who manages to put the brakes on as he slides downhill to destruction. For the antithesis to Manasseh's humility and repentance is that Amon sinned "more and more". "Humble himself" is parallel with 'repentance' (LXX uses the term 'repentance' here). This is the essence of repentance- self humbling.

2Ch 33:24 His servants conspired against him, and put him to death in his own house-
There seems a special stigma and shame attached to being murdered in ones' own home, rather than on a battlefield or dying from old age.

2Ch 33:25 But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place-
Josiah means 'foundation of Yah'. It's unlikely this was the name Amon gave him, although a repentant Manasseh may have influenced it. However, at no point did even kings like Amon and Manasseh formally deny Yahweh. They worshipped Him, so they thought, through worshipping idols. So it is not impossible that indeed this was Josiah's birth name. And from that we can take yet another warning, to serve Yahweh with our whole hearts; and not assume that our service of the flesh is serving Him.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 34

2Ch 34:1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem-
Josiah means 'foundation of Yah'. It's unlikely this was the name Amon gave him, although a repentant Manasseh may have influenced it. However, at no point did even kings like Amon and Manasseh formally deny Yahweh. They worshipped Him, so they thought, through worshipping idols. So it is not impossible that indeed this was Josiah's birth name. And from that we can take yet another warning, to serve Yahweh with our whole hearts; and not assume that our service of the flesh is serving Him.

2Ch 34:2 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and walked in the ways of David his father, and didn't turn aside to the right hand or to the left-
And yet Josiah died in spiritual weakness and at a point of disobedience to God's word (2 Chron. 35:20-24). The rubric 'He did what was right...' is found even of kings who clearly departed from Yahweh. The truly righteous ones such as Jehoshaphat have a clause added to their summary, saying that they had followed Yahweh in their hearts. But this is lacking in the case of Josiah. We note too that he raised evil sons. And so we wonder whether the record is acknowledging the good works which he did at some points in his life, and it concludes with this too (2 Chron. 35:26). But there is a notable absence of any statement to the intent that he was judged as having a heart

right with God. And the state of the heart was and is the critical indicator in God's final judgment of men.

2Ch 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father. In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the Asherim, and the engraved images, and the molten images-

Kings places this reformation after the repair of the temple, whereas Chronicles puts it before that. However, Manasseh had repaired the temple just a few years earlier (2 Chron. 33:16) and that may be what Kings has in mind. Or the temple may have been repaired in stages. However the chronological problems are avoided if we accept a confusion in copying between "eighth" and "eighteenth" (2 Kings 22:3).

We note that Amon had revived Manasseh's images in the two years of his reign, and it seems the people worshipped them for the first 12 years of Josiah's reign. Again we have the impression that the removal of idolatry was something done by the reformist kings, but the hearts of the people were generally with the idols. And this was why they were condemned relatively soon after Josiah's time. The timing of Josiah's reformation (2 Chron. 34:3) coincides with the prophecies of Jer. 2,3; he heard them, and responded. Hence Jeremiah wept when Josiah died, remembering how as a teenager, Josiah had heard his prophecies and immediately responded to them.

2Ch 34:4 They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence. He cut down the incense altars that were on high above them. He broke in pieces the Asherim, and the engraved images, and the molten images, and made dust of them, and strewed it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them-

We note the contrast between altars being cut down "in his presence", and he himself cutting others down. We get the impression of total personal involvement and commitment, just at the age of 20. He put their dust on the graves of their worshippers who were buried near to the idols, referring maybe to the children offered to them, or to the fact that some were so devoted to idols that they gave their lives to them and were willing human sacrifices.

2Ch 34:5 He burnt the bones of the priests on their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem-

It was done specifically at Bethel (2 Kings 23:15,16). This implies he murdered the priests and burnt their hones on the altars, or it could refer to the exhuming of their bodies buried near the altars (:4) and burning their bones. This would have been seen as permanently desecrating the altars. This was done because God said that He would do this if His people broke covenant (Lev. 26:30), and Josiah is recognizing that indeed they had broken covenant and were worthy of such things. However, it would seem from :15 that Josiah was ignorant of those curses for disobedience; so it may be that he intuitively did what was written in them without specifically being aware of them. This is the spirit of Rom. 2:14.

2Ch 34:6 He did this in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even to Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins-

Simeonites lived in Judah (1 Chron. 4:28). But even in the ruined northern tribes, ruined because of the Assyrians, they were still worshipping idols and had not been led to repentance. Like Hezekiah, Josiah had a sense of responsibility towards the

separated, spiritually weak brethren of the ten tribes. And he also knew that idolatry there would easily seep into Judah, as it had done previously. This sense of responsibility even for separated brethren is another abiding lesson for us. Assyrian power was declining, which is why Josiah was able to enter Israel and do this. It seems Josiah had a vision of a reunited kingdom, centered around Yahweh worship. This was indeed the prophetic potential, but the idolatrous hearts of the people precluded it from coming about.

2Ch 34:7 He broke down the altars, and beat the Asherim and the engraved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, and returned to Jerusalem-
"All the land of Israel" need not mean that every altar in all Israel was broken down, but that he went throughout "all Israel" on this mission; see on :6.

2Ch 34:8 Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of Yahweh his God-
"His God" could imply that he was not widely supported by the people. For as ever, their hearts soon returned to idolatry after this. For the chronological issue on when this repair occurred, see on :3. The "scribe" or historian was a senior advisor in the Hebrew court (2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 2 Chron. 34:8) because of the huge value attached to history in the Hebrew mind, and as reflected in the Bible being largely history. Advice on how to act was to be based upon historical, or as we would now say, "Biblical", precedent.

2Ch 34:9 They came to Hilkiah the high priest, and delivered the money that was brought into God's house, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem-
AV "And they returned to Jerusalem". We note the generosity of the people even in the northern tribes, as well as the Israelites living in Judah ["the remnant of Israel"]. The way the various sources of income are described suggests a detailed record was made, indeed Kings says that Hilkiah took the sum. The half shekel temple tax was to be paid when a census was taken, and it seems this is what he did.

2Ch 34:10 They delivered it into the hand of the workmen who had the oversight of the house of Yahweh. The workmen who laboured in the house of Yahweh gave it to mend and repair the house-
Chronicles was written for the encouragement of the exiles to likewise mend and repair the temple, and so they were intended to take encouragement from these men.

2Ch 34:11 even to the carpenters and to the builders they gave it, to buy cut stone, and timber for couplings, and to make beams for the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed-
The destruction of the temple by these kings may not have been because they totally rejected Yahweh. The essence of their apostacy, as ours, was to use the things of Yahweh for idolatry, to mix paganism and the way of the flesh with Yahweh worship. So it is likely that when we read of men like Manasseh building other temples or shrines to idols in the vicinity of the temple, what happened was that they took the materials from the temple structure and used them for the idol temples. For materials

like cut stone and timber were expensive and hard to source; Solomon had spent huge effort in bringing them from far away to build Yahweh's temple.

2Ch 34:12 The men did the work faithfully; and their overseers were Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward; and others of the Levites, all who were skilful with instruments of music-
This could mean that the builders worked to the accompaniment of spiritual music. Or that musicians, not used to manual labour, worked in the rebuilding; just as apothecaries and others unused to such work laboured in rebuilding the wall in Nehemiah's time. And Chronicles was written for their encouragement.

2Ch 34:13 Also they were over the bearers of burdens, and set forward all who did the work in every kind of service. Of the Levites there were scribes, and officers, and porters-
This is the first time we read of the "scribes" as a distinct body. Although possibly they began in the time of Hezekiah (Prov. 25:1). Whilst this was the class which so persecuted the Lord Jesus generations later, the original intention was that they would be responsible for "the writings" and perhaps interpretation of them. But for now, they were to be concerned not with academic study, but in making the word flesh through actually labour in the rebuilding work.

2Ch 34:14 When they brought out the money that was brought into the house of Yahweh, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of Yahweh given by Moses-
All spiritual endeavour leads to the Lord inviting us deeper into that endeavour; thus it was *as* Barnabas and Paul went about their ministering to the Lord that they were invited to go on a missionary journey (Acts 13:2). Likewise it was *as* the Levites were in process of collecting funds for repairing the temple, that they found the book of the law- perhaps because they needed more space in which to store the donations, and whilst making space they found the scroll. In the process of being a deacon, faith is developed (1 Tim. 3:13). The very process of service and obedience leads to greater faith in practice.

There is an apparent parallel between money being found in the temple, and the book of the law being found (2 Kings 22:8,9). The idea is that as David often says in Ps. 119, Yahweh's law was the greatest treasure. So much so that the Chronicles record focuses so much on the book of the law being found that no direct mention is made of the money also "found"along with it until :17. Even in Kings, the discovery of the money is only mentioned in passing, as if the greatest discovery was not wealth, but God's law. And that is an abiding principle.

2Ch 34:15 Hilkiah answered Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Yahweh. Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan-
This book was probably not the entire Pentateuch, but the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28, for Josiah's response is appropriate to someone who had just heard them read. But see on :5. Jer. 15:16 refers to this: "Your words were found, and I did eat them... [they] were to me the joy and the delight of my heart: for I am called by Your name, Yahweh". Jeremiah rejoiced in those words of judgment. And as a result, “I am called by Your name”- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband’s name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his “joy [and] delight”- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34;

16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was “full of the wrath / passion of God” (Jer. 6:11). Jeremiah's lament that the people had no joy or delight in God's word (Jer. 6:10) is the basis for this comment that when *he* found God's words, they were his joy.

2Ch 34:16 Shaphan carried the book to the king, and moreover brought back word to the king, saying, All that was committed to your servants, they are doing-
There appears an intentional contrast here. The book of the law contained a list of curses for disobedience, and the people had not being doing according to God's word. But the message of Shaphan is that the servants are doing all they have been commanded to do. The idea is that Josiah perceived this, and realized that all this rebuilding of the temple was not going to save them of itself. They needed to make a from the heart repentance amongst all the people, in order to truly avoid Divine judgment. And this was so relevant to the exiles, for whom Chronicles was written. Rebuilding the temple alone was not in fact what God primarily wanted. He desired their hearts.

2Ch 34:17 They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of Yahweh, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and into the hand of the workmen-
The implication is that all was being done honestly. Whenever there was an appeal for materials, money or labour to build the tabernacle or rebuild the temple, God's people were always very responsive. But the lesson of Judah's history is that material generosity is not the same as true spirituality.

2Ch 34:18 Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest has delivered me a book. Shaphan read therein before the king-
What was read were the curses for disobedience. The harder side of the Father and the Lord Jesus should actually serve as an attraction to the serious believer. Peter knew that if it really was the Lord Jesus out there on the water, then He would bid him walk on the water to Him. Peter knew his Lord, and the sort of things He would ask men to do- the very hardest things for them in their situation. He knew how Jesus could be a demanding Lord. Jeremiah “knew that this was the word of the Lord” when he was asked to do something so humanly senseless- to buy property when he was in prison, when the land was clearly about to be overrun by the Babylonians (Jer. 31:8). When Jeremiah had earlier found the curses for disobedience recorded in the book of the Law which had been lost, He 'ate them', those words of cursings were "the joy and rejoicing of my heart" - they so motivated him (Jer. 15:16 = 2 Chron. 34:18-21). When Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, fear came upon "as many as heard these things" .

2Ch 34:19 It happened, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he tore his clothes-
Although Josiah was personally innocent, he felt so passionately for God's people. We too need to have hearts that bleed for others, and not be solely concerned with our own standing before God. For our standing before Him involves our attitudes to others and our concern for their salvation, if we truly seek God's glory and not our own.

2Ch 34:20 The king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying-
This is the Ahikam of Jer. 26:24; 40:5. His son Gedaliah appears to have been faithful and to also have cared for Jeremiah after Jerusalem fell (Jer. 40:6).

2Ch 34:21 Go inquire of Yahweh for me, and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found. Great is the wrath of Yahweh that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of Yahweh, to do according to all that is written in this book-
"Poured out" is "kindled" in 2 Kings; the sense was that he realized the wrath of God was kindled and was literally about to burn against them, and so repentance must be immediate with no time to lose.

2Ch 34:22 So Hilkiah, and they whom the king had commanded, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she lived in Jerusalem in the second quarter), and they spoke to her to that effect-
"The second quarter" may refer to a newer area of Jerusalem (Zeph. 1:10 RV), or as AV "the college", implying as a prophetess she had a kind of Bible study centre. "Keeper of the wardrobe" may refer to the priestly garments (cp. 2 Kings 10:22).

2Ch 34:23 She said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me-
We see here and in :26 how Josiah had no direct vision from God. He was dealing all the time through the prophetic word relayed to him, and his obedience to it is the more commendable. Because it reflects his humility to God's revealed word, in a way more impressive than if these words had come directly to him. We are in his position, and should learn from him.

2Ch 34:24 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil on this place, and on its inhabitants, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah-
The reference to curses suggests that the scrolls discovered contained at least Dt. 28 and Dt. 27:15-26. See on :5.

2Ch 34:25 Because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore is My wrath poured out on this place, and it shall not be quenched'-
God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

Idolatrous Israel never *consciously* tried to provoke Yahweh to anger with their apostasy; the words of the prophets must have seemed to them a gross exaggeration. But this was really how God saw it (2 Chron. 34:25).

Although "it shall not be quenched", Josiah knew God well enough to try to quench it, by getting all His people to make a from the heart commitment to

Him. Even though God had told Josiah that His wrath with His people would not be quenched, it would seem that there was still some possibility of "remedy", had the people accepted God's word in their hearts (2 Chron. 36:16). We see here His absolute eagerness for their repentance, and unwillingness that any of His people should have to perish. And that is the same God with whom we have to do.

2Ch 34:26 But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of Yahweh, thus you shall tell him, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: 'As touching the words which you have heard-
See on :23 for the significance of Josiah not receiving these words directly.

2Ch 34:27 because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place, and against its inhabitants, and have humbled yourself before Me and have torn your clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard you, says Yahweh-
We see here the mutuality between God and man; He hears the man who hears Him. We see the root of humility as being in having a heart / mind sensitive to Him. But "tender heart" is the same phrase used for being "faint hearted" in time of battle (Dt. 20:3; Is. 7:4; Jer. 51:46). It was as if Josiah saw the judgment of God coming, as if it had come, and was faint hearted before the soldiers he saw coming against him. And yet even such a tender heart can be given by God (s.w. Job 23:16), for He can also give attitudes of mind by His sovereign operation .

2Ch 34:28 Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil that I will bring on this place, and on its inhabitants'. They brought back word to the king-
This is a similar situation to the promise to Hezekiah and Ahab (1 Kings 21:29). It is as if God judged the entire weight of sin to be such that even Josiah's reformation could only delay and not remove the judgment for it. However, if the people had all repented in their hearts, rather than passively allowing a reformer like Josiah to remove the external evidence of idolatry, then surely the outcome could have been different. See on :31.

The reality was that Josiah died in battle, not in peace (2 Chron. 35:22-24). Yet he had been promised to be gathered to his grave in peace (2 Chron. 34:28). Here we have an example of God making a statement about the future which is conditional upon human behaviour. Thus He stated that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days; but it wasn't, because they repented. There is a gap between the pronouncement and its fulfilment, and in that gap our behaviour can change the outcome. We too must waste so many potential futures.

2Ch 34:29 Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem-
Josiah's idea was to bring about a reformation of the ordinary people, as in :30 we read of the people small and great being gathered. So presumably his gathering of the leaders was in order for them to bring their people with them.

2Ch 34:30 The king went up to the house of Yahweh, and all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, both great and small; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Yahweh-

2 Kings has "prophets" for "Levites". There were clearly prophets actively operating at this time. As noted on :31, Josiah saw the only way to change the threatened judgments as getting the ordinary people to repent in their hearts. Unlike Hezekiah, he was not satisfied with simply avoiding seeing judgment come in his days. Indeed he learned from Hezekiah's mistake in that matter. See on 2 Chron. 35:7.

2Ch 34:31 The king stood in his place, and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after Yahweh-

Maybe a reference to Dt. 10:12,13, which perhaps was in this scroll.

And to keep His commandments, His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book-

Josiah recognizes that Judah have broken covenant with God and must be judged appropriately (see on :5,28). God was unwilling to ultimately avert the judgment upon the people because of their state of heart. And yet Josiah throws himself into trying to persuade the people to totally give themselves to covenant relationship. He realized that in the gap between the pronunciation of judgment, and it being carried out, there was the possibility of repentance and the judgment not being performed. His mentor Jeremiah had made this point in Jer. 18, and was also appealing to the people to change their hearts so that the threatened judgment wouldn't happen. This is how open God's purpose is, and Josiah and Jeremiah perceived that.

2Ch 34:32 He caused all who were found in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. The inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers-

There are a number of Old Testament examples of preaching the word after becoming aware of the depth of one's own sins. Consider Jonah preaching the second time, with the marks in his body after three days in the whale, admitting his rebellion against Yahweh, pleading with them to respond to His word. Reflect how when his head was wrapped around with seaweed, at the bottom of the sea at the absolute end of mortal life, he made a vow to God, which he then fulfilled, presumably in going back to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 2:9). His response to having confessed his sins and daring to believe in God’s forgiveness, turning again towards His temple even from underwater, was to resolve to preach to others if he was spared his life. And this he did, although as with so many of us, the pureness of his initial evangelical zeal soon flaked. Or consider Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33:16; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19:3 cp. 18:31; 19:2; Josiah, 2 Chron. 34:29,32; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3:29; 4:2...

We note the specific reference to the people of Jerusalem. It seems that Josiah tried to gather together literally all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all "found" there. And yet Jerusalem particularly was to suffer in the judgments to come, and Jeremiah's prophesies at this time tend to single out Jerusalem for particular judgment for the unspirituality of the population. So again we perceive that this was all the enthusiasm of Josiah; the people's hearts weren't affected. This is the trouble with mass meetings for "revival". Reformation is essentially personal and of the heart.

2Ch 34:33 Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all who were found in Israel to serve, even to serve Yahweh their God. All his days they didn’t depart from following Yahweh, the God of their fathers-

As noted above, Assyrian power was declining, and the ten tribes although living in

ruins, were invited hereby to become Josiah's subjects. His vision was of a reunited kingdom of Israel and Judah, based around solid commitment to Yahweh. For a people accepted the gods of those dominant over them, and Israel were now agreeing to accept Yahweh, which was Judah's God, as theirs. But this was to be experienced only in "his days" as his son Jehoiakim let the ball drop rather dramatically. All this potential was wasted by him.

Josiah discovered the book of the Law- and he then went on to do something about it in practice. Reflect through what he did:

Passover kept in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:21-23) = Dt. 16:1-8; Removed asherahs (2 Kings 23:4,6,14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:21; Star worship removed (2 Kings 23:4,11) = Dt. 17:3; The 'high places' and cults removed (2 Kings 23:8-20) = Dt. 12; Child sacrifice ended (2 Kings 23:10) = Dt. 12:31; 18:10; The cultic stones / 'mazzeboth' removed (2 Kings 23:14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:22; Conjouring up the dead ended (2 Kings 23:24) = Dt. 18:11.

Do you notice from where in Deuteronomy he got those ideas? From chapters 12-18. My suggestion is that he maxed out on that part of the 'book of the law' which was read to him, and went and did it. The Lord in the wilderness was likewise motivated by Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 8.

In the first century, when people heard the Gospel, they were generally baptized immediately. This meant that the prison keeper was baptized in the middle of the night, amidst an earthquake… in essence, people heard the message, and responded immediately. We likewise heard of the Bible's teaching about baptism, and we did something concrete and actual- we got wet. We went under the water. But we must ask ourselves whether we are continuing to be responsive to the word of God which we become increasingly familiar with as we read daily. Our very familiarity with it can militate against a real response. When last did you read / understand something from Scripture, and then get up and *do something real, concrete and actual about it?*

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 35

2Ch 35:1 Josiah kept a Passover to Yahweh in Jerusalem: and they killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month-

Josiah urged the people to keep this (2 Kings 23:21) despite having been told in 2 Chron. 34:25 that the people would indeed to judged for their sons. He had sought to change this by appealing for all the people to enter covenant with Yahweh from their hearts (2 Chron. 34:30). And he seeks to confirm this by holding a huge Passover, where he provided the people with the sacrifices.

2Ch 35:2 He set the priests in their offices, and encouraged them to the service of the house of Yahweh-

This encouragement may have been necessary because they themselves were not so enthusiastic; for as noted on :3, it was their servants the Levites who were teaching Israel, when the priests ought to have been doing so.

2Ch 35:3 He said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to Yahweh, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built. There shall no more be a burden on your shoulders. Now serve Yahweh your God and His people Israel-

The Levites here are distinguished from the priests (:2). But it was the duty of the priests to teach (2 Chron. 15:3; Mal. 2:7), but we sense the priesthood was not solidly

behind the reforms; although their servants the Levites were. This is similar to how the situation was at the time of Hezekiah's reforms (2 Chron. 29:34), and it explains why all these reforms were so quickly undone; for the priesthood and people were always still hankering after idols.

We note that the ark had been carried around on their shoulders for some time, and the temple was therefore devoid of the supreme symbol of God's presence. The religion of Judah had therefore been hollow for quite some time. Perhaps the ark had been removed from the temple by Manasseh, or by faithful priests who feared he would destroy it or abuse it.

2Ch 35:4 Prepare yourselves after your fathers' houses by your divisions, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son-

These writings had been preserved for some centuries, and had presumably been copied out by the scribes. But they had to be urged all the time by Josiah to act in a way which ought to have been natural for them if they from their hearts were really obedient and eager for reformation (see on :3).

2Ch 35:5 Stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of your brothers the children of the people, and let there be for each a portion of a father's house of the Levites-

"The children of the people" is s.w. "the common people" (2 Kings 23:6). The idea is that each father's house of the common people was assigned a group of Levites to help them in the preparation of the Passover sacrifices. And we noted in :3 that the Levites had at this time replaced the priests as the teachers, so they presumably also taught them what the law of Moses said about the Passover.

2Ch 35:6 Kill the Passover and sanctify yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of Yahweh by Moses-

The Levites were to perceive the common people of Israel as their "brothers" (:5) which is the most effective way of teaching (:3) and spiritually helping people, rather than assuming a position of high authority over them.

2Ch 35:7 Josiah gave to the children of the people of the flock, lambs and young goats, all of them for the Passover offerings, to all who were present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls. These were of the king's substance-

The people were intended to bring their own Passover lambs, but they hadn't. And Josiah was hoping that he could bring the hearts of the people back to Yahweh (see on 2 Chron. 34:30) so that the threatened judgment upon them would be revoked. We recall that Josiah himself had been assured of his personal acceptability with God, and that he would not see judgment come in his days. Unlike Hezekiah, he didn't shrug at the fate of his people. He of his own substance gave them huge numbers of animals in order that they would each have something personal to offer, in accordance with the law (:6). But again, this was a case of a reformer seeking to impose his vision upon the masses, and it ultimately didn't work. For they soon returned to idolatry and were judged for that. Hezekiah likewise had given the people the offerings they themselves ought to have brought (2 Chron. 30:24) and that too didn't ultimately work out.

2Ch 35:8 His princes gave for a freewill offering to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, the rulers of God's house, gave to the

priests for the Passover offerings two thousand and six hundred small livestock, and three hundred head of cattle-
Hilkiah is well attested as the one who found the lost book of the law (2 Kings 22:8), helped in Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:14-20) and arranged the great Passover observance of 2 Chron. 35:1-19. But Hilkiah did all this despite being the son of a High Priest called Shallum (1 Chron. 6:12,13), whose name can mean 'bribe' (s.w. Mic. 7:3 about the corruption of the priesthood). Perhaps this was what he was known for. But his son / descendant rose above that bad background, as we can. "For a freewill offering" may be better as AV "freely", that is these offerings were given willingly and freely.

2Ch 35:9 Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethanel, his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the Passover offerings five thousand small livestock, and five hundred head of cattle-
This was a major act of generosity, reflecting Hezekiah's desire to as it were make the people acceptable to God by each having something to offer. But sacrifice is ultimately a very personal thing and cannot be forced, nor done using other people as a proxy.

2Ch 35:10 So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites by their divisions, according to the king's commandment-
This was all done according to the commandment of God through Moses (:6). Josiah was careful that his commandments exactly reflected God's. He was sincerely doing all he could to make the people acceptable to God through strict obedience. But it didn't ultimately work because their hearts were untouched and soon returned to idolatry.

2Ch 35:11 They killed the Passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood which they received of their hand, and the Levites flayed them-
As noted on :10,13 Josiah was being careful to follow the absolute letter of the law.

2Ch 35:12 They removed the burnt offerings, that they might give them according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of the children of the people, to offer to Yahweh, as it is written in the book of Moses. So they did with the cattle-
As explained on :5, the animals were carefully given to the common people to offer. But those huge numbers of sacrifices, put into the hands of people to offer, was not the spirit of the law. God had made it clear that He didn't delight in huge numbers of offerings, but rather sought humble, contrite hearts. Just as David had been taught when faced with death over his sins with Bathsheba. But the hearts of the people were apparently unmoved at this time. It was all the externality of mere ritualism.

2Ch 35:13 They roasted the Passover with fire according to the ordinance. They boiled the holy offerings in pots, in caldrons and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the children of the people-
"According to the ordinance" reflects the continued stress on the fact they were doing all they could to be obedient to the letter of the law (see on :10). But as noted on :12, what was required was broken hearts, and not rivers of blood and mounds of slain animals. What was offered using pots was the boiled flesh of the peace offerings, offered on the days of unleavened bread (Lev. 23:4-8). We get the impression of

hyper vigilance to obey the letter of the law; although their hearts were still far from God, and they had not even brought their own Passover sacrifices.

2Ch 35:14 Afterward they prepared for themselves, and for the priests, because the priests the sons of Aaron were busy with offering the burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves, and for the priests the sons of Aaron-
The priests themselves kept the Passover, despite being so busy, although they needed the help of the Levites to do it. Again we have the impression of careful, all out effort to obey every letter of the law about the Passover. We may take the lesson that we are not to be so caught up with serving others that we neglect personal obedience. But the stronger lesson is that all this legalistic obedience didn't succeed, as Josiah hoped it would, in averting the judgment coming upon the people. Because their hearts were not changed.

2Ch 35:15 The singers the sons of Asaph were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's prophet. The porters were at every gate: they didn't need to depart from their service; for their brothers the Levites prepared for them-
Jeduthun is called Ethan in 1 Chron. 6:44. As with priests explained on :14, the singers also kept the Passover because the Levites prepared it for them. But we wonder whether this was not a departure from the letter of the law, for each family were to prepare their Passover lamb personally and not have others doing it for them. So in the intense effort to obey the letter of the law (see on :14), they still had to fall back upon keeping the spirit of it.

2Ch 35:16 So all the service of Yahweh was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover, and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of Yahweh, according to the commandment of king Josiah-
"So the service... was prepared / set in order" is a phrase used only of the time of Hezekiah's reformation (2 Chron. 29:35) and of that of Josiah (2 Chron. 35:10,15,16). I suggested on 2 Chron. 29:17 ,18 that this term was used in the context of Hezekiah keeping a kind of Passover. It seems Josiah was inspired by the record of Hezekiah's reformation, and sought to follow it. Just as we too in our own contexts are to be inspired by the spirit of these reformers.

2Ch 35:17 The children of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days-
The number of sacrificial lambs was huge. If each extended family numbered 13 people, there would have been over half a million people present. But that is unrealistic. More like, each head of family offered more than one Passover lamb, in a attempt to cover families not present. It was Josiah's attempt at as it were impressing God by the number of animals offered, and to somehow cleanse all Israel. But he failed to appreciate that numbers of sacrifices were not impressive to God, and He instead was searching for broken hearts as David's was. And there is no mention of any appeal to the hearts of the people.

2Ch 35:18 There was no Passover like that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did any of the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the

inhabitants of Jerusalem-
This Passover was unique both in terms of numbers of offerings, and in the strict obedience to all the legislation about it. We note the repeated treatment of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" as a separate group. And yet Jeremiah, who was the contemporary prophet, specifically criticizes this group above all as being so far from Yahweh in their hearts. And this was the critical dimension which was not addressed by all this ritualistic obedience.

2Ch 35:19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this Passover kept-
We have no record of what Josiah did in the last 13 years of his reign (2 Chron. 34:1), apart from the note we will now have about how he died in disobedience to God's word. Perhaps this was the end point of a spiritual slip in that period. Tragically, so many of the kings started well and slipped at the end; truly a warning to us. We would rather hope to read that Judah continued to keep Passovers after this one, but there is no record of that. See on :20.

2Ch 35:20 After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him-
"After all this" may suggest that despite all this external obedience, 13 years later, Josiah came to his end in unfaithfulness to God's word, despite all his zeal to so carefully obey every part of the rituals commanded by Moses.

2Ch 35:21 But he sent ambassadors to him saying, What have I to do with you, you king of Judah? I come not against you this day, but against the house with which I have war. God has commanded me to make haste. Beware and know that it is God who is with me, that he not destroy you-
God does use Gentiles to perform His purpose, and even they often get a sense of this, without themselves believing.

2Ch 35:22 Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and didn't listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo-
Going into battle disguised is exactly what Ahab did (2 Chron. 18:29), and was slain doing it- having also defied God's prophetic word to do so. See on :23. Josiah totally failed to hear God's word at this point, both from the historical precedents and the explicit prophecy given to him. The valley of Megiddo, and mourning in it (:24), will have an equivalent in the latter days (Zech. 12:10). Josiah therefore seems to represent a disobedient Israel, who will be finally saved by grace.

2Ch 35:23 The archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Take me away, because I am seriously wounded!-
Josiah must have seen the similarities with the death of Ahab, also slain by archers in his chariot (2 Chron. 18:33). He died in the same way as Ahab because he too had refused to accept God's prophetic word, despite previously having been so sensitive to it. We naturally wonder whether Josiah will be saved, despite dying in sin, or at best, at a very low point spiritually. The overall spirit of his life was perhaps acceptable with God (2 Chron. 34:2), despite this failure at the end. This may help us more positively hope for those who are weak at the end of their lives, such as those believers who take their own lives.

2Ch 35:24 So his servants took him out of the chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah-
Josiah died in battle, not in peace (2 Chron. 35:22-24). Yet he had been promised to be gathered to his grave in peace (2 Chron. 34:28). Here we have an example of God making a statement about the future which is conditional upon human behaviour. Thus He stated that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days; but it wasn't, because they repented. There is a gap between the pronouncement and its fulfilment, and in that gap our behaviour can change the outcome. We too must waste so many potential futures.

2Ch 35:25 Jeremiah lamented for Josiah. All the singing men and singing women spoke of Josiah in their lamentations to this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel. These are written in the lamentations-
The timing of Josiah's reformation (2 Chron. 34:3) coincides with the prophecies of Jer. 2,3; he heard them, and responded. Hence Jeremiah wept when Josiah died, remembering how as a teenager, Josiah had heard his prophecies and immediately responded to them.

2Ch 35:26 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his good deeds, according to that which is written in the law of Yahweh-
Josiah died in spiritual weakness and at a point of disobedience to God's word (2 Chron. 35:20-24). The rubric 'He did what was right...' used about him (2 Chron. 34:2) is found even of kings who clearly departed from Yahweh. The truly righteous ones such as Jehoshaphat have a clause added to their summary, saying that they had followed Yahweh in their hearts. But this is lacking in the case of Josiah. We note too that he raised evil sons. And so we wonder whether the record is acknowledging the good works which he did at some points in his life, and it here concludes with this too. But there is a notable absence of any statement to the intent that he was judged as having a heart right with God. And the state of the heart was and is the critical indicator in God's final judgment of men.

2Ch 35:27 and his acts, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah-
As discussed on :26, this puts huge emphasis upon his works rather than the state of his heart. As discussed on 2 Chron. 33:18, the "book of the kings" apparently included Manasseh's prayer, which is not found in our books of Kings; and so the book referred to here may not be that which we have in our Bibles.

2 CHRONICLES CHAPTER 36

2Ch 36:1 Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem-
2 Kings 23:31 says that Jehoahaz was the son of Hamutal, whereas his brother Eliakim was the son of Zebudah (2 Kings 23:36). So we see that Josiah practiced polygamy- another indication that he was not such a stellar example of spirituality, despite his

works of obedience to the Mosaic law; see on 2 Chron. 35:19,20. And the mothers of his sons are blamed in Ez. 19 for leading them into very bad behaviour, so these were not good women.

2Ch 36:2 Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem-
It is possible that Josiah was spiritually sliding downwards in the last 13 years of his reign; see on 2 Chron. 35:19,20. So the formative years of his sons may not have been spent under a good parental influence, which would explain their weakness and apostacy. LXX adds: "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done. And Pharaoh Neco bound him in Deblatha in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem".

2Ch 36:3 The king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and fined the land one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold-
2 Kings 23:35 says that Jehoiakim raised the tribute for the Babylonians by imposing a poll tax on the people. And he succeeded in raising the money. Yet such a tax ought to have been paid to the temple, but Jehoiakim hadn't bothered doing that. He was "deposed at Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 36:3) but put in bonds at Riblah (2 Kings 23:33), which was on the Orontes river on the road from Babylon to Palestine. This was the same place where Nebuchadnezzar was based during the destruction of Jerusalem, and where the captives were brought to him for judgment (2 Kings 25:20,21). The parallel is to show how Judah were intended to learn from their sufferings at the hands of the Egyptians and to repent. But they didn't, and so the situation repeated with the Babylonians.

2Ch 36:4 The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Neco took Joahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt-
"Eliakim" means "God will raise", and "Jehoiakim" means the same, only "Yah will raise". Perhaps the king made Eliakim swear by his God Jehovah, that he would be subservient to him. But it could be that the "Jeh" prefix meant something different to the Egyptians, and was effectively a sign of subservience to them; it may even refer to an Egyptian god. Joahaz died in Egypt (2 Kings 23:34) as prophesied in Jer. 22:12. Shallum in Jer. 22 is the same as Jehoahaz. Perhaps he is called Shallum because that word means 'The one marked out for judgment'. I explain on Ez. 4:6 that potentially, the captivity of Judah need only have lasted for 40 days or years, but this period was extended, just as it could have been reduced. But Jehoahaz was not going to experience this, he had precluded any reduction in his captivity period because of his impenitence at that time. Jer. 22:11,12 imply that the false prophets were claiming that his exile was going to be very short lived and he would return to establish a Messianic kingdom, thus twisting the prophecies of

the restoration which Jeremiah may have already given, along with those of Isaiah which were already extant.

LXX adds: "And Pharaoh Neco took his brother Joahaz and brought him into Egypt, and he died there: but he had given the silver and gold to Pharaoh. At that time the land began to be taxed to give the money at the command of Pharaoh; and every one as he could borrowed the silver and the gold of the people of the land, to give to Pharaoh Neco.".

2Ch 36:5 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh his God-
Jer. 22:13-18 gives an example of the sins of Jehoiakim- he built an opulent home for himself and refused to pay the labourers for their work. He also murdered the prophet Urijah who spoke against him (Jer. 26:20-23), and burnt the scroll of God's words and persecuted Jeremiah (Jer. 36).

2Ch 36:6 Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon-
It may not have been Nebuchadnezzar in person. "To carry him to Babylon" means that was the intention, but it may not have happened. Jer. 22:18,19 says he was to be thrown out onto the garbage tip outside Jerusalem like a dead donkey. 2 Kings says that bands of the Babylonians attacked him at this time, and he may have been slain at this time.

2Ch 36:7 Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of Yahweh to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon-
"Of the vessels" means they were not all taken at this time; that was to happen later (:18). Babylon's original plan seemed to have been to make Judah a tributary state, taking away the leadership and seeking to make the youngsters like Daniel completely Babylonian, with a view to them returning and governing Judah. Hence only part of the vessels were initially taken. But this changed to a policy of complete destruction. It would have been at this time that Daniel and his friends went into captivity. Dan. 1:2 describes this situation: "He carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god". The captives were paralleled with the temple treasures; they were taken into the temple as evidence that Yahweh and His people had now been apparently dominated. But Isaiah had prophesied that Bel would be rendered helpless and judged (Is. 46:1,2). The faithful captives would have remembered that, even when it seemed their chips were down.

2Ch 36:8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and

that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah-
I have noted earlier that the kings are often described with a double description- of their works, and of their heart. Some of them like Jehoshaphat had imperfect works but good hearts for God; others performed some outstanding works at some times, but their hearts were not devoted to Yahweh. Here we have the same double reference; Jehoiakim's works were abominations, and what was "found in him", by the Divine search of his heart, was also [it is implied] very bad. I have noted before that "the book of the kings" is not necessarily the books we know as 1 and 2 Kings in our Bibles.

Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place-
Jeconiah of 1 Chron. 3:16 is Coniah in Jer. 22:14, and Jehoiachin in 2 Chron. 36:8,9; 2 Kings 24:6. A reminder that people carried multiple names, explaining some of the apparent contradictions in the genealogies. Ez. 19 says that he was effectively made king by his ambitious mother, whose hope was to be the glorious queen mother, teaching her sons to be ambitious, aggressive lions to that end.

2Ch 36:9 Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh-
Jehoiachin of 2 Chron. 36:9 is also called Jeconiah or Jechoniah (1 Chron. 3:16,17); Coniah (Jer. 22:24), and Jechoniah in 2 Chron. 24:1. We note that he was judged as a sinner at eight years old, for what he did over a 70 day period. We sometimes tend to excuse ourselves on the basis of only being products of our background. But eight year old Jehoiachin reigned a mere three months and ten days: and God's comment was that "he did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh". We could, of course, make the excuse that his surroundings, his immediate family, his peers...were all idolatrous. But Yahweh evidently didn't see this as any real excuse: he, at sweet eight years old, "did that which was evil" and was punished accordingly. Not only does this give an unusual insight into God's view of responsibility; but it shows that God expects even a child to break away from background influences when they are evil.

However, 2 Kings 24:8 says he was 18. Although even so, 18 is very young to be condemned for 70 days' behaviour, and the points made above about God's sensitivity to sin still stand. Kings also gives "three months" rather than "three months and ten days", and it has been suggested that the "ten" has been misplaced by a copyist, explaining why 18 has been miscopied as 8.

2Ch 36:10 At the return of the year king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the beautiful vessels of the house of Yahweh, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem-
"Brother" is used in a very wide sense, and more means "uncle" here (2 Kings 24:17). 2

Kings 24:17 says that Nebuchadnezzar changed the name Mattaniah, 'gift of Yah', to "Zedekiah", 'Yah is right / just'. Perhaps even Nebuchadnezzar perceived that Yahweh was judging Judah justly. But "Zedekiah" is also "Yahweh our righteousness", but his birth name was Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17). We wonder if this was a pre existing name given him by Josiah, and that Josiah named him this in keeping with his vision of reestablishing the Kingdom of God, based around a united Israel and Judah centered around worshipping Yahweh. For this is the term associated with king of the restored kingdom in Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 51:10. But he again was a case of wasted potential.

2Ch 36:11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem-
Hamutal his mother (2 Kings 24:18) is severely criticized in Ez. 19 as an ambitious, aggressive and scheming mother lion who set up her young lion sons for destruction by wanting them to be kings. Instead they needed to heed Jeremiah's message and humble themselves before Babylon, realizing they had sinned, rather than trying to break away from Babylon to achieve the independent kingship their mother was so obsessed with.

2Ch 36:12 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh his God; he didn't humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking the words of Yahweh-
The prophets "spoke from the mouth of Yahweh" Himself; and yet the people scoffed at them (2 Chron. 36:12,16 RV). The power of inspiration was and is so great; and to not heed God's word is therefore a personal affront to Him. And those words have been recorded. When we read His word, we hear His voice. 1 Kings 13:21 speaks of us hearing "the *mouth* of God". Jeremiah spoke "from the mouth of the Lord". His word brings Him that near to us, if we will perceive it for what it is. Jeremiah's appeals for Zedekiah to submit to Babylon were repeated so often (Jer. 21:1-7; 34:8-22; 37:1-10,17; 38:17-23).

And yet we wonder whether Zedekiah may have finally repented. For Ez. 21:14 speaks of Zedekiah as "the deadly wounded", likewise "You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come" (Ez. 21:25). The intention was that Zedekiah would die by the sword, but in fact he didn't. He was blinded, but died peacefully in prison (Jer. 52:11). The wound that ought to have been unto death was in fact not unto death- because God wanted him to be moved by His grace to repent. And the change of judgment upon him would suggest to me that he did repent.

2Ch 36:13 He also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart against turning to Yahweh, the God of Israel-
Turning to Yahweh with a soft heart therefore involved his accepting that Judah had sinned, and therefore their servitude to Babylon was the appropriate punishment. But

egged on by his mother (see on :11), Zedekiah broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, which he had made in the name of Yahweh. He thus despised the Name. The parable of Ez. 17:12-20 clearly condemns him for doing this (also Ez. 21:25). Ez. 17:14 explains the intention of God in all this: "That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand". The idea may be that it was God's plan that through keeping the covenant, the royal family and leadership would be humbled, and this would bring about God's favourite paradox- the brought down could then be exalted, "that... it might stand". See on Ez. 17:24. But they refused to repent, to be humbled, to be ashamed, and instead sought to wriggle out of the covenant by making agreements with Egypt to attack the Babylonian forces, liberate Jerusalem and perhaps later themselves from Babylon itself. Yet all these things had been explicitly promised to Judah; God would do all these things, if they repented. But instead of doing so, they sought by all manner of desperate means to bring about this liberation in the strength of Egypt. This is so typical of human behaviour. It is for us to learn the lesson.

Ez. 17:15 commented: "Shall he who does such things escape? Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?". This is the language of Judah breaking covenant with God, just used in Ez. 16:59. God had designed the covenant between Zedekiah and the Babylonians, for the spiritual growth and repentance of the Jews. To break it was therefore to effectively break covenant with God. Or we could instead perceive that covenant breaking with God is reflected in covenant breaking with men. Our attitude to God becomes our attitude to men. Hence Ez. 17:19 specifically states: "Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely My oath that he has despised, and My covenant that he has broken, I will even bring it on his own head". Judah were light hearted in their attitude to everything; they "gave the hand" in covenant (Ez. 17:18) in order just to get "bread" (Lam. 5:6). They were in need, and instead of turning to God in repentance, they madly made promises of total loyalty to various peoples and their gods. It is this light hearted, not serious attitude, seeking for the immediate for the total sacrifice of principle, which dominates our age today.

2Ch 36:14 Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of Yahweh which He had made holy in Jerusalem-

Their sin with "all" the abominable idols of the nations is in contrast to how those nations were themselves loyal to their gods. But Judah was so desperate for help that she prostituted herself to every possible god of the nations. Hence Hosea describes her with the image of a woman who is sexually addicted. This is what happens when someone goes away from the true God; they will live a sad life of endless drifting between idols, desperately trying to find as much benefit as possible from as many of

them as possible. The temple was therefore finally found to be full of various idols and images to various gods.

2Ch 36:15 Yahweh, the God of their fathers, sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place-
Several times God speaks of His rising up early in the morning through the ministry of the prophets, every single day since Israel left Egypt (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25). The figure is stressed- God Himself rose up early every day to teach and appeal to His people (Jer. 32:33). Alarm clocks have changed our appreciation of this. Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries... This figure of rising up early is surely the basis for the Lord's parable in Mt. 20:1- where God is likened to a man going out early in the morning to hire labourers. It is through the ministry of His word that God does this- each morning that word calls us to labour for Him in His vineyard. Israel didn't notice the huge effort God puts into His word- that every day He rose early and taught them. We can also misunderstand Biblical inspiration to mean that God effortlessly inspired "the original autographs" long ago, and moved on; but actually the whole process is an ongoing and incredible outgiving of God's energy in appealing to us. And... in our mismanaged, weakly disciplined lives, is it so that we don't even make time to read His word daily?

There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1); Samuel (1 Sam. 15:12); David (1 Sam. 17:20; 29:11); Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 29:20). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

2Ch 36:16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against His people, until there was no remedy-
"Despised" is the word used for the sin of presumption (Num. 15:31), and yet having been told this, they could still repent; but they did not, until there was no remedy, the implication being that each time they were told what they were doing, they could have repented. It is the word used by Nathan to David of what he had done (2 Sam. 12:9,10), and he repented in response to the prophetic word of rebuke. Even though God had told Josiah that His wrath with His people would not be quenched (2 Chron. 34:25), it would seem that there was still some possibility of "remedy", had the people accepted God's word in their hearts (2 Chron. 36:16) and not despised and imprisoned Jeremiah and murdered Urijah the prophet (Jer. 26:20-23). We see here His absolute eagerness for their repentance, and unwillingness that any of His people should have to perish. And that is the same God with whom we have to do.

2Ch 36:17 Therefore He brought on them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or gray-headed. He gave them all into his hand-
The particular anger with the temple was because Judah had promised unique loyalty to Babylon, and had therefore put Babylonian gods in the temple of Yahweh. But when the Babylonians took Jerusalem, they found the temple full of idols to other gods. As the prophets explain, her nakedness was discovered, and she was put to shame before all her lovers. For she had promised each of them unique loyalty and acceptance of their gods. This verse is the fulfilment of the vision of slaughter in Ez. 9:1-11.

2Ch 36:18 All the vessels of God's house, great and small, and the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon-
These were the vessels remaining after the deportation of :10, and were largely the brass vessels which remained (2 Kings 25:13-15).

2Ch 36:19 They burnt God's house and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all the beautiful vessels of it-
Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5;

12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48;25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice. God will conquer sin, ultimately.

2Ch 36:20 He carried those who had escaped from the sword away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia-
Being servants to the ruling dynasty of Babylon was the judgment upon all the nations (Jer. 27:7). So God's people were sharing in the judgments of the world, because they were not separate from the world. And thus the punishment of the apostate amongst the new Israel will be to be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The critics claim that the sons or descendants of Nebuchadnezzar ceased to reign at some point before Persia took over. There were three kings of Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar before Cyrus and the Persians took over: Evil-Merodach (Amil-Marduk) (2 Kings 25:27), Neriglissar and Nabonidus. The last two were not "sons" of Nebuchadnezzar but they were both his sons in law. The Hebrew term "sons" is very broad and easily includes this dimension.

2Ch 36:21 to fulfil the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. As long as it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years-
It would seem from 2 Chron. 36:21 that the law concerning the land resting every Sabbath year was hardly ever kept, even by the righteous kings. We can imagine how the thinking developed: father didn't do it. grandfather didn't, none of the faithful old kings seemed that interested in it... therefore every time that passage was considered in their study of the Law, it was mentally bypassed. *We are all absolutely expert at this kind of bypass.*

The land of Israel had to be rested every Sabbath year. God's people thought they could quietly ignore this inconvenient requirement of their God, and get away with it. But God has His way, in everything, all the time. Eventually the whole land had to go through 70 years laying desolate, to compensate for the 70 Sabbaths (over 490 years) which His people had ignored to keep (2 Chron. 36:21).

Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the

freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

The prophecy of 70 years exile in Babylon is specifically stated as having been fulfilled in the first year of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:20-22, "till seventy years were completed... in the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulilled"). But it is also said to have been fulfilled in the second year of Darius: "O Yahweh of Armies, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You have had indignation those seventy years?" (Zech. 1:12; the rest of Zech. 1 shows that God has indeed had mercy on Jerusalem). Daniel 9 could be reinterpreting the 70 years as 70 'sevens'; or, adding another 70 'sevens' to the 70 years. Clearly fulfilment of time periods can be delayed or made open to various starting and ending points. Such is the open ended nature of such prophecies.

2Ch 36:22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished-
Daniel understood from Jeremiah's prophecies that Jerusalem's fortunes would be revived after the 70 year period was ended. Yet he goes on to ask God to *immediately* forgive His people, as if Daniel even dared hope that the period might be shortened. Daniel lived into the reign of Cyrus (Dan. 6:28), and so he would have witnessed "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25; Ezra 1:1). But it seems to me that whilst the prophecy of the 70 years came true in one sense, the Jews didn't respond as they should, and so the time of Zion's true freedom in the Messianic Kingdom was delayed. Daniel had been petitioning the Father to not delay beyond the 70 year period in doing this. But in another sense, the prophecy was re-interpreted; Daniel was now told that there was to be a "seventy weeks of years" (Dan. 9:24 RSV) period involved in order to gain ultimate forgiveness for Israel as Daniel had just been praying for. The 70 years had become "seventy weeks of years". The command to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the first year of Cyrus; but Daniel must have watched in vain for any sign that Zion's glad morning had really come. And so it is recorded that in the third year of Cyrus Daniel was given a vision that confirmed to him that "the thing was true, but the time appointed was long [Heb. 'extended'; the word is also translated "greater", "more"]: and he understood the thing" (Dan. 10:1). What was "the thing" that was true, which Daniel sought to understand? Surely it was the vision of the 70 years that he had sought to "understand" in Dan. 9:2. The Hebrew *dabar*, translated "thing", is usually translated "word". He was comforted that the word of prophecy would come true; it was "noted in the scripture of truth" (Dan. 10;21). It was just that it had been

extended in its fulfilment; “for yet the vision is for many days” (Dan. 10:14). And this was how he came to “understand the thing / word”. The essential and ultimate fulfilment of the 70 years prophecy would only be after a long time, involving 70 “weeks of years”. Thus Daniel came to “understand” the vision (Dan. 10:1); hence he was so shocked, depressed and disappointed that the fulfilment would not be in his days. But he is set up as a representative of those of us in the very last days who shall likewise “understand” (s.w. Dan. 12:10) the very same prophecies which Daniel studied. Daniel is described as both understanding, and also not understanding (Dan. 10:1; 12:8). Surely the idea is that he understood the principle of deferment and the outline meaning of the prophecy; but he didn’t understand the details. And so perhaps it is with us who will, or do, likewise “understand” as Daniel did.

Ez. 4:6 revealed the variable nature of Divine time periods: "You shall lie on your right side, and shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it to you". Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years. Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation- This is the same word for "noise" in Ez. 37:7: “So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone”. This meant that the “whole house of Israel” was to stand up from their graves and return as a mighty army to the land. Their attitude in Babylon was exactly as in Ez. 37:11: “behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we

are cut off for our parts". These were the very sentiments of Jeremiah in Lamentations, and those who wept by the waters of Babylon when they remembered Zion. They were revived by the gift of the Spirit, the breath / spirit which was blown into them by God's initiative.

The stirring up [Heb. 'opening the eyes'] of Cyrus is a parade example of the ability of God to work directly on the human mind, inserting ideas and initiatives, and confirming a person in their responses to various psychological stimuli. This is the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers today, and it was and will be seen in the revival of the dead bones of Israel. Not visible miracles, but internal mental working. And that Spirit can be resisted, as it was by many of the exiles; for we are not mere puppets in God's hand. Yet grace means that God takes the initiative; "He first loved us". That initiative is seen through His working on the human heart in calling us to action (s.w. 2 Chron. 21:16; Is. 13:17; Jer. 50:41; Joel 3:9) and Cyrus was a parade example of this (Is. 41:2,25, 45:13). The hearts of the returnees were likewise stirred up (see on :5). But this was not some irresistible manipulation of the human person; Zion was called to be stirred up ["awake"], but she refused to be stirred up (Is. 51:17; 52:1 cp. Is. 64:7). Zerubbabel had his mind or "spirit" stirred up to be the king-priest Messianic figure (Hag. 1:14); but he let the baton drop.

Throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing saying-
The restoration prophecies speak of how "all nations" are to be gathered to Zion; they are those who scattered Judah amongst the nations; not every literal nation. And who "scattered" Israel? The Hebrew word is used in Jer. 50:17 to describe how Babylon scattered Judah amongst the nations. And most significantly, the same word occurs again in Est. 3:8: "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people *scattered abroad* and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom…". It is quite wrong for us to imagine Judah sitting quietly by the rivers of Babylon, all huddled together. They were scattered throughout all the many provinces / colonies of the Babylonian empire. This was why Cyrus' decree bidding the Jews return to rebuild Jerusalem had to be published "throughout all his kingdom", and Jews living "in any place" of that kingdom were included in the invitation. It was Babylon who had "parted my land" by dividing it up amongst the various 'Samaritan' peoples who were transported there from other conquered territories. And their being in Babylon is paralleled with being scattered to the four corners of the world as it was known to them: "Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon" (Zech. 2:6-7). And consider Zech. 7:14: "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them [i.e. this concerns the Babylonian invasion], that no

man passed through nor returned". Indeed, Zech. 8:7,8 speaks of the restoration as coming from both West and East of Israel, implying that the Babylonians had sold some of the Jews as slaves in Greece and north Africa.

2Ch 36:23 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, Yahweh, the God of heaven has given all the kingdoms of the earth to me; and He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah-

Cyrus clearly had a sense of relationship with Yahweh, and I have argued that he was one of the potential Messiah figures who could have reestablished the Kingdom at the restoration. Is. 44:28 is crystal clear about this. God "says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'". It was God's intention that Cyrus repent and become a proselyte, and Yahweh would then use him to save His people "out of all places where they have been scattered". The decree of Cyrus was addressed to "Whoever is left [of the Jews], in any place where he lives" (Ezra 1:4). "Cyrus" literally means "sun" and so contrasts with the cloudy and dark day. But Cyrus let the ball drop and didn't carry through the Divine purpose as he might have done and neither did the Jews respond as they should have done. Cyrus was Yahweh's anointed (Is. 45:1), and so the essence of these prophecies is to come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. We could say that the prophecies are transferred from Cyrus to the Lord Jesus. LXX "Who bids Cyrus be wise, and he shall perform all my will" suggests Cyrus had a choice; he was commanded, and it seems he partially obeyed, but not enough to the Messiah figure envisaged.

It is significant that Ezra and Nehemiah speak of the "God of Heaven" (e.g. Ezra 1:2) whilst Zechariah speaks of the "God of the earth" or 'land' of Israel, perhaps because the Angel of Israel literally went to Heaven when the glory departed from Jerusalem, and returned, in a sense, at the restoration- to depart again at the Lord's death ("Your house is left unto you desolate"; of the Angel that once dwelt in the temple).

Whoever there is among you of all his people, Yahweh his God be with him, and let him go up-

"His God..." sounds as if Cyrus had not adopted Yahweh as his own God. And yet he does recognize that "He is God". We can know things *about* God, without grasping their personal reality. That is the lesson of Cyrus.

Amos 9:11-15 is most comfortably interpreted when read as referring to the restoration of Judah and the "remnant" of the ten tribes to the land under Ezra: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake

the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God". "I will *raise up*" uses a Hebrew word very commonly featured in the records of the restoration, when the people were exhorted to "rise up and build" (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 10:4,15; Neh. 2:18,20). The statement that they would "close up the breaches thereof" is exactly the language of Neh. 6:1, which records that the walls were rebuilt so that there was no breach [s.w.] therein. It was after the Babylonian invasion that Zion was "fallen" and 'ruined' (s.w. Jer. 31:18; 45:4; Lam. 2:2,17). "I will build it" is exactly the theme of the records of the return from Babylon (Ezra 1:2,3,5; 3:2,10; 4:1-4; Neh. 2:5,17,18,20; 3:1-3, 13-15; 4:1,3,5,6,10,17,18; 6:1,6; 7:1). Surely Amos 9 is saying that at the rebuilding at the time of the restoration, God's people could have ushered in the Kingdom age of agricultural plenty and victory over their Arab neighbours. But they intermarried with Edom, and suffered drought because they didn't fulfill the requirements to rebuild Zion correctly. But the words of Amos were still to come true in some form- they are given an application in Acts 15:17 which may appear to be way out of context, i.e. to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus words which could have had a plain fulfilment at the restoration were given a delayed fulfilment; but they were not fulfilled in a literal sense, but in a spiritual one. And so it is with prophecies like Ezekiel 38, and the temple prophecies of Ezekiel. They will be fulfilled in spiritual essence, but probably not in strict literality, although they *could have been* had God's people been more 'fulfilling' of them.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: EZRA

EZRA

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

EZRA CHAPTER 1

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished- The reference must be to the first year when Cyrus conquered Babylon. Bullinger claims Cyrus was the son of Astyages and Esther, who named him Cyrus in conscious fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies. That however creates huge chronological difficulties. Daniel understood from Jeremiah's prophecies that Jerusalem's fortunes would be revived after the 70 year period was ended. Yet he goes on to ask God to *immediately* forgive His people, as if Daniel even dared hope that the period might be shortened. Daniel lived into the reign of Cyrus (Dan. 6:28), and so he would have witnessed "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25; Ezra 1:1). But it seems to me that whilst the prophecy of the 70 years came true in one sense, the Jews didn't respond as they should, and so the time of Zion's true freedom in the Messianic Kingdom was delayed. Daniel had been petitioning the Father to not delay beyond the 70 year period in doing this. But in another sense, the prophecy was re-interpreted; Daniel was now told that there was to be a "seventy weeks of years" (Dan. 9:24 RSV) period involved in order to gain ultimate forgiveness for Israel as Daniel had just been praying for. The 70 years had become

“seventy weeks of years”. The command to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the first year of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1); but Daniel must have watched in vain for any sign that Zion’s glad morning had really come. And so it is recorded that in the third year of Cyrus Daniel was given a vision that confirmed to him that “the thing was true, but the time appointed was long [Heb. ‘extended’; the word is also translated “greater”, “more”]: and he understood the thing” (Dan. 10:1). What was “the thing” that was true, which Daniel sought to understand? Surely it was the vision of the 70 years that he had sought to “understand” in Dan. 9:2. The Hebrew *dabar*, translated “thing”, is usually translated “word”. He was comforted that the word of prophecy would come true; it was “noted in the scripture of truth” (Dan. 10;21). It was just that it had been extended in its fulfilment; “for yet the vision is for many days” (Dan. 10:14). And this was how he came to “understand the thing / word”. The essential and ultimate fulfilment of the 70 years prophecy would only be after a long time, involving 70 “weeks of years”. Thus Daniel came to “understand” the vision (Dan. 10:1); hence he was so shocked, depressed and disappointed that the fulfilment would not be in his days. But he is set up as a representative of those of us in the very last days who shall likewise “understand” (s.w. Dan. 12:10) the very same prophecies which Daniel studied. Daniel is described as both understanding, and also not understanding (Dan. 10:1; 12:8). Surely the idea is that he understood the principle of deferment and the outline meaning of the prophecy; but he didn’t understand the details. And so perhaps it is with us who will, or do, likewise “understand” as Daniel did. And yet all this is not to say that the restoration couldn't have then happened. God revealed His foreknowledge to Daniel. But the reality was that Zerubbabel / Sheshbazzar failed to achieve the restoration, the people didn't respond nor repent as they should have done, Cyrus didn't respond as the prophecies about him said, and Ezra's brave attempt at another return from exile in Ezra 7,8 didn't come to anything because the Jews intermarried and as Haggai and Malachi observe- focused on their own houses rather than God's.

Ez. 4:6 revealed the variable nature of Divine time periods: "You shall lie on your right side, and shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for a year, have I appointed it to you". Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years. Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years

that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation- This is the same word for "noise" in Ez. 37:7: “So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone”. This meant that the “whole house of Israel” was to stand up from their graves and return as a mighty army to the land. Their attitude in Babylon was exactly as in Ez. 37:11: “behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts”. These were the very sentiments of Jeremiah in Lamentations, and those who wept by the waters of Babylon when they remembered Zion. They were revived by the gift of the Spirit, the breath / spirit which was blown into them by God's initiative.

We could take a positive view of Cyrus according to his own claims in the Cyrus Cylinder and the Nabonidus Chronicle. But there is a very negative image of Cyrus presented in Herodotus’ *The Histories* and Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*. The spirit of Cyrus is there presented as despotic and narcissistic, a cruel man who loved blood shedding for the sake of it. If that was indeed so, and it probably was the case, then we are left the more in awe of Yahweh's stirring up of even such a spirit to be gracious to His people. He can work on equally hard spirits today.

The Babylonian writer of the “Annalistic Tablet” claims that the god Merodach stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, so perhaps Ezra's point is that in fact it was Yahweh who did so: “Merodach ... appointed a prince who should guide aright the wish of the heart which his hand upholds, even Cyrus ...”.

The stirring up [Heb. 'opening the eyes'] of Cyrus is a parade example of the ability of God to work directly on the human mind, inserting ideas and initiatives, and confirming a person in their responses to various psychological stimuli. This is the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers today, and it was and will be seen in the revival of the dead bones of Israel. Not visible miracles, but internal mental working. And that Spirit can be resisted, as it was by many of the exiles; for we are not mere puppets in God's hand. Yet grace means that God takes the initiative; "He first loved us". That initiative is seen through His working on the human heart in calling us to action (s.w. 2 Chron. 21:16; Is. 13:17; Jer. 50:41; Joel 3:9) and Cyrus was a parade example of this (Is. 41:2,25, 45:13). The hearts of the returnees were likewise stirred up (see on :5).

But this was not some irresistible manipulation of the human person; Zion was called to be stirred up ["awake"], but she refused to be stirred up (Is. 51:17; 52:1 cp. Is. 64:7). Zerubbabel had his mind or "spirit" stirred up to be the king-priest Messianic figure (Hag. 1:14 "Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remainder of the people"); but he let the baton drop.

Throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying-The restoration prophecies speak of how "all nations" are to be gathered to Zion; they are those who scattered Judah amongst the nations; not every literal nation. And who "scattered" Israel? The Hebrew word is used in Jer. 50:17 to describe how Babylon scattered Judah amongst the nations. And most significantly, the same word occurs again in Est. 3:8: "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people *scattered abroad* and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom...". It is quite wrong for us to imagine Judah sitting quietly by the rivers of Babylon, all huddled together. They were scattered throughout all the many provinces / colonies of the Babylonian empire. This was why Cyrus' decree bidding the Jews return to rebuild Jerusalem had to be published "throughout all his kingdom" (Ezra 1:1), and Jews living "in any place" of that kingdom were included in the invitation. It was Babylon who had "parted my land" by dividing it up amongst the various 'Samaritan' peoples who were transported there from other conquered territories. And their being in Babylon is paralleled with being scattered to the four corners of the world as it was known to them: "Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon" (Zech. 2:6-7). And consider Zech. 7:14: "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them [i.e. this concerns the Babylonian invasion], that no man passed through nor returned". Indeed, Zech. 8:7,8 speaks of the restoration as coming from both West and East of Israel, implying that the Babylonians had sold some of the Jews as slaves in Greece and north Africa.

This proclamation was the fulfilment of many prophecies in Isaiah about "the messenger of good tidings" who announces salvation and God's return to Zion (Is. 52:7). "Go you forth from Babylon... proclaim this... make it go out even to the end of the earth [land]; say: The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob" (Is. 48:20). But this was a Gospel, a message of salvation, that was largely ignored by God's people because they were blindsided by materialism and cozyness in Babylon. Just as we see today.

Ezra 1:2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all

the kingdoms of the earth; and He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah-

This fits exactly how Darius I is called in his Persian "display" inscription, erected in Egypt, "The great king, king of kings, king of countries, containing all (kinds) of men, king of this great earth, far and wide". But we note the contradiction with the inscription on Cyrus' Cylinder which names Marduk as the god who appointed Cyrus as King. The term "God of heaven" is the equivalent of the Zoroastrian deity Ahura Mazda; the implication is that Yahweh and not Ahura Mazda is the God of Heaven. So perhaps here in Ezra 1:2 we have what Cyrus actually thought in his heart; or perhaps in his decree to the Israelites he used terms which they would relate to. Likewise it could be argued that Cyrus had a policy of giving subject peoples religious autonomy and some local political autonomy- in order, so he reasoned, to preserve his power over the empire. Whatever his motives, God worked through this to achieve His purpose. Although I would suggest that it was God's intention that Cyrus did actually become a believer who consciously, willfully served Him. But Cyrus failed in that, just as God's people failed to realize their intended potential at this time.

Cyrus clearly had a sense of relationship with Yahweh, and I have argued that he was one of the potential Messiah figures who could have reestablished the Kingdom at the restoration. Is. 44:28 is crystal clear about this. God "says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure', even saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be built;' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'". It was God's intention that Cyrus repent and become a proselyte, and Yahweh would then use him to save His people "out of all places where they have been scattered". The decree of Cyrus was addressed to "Whoever is left [of the Jews], in any place where he lives" (Ezra 1:4). "Cyrus" literally means "sun" and so contrasts with the cloudy and dark day. But Cyrus let the ball drop and didn't carry through the Divine purpose as he might have done and neither did the Jews respond as they should have done. Cyrus was Yahweh's anointed (Is. 45:1), and so the essence of these prophecies is to come true in the last days in the person of the Lord Jesus. We could say that the prophecies are transferred from Cyrus to the Lord Jesus. LXX "Who bids Cyrus be wise, and he shall perform all my will" suggests Cyrus had a choice; he was commanded, and it seems he partially obeyed, but not enough to the Messiah figure envisaged.

It is significant that Ezra and Nehemiah speak of the "God of Heaven" (e.g. Ezra 1:2) whilst Zechariah speaks of the "God of the earth" or 'land' of Israel, perhaps because the Angel of Israel literally went to Heaven when the glory departed from Jerusalem, and returned, in a sense, at the restoration- to depart again at the Lord's death ("Your house is left unto you desolate"; of the Angel that once dwelt in the temple).

Critics have noted the difference between this decree and the record of it in Ezra 6 when it was it were dug out of the archives. I suggest the document of Ezra 6, which is

recorded in Aramaic rather than Hebrew as in Ezra 1, was a memorandum to the king's treasurers.

Ezra 1:3 Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh, the God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem-

Repeatedly the emphasis is upon the command to "go up to Jerusalem" (:4,11; Ezra 2:68 also). Yet the lament is that the Jews settled in the towns around Jerusalem or ran to reclaim the land and houses of their ancestors. They lost the focus upon Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple, as Haggai and Malachi lament.

"Of all His people" could be read as a hint that all members of Israel, from whatever tribe, were to return and therefore form a 12 tribe kingdom in Israel. This would explain the frequent usage of the term "Israel" in Ezra, rather than simply "Judah". See on Ezra 2:64. "His God..." sounds as if Cyrus had not adopted Yahweh as his own God. And yet he does recognize that "He is God". We can know things *about* God, without grasping their personal reality. That is the lesson of Cyrus.

Amos 9:11-15 is most comfortably interpreted when read as referring to the restoration of Judah and the "remnant" of the ten tribes to the land under Ezra: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God". "I will *raise up*" uses a Hebrew word very commonly featured in the records of the restoration, when the people were exhorted to "rise up and build" (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 10:4,15; Neh. 2:18,20). The statement that they would "close up the breaches thereof" is exactly the language of Neh. 6:1, which records that the walls were rebuilt so that there was no breach [s.w.] therein. It was after the Babylonian invasion that Zion was "fallen" and 'ruined' (s.w. Jer. 31:18; 45:4; Lam. 2:2,17). "I will build it" is exactly the theme of the records of the return from Babylon (Ezra 1:2,3,5; 3:2,10; 4:1-4; Neh. 2:5,17,18,20; 3:1-3, 13-15; 4:1,3,5,6,10,17,18; 6:1,6; 7:1). Surely Amos 9 is saying that at the rebuilding at the time of the restoration, God's people could have ushered in the Kingdom age of agricultural

plenty and victory over their Arab neighbours. But they intermarried with Edom, and suffered drought because they didn't fulfill the requirements to rebuild Zion correctly. But the words of Amos were still to come true in some form- they are given an application in Acts 15:17 which may appear to be way out of context, i.e. to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus words which could have had a plain fulfilment at the restoration were given a delayed fulfilment; but they were not fulfilled in a literal sense, but in a spiritual one. And so it is with prophecies like Ezekiel 38, and the temple prophecies of Ezekiel. They will be fulfilled in spiritual essence, but probably not in strict literality, although they *could have been* had God's people been more 'fulfilling' of them.

Ezra 1:4 Whoever is left, in any place where he lives, let the men of his place help him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with animals, besides the freewill offering for God's house which is in Jerusalem'-

The original could mean that whoever is left because he can't afford to migrate to Judah, the [Gentile] people around him were commanded to assist him to make the journey. Assistance from Gentiles prior to leaving is one of many impressions given that a second exodus is underway. Thus "we are slaves this day" (Neh. 9:36) suggests they were in Egypt and had to leave, even though they were hardly slaves in Babylon / Persia. The same term for "heads of families" is used also in the Exodus record. This command for the Gentiles to help those Jews who couldn't otherwise return would reflect an assumption that the command of :3 would be obeyed by all other Jews who could leave. But Cyrus was so sadly wrong. "Sojourns" is the idea behind "lives"; Cyrus recognized the Jews were only sojourners, temporary residents. The language suggests he accepted the Jews were only temporarily in Babylon. The Divine hope was that Cyrus would accept the Holy One of Israel (Is. 41:25 "I have raised up one from the north... one who calls on My name...") although initially Cyrus is the one God had called who knew Him not (Is. 45:4 "I have called you by your name... I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me"). Although Cyrus initially didn't know God's Name, he would come to a point when he did "call on My name". That was the hope, but it seems it didn't happen. We could read Is. 45:4 "yet you have not known Me" as a Divine lament that Cyrus did not respond to Yahweh and enter personal relationship with Him. It is repeated again in Is. 45:5.

It's surely intentional that the repentance and subsequent witness of Jonah led to the King of Assyria [often paralleled with Babylon in the prophets] making a phenomenally unexpected decree and published it (Jonah 3:7)- which ought to have prepared the faithful in exile for the possibility that such a decree could be forthcoming from the King of Persia, if they like Jonah repented and witnessed their faith to the world. It did in fact

happen (Ezra 1:1-4). But it happened by grace, for there seems to have been little true repentance let alone preaching by the Jews in exile.

God had told His people to flee from Babylon before she fell, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7). Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They didn't leave as asked, and so after Babylon fell, Cyrus the Persian was moved still to as it were push them to return to the land. We see here God's continual effort to get people to respond to His message even if they at first refuse. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

Ezra 1:5 Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, even all whose spirit God had stirred to go up, rose up to build the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem- This fulfilled Joel 3:7 "I will *raise them* out of the place whither ye have sold them". The same Hebrew word is used in Ezra 1:1,5 concerning how God raised up the spirit of Judah to return to the land. But despite their spirits having been stirred up [also Ezra 9:9 "To give us a reviving"], it is apparent from Haggai and Malachi that their motives for returning were mixed. They desired to get land for themselves and enjoy good harvests, building ornate houses for themselves rather than building up God's house. We see how as with the Corinthian church, the Spirit can be given and it begins to work on the human spirit, but there has to be further freewill response on the human side. When this is lacking, as in Corinth, those affected are unspiritual. I observed this happening with so many converts after baptism of water and the subsequent work of the Spirit.

God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus (see on :1) and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would be "raised up" [s.w.]- Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up- Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to "Awake!"- the same word translated "stirred up". But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would 'stir up themselves' (Is. 64:7 "There is none who calls on Your name, who stirs up himself to take hold of You"). God had given them the potential to be 'stirred up' in their hearts

and minds to leave Babylon and return- but they wouldn't respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits- but because we're not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God's grace still shines through. 1 Kings 8:47-50 had predicted that God would give the exiles compassion in captivity *if* they repented. They didn't repent, as passages like Ez. 18 make clear (they blamed everything on their fathers and protested their personal innocence)- and yet still God gave them compassion in the eyes of their captors, through the amazing decrees of Cyrus enabling them to return to their land and rebuild the temple at his expense.

"Rose up / arose" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. Yahweh cut off the “master” [‘the stirred up one’, s.w.] because they divorced their wives and married Gentiles (Mal. 2:12). The potential work of God on men’s hearts was frustrated by their hardness of heart.

Ezra 1:6 All those who were around them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with animals, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered- The book of Esther has explained how the Jews were popular in captivity. These precious gifts recall those given to Israel when they left Egypt. The whole narrative of their return from Babylon is framed by Isaiah in terms of the exodus from Egypt. As Israel were intended to use these gifts to build the tabernacle, so the exiles were to use them to rebuild the temple. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV “instruments”] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah’s ‘Kingdom’ passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra. But so much potential was wasted.

Ezra 1:7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out of Jerusalem, and had put in the house of his gods- This sounds very much like at least some element of repentance, although it has been argued that this was standard Persian practice and policy at this time. For the other captive nations were also bidden return to their homelands with their religious paraphernalia which had been taken into captivity by them.

Ezra 1:8 Even those, Cyrus king of Persia brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah- Note how "the prince" is very much the language of Ezekiel 40-48 concerning a mortal "prince", and also Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:8; there is good reason to think that Sheshbazzar was an official name for Zerubbabel- see Michael Ashton, *The Exiles Return*). And Isaiah 53 is prefaced in chapter 52 by the command to return from Babylon and to proclaim the good news of the Messianic Kingdom which Cyrus' decree could have brought in; as if it *could* have come true then. He shall "grow up" as a root from a dry land (Is. 53:2) uses the word frequently used about the 'going up' from Babylon to Jerusalem.

There could have been a fulfilment of Jer. 23:5 by Sheshbazzar / Zerubbabel: "Behold, the days come says Yahweh, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land". I suggested on Jer. 22:24 that the king in view was potentially Zerubbabel, "the branch of God from Babylon". Zech. 6:12 interprets this as a reference to Zerubbabel: "the man whose name is the branch... shall build the temple of the Lord". Zerubbabel being a king-priest was in the kingly line, and thus can correctly be called a king in the line of David (Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:7; 'Sheshbazzar' of Ezra 1:8 is the Babylonian equivalent of 'Zerubbabel'; Ezra 3:8 describes his brothers as "priests and Levites"). Great prince Nehemiah humbly entered Jerusalem incognito on an ass (Neh. 2:11-15)- it is a wild speculation that Zerubbabel did the same, and thus provided a primary basis for Zech. 9:9 "Thy king cometh unto thee (also unrecognized, in the case of Jesus entering spiritually ruined Jerusalem)... lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass".

Ezra 1:9 This is the number of them: thirty platters of gold, one thousand platters of silver, twenty-nine knives- "Platters" or "chargers" is an unusual word; "Aben Ezra derived it from two words meaning 'to collect' and 'a lamb', and understood it to be applied to 'vessels intended to receive the blood of victims'".

Ezra 1:10 thirty bowls of gold, silver bowls of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels one thousand- Of a second sort" is LXX "double".

Ezra 1:11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand four hundred- This is larger than the sum of the vessels listed in :9,10. In addition to the 1000 "other vessels" (:10), there may have been other vessels of gold and silver, perhaps belonging to the royal family rather than to the temple (see 2 Chron. 36:18); and the total sum is given here.

Sheshbazzar brought all these up, when the captives were brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem- Those who truly waited upon Yahweh [waiting for the restoration prophecies to be fulfilled] would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Is. 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' or 'bringing up' to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Neh. 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. This was the strength available to confirm them in their desire to return. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness.

There is no account of the actual journey to Zion of the first exiles in Ezra 1:11, but the apocryphal 1 Esdras 5:1-6 speaks of the returnees playing the restored musical instruments of the temple and singing as they came. This was therefore a primary fulfilment of the restoration prophecies about God's people coming with singing unto Zion (Is. 35:10; 51:11). We note how Ezra 2:65 mentions "singers" as amongst the exiles who returned.

EZRA CHAPTER 2

Ezra 2:1 Now these are the children of the province, who went up out of the captivity of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon- "The province" could refer to Judah, or Babylon. In which case we have a list here specifically only of those who came from Babylon. The majority of Jews preferred to stay in Persia / Babylon. Archaeological and inscription evidence (see Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*), as well as Josephus, suggests there may have been 1 million of them in Persia at the time of Cyrus. Ezra 2:1 may suggest that only a relatively few Jews who lived in the province of Babylon returned (one out of 127 provinces), even though there were significant numbers of Jews in all the provinces, as the book of Esther makes clear (as also does Nehemiah 1:8, which says that the Babylonian captivity fulfilled God's prophecy to scatter Israel amongst all nations). The Persian records even suggest that some of those who obeyed the call to 'return' actually only made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and then returned to their homes in Persia. And the mighty political and linguistic changes taking place *purely for our sakes* are often ignored by us. Like the Jews in Babylon, we figure that *surely* such huge changes couldn't have occurred *only* for us. But they do, and have done. Isaiah frequently shows the folly of worshipping Babylonian idols. And yet it seems that it was Judah's worship of these idols that kept them in Babylon. See on Is. 50:10,11.

And who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each one to his city-

The purpose of the return was to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The stress is always that they were to return to Jerusalem. But in reality, the motives of the

returnees were mixed. Ostensibly they returned to Jerusalem, but in reality "each one to his city", to reclaim ancestral property. Hence the later problems with getting enough people to dwell in Jerusalem, and the disinterest in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple when their focus was on building their own "ceiled houses". Haggai is all about this problem.

Ezekiel's temple prophecies begin with a man / Angel with a measuring reed, measuring Jerusalem and the temple. This recurs in Zech. 2:1, where the Angel again measures the temple and then promises that Yahweh will be a protecting wall of fire around the city, meaning that the Jews should fearlessly return from Babylon (Zech. 2:5-10). There follows a description of God's Kingdom on earth, with God Himself dwelling in Zion and all nations converting to Him. Yet the Jews returned with fear from Babylon- or some of them did. And they fussed so much about building a wall to protect them, in studied disregard of God's promise here. God helped them build the wall- He was still so keen to work with them. And He later encouraged them that "I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth [s.w. used about Judah's return from captivity, Ezra 2:1; 6:21]: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more" (Zech. 9:7,8).

Ezra 2:2 who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel-

Zerubbabel suddenly appears as the leader. Sheshbazzar was the named leader in Ezra 1, but quite possibly they are the same person. His absence in the record at this point is otherwise strange. Zerubbabel started using his Hebrew name ['stranger in Babylon' or 'born in Babylon'] rather than the paganic Babylonian name he had of Sheshbazzar. As Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were the names given to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Dan. 1:6,7). Both are called the "governor of Judah" (Ezra 5:14; Hag. 1:1; 2:2,21). The Nehemiah mentioned is probably not the same as the later Nehemiah in the record.

The mention of 11 leaders perhaps leaves us wondering why not 12; perhaps the implication is that the intention of regathering all 12 tribes was not to be fulfilled completely.

The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7). When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10). he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then.

Ezra 2:3 The children of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two-

"Children of..." can be understood literally; or the 'children of' a geographical area are the people who live in it. It seems that in :3-19 we have a list of the literal families who returned. Then in :20-35 those who returned, arranged according to geographical localities; in :36-39 the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42); then the families of the Nethinim (:43-54) and of Solomon's servants (:55-57).

Ezra 2:4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two- The Persian and Babylon practice was to replace Hebrew names with local names, as we see with Daniel and his friends. The fact some retained their Hebrew names, especially a name like "Yah has judged", may be an indication of faith; although it may also have been mere cultural loyalty.

Ezra 2:5 The children of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five- "Arah" is 'wandering', perhaps aware that the Jews had been exiled to the east just as Cain was to wander east of Eden.

Ezra 2:6 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve- 2818 in Neh. 7:11. The numbers in the parallel record in Neh. 7 are often higher. I suggest that that was a list of those who began the journey, or expressed interest in it; whereas Ezra 2 is the list of those who completed it. And there was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today.

Ezra 2:7 The children of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four- Elam was the name of a neighbouring nation, so we wonder whether this was a Jew very influenced by secularism who then repented and had a spiritual revival. And he was one of the largest families to return.

Ezra 2:8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five- Neh. 7:13 says 845. 100 didn't actually make it. There was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today.

Ezra 2:9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty- "Pure", perhaps once a Nazirite (Lam. 4:7 s.w.).

Ezra 2:10 The children of Bani, six hundred and forty-two- "Builder", perhaps so named because he was keen to rebuild Jerusalem.

Ezra 2:11 The children of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three- "Bebai" isn't a Hebrew word; some of the exiles had so assimilated that they only had local Persian names. To leave all they had known was therefore a major challenge.

Ezra 2:12 The children of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two- The differing sizes of the families may not simply mean that some were larger than others, but that some families divided more than others over this question of returning to Judah. Some stayed, and others went. And of course many families didn't respond at all.

Ezra 2:13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six- 'Lord of the sunrise', a pagan, cultic name; again reflecting the extent to which the exiles had assimilated. I have noted on Esther how "Esther" and "Mordecai" were both local names associated with idolatry.

Ezra 2:14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six- A relatively large

number. We are again faced with the question of why some families and geographical areas responded to the call more than others.

Ezra 2:15 The children of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four- "Adin" is s.w. "given to pleasures" (Is. 47:8). And yet the message of return to restore the Kingdom was somehow attractive even to such a person.

*Ezra 2:16 The children of Ater, of Hezekiah, ninety-eight- "*Ater" is 'maimed'. Perhaps he was an invalid, which might account for the relatively small family size. The call of the Kingdom is going to be more attractive to those in such situations.

Ezra 2:17 The children of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three- Perhaps the same as Besai one of the Nethinim (:49).

Ezra 2:18 The children of Jorah, one hundred and twelve- We note the lack of the 'Yah' prefix or suffix in these names. Those who responded were apparently secular people, not known for their devotion to Yahweh. That may explain why the records of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi complain that they were not well motivated and were largely only looking for personal benefit and advantage through returning to Judah. See on :19.

Ezra 2:19 The children of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three- "Enriched" or 'seeking enrichment'; see on :18.

Ezra 2:20 The children of Gibbar, ninety-five- "Children of..." can be understood literally; or the 'children of' a geographical area are the people who live in it. It seems that in :3-19 we have a list of the literal families who returned. Then in :20-35 those who returned, arranged according to geographical localities; in :36-39 the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42); then the families of the Nethinim (:43-54) and of Solomon's servants (:55-57).

"Gibbar" is Gibeon in Benjamin (Neh. 7:25), and we note that a disproportionate number of the returnees were from Benjamin.

Ezra 2:21 The children of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three- These are pathetically small numbers, bearing in mind there were around 1 million Jews in the empire (see on :1).

Ezra 2:22 The men of Netophah, fifty-six- Counted together with Benjamin in Neh. 7. The majority of those who returned were from Benjamin and Judah. The prophetic vision of all the tribes of Israel returning didn't come about at the time.

Ezra 2:23 The men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight- The very existence of "men of Anathoth" who returned was a sign of God's grace. For because of their persecution of Jeremiah, Jer. 11:21,23 had prophesied: "There shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth". Perhaps like Nineveh some repented and therefore the threatened judgment didn't come about; or Jeremiah prayed for them his enemies and was heard; or Yahweh simply pitied His people.

Ezra 2:24 The children of Azmaveth, forty-two- The small number was because this

was known as literally "fields" near to Jerusalem (Neh. 12:29). And yet 42 people returned from this area. Whereas from far larger settlements, not one.

Ezra 2:25 The children of Kiriath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three- They may have been listed together because these villages were close to each other, or they travelled together as if one family. The men of Kirjathjearim (s.w. "Kiriath Arim") had looked after the ark previously (1 Sam. 7:1,2) and been blessed for it. There had been a faithful prophet there at the time of the captivity (Jer. 26:20); these considerations may account for the relatively large number who returned from that area.

Ezra 2:26 The children of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one- "Gaba" is s.w. "Gibeah of Benjamin" (Jud. 20:10). This was a priestly city, given to the Levites, although very few Levites returned (Josh. 21:17).

Ezra 2:27 The men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two- The order of the towns appears to be geographical, as "Michmas" was close to "Geba" (s.w. "Gibeah") of :26 (1 Sam. 14:5).

Ezra 2:28 The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred and twenty-three- Mentioned together because they were geographically close (Josh. 7:2; 8:9). Bethel was in the ten tribe kingdom, so it seems that some of the Israelites did return along with Judah; but not to the extent of the prophetic vision, whereby a repentant Israel and Judah would be united together in a reestablished Kingdom of God in the land.

Ezra 2:29 The children of Nebo, fifty-two- Neh. 7:33 "the other Nebo", perhaps to differentiate it from Nebo in Moab; or as LXX "Nabia".

Ezra 2:30 The children of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six- There is no other reference to this village. The impression is given that those who returned were largely from insignificant villages rather than the larger cities. Perhaps it was in those areas that there was greater faithfulness to Yahweh. Or perhaps the urban dwellers didn't want to return and rebuild their cities, whereas the rural dwellers guessed that their land would still be there for them to take.

Ezra 2:31 The children of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four- LXX Elamar. We wonder why so many, relatively speaking, should return from an unknown small village. Perhaps there was a community of faithful there.

Ezra 2:32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty- Whilst in this section we are reading of the names of towns and not people, this location is unknown, and means 'flat nosed' as if referring to a person. Perhaps the interesting case of the person Harim is being emphasized, in that people from his village also returned with him. See on :39.

Ezra 2:33 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five- Neh. 7:37 gives 721. The fact is noted that even four people began the journey, or were willing to start it, but didn't make it. These details show the abiding value to God of every human person.

Ezra 2:34 The children of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five- There was a community of "sons of the prophets" there which may account for this (2 Kings 2:5).

Ezra 2:35 The children of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty- A relatively large number. We are again faced with the question of why some families and geographical areas responded to the call more than others. The larger cities such as Lachish had apparently not a single one who returned from there.

Ezra 2:36 The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three- As noted on :3, in :36-39 we have the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42). They were not particularly faithful for by the time Ezra came, many of them had married Gentile women. Only four families of priests are mentioned in :36-39, whereas 24 priestly families went into exile.

Ezra 2:37 The children of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two- Only four courses of priests returned, when there were supposed to be 24 of them , namely Pashhur, Jedaiah, Immer, and Hardin (1 Chron. 24:7, 8,14). The priesthood had been deeply corrupt at the time of the exile, and it seems most of them preferred to remain in Babylon.

Ezra 2:38 The children of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven- Perhaps descendants of the unfaithful Pashur the priest of Jer. 20:1-3.

Ezra 2:39 The children of Harim, one thousand and seventeen- "Harim" means 'snubnosed'; the priest in whom there was a physical defect, such as to exclude him from priestly service. For this is the word used of how a 'flat nosed' man was excluded from priestly service (Lev. 21:18). Perhaps they were eager at the chance to serve in the restored temple, guessing that the regulations would be relaxed due to the relative lack of priests and Levites returning. Or the idea could simply be that the requirements of the law were not followed by the priests who returned.

Ezra 2:40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy-four- As noted on :3, in :36-39 we have the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities (:40-42). These Levites of :40 are the ordinary Levites; :41 refers to the Levites who sung, and :42 to those who kept the gates. But only two families of the ordinary mass of Levites returned- a pathetic response. Only 431 Levites returned compared to 4289 priests, and we note the lack of Levites again in Ezra 8:15. Perhaps nobody wanted to return to the land just to do humble temple service and get no land inheritance- as the Levites had no land inheritance to return to. This underlines how the motive for the returning exiles was land for themselves, rather than a true desire to do Yahweh's service and reestablish His Kingdom. Yet they returned because He stirred up their spirit / heart. But the unspiritual side of their hearts came to dominate. Just as in the movement of the Spirit in many hearts today.

Ezra 2:41 The singers: the children of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight- This was very poor response. We note that apparently the famous singing families of Heman and Jeduthin didn't return (1 Chron. 25:1).

Ezra 2:42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all one hundred and thirty-nine- This is a very small number for the families of the gate keepers. The number of ordinary Levites compared to priests is very low (4289 priests, and 341 Levites). There were far more Levites than there were priests, but it seems the Levites didn't want to return and do the dirty work; everyone wanted to be religious leaders. Hence Ezra's problem in finding Levites to return (Ezra 8:15). We can note that it was this tension between Levites and priests which resulted in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-10).

Ezra 2:43 The Nethinim: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth- The Nethinim were grouped beneath the Levites but above "the servants of Solomon" (Ezra 2:55). "Nethinim" is literally 'those who are given' and many presume they were originally the Gibeonites, who were 'given' by Joshua to the Levites to do their more menial work (Josh. 9:3-27). Whenever Gentiles were captured in war, some of them would have been devoted to Yahweh in that they were given to His service through joining the Nethinim (Num. 31:28). Thus in Ezra 8:20 we find mention of some "whom David and the princes had appointed (Heb. 'given') for the service of the Levites".

Ezra 2:44 the children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon- These names could well be Persian and not Hebrew. The Nethinim were Gentiles (see on :43), and had unsurprisingly adopted Persian names in the exile. But they wanted to return to rebuild Judah. It's hard to guess whether the push or pull factor was strongest. Perhaps they felt they had never been accepted in Persian society just as they hadn't been in Jewish society and therefore felt a 'push' from exile; or perhaps they were truly faithful to the God of Israel they served, and were thereby 'pulled' by that back to His service.

Ezra 2:45 the children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub- "Lebanah" is "the moon"; "Hagabah" is "the locust". These names suggest a high level of assimilation into Persian society.

Ezra 2:46 the children of Hagab, the children of Shamlai, the children of Hanan- We note the lack of the 'Yah' prefix or suffix in these names. Those who responded were apparently secular people, not known for their devotion to Yahweh. That may explain why the records of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi complain that they were not well motivated and were largely only looking for personal benefit and advantage through returning to Judah. See on Ezra 2:19.

Ezra 2:47 the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah- "Reaiah", 'Yah has seen', is one of the few names which has the 'Yah' suffix. And he was of the Nethinim, a Gentile, who had retained his devotion to Yahweh despite being made a servant of Yahweh's apostate people.

Ezra 2:48 the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam- "Nekoda" is a female name. This female head of house, a Gentile of the Nethinim, meaning literally "speckled" (s.w. Gen. 30:33,35), led her family back to Judah when many Jews wouldn't respond.

Ezra 2:49 the children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai- We note that "Uzza" and not "Uzziah" is mentioned; as noted on :46, the 'Yah' suffix or prefix is notably missing in these names. "Paseah" means 'limping', suggesting as noted on :32,48,51,52 that it was those who had some physical infirmity who returned. Thus was fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy of limping Jacob returning from Babylon to Zion. And today likewise, it is those who are marginalized for whatever reason who are more likely to respond to the Gospel of the restored Kingdom.

Ezra 2:50 the children of Asnah, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephisim- "Meunim" is literally 'from Maon', a location in the desert where Nabal and Abigail were from (1 Sam. 25:2). Perhaps some of their Gentile servants became Nethinim and remained faithful- despite all the bad examples they saw from God's ethnic people.

Ezra 2:51 the children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur- "Hakupha" means bent or crooked; "Harhur" means 'inflamed'- suggesting as noted on :32,48,52 that it was those who had some physical infirmity who returned.

Ezra 2:52 the children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha- "Bazluth" means 'peeled skin'; see on :32. "Harsha" is 'magician', confirming the impression that those who returned weren't the religious zealous but generally very secular people.

Ezra 2:53 the children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Temah- These names are all non-Hebrew; the Nethinim were originally Gentile, and these ones appear to have retained that despite returning to the land. The question is whether they were as it were pushed or pulled to return to the land; see on :44.

Ezra 2:54 the children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha- These names could arguably include the 'Yah' suffix, although most of the Nethinim and even the Jews listed here don't have 'Yah' within them. They were of the Nethinim, Gentiles, who had retained their devotion to Yahweh despite being made servants of Yahweh's apostate people.

Ezra 2:55 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Hassophereth, the children of Peruda- As noted on :43, these appear to have been reckoned beneath the Nethinim. "They have been traditionally understood to be the descendants of those inhabitants of the land 'that were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites' of whom Solomon had hired 'bondservants' for the work of building his temple (1 Kings 5:13)". It was therefore the most despised classes who responded to the call of the Kingdom. And it is the same today.

Ezra 2:56 the children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel- "Jaalah" is the word for "profit" used of the idols whom Israel believed would profit them (Is. 44:9,10; 47:12; Jer. 2:8,11; 16:19 etc.). This again rather suggests that the majority of those who returned were secular folks who were not doing so from religious, spiritual motives but for secular reasons.

Ezra 2:57 the children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth Hazzebaim, the children of Ami- Shephatiah, "Yah has judged", is one of the few names in these lists which includes 'Yah'. Amongst these largely secular people who returned (judging by their names) there were some who were doing so from spiritual reasons. But they were a minority. And that impression accords with the historical information about their later behaviour in the land as found in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi.

Ezra 2:58 All the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred and ninety-two- This figure is exactly the same as that given in Neh. 7:60, whereas the numbers in the parallel record in Neh. 7 are often higher when it comes to the Jews who returned. I suggest that that was a list of those who began the journey, or expressed interest in it; whereas Ezra 2 is the list of those who completed it. And there was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today. But the despised Gentile classes of the Nethinim and Solomon's servants were actually more committed.

Ezra 2:59 These were those who went up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses, and their genealogy, whether they were of Israel- These people may have included Gentiles; for it is unlikely that many Jews apart from the Levites could prove their descent, and that is why those who returned are not listed according to their tribes. Indeed it would appear that the genealogical records were destroyed when the temple was burnt. So the reference here may be to those who lived near to the original encampments of the exiles who wanted to return with them. This had been the prophetic vision- that Judah and Israel would repent, Babylon would be judged and fall, and the repentant remnant of the Gentiles would return with the repentant ones of God's people to form a new, multiethnic people of God in His restored Kingdom. But the impenitence of God's people meant that things didn't work out like that. Babylon didn't "fall" in the way that was potentially possible, the majority of God's people chose to remain in exile. And only a handful of Gentiles returned, probably the poorest of the land, perhaps captives from other nations who had been grouped along with the Jews, and likely motivated by the chance of a better life.

Ezra 2:60 the children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two- As explained on :59, these were likely Gentiles, and their names suggest that. However, "Delaiah" means 'Yah has delivered', so perhaps this was a Gentile who wished to share in Yahweh's deliverance from Babylon / Persia.

Ezra 2:61 Of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name- Barzillai was famous in Israel from the times of David. This priestly family had taken the name of this family, seeking for kudos and prestige; and thereby had lost their priestly lineage.

Ezra 2:62 These sought their place among those who were registered by genealogy- Ezra 2:62 records Judah being 'reckoned by genealogies', using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron. 4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of

Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there". The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

But they were not found: therefore were they deemed polluted and put from the priesthood- There is a clear connection here with Is. 43:28: "Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse, and Israel an insult". They were put forth "as polluted from the priesthood" (Ezra 2:62). This is tacit proof enough that the restoration from Babylon failed to be the potential restoration prophesied. Indeed, the behaviour of the Jews at that time attracted further curses and judgment.

Ezra 2:63 The governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things, until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim- This situation precluded the fulfilment of the restoration prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13: "Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things". The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ezekiel 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. And this never happened. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfill Ezekiel 42:13. In a restoration context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zech. 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey" (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn't have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ez. 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom.

Ezra 2:64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty- As noted on :1, this was but a tiny minority of the 1 million or so exiles in

Babylon / Persia; and the prophetic intention that the ten tribes returned at the same time was not realized, because they too preferred the life of exile from God rather than returning to Him.

The total number of returned exiles given in Ezra 2:64 is 42360 but this is far greater than the sum of those listed in Ezra 2 as coming from Judah. We conclude that the difference is in the fact that many Israelites from other tribes are within this larger number and they also returned. The chapter begins in Ezra 2:2 with the description of the list as being the number of the children of Israel- rather than simply Judah. Some from Ephraim and Manasseh are specifically mentioned as living in Jerusalem with men of Judah and Benjamin (1 Chron. 9:3). See on Ezra 1:3. Alternatively the larger figure might be some kind of summary of the three waves of the return of the exiles: that during the years of Cyrus and led by Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8-11), the second wave in the early days of Darius I led by Zerubbabel [perhaps another term for Sheshbazzar] (Ezra 2:1-2), and the third wave during the reign of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7-8).

Ezra 2:65 besides their male servants and their female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven: and they had two hundred singing men and singing women- 7337 servants for 42360 people (:64) suggests that on average each family had a servant. We therefore get the impression that those who returned weren't the poorest of society, although as noted with regards to the meanings of their names above in this chapter, many of them were probably slightly marginalized. They returned seeking material benefit (Hag. 1:9), as lower middle class people often do; rather than seeking to do God's work. See on :67.

Ezra 2:66 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six; their mules, two hundred and forty-five- See on :67. This picture of the Jews returning on various animals is to be connected with the prophecies of the restoration, where the leaders of the nations of their exile were to also make the journey to Zion, carrying the children of the Jews (Is. 49:22,23); and using all the animals here listed in order to bring the Jews back to Zion, and then help them rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Is. 60:4-10). Especially Is. 66:20 "They shall bring all your brothers out of all the nations for an offering to Yahweh, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries, to My holy mountain Jerusalem". But there were only 245 mules; this is very different to the scene we have here; of a very few Gentiles returning with a few Jews (see on :59), and those Jews not even having enough animals for each of them to ride on (see on :67). Comparison with the prophecies of what was potentially possible makes for a rather sad impression. So much Divine potential was wasted; just as it is by the millions who refuse the call to the Kingdom today. See on :69.

Ezra 2:67 their camels, four hundred and thirty-five; their donkeys, six thousand seven hundred and twenty- Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the lower classes, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon. It would be fair to infer that only the lower class Jews returned from Babylon. The record in Ezra 2:64-70 speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple- so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin in Ezra 2 suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in

peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities.

Ezra 2:68 Some of the heads of fathers' households, when they came to the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for God's house to set it up in its place- Note the stress on "some"; see on :52. It's stressed twice that only "some" of the returned exiles supported the work of the temple (Ezra 2:68-70)- which was supposed to be the main reason for their return. This hardly sounds like the glorious, positive, confident return of the captives to Zion prophesied in the restoration prophecies.

Ezra 2:69 they gave after their ability into the treasury of the work sixty-one thousand darics of gold, five thousand minas of silver and one hundred priests' garments- This may sound significant, but it is nothing compared to the entire wealth of the lands of their exile which was intended to be brought to Jerusalem at the restoration (Is. 60:5-10). See on :66. Giving according to ability is alluded to by Paul in 1 Cor. 16:2; and he notes some gave beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:3).

Ezra 2:70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim, lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities- The priests in the restored Kingdom were to live in one specific area near the temple (Ez. 45:4), whereas under the Mosaic Law, the priests were given land to live on in each of the various tribes of Israel. And yet the record of the restoration stresses that the priests lived not around the temple, but in various cities throughout Judah (Ezra 2:70; Neh. 7:73; 11:3,20; 12:44). Note the word "some"; see on :68.

EZRA CHAPTER 3

Ezra 3:1 When the seventh month had come and the children of Israel were in the cities- The seventh month could have been the seventh month after they arrived. But at this time they kept the feast of tabernacles (:4), which was to be kept in the seventh month of the Jewish year, so that is probably the month in view here. We note they were in their cities and had to gather to Jerusalem. The intention was that they returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple; but they had gone to their ancestral lands and reclaimed them.

The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem- This seems to imply a strong unity amongst them; the same phrase is found in Jud. 20:11.

Ezra 3:2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak stood up with his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers, and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God- "Rose up / stood up" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. Joshua and Zerubbabel between them were intended to be the priest and king of the restored kingdom, but when that didn't work out, Zechariah's prophecies seem to have

envisaged the appearance of a singular king-priest. But this too didn't happen. God was trying by all means to bring about the reestablishment of the Kingdom despite so much human dysfunction and disinterest, just as He is today.

Note that Zerubbabel was the adopted son of Shealtiel, and only on that basis was reckoned his "son".

Ezra 3:3 In spite of their fear because of the peoples of the surrounding lands- The same word is used of the fear and dread which came upon the peoples of the lands because of the Israelites in Joshua's time (Josh. 2:9 etc.). The hint is that the exiles were wrong to be in fear of those peoples.

Time and again, Isaiah's restoration prophecies told Judah that they should not fear, as Yahweh would mightily be with them in their work (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8,11; 54:7,14; 59:19). But Judah feared the surrounding nations- Ezra and Nehemiah are full of this theme. Nehemiah refused to be put in fear by the Samaritan opposition because of his faith in Isaiah's promises (Nehemiah 6:14). And Isaiah further spoke to Judah's heart in Isaiah 51:12,13: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations [s.w. re. the foundation of the temple being laid] of the earth ['heaven and earth' often refers to the temple]; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?". The fact they did fear meant that they had forgotten Yahweh who was so eager to re-establish their Kingdom.

The restoration prophecies had stated clearly that the returned exiles would not be afraid. Jer. 30:10: "Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid". Isaiah's restoration prophecies contained not only many clear commands to *not fear* at the time of the restoration (Isaiah 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4), but also a clear statement that if they were truly the re-established Kingdom, they would not fear: "Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest [s.w. Zechariah 7:14 re. how Judah was 'tossed around' by the 70 years captivity] I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires...and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee... and all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Is. 54:11-14). But the adversaries to the rebuilding *did* make the returned exiles afraid (and also Neh. 6:9). Nehemiah exhorted the people *not* to be afraid perhaps on the basis of Jeremiah's words (Neh. 4:14). Their fear and problem-oriented view of life stopped the Kingdom bursting forth into their experience. That fear was rooted in an obsessive self-interest that eclipsed a true faith in that which is greater and larger than us as individuals. And so it can be with us.

They set the altar on its base- That is, they built it on its previous site.

And they offered burnt offerings on it to Yahweh, even burnt offerings morning and evening- These were the daily offerings commanded for each day under the law of Moses.

Ezra 3:4 They kept the feast of tents, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt

offerings by number, according to the ordinance, as the duty of every day required- This was in the "seventh month" (:1). Even with Ezekiel's prophecies behind him concerning "the prince", Zerubbabel was easily discouraged in the rebuilding, and needed the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to encourage him again. He kept the feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3:4) but without dwelling in booths (Neh. 8:17)- i.e., half heartedly. He *could* have been Messiah, perhaps- he may well have been 30/33 at the time of the restoration (Mt. 1:12,13). When Judah returned, they could have entered into the new covenant, featuring "nobles [an intensive plural, meaning 'the great noble']… and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21). Zerubbabel the Governor could have fulfilled this; but he flunked out. Yet God lifted up his spirit a second time (Hag. 1:14 cp. Ezra 1:5); he was given a second chance, such was God's enthusiasm that he should achieve what was potentially possible for him. But again, he failed. He saw the glory of Babylon as more attractive than the hard work required to bring about Yahweh's eternal glory in Zion. It is noteworthy how God worked through this man's failures, and desired to give him (and all Israel) further opportunities.

The restored kingdom would feature a feast of tabernacles attended by the Gentiles (Zech. 14:16,17), and the restored tabernacle would house the remnant of the Gentile nations (Amos 9:11,12). Indeed, Gentiles were to be invited to participate in the feast of Tabernacles (Dt. 16:14); the 70 bulls sacrificed at the feast represented the acceptance of the Gentiles (Num. 29:12-34). But here, that feast was kept in fear of the surrounding Gentiles (:3). Clearly the restoration was not going as potentially intended. Indeed, as discussed on :11, we see the development of a cult-like dislike of Gentiles in the returnees. At this point, their keeping of the feast of Tabernacles seems to only involve sacrifices. Five times within the first six verses of Ezra 3 we are told that the religious leaders sacrificed the "burnt offerings", and "in accordance with the Law". But we read nothing of the other requirements for keeping that feast- the celebration of the harvest, the cessation of work, the reading of the law and the building and inhabiting of booths. It was all about technical obedience rather than the spirit of the feast. And the stress on burnt offerings raises the question as to why they were not preceded by sin offerings, as was usually the case. As Ez. 18 laments, the captives had no sense of repentance. Yet their return [*shub*] to the land was predicated upon their return [*shub*] to God. God had forced things through by making them return to the land... but they didn't follow through on that grace by making the required repentance. Haggai presents them as focused solely on their own possible benefit from having returned, with no sense of grace nor repentance. Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel all tried to as it were repent for them in their prayers of penitence (Ezra 9; Neh. 9; Dan. 9). But they were not Jesus. Even they could not get an impenitent people counted as penitent.

Ezra 3:5 and afterwards the continual burnt offering, the offerings of the new moons, of all the set feasts of Yahweh that were consecrated, and of each one who willingly offered a freewill offering to Yahweh- Their technical obedience in offering sacrifice was commendable, but it was not being done according to the commandments for the restored temple in Ez. 40-48. They were still attempting to keep the old covenant, the law of Moses; ignoring the plain teaching of Jeremiah that they had broken this, and were being offered a new covenant which was not at all identical to the old covenant. Their motivation was therefore religious, historical and cultural, rather than spiritual and based upon God's word.

Ezra 3:6 From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh; but the foundation of Yahweh's temple was not yet laid-

The work was in three stages. First the altar was built, then foundation of the temple laid (:10-13) and then the temple was built on that (Ezra 4-6). It is commendable that they built the altar first, and God accepted it. There was no need for a temple or any structure to as it were sanctify the altar. Offering can be made to God in any context, without any surrounding religious structure.

The impression given is that they focused upon the sacrifices rather than laying the foundations of the temple, which ought to have been laid out according to the dimensions clearly given in Ez. 40-48. The prophets had often reminded God's people that He was not so interested in sacrifices as in hearts broken in repentance; but their focus upon sacrifice and ritual reflected their lack of repentance.

Ezra 3:7 They also gave money to the masons, and to the carpenters. They also gave food, drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus King of Persia-

Lebanon was not under Persian control so presumably they used "the grant" of 'all expenses met' to order these trees. Again we see how material resources will never be a barrier to serving God. They were consciously trying to imitate how Solomon had built the first temple. But instead they should have been seeking to build according to the dimensions and details of the plans given to them in Ez. 40-48. Their attempted replication of Solomon suggests they were rebuilding *his* temple rather than building the new structure of Ez. 40-48. Their motivation was in recreating their national past, following national heroes, rather than moving in line with the Spirit.

Haggai's prophecy can be dated quite precisely- it was given August-September 520 BC. This was harvest time. And at this very labour intensive season, where all hands had to be on deck out in the fields, the prophet called for a dedication of labour to building up God's house. Yet Judah were too concerned with their own harvests than the harvest of God's glory. They were asked to do something counter-instinctive- to take time out from harvest, and spend that time on building up God's house. And they failed the challenge. But it wasn't that they were simply lazy. Hag. 1:8, a prophecy given 18 years after the decree of Cyrus, orders the people to go up into the hills of Judah and get wood with which to build the temple. And yet according to Ezra 3:7, the decree of Cyrus 18 years earlier had resulted in cedar wood being brought from Tyre and Sidon, enough for the temple to be built. Where had the wood gone? Is the implication not that the leadership had used it for their own "cieled houses" (Hag. 1:4)? It all seems so petty minded. But this is what we are tempted to do, time and again- build up our own house and leave God's house desolate and in a very poor second place. And even worse- Hag. 1:9 records that the people expected "much" harvest, and were disappointed at the poor yields in Palestine. This would confirm the suggestion that many of those Jews who did return from Babylon were amongst the poor in Jewish exile society, and returned in home for personal betterment- rather than because they wished to obey the call of the prophets and establish God's glory in the land. That's a sober warning for all of us who may go through an external appearance of zeal for our God, whilst having very selfish and human motives underneath.

Ezra 3:8 Now in the second year of their coming to God's house at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out

of the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work of Yahweh's house- I noted on Ezra 2 how very few Levites there were who returned. Only 341 members of Levitical families are listed in Ezra 2:40-42; and if only males over 20 were counted, that total number may have been as low as only 30- and that is assuming all the Levites who returned were obedient to this command, none were sick or handicapped etc. Levites were supposed to start work at 25 (Num. 8:24,25; a similar reduction was made by David in 1 Chron. 23:24,27) but they reduced this to 20 because of the lack of Levites- who had no land inheritance and so were less interested in returning to Judah. This is tacit reflection of how the real motive of the returnees was to reclaim their ancestral land, rather than to build the temple and live in Jerusalem.

Ezra 5:16 says that Sheshbazzar laid the foundations of the temple while Ezra 3:8-10 says that Zerubbabel did. Possibly Sheshbazzar ['glory of the sun god'] was the Babylonian name for the Hebrew 'Zerubbabel'. Or perhaps Sheshbazzar began to lay the foundations, there was a delay, and Zerubbabel completed the work. The delay may have been caused by the famine sent for their lack of zeal to build the temple (Hag. 1:6) as well as the local opposition. Zech. 8:9,10 describes the situation just prior to the foundations of the temple being laid: "...the prophets who were in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of Armies was laid, even the temple, that it might be built. For before those days there were no wages for man, nor any wages for an animal; neither was there any peace to him who went out or came in, because of the adversary. For I set all men everyone against his neighbour". The implication is that the Jewish builders demanded wages for their work and even for the work their animals did; and when they weren't given them, they argued with each other and thus the work stopped.

Ezra 3:9 Then Jeshua stood with his sons and his brothers, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, having the oversight of the workmen in God's house: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brothers the Levites- "Henadad" means 'the grace of Hadad', a Syrian king. Even the Levites still had their pagan names. This was all a far cry from the restoration prophecies of the Gentiles carrying the repentant Jews back to Judah and then themselves working to rebuild the temple for the Jews (Is. 60:10; Zech. 6:15). The Jews had to do so themselves, and as noted on :8, there were very few of them doing the work.

Ezra 3:10 When the builders laid the foundation of Yahweh's temple, they set the priests in their clothing with trumpets, with the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Yahweh, according to the directions of David king of Israel- They were attempting to restore what had once been, as David had established things, from nationalistic and cultural reasons, just as they tried to replicate Solomon's usage of cedars from Lebanon. Instead they should have been trying to rebuild the temple according to the commands given in Ez. 40-48. This would have been why some wept and others shouted for joy in :12. The scene would not have been that impressive, for they only had 100 sets of priestly clothing (Ezra 2:69). The system of praise instituted by David would have only been very poorly replicated. Ezra 2:41 says that only 128 people from the singing family of Asaph returned, and not all of them would have been adults. This was very poor response. We note that apparently the famous singing families of Heman and Jeduthun didn't return (1 Chron. 25:1).

Ezra 3:11 They sang to one another in praising and giving thanks to Yahweh: For He

is good, for His grace endures forever toward Israel. All the people shouted with a great shout when they praised Yahweh, because the foundation of the house of Yahweh had been laid- The "shouts" with which it was laid were the "shouts" of the foundation ceremony described in Zech. 4:7. This passage describes the Messianic kingdom of God which could have been restored in Israel at the time. But as explained on :12, the shouts were tinged with unreality, because it was clear that what had been built was not in obedience to the dimensions and system of Ez. 40-48, and was not even the size of the previous temple which the older men remembered from their youth in Jerusalem. Such great potential was precluded by Judah's limited vision. We notice that the young and old didn't rejoice together- the old men wept at how small the temple was compared even with Solomon's, whilst the younger ones rejoiced. Yet the restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:13 had spoken of how "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together".

The refrain "For He is good, for His grace endures forever toward Israel" is based upon the frequent usage of similar words in David's Psalms, which they were using for their praise (:10), and in the restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:11. But those scriptures speak of how "For He is good, for His grace endures forever". They have added "toward Israel", and yet as discussed on :4, the restoration prophecies were all about the Gentiles also worshipping at Zion. Here we see the beginnings of a nationalistic, anti-Gentile stream of thought that was to get progressively worse over time.

These words were an attempt to fulfil the resoration prophecy of Jer. 33:10,11: "Yet again there shall be heard in this place, about which you say, It is waste, without man and without animal, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem... the voice of joy and the voice of gladness... the voice of those who say, Give thanks to Yahweh of Armies, for Yahweh is good, for His loving kindness endures forever". But those words are prefaced by the prophecy that the sound of joy would be heard in Jerusalem. This sound was heard, but it was mixed with the sound of weeping that the temple was not going to be built according to the required specifications of Ezekiel.

Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice-

The weeping was perhaps because the temple foundations were laid and there was the singing of praise, just as had happened at the dedication of the first temple. But then, God's glory had come down. Now, nothing happened. Ezekiel and the restoration prophets repeatedly spoke of that glory descending visibly onto Zion. But nothing happened. They all knew that they had disregarded Ezekiel's commands of the size and structure of the temple, preferring to just replicate Solomon's temple, the structure they were familiar with and which represented their historical and cultural tradition.

There is the hint in Hag. 2:3-9 that despite the planned temple being smaller than that commanded by Ezekiel, causing some to weep when the foundations were laid rather than rejoice (Ezra 3:12), God was still willing to force through His intention of restoring the Kingdom: "'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel!' says Yahweh. 'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest! Be strong, all you people of the land', says Yahweh, 'and work, for I am with you', says Yahweh of Armies... 'Don't be afraid'... 'The latter glory of this house will be greater

than the former', says Yahweh". Likewise Zech. 4:10 appealing for the faithful not to despise the day of small things.

The language of Israel's return from captivity as found in Isaiah and Ezekiel all has evident reference to the second coming and the final establishment of the Kingdom. It isn't just that Israel's return under Ezra and Zerubbabel was a type of that final homecoming. It could have been the Kingdom- had they obeyed the prophecies. It was all about a potential Kingdom of God. But they were too caught up with their own self-interest, with building their own houses rather than God's; and so it was all deferred. Using the prophetic perfect, God had prophesied that at the time of the restoration, He would come and dwell in rebuilt Zion (Zech. 8:3)- just as Ezekiel's prophecy had concluded: "The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there" (Ez. 48:35). Clearly, Ezekiel's prophecies could have been fulfilled at the restoration; God was willing that they should be. But human apathy and self-interest stopped it from happening as it could have done. When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former (Hag. 2:9); Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". The super generous decree of Cyrus had potentially enabled all such valuable metals to be provided. But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar). And the old men wept at the fact that the glory of the new house was *less than* that of the earlier one.

Is. 65:17-19 describes the new creation of Zion as it was possible at the restoration, when the former heavens and earth would not come into mind. The former "heavens" of Solomon's temple *did* come to mind, and the old men mourned because of how far superior the former had been (Ezra 3:12). The voice of weeping *was* heard in the streets of Zion, as Judah mourned for their sins of marrying the surrounding nations and breaking the Sabbath.

Many also shouted aloud for joy- The returnees were to lift up their voice with joy at Zion's restoration. But at the very humble dedication of the temple, the younger people lifted up their voice with joy (Is. 40:9 same words), but the older men wept, as the temple was not even as great as Solomon's, and certainly not that commanded in Ezekiel and Isaiah.

Ezra 3:13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard far away- "The people" may refer to the people of the land. They did not get a clear message, for it could not be discerned; when instead the joy of the restored Zion was intended to be a witness to the Gentiles. Instead they heard a sound which was a mixture of weeping and rejoicing.

EZRA CHAPTER 4

Ezra 4:1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple to Yahweh, the God of Israel- This

opposition was real and actual; LXX "And they that afflicted Juda and Benjamin...". They were opposed to the newcomers and were against the idea of a temple being built. This opposition was not at all the scenario presented in the restoration prophets. I noted on the preceding Ezra 3:8-12 that the returnees had no intention of building the city or temple structure according to the dimensions commanded them in Ez. 40-48. And they had rejected the offer of a new covenant deal, instead attempting to still keep the old covenant, however imperfectly, even though they had broken it. And so God as it were reflected His opposition to them through these local adversaries. But as the vision of Zech. 3:1 makes clear, if they had faith then even this 'satan' or adversary would have been removed.

The adversaries included the Israelites already living in Judah as well as the Samaritans, the peoples moved in to live in Judah after the Jews had been deported. The returnees naturally wanted to reclaim their ancestral land and homes- where the Samaritans were living. Samaria was the local capital, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem would suggest this was now going to be shifted to a Jewish-controlled Jerusalem. Hence they claim that if this happens, tax will likely not be collected for the empire (:14) as the capital city was used as a centre for taxation. The Samaritans had a good argument. It was only God's hand that overturned it. Their argument about Jerusalem's history in :15,20 was correct. Her kings like Solomon had indeed dominated territory up to the Euphrates and had tax paid to them. Their suspicion was that the Jews wanted to take control of all land up to the Euphrates (:16). And that was indeed the land promised to Abraham which they felt was rightfully theirs. The subsequent history of the Jews in the time of the Maccabees shows that indeed they did seek to rebel and gain independence.

Even after the temple had been destroyed, it seems those left in the land still worshipped there and there was some kind of altar there: "there came men from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria... with meal offerings and frankincense in their hand, to bring them to the house of Yahweh" (Jer. 41:5). These were perhaps those who wanted to help rebuild the temple, protesting they had been sacrificing to Yahweh during the captivity. This also shows that the setting up of the altar was more like restoring whatever was already being used.

Ezra 4:2 then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' households and said to them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as you do; and we sacrifice to Him since the days of Esar Haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here- These people may have been Israelites who were sent to Judah not at the time of the exile of the ten tribes into Assyria, but later Because Esar Haddon was some time after Sennacherib. They ended up being adversarial specifically to Judah and Benjamin (:1), although they were Israelites from other tribes. Or quite possibly these people were sincere proselytes who had been taught the way of Yahweh by the poor Jews who remained in the land after the exile (see on :4). In this case, it was perhaps wrong and elitist to refuse their assistance. The community of returnees would have argued that Cyrus' decree gave them exclusive command and power to rebuild the temple, applying only to those in the list of Ezra 2. I will discuss on :3 as to whether or not this refusal of Gentile help was correct. These people were Gentiles who had been brought to Palestine after the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes. But the desolated land meant lions running wild, and they assumed this was because they were not worshipping the "god of the land", Yahweh (2 Kings 17:26). And so they had been taught to worship Yahweh as the ten tribes had- which meant worshipping the local idols in the name of Yahweh worship. The Jews in Babylon were doing the

same, as Ezekiel's criticisms of them make clear. And we note how later when Persia took over, both Esther and Mordecai had names reflective of idol worship. So indeed they did worship Yahweh "as you do". So the objection to working with them was not on religious grounds.

Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel, said to them- Zerubbabel was the 'head' of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled king, Zerubbabel would've been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos. 1:11 could have come true: "Judah and… Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the "David my servant" who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called "the people of Israel" (cp. Ezra 2:2). And yet he let the baton drop. The prophecies and potentials were therefore reapplied and rescheduled for fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves together will build to Yahweh, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us- See on :2. It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (Ezra 4:3 cp. Neh. 2:20), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6:15 and in Isaiah 60:10, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion. As with some of us, their refusal to allow "the adversaries of Judah" (Ezra 4:1) to fellowship with us in the work can lead us to an exclusive approach to fellowship, that actually disallows the essentially outgoing and inclusive spirit of the God we serve. The Jews returned from Babylonian having swung to the opposite extreme from their earlier worldliness; they returned proud and refusing contact with the Gentile world, considering themselves saved by their own strength. And this is perhaps reflected in the way they refused on principle to allow any Gentiles to help them in the building work. Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee [as in the decree of Cyrus]... Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night"; and them as Ez. 43 had also described, "I will glorify the house of my glory" (Is. 60:7).

The stress perhaps is on "commanded *us*... you have nothing to do with *us*". They felt that only the returnees had been commissioned to build the temple, and so they rejected the help offered by the Jews or Israelites who had remained in the land after the deportations. And here we have the seeds of exclusivism that led to the extreme elitism at the Lord's time.

Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building- Hands becoming feeble / weakened is the phrase used of Divine judgment (Is. 13:7; Jer. 6:24; 49:24; 50:43; Ez. 7:17). The restored Zion would not have such weakened hands (Zeph. 3:16 "In that day it will be said to Jerusalem, Don't be afraid, Zion. Don't let your hands be weak"). The builders were 'terrified' (Heb.). Clearly, the rebuilding was not even beginning with God's blessing but rather His displeasure.

“The people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things in the kingdom of God which could have been restored in Israel (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God’s intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel’s temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not.

It could also be considered that "the people of the land" were not only the Samaritans, but also those very poor Jews who had remained behind in the land after the exile. In this case, the exiles disliked them and didn't want their participation in rebuilding the temple. Perhaps those "people of the land" had inhabited property and land belonging to the exiles who had now returned. If those exiles had lived in Jerusalem as commanded, then this point of conflict would not have existed. We note the phrase is used several times about those Jews left in Judah: "the poorest sort of the people of the land [remained]... people who were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left... the people who were left in the land" (2 Kings 24:14; 25:22; Jer. 40:6). And "the people of the land" is a term used very many times for God's people in Judah. Ezra and Nehemiah make no mention of these people joining in the community of the returned exiles. That community clearly saw themselves as the exclusive people of God- originally because they returned from economic motives and wanted all the land for themselves, perceiving the local Jewish population as poor whereas they had come from the wealth of Persia and Babylon. The closest we get to seeing any acceptance of the other Jews is in Ezra 6:21,22: "The sons of Israel who had returned from the exile ate, along with all those [i.e. other sons of Israel] who had separated themselves from the impurity of nations of the land to them to seek Yahweh God of Israel". This community are specifically referred to multiple times, in titles like "the children of the exile", "those who returned".

The "people of the land" ["lands" is not a helpful rendering] are not the same as the Canaanites, etc. In Ezrfa 9:1, the people of the land were doing the abominations of the original inhabitants of the land- that's the point. The term "people[s] of the land", *am ha'eretz*, is used of the large community of Jews who had remained in the land after the exile (s.w. "none remained, except the poorest sort of the people of the land", 2 Kings 24:14; "the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to work the vineyards and fields", 2 Kings 25:12). They were "the people that remained in the land" over whom Gedaliah was made ruler (2 Kings 25:22). "The people of the land" is a term specifically used of Judah (2 Chron. 23:13,20,21; 26:21;33:25; 36:1). Only a few chapters after those usages, we find "the people of the land" opposing the Judean exiles in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 4:4).

Ezra was trying to resolve this problem by redefining God's people to exclude those Jews who had remained in the land. His concern was because the Jewish exiles who had returned under Zerubbabel had married the Jews who were already in the land. And so he creates a situation whereby if they didn't separate themselves from the peoples of the land, then they would be separated from the congregation of God's people (Ezra 9:8 s.w.). It is of course so that we cannot be both with the world and with God. But Ezra is legalistically playing with definitions, and trying to label the spiritually second class people of God as in fact not being His people at all. Indeed God had separated His people from the other peoples (1 Kings 8:53; Lev. 20:24), but they had to make the freewill choice to separate themselves (Ezra 10:11). If they did, then God was working with them to separate them from the world and unto Himself.

By not doing so, they were precluding His help and denying fellowship with Him. But Ezra is making a fundamental error in defining who is "in" and "out" of God's people. And ignoring the huge sins and impurity of the Jews whilst in exile, as documented by Ezekiel and Isaiah.

Ezra 4:5 And hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia- Yahweh "performs the *counsel*" or "purpose" of rebuilding Jerusalem (Is. 44:26). But the Samaritan opposition sought to frustrate Judah's "purpose" / counsel (Ezra 4:5 s.w.), and succeeded. Yahweh allowed Himself to be limited within how His people performed His purpose. His 'purpose' is therefore conditional upon those whom He allows to fulfill it. God is so invested in the freewill responses of His people that He even allows His own purpose to be 'frustrated' in the short term. Ultimately His purpose for His Kingdom will of course be fulfilled. We note that Ezra records the opposition from the local people, who naturally resisted the return of the Jews because they feared they would claim the land they were living on as their ancestral inheritance. And want to push them off it and live on it themselves. However, Haggai and to an extent Zechariah emphasize the weakness of the Jews, their poor motivation and unspirituality as being the reason why the restoration was delayed. Ezra 1 began with the idea that God's purpose worked out through the decree of Cyrus, but all the days of Cyrus that purpose was frustrated- ostensibly, visibly, by the adversaries, but only reflecting how God used this or created this opposition in response to the indolence and disinterest of the returnees.

Ezra 4:6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem- RVmg. "Xerxes". The well-known Xerxes, the son of Darius, who reigned 20 years (BC 485–465). He is generally identified with the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther.

Ezra 4:7 In the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his companions, to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in Syrian, and set forth in the Syrian language- This Artaxerxes could have been the son of Ahasuerus / Xerxes of :6; so this would refer to a second letter to that in :6. Or it could be the same king; for 'Arta' means 'great', 'the great Xerxes', of :6 (see note there). The reference to it being "set forth" suggests Ezra saw it and remembered it exactly as seen, as if traumatized by it. Another view is that this Artaxexes is Cyrus, as the names each have the same numerical vakue [520]. In this case, we have a backtrack in order to make the point that complaints were made in the time of Ahasuerus (:6) just as they had been in the time of Cyrus. In this case they sent a letter to Cyrus (:11) and he replied repealing his decree made in Ezra 1:1. He failed to live up to the potential as Judah's deliverer according to the prophecies of Isaiah about him.

Ezra 4:8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this way- Rehum and Shimshai were the local Persian officials, who now took the side of the Samaritan opposition of :7, probably having been bribed or manipulated by them. It could be that they wrote separately, or were giving a stamp of approval to the letter of :7.

Ezra 4:9 then Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions, the Dinaites, and the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Shushanchites, the Dehaites, the Elamites- This list of nine nations along with the local "people of the land" makes ten nations. This is not a literal number because there were other nations there too (:10), but we note a similar ten neighbouring nations against Israel in Ps. 83 and Ez. 38, and these are the historical basis for the ten toes of Dan. 2 and the ten horns of the beast. These nations are geographically throughout the Persian and Babylonian empires. It could be argued that had the returnees allowed these nations to be involved with the temple, then the restoration prophecies of all nations worshipping in Zion could have come true.

Ezra 4:10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar brought over, and set in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River, and so forth, wrote- Assur-bani-pal, the great Assyrian king, is probably the king in view; for it was he had conquered and deported the peoples of :9. "He was the only Assyrian king who captured Susa and could carry off 'Susanchites'; no king so fully deserved the titles of 'great and noble'; this name ('Assur the father of the son') by a strong contraction of the middle word, is not so far removed from the sound of 'Osnappar', especially if the final 'l' of 'pal' is changed to 'r' (cf. 'Porus' for 'Pul', or 'Babiru' for 'Babilu'), and the 'r' of 'Assur' is weakened to 'n' (cf. Nebuchadrezzar and Nebuchadnezzar)".

Ezra 4:11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent to Artaxerxes the king: Your servants the men beyond the River, and so forth- Zech. 9:8-10 is a prophecy of Zerubbabel or Joshua which had to have its real fulfilment deferred until the coming of Jesus: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass [Did Zerubbabel / Joshua like Nehemiah enter Jerusalem on a donkey?]. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem [the opposing Samaritans], and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth". This latter phrase contrasts with the repeated reminder that the Persians had dominion "on this side the river" (Ezra 4:10,11,16; 5:3,6; 6:13; 8:36; Neh. 3:7). The coming King (and Joshua was prophesied as a king) was to free Judah from Persia's dominion, and establish God's Kingdom, with boys and girls playing in the streets of Jerusalem (Zech. 8:5).

Ezra 4:12 Be it known to the king, that the Jews who came up from you have come to us to Jerusalem; they are building the rebellious and the bad city, and have finished the walls, and repaired the foundations- There had been three or four revolts against Babylon (2 Kings 24:1,9,10,20; 25:1-30) and two against Assyria (2 Kings 18:7; 2 Chron. 33:11). The walls were not finished until Nehemiah's time, so the accusation was false and exaggerated. It was designed to provoke the Persian authorities, and to give the impression that the Jews were far exceeding the instructions of Cyrus's decree, which limited them to the rebuilding of the Temple.

Ezra 4:13 Be it known now to the king that if this city is built, and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and in the end it will be hurtful to the kings-

"Tribute" = the contribution of provinces / districts to the central budget; "custom" = tax on goods or on agricultural produce; "toll" = travel tolls levied for maintenance of the infrastructure and roads.

Ezra 4:14 Now because we eat the salt of the palace, and it is not right for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and informed the king- Throughout the Biblical record, the kings of Babylon and Persia are presented as naive despots whose pride makes them easy prey for vain flatterers. Those writing the letter had themselves been the enemies of the empire not so long ago, and their complaints surely ought to have led to an investigation which revealed the very recent decree of Cyrus. Persian satraps had no salaries, but taxed their provinces for the support of themselves and their courts. This was another obvious reason why the locals were against any restored Jerusalem.

Ezra 4:15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers: so you shall find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful to kings and provinces, and that they have made rebellion within the same city from old time; for which cause this city was laid waste- "From old time" was only 70 years previously; any serious investigation would have sensed major exaggeration in the complaints, and sought to investigate deeper before making a rash decision. But again the rulers are presented as always acting too hastily and being prone to flattery. For the abiding lesson from them which the Bible presents is their pride.

Ezra 4:16 We inform the king that if this city be built and the walls finished, because of this you shall have no portion beyond the River- We note the contradiction with their statement in :12 that the walls were already finished. Their exaggerations were such that they couldn't be hidden, as with all lies against God's people.

Ezra 4:17 Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River: Peace, and so forth- We notice that the opposition was based in Samaria, in the former ten tribe area; and they opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the people of Judah. Not all the ten tribes were taken into captivity. Those who remained still may have retained this sectarian spirit, believing Samaria to be the preferred dwelling of God rather than Jerusalem. The Samaritan opposition may well have been fuelled by those local Israelites. This is all so far from the prophetic vision of a repentant Judah and Israel being united together with repentant Gentiles in a new multiethnic people of God in the reestablished Kingdom. Human pride, impenitence and sectarian thinking precluded so much that was possible then, just as it does today.

Ezra 4:18 The letter which you sent to us has been plainly read before me- The Biblical record again seems to emphasize the relative simplicity of these powerful kings; for he was illiterate and needed to have the letter read before him (as in Esther 6:1).

Ezra 4:19 I decreed, and search has been made, and it is found that this city of old time has made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it- The Babylonian records would only have covered the rebellions of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:1,10,20). And these were only

around 80 years previously. So the king is presented as making an exaggerated response just as the complaints had been exaggerated. And apparently they didn't search in the record house in Babylon mentioned in Ezra 5:17. And yet the accusations were true- highlighting how it was God's hand alone that made this decree to cease be overturned.

Ezra 4:20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the country beyond the River; and tribute, custom, and toll, was paid to them- Again an exaggeration, as this was only really true in Solomon's time. But the king wishes to give a nod toward the apparent concern about loss of taxation.

Ezra 4:21 Make a decree now to cause these men to cease, and that this city not be built, until a decree shall be made by me- The king is presented as hopelessly proud, speaking of how he made a decree to research the matter (:19) and now decreed the work should stop until he were to make another decree. The decree to rebuild Zion had of course been given by God, and in this we see the word of God and the word of man compared. The very decrees the king so prided himself in making were all subject to God's decrees, finally.

Ezra 4:22 Take heed that you not be slack herein: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?- The king surely realized that the authors of the letter had their own agenda as to why they wanted the rebuilding to cease. And so this urging of speedy response is clearly tongue in cheek. He knows this is what they are wanting to hear.

Ezra 4:23 Then when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their companions, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power- LXX "with horses and force". The broken down state of the walls in Nehemiah's time may partly have been due to this use of force and power, which implies significant military strength. Zech. 4:6 is Yahweh's response to this: "Not by might (s.w. "force") nor by power, but by My Spirit". The Jews were not in step with God's Spirit; for His work cannot be hindered like this. The whole incident was to make the Jews consider their motives in this work and to perceive how they were largely doing it all for themselves and their own religious agendas rather than for God. Our work for the Lord is often likewise paused at times, so that we might consider the same question- as to whether we are doing it in the flesh or in His Spirit.

Ezra 4:24 Then ceased the work of God's house which is at Jerusalem; and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia- see on Zech. 3:1. The statement in Ezra 5:16 that they had been continuously building it would suggest that some faithful ones did continue building after they were told to stop, although the majority gave up. God will confirm us in the way we chose to take. Ezra 4 says that the reason the temple was not further rebuilt was because of the decree of Artaxerxes suspending the building program; then Haggai came and told Israel that the temple wasn't built because they had preferred to build their ceiled houses (Ezra 5:1). So God had confirmed the people in the way they chose. They preferred to build their houses rather than His, so He stopped them from building His house altogether until they wholeheartedly recommitted themselves to Him. Throughout this period of their history, Israel knew what they ought to do, and they knew very well their weaknesses.

They should *all* have returned from Babylon; but many remained, although they gave those who returned material support.

The Rabbis calculate that the first year of Cyrus was 52 years after the exile of Zedekiah. The work revived in the second year of Darius, which they calculate as 18 years later- when Judah had fully been 70 years in captivity. Yet the 70 years prophecy could have come true in the first year of Cyrus. It depends whether we start the period with the first deportations, or with the full destruction of the temple. We see here God's flexibility and openness to fulfilment, but always wanting to achieve fulfilment of His word of restoration as soon as possible.

EZRA CHAPTER 5

Ezra 5:1 Now the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem; in the name of the God of Israel they prophesied to them- see on Ezra 4:24; Hag. 1:2. These prophets were critical of the returned exiles, and yet it seems they were responded to; because despite the legal problems, they arose and built. Indeed it seems that the people responded by resuming work on the temple within 23 days of Haggai's prophecy (Hag. 1:15). Although we note Haggai had to appeal to them to keep on building about a month after this (Hag. 2:1). This is a parade example of people hearing God's word, being convicted and seriously responding after a period of reflection.

Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah returned from Babylon and were intended to be leaders who would crown Joshua / Jesus as the Messiah-Priest-Branch who would rebuild Jerusalem. But nothing is heard of them further. Perhaps it is to them that Zech. 11:8 refers: “Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them… then said I [on God’s behalf], I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die”. They had gone into captivity because of poor shepherds, and now at their return they again lacked men willing to be their Saviours; and God is saying that He would not do the shepherding job which He had delegated to others. It could be that Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah all died in one month as a result of Zechariah’s prophecy at the time of Ezra 5:1. Or it could be that the three potential shepherds who failed were Zerubbabel, Joshua and Nehemiah.

We might expect the message of Haggai and Zechariah to have been "Have faith! Keep building although you've been told to stop, God will be with you, all will be good in the end". Instead Haggai focuses upon the spiritual weakness and poor motivation of the Jews and appeals for their repentance. This would suggest that the real reason God allowed the command to cease building was because He was only confirming the Jews in their lack of desire to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. Zechariah speaks of how the armies of Heaven are operative in the restoration- and perhaps the takeaway message from that was that the Jews were not to fear a mere human command to cease doing God's work, seeing His Spirit was with them.

Ezra 5:2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build God’s house which is at Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them- The fact Ezekiel gave prophesies- or what sound like prophesies- of a restored temple doesn’t mean that they would come true regardless of Israel’s obedience. 19th century Christians looked at the prophecies relating to Israel’s return to the land and worked to enable them to happen- by

financially supporting the Jews etc. It is therefore no mere coincidence that we read that the prophets who 'prophesied' of the rebuilding of the temple also helped physically to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:2). They worked for the fulfilment of their prophecies.

Ezra 5:3 At the same time came to them Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shetharbozenai, and their companions, and said thus to them, Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall?- Tattenai was in charge of the entire area west of the Euphrates and was based in Damascus. He came specially to Jerusalem to find out first hand what the situation was.

We know that finally, the work of rebuilding wasn't done in obedience to the commands in Ez. 40-48 and the envisioned rebuilt temple and reestablished Kingdom didn't come about. The essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days, but they were also reapplied and reinterpreted with reference to the building of a spiritual house for God to indwell. We therefore perceive a similarity here with the attempts of local authorities to close down the preaching of the early apostles of the Lord Jesus. They too were asked in whose name they were operating (Acts 4:7) and they likewise continued in God's work despite being told not to. We conclude that the work of building God's house was now being understood in terms of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and baptizing people into the Lord Jesus. See on Ezra 6:6,7.

Ezra 5:4 Then we told them in this way, what the names of the men were who were making this building- It seems from :5 that the names of the "elders of the Jews" were given (see too :9,10).

Ezra 5:5 But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not make them cease, until the matter should come to Darius, and then answer should be returned by letter concerning it- "The eye of their God" may refer to the Angel giving them power to continue the work. Again we note the similarities with the preaching of the apostles, who refused to cease the work of the new temple when ordered to (see on :3). The elders of the Jews [LXX "those of the captivity", as if referring to all the people] don't present as particularly righteous, and yet God's eye is "on" the righteous: "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him... The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous" (Ps. 33:18; 34:15). This was by the grace of imputed righteousness, and again shows God's desire to almost force through His plan of restoring the Kingdom despite human weakness.

Ezra 5:6 This is the copy of the letter that Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shetharbozenai, and his companions the Apharsachites, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king- As noted on :3, Tattenai was in charge of the entire area west of the Euphrates and was based in Damascus. He came specially to Jerusalem to find out first hand what the situation was. It seems from Ezra 4:9 that the Apharsachites were a favoured group of exiles who collaborated with the Persians in maintaining order west of the Euphrates.

Ezra 5:7 They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus: To Darius the king, all peace- The inspired author of Ezra apparently had access to this correspondence; it likely was in the public domain, as it were, and not confidential.

Ezra 5:8 Be it known to the king, that we went into the province of Judah, to the house

of the great God, which is built with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls; and this work goes on with diligence and prospers in their hands- These impartial observers couldn't but note that despite the command to cease the work, the work was 'prospering'. This prospering was from God (s.w. Neh. 1:11; 2:20). No device formed against the program of rebuilding the Kingdom would prosper (Is. 54:17 s.w. , LXX " I will not suffer any weapon formed against thee to prosper; and every voice that shall rise up against thee for judgment, thou shalt vanquish them all; and thine adversaries shall be condemned thereby"), and the Divine word of restoration would prosper (Is. 55:11 s.w.). Any attempt to bring about the intended reestablishment of the Kingdom would be prospered by God; the fact that ultimately didn't happen was because the exiles ceased to make use of His potential assistance.

Ezra 5:9 Then we asked those elders, and said to them thus, Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall?- Again we note the similarities with the preaching of the apostles, who were demanded to provide human authority for their work of building the spiritual temple, and refused to cease the work of that new temple when ordered to (see on :3).

Ezra 5:10 We asked them their names also, to inform you that we might write the names of the men who were at their head- This demand for names was answered, apparently, by the statement that "We are the servants of... God" (:11). It recalls John the Baptist being asked for his name, and responding that he was merely "a voice" in obedience to God's voice.

Ezra 5:11 Thus they returned us answer saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and are building the house that was built these many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished- See on :10. They were unashamed of their connection with the previous Israel, which had been researched as rebellious and the land of "great kings" (Ezra 4:20). It's almost as if they allude to that. They were unashamedly about reestablishing the Kingdom of God in Israel, and they were not pretending otherwise. They were brave to title their God "God of heaven and earth" because this was the title given to the Persian gods. They were making the point that in fact their God Yahweh was the true God. We note Darius uses this term of Yahweh (Ezra 6:19), perhaps suggesting he was inclined to believe in Yahweh.

Ezra 5:12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon- This confession of sin and just punishment was not easily forthcoming. For Ezekiel had argued with the exiles against their view that the whole exile had been due to Yahweh being too heavy handed with His people. But it seems there was at least a minority who recognized the guilt of their fathers, or at least did in words. But it appears there was not the personal repentance required to activate the huge potential plans God had to reestablish His Kingdom at the time.

Ezra 5:13 But in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree to build this house of God- Cyrus was king of Persia, but they call him "king of Babylon" because he took over Babylon and therefore governance of the Jews.

Ezra 5:14 The gold and silver vessels also of God's house, which Nebuchadnezzar

took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought into the temple of Babylon, those Cyrus the king took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor- This "Sheshbazzar" may be a title, and could refer to Nehemiah or Zerubbabel; for in Ezra 1:8 he is defined as "prince of Judah". The "governor" was Zerubbabel in Hag. 1:1 (s.w. "governor"); see on :16.

Ezra 5:15 and he said to him, 'Take these vessels, go, put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let God's house be built in its place'- The problem with this command is that it involved building the temple according to the dimensions of Cyrus (see on Ezra 6:3) which were far smaller than those given in Ezekiel 40-48. Building it "in its place", as if restoring what once was, precluded fulfilling the Kingdom vision of Ezekiel. And so the preference of the word of man (Cyrus) over that of God through Ezekiel precluded the fulfilment of the Kingdom then.

Ezra 5:16 Then the same Sheshbazzar came, and laid the foundations of God's house which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now has it been in building, and yet it is not completed- It was Zerubbabel who laid the foundations in Ezra 3, so it seems he was the Sheshbazzar; see on :14. Their statement that they had been continuously building it would suggest that some faithful ones did continue building after they were told to stop, although the majority gave up (Ezra 4:24). Ezra 5:16 says that Sheshbazzar laid the foundations of the temple while Ezra 3:8-10 says that Zerubbabel did. Possibly Sheshbazzar ['glory of the sun god'] was the Babylonian name for the Hebrew 'Zerubbabel'. Or perhaps Sheshbazzar began to lay the foundations, there was a delay, and Zerubbabel completed the work. The delay may have been caused by the famine sent for their lack of zeal to build the temple (Hag. 1:6) as well as the local opposition. Zech. 8:9,10 describes the situation just prior to the foundations of the temple being laid: "...the prophets who were in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of Armies was laid, even the temple, that it might be built. For before those days there were no wages for man, nor any wages for an animal; neither was there any peace to him who went out or came in, because of the adversary. For I set all men everyone against his neighbour". The implication is that the Jewish builders demanded wages for their work and even for the work their animals did; and when they weren't given them, they argued with each other and thus the work stopped.

Ezra 5:17 Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter- The records quickly searched in Ezra 4:19 would have been kept in a different location. We suspect that Tattenai was in fact aware of the decree of Cyrus. See on Ezra 6:2.

EZRA CHAPTER 6

Ezra 6:1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the archives, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon- Apparently nothing was found and if Darius was the least bit against the Jews, he would have said so. But he continued the search until the document was found at Achmetha (:2). Darius had

married two of the daughters of Cyrus, so he was likely eager to continue the wishes of Cyrus. The internal correspondences within the record (see on :2) are significant, and give the ring of truth to the claim that this is indeed the inspired word of God and not something written by secular men long after the events.

Ezra 6:2 There was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media- It had apparently been moved from the record house in Babylon where it had previously been (Ezra 5:17).

A scroll, and therein was thus written for a record- The reference to a scroll fits with what is known from archaeology: that the Persians used parchment or vellum for their records, not baked clay, like the Assyrians and Babylonians, or paper, like the Egyptians.

Ezra 6:3 In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king made a decree: Concerning God's house at Jerusalem, let the house be built, the place where they offer sacrifices, and let its foundations be strongly laid; its height sixty cubits, and its breadth sixty cubits- Ezekiel's temple was 500 cubits by 500 cubits. The problem with this command is that it involved building the temple according to the dimensions of Cyrus which were far smaller than those given in Ezekiel 40-48. Building it "in its place" (Ezra 5:15), as if restoring what once was, precluded fulfilling the Kingdom vision of Ezekiel. And so the preference of the word of man (Cyrus) over that of God through Ezekiel precluded the fulfilment of the Kingdom then.

The temple which Cyrus commanded the Jews to build in Jerusalem was of different (smaller) dimensions to that of Ezekiel (Ezra 6:3,4). Two possibilities arise here. Either Israel chose to listen to the words of man rather than those of God through Ezekiel; or (more likely) God reduced the dimensions, knowing that this was within the capability of Israel to achieve. In any case, Israel were encouraged by Divine prophesy in the work of building according to the pattern which Cyrus had given (Ezra 6:14). God is so eager to work with men that He will work with us on our lower level, even if it is a level lower than what we are capable of. And so we should treat our weaker brethren. See on :9.

We could also note that Cyrus only defined the height and breadth, but not the length. This may have been purposeful; to allow the Jews to themselves decide upon this.

Ezra 6:4 with three courses of great stones, and a course of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house- Great stones are literally rolled stones, stones of greater size than could be carried. The LXX interprets this as meaning four storeys high, three storeys being built of stone, and one of timber. Not all the expenses were in fact met from the king (Ezra 2:69; 3:7). At every moment in the whole story we find potential promises not realized, for whatever reason.

Ezra 6:5 Also let the gold and silver vessels of God's house, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored, and brought again to the temple which is at Jerusalem, each one to its place; and you shall put them in God's house- The Medo-Persians would have recalled that they captured Babylon at the very moment when the Babylonian king was blasphemously using these vessels in a drunken feast (Dan. 5:2,3). Their superstitious thinking would therefore have actually wanted to return these vessels to their appropriate deity. And again, in all these things God's hand was at work; there is

an internal credibility within the entire account, as noted on :2.

Ezra 6:6 Now therefore, Tattenai, governor beyond the River, Shetharbozenai, and your companions the Apharsachites, who are beyond the River, you must not hinder this matter- This continues the points of similarity with the attempts to stop the apostles building the spiritual house of God. For this is in essence the same advice as Gamaliel gives in Acts 5:39, warning not to hinder God's work: "You will not be able to overthrow / hinder them. You might be found to be fighting against God". See on Ezra 5:3.

Ezra 6:7 Leave the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in its place- The LXX is pretty much quoted by Gamaliel in Acts 5:38: "Refrain from these men and *let them alone*; if *this work* be of men, it will come to nothing". As explained on Ezra 5:3, the work of building God's house is reinterpreted with reference to the people of God building His spiritual house through preaching in the Christian dispensation. And the apostles who were being persecuted by the elders of the Jews and the leader of the Jewish council in the first century- are thereby presented, in the analogy, to the true elders of the new Israel that the Lord Jesus had founded.

Ezra 6:8 Moreover I make a decree what you shall do to these elders of the Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the River, expenses be given with all diligence to these men, that they be not hindered- Isaiah makes many allusions to Israel's leaving Egypt. The Jews in Babylon were intended to live out the type by leaving Babylon and making the wilderness journey to the land- and God helped them in it. For example, Ezra records how God moved the local authorities to pronounce that the residents around the returning exiles should give them silver, gold and goods. This was an exact re-living of how Israel left Egypt with Egypt's gold and silver (Ex. 12:35). Yet most of the Jews didn't want to return, they didn't want to live out the type.

"Be not hindered" is s.w. Dan. 6:15 of how "no decree… may be changed". The idea clearly is that the decree was changed- and the connection shows that Darius ought to have known this and humbled himself to change the decree about Daniel. Because changing the unchangeable decree was perfectly possible for the emperor, despite the apparent loss of face and suggestion that he was not in fact Divine but fallible.

Ezra 6:9 That which they have need of, both young bulls, and rams, and lambs, for burnt offerings to the God of heaven; also wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the word of the priests who are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail- Absolutely everything physical which was required for obedience to the law was to be provided. The lesson is that if we wish to live the kingdom life and build that kingdom, lack of resources can never ultimately be cited as a reason for disobedience. We must note however that the Jews had broken the old covenant, and had been offered a new covenant deal with God in Jer. 33 and Ez. 20. They apparently rejected that and still tried to keep the old covenant. And yet clearly God worked with them through that immaturity. He comes over as ever eager to work with His people at whatever level they are at. See on :3. "According to the word of the priests" is LXX "whatsoever they shall ask". There is almost a blank cheque offer to hear our requests- if they are in order to do God's will and work. But not merely for ourselves.

Ezra 6:10 that they may offer sacrifices of pleasant aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and of his sons- Let's remember that the exiles were symbols of us. We in this life are passing through "the time of our exile" (1 Pet. 1:17 RSV). Paul exhorts us to pray for kings and governors, in the very language of the LXX in Ezra 6:10 about the returnees praying in the new temple for the kings of Babylon. Again, as noted on Ezra 5:3, the whole narrative of the rebuilding of the temple and Kingdom is applied to the work of the Christian church in this age.

Ezra 6:11 Also I have made a decree, that whoever shall alter this word, let a beam be pulled out from his house, and let him be lifted up and fastened thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this- The condemnation upon those who tried to change the decree was severe, and clearly had in view the local Samaritan opposition to the Jews. However the idea of cursing those who changed the word of a king was still alluding to the paganic idea that kings were divine, and therefore to try to change their word was an act of blasphemy. This paganic concept reveals how far the Persian kings were from Yahweh; and yet He worked their arrogance in order to enable His people to get on with His work- if they wished to.

The punishment of hanging on a gallows [possibly a form of crucifixion] and his house made a dungheap recalls the judgment of Haman and those who supported him. This confirms our suggestion that the events of the book of Esther had happened around this time. Those events resulted in a "fear of the Jews" which would explain this change of policy about stopping the building of the temple.

Ezra 6:12 and the God who has caused His name to dwell there overthrow all kings and peoples who shall put forth their hand to alter the same, to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with all diligence- The kings and peoples likely to want to overthrow Jerusalem at that point were those who were going to be opposed to Persia; and so this decree was in its own way a restatement of Persian dominance in the area. To alter the word of Persian command (:11) is seen here (in the AV) as seeking to alter the house of God. They wished to perceive the rebuilding of Yahweh's temple as a function of their word of command concerning it. The rebuilding of the temple was to be the result of Yahweh's prophetic word; but He allowed others to perceive that it was their word which was causing the fulfilment.

Ezra 6:13 Then Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, Shetharbozenai, and their companions, because Darius the king had sent a decree, did accordingly with all diligence- See on :3. Their diligent ('speedy') obedience to the decree of Darius was meant to be an example to the Jews to respond speedily and diligently to the Divine decree to rebuild Jerusalem. For that was what was behind the decrees of Cyrus and Darius. The two decrees, of God and man, are paralleled in :14.

Ezra 6:14 The elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia- As noted on :13, the two decrees, of God and man, are paralleled. As Gentile men like Tattenai diligently responded to the human decree, so God's people should have done moreso to the Divine decree. The real reason for prospering in fulfilling the decree was through the Divine word

through Haggai and Zechariah- which was in fact highly critical of the Jews, with Haggai accusing them of not continuing to rebuild the temple because of their desire to build their own homes, with elegant ceilings, whilst God's house remained waste. They were only using the command to stop the work as an excuse for their own laziness and lack of commitment. That hard hitting message apparently was responded to. For here we read that the work prospered because of it.

Ezra 6:15 This house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king- Hag. 1:15 says that the work began on the 24th of Elul in the second year of Darius. From Zerubbabel's laying of the foundation (Ezra 3:10), 21 years had passed. Since the prophets Haggai and Zechariah had challenged the people to repent and get to work, it took exactly four years, five months and ten days to complete it. This shows a commendable speed of response.

Ezra 6:16 The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy- Clearly seeking to emulate Solomon's grandiose dedication of his temple; but they were missing the point that Isaiah had made, that God doesn't delight in huge numbers of sacrifices as Solomon made, but rather seeks humble hearts. The reference to "Israel" rather than Judah connects with the offering of 12 goats for the 12 tribes in :17. The prophetic vision was that both Israel and Judah would be reunited in this restored Kingdom. But the majority of the ten tribes didn't return, and relatively few of the 1 million of Judah in Babylon. This feast of dedication is that of Jn. 10:22, and the LXX calls Psalms 145-148 the Psalm of Haggai and Zechariah- so they may have been used at this time. The difference between "the children of Israel" and the returnees may suggest that despite the returnees' dislike of the Israelites who were in the land at their return, they allowed them now to dedicate the temple. But :19 suggests the returnees alone kept the Passover- they didn't let their other brethren as it were 'break bread'. The "joy" may have been in the words of Ps. 148-150, called in the LXX 'Psalms of Haggai and Zechariah'.

Ezra 6:17 They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel- As when the tabernacle was dedicated (Num. 7:87; 8:17). Again they were missing the point- the old covenant was over. And any attempt at emulating Solomon's ridiculously grandiose offering of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep to dedicate his temple was also being made in the wrong spirit; see on :16. The dedication offerings of Solomon, Josiah and Hezekiah (2 Chron. 30:24; 35:7) involved far more animals- and yet the returnees had the empowerment by the emperor to have as many animals as they wished.

"The Jews" is used synonymously with "Israelite" (Nehemiah 2:10; 4:1; 5:1,8; 7:73; 12:47). 12 he-goats and 12 bulls were offered for "all Israel" in Ezra 6:17; 8:35. But still Judah and Israel remained divided; and no "prince" arose to fulfill the prophecies. Israel and Judah were to become one nation in the land, "and my servant David shall be a prince in the midst of them" (Ez. 37:16-24). This is clearly the same "prince" as referred to in Ezekiel 45-48. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 30:9 speaks of a returned Judah serving "David their king, whom I shall raise up unto them"- implying that David would have been resurrected at the restoration, if all had gone according to what was possible. Some of the ten tribes did return with Judah but the

scale of prophesied reunion was simply not achieved, and the offering of the 12 goats was therefore but external symbolism.

Ezra 6:18 They set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses- But as noted on Ezra 2, only four of the 24 courses returned. And hardly any Levites. Their attempts to keep the old covenant were compromised; and yet they had been told in Ezekiel and Jeremiah that they had hopelessly broken that covenant, and needed to accept the new covenant, which they stubbornly refused to do.

Ezra 6:19 The children of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month- It seems they were proud of their technical obedience to the old covenant; see on :18. At this point, the book of Esther reverts to Hebrew from Chaldee (which began to be used in Ezra 4:18). I discussed on :16 how the other Israelites were allowed to rejoice at the dedication of the temple, but apparently weren't allowed to keep Passover / break bread. This is stressed in :20 . The Passover was slain only "for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves". Despite this God "made them joyful" (:22), just as He still fellowships with the most exclusive of brethren and seeks to work with them.

Ezra 6:20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure- I suggest this was just a technical purification, just as people may be baptized in water but refuse the birth or cleansing of the Spirit. Ez. 36:24-29 had prophesied: “For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh”. The captives were taken from among the many nations that comprised Babylon / Persia; they were brought, as many as could be bothered to go, to their own land. They were cleansed there (s.w. Ezra 6:20; Neh. 12:30). But they became un-cleansed through allowing Tobiah into the temple chambers, by trading on the Sabbath, and by marrying Gentiles (Neh. 13:9,22,30). The priesthood needed to be “cleansed” again (Mal. 3:3 s.w.). The promise of Ezekiel 36 sounds unconditional- as if, whoosh, God would make His sinful people righteous regardless of their own will. And so some have misunderstood the operation of God’s Spirit in our own days. But although not directly stated, the promise of entry into the new covenant, whereby God would encourage obedience through the work of His Spirit, was conditional. Judah could have entered the new covenant there and then, with all its requirements for a Messiah figure to abrogate the Mosaic law. But they turned back to their uncleannesses, they would not keep God’s statutes, and their potential Messiah figures failed to appear. Yet again, the promise of entry into a new covenant was deferred, to be fulfilled in a new Israel who are sprinkled through the waters of baptism. The promise was fulfilled, but in a far different context to that intended.

And they killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brothers the priests, and for themselves- The Mosaic legislation was that each head of house should kill the Passover. But they now considered that only the clean could kill the Passover, and the Levites were supposed to be super clean- even though we are soon to read that some of them were so uncommitted to Yahweh that they had married

Gentiles. So their zeal for technical, casuistic purity meant they ended up breaking the law, as has so often been seen amongst God's people.

Ezra 6:21 The children of Israel who had come again out of the captivity- Time and again, Jeremiah had prophesied how Yahweh would *bring again* His people and the vessels of the temple back to the land (Jer. 28:3,4,6; 30:3,18; 31:23); and this all had a fulfilment in the return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. It was then that in some sense Yahweh 'brought again Zion' (Is. 52:8). The very same word used by Joel [translated "bring again"] is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8 and 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16). Joel 3, however, speaks from the perspective that Judah would be 'brought again' from Babylon under Ezra; and then Joel 3:2 "I will also gather all nations...and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land".

And all such as had separated themselves to them from the filthiness of the nations of the land, to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel, ate- They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Neh. 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Neh. 10:28).

But the reference is probably to Gentiles keeping the Passover along with Israel. We notice that there is no mention of their being circumcised to do so. I have suggested elsewhere that the command for only the circumcised to partake of it was relevant only to the first Passover, as later in the Mosaic law and Jewish practice, all of one mind with Israel were welcome to partake of it. And this has relevance to the openness of the breaking of bread service.

However it is the Jews who are described as needing to separate themselves from the filthiness of the nations of the land (Ezra 9:1; 10:11). Perhaps the category here referred to those Jews who had remained in the land throughout the exile, and now separated themselves from the idolatry of the land. See on Ezra 4:4.

Ezra 6:22 and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for Yahweh had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, to strengthen their hands in the work of God's house, the God of Israel- This verse emphasizes the direct work of God on human hearts (as in 1 Kings 18:37; Mal. 4:6): making them joyful, turning the heart of the king, and strengthening their work for Him. Despite their many weaknesses as discussed in the previous commentary, God was eager to work with them. Although they had not accepted the new covenant, with its promise of the Spirit in their hearts, He still worked directly upon their hearts in confirming them in the way they had apparently chosen. We naturally enquire why the king of Persia is called "the king of Assyria". It could be that the Assyrian kings

were famed for their hardness and cruelty; and even such a hard heart was turned by God. Just as His Spirit can work today.

EZRA CHAPTER 7

Ezra 7:1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah-

"After these things" refers to the 58 year gap between the events at the end of Ezra 6, during the first return under Zerubbabel, to this second return under Ezra. And there was to be a third return under Nehemiah, the three returns matching the three deportations of the Jews. The book of Ezra includes the historical information about the return under Zerubbabel, as historical background to Ezra's inspired reminiscence of his own return.

A call to flee Babylon was made by Zechariah in the second year of Darius, at the time of Ezra 5 when the exiles were forbidden to continue rebuilding the temple and Zechariah and Haggai prophesied to them. So now, there was another return led by Ezra as recorded in Ezra 7. This may well have been in direct response and obedience to the call to "flee from the land of the north!" made in Zech. 2:6,7. Although Babylon had fallen to Cyrus, he left the city intact. The total destruction of the city envisioned in the prophets didn't happen at that time- perhaps because God's people weren't ready to leave as they should have done. For the exit of the Jews from Babylon was envisaged as preceding Babylon's total destruction. Although the people hadn't left Babylon, God in Zech. 2:6 gives another scenario- they could leave now, and then Babylon would fall as predicted. Ezra leads another group from Babylon in response to this call (Ezra 7), but again there was very limited response to his efforts to get the Jews to leave. We marvel at God's desire to somehow make it all work out...

A fair case can be made that the book of Esther occurred between Ezra 6 and 7. Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah may well have been contemporaries. We appear to have a gap of 58 years covered by "after these things". Artaxerxes was the son of Xerxes, the king at the time of Esther. The book of Esther closes with the Jews popular and wealthy. This was surely the real reason why so few wanted to return. Ezra is to be commended for perceiving the need to leave that comfortable society and return to Zion.

Seraiah was High-priest in the days of king Zedekiah and was slain at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-21). So immediately we see that generations are omitted here, as often in the Biblical genealogies. Ezra was however the descendant of the high priest; but he is presented as the scribe of Yahweh's law. He made no attempt to leverage his ancestry to become High Priest, but rather focused on the essence- the teaching of God's word to people.

Ezra 7:2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub- There is reason to think that it could have been possible for the Messianic Kingdom to have been established at the time of the restoration, and the temple prophecies would fit perfectly into this context. Thus Ezekiel emphasized that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (Ez. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); and it was surely not incidental that Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok (Ezra 7:2). He was in a position to fulfill those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. See on :27.

Ezra 7:3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth- 15 names are listed between Ezra and Aaron- covering about 1000 years. Clearly many generations were omitted. We note there are 26 names listed between Zerubbabel (a generation or two before Ezra) and Nashon a contemporary of Aaron, in 1 Chron. 2:10-15; 3:1-19). Some details of the omitted generations are found in 1 Chron. 9:10,11; Neh. 11:11. Why was that information not included here? Perhaps because the intention was to focus upon various individuals who were historically known as involved in temple and priestly work, as if to really emphasize how Ezra was qualified for his work through being part of a long line of such workers. Thus Azariah is mentioned in 1 Chron. 6:10 as 'having executed the priest's office in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem'.

Ezra 7:4 the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki- Ezra's genealogy is carefully traced back to Aaron, because there were some who could not prove their genealogy at the time. If indeed the genealogical records were destroyed when the temple was sacked, we wonder how he actually managed to prove such a long genealogy.

Ezra 7:5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest- Ezra's great grandfather had been High Priest (:1), and he could trace his descent right back to Aaron. He was really well qualified to be the next high priest. The fact he wasn't could imply there was some degree of internal politics going on, or he failed to rise up to the call; and so the prophecies of a Messianic high priest in the restored Kingdom were left unfulfilled.

Ezra 7:6 this Ezra went up from Babylon: and he was a willing scribe in the law of Moses, which Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given- The Hebrew word for "scribe" doesn't simply mean one who writes down or copies. It carries the idea of publishing, teaching, openly declaring- and is the word used in passages like Is. 43:21 "shew forth My praise". Ezra was an enthusiastic teacher of the law of Moses, and he wanted the returned exiles to be obedient to the old covenant and thereby be blessed. We might note however that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had made clear that the old covenant had been broken with Judah; and they had been offered a new covenant with those who repented, involving the gift of the Spirit and inclusion of any Gentiles who wished to accept it. Ezra was contemporary with Jeremiah and certainly Ezekiel; surely he was aware of the new covenant, and surely he knew the prophecies of Isaiah relevant to the exiles. They clearly offered a new covenant. But still God's good hand was upon him, because he wanted to teach the old covenant (:9,10). God will still work with those who have wrong theology and mistaken emphases, if their heart is clearly for Him. This is something that denominational Christianity can't cope with, as each denomination basically feels that God is only working with those who share their positions. So Ezra's passion for the old covenant was to some degree zeal not according to knowledge. He was missing the point of the wonderful offer of the new covenant, and not giving due weight to God's statements in the prophets that the old covenant was effectively over. And yet despite this wrong focus upon law and traditional positions, God clearly worked with Ezra.

And the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of Yahweh his God on him- The hand of God operating on human hearts is a great theme of Ezra and

Nehemiah. It was the outworking of grace and the gift / work of the Spirit. For the human spirit is primarily where God's Spirit works.

Ezra 7:7 There went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the porters and the Nethinim, to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king- These are the same six categories who had returned with Zerubbabel initially (Ezra 2:70). But the order is different. Here, the first category is the ordinary people; whereas before it was the priests and Levites who were listed first. This may be read as positive, in that the ordinary people were now responding; or negative, in that the priests were less responsive than they had been.

Ezra 7:8 He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king- This was according to Yahweh's "hand" (:6). When Nehemiah speaks of Judah having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10), he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7).

Ezra 7:9 For on the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon; and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God on him- The continual reference to the hand of God in Ezra is another way of saying that God was acting through His Spirit. There was (and is) a power higher than that of human endeavour, a hidden hand, which alone makes our way to the Kingdom ultimately prosperous; and our salvation therefore by grace rather than our own device.

As the crow flies, the journey was about 520 miles; but they would've taken the standard route along the Orontes valley, which was nearly double that, around 900 miles. They averaged around 10 miles / day, assuming they didn't travel on the Sabbath- implying they were travelling at walking speed and perhaps with further breaks for the Mosaic feasts.

All we read of Ezra in the book of Ezra concerns the events around his coming to Jerusalem and what he did there. We read no more of Ezra until in Neh. 8:1 he is asked to read God's law to the people in Nehemiah's time. Ezra returned from Babylon in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7:7) in 458 BC, and Nehemiah arrived in the same king's twentieth year (Neh. 2:1) in 445. Ezra's work over those 13 years isn't recorded. In that time, Jerusalem had gone from a populated city (Ezra 1:1) to a depopulated city with broken down walls (Neh. 7:4; 11:1-3; 13:10-13). Possibly Ezra had returned to Babylon in that period; or perhaps he had a ministry which, like that of so many, produced little fruit. Yet still he kept on, for he reappears in Neh. 8:1 to read the law to the people. His attempt to fix the mixed marriages didn't go well, because Nehemiah had to address the same problem. But nearly all the prophets were failed reformers, and only a very few believers ever seem to remain consistently faithful to the Lord. In fact only Jonah, of all the prophets, had a successful ministry.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances-

We have here a powerful pattern: A heart set, seeking God's word, personally doing it- and then teaching it to others. Ezra definitely presents as sincere. However, his message should have been of the new covenant. He was surely aware of the prophetic position on this, but instead sought to return Israel to the old covenant. This is the problem with getting 'doctrine' wrong; we can end up going down rabbit holes, wasting our life ministry, misguiding others into irrelevancies, and in the worst cases, "The time shall come when he who kills you will think he does God's service". Indeed, a focus on God's law and devotion to teaching it didn't stop Israel from murdering God's Son.

The compelling hand of God (:9) was in response to Ezra's desire in his heart to do God's law and teach it to others. I discussed on :6 how his zeal for the law of Moses was in fact misplaced, and he ought to have given more attention to the new covenant. But still God worked with him in respect for his misplaced idealism. And his setting of his heart to seek God is clearly wonderfully positive (s.w. 2 Chron. 19:3). His "set" or 'prepared' heart could be seen as a fulfilment of Solomon's prayer in 1 Chron. 29:18, where He asks God to keep the hearts of His people focused upon the temple, keeping it "in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and prepare their heart unto You". Ezra's set or prepared heart (s.w.) was therefore a result of his willingly allowing God to work directly upon his heart. Again we see the direct working of God upon the human heart or spirit, all performed by His Spirit.

Ezra 7:11 Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, even the scribe of the words of the commandments of Yahweh, and of His statutes to Israel- It could be that Ezra was a "scribe" in the court, but more importantly he was a scribe or proclaimer of the words and commandments of Yahweh, and His statutes- as well as those of the king. The word for "scribe" can mean a court secretary, and the word is used like that in describing the reigns of David and others. It is also the title used in the Persian empire for someone who would assist the colonization process, teaching the subject people the civil laws of Persia. "The scribe, even the scribe" may be trying to say that although he was a scribe of the Persian empire, he was also a scribe of God's law. Possibly he was the scribe in the sense of a Persian secretary, maybe 'Secretary of State for Jewish Affairs', as well as a Jew, a priest who in fact could have been the High Priest. If indeed Ezra was a senior Secretary, this would explain his ease of access to the king. We know that the Jews had assimilated into Babylon, so to preserve the transmission of the extant scriptures and to be able to read them, it was necessary that some like Ezra still knew original Hebrew. We recall how the children of the returned exiles could not speak fluent, pure Hebrew. Whether Ezra was right to do this... raises many ethical questions. I see the book of Ezra as his personal memoir, a kind of autobiography recorded under Divine inspiration. And if you were to write a memoir looking back at your life, you likewise might muse about your motives and wisdom in various decisions. But it is for us to reflect upon his life decisions. As with every human life, behaviour reflects mixed motivations.

Ezra 7:12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace and so forth- Ezra 1:2 records Cyrus originally defining Yahweh, Israel's God, as "the God of heaven". This was in allusion to the Persian belief in Ormuzd as the mightiest god, in contradistinction to Ahriman, who was lord of the lower regions. The proclamation of Cyrus was effectively a denial of the Persian view of the gods and Ormuzd, although it seems Cyrus didn't maintain that;

but Artaxerxes is more vague, leaving it open to interpretation as to whether the "God of heaven" is Yahweh or Ormuzd.

Ezra 7:13 I make a decree, that all those of the people of Israel, and their priests and the Levites, in my realm, who are minded of their own free will to go to Jerusalem, go with you- Those who left Babylon did so of their own freewill, and yet providential events stirred up their spirits to do this (Ezra 1:5); and the way was prepared in miraculous ways. The new covenant offered to the exiles a new heart and spirit from God. His Spirit was eager to work upon their spirit, but still there was required their own freewill desire to return both to their land and to their God. Otherwise they would have been reduced to mere puppets in the Divine hand.

In Ezra 4, Artaxerxes issues a decree to cease the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Here in Ezra 7 king Artaxerxes issues a decree to begin restoring and building Jerusalem. But the laws of the Medes and Persians were unchangeable (Esther 1:19; Dan. 6:14-16). So we see here how Darius could have changed the fate of Daniel- only his pride stopped him. We also reflect how amazingly strong was God's hand upon him to make him issue this second decree. However another take is that there are two different kings in view here. Even if that is the case, we are still left with the fact that the laws of Medes and Persians were changed by the influence of God's Spirit.

Ezra 7:14 Because you are sent of the king and his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your hand- The book of Esther (Esther 1:14) likewise mentions these seven counsellors. "To inquire" doesn't necessarily mean here 'to find out information'. The idea could be that he was sent there to pray for Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of God. For this is how prayer must be- according to God's word.

The law being in the hand of Ezra invites us to see him as a second Moses, who alone is recorded as carrying the law in his hand [on his descent from Sinai]. "At His right hand was a fiery law for them" (Dt. 33:2). Carrying through the desert to Israel gold, silver and bronze, along with great Gentile wealth donated to Israelites, all recalls what Moses did. Surely Ezra took inspiration from this; for the gold, silver and bronze were used by Moses to create the tabernacle (Ex. 25:3; 26:32; 33:5; 36:36), just as Ezra used them for the temple. Ezra was told to appoint judges to teach the people (Ezra 7:25,26), just as Moses was told (Ex. 18:13-27; Dt. 1:13-18; 16:18; 17:8-13). See on Ezra 8:1.

Ezra 7:15 and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel whose habitation is in Jerusalem- The king clearly sees "the God of Israel" as the local god of Jerusalem, who as it were lives there. He doesn't use the term Yahweh, as Cyrus did.

Ezra 7:16 and all the silver and gold that you shall find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem- "That you shall find" doesn't mean he was to just grab whatever silver and gold he could; rather the idea is that he should take with him whatever silver and gold people were willing to give him. This is the king's way of repeating the essence of the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:4,6).

Ezra 7:17 therefore you shall with all diligence buy with this money bulls, rams, lambs, with their meal offerings and their drink offerings, and shall offer them on the

altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem- The king appears to have some detailed knowledge of the law of Moses; as an eager scribe or proclaimer, Ezra apparently had shared the details of Yahweh with the king. And he is to be commended for this; for religion is always a difficult subject with powerful employers who have their own religious views.

Ezra 7:18 Whatever shall seem good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do that after the will of your God- We note the parallel between the will of God, and what Ezra willed or thought good. The king thus accepts that the will of Ezra is that of his God; they were aligned. He perceives congruity between what he preached and what he really stood for himself.

Ezra 7:19 The vessels that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver before the God of Jerusalem- Although the king appears to have seen Israel's God as merely a local entity, he also seems to recognize He had some real presence there in Jerusalem. The original temple vessels taken away from Jerusalem had been restored there already, but there was apparently the need for many more, which were offered voluntarily (:15; Ezra 8:25-28). Perhaps some had been stolen before they were taken into captivity; or some which had been returned had been stolen. Or again, perhaps Ezra wished to operate worship on a far grander scale than previously.

Ezra 7:20 Whatever more shall be needful for the house of your God, which you shall have occasion to grant, grant it out of the king's treasure house- The treasure house was presumably that in Jerusalem, into which the local taxes were paid.

Ezra 7:21 I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers who are beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done with all diligence- The king seems to have foreseen that the God of Ezra was alive and real enough to give Ezra more commandments which would require material to fulfill them. The inspired writer of Psalm 45 says that his tongue is like the pen of a scribe or writer (Ps. 45:1). The writer is God. God was using the inspired person's words as His pen, with which to communicate to men. Ezra likewise was a "scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:21). The God who is in Heaven wrote through a scribe here on earth. That's the idea of inspiration.

Ezra 7:22 to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred measures of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much- The taxes paid to the local treasure house in Jerusalem (:20) would have been paid partly in kind, and wheat, wine and oil were all local products of Judah (2 Kings 18:32). The king had clearly been told about the exact nature of the Jewish sacrifices, including the command to always offer with salt (Lev. 2:13).

Ezra 7:23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?- It would appear that about this time, the Persians had been driven out of Egypt, and their records describe it in these terms, as "wrath against the realm of the king". But after Ezra returned, Persia recovered Memphis.

So there was a lot of politics here, and the Persian empowerment of Ezra was from mixed motives. The Persians wanted to ensure the loyalty of Yehud as it

bordered the breakaway region of Egypt. Egypt revolted against Persia in 460 BC and in 458 BC the Persians had sent an army to Egypt through Yehud, in order to pacify Egypt. Ezra was willing to go along with this in order to rebuild the temple and have power to teach God's law. This explains why any disobedience to his "law" were to be so severely punished. But that "law" was Persian civil law.

Ezra 7:24 Also we inform you, that concerning any of the priests and Levites, the singers, porters, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on them- The Persians didn't exclude their own priests from taxation, so this was all the more a wonderful kindness. But the lesson from it all is that God was providing absolutely everything for His work to go ahead. And to this day, lack of resources has never been a barrier for the progress of any project which God wills to happen. He will always provide, most generously.

Ezra 7:25 You, Ezra, after the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach him who doesn't know them- This was giving a huge amount of power to Ezra. We get the impression that there were Jews still scattered through the whole area west of the Euphrates. They had not returned to the land. Ezra was empowered to preach to them, and also to those who didn't know Yahweh. This was a huge commission; but there is no evidence Ezra fulfilled it.

Let's remember that the exiles were representative of us. They failed, and so these things in essence are reapplied to ourselves. We in this life are passing through "the time of our exile" (1 Pet. 1:17 RSV). They were commanded to spread the knowledge of Israel's God to all in the dominion of Babylon (Ezra 7:25 LXX), and thus they would have fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies about the spreading of the Gospel to all peoples. Yet we have a similar commission, and God will provide for us likewise, as He did for Ezra. But we have to learn the lesson of the exiles; for the exiles who returned became so caught up with their own lives that they again failed to be a light to the nations.

It is hard to understand whether the mission Ezra was given was to literally all people "Beyond the River", or just to teach Yahweh's laws to all those who were already under them, i.e. the Jews. It could be that the king was telling Ezra to bring literally all people "Beyond the River" under Yahweh's laws, and under the civil laws of "the King" of Persia (:26). And Ezra decided this was a good deal. The apparent massive generosity from the Persian side was surely done with an agenda in mind- the cementing of their own colonial power. There is no evidence that Ezra's mission succeeded. Had it succeeded, the prophecies would have been fulfilled about the conversion of the surrounding nations in the land promised to Abraham, up to "the River". Ezra isn't mentioned again in Scripture apart from some years later in Nehemiah. "All" we read is that he returned, taught God's law, lamented how far the people were from it (Ezra 9) and made them divorce their Gentile wives, thus breaking up many families (Ezra 10). And that is all he's recorded as achieving. Isaiah's prophecies were that repentant Jews, marvelling at the grace of the new covenant, would be such an example of God's grace that the Gentiles would come with them to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. Ezra instead maxes out on teaching them the old covenant, divorcing their Gentile wives, and pushing obedience to the Persian empire in return for being funded in his religious mission. No wonder he apparently got nowhere, and by Nehemiah's time, the temple and walls were broken down again and Jerusalem was depopulated. And yet Ezra's prayer of Ezra 9 reflects genuine

spirituality and relationship with God. He admittedly ignored a large chunk of Bible teaching, Isaiah - Daniel, and the wonderful message of grace in the new covenant that was being offered. He was a legalist and very small minded in his spiritual worldview, and his ministry was ultimately not very fruitful. But still he had relationship with God. And this is how it is with very many such believers today. If God is willing to walk with and save such legalists, ignoring large chunks of His word, then it cuts the other way too- those who may be more liberal, at the other end of the spectrum, also ignoring large parts of God's revelation, may well still be in relationship with Him. It's not for us to judge, but simply to reflect upon the implications of Ezra.

Ezra 7:26 Whoever will not do the law of your God, and the law of the king, let judgement be executed on him with all diligence, whether it be to death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment- The law of God and that of the king are paralleled, just as the decree of the king was effectively the fulfilment of God's decree and commandment. But we see here the politics behind the Persians allowing Ezra to go to Palestine and teach God's law (see on :23). If he was to be the teacher, he was to teach the secular / civil law of the Persians even if he was allowed to teach the law of Moses as religious law. He was to set up teachers and judges according to Moses' religious law, and also Persian civil law. Rather like a 19th century missionary being funded by a Government to establish Christianity, and also to establish colonial political hegemony. And it seems he agreed to this deal. The ethical issues here are left open to our reflection! For obedience to Yahweh and His vision for Israel precluded, surely, obedience to Persian civil law. If indeed Ezra 7 comes right after the Esther story, we recall that Haman in Esther 3:8, claimed that the Jews followed their own religious laws and not the civic laws of the king. But now Ezra appears to be teaching both of them. Whereas God's people were to be governed exclusively by *His* law because they were *His* Kingdom. We see in Ezra's compromise the beginnings of the idea of separation between church and state, whereby man is supposed to live under God's law but also under the law of the state. Peter of course spells it out, that man can only be obedient to secular law in so far as it doesn't contradict the Lord's law. Quite possibly we are to assume Ezra taught the same; but all the same, for a theocratic nation, who stood on the brink of the possibility of being re-established as God's Kingdom, it seems this was a compromise too far.

In reality, Ezra didn't put to death those disobedient to God's law. Thirteen years after his coming to Jerusalem, the people had again intermarried and were breaking the Sabbath (Neh. 8,10,13). His hard line "Obey or die" approach just didn't work. His hard line on 'marriage out of the faith' likewise didn't work; the people divorced their wives as he asked, and just did it all again. Ezra's approach is the classic evidence that hard core legalism just doesn't elicit long term transformation nor personal spirituality. In those 13 years, the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down- implying some sort of judgment from God. His "back to the Bible" message on his first arrival in Jerusalem had simply not brought forth much fruit. Indeed, the returned exiles had apparently turned further away from God. Hence his memoir finishes so otherwise strangely, with the lament that many of those he made divorce their Gentile wives had children by them. He had broken families in his initial zeal, but it achieved nothing spiritually. In fact quite the opposite. The situation in Nehemiah 8, when Ezra reads the law to the people, is very similar to that in the book of Ezra. The people had married Gentile wives and were asked to repent; and they seemed ignorant of God's

law. Higher critics therefore argue that Nehemiah 8 has been misplaced and is really part of the Ezra story. But that requires viewing the book of Nehemiah as having its dates totally wrong, and the rest of the book loses coherence. I suggest rather that the close, intentional similarities are to show how Ezra's ministry was a failure. It achieved nothing. He came to Judah zealous to teach the Torah, when he should have been teaching the people Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, with the great possibilities of a new covenant. Instead he teaches the Torah, the old covenant which they had already broken, and makes them divorce their Gentile wives, leading to massive family breakup. And that's all he's recorded as doing. Over the next 13 years until Nehemiah's time, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, Jerusalem was depopulated, and the people went even further away from God's law. Ezra was clearly sincere in his own way and displays much genuine spirituality, but his zeal and ideals were misplaced. He was the first "scribe". Despite their location in the Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are at the very end of the Hebrew Biblical history, around the time of Zechariah and Malachi. Ezra was the first scribe... and we know that his spiritual descendants crucified the Lord. He himself was not of that spirit, but his legalism spawned that. All Ezra is recorded as doing is returning to Jerusalem, forcing mass divorces of Jews married to Gentiles, breaking up families... and then 13 years later reading the Torah and doing the same again. That's all. No fruit in that. And human life is judged by the fruit we bore, when all is said and done. The lesson of Ezra has gone unheeded in so many churches, denominations and families. Especially those who have insisted that divorced and remarried couples must separate in order to have communion in the Lord's body.

Ezra 7:27 Blessed be Yahweh, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem- See on :2. Ezra was enabled to "beautify" the temple (Ezra 7:27), the very same word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would "glorify" [s.w.] His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire- all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. Is. 60:7 prophesied that God would "*glorify* the *house* of my glory". But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes "to *beautify* [s.w. "glorify"] the house of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building "cieled houses" for themselves (Hag. 1:4). The word for "cieled" occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to

discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Ezra 7:28 and has extended grace to me before the king, his counsellors and before all the king's mighty princes. I was strengthened according to the hand of Yahweh my God upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me- The extension of grace, or 'gift', was in terms of God working directly upon the king's heart (:27- see too Neh. 2:12; 7:5; 1 Kings 10:24). And this too is how God's grace can work today- the insertion of ideas into the human heart, intended to bring us to obedience to Him and the advancement of His glory. We note Ezra's repeated awareness of the hand of God upon him (Ezra 7:6,9,28; 8:18,22,31); another way of saying that the Spirit was upon him. His contemporary Ezekiel had felt that hand even lifting him up and transporting him to and from Jerusalem from Babylon.

EZRA CHAPTER 8

Ezra 8:1 Now these are the heads of their fathers' households, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king- Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' ["went up with me"] to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Neh. 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness.

The "genealogy" is strictly "those enrolled by genealogy". This is parallel to Moses doing this before the people began their wilderness journey to the land: "They registered themselves in their clans, by their ancestral houses" (Num. 1:18). The list of returnees in :3-14 follows the style of Num. 1, "from the clan of A, B ben C, and with him D males". I have discussed the parallels between Ezra and Moses on Ezra 7:14. Faced with the task of making an exodus from Babylon to Zion carrying precious materials for the sanctuary, Ezra is rightly careful to model himself upon a Biblical precedent. Just as we should be. Possibly the three days waiting by the Ahava (:15) was to recall the three days of preparation by Sinai (Ex. 19:10-12). See on :15. And yet he was majoring on the minors, forgetting the entire thrust of Isaiah-Daniel about the new covenant. But he was stressing the genealogies because of his misplaced idea that the Jews who had returned from exile were the true Israel, the "holy seed", and anyone who couldn't prove their genealogy was at best second class or not of "Israel". And this led to the division between Jews and Samaritans, which the Lord Jesus definitely didn't approve of.

Ezra 8:2 Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush- We wonder of course why these priests hadn't returned with Zerubbabel. We noted on Ezra 2 that there were so few priests who returned then. It would appear that Ezra had been a good scribe or teacher / proclaimer of the law, and

now more priests were willing to return. We also note that the names used here have more reference in them to the name of Yahweh, either as suffix or prefix. It's amazing what one man can do in reviving a community, and Ezra seems to have been an example. But whilst this return of the Aaronic priests may seem commendable, it was a tacit act of disobedience to the commandment that only the Zadokites should serve in the new temple (Ez. 43:19; 45:15). And thereby the possibility of the Kingdom being reestablished as planned was precluded. It seems Ezra had not paid attention to the prophecies of the restoration and was fixated upon obedience to the letter of the old covenant, which was now intended to be obsolete.

Ezra 8:3 Of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males one hundred and fifty- According to 1 Chron. 3:22, we should read this as meaning "Hattush the son of Shecaniah". This would make him the great-great-grandson of Zerubbabel.

Ezra 8:4 Of the sons of Pahathmoab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah; and with him two hundred males- The family of Pahathmoab also features in those who returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:6) and were later noted for their work in rebuilding the walls (Neh. 3:11). And yet the founder of this family apparently had Gentile connections- "the pit of Moab". It is tempting to see a connection with the incident in 1 Chron. 11:22, when one of David's mighty men slew two lionlike men of Moab along with a lion- in a pit. Perhaps this was name arose from a desire to imitate that great act of faith.

Ezra 8:5 Of the sons of Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel; and with him three hundred males- LXX "Of the sons of Zattu, Shechaniah, the son of Jahaziel"; this may be the Zattu of Ezra 2:8.

Ezra 8:6 Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan; and with him fifty males- The numbers are embarrassingly small, given the presence of around 1 million Jews in the empire (see on Ezra 1:1); and therefore the uninspired, apocryphal record tends to always exaggerate the numbers. In this case, 50 is exaggerated to 250 in 1 Esdras.

Ezra 8:7 Of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiah the son of Athaliah; and with him seventy males- Athaliah may be a female name. This unusual mention of a woman in the genealogies could be because she had a particular spiritual influence upon her family.

Ezra 8:8 Of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael; and with him eighty males- Shephatiah was also a family who had partially returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:4). Out of the 1 million or so Jews in Babylon (see on Ezra 1:1), it seems that the interest in the things of the restored Kingdom was confined to only a few families; for instead of as it were fresh blood being converted to the cause by Ezra, those he persuaded to accompany him were largely from families who had already partially returned to the land.

Ezra 8:9 Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel; and with him two hundred and eighteen males- This is the Joab of Ezra 2:6, some of whose family members had already returned under Zerubbabel. As noted on :8, those who returned with Ezra were generally not 'fresh blood' but relatives of those already in Judah; their motives

may therefore have been mixed, between a desire for family reunification and yet also a wish to serve God in response to His word.

Ezra 8:10 Of the sons of Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah; and with him one hundred and sixty male- LXX "Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah." Bani appears as the head of a family in Ezra 2:10. See on :8.

Ezra 8:11 Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai; and with him twenty-eight males- Again, this was a family which had already partially emigrated to Judah (Ezra 2:11); see on :8,9.

Ezra 8:12 Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan; and with him one hundred and ten males- Again, this was a family which had already partially emigrated to Judah (Ezra 2:12); see on :8,9.

Ezra 8:13 Of the sons of Adonikam, who were the last; and these are their names: Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah; and with them sixty males- "The last" may refer to how the other family members had returned with Zerubbabel at the 'first' return.

Ezra 8:14 Of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud; and with them seventy males- The total comes to 1496 males; even if we multiply this several times over to get the total number of Jews who returned with Ezra, the number still isn't that great. The response to the call to flee Babylon and reestablish God's Kingdom in Israel was still pathetically small, considering there were around 1 million Jews in the Babylonian empire (see on Ezra 1:1).

Ezra 8:15 I gathered them together to the river that runs to Ahava; and there we encamped three days: and I viewed the people and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi-

Ezra gathering the people and then leading them to Zion along the riverside route to Judah could be seen as him consciously trying to fulfil the restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:10 "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock". His confidence that God will be with them on the journey by the rivers of waters (Ezra 8:15,22,31) was perhaps because of his sense that he was fulfilling Jer. 31. And yet the new covenant offered in Jer. 31 and the salvation through Messiah all means that in the end, Ezra's return failed to fulfil the prophecy. It was deferred and reinterpreted in the Lord Jesus. For Jer. 31:18,19 required repentance and acceptance of the new covenant, and the exiles are never recorded as being generally repentant. Ezra tried to do it for them in his prayer of Ezra 9 but those who 'returned' were all intended to have 'returned' to God individually. This explains Ezra's deep sadness at the revelation of sin and intermarriage within the community who returned. They were precluding the fulfilment of Jer. 31 and other restoration prophecies. And Ezra precluded the fulfilment of Jer. 31 by insisting on teaching the old covenant, and rejecting the new covenant. Likewise Is. 59:9-11 laments that the peoples' sin resulted in darkness rather than the light that could potentially have come for Zion.

It is clear from :29-31 that there were Levites already in Jerusalem, to whom the gold, silver and temple vessels were delivered. They had presumably returned under Zerubbabel. But we can assume that many more were needed. Possibly Ezra was so committed to emulating the exodus from Egypt with the materials for the tabernacle that he wanted there to be Levites forming a barrier as it were between God's holy

things and the ordinary Israelites, just as there had been on the wilderness journey. See on :1. However, again we see Ezra resigning from the ideal (as discussed on Ezra 7:26). For in the restored temple, the Levites were not to come near the holy things. That was the work of the sons of Zadok: "They are not to serve me as priests or to go near anything that is holy to me or to enter the Most Holy Place. This is the punishment for the disgusting things they have done. I am assigning to them the menial work that is to be done in the Temple" (Ez. 44:13,14 GNB). Ezra came to teach Torah, but he should've been teaching Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel- the things of the new covenant. Not the old covenant.

Ezra 2:42 records a very small number for the families of the gate keepers. The number of ordinary Levites compared to priests is very low in Ezra 2 (4289 priests, and 341 priestly workers and 74 Levites). There were far more Levites than there were priests, but it seems the Levites didn't want to return and do the dirty work; everyone wanted to be religious leaders. Hence Ezra's problem in finding Levites to return (Ezra 8:15). We can note that it was this tension between Levites and priests which resulted in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-10). See on :24.

Ezra 8:16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, who were teachers- The Hebrew confusion of understanding and teaching is brought out by comparing the AV and RV of Ezra 8:16: “Men of understanding” (AV), “which were teachers” (RV). To have true understanding is axiomatically to teach it. We can’t hold it passively within ourselves.

Ezra 8:17 I sent them forth to Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia; and I told them what they should tell Iddo, and his brothers the Nethinim, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring to us ministers for the house of our God- The LXX implies Ezra was so desperate that he used a financial incentive to get some Levites to respond: "And I forwarded them to the rulers with the money of the place, and I put words in their mouth to speak to their brethren the Athinim with the money of the place". But for all that, only 38 Levite men responded (:18,19).

Ezra 8:18 According to the good hand of our God on us they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brothers, eighteen- Those who returned did so because of God's hand upon them; even if only 18 Levites and then 20 (:19) responded, this was the result of God's hand working as it were at the very last minute. And yet according to the LXX of :17 (see note there), their motives must have been very mixed; they had not intended to return, and were only persuaded by a last minute offer of money.

Ezra 8:19 and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty- The numbers of Levites are again pathetically small. Far more priests than Levites wanted to return. The idea of doing humble service wasn't attractive; see on :15,24. And so it has always been; to find real 'workers' for the Kingdom has always been difficult. And yet no matter how small the numbers, God works through them.

Ezra 8:20 and of the Nethinim, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim: all of them were mentioned by name- The Nethinim were grouped beneath the Levites but above "the servants of

Solomon" (Ezra 2:43,55). "Nethinim" is literally 'those who are given' and many presume they were originally the Gibeonites, who were 'given' by Joshua to the Levites to do their more menial work (Josh. 9:3-27). Whenever Gentiles were captured in war, some of them would have been devoted to Yahweh in that they were given to His service through joining the Nethinim (Num. 31:28). Thus here in Ezra 8:20 we find mention of some "whom David and the princes had *given* for the service of the Levites".

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance- Jer. 31:9 had prophesied of the restoration: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". A straight way back to Zion had been prepared potentially for them to walk in (Is. 40:3). Likewise Is. 63:13 reminded the returnees that when they had been led through the wilderness to Canaan under Moses, they did not stumble [s.w.]. But both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a "straight way", as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim featured "straight" progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to "keep in step with the Spirit"... They were to walk "each one straight before him" (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a "straight way" to Zion ["He led them also by a straight way"], as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the "straight way".

The return of the exiles led by Ezra made the journey by a "right way" from Babylon to Zion (Ezra 8:21). Yet this is the very word used about the "straight" feet of the Cherubim Angels in Ez. 1:7,23. The return from Babylon involved following in the path of the Angels, walking in step with them. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk "in a straight way" (s.w.) "by the rivers of waters"- and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a "right / straight way". He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true- they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today- to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness. I feel this is especially true in the matter of latter day witnessing. See on Is. 52:8.

Ezra 8:22 For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken to the king saying, The

hand of our God is on all those who seek Him for good; but His power and His wrath is against all those who forsake Him-

The prophecies of the restoration had spoken specifically of God's protection for those returning from Babylon with the temple vessels: "Depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing! Go out of the midst of her! Cleanse yourselves, you who bear the temple vessels of Yahweh. For you shall not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight: for Yahweh will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your vanguard" (Is. 52:11,12). A way was to be prepared through the desert by God Himself (Is. 40:3). "With petitions will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel" (Jer 31:9). It is one thing to read comforting words in Scripture; quite another in reality to practice them. And Ezra surely is to be commended for taking God at His word. But Ezra was "ashamed to ask" for human help, and again we are drawn into his internal struggles. It is the same word used in Ezra 9:6 for his being "ashamed" before God on account of the peoples' sins. He knew he was supposed to trust in Divine help. But his 'shame' in asking for human help rather suggests he wanted to ask for human help, but was ashamed to, because he was supposed to trust in God's help. Again we recall that this book is his memoir, looking back on life, the surrounding history that went on... and pondering his motives. Reflecting as he does so often that it was the higher hand of God that had been upon him for good. All of grace. We may externally do the thing of faith, in generosity, forgiveness, theological debate, evangelistic work, attending church meetings... but that may conceal mixed motives. It is self-examination before the cross of Christ which illuminates our motives.

And yet Ezra is also, in another part of his brain, firmly rooted in God's word. He had taught that "the hand of our God is on all those who seek Him for good". And he uses the same word as in Dt. 4:29 concerning a repentant Israel returning to their God from exile: "But from there you shall *seek* Yahweh your God and you will find Him, when you search after Him with all your heart and with all your soul". He figured that if they were acting in repentance and returning to their God in Zion, then surely His hand would protect them. Just as all expressions of repentance will somehow have God's protecting hand, always enabling it to happen. We think of the person with a phobia of water, being somehow empowered to get baptized as a token of their repentance. Ezra was sure that God's wrath would only be upon those who "forsake" Him. But he himself later lamented that Judah had "forsaken" their God ("We have forsaken Your commandments", Ezra 9:10, and the word is likewise used in Neh. 13:11 for how the exiles had "forsaken" the house of their God). Yahweh forsakes those who forsake Him (2 Chron. 24:20). Possibly this was the cause of his dilemma- he knew that the exiles didn't need protection if they had not forsaken their God. But there was likely plenty of evidence that many of them still had forsaken their God. Ezra had not, so possibly they were not attacked on the way because of his faithfulness.

Josephus claims that the treasure annually remitted to Jerusalem from Babylon in Roman times was escorted by an army of 20,000 men. So to travel without any soldiers for defence was a truly brave and faithful undertaking. Indeed, Ezra seems to reason that to accept such human strength would be to "forsake Him". To not trust in God, to hedge our bets, as it were, is portrayed here as forsaking Him.

Ezra was ashamed to ask for *help* against Judah's enemies, the implication being that he wanted that human help but was ashamed to ask for it from the King. He had initially believed those words of Isaiah, but found it hard to maintain that level of

faith. But they should have had faith in the restoration prophecy's promise: "Fear not ... I will *help* you" (Is. 41:10). Yahweh had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way. Consider Is. 50:10: "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice [s.w. Ezra 1:1 re the proclamation of Cyrus] of his servant [i.e. Cyrus, Is. 45:1], that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God". Yet Ezra was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers to guard them on the journey only because he had earlier told the king that Yahweh would be with them (Ezra 8:22), as if he really did want the support but was ashamed to ask for it. He disallowed Isaiah's prophesy that the restored Israel would never be ashamed [s.w. Ezra 8:22; 9:6] nor confounded (Is. 45:17; 49:23; 54:4). Nehemiah accepted such support when he came up from Babylon (Neh. 2:9).

Ezra 8:23 So we fasted and begged our God for this: and He was entreated of us- This is Ezra writing up the incident after having reached Judah safely. "For this" may refer to the fact that as discussed on :22, they had forsaken their God and so had no right to presume upon His protection. So Ezra the legalist is forced by circumstance to throw himself upon God's grace. Just as so many have experienced. "He was intreated" is the phrase used of God responding to the prayers of repentant sinners in 2 Sam. 21:14; 24:25; 2 Chron. 33:13.

Ezra 8:24 Then I set apart twelve of the chiefs of the priests, even Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers with them-

But Sherebiah and Hashabiah were Levites (:19). The priests are elsewhere repeatedly distinguished from the Levites in the phrase "the priests and the Levites" e.g. in :33. As elsewhere (see on :28), Ezra the legalist seems forced by circumstance to not be strictly obedient to God's law. This was all part of God's attempt to bring him to grace. Just as He does with so many.

LXX "And I assigned of the chiefs of the priests twelve unto Sherebiah". This would place the priests in a subordinate position to the Levites. Perhaps this was intentional, because Ezra had been disturbed at the lack of Levites amongst them, as likewise was the case in Ezra 2. There were many who wanted the glory of priesthood, but very few prepared to do the humble work of service. And he therefore exalts those humble workers. See on :15.

Ezra 8:25 and weighed to them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering for the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his princes, and all Israel there present, had offered- As discussed on :35, Ezra considers the present, returned exiles as the one true "all Israel", refusing to accept the Jews who had remained in the land as the true Israel. The idea was that the exiles would be purged in captivity. But they weren't, and God returned them by grace alone, even though they had not repented. "There present" is literally "that were found", as if out of the huge Jewish population in Babylon, these were the only ones found present. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV "instruments"] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's 'Kingdom' passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). The restoration of the kingdom could potentially have happened at the time of Ezra. But Ezra didn't take this potential forward, for he neglected the commands in Ezekiel to only use Zadokite priests, and he was obsessed

with keeping the law of Moses, the old covenant, rather than accepting the new covenant and the new, non-Mosaic worship system of Ez. 40-48.

Ezra 8:26 I weighed into their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels one hundred talents; of gold one hundred talents- The total value of all this is huge. I don't believe the figures are exaggerated; it is simply so psychologically credible and true to experience that when a majority refuse to respond to God's call as required, they are eager to donate wealth, as if to as it were buy themselves out of their personal responsibilities.

Ezra 8:27 and twenty bowls of gold, of one thousand darics; and two vessels of fine bright brass, precious as gold- The total value of all this would probably have worked out at something like 130 million British pounds as of 2018. To carry all this in cash without military escort, and to arrive with it all safely after a four month journey through Bedouin and robber infested territory, was an amazing miracle.

Ezra 8:28 I said to them, You are holy to Yahweh, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to Yahweh, the God of your fathers-

"You are holy to Yahweh" is declaring those priests holy and able to handle the holy vessels. But in the restored temple, the Levites were not to come near the holy things- only the sons of Zadok could. Ez. 44:13,14 was clear on this (see on :15). Did Ezra have some Divine mandate to now declare them holy and able to deal with the holy vessels? There is no evidence he did. It is not recorded. We wonder whether he was driven by a lack of alternatives to just do the best he could in the situation. But we would rather read of some attempt to find the required "Sons of Zadok" and some apology for being unable to follow Ez. 44:13,14. Again and again, Ezra invites us to ponder his motives, and the degree to which we can break one Divine principle in order to attempt to keep another. This in fact is the spirit in which the book ends, with the otherwise strange comment after Ezra had made the Jews divorce their Gentile wives: "some of them had wives by whom they had children" (Ezra 10:44). Ezra is looking back and reflecting on the long term impact of his decisions. For there was no Mosaic command to separate from Gentile wives. We could say that what he did haunted him, even though there were strands of sincerity in his motivation. Just as those who disfellowship individuals from churches in their zeal for "God's truth" end up wrecking families... and at the end of their days must look back and wonder about what they did...

Ezra perceived a parallel between the vessels and those who carried them. Paul uses this same idea, describing all believers as a vessel made holy to the Lord (1 Thess. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:21). Perhaps his allusion recognizes that the situation at the restoration didn't come about as was prophetically possible, and has now been reinterpreted with reference to God's new people and their spiritual work in the spiritual house of God today.

Ezra 8:29 Guard and keep them, until you weigh them before the chiefs of the priests and the Levites, and the princes of the fathers' households of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the rooms of the house of Yahweh- "Guard" is Heb. 'keep awake'. To remain awake and keep that committed unto us is very much New Testament language (e.g. 1 Tim. 6:20; Rev. 16:15) for our keeping of that which is committed to our trust until we arrive at Zion, the future Kingdom of God, when there will be the day of judgment, cp. the weighing of the vessels to ensure those carrying them had preserved them.

Again, these allusions recognize that the situation at the restoration didn't come about as was prophetically possible, and has now been reinterpreted with reference to God's new people and their spiritual work in the spiritual house of God today.

Ezra 8:30 So the priests and the Levites received the weight of the silver and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God- We note how the priests and Levites were given equal responsibility in transporting this vast wealth. Ezra had been disturbed at the lack of Levites amongst them, as likewise was the case in Ezra 2. There were many who wanted the glory of priesthood, but very few prepared to do the humble work of service. And he therefore exalts those humble workers. See on :15,24,33.

Ezra 8:31 Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was on us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the bandit by the way- This was no small miracle, carrying such a huge amount of wealth in cash with no military escort. See on :32. The text implies there were indeed enemies and bandits by the way, but the hand of God was greater than "the hand of the enemy". This was to encourage them upon settling in Judah that the hand of their enemies would never be greater than God's hand- if they allowed Him to act and humbled themselves beneath that hand.

Passover was to be kept on the 14th day of the first month, with the feast of unleavened bread for some days afterwards. Ezra is noted as a student and teacher of the Torah, with a self proclaimed mission of bringing the Jews back to God's law. But apparently he skips keeping the Passover. He could have argued that he was leading a second exodus, and indeed he was (see on Ezra 7:14). But even so... with such careful attention to imitating the exodus (see on Ezra 8:1), he appears to have omitted the most obvious: To keep Passover as requested. He is recorded as offering thanksgiving offerings on arrival in Jerusalem, even though there was no feast of Yahweh at that time. But he couldn't offer the Passover sacrifice? Nor make use of the command to keep the Passover in the second month if he was travelling (Num. 9:9-13). But it is too much like coincidence that Ezra consciously sought to emulate the exodus. Surely he planned to leave Babylon on the same date as Israel left Egypt. So he was surely aware of the need to keep Passover; but he didn't. Quite possibly because he didn't want to "waste" seven days keeping the related feast of unleavened bread, he impatiently wanted to start the journey. And now in his memoir he is looking back on that choice and drawing us in to his internal reflections... For we too can zealously strive to be so Biblical, but miss the essential points. So often our much vaunted Biblicism is revealed as lacking and empty when it comes to the critical issues of the Christian life. Contra all this, we could consider that his decision was based upon Dt. 16:5,6: "You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which Yahweh your God gives you, but at the place which Yahweh your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell in, there you must sacrifice the Passover at evening, at the going down of the sun, at the time that you came forth out of Egypt". But surely the spirit was important, not the place. Thus "They kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho" (Josh. 5:10); and Passover was celebrated in the Desert of Sinai in the second year after leaving Egypt. Like all of us, Ezra was negotiating between various principles, precedents and scriptures... and musing about having done so in his Divinely inspired memoir. However we note from Neh. 8:14-17 that about 13 years after Ezra had come to Jerusalem to teach the law, the people only then understood they were intended to keep the feast of Tabernacles:

"They found written in the law, how that Yahweh had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month... So the people went out, and brought them, and made themselves booths... for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day the children of Israel had not done so". Ezra had not exactly been very effective in teaching the law of God about the feasts during those 13 years [unless we take Neh. 8 as being misplaced and referring to Ezra's return].

Ezra 8:32 We came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days- This was the result of God's "hand" upon them (:31). When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10). he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7).

Perhaps they remained stationary for three days to praise and thank God; for they had likewise begun their journey with three days of fasting and prayer (:15). So often we forget to thank God with the same intensity with which we asked Him for help. It was this three days of praise which may have inspired Nehemiah to do likewise on arrival in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11). The Godly examples and prayer patterns of others really should affect us, and our examples likewise influence others.

Ezra 8:33 On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed in the house of our God into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, the Levite- Transparency is clearly the order of the day- for I have suggested that there was over 130 million British pounds [2018] worth of gold and silver being dealt with. We note that the money was counted by two priests and two Levites. Again we see the Levites paralleled with the priests. This was a particular theme with Ezra; see on :15,24,31.

Ezra 8:34 Everything was counted and weighed: and all the weight was written at that time- I suggested above that the total value of all this would probably have worked out at something like 130 million British pounds as of 2018. To carry all this in cash without military escort, and to arrive with it all safely after a four month journey through Bedouin and robber infested territory, was an amazing miracle. It would have made the temple storerooms a place of great value.

Ezra 8:35 The children of the captivity, who had come out of exile, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs and twelve male goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering to Yahweh- The exiles who returned are presented as "all Israel". "Israel" is used by Ezra to refer to the exiles (Ezra 8:25). It could be argued that Ezra was seeking to redefine "Israel" as the exiles who had returned. The ten tribes and the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile, he considers as not Israel. It is mythical to think that the land was emptied of all Jews at the time of the exile. Archeological and Biblical evidence is quite the opposite. Archaeological evidence is that there were around 350,000 Jews in the land before the exile, and 200,000 remained, although all outside

Jerusalem. Persian records speak of the province of Yehud [Judah] as having a significant Jewish population especially in the towns not destroyed by the Babylonian invasions. The Biblical numbers of exiles don't come to more than 20,000. We recall in Ezra 4:1-4 that the exiles insisted that they alone would rebuild the temple, and refused assistance from anyone else. There is no record of them mixing with the existing Jewish community in the land. That existing Jewish community became known as the Samaritans- whom the Lord clearly had a lot of time for. So Ezra's zeal had an undercurrent of exclusiveness and divisiveness, mistakenly reasoning that ethnic purity was critical for definition as "Israel". Even though the returned exiles were not ethnically pure anyway. Or we could reason that his thinking was that the twelve goats implied that Israel and Judah were to be united as one at this time. This was the potential implicit in the restoration prophecies. See on Ezra 6:17. Despite all the great offering of such huge wealth, they offered sin offerings, ever aware that donation of wealth alone cannot reconcile us to God. And Ezra clearly had in mind that the community had not repented as they had been intended to. Many had returned to their land but not to their God. The way these sacrifices match those offered by Zerubbabel's group (Ezra 6:17) may have hinted that they had not devoted themselves to the work as they ought to have done.

Ezra 8:36 They delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps, and to the governors beyond the River: and they furthered the people and God's house-

Here we have the strongest hint that the Persian support for Ezra was done for political reasons. Ezra's mission was indeed to further God's people and His temple, but the deal was that he reinforced Persian power and civil law in their empire. Clearly, Yehud [Judah] was to remain under strong Persian control, and Ezra went along with that. We note that Nehemiah after him was likewise the Persian appointed colonial governor of Yehud. In his memoir known as the book of Ezra, Ezra is asking us to join him in pondering whether he had been right to accept material help from Persia in order to teach God's law to the people in Judah, whilst at the same time reinforcing Persian control over Judah. Haggai a generation earlier had rebuked Zerubbabel: "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots, and those who ride in them. The horses and their riders will come down, everyone by the sword of his brother" (Hag. 2:21,22). I take this as a rebuke, because Zerubbabel was being told that Yahweh would bring down the Persian empire, whose puppet and "governor" he was. The focus of God's people should have been upon the total freedom and glory of Zion, inhabited by the returned exiles, as spoken of in Isaiah.

This support of the temple and kingdom work by leaders of the Gentiles was a small fulfilment of the restoration prophecies about this. But those prophecies featured the full reestablishment of God's Kingdom, with these leaders themselves becoming proselytes and carrying the Jews back to their land. They were to lift up the people (s.w. "furthered") and bring them back (Is. 49:22). This just didn't happen, because the Jews and Gentiles were not repentant, and Ezra in any case was seeking to only reestablish the old covenant and had little interest in accepting the new covenant, or obeying the laws of the temple system as given in Ez. 40-48.

EZRA CHAPTER 9

Ezra 9:1 Now when these things were done- There is an intended anticlimax here, a juxtaposition of God's amazing grace to the exiles in Ezra 8 now contrasted with their fall into sin. The same thing happens at Acts 5:1, and often in the Biblical record. The "things" may refer to Ezra 8:36, where Ezra has to deliver Persian civil law to the local satraps. I have discussed earlier how this was part of the deal Ezra cut with the emperor- to be supported in teaching Jewish religious law to the Jews, whilst enforcing Persian civil law. He came to Jerusalem on the 4th day of the fifth month (Ezra 7:8; 8:33); but called an assembly of the Jews on the 20th day of the ninth month (Ezra 10:9). We note that he gave priority to establishing Persian civil law before moving on to teach God's law. And the first thing he did was to attack the issue of Jewish intermarriage; it's as if he had an agenda and this was at the top of it.

The princes drew near to me saying, The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands and are following their abominations, even those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites-

The majority of Ezra's memoir is in Ezra 9,10 and concerns how he dealt with intermarriage. I think he was haunted by it. The most significant thing he did was to break up 112 families, and he realizes he was likely wrong to have done it. And the problem reappeared 13 years later in Nehemiah's time- so he achieved nothing. The drawing near of the princes was surely not to inform Ezra of something of which he wasn't aware. Rather it was to pressure Ezra. For Ezra surely knew of the intermarriages- if he was indeed teaching the torah to the Jews, he must have realized that some of them were married to "foreign women". Therefore his casting of himself down in shock horror surely has an element of the theatrical to it. He will record in Ezra 10 how it was Shecaniah who suggested the idea of divorce- and again, Ezra goes along with him. Likewise here, it seems his response is due to the pressure from "the princes", rather than from his own conscience.

See on :14; Ezra 6:21. Ez. 42:20 commands for the restored Kingdom: “He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a *separation* between the sanctuary and the profane place”. This reflected the difference between God’s people, His “sanctuary” (Ps. 114:2), and the surrounding world. But Judah did not ‘separate’ themselves from the surrounding tribes but instead married them and worshipped their idols (s.w. Ezra 9:1 “The people of Israel... have not separated themselves from the people of the land, doing according to their *abominations*... for they have taken of their daughters for themselves”). The same word for “abominations” occurs in the same context in Mal. 2:11: “Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god”. Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the “abominations” [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

The "people of the land" ["lands" is not a helpful rendering] are not the same as the Canaanites, etc. They are accused of doing "like" what those people did. Many of those nations listed didn't exist in Ezra's time. In Ezra 9:1, the people of the land were doing the abominations of the original inhabitants of the land- that's the point. The term "people[s] of the land", *am ha'eretz*, is used of the large community of Jews who had remained in the land after the exile (s.w. "none remained, except the poorest sort

of the people of the land", 2 Kings 24:14; "the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to work the vineyards and fields", 2 Kings 25:12). They were "the people that remained in the land" over whom Gedaliah was made ruler (2 Kings 25:22). "The people of the land" is a term specifically used of Judah (2 Chron. 23:13,20,21; 26:21;33:25; 36:1). Only a few chapters after those usages, we find "the people of the land" opposing the Judean exiles in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 4:4), although they were worshipping the same God of Israel since the king of Assyria had brought them "up" to live in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:2). We note that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were bound up with Chronicles in the original scrolls; and there are so many similarities of language and style between Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah that it would seem they are from the same author (possibly Ezra). So the term "people of the land" is likely to have the same meaning in Ezra as it does in Chronicles- where it means "the people of Judah living in their land". Admittedly, the term "peoples of the land" can elsewhere refer to the tribes who lived in Israel before the Hebrews arrived- as well as the Jews who lived in the land. But the context surely requires us to read it in the latter sense. Modern ultra Orthodox Jews use the Ezra 9,10 precedent to argue against marriage to other Jews who aren't also ultra Orthodox.

Ezra was trying to resolve this problem by redefining God's people to exclude those Jews who had remained in the land. His concern was because the Jewish exiles who had returned under Zerubbabel had married the Jews who were already in the land. And so he creates a situation whereby if they didn't separate themselves from the peoples of the land, then they would be separated from the congregation of God's people (:8 s.w.). It is of course so that we cannot be both with the world and with God. But Ezra is legalistically playing with definitions, and trying to label the spiritually second class people of God as in fact not being His people at all. Indeed God had separated His people from the other peoples (1 Kings 8:53; Lev. 20:24), but they had to make the freewill choice to separate themselves (Ezra 10:11). If they did, then God was working with them to separate them from the world and unto Himself. By not doing so, they were precluding His help and denying fellowship with Him. But Ezra is making a fundamental error in defining who is "in" and "out" of God's people. And ignoring the huge sins and impurity of the Jews whilst in exile, as documented by Ezekiel and Isaiah.

A case can be made that "the peoples of the lands" refers to the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile, and had assimilated with the practices of the Gentiles living there. This group later became the Samaritans. There was tension between those who had returned from exile, and those Jews who had remained in the land at the time of the exile. Those who remained had been given "fields and vineyards" by the Babylonians, and those properties had belonged to the wealthy who had gone into exile. Surely at their return, the exiles were interested in getting back their ancestral lands- which had been given to the poor Jews who remained in the land (Jer. 39:10). Ezra is now effectively driving them out from the community of what he thought was the true Israel. He threatens them with huge punishments if they didn't divorce their wives; "all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the assembly " (Ezra 10:8). This was effectively railroading them into conformity, and dividing the community. In this case, Ezra was arguing for a hyper strict interpretation of God's law, far beyond what Moses had actually taught. Moses himself had married a Gentile then divorced and remarried another Gentile. Israelite soldiers could marry Gentile virgins they captured. There was no Mosaic consequence for marriage to a Gentile, nor do we see it ever punished in this way. Ezra in this case considered that there was a true, pure Israel and a corrupted Israel. The truth is that the returned exiles

were not very pure at all. In Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel had rebuked the exiles in Babylon for being themselves impure and acting like their Gentile ancestors: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Jerusalem: Your birthplace is in the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was your father, and your mother was a Hittite" (Ez. 16:3). The exiles were spiritually Canaanite, so their demand that the other Jews divorce their "Canaanite" wives was hypocritical. And the hypocrisy is crowned by the fact that 13 years later, Neh. 9:2 records how again the Jews had intermarried with local Gentiles: "The seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers". They lament that their fathers had sinned in this way too. Isaiah laments the deep hypocrisy amongst the exiles, casting out their brethren and refusing to worship with them because they were impure: "Your brothers who hate you, who cast you out for My name's sake... who say, 'Stand by yourself, don't come near to me, for I am holier than you'" (Is. 66:5; 65:5). In that context, God had said that He dwelt in the hearts of those who trembled at His word (Is. 66:2), and that term is only used about those who trembled at God's word and divorced their wives (Ezra 9:4; 10:3). They didn't need to do this. They should have repented of their marriages, quit idolatry, and taught their wives and children Yahweh's way. But they were given false guilt by Ezra, and accepted it. But their trembling at the principles of God's word was such that God decided to dwell in them, not in the rebuilt temple. He so respected their humility, even though they had been spiritually abused by Ezra, and were pawns in the game of church politics- i.e. Ezra's desire to build a 'pure Israel' and excommunicate the rest. The tensions between the returned exiles, and the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile. So it is with the church of today. It is the spiritually abused little ones who are the ones God dwells in. Whilst according to Isaiah, the elders who abuse them have only condemnation to look forward to. We think of the widow who gave her last pennies to a corrupt priesthood in the Lord's time, and those today who are spiritually abused into giving their homes to corrupt church leaderships.

We note that Nehemiah thought that divorcing a Gentile wife meant being cleansed from foreigners (Neh. 13:30 "Thus I cleansed them from all foreigners", a comment made with no reference as to whether they were idolaters or not). This implies he thought interracial marriage was a defilement of itself. He considered that the Levites and priests who had done this had thus defiled the priesthood. But the law of Moses doesn't actually stipulate what should happen to a Levite who married a Gentile. All we know is that priests were prohibited from marrying prostitutes or divorced women (Lev. 21:7). In the restored temple, the sons of Zadok were to marry Israelites: "Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her who is divorced; but they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel" (Ez. 44:22). But Nehemiah applies this to all Priests and Levites, not just Zadokites, and simply ignores the fact that in no way had the Jews rebuilt the temple according to the scenario in Ezekiel 40-48. He was twisting scripture, seeking to extract a principle from a highly specific ruling. He wrongly assumed that the Jewish blood line was pure- when it never was. For intermarriage had been so common. The Jews came to teach that intermarriage was wrong because the blood line to Messiah must be kept pure. Quite ignoring all the previous Gentile intermarriage in the Jewish gene pool. The Lord's genealogy includes Gentiles and whores... how wrong they were.

Ezra 9:2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, so

that the holy seed have mixed themselves with the peoples of the lands. Yes, the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this trespass-

Ezra appears to present the returning exiles as somewhat more holy than they were: "the holy seed". They had been idolaters in Babylon, for part of their condemnation had been to serve foreign gods in the land of their captivity, and Ezekiel had lamented the exiles' idolatry. Whilst on one hand Ezra presents as sincere, his argument appears to be that the Jews were somehow "holy seed" and intermarriage made them unholy. Israel's history was full of intermarriage, as can be seen from the Lord's genealogy. The seed [s.w.] of Abraham was to include many nations. The question was whether they were spiritually corrupted. But the language of "holy seed" veers towards wrongly condemning interracial marriage for the sake of it. Earlier, some had been told they were not of Israel because they couldn't prove their genealogy, their "seed": "They could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel" (Ezra 2:59 AV). But the Israelite community was open to Egyptians joining them when they left Egypt and became a nation, indeed they are described as a "mixed multitude" in Ex. 12:38; and Paul's argument from Melchizedek is that lack of genealogy doesn't preclude from relationship with Yahweh. It seems Ezra is alluding to the prohibition for the High Priest to marry a Gentile: "a virgin of his own people shall he take as a wife. He shall not profane his seed [cp. "the holy seed"] among his people" (Lev. 21:14,15). But he is expanding this to apply to all the people. He certainly appears to be looking for an excuse to condemn a certain group of Jews to exclusion from the community. This is not how to use scripture... as the "scribe", he knew scripture better than the rest of the probably illiterate community, especially the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile. And he was abusing that, taking half a verse about the High Priest and applying it to them all, and then adding the sanction of losing all their possessions and being expelled from the community of God's people. That is quite without any Mosaic support. Ezra's mishandling of scripture clearly had an agenda, and it makes his subsequent 'grief' at the intermarriages appear as possibly theatrics. He appears to be shocked and surprised- when surely he was fully aware of the situation ahead of time. The idea of mixing seed is that the fruit resultant from it will not be legitimate. Hence the demand they abandon their children as well as the wives. But the Lord's genealogy shows how wrong is that thinking. He was the purest seed, but His genealogy involved prostitutes and Gentiles like Ruth and Rahab. This hatred of intermarriage was likely picked up from the Persians; for the Bible doesn't teach this idea of racial corruption or purity. "Israel" began as an ethnically mongrel race, with Ephraim and Manasseh the descendants of an Egyptian woman and plenty of other intermarriage. The Zoroastrian community and religion taught against any ethnic intermarriage, and that was perhaps one reason why the Jewish exile community didn't much intermarry with the Persians- because the Persians were against ethnic intermarriage.

It could even be argued from Is. 6:11-13 that the "Holy seed" were to be the remnant of Jews who remained in the land, after the others had been taken into exile or killed: "Until the cities are waste without inhabitant and houses without man and the land becomes utterly waste, and Yahweh has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. If there is a tenth left in it, that also will in turn be consumed: as a terebinth, and as an oak, whose stump remains when they are felled; so the holy seed is its stump". But Ezra was arguing that the returned exiles were the holy seed, and the Jews who had remained in the land were not to be married nor accepted into "Israel" lest the holy seed of *the exiles* be contaminated. He has it all the wrong way around. Likewise Mal. 2:14 says that Yahweh was seeking to

develop a holy seed, and the sexual behaviour of the exiles was hindering His efforts. The holiness of the seed was not automatic nor ethnic, as Ezra is supposing. Judah once were holy to Yahweh (Jer. 2:3), but not any more.

The priests and rulers were guilty of the idol abominations mentioned in :1. This is the picture we have in Isaiah, of the exiles committing idolatry in their rebuilt temple and yet condemning their brothers.

These relationships and children are defined as being part of mixing with the abominations of the peoples (:1). And "abominations" always refers to idol worship. So it could be that the relationships with "their daughters" were a result of sleeping with cult prostitutes and having children thereby. There was therefore far more to what happened than simply marrying out of the faith. To 'take daughters for themselves' may not mean marriage itself, but could refer to the kind of cultic relationships which went along with idol worship at the shrines. This is why the separation from these women with whom they had had children (Ezra 10:3) would not then be quite the same as breaking up marriage and full blown family life. Israel are only specifically called "the holy seed" in Is. 6:13, where the idea was that after their experience of judgment, those who survived would be a "holy seed" who would shoot forth the Messianic "Branch" from the decaying stump of the house of David. But now the "holy seed" had corrupted themselves; for they were the minority preserved from judgment, and now they had corrupted their holiness. So the possibilities of the reestablishment of the Kingdom of God in Israel which the prophets were full of... was now precluded. They failed to see themselves and their offspring as anything so "holy" to Yahweh. This is the root of all sin- a failure to appreciate our holy standing in His eyes, our sanctification in Christ.

Ezra 9:3 When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down confounded-

Ezra's actions betray genuinely deep surprise and personal grief. Surprise and grief are the themes of other incidents when a man tears his robes: Reuben rent his clothes on not finding Joseph (Gen. 37:29); Jacob rent his ‘garments’ on seeing Joseph’s coat (Gen. 37:34); Joseph’s brethren rent their clothes when the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack (Gen. 44:13): Joshua rent his clothes after the defeat at Ai (Josh. 7:6); Job rent his mantle on hearing of his children’s death (Job 1:20), and his friends rent each one his mantle when they saw his shocking state (Job 2:12). These were all signs of deep grief and surprise. We of course wonder whether the surprise element was somehow 'put on' by Ezra. For he surely knew the idolatrous state of things amongst the exiles. "Confounded" is the same word translated 'destroyed / desolated' (Dan. 9:27; 11:31). His heart was truly broken by others' failures. And that surely must be read positively, for it reflects his passion for God's glory in His people. Otherwise he would have just focused on his own personal spirituality. Here we have a challenge to 'out of church' believers, who say they focus on their own faith, and lament the apostacy of others by simply keeping away from others. To have no heart for people, not shedding a tear for others' spiritual state... is not the spirit of our Lord.

The temple still lay “waste” (Hag. 1:4,9) just as it had lain “desolate” [s.w. Jer. 33:10,12] after the Babylonian destruction. The ‘restoration’ was in fact not really a restoration at all, in God’s eyes. Thus Ezra sat down desolate [s.w. "confounded"] at the news of Judah’s apostasy in having children by the surrounding women; using the very same word as frequently used to describe the ‘desolate’ / 'confounded' Jerusalem that was to be rebuilt (Ezra 9:3 cp. Is. 49:8,19; 54:3; 61:4). He tore his priestly garment (Ezra 9:3), as if he realized that all Ezekiel’s prophesies about those priestly

garments now couldn't come true (s.w. Ez. 42:14; 44:17,19). Is. 58:12,13 prophesied that the acceptable rebuilding of Zion was dependent upon Judah keeping the Sabbath acceptably; and yet Nehemiah's record makes clear their tragic abuse of the Sabbath at the time of the restoration; and this therefore meant that the rebuilding of the temple and city were not going to fulfill the Messianic prophecies about them which existed.

The Lord would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if he has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:3 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26).

Ezra 9:4 Then were assembled to me all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat confounded until the evening offering- See on :7. The double reference in Is. 66:1-5 to trembling at Yahweh's word is a definite prediction of the situation in Ezra 9:4; 10:3, where the same rare Hebrew word is used regarding how those of the exiles who repented for their marriage out of the Faith trembled before the word in repentance. Then, at that point, the Kingdom blessings could have been brought about, as described in the rest of Is. 66. But again, there was no staying power in their repentance. By Nehemiah's time, and by Malachi's time even after his, marriage out of the Faith was still their weakness.

I have argued on Is. 56:4 that actually the better response would have been not to divorce those women, but to lead them into covenant with Israel's God. For Isaiah 56 offers a place amongst God's people to Gentiles and eunuchs, those previously excluded. So these who trembled at God's word responded to the word, but in a less than ideal way. Still God was thrilled with them.

As discussed on Ezra 10:3, the trembling at God's words was largely from false guilt. But these who had been spiritually abused are those in whom Yahweh would dwell, even if they had been given a very distorted picture of God's word; and their hypocritical leaders would be condemned (Is. 66:1-5).

Ezra 9:5 At the evening offering I arose up from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn; and I fell on my knees, and spread out my hands to Yahweh my God- The "humiliation" may refer to fasting. He felt so identified with his sinful people. But I discussed on :2 and elsewhere how Ezra may have had an agenda- to excommunicate the Jews who were in the land, along with the exiles he thought were spiritually substandard, and present his group of returned exiles as the one true Israel. In this case, it's possible that his behaviour here was at least partly theatrics. Making a big expression of shock and horror at something he surely knew was happening before he encountered it. Unfortunately, the language of praying with spread out hands and on the knees is exactly that of Solomon at the dedication of the temple God never wanted and later cursed (1 Kings 8:54); and Solomon was not sincere, and was also guilty of theatrics. But this is Ezra's memoir, he is the author, and he draws us in to this question of to what degree was he sincere. He was, to an extent. But then there was theatricism. We likewise have to look back and search our motives, for human motivation is so often mixed.

"Rose up / arose" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command

to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). Perhaps Ezra was motivated by these prophecies to now "arise", hoping that somehow his people would still be raised up. But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. Ezra was driven to appeal to God directly and solely from himself with his priestly garments now in ruins. I have noted earlier that his focus upon teaching the law of Moses was rather missing the point- that the old covenant had been broken by Judah, and they could only throw themselves upon the grace of the new covenant.

Ezra 9:6 and I said, My God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have increased over our head, and our guiltiness has grown up to the heavens- The description of Ezekiel's Temple was to be given to the captives in Babylon by Ezekiel, to lead them to repentance and to assure them of what could be if they repented. Then when the invitation to leave Babylon and return came in the time of Ezra, they ought to have been motivated to return to the land and build the temple which Ezekiel had explained to them. But sadly most of them weren't very deeply motivated at all; they wanted to build a temple, but not to the extent Ezekiel had outlined. Consider in this light Ez. 43:10,11: "Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them". *Then*, when the temple was built, they were to be obedient in all the ways in which they hadn't been obedient in the past, with the result that they were now sitting in captivity (Ez. 44:24). This was the tragedy felt by Ezra, when he realized the exiles were not living as they should be: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased" (Ezra 9:6). Israel would only be able to build the temple properly if they were "ashamed of their iniquities" (Ez. 43:10). And Ezra knew they weren't. And thus he sought to take upon himself that shame, believing that God would accept *his* shame on behalf of the people. Note in passing how he speaks of blushing before God. You only blush in someone's presence. And this was how close and real Ezra felt his God to be. Perhaps this repentance of a remnant explains why in fact the record of Ezekiel's temple was written down at all- for Ez. 43:11 seems to say that it would be written down *if* Judah were ashamed of their sins. Ezekiel's opening chapters record him being forewarned by God that they would not generally be responsive to his ministry; and yet some were, like Ezra, and maybe this was eagerly seized upon by God as the basis for allowing the writing down and preservation of the specifications we have in Ez. 40-48.

Isaiah 45 is as clear a prophecy as any could wish. God categorically stated that Cyrus would be raised up by Him in order to release the captives in Babylon, and to enable the building of Jerusalem (Is. 45:12); all because God had formed the land [AV "earth"] of Israel to be inhabited and not to be left without His people dwelling upon it. And this happened; the captives were released (although most preferred to stay put in Babylon), and the building of Jerusalem was enabled (although the work was not done very enthusiastically by Judah, and they preferred to build their own houses rather than Yahweh's). But the prophecy goes on in Is. 45:13-17: "I have

raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God... They shall be *ashamed*, and also *confounded*, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be *ashamed* nor *confounded* world without end". But the Egyptians and Ethiopians didn't come and fall down before Judah, as the Queen of Sheba had before Solomon. Nor did they accept Yahweh as the only God, and ditch their idols. Instead, the returned Jews worshipped the idols of Egypt, and married their women (Ezra 9:1). And thus Israel *were* ashamed and confounded in the future. The same Hebrew words for "ashamed [and] confounded" occur in Ezra 9:6, where as a result of Ezra realizing that Judah had married the local women and broken covenant with Yahweh, he admits: "I am *ashamed* and *blush* [s.w. 'confounded'] to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased....". The words of Is. 45 could have had their fulfilment in the time of Cyrus; the surrounding nations could have come and worshipped before Judah, and the whole earth quit their idols and look unto Yahweh as a just God and a saviour. But Judah would not. Judah in the new temple would not "defile" Yahweh's Name any more (Ez. 43:7,8); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodied and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices (Ez. 43:7); but now, Judah thought they were above God's law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies (Ez. 43:9); but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration.

The same phrase translated "ashamed and blush / be confounded" is used of condemnation (Is. 45:16; Ps. 35:4). Ezra felt condemned with the sinners, even though marriage to a Gentile is not necessarily going to bring condemnation. But he felt it did, and wrong as he was, he lived what he believed and believed what he lived. He had integrity, despite ignoring much of God's word. Ezra's expression of shame and confusion is that of Ez. 36:32: "Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel". The Jews, by contrast, "were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer. 6:15; 8:12).

The word "trespass" is that used in Lev. 4:3 concerning the case where a priest trespassed and brought guilt on the people. The path forward in that case was for sacrifice to be offered. No talk of excommunication or confiscation of his property. But Ezra never asks the repentant Jews to offer sacrifice to cover their sins... if a leader of the people sinned, and there were leaders who had married Gentiles, the law required a special offering. But there are no such offerings, just the "works" of divorce. Quite possibly because Ezra failed to see in the blood of the sacrifices any prophecy of the Lord's blood.

Ezra 9:7 Since the days of our fathers we have been exceeding guilty to this day; and for our iniquities we, our kings and our priests, have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder and to confusion of face, as it is this day- The sins of those who returned are styled "the transgression of those that had been carried away" (Ezra 9:4). Yet those who returned to the land

weren't mainly the generation who had been carried away. The intended confusion is surely to suggest that those who returned committed the same sins as had led Judah into captivity a generation earlier. And Ezra comments on this fact here in his subsequent prayer. He feels shame of face just as his people did.

Ezra 9:8 Now for a little moment grace has been shown from Yahweh our God, to leave us a remnant to escape- Perhaps he saw the "little moment" as the time between the exiles leaving Babylon and Babylon's much threatened judgment and obliteration. See on :13. Ezra saw that “little moment" or "space” as a time when they received *grace*; he understood the prophecy of the figs in Jer. 24, that it was only through the captivity and the fact God had graciously not destroyed them but rather preserved them there, that there was the opportunity for a remnant to re-establish the Kingdom. What may appear to some as forsaking is in fact God’s grace to us, when spiritually discerned- whether it be deep within our own lives, or in the state of affairs upon this planet. Yet it should be noted that the prophecy of Jer. 24:6,7 about the good figs seems not to have come true at the restoration- although it could potentially have done so.

And to give us a nail in His holy place- I submit that the Messianic prophecies of the restoration prophets *could* have had their fulfilment in Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel, or some other Messianic figure at that time. Everything was made possible to enable this- Joshua, who couldn’t prove his Levitical genealogy, was given “a place of access” amongst the priesthood, those who “stood” before the Lord (Zech. 3:7 RV). Ezra thanked God that they had returned and that they had “a nail in his holy place” (Ezra 9:8), a reference surely to a Messiah figure whom he felt to be among them, the “nail in a sure place” of Is. 22:23. According to Mt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27, Zerubbabel was the Prince of Judah, and the rightful heir to David’s throne. But due to his weakness, the fulfilment was deferred to Jesus.

The sense of the Hebrew seems to be as GNB "you have been gracious to us and have let some of us escape from slavery and live in safety in this holy place". LXX "to give us an establishment in the place of his sanctuary". Ezra's focus was on the return of the people to the temple, to the holy place; whereas clearly enough, the desire of the majority was to get land for their own farms and houses outside of Jerusalem.

That our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage- Blindness had been their punishment for not wanting to see; and despite little evidence that they did want to see, God was trying to open their eyes all the same, and to give them revival, new life, in bondage. For they were still in bondage to the Persians and were not independent of them. But they had spurned all that huge grace.

Ezra feels that the exiles have been given a revival in their bondage. Perhaps he felt the spirit of life had been breathed into the dead bones of the exiles (Ez. 37:5-10); the prayer of the exiles "Will You not revive us again?" (Ps. 85:16) had been heard. God had been willing to "revive the spirit of the humble" amongst the exiles (Is. 57:15). Man can be given the life of the Spirit, but then preclude the working of the Spirit and quench that life. The Galatians began in the Spirit, but turned to the flesh.

The gift of light from God meant His face shining, which was exactly what the Psalms of exile continually beg for- for God to make His face to shine upon His people and restore them. Ezra clearly felt that these prayers had been answered, but intermarriage had as it were wasted the answer. Just as we can waste the gifts of spiritual strength. "Arise, shine, for your light is come" (Is. 60:1) had had a potential fulfilment. But

their worldliness had stopped it. Daniel had prayed for God's face to shine (Dan. 9:17), and it had done.

Ezra repeatedly speaks of the returned exiles as "the remnant" (:8,13,14,15). This is the classic language of the religious cult- we are the remnant, those alone who are faithful, with the majority of God's people unfaithful. But the remnant were to be those who repented and accepted the new covenant (Am. 5:15; Mic. 7:18; Jer. 23:3; 31:7)- and the returned exile community, didn't do this. Indeed, "the remnant of Judah" is a term multiple times used in Jeremiah of the community of Jews who remained in the land after the exile. But Jeremiah is at pains to reapply this term to the returned exiles. He was seeking to redefine "the remnant" as the returned exiles. And he uses his public prayer as an opportunity to do this. This is not to say that Ezra's prayer was totally insincere. This is his memoir, and he is drawing us in to the consideration of how sincere his prayer had been. Parts of it were, but there were unspiritual elements within it.

Ezra 9:9 For we are bondservants; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage- Although the Apocryphal book of Baruch isn't inspired, it gives a significant window into the mindset of the exiles in Babylon. Baruch 1:10 mentions how the attitude was that the majority wanted to send funds to support the 'good work' going on in Judah- but didn't want to return there themselves. Like the book of Esther, this indicates that the exiles had soon quit languishing by the rivers of Babylon, and had quickly acquired wealth and some degree of prosperity. Inspired prophecies had warned them of the fall of Babylon, and their need to flee out of it and return to Judah. And yet Baruch 1:12 records the exiles praying "that we may live long under the protective shadow of [the] king of Babylon". This is in sad contrast to Daniel's prophecies that the sheltering tree of Babylon was to be cut down! There ought to have been an urgency about the need to flee from Babylon. Zech. 2:10 speaks of the need to "flee" and "escape"- the language of crisis. And the call "Ho!" means quite literally "Hey!!". The urgency to flee was spiritual rather than physical- for there's no evidence that when Babylon fell to the Persians, the Jews were punished. Indeed they appear [from Esther] to have prospered even more. Hence the urgent appeal was to flee from the spiritual crisis which they faced in Babylon. And yet they didn't perceive the danger, just as so many today don't. For the call to leave Babylon is applied in New Testament passages like 2 Cor. 6 to our call to leave the world in which we live. The urgency of 'fleeing' from Babylon was understood by Nehemiah, when he referred to those who had returned to the land as those who has "escaped" from Babylon (Neh. 1:2)- even though they had returned with every blessing from the authorities. He perceived as few did the vital danger of remaining in the soft life of Babylon. Ezra likewise had referred to the Jews in Babylon as those "in bondage... bondmen" (Ezra 9:9)- when historical records, as well as the book of Esther and the fact Nehemiah the Jew was the king's cupbearer, show that the Jews were very far from being servants in Babylonian society. Yet Ezra perceived the spiritual poverty and servanthood of remaining in that affluent society.

*But has extended loving kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins- "*To give us a reviving" uses the same word for "put" when we read of God putting a new heart and spirit in His revived people if they entered the new covenant at the restoration: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your

uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you" (Ez. 36:27-29). They revived the stones out of the heaps (Neh. 4:2). A new spirit was potentially given to them, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Neh. 2:12 s.w.). But this didn't force them to be obedient. They chose not to be.

Ezekiel 37 had its primary fulfilment in the return under Ezra. Then, Israel was given "a quickening" (Ezra 9:9 LXX), in fulfilment of how the dry bones in captivity were revived. At that time, Judah *could* have fully revived. But most of them chose to stay in Babylon. If there had been a full revival, then the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 would have taken place. It has been suggested that there was a primary fulfilment of Ezekiel 38/9 in an unrecorded invasion of the land at the time of the restoration. However, historical evidence for this is severely lacking . And yet the Scythian tribes such as Magog, Gomer, Meshech, Tubal etc. are all recorded as being the scourge of the Middle East at that time. They were marauding into more prosperous areas "to take a spoil", especially "cattle and goods", at around Ezekiel's time. They could so easily have turned their attentions toward Israel. That invasion *could* have happened; but it didn't. But because Israel were not faithful the temple was not built properly, and therefore the Ezekiel 38 invasion didn't happen, and therefore Yahweh's intervention and establishment of His Kingdom as described in Ezekiel 39 didn't occur.

And to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem- Zech. 2:4 had foretold that "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein", seeing that Yahweh Himself would be as a wall of fire around her to protect her from her adversaries (Ezra had recognized this promise, that God would be a wall to them- Ezra 9:9). Note how this prophecy is introduced by an Angel with a measuring reed measuring out the rebuilt Zion (Zech. 2:1), just as we have in Ezekiel 40. But Judah disbelieved the promise of a Divine wall of fire, and insisted on building a physical wall to protect them; and the record in Nehemiah has plenty of reference to their setting up of bars and gates in their fear (Neh. 3:3,6,13-15). By doing so they disallowed the fulfilment of Ezekiel 38:11, and thereby precluded what was prophesied as subsequently following. If they had trusted Him and paid their tithes, their cattle would have multiplied, and the Scythian tribes would have come down to seek to take them, as Ezekiel 38:12,13 foretold. But as it happened, their cattle were diseased and their agriculture not blessed because of their dilatory attention to Yahweh's house that lay waste (Haggai 1:11). So therefore there was no invasion, and no victory against the nations, and no Kingdom established at that time.

The wall may refer to the protection of the Persian empire whilst the temple was rebuilt. The constant mention of being still in servitude to Babylon / Persia may have been politically motivated. Ezra, after all, was funded by Persia and was also tasked with extending Persian civil law in Judah. He knew his prayer was going to be reported back to his Persian superiors. I have earlier discussed whether Ezra was in fact right to accept Persian support for his spiritual ministry in return for enforcing their political control over Judah. His description [in a prayer to God!] of the Persians as the "wall" of Jerusalem seems politically motivated. Had they broken free of Persian control, Yahweh would have been a wall of fire to Jerusalem.

Ezra 9:10 Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments- Again we note Ezra's total identity with his sinful people. This is proof enough that there is no "guilt by association" as believed by so many groups.

Rather there is to be the very opposite- freewill association of ourselves with the guilt of sinners, that we might thereby appeal to them and intercede for them. And this was in fact the very basis of our redemption through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Ezra 9:11 which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets saying, 'The land, to which you go to possess it, is an unclean land through the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, through their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their filthiness-

Ezra appears to make a quotation ["Saying..."]. But actually he is conflating various words from various parts of the law of Moses. This kind of approach gets dangerously close to making our interpretation equal to God's word and law.

The people were warned that the temple had been destroyed because of their previous "abominations", and that the rebuilt temple was not to feature any such abominations (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13). "let it suffice you of your abominations" they were told- and were then told not to allow the uncircumcised into the temple, as they had been doing (Ez. 44:6,9). This sounds as if the prophecy of Ezekiel was more command than prediction- to those of his own day. But they returned, and committed the abominations [s.w.] of the Gentiles (Ezra 9:1,11,14) and married their daughters; to the extent that Malachi commented upon this: "Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination [s.w.] is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Mal. 2:11).

Ezra 9:12 Now therefore don't give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters to your sons, nor seek their peace or their prosperity forever; that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever'- This command directly addressed the human tendency to think that 'it won't happen to me / my family'. The "abominations" of the land (:11) were idolatry. Intermarriage was seen as inevitably involving the people in idolatry, as we saw in :2,3. The implication is that marriage is the most intimate of human relationships, and the spiritually weaker party will almost inevitably bring down the spiritually stronger party to their level. Solomon is the parade example. But it seems the lesson is never learnt- because there is an inbuilt tendency in human nature to take the easiest way. The argument was that they should not "seek their peace or their prosperity forever" because that phrase is found in Dt. 23:7 about Moabite and Ammonite *males*. But the case of Ruth the Moabite shows this was not to be applied to all Moabites. Ezra seems hyper eager to find a justification for making the Jews divorce local *women* whom they had married (:2). And to then threaten those who didn't do so with exclusion from the Jewish community and total confiscation of all their property. This was extreme railroading. And it didn't work because 13 years later in Nehemiah there was still the problem of alien marriage.

Ezra 9:13 After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You, our God, has punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and has given us such a remnant-

Ezra's argument is that Judah had previously sinned in the matter of marriage; he calls it their "evil deeds" and "great guilt". But the extensive prophetic material which is so critical of Judah never mentions intermarriage as Judah's sin; rather was it the sin of idolatry. Ezra is conflating idolatry with intermarriage. Whilst the two are related, as Deuteronomy warned, intermarriage of itself is not the sin. And the reference to

related "abominations" or idolatry is made only in :1. The reasoning throughout Ezra 9,10 and later in Nehemiah only mentions intermarriage as the great sin. We note Ezra is using his prayer to God as an opportunity to make these 'political' points. Perhaps in his memoir he is reflecting how sincere were the words of his recorded prayer of long ago...

Ezra said that God had punished them less than their iniquities deserved, somehow alluding to the prophecy of Is. 40:2, which said that at the time of Zion's restoration, God would admit to having punished her "double for all her sins". Yahweh in His love and pity felt that He had punished them twice as much as they deserved; but Ezra realized that in reality it was less than what they deserved. See on :8.

There are evident similarities between the vocabulary and style of Zechariah, Job and the prophets of the restoration. Thus both Job and Zechariah refer to the ideas of the court of Heaven, "the satan" etc. My suggestion is that Job was rewritten during the exile, hence the many points of contact between Job and Isaiah's prophecies about the restoration. When we read that Job has suffered less than his iniquities deserve (Job 11:6), this is the very term used to describe Israel's sufferings in Babylon (Ezra 9:13). Job, "the servant of the Lord", is being set up as Israel, just as that same term is used about Israel in Babylon throughout the latter part of Isaiah. Job's mockery by the Arabian friends perhaps parallels the Samaritan and Babylonian mockery of Judah; his loss of children is very much the tragedy of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians which Lamentations focuses upon. And Job's final revival and restoration after repentance would therefore speak of the blessed situation which Judah could have had at their return to the land. Job's response to the words of God and Elihu would then speak of Judah's intended repentance as a result of God's word spoken to them by prophets like Haggai and Zechariah. There are many connections between Job and the latter parts of Isaiah which speak about the restoration.

Ezra 9:14 shall we again break Your commandments, and join in affinity with the peoples that do these abominations? Wouldn't You be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape?- The covenant was not to be broken; the temple had been destroyed before because of breaking covenant with Yahweh (Ez. 44:7). But Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods (Ezra 9:1,14). They were themselves the remnant, and Ezra recognizes that now they too deserved to be destroyed, leaving God as it were with no Israel (:15). His spiritual mind however might have been driven to reason further, and perceive that indeed Israel would no longer be Yahweh's people- and therefore He would seek another people, on a different covenant basis. And that in fact was what the restoration prophets had been saying, although Ezra's obsession with the old covenant and teaching it had rather blinded him to that.

The anger of God would be with the idolatry which could well arise from intermarriage, not with the intermarriage itself: "Your daughter you shall not give to his son, nor shall you take his daughter for your son. For he will turn away your son from following me to serve other gods; so the anger of Yahweh would be kindled against you and He would destroy you quickly" (Dt. 7:3,4). "Wouldn't You be angry...?" is Ezra's imagination of God's response. I have argued elsewhere that the intermarriage itself wouldn't have caused God's wrath. This is Ezra putting words in God's mouth. And as discussed on Ezra 10:1, although his intercession was modelled

upon the prayers of Moses and Daniel before him, there was zero Divine response to him. Unlike with Moses and Daniel. He here supplies what he thinks God's response would be. And he had it wrong. Yahweh would not fry people alive for ethnic intermarriage of itself.

Ezra 9:15 Yahweh, the God of Israel, You are righteous- The repeated emphasis on "Israel" (:6) may be because Ezra was redefining "Israel" as those faithful to his particular strict interpretation of God's law. True confession of sin always involves this recognition that God is right.

For we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is this day. Behold, we are before You in our guiltiness-

"Before You" may mean he felt that they were standing already at God's judgment seat. But he may also simply refer to the fact he was praying "before the house of God'"(Ezra 10:2). In which case, he is assuming God was present and dwelling there. Despite Isaiah's clear statement that Yahweh did not dwell in the house built by the exiles, but rather in the hearts of humble individuals. The argument is that despite their sin, they were "before You", but he goes on to immediately say that "we cannot remain before You because of this". That is, Ezra argues that Yahweh was imminently going to destroy His people because some had married "out". But that is an unreasonable position. God would not destroy His people for that reason, when He has tolerated marriage to Gentiles throughout the history of His people. Ezra seems to be setting up a straw man, and then demanding radical and immediate measures to correct it lest all Israel be destroyed permanently from "before" God. This is a classic case of creating a crisis and then using it to justify quick and decisive action- when in fact the crisis has been created and such actions are politically motivated. God has protested that Israel shall always be "before" Him because of His huge love and grace for them: "Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually *before Me*" (Is. 49:16). Jer. 31:36 is clearest: "If these ordinances [of sun and moon] depart from *before Me*, says Yahweh, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation *before Me* forever". Ezra's [false] argument was that Israel were about to be destroyed, and his intercession and their immediate repentance through forced divorce were the only factors that would save the situation. I suggest that he was looking for an excuse to get exclude some from the community of "Israel". He was overlooking the repeated comfort in the recent prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, that God's love for His people was eternal: "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My loving kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, says Yahweh who has mercy on you" (Is. 54:10). "Don't you be afraid, O Jacob My servant, says Yahweh; for I am with you: for although I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, I will not make a full end of you" (Jer. 46:28).

We must soberly 'think of ourselves' as someone who has something to contribute to the rest of the body, even if first of all we are not sure what it is (Rom. 15:3-8). We feel their weaknesses as if they are our own. Self interest must die; their wellbeing becomes all consuming. This is why men like Daniel and Nehemiah could feel that "*we* have sinned..."- not '*they* have sinned'. Ezra said that because *we* have sinned, *we* cannot lift up ourselves before Yahweh. And he cast himself down before Yahweh in demonstration of how much he was with his people in this (Ezra 9:15; 10:1)!

For we cannot remain before You because of this- Is. 66:22 and Ez. 44:15 use the same word: "But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my

sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall *stand before me* [s.w. "remain before You"] to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD". But Ezra had to confess, using these very words of Isaiah and Ezekiel which he would have been familiar with, that they could not remain before Yahweh. They hadn't lived the Kingdom life, and therefore the Kingdom prophecies could not come true in them. It makes a profitable exercise to consider all the times that Ezra and Nehemiah allude to the words of Isaiah and Ezekiel. It must have been heartbreaking for them to see the possibility of fulfilment within their grasp, and yet to know that their people didn't see the wonder of it all.

"Remain before You" effectively means 'we cannot any longer be your people'. As discussed on :14, Ezra recognizes that now they too deserved to be destroyed, leaving God as it were with no Israel. His spiritual mind however might have been driven to reason further, and perceive that indeed Israel would no longer be Yahweh's people- and therefore He would seek another people, on a different covenant basis. And that in fact was what the restoration prophets had been saying, although Ezra's obsession with the old covenant and teaching it had rather blinded him to that.

"Remain" is 'stand'. But the truth is that all men sin, including Ezra, and we only stand before God by grace: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Ezra should have sought forgiveness by grace through faith, rather than thinking that divorce would resolve things with God.

EZRA CHAPTER 10

Ezra 10:1 Now while Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before God's house, there was gathered together to him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children; for the people wept very bitterly-

The words for pleading and casting oneself down in prostration are those used of Moses in his intercession for Israel after the golden calf incident (Dt. 9:18,20,25,26). The people wept at the same time on both occasions. Ezra refusing bread and water (:6) is in imitation of Moses in his great intercession (Ex. 34:28). Ezra was clearly inspired by a Biblical example of prayer. He felt God was about to reject Israel again, and that the sin of intermarriage was of the same nature as that of the golden calf. But was it? Indeed there were idolatrous connections due to the intermarriages, but as discussed earlier, intermarriage of itself was not to be rectified by divorce. Ezra was eager to imitate Moses on a surface level, but he seems to have rather ignored the precise context. For all his much vaunted teaching of Moses' law. God responded to Moses' intercession. There is a pointed silence from God to Ezra's intercession. Ezra just gets up from his knees and orders mass forced divorces and family breakups for marrying Gentiles. Ignoring the fact that the Moses whom he was so keen to emulate had divorced his Midianite wife and married an Ethiopian- with no Divine criticism nor sanction recorded. There are also many connections between Ezra's prayer of confession and intercession, and that of Daniel in Dan. 9. Again we note that there was a Divine response to Daniel's prayer- Gabriel appeared with a message in response. But no response to Ezra's. Ezra surely was aware of Daniel's prayer, a generation before him.

The bleeding hearts of Jeremiah and Moses were actually for the ecclesia. David's eyes wept "streams of tears" because Israel didn't keep the Law (Ps.

119:136); the faithful in Ezekiel's time sighed and groaned over all the abominations committed in Jerusalem (Ez. 9:4); Paul spoke "even with tears" about those in the ecclesia who lived as enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), exhorting the Corinthians to mourn for those they had to disfellowship (1 Cor. 5:2; 2 Cor. 12:21); Ezra wept for the sins of his people (Ezra 10:1). Is this attitude seen amongst us? We lament in a gossipy way the weaknesses of the brotherhood; but is there this bleeding heart for the cases we mention? Perhaps we should never think of separating from anybody unless the decision has been come to through a process of such prayerful mourning for them first. 'Casting... down' is the common Hebrew word for "fall", often used of the condemned 'falling'. Ezra felt condemned on account of his total identity with his sinful people, and yet begs for mercy and makes intercession for them. This looked forward to how the Lord Jesus felt our condemnation, even feeling forsaken by the Father (Mt. 27:46), when in fact He Himself was personally sinless. It was this extreme identification with his sinful people which resulted in Ezra eliciting repentance in his people; for they too came forth and wept as he wept, in repentance. The result of the Lord's identification with us should be likewise.

Ezra 10:2 Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land-

Shecaniah wasn't a Levite. He claims here intermarriage mean "trespass", or 'breaking faith' [GNB "We have broken faith with God", LXX "We have broken covenant with our God"], and so in :3 he proposes renewing the covenant with God [which is never recorded as happening]. The new covenant on offer was that of Jer. 31, and Ezra didn't seem interested in that- only in teaching the old covenant laws again. But intermarriage didn't in fact break covenant with Yahweh. There are many examples of it, not least Moses, and the law allowed Israelites to marry Gentile captives. Covenant with Yahweh wasn't broken by it of itself. Idolatry did- but he doesn't mention that.

In Ezra 9, Ezra showed a fine example of feeling that the failures of the community are our personal failures- so identified was he with his brethren. But then in Ezra 10:2 we read of Shecaniah saying that "we" have married unbelievers, even though Ezra 10:26 makes it clear that he himself wasn't guilty [even though his brothers, five uncles and father had been, :26]. Ezra's selfless example of solidarity with his weak brethren inspired this man, as it should us. *Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing*- This could equally be translated to the effect that the hope of Israel of the restored Kingdom was still possible, despite "this thing" of failure. If they repented. "Shecaniah" means 'Yah's shekinah'; he had been named in hope of the *shekinah* glory returning visibly to Zion. And he felt that was still possible, although as it happened, it didn't happen.

Ezra 10:3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God. Let it be done according to the law- They claimed that this mass divorce, on pain of expulsion from the community and confiscation of property, was required by the law of Moses: "Let it be done according to the law". But the law didn't require such punishments. He wrongly predicated hope of forgiveness upon works, in this case, divorce. They had made their extrapolation from God's law equal to God's law. In expounding the Bible, it may indeed be that some things logically follow from others, and we can make inferences and fair

deductions. But they are not God's word. It could be that "according to the law" was an appeal to the teaching of Dt. 24:1-4 that a man could divorce his wife "if she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some unseemly thing in her". But the Lord explains that this provision was "for the hardness of your hearts" and says that the pattern of the Genesis creation was not to make use of this. So in this case, Ezra hardly presents as a deep student of Torah, despite being called a skillful scribe of that law. He presents [perhaps, presents himself now, in his memoir] as a petty legalist who had ignored the foundational spirit of the Torah in early Genesis. Majoring on minors and ignoring the majors. And we might note that Shecaniah's idea of making a covenant with God about these things was apparently ignored. It seems what was important to Ezra was the divorces, and then claiming that anyone still married to a Gentile [such as very many amongst the Jews who had remained in the land] was in fact not "Israel". We are invited to consider whether Ezra's casting himself down was partly mere theatrics. And it is Ezra who invites us to this reflection, because these are his memoirs and he is himself pondering these matters about himself. I suggested on :2 that the "therefore" suggests that repentance would have led to the prophetically promised hope of Israel still coming true in his time.

These relationships and children are defined as being part of mixing with the abominations of the peoples (Ezra 9:1,2). And "abominations" always refers to idol worship. So it could be that the relationships with "their daughters" were a result of sleeping with cult prostitutes and having children thereby. There was therefore far more to what happened than simply marrying out of the faith. To 'take daughters for themselves' (Ezra 9:2) may not mean marriage itself, but could refer to the kind of cultic relationships which went along with idol worship at the shrines. This is why the separation from these women with whom they had had children would not then be quite the same as breaking up marriage and full blown family life.

The double reference in Is. 66:1-5 to trembling at Yahweh's word is a definite prediction of the situation in Ezra 9:4; 10:3, where the same rare Hebrew word is used regarding how those of the exiles who repented for their marriage out of the Faith trembled before the word in repentance. Then, at that point, the Kingdom blessings could have been brought about, as described in the rest of Is. 66. But again, there was no staying power in their repentance. By Nehemiah's time, and by Malachi's time even after his, marriage out of the Faith was still their weakness.

GNB "We will do what God's Law demands" highlights the problem: separation from wrongly taken wives was not stated in God's law. As so often happens, men assumed that their interpretation of His law was what His law "demands". But God never commanded divorce for marriage out of the faith, let alone loss of property. But divorce for no reason was not according to the law, neither in letter nor spirit.

Shecaniah is manipulative. He puts the idea of mass divorce to Ezra, then says that Israel must do according to the counsel of Ezra. But Shecaniah is putting his words into Ezra's mouth. And now Ezra in his memoirs is admitting this. The "they" in :7 who send out the summons to the meeting were quite possibly Shecaniah and his supporters, rather than Ezra.

Ezra 10:4 Arise; for the matter belongs to you, and we are with you. Be courageous, and do it- Shechaniah is seen as encouraging Ezra to do that which he was perhaps nervous to do- making the people swear to end their illicit relationships, and not to begin new ones. Being courageous and doing it is the language of encouragement given to Joshua, so that he might enter the land and establish God's Kingdom there. This was the same situation the exiles were in.

Ezra in this his memoir seems to say that he was told that he was the one to act, with the promise that he would be supported, and therefore he acted. They told him to "arise" and "do", and so he did. So often legalists egg each other on. And he now looks back and sees it for what it was... ending with that terrible final verse, admitting he had left children fatherless in the 112 marriages be broke up. And that list of names appears to be just of the priests and Levites. It rightly haunted him. And looking back, he sees Shecaniah as having put him up to it. Ezra 1-6 are Ezra's giving background information about the first return under Zerubbabel about 60 years before. The material about his own life's work is taken up almost exclusively with his response to the issue of intermarriage. He saw it as his defining work and legacy, although surely he did many other things with his life. And looking back, he is haunted by it. And his record draws us in to his own reflections and introspection.

The call to "be courageous!", 'Be strong for the truth!' has been heard so often. David uses the same words to Solomon when encouraging him in the work of building a temple which God never wanted: "Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it" (1 Chron. 28:10). Possibly they are assuming that divorcing wives and breaking up families was in fact establishing the temple.

Ezra 10:5 Then Ezra arose, and made the chiefs of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they would do according to this word. So they swore- The "word" was that of the proposed covenant of :3. The way Ezra had to 'make' them swear could imply that he forced this direction upon them. Which would explain why in Nehemiah and later in Malachi we find them committing the same failure; because their repentance was more likely a bought position which was enforced upon them by Ezra and Shechaniah. And repentance cannot be a group thing nor a bought position; it has to be from the heart, on an individual level. The fact the leading priests and Levites failed in this matter is a reflection of how unspiritual were the spiritual leadership of the people. We recall that Ezra had offered money for the Levites to come back to Judah at the last minute. They clearly were not spiritually committed to the whole project in spiritual terms.

Ezra 10:6 Then Ezra rose up from before God's house, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came there, he ate no bread, nor drank water; for he mourned because of the trespass of the captives- Jehohanan had come up with Zerubbabel in the previous return of the exiles (Neh. 12:13). He was presumably a faithful one amongst the largely apostate priesthood. Ezra refusing bread and water is in imitation of Moses in his great intercession (Ex. 34:28). I discussed on :1,2 how sincere all this was.

Ezra 10:7 They made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together to Jerusalem- There was and is a value in group repentance; the repentance of one person provokes that of another. This is why it is helpful to confess sins to each other as James asks.

Ezra 10:8 and that whoever didn't come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the assembly of the captives-

"Forfeited" is the word for herem, devotion, to the things of the temple. And yet the Persians had given them unlimited resources for this. This command and demand

was quite unnecessary, so it was done in order to railroad people into submission. Never does the law of Moses require this as a punishment for intermarriage. Dt. 7:1-3 is clear that they were not to intermarry with the nations then in the land, but there is no sanction mentioned if Israel did so. They did so, and there is never any "forfeiting" of property as a Divine legal punishment. The anger of God would be with the idolatry which could well arise from intermarriage, not with the intermarriage itself: "Your daughter you shall not give to his son, nor shall you take his daughter for your son. For he will turn away your son from following me to serve other gods; so the anger of Yahweh would be kindled against you and He would destroy you quickly" (Dt. 7:3,4). Ezra surely had in view that the Jews who had remained in the land had intermarried, and he was seeking to ensure that they "lose their right to be members of the community" (GNB). His legacy was divisive. That large excluded group became the Samaritans, and the Lord's parable of "the good Samaritan" showed His identity with them. He was considered a Samaritan, and we recall His favourable acceptance of the Samaritan woman. But there may be another reason why the person's property was to be confiscated. The exiles had returned hoping to regain the property of their ancestors. But the fields and vineyards of the land, the property of the wealthy, had been given by the Babylonians to the people of the land- the Jews who remained in the land (Jer. 39:10). This heavy punishment was likely also an attempt to get those lands into the hands of the returned exiles.

This talk of *herem*, being forfeited or destroyed, is an out of context midrash on various passages in the law of Moses that spoke of property being made *herem*, dedicated to Yahweh or destroyed. The spoil of some enemies or an idolatrous town was to be dedicated as *herem* to Yahweh (Dt. 13:15-18; 20:16-18). That's as bizarre as orthodox churches today taking some Biblical reference to High Priestly robes and dressing up likewise. Taking a single word from the scriptures and applying it out of context. Particularly in view was Dt. 7:2,3: "When Yahweh your God delivers [the local nations] up before you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy [*herem*] them. You must make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them, neither shall you arrange marriages with them; your daughter you shall not give to his son, nor shall you take his daughter for your son". *Herem* means both destruction and devotion / being forfeit to God. Having stated that about the Canaanites, the passage goes on to warn about intermarriage with such people. Shecaniah and Ezra are twisting this to mean that the punishment for anyone who marries one of the "peoples of the land", who may well have been second class Jews [in their estimation], was that their property would become *herem*, forfeit and taken from them. That is a big jump of logic. *And Ezra surely knew better than this*- he was a scribe and student of the law. And yet he failed to successfully teach basic things from the law to Judah, e.g. keeping the feast of tabernacles. The common people were likely illiterate. Ezra is really abusing his knowledge of the scriptures at this point. And here in his memoir, he looks back and to his credit, recognizes what he has done. "Let it be done according to the law" (:3) was a terrible blasphemy, really. For this mass forced divorce was not at all according to the law of Moses- which contained no sanction for those who did intermarry. Ezra failed to realize that his actions were so similar to how Israel took an oath to put to death anyone who did not come to the assembly in Jud. 21:5, thereby making the men of Jabesh-Gilead *herem* because they failed to appear at the meeting (Jud. 21:11). The moral of that story was that such bulldozer behaviour was wrong, and led to the decimation of God's people and almost the cutting off of an entire part of Israel. But Ezra didn't see that clear Biblical precedent in his obsession for purity amongst others.

"Captives" is as AV "those that had been carried away". Although that had happened some generations previously, Ezra encouraged the exiles to perceive themselves as those who had first gone into captivity and who were now returning. We too are to see ourselves as of "no continuing city" even if for generations we lived in the same area. The exclusion from the community was like all Divine judgments- it was only really a confirmation of the position these people had themselves chosen by marrying those outside of the community of faith. The logic reflects how serious is marriage out of the faith.

Ezra 10:9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together to Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month: and all the people sat in the broad place before God's house, trembling because of this matter, and because of the great rain- Apparently "all" of them came, nobody refused to repent. This however raises the possibility of group repentance, when repentance is essentially a personal matter. The restoration prophecy of Is. 66:2 is relevant: "But to this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word". The Jews did tremble at the word at the beginning of the rebuilding. But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term.

Ezra 10:10 Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have trespassed, and have married foreign women, to increase the guilt of Israel- The implication may be that by repentance and a devoted life, they were to decrease that guilt. But Ezra still comes over as a legalist, considering sin built and diminished by degrees. Israel had broken the old covenant. All they could do was throw themselves upon God's grace and accept the new covenant, as the restoration prophets had taught. But he is still far from perceiving that.

Ezra here defines the "trespass" as merely marrying foreigners. Yet the key issue was idolatry. He doesn't much mention that. There was the teaching that idolatrous wives deserved death (Dt. 13:6-11). But that is not appealed to as the basis for divorce. The focus instead is on excluding from the community anyone who remained married to a Gentile or to the "people of the land", the Jewish community who had remained in the land after the exile.

Ezra 10:11 Now therefore make confession to Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and do His will- See on :16. "Confession" is the same word translated "thanksgiving" (s.w. Neh. 12:27,31,38). Praise of Yahweh is in confession of sin. But this is the word used about the "praise" or "confession" which was to characterize the restored Kingdom (s.w. Is. 51:3; Jer. 30:19; 33:11). So even through this sin, the repentance from it led to the "confession" which produced a potential fulfilment of the restored Kingdom.

And separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign women- We notice that relationships with "foreign women" is paralleled with union with "the peoples of the land". I discussed on Ezra 9:1 how "the peoples of the land" were likely the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile. Separation from brethren is not God's "will". But like a pastor telling the congregation that giving him

money is God's "will", so Ezra tells these people. He is now using the word "foreign" about the Jewish "people of the land".

Marriage is not just with a woman as an individual, but with the society she is part of it; we marry a family and not just a person. But “The people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God’s intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel’s temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not.

Ezra 10:12 Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, As you have said concerning us, so must we do- This was repeated by the penitent people later shouting likewise their confession of sin "with a loud voice" (Neh. 9:4). But yet again in Malachi's time, they sinned again by marrying unbelievers. The point is that repentance is not necessarily related to the loudness of our confession that 'we're all sinners', especially when pronounced in unison with others. For repentance has to be personal. The LXX however brings out their obedience to God's word, practically doing what they had been told: "This thy word is powerful upon us to do it".

"It is so; we must do as you have said" suggests they were forced into agreeing with the judgment upon them. It was, after all, on pain of losing all they owned and being removed from the community. Their language is also an echo of the covenant ceremonies of Sinai (Ex. 24:3) and Shechem (Josh. 24:16-28). But at Sinai the people promised to do "all the words that Yahweh has spoken", whereas here the promise is to keep the commandments of Ezra. They were being kidded that by divorcing their wives, they were re-entering covenant with Yahweh. But covenant relationship didn't depend upon divorce. The new covenant which Ezra ought to have been offering was that of Jer. 31, Ezekiel and Isaiah. That was even then still on offer from God. Instead, he kids them that they need to re-enter the old covenant through divorcing their wives and disowning their kids. And this, from a man who was 'skilled' in the law of Moses- which said nothing about all this. Ezra knew the law, he was literate; his victims didn't know it as well as he did, and so they assumed he must be right, or at least, felt unable to argue with him in terms of Biblical interpretation. So often this has been the case. It is classic religious abuse. Ezra presents badly here; and he was clearly just following the lead of Shecaniah, who had falsely claimed they were breaking covenant with God and needed to make a new one (:2). The answer to that should have been that they needed to bring their Gentile wives and children into the new covenant with Yahweh.

Ezra 10:13 But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand outside; neither is this a work of one day or two; for we have greatly transgressed in this matter- The idea seems to be that they felt they had to wait in line outside in order to each come before Ezra and have absolution from sin or their marriages dissolved. Perhaps I am being too critical, but I do get the sense that they were still in a 'religious' mindset, rather than seeking to God personally on their knees. For repentance and receipt of forgiveness doesn't need to be formalized by men, nor are those things mediated through men. Perhaps this is why by the time of Nehemiah, they sinned again in this manner; and again in Malachi's time.

The torrential rain made an open air meeting very difficult. Why did this occur, and why does the record labour it? Possibly because this agreement to mass divorce

wives and break up families did not have God's blessing. In fact they couldn't effect the divorces as planned because of the rain, and had to delay it. We think of the rain sent when Israel wanted a king, a sign of God's displeasure with their decision making. His wrath at that point was hardly with the Jews for their marriages, which had been contracted before, and now they were repentant. His wrath, I suggest, was with the divorces.

Ezra 10:14 Let now our princes be appointed for all the assembly- "Appointed" is AV "stand"; the idea may be as in GNB: "Let our officials stay in Jerusalem and take charge of the matter".

And let all those who are in our cities who have married foreign women come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and its judges, until the fierce wrath of our God be turned from us, until this matter is resolved- They seemed to think that the legal resolution of the marriage issue was required to turn away the wrath of God, and it took three months to do so (see on :17). But getting paperwork right in a legal sense is not going to turn away the wrath of God; He doesn't cherish being angry and His wrath can be turned away in a moment by repentance. Yet they seemed to think that the three months of legal process was required to turn away His wrath.

Ezra argues that the mass divorce will turn away God's wrath (:14). Despite having spoken about guilt and trespass, he never suggests they offer a sacrifice for their guilt and transgression, even though this was specifically stipulated for leaders who had sinned. This lack of attention to basic Divine principle and law was because Ezra failed to understand that the blood looked forward to that of the Lord. It was all of works, to him, and not of faith in grace.

Ezra 10:15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah stood up against this; and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them- This could mean that they "opposed the plan" (GNB), or that they alone assisted Ezra in it, "were with me concerning this" (LXX).

Ezra 10:16 The children of the captivity did so. Ezra the priest, with certain heads of fathers' households, after their fathers' houses, and all of them by their names, were set apart; and they sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter-

The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Nehemiah 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Nehemiah 10:28). There was a powerful logic- either separate from the world around, or be separated from the people of God (Ezra 10:8). It's a separation- one way or the other.

Ezra 10:17 They made an end with all the men who had married foreign women by the first day of the first month- This seems a long period of time to resolve the issue; three months. Presumably this was because there was some local law to the effect that divorce could not be effected immediately but required a period of time. And yet as explained on :14, they were mistaken to think that such legalism would turn away God's wrath of itself. It was from the heart repentance that was required. Because of

this legalistic approach, it is unsurprising that by Nehemiah's time they were committing the same sin.

Ezra 10:18 Among the sons of the priests there were found who had married foreign women: of the sons of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and his brothers, Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah- This would indicate that Joshua of Zech. 3 was not so spiritually strong, and therefore failed to fulfill the potential of there being a Messianic high priest in the reestablished Kingdom of God whose name was Jesus. This public listing of the sinners, beginning with the family of the High Priest, was itself a form of discipline; and may be the basis of "them [elders] that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

Ezra 10:19 They gave their hand that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their guilt- The implication could be that all who were guilty also offered the guilt offering. But a ram was offered for a guilt offering when people had sinned in ignorance (Lev. 5:14-19). It is hard to believe that they really had acted in ignorance; so their repentance was rather compromised by claiming they had in fact sinned in ignorance. If indeed they had sinned in ignorance, then this is a tacit reflection of the extent to which they were totally adrift from the word and spirit of their God. We note that although the cult was established and an altar in place, Ezra doesn't make the individuals offer a personal sacrifice for atonement- although for priests it was required in Lev. 4:1-6:7. He failed to perceive that atonement required the shedding of blood, looking forward to that of Messiah. Despite being "a scribe expert in the law of Moses".

Ezra 10:20 Of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah- Only four courses of priests returned, when there were supposed to be 24 of them, namely Pashhur, Jedaiah, Immer, and Hardin (Ezra 2:37; 1 Chron. 24:7, 8,14). The priesthood had been deeply corrupt at the time of the exile, and it seems most of them preferred to remain in Babylon. And even of those who did return, they married unbelievers, despite having the 'Yah' suffix in their names.

There are only around 112 men mentioned here as having divorced their wives, and most were priests or Levites. Surely there were many others who had married women from the "people of the land"? There is no record of the threatened sanctions being carried out. We suspect that this repentance was not very deep reaching; and around 15-20 years later, in Nehemiah's time, the issue persists.

Ezra 10:21 Of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uzziah- "Harim" means 'snubnosed'; the priest in whom there was a physical defect, such as to exclude him from priestly service. For this is the word used of how a 'flat nosed' man was excluded from priestly service (Lev. 21:18). Perhaps they were eager at the chance to serve in the restored temple, guessing that the regulations would be relaxed due to the relative lack of priests and Levites returning. Or the idea could simply be that the requirements of the law were not followed by the priests who returned. Perhaps this was why Harim's sons married out of the faith; or perhaps their physical defect made them prone to any possibility of marriage.

Ezra 10:22 Of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah- Perhaps descendants of the unfaithful Pashur the priest of Jer. 20:1-3. We note that a relatively large number of this family returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra

2:38). They would have been perceived as relatively faithful; but relatively many of them married unbelievers. So having a 'good name' amongst the community of believers is no guarantee of abiding spirituality.

Ezra 10:23 Of the Levites: Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer- "Shimei" = 'famous' and "Kelaiah" = 'insignificant'. The impression is that the well known and prominent as well as the insignificant were alike caught up in this weakness of relationships with Gentile women.

Ezra 10:24 Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the porters: Shallum, and Telem, and Uri- Again the impression is given that weakness in terms of illicit relationships is a weakness which is found in all sectors of society; from the high priest to the priests to the singers and even the porters.

Ezra 10:25 Of Israel: Of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, and Izziah, and Malchijah, and Mijamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah- We note again that the exiles of Judah are called "Israel"- because Ezra was seeking to redefine "Israel" as the returned exiles, to the exclusion of all others. "Of Israel" appears to refer to the ordinary Israelites, apart from the priesthood. 85 offenders are now listed, compared to 28 amongst the Levites in the previous verses. A fair case could be made that the Levites / priests, those who were intended to be the spiritual leaders and teachers of the community, had sinned proportionately far more than the rest of the general population. And we noted on Ezra 2 that there were relatively few from the tribe of Levi who returned. This was truly a sad state of affairs, especially as I suggested on Ezra 9:2,3 that the relationships with these women were associated with an acceptance of their gods.

Ezra 10:26 Of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Elijah- It was their brother Shecaniah who realized that there really had to be action taken about the situation (:2). This is the more commendable because it involved a recognition that his own family had done wrong; and as in many churches today, to accept wrong behaviour amongst family members isn't something which comes easy, and involves a willingness to see things from a far wider and Godly perspective.

Ezra 10:27 Of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza- Zattu was one of the elders who later was to sign to the covenant that they would separate themselves from the peoples of the land (Neh. 9:2 cp. Neh. 10:14). So this separation at this time was quickly undone, so quickly that we can assume it was somewhat fictive and insincere.

Ezra 10:28 Of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, Athlai- "Bebai" isn't a Hebrew word; some of the exiles had so assimilated that they only had local Persian names. And so the attraction to Gentile women in Judah was in turn hard to resist. They failed to appreciate their high calling in one context and so failed in later contexts.

Ezra 10:29 Of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, Jeremoth- Bani = "Builder", perhaps so named because he was keen to rebuild Jerusalem; it was a popular name because there are three separate men in this chapter

called that name (:29,34,38). But, as we all can, he focused so much on the physical aspects of God's work that he failed to appreciate the spiritual implications.

Ezra 10:30 Of the sons of Pahathmoab: Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, and Binnui, and Manasseh- The family of Pahathmoab also features in those who returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:6) and were later noted for their work in rebuilding the walls (Neh. 3:11). And yet the founder of this family apparently had Gentile connections- "the pit of Moab". This might explain their tendency towards marriage out of the faith. But see on Ezra 8:4.

Ezra 10:31 Of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon- All these names are very 'spiritual'; but we can have a name we live and yet be spiritually dead and worldly.

Ezra 10:32 Benjamin, Malluch, Shemariah- Shemariah is LXX Samaria. This is incidental evidence that some of the ten tribes returned with the people of Judah. But the grand reunion of Israel and Judah on the basis of repentance, to form a new people of God, simply didn't happen; for most of the ten tribes as well as Judah chose to remain in captivity.

Ezra 10:33 Of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, Shimei- Admittedly "sons of..." may mean relatives. But if they were all the sons of Hashum, this is a sad spiritual statement about the family- that the seven sons all married out of the faith. We see here how spiritual attitudes spread so easily within families, and negative attitudes spread easier than positive ones.

Ezra 10:34 Of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, and Uel- Bani = "Builder", perhaps so named because he was keen to rebuild Jerusalem; it was a popular name because there are three separate men in this chapter called that name (:29,34,38). But, as we all can, he focused so much on the physical aspects of God's work that he failed to appreciate the spiritual implications.

Ezra 10:35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi- Benaiah was a popular name, taken in memory of the chiefest and most loyal of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:22); there are four men in this chapter of this name (:25,30,35,43). The tendency to name children after spiritual heroes is understandable, but spirituality isn't inherited; it has to be personal. And these four men of this name are named and shamed here for their marriage out of the faith.

Ezra 10:36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib- In all, 12 "sons of Bani" married out of the faith. The family of "the builder" were shamed by their apostasy. To physically work for the Lord isn't the same as true personal spirituality.

Ezra 10:37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu- Again we note the Yah suffix or prefix in the names. But this was all external spirituality only.

Ezra 10:38 and Bani, and Binnui, Shimei- This seems to mark a new clan or "sons of...". LXX "And so did the children of Banui, and the children of Semei"; GNB "Clan of Binnui: Shimei, Shelemiah...". See on :34.

Ezra 10:39 and Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah- Shelemiah's son Hananiah worked on repairing the walls (Neh. 3:30). So perhaps Shelemiah's repentance was genuine and his son learnt the lesson from seeing his half-siblings being separated from.

Ezra 10:40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai- "Machnadebai" is a form of the word translated 'willingly offered' (Ezra 1:6; 2:68; 3:5; Neh. 11:2). And yet he married an unbeliever. No amount of freewill offering to God or voluntary work for Him can compensate for a heart given to Him. And he clearly lacked that, otherwise he wouldn't have married an unbeliever and been named and shamed for it.

Ezra 10:41 Azarel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah- Many of these names reflect thankfulness to God- meaning things like "God has helped" or "Yah has guarded". But it's as if the receipt of grace and recognition of grace had resulted in a continuance in sin that that grace might abound (as in Rom. 6:1), rather than a dedication of themselves solely to Him.

Ezra 10:42 Shallum, Amariah, Joseph- A name like Joseph is incidental evidence that some of the ten tribes returned with the people of Judah. But the grand reunion of Israel and Judah on the basis of repentance, to form a new people of God, simply didn't happen; for most of the ten tribes as well as Judah chose to remain in captivity.

Ezra 10:43 Of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Iddo, and Joel, Benaiah- Benaiah was a popular name, taken in memory of the chiefest and most loyal of David's mighty men (2 Sam. 23:22); there are four men in this chapter of this name (:25,30,35,43). The tendency to name children after spiritual heroes is understandable, but spirituality isn't inherited; it has to be personal. And these four men of this name are named and shamed here for their marriage out of the faith.

Ezra 10:44 All these had taken foreign wives; and some of them had wives by whom they had children- These relationships and children are defined as being part of mixing with the abominations of the peoples (Ezra 9:1,2). And "abominations" always refers to idol worship. So it could be that the relationships with these women were a result of sleeping with cult prostitutes and having children thereby. There was therefore far more to what happened than simply marrying out of the faith. To 'take daughters for themselves' (Ezra 9:2) may not mean marriage itself, but could refer to the kind of cultic relationships which went along with idol worship at the shrines. This is why the separation from these women with whom they had had children would not then be quite the same as breaking up marriage and full blown family life.

We have seen that the demand to break up families was not in fact in accordance with God's law, which is "holy just and good", and is never willfully destructive of man. Again and again, Ezra invites us to ponder his motives, and the degree to which we can break one Divine principle in order to attempt to keep another. This in fact is the spirit in which Ezra's memoir ends, with this otherwise strange comment after Ezra had made the Jews divorce their Gentile wives: "some of them had wives by whom they had children" (Ezra 10:44). Ezra is looking back and reflecting on the long term impact of his decisions. For there was no Mosaic command to separate from Gentile wives. We could say that what he did haunted him, even though there were

strands of sincerity in his motivation. Just as those who disfellowship individuals from churches in their zeal for "God's truth" end up wrecking families... and at the end of their days must look back and wonder about what they did... See on Ezra 8:22.

We read no more of Ezra until in Neh. 8:1 he is asked to read God's law to the people in Nehemiah's time. Ezra returned from Babylon in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7:7) in 458 BC, and Nehemiah arrived in the same king's twentieth year (Neh. 2:1) in 445. Ezra's work over those 13 years isn't recorded. In that time, Jerusalem had gone from a populated city (Ezra 1:1) to a depopulated city with broken down walls (Neh. 7:4; 11:1-3; 13:10-13). Possibly Ezra had returned to Babylon in that period; or perhaps he had a ministry which, like that of so many, produced little fruit. Yet still he kept on, for he reappears in Neh. 8:1 to read the law to the people. His attempt to fix the mixed marriages didn't go well, because Nehemiah had to address the same problem. The scene in Neh. 13 is very similar to that in Ezra 9,10- to make the point, that the problem recurred and Ezra had failed to address the root of the issue. But nearly all the prophets were failed reformers, and only a very few believers ever seem to remain consistently faithful to the Lord. In fact only Jonah, of all the prophets, had a successful ministry. On the other hand, we could say that Ezra himself is reflecting that his defining work had simply been to break up 112 marriages- and it hadn't worked. In Nehemiah's time, 13 years later, the people apparently had not even been taught the need to keep the feast of Tabernacles. They are very disobedient to Torah, practicing usury, not tithing and breaking the sabbath. Ezra's ministry had failed, or perhaps he had not really bothered doing the hard work of teaching God's word; he had simply maxed out on marriage out of the faith. And broken up families with kids. And in his memoirs, he admits this.

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: NEHEMIAH

NEHEMIAH

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the

wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 1

Nehemiah 1:1 The words- Better, the story or history. It is Nehemiah's personal testimony to God's grace and activity. As with the book of Ezra, this is autobiography, the memoir of a man looking back on his life. His ministry ultimately failed, and his attitude to breaking up other mens' marriages was not the most spiritual path. But he definitely had a heart for God and His people, and he recognizes that. Eleven times in 13 chapters he records that he prayed; prayer was a leading feature of his life. But to have been the king's cupbearer, perhaps the second most powerful person in the greatest empire on earth at the time, surely reflects poorly on his spirituality. Like Mordecai and Esther, he sought for greatness in this world- and he got it. For no man gets to the top like he did unless he drives and strives for it. Quite possibly he had been willingly castrated in order to achieve it. His simple comment "I was the king's cupbearer" can be read as a confession of failure. For such a post surely required oaths of absolute allegiance to the pagan king and empire, and involvement with idolatry. His name, 'Yah's comfort', places him as a potential fulfilment of the Comforter passages in Is. 40. But no Messiah came after him, nor did he bring Judah to their Messiah. Indeed he upheld the already broken old covenant rather than urging the people to accept the new covenant, as Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel had urged. Nor did he seek to fulfil the clear requirements that Judah break free of the Persian yoke. Instead he was Persia's lacky and colonialist for a time whilst he was the Persian governor of Jerusalem, offering to build a fortress for them in Jerusalem to consolidate their colonial power and a mansion house for the Persian governor- as well as rebuilding the city walls. There are countless sermons about Nehemiah as a man of faith, setting us a wonderful pattern. But they fail to engage with the fact that this is Nehemiah's memoir; and no spiritual man looks back on his life and

presents himself as always having acted wonderfully. We look back at our lives and muse over our motives, seeing the bad as well as the good, and all the stuff somewhere in between the dark and the light, the darkness on the edge of town.

Of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah- To distinguish him from the Nehemiah who had come to Judah with Zerubbabel many years before (Ezra 2:2). "Hacaliah" can mean 'God is hidden', reflective of how the exiles felt.

Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace- Neh. 2:1 speaks of Nehemiah subsequently coming to the king in the first month (Nisan) of the king's 20th year. But we read here about the ninth month, Chislev, in the twentieth year. Perhaps the year of his reign is being read inclusively in one place and exclusively in the other. Or perhaps the twentieth year here in Neh. 1:1 is not the twentieth of the king's reign, for that is not actually specified here. The more appropriate explanation is that we are reading of Jewish months, but the years of the reign of the king; and here in Neh. 1:1 we are reading the background for what happened in Neh. 2:1. Nehemiah came to the king in Nisan, whereas four month previously, in Chislev, he had been visited by Hanani. But both those dates were within the 20th year of the king.

Shushan was the Winter palace of the Persian kings, and this fits with being the ninth month of the Jewish year, Chislev, which is in Winter (December).

Nehemiah 1:2 that Hanani one of my brothers came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem- Although the Apocryphal book of Baruch isn't inspired, it gives a significant window into the mindset of the exiles in Babylon. Baruch 1:10 mentions how the attitude was that the majority wanted to send funds to support the 'good work' going on in Judah- but didn't want to return there themselves. Like the book of Esther, this indicates that the exiles had soon quit languishing by the rivers of Babylon, and had quickly acquired wealth and some degree of prosperity. Inspired prophecies had warned them of the fall of Babylon, and their need to flee out of it and return to Judah. And yet Baruch 1:12 records the exiles praying "that we may live long under the protective shadow of [the] king of Babylon". This is in sad contrast to Daniel's prophecies that the sheltering tree of Babylon was to be cut down! There ought to have been an urgency about the need to flee from Babylon. Zech. 2:10 speaks of the need to "flee" and "escape"- the language of crisis. And the call "Ho!" means quite literally "Hey!!". The urgency to flee was spiritual rather than physical- for there's no evidence that when Babylon fell to the Persians, the Jews were punished. Indeed they appear [from Esther] to have prospered even more. Hence the urgent appeal was to flee from the spiritual crisis which they faced in Babylon. And yet they didn't perceive the danger, just as so many today don't. For the call to leave Babylon is applied in New Testament passages like 2 Cor. 6 to our call to leave the world in which we live. The urgency of

'fleeing' from Babylon was understood by Nehemiah, when he referred to those who had returned to the land as those who has "escaped" from Babylon (Neh. 1:2)- even though they had returned with every blessing from the authorities. He perceived as few did the vital danger of remaining in the soft life of Babylon. Ezra likewise had referred to the Jews in Babylon as those "in bondage... bondmen" (Ezra 9:9)- when historical records, as well as the book of Esther and the fact Nehemiah the Jew was the king's cupbearer, show that the Jews were very far from being servants in Babylonian society. Yet Ezra perceived the spiritual poverty and servanthood of remaining in that affluent society.

Another approach is to read this as Nehemiah's concern for the Jews who had escaped going into captivity- that's how the Hebrew reads. We discussed on Ezra 9,10 how Ezra had sought to redefine "Israel" as those who returned from captivity, and sought to disfellowship the Jews who had remained in the land and had intermarried with Gentiles. I discussed there how intermarriage was only wrong if it led to worshipping idols. And there were so many examples of uncondemned intermarriage, not least Moses, Ruth, Rahab etc. Nehemiah was rightly heartbroken at the situation and at the miserable state of that community. As a eunuch, being the king's cupbearer, he was excluded from the community himself, according to Is. 56:3,4. Hence his empathy with this group. But he ends his ministry doing exactly what Ezra did- breaking up marriages within that community, and upholding the wrong position that any interracial marriage involving Jews was sinful. He even gets physically aggressive about it, pulling out men's hair and beards. Nehemiah ends up doing just the same as Ezra. This explains why the account of Nehemiah's dealing with intermarriage reads so similarly to that of Ezra's dealings with the issue. The point is that Nehemiah, like many men, ended up doing that which he earlier hated. Just as the young reformers in a church end up in later years acting just like the brethren whose behaviour they once realized was so wrong. And as people who start on the far left of politics in their youth end up on the far right, and vice versa. This is a human trait. In spiritual contexts, it reflects a lack of attention to and respect of God's word as the sole guiding light and source of principle.

Nehemiah 1:3 They said to me, The remnant who are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach-

We note that Judea was still a "province" of Persia and was not independent. The restoration prophecies of her radical independence had not been fulfilled, because the fulfilment had been precluded by the lack of repentance and spirituality amongst the exiles. And they were in "great affliction" rather than enjoying the Kingdom blessings promised in the restoration prophets.

There could be the implication in the Hebrew of Neh. 1:3 that the majority of those who initially returned to Judah then returned back to Babylon- for Nehemiah speaks of "The remnant that are left of the captives there in the province" [of Judah]". We shouldn’t

underestimate the seriousness of the famine conditions in Judah as described in Neh. 5. The sheer lack of food led the Jews to sell their children and land to their richer brethren just to get something to eat. Mal. 3:5-15 says that this was directly a result of their lack of zeal to rebuild and care for God's house. What a far cry from the prophecies of plenty and huge harvests which had been made. So much potential was wasted. Neh. 5:8 records Nehemiah's comment that the wealthy Jews were victimizing the poorer Jews just as Babylon once had, and now Nehemiah needed to redeem them from slavery just as God had redeemed His people from servitude in Babylon. God's deliverance of His people simply hadn't been responded to. Tragically, it would appear from Neh. 5:15 that Zerubbabel, the potential Messiah of Israel, had acted in this oppressive way too.

The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire- The walls had been ruined by Samaritan oppositioni- cp. Ezra 4:12. This isn't a reference to what the Babylonians dd. The army of the Samaritans (Neh. 4:2) suggests they were an organized force. The existence of this army is perhaps the explanation as to how the wall and gates of Jerusalem were broken down, and the news of this catastrophe reached Nehemiah. Although we note that under Zerubbabel, only the temple had been rebuilt. Not the city, walls and gates, even though provision had been made for that by the Persians. Quite likely the building materials had been stolen by the Jews and used for their own houses as criticized by Malachi. This is Nehemiah's memoir... quite possibly he is looking back and wondering whether his focus on rebuilding the wall was right. Rebuilding the temple according to Ezekiel's specifications would surely have been a far better thing to do, rather than focusing on the wall. Yahweh was to have been a wall of fire around an independent Jerusalem, had they been obedient...

Nehemiah appears shocked. The state of the walls and gates surely doesn't refer to what the Babylonians did around 200 years previously. He was aware of that. His surprise and subsequent grief at the news therefore suggests that there had been some more recent attack on Jerusalem. And yet the language of the burnt gates and broken down walls is that of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem as recorded in Jer. 52 and Lamentations. But Nehemiah appears shocked at the descriptions, and is thereby provoked to confess the sins of His people and beg for forgiveness. I suggest that the restoration at the time of Zerubbabel had not happened as it could and should have done, and so God had returned Jerusalem almost to its baseline at the time of the Babylonian destruction of it. Again the city had been attacked and destroyed, and much of the apparent progress made by Zerubbabel had been eradicated. Sitting down and weeping is exactly what we read of the first exiles doing when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, they sat down and wept by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. 137:1). And now Nehemiah does the same, perceiving that God had given up with the idea of restoration

and returned Jerusalem to how it was at the time of the Babylonian invasion. It seems to me that God still was eager to make a restoration work out; Nehemiah, comfort of Yah, could have been the messenger of Is. 40 who brought comfort to Zion.

Nehemiah 1:4 It happened, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days. I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven- The weeping was not simply because of the material calamity there. It was surely also, as noted on :3, because the huge prophetic potential depicted in the restoration prophets had not come about. His fasting and praying is in the spirit of Daniel, who did this in order to beg God to allow those potentials to be realized and the Kingdom of God to be reestablished in the land. This sense of wasted potential totally overpowered Nehemiah. But it was only someone who had a true heart for God's glory who would be so overpowered as he was.

Sitting down and weeping is elsewhere used of those who feel there is no way out of their situation, that the loss and damage are permanent and irreversible. Facing death by dehydration in the desert, Hagar sat down and wept (Gen. 21:16). A female captive had to sit and weep for the loss of her family in war (Dt. 21:13). And we think of Job weeping for his lost children and possessions. Other examples in Jud. 21:2; 2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 34:27; Ps. 137:1; Is. 30:19; Ez. 8:14. Nehemiah is therefore to be commended for perceiving that the apparently irreversible can be reversed by God's transforming grace. We too should sit and weep for our sins, for the wages of sin is death. But this too can be ultimately and gloriously reversed, by faith through grace. We note Nehemiah says he did this "Before God", as if he felt Yahweh's presence there in Susa, Persia.

Nehemiah 1:5 and said, I beg you, Yahweh the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and grace with those who love Him and keep His commandments-

Nehemiah's prayer is very similar to those earlier prayers of Ezra (Ezra 9:5-15) and Daniel (Dan. 9:4-19). Indeed this verse 5 is a repeat of Dan. 9:4. We see how Godly men are influenced by the prayers of others- Daniel's prayer influenced Ezra, whose prayer influenced Nehemiah, or at least pointed Nehemiah back to Daniel's prayer. The more you spend time with prayerful people, the more you will likewise influened to prayerfulness. And that is the idea of association with other Christians. The examples of Ezra and Daniel in speaking of "our" sins clearly influenced Nehemiah. Just as we are to likewise feel identity with sinners because of how the Lord identified with us.

The phrase "great and awesome" is frequently connected with God's power at the exodus in bringing the people out from Egypt, and giving them the promised land (Ex.

14:31; Dt. 1:19; 7:21; 10:17,21; 2 Kings 17:36). Nehemiah sensed that they could likewise be brought out of Babylon and overcome all obstacles in order to enter His Kingdom. We note that the keeping of the covenant was by grace. God keeps His side of the covenant by grace; it is not a measured response to our good deeds of obedience.

Nehemiah 1:6 Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may listen to the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants; while I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You- "Your servant" is significant; for as king's cupbearer, he was the servant of the King and the empire of Persia. But he looks back now in his memoir, and recognizes that indeed he had always seen himself, deep in his heart, as Yahweh's servant. This example of tears and praying "day and night" surely influenced Paul, who in Acts 20:31 appealed likewise to his brethren "night and day with tears". We too are to be influenced by these great examples of hearts that bled for their weaker brethren.

"The prayer of Your servant [Nehemiah] for... the children of Israel Your servants" suggests that he saw his prayer as being the prayer of all Israel. Hence in :10 we have the otherwise strange statement: "Now these are Your servants". He is surely asking God to see him as all God's people. He was their representative. He prayed "for" them not simply in the sense of praying 'about' them, but for them, in their place, as their representative. In this sense the Lord died "for" us. There is no evidence anyone else prayed at the time, but he says in :11 "let Your ear be attentive now to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants". He saw his prayer as theirs. And this is just how the Lord prays to God for us. Not simply translating our prayers into God's ears. But praying on His own agenda for us, with Him and His prayers counted as us. National repentance was required, but Nehemiah hoped his prayer and repentance could count for their prayer.

God's eyes are opened to listen in that the situations He sees are effectively the cry to Him for help. He doesn't wait for us to say magic words, nor to ask specifically. He has as it were *eyes* to hear. Just as any sensitive person sees that the need is the call for help. This is comfort to those who feel they cannot verbalize well in their prayers. Nehemiah had "heard" about the situation in Jerusalem (:4), and now he asks God to hear his prayer. He reflects the natural human assumption that because something has come to our notice, we must bring it to God's notice. The truth of course is that He saw it all before we did, and saw it coming, seeing all things, even every human thought, from afar off.

Nehemiah perceived that the broken down state of Jerusalem was because of Israel's sins. Zerubbabel had led a return a generation ago, and Ezra had led a return 13 years earlier. Ezra seems not to have taught the people God's law despite being qualified and apparently zealous to do so, because later in Nehemiah we find the people were

ignorant of the feast of tabernacles. All he did was break up the marriages of 112 men who had married "the people of the land", quite possibly just Jews who had remained in the land after the exile. The "sins" in view may well have been the apostasy and hypocrisy of the exiles, including idol worship, mentioned in Isaiah, Zechariah and elsewhere. As well as the failures recorded by Haggai and Malachi.

"Eyes open" is an allusion to 1 Kings 8:29, where the understanding was that God's eyes would be open to the temple. But Nehemiah understands now that God's eyes are open directly to his prayer. He was brought and led to the understanding that direct personal contact with God is possible without the trappings of religion- even the religion which He has instituted. We're all brought to the same. He likewise came to understand that he was "before You" even in Babylon. Notice Nehemiah's loneliness and being alone with God in Neh. 2:12-16.

Yes, I and my father's house have sinned- Nehemiah quite often references his own sins, and the book concludes with his personal begging for mercy. We wonder if there was some specific sin he felt guilty about; or whether this personal confession of sin was because he, like the Lord Jesus, so absorbed into himself the sin of his people and immediate family.

Nehemiah 1:7 We have dealt very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses- Moses likewise felt identity with the sins of his people: "pardon our iniquity and our sin" (Ex. 34:9). See on Ex. 34:27. There are multiple allusions here to the curses for breaking the covenant in Deuteronomy. According to Jewish tradition, Ezra edited and produced the Pentateuch in its present form in Babylon. Carl Kraeling, *The Synagogue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956) pp. 232-235 reproduces plates from the synagogue wall at Dura-Europas showing Ezra doing this in Babylon. This would account for the record of Jacob in exile being so verbally similar to the allusions made to it in the restoration-from-Babylon prophecies in Isaiah. There was certainly great scribal activity in Babylon- 2 Macc. 2:13 speaks of Nehemiah founding a library of the Jewish scriptures there. This gives another perspective on the way Nehemiah's prayer in Neh. 1 is so full of references to Deuteronomy- if the latter had just been re-written and presented to the Jews in Babylon.

Nehemiah 1:8 Remember, I beg You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses saying, 'If you trespass, I will scatter you abroad among the peoples- Nehemiah isn't quoting from any specific passage, although Dt. 30:1-5 is closest. Rather it seems he has in mind various passages in addition to this (Lev. 26:33; Dt. 4:27; 28:64). The Bible writers often use the idea of 'quotation' in this kind of vague, summary way- rather than specific citation.

Nehemiah 1:9 but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though your outcasts were in the uttermost part of the heavens, yet will I gather them from there, and will bring them to the place that I have chosen, to cause My name to dwell there'- Their regathering was to be "if" you return to Me and keep My commandments. Therefore their regathering had been by pure grace; for Judah in captivity didn't keep the commandments, but the regathering was done anyway, such was God's yearning for His people. Ez. 34:13 prophesied that this regathering would be in order to enter the new covenant: "And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land". But Nehemiah didn't teach the new covenant, instead he tried to make the people obedient to the old covenant.

The Hebrew verb 'cause to dwell' is that from which came the late Hebrew word 'Shekinah', applied to the visible glory of Yahweh's presence. The only problem for Nehemiah's reasoning is that the Shekinah wasn't in the Jerusalem temple as intended according to Ezekiel 40-48. He would've done far better to go with Isaiah's message that God had given up on the idea of a temple, and wanted to dwell in the hearts of humble people.

Nehemiah 1:10 Now these are Your servants and Your people whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand- As explained on :9, that great power and hand was revealed in the pure grace of the restoration, which was supposed to have occurred only if they returned to God. When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand", he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7). Nehemiah means 'Comfort of Yah' and so he is admitting here, by recounting his prayer, that he was aware that he could have been the Comforter figure who brought comfort to Zion and the re-establishment of God's Kingdom. But that didn't work out.

Nehemiah 1:11 Lord, I beg You, let Your ear be attentive now to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who delight to fear Your name- "Attentive" is s.w. 2 Chron. 6:40; 7:15, where we read of God being "attentive" to prayers offered in the temple. But Nehemiah is praying in Babylon, not in the temple. The desperation of the situation made him learn a lesson- that God wasn't only accessible in the temple. This may sound obvious to us, but it wasn't for those used to the temple cult. The lesson is that God uses punishments for sin, hard situations, to break our paradigms and lead us

to a greater spirituality- if we will follow. S.w. also Neh. 9:34- Israel weren't "attentive" to God's word, but in their time of need they hoped He would be "attentive" to their word of prayer. And He was. His grace isn't 'measure for measure'; He treats us out of proportion to our attentiveness to Him. We must show the same grace.

And please prosper Your servant this day- We put God to endless pain and labour in order to fulfill His wish to save men, if we don't fulfill what in prospect we could fulfill. In the context of the restoration, Yahweh truly said that "...so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Is. 55:11 AV). His word will have fulfilment in the end, but it can have its fulfilment in us, here and now. Nehemiah twice stated that Yahweh was prospering him in his work of restoring Zion [Neh. 1:11; 2:20 s.w.]; but generally, the word of prophecy was deferred in its fulfilment. Let's not be satisficers as Israel were, minimalists happy so long as we have our bit of land to live on, our cieled roof to dwell under... and neglect *His* house.

"This day... this man" suggests that Nehemiah prayed this prayer and resolved the same day to go in to the King and ask him for permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem. But he didn't. It was only some four months later that the king noticed he was sad, and asked what the problem was. Nehemiah didn't ask "this day". He lost his nerve, as Esther did before him. But still God worked through him, remembering his core desire to ask the king, and then suddenly, months later, making it happen. The answer to prayer came out of left field, for we are left with the impression in Neh. 2 that Nehemiah didn't intend to look sad. That's why he was so scared when the king suddenly complained that he was looking sad.

And grant him mercy in the sight of this man- Commendably, Nehemiah considers the great king, the most powerful man on the planet, as merely a man. When he was likely seen as divine or at least, superhuman. "Grant him mercy in the sight"- uses three Hebrew words taken from 1 Kings 8:50: "And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them". Nehemiah knew those words, and had thought and prayed himself into the situation; so it was appropriate to quote them. Prepared prayer should involve such relevant Bible quotations.

Now I was cup-bearer to the king- This involved him drinking the wine which had been offered to idols. This in sharp contrast to Daniel's attitude. And yet Nehemiah, although apparently weaker than Daniel, is none the less presented as a man of great spirituality and devotion to God; even though his conscience was clearly different and even inferior to Daniel's. We must be careful not to judge others as being unbelievers because their consciences or spiritual weakness leads them to do something which is apparently wrong. For Nehemiah's conscience on this matter was weak, and yet he was clearly

counted as a spiritual person and legitimate believer. As someone so close to the king, he would have chosen this career path; and that again would appear spiritually unwise or inappropriate for a Jew under the old covenant. For he would hardly have been as it were pressganged into that senior position. It likely involved him in being castrated, for the close courtiers were eunuchs. But for all this, his weakness was used by God just as Esther's was. And that weakness in one aspect of character didn't mean that he was not a legitimate believer. This is not to be used to justify our own weaknesses; but rather to inspire tolerance in us towards the weakness of others. See on Neh. 2:8. We note that at the time of the restoration, the religious fanatics [possibly including Ezra] considered that eunuchs were excluded from the community (Is. 56:4,5). This would explain Nehemiah's sympathy with the Jews left in the land at the Babylonian invasion, who were likewise being excluded from the community by the likes of Ezra, as discussed on :2. We naturally are empathetic for those who have had or are having our own experiences. And this is the basis for the Lord's empathy with us.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 2

Nehemiah 2:1 It happened in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king- But we read in Neh. 1:1 about the ninth month, Chislev, in the twentieth year. Perhaps the year of his reign is being read inclusively in one place and exclusively in the other. Or perhaps the twentieth year here in Neh. 1:1 is not the twentieth of the king's reign, for that is not actually specified here. The more appropriate explanation is that we are not reading of Jewish months, but the years of the reign of the king; and in Neh. 1:1 we are reading the background for what happened in Neh. 2:1. Nehemiah came to the king in Nisan, whereas four months previously, in Chislev, he had been visited by Hanani. But both those dates were within the 20th year of the king. Perhaps it took him four months to get the courage to ask the king.

When wine was before him, that I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad before in his presence- LXX "and there was not another before him", i.e. Nehemiah was alone with the king and queen. The Persian queens were not usually enthroned when formal meetings were held, so this was a private audience. Being the wine taster involved him drinking the wine which had been offered to idols. This in sharp contrast to Daniel's attitude. And yet Nehemiah, although apparently weaker than Daniel, is none the less presented as a man of great spirituality and devotion to God; even though his conscience was clearly different and even inferior to Daniel's. We must be careful not to judge others as being unbelievers because their consciences or spiritual weakness leads them to do something which is apparently wrong. For Nehemiah's conscience on this matter was weak, and yet he was clearly counted as a spiritual person and legitimate believer. As someone so close to the king, he would have chosen this career path; and that again would appear spiritually unwise. It likely involved him in being castrated, for the close courtiers were eunuchs. But for all this, his weakness was used by God just as Esther's was. And that weakness in one aspect of character didn't mean that he was not a legitimate believer.

This is not to be used to justify our own weaknesses; but rather to inspire tolerance in us towards the weakness of others. See on :8.

Nehemiah 2:2 The king said to me, Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very much afraid- As the cup-bearer (Neh. 1:11), he was supposed to taste any foods and drinks intended for the king, in order to see if they contained poison. He himself was assessed every day as to whether he were sick. This is why the king was sure Nehemiah was not sick. It was a law of the Persian court that nobody was to be sad, hence the reference in Esther 4:2 to nobody being allowed to wear sackcloth near the court. We too live in a world where we are somehow expected to wear the mask of being upbeat and positive; we are taught that at work, you leave your personal and domestic issues at home. But Nehemiah's sadness for God's people, for the plight of the abused, was greater than that. He surely tried to do his job, to be upbeat and smiley. But his inner sadness couldn't be disguised. It is a testament to his bleeding heart for others- others whom he had never met, for he had likely never been in Judea, and was only going on what he had heard. His great fear may not simply have been because he knew that the king was displeased with his sadness. Rather was it the fear every man has as he realizes his time has come to speak up and openly do something for God, realizing that so much depends upon him and him alone. It was the Lord's fear in Gethsemane. Again we mark Nehemiah very highly for his commitment and serious attitude to using his secular position for God's people and purpose.

"Sad" is s.w. Neh. 1:3 "affliction". See on Neh. 13:8. Nehemiah was so identified with his people that their situation was his, to the point of it subconsciously affecting his body language. Likewise the Lord Jesus bore our sins and human condition in His own body on the cross; His identification with us is to be reflected in our identification with others, to the point that their condition affects our body language. But the Hebrew word translated "sad" is usually translated 'evil' or 'wicked'- it could be that the King was suspicious of some bad motive in what Nehemiah had in his heart. Therefore Nehemiah's desperate outburst was an amazing turn around- one moment the king was suspicious that his cupbearer was planning something against him, the next- he was giving Nehemiah amazing blessing. Such paranoia and fickleness would have been typical in ancient kings.

LXX "Why is thy countenance sad, and dost thou not control thyself?". This would imply the king accepted his servants might be sad for various personal reasons, but they controlled themselves and always put on a positive face for him. And yet the king, knowing this was how his servants acted, concluded that there must be some unusually overpowering grief within Nehemiah. That grief was indeed a reflection of an unusually passionate love for God's people and purpose.

Nehemiah 2:3 I said to the king, Let the king live forever! Why shouldn't my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates have been consumed with fire?- We get the impression that Nehemiah just blurted out what was in his heart. As a senior courtier, he would have been well trained and practiced in hiding emotions and never introducing his personal issues into the business of serving the king. We see here his depth of feeling for God's people. The city was now lying waste not because of the Babylonian destruction but because of the work of the Samaritan "army" of which we will later read. If Nehemiah's ancestors were buried in sepulchers in Jerusalem, they would have been wealthy. For that was the burial of the

wealthy. Quite possibly he refers to the tombs of the family of David (Neh. 3:16), implying he was somehow related to the royal line.

Nehemiah 2:4 Then the king said to me, For what do you make request?- Neh. 2:4,5 have many similarities with Esther 4:8; 5:14; 8:5; as his being fearful of being sad before the King (Neh. 2:2) recalls how in Esther 4:2 it was not allowed to come before the King in sackcloth. He was surely motivated by the example of young Esther in the very same city and palace of Shushan.

So I prayed to the God of heaven- This was clearly in his mind with eyes open. The fact God naturally accepts such urgent prayers of a moment mustn't lead us to only pray to Him like that. Prayer is also to be seriously thought out in advance, just as the incense was carefully prepared before being offered. The instant prayer of a second or two reached "the God of heaven". That is the wonder. The king was effectively asking Nehemiah to pray to him, to make a request. But firstly and quite naturally, Nehemiah pauses for a few seconds to pray and make request to God.

Nehemiah 2:5 I said to the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you would send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs- "If it pleases the king" is the exact term used by Esther in her intercession for her people, in the very same palace in Shushan / Susa (Esther 9:15). Nehemiah was clearly inspired by her, just as his prayers of Neh. 1 and Neh. 9 were inspired by the prayers of Ezra and Daniel before him. We note that Nehemiah's fathers were buried in Jerusalem, suggesting he may have been from the royal family. Or again, this could simply be reflecting the depth of his identification with his people.

That I may build it-

According to the unchangeable decrees of the Persian kings, building Jerusalem was not to happen: "Make a decree... that this city be not rebuilt" (Ezra 4:21). That decree had been made because the Jews had been reported as rebuilding the walls of the city in order to establish their independence from Persia (Ezra 4:12,16). And Nehemiah is now asking for that to be reversed, and for him to arrange the rebuilding of those same walls. He was bravely asking for a change to the unchangeable. It really was a brave request, in the spirit of the Lord changing the unchangeable for us His people.

"Build" is the word used of the promised rebuilding of the city and temple at the restoration. Nehemiah, for all his worldly career, was deeply aware of all the possibilities that were potentially enabled by all the prophecies. Amos 9:11-15 is most comfortably interpreted when read as referring to the restoration of Judah and the "remnant" of the ten tribes to the land under Ezra: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God". "I will *raise up*" uses a Hebrew word very commonly featured in the

records of the restoration, when the people were exhorted to “rise up and build” (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 10:4,15; Neh. 2:18,20). The statement that they would “close up the breaches thereof” is exactly the language of Neh. 6:1, which records that the walls were rebuilt so that there was no breach [s.w.] therein. It was after the Babylonian invasion that Zion was “fallen” and ‘ruined’ (s.w. Jer. 31:18; 45:4; Lam. 2:2,17). “I will build it” is exactly the theme of the records of the return from Babylon (Ezra 1:2,3,5; 3:2,10; 4:1-4; Neh. 2:5,17,18,20; 3:1-3, 13-15; 4:1,3,5,6,10,17,18; 6:1,6; 7:1). Surely Amos 9 is saying that at the rebuilding at the time of the restoration, God’s people could have ushered in the Kingdom age of agricultural plenty and victory over their Arab neighbours. But they intermarried with Edom, and suffered drought because they didn’t fulfill the requirements to rebuild Zion correctly. But the words of Amos were still to come true in some form- they are given an application in Acts 15:17 which may appear to be way out of context, i.e. to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus words which could have had a plain fulfilment at the restoration were given a delayed fulfilment; but they were not fulfilled in a literal sense, but in a spiritual one. And so it is with prophecies like Ezekiel 38, and the temple prophecies of Ezekiel. They will be fulfilled in spiritual essence, but probably not in strict literality, although they *could have been* had God’s people been more ‘fulfilling’ of them.

Nehemiah 2:6 The king said to me (the queen was also sitting by him)- The queen may possibly have been Esther, although this presents insurmountable problems of chronology. "The queen" is the term for a foreign queen; she may have been a Jewess, but not Esther. Whether it was or not, clearly her example inspired Nehemiah. The chronology is very complex at this point; but if it wasn't Esther, we can imagine that possibly it became seen as a good omen to be married to a Jewess, or at least to have some Jewish women within the harem. The book of Esther closes with the Jews popular within Persia- so much so that the king's wine taster, one of the most senior positions, was Nehemiah the Jew.

How long shall your journey be? And when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time- It would seem that this initial trip was of short duration, but he later returned as governor of Judah for 12 years (Neh. 5:14), and then he returned to Persia and then apparently made another visit to Judah after that.

Nehemiah 2:7 Moreover I said to the king, If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah- Nehemiah was clearly inspired by the letters given to Ezra. Ezra was his inspiration as was Esther. We are to likewise be inspired by Biblical characters and to actually make decisions and do things directly motivated by the examples we encounter in the pages of the Bible.

We have the impression that the conversation between the King and Nehemiah arose spontaneously, without Nehemiah intending it. Had he planned this? I would say, no. Did he have these concrete plans for rebuilding the wall at this point? I don't think so. He blurted out what was subconsciously in his mind. "What my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem" (Neh. 2:12).

Nehemiah 2:8 and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. The king granted my requests because of the good hand of my God upon me- This is a phrase used of Ezra's work towards the restoration (Ezra 7:9; 8:18). But it was exactly "because of the good hand of my God

upon me" that Ezra refused to ask for soldiers to accompany him (Ezra 8:22). That same Divine hand working for good was upon Nehemiah, but we sense he believed it somewhat less. Just as his being the wine taster makes him compare unfavourably with Daniel who refused the king's wine. But for all this lower level, he was clearly a faithful and spiritual man. The repeated emphasis upon the "hand of God" is another way of saying that the operation of God through His Spirit was with every effort to do according to His word, and restore Jerusalem. And so it is to this day. Again we recall that this is Nehemiah's memoir; the clear allusion to Ezra's more faithful attitude to the hand of God is perhaps Nehemiah's self-criticism.

GNB "and for the house I was to live in", ESV "and for the house that I shall occupy". Rashi translates: "And for the house to which I shall go and to make a house in which I shall dwell for my needs". Nehemiah on many accounts presents as more spiritually minded than Ezra, at least initially. But he seeks armed escort from the king, unlike Ezra; and specifically asks for materials to build a house for himself in Jerusalem. And quite possibly, he means 'Let a mansion be built for the Persian governor', again a nod towards reinforcing Persian hegemony over Jerusalem. Rather than working towards the prophesied radical freedom of Zion. He is now looking back in this his memoir, reflecting on it all.

"The citadel by the temple" was a kind of fortress, called the fortress / tower of Antonia by the Romans (Acts 21:34). It was used by the Romans as it was by the Persians- as a garrison for their colonial forces. The idea was surely being sold to the Persians that this would be necessary for the Persians to maintain military and political control over Jerusalem. Neh. 3:7 describes the building of "A throne for the governor of the land beyond the river" (Rashi). This was part of the deal Nehemiah had offered the king- to build a Persian fortress for the garrison, right next to the temple, and to enforce and strengthen Persian power. What should Nehemiah have been thinking? That Zion must be free of all Gentile power. Instead, he reinforced it, the deal being that the shame of Jerusalem being a city without walls was thus taken away. Because he also got permission to rebuild the walls. This kind of thing is reminiscent of how in the 17th and 18th centuries in the German states, there were *Hofjuden*, court Jews, who would persuade rulers to support enterprises favourable to the Jews whilst at the same time reinforcing the power and control of those rulers in other, related projects.

Nehemiah doesn't ask anything for the temple itself. He might surely have considered rebuilding it according to the commandments of Ez. 40-48. We sense he was asking for Persian hegemony and control to be enforced in Jerusalem through building the fortress, rather than seeking freedom for Zion and Judah. Like Ezra, accepting the commission to enforce Persian power in Judah, but with the agreement he could teach Yahweh's law to the people there. We discussed on Ezra 7,8 how this is rather like a missionary accepting Government funding for preaching work, whilst agreeing to ensure the territory comes under the political empire and control of his government. And was this compromise correct? Nehemiah in his memoirs, like Ezra, looks back and wonders. And invites us to to be drawn into his reflections...

Nehemiah 2:9 Then I came to the governors beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me captains of the army and horsemen- See on :8. That captains were sent with Nehemiah was perhaps not only for protection but in order to add credibility to his mission.

Nehemiah 2:10 When Sanballat the Horonite- This may mean he was from Horonaim,

in southern Moab (Is. 15:5; Jer. 48:3,5,34). So he may have been a Moabite. His name is Assyrian, 'Sin (the moon god of the Assyrians) gives life', just as Sennacherib = 'Sin gives many brothers'. His family may have been moved there by the Assyrians when the ten tribes went into captivity and other peoples were moved into the land of Palestine. His Assyrian connections are the basis for the allusions to his opposition in terms of the Assyrian invasion at the time of Hezekiah (see on Neh. 4:3,8).

And Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly- This means that Moab (Sanballat) and Ammon are again pictured as united against Israel. Tobiah may have been a slave who had been freed and arose to a position of power, hence "the servant". Or he may have been "the servant" of the Persians in some official capacity. But his name includes the termination 'Yah', suggesting he may have been a renegade Jew (cp. Ezra 2:60; Zech. 6:10). His son's name, Jehohanan (Neh. 6:18) also features the 'Yah' prefix. But he self identified as an Ammonite. Or possibly he was just called an "Ammonite" by Nehemiah; just as the "people of the land" were called 'foreign women' in Ezra. The returned exiles saw themselves as the true "Israel", and the Jews who had remained in the land as effectively Gentiles, outside the community.

Because a man had come to seek the welfare- He was motivated by Ps. 122:9, where the Psalmist vows to seek the welfare (s.w.) of God's people, city and house. We too need to read Scripture and arise and do it, rather than leaving it as words on a screen or page.

Of the children of Israel- "The Jews" is now used synonymously with "Israelite" (Nehemiah 2:10 cp. Neh. 4:1; 5:1,8; 7:73; 12:47). 12 he-goats and 12 bulls were offered for "all Israel" in Ezra 6:17; 8:35. This reflects the prophetic vision of a repentant Judah and Israel reuniting in a restored Kingdom of God on earth at the restoration. But still Judah and Israel remained divided; and no "prince" arose to fulfill the prophecies. Israel and Judah were to become one nation in the land, "and my servant David shall be a prince in the midst of them" (Ez. 37:16-24). This is clearly the same "prince" as referred to in Ezekiel 45-48. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 30:9 speaks of a returned Judah serving "David their king, whom I shall raise up unto them"- implying that David would have been resurrected at the restoration, if all had gone according to what was possible. Some of the ten tribes did return with Judah.

Nehemiah 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem- When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10), he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7). The redeemer was to come to Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Quite possibly Nehemiah is now looking back at his life and realizing that he had failed to fulfil the potential of being the comforter, Yah's comfort, as his name means. And was that his fault, or that of the community? These are the kinds of things that go on in our self-examination.

And was there three days- Ezra and his group likewise spent three days in reflection, prayer and praise on arriving in Jerusalem (Ezra 8:32). They had likewise begun their journey with three days of fasting and prayer (Ezra 8:15). So often we

forget to thank God with the same intensity with which we asked Him for help. It was this three days of praise which may have inspired Nehemiah to do likewise on arrival in Jerusalem. The Godly examples and prayer patterns of others really should affect us, and our examples likewise influence others. But Ezra's ministry was a failure. And Nehemiah is now reflecting that he had been very influenced by Ezra...

Nehemiah 2:12 I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me, except the animal that I rode on- See on :19. "Put in my heart" uses the same word for "put" when we read of God putting a new heart and spirit in His revived people if they entered the new covenant at the restoration: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you" (Ez. 36:27-29). They revived the stones out of the heaps (Neh. 4:2). A new spirit was potentially given to them, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Neh. 2:12 s.w.). But this didn't force them to be obedient. They chose not to be. Nehemiah now in his memoir is looking back on life and seeing the hand of God, the Spirit of God placing things in his heart... and pondering the degree to which he had personally failed to use the potential, compared to the issue of the fact that the people generally failed to.

Nehemiah 2:13 I went out by night by the valley gate, even toward the jackal's well, and to the dung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down, and its gates which were consumed with fire- LXX "and I mourned over the wall of Jerusalem which they were destroying". This would suggest that the broken down walls were a result of the ongoing Samaritan opposition, and not referring to the Babylonian destruction many decades previously.

Nehemiah 2:14 Then I went on to the spring gate and to the king's pool; but there was no place for the animal that was under me to pass- This amount of rubble in a steep place, stopping a donkey passing, meant there had been significant destruction of the walls by the Samaritans. "The king's pool" was Siloam, next to the king's garden, fed by a conduit bringing water from the Gihon spring (2 Kings 20:20).

Nehemiah 2:15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall- This would be the Kidron brook, also crossed at night by the Lord Jesus, perhaps with His mind on faithful Nehemiah.

And I turned back, and entered by the valley gate, and so returned- Turning back in the context seems to mean turning westward in order to come back to his starting point. But we note the lack of mention of any location on the North or North West of the city; so perhaps he 'turned back,' having seen enough, or unable to continue.

Nehemiah 2:16 The rulers didn't know where I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest who did the work-

We wonder why Nehemiah felt he couldn't immediately tell the local Jews and their leaders. We get the sense that something wasn't quite right with them, and Nehemiah knew it. The rapid decline of the situation in Jerusalem was largely due to

them. They were very much at the centre of the sinful, spiritually negative situation in Jerusalem which is described in Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. In Neh. 5 we will find that these local Jewish leaders were abusing their own brethren. There were false prophets and a group amongst the Jews who were allied with their own enemies (Neh. 6:10-14,17-19).

According to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah's real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, 'comfort of Yahweh', invites us to see him as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God's comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16).

Nehemiah 2:17 Then I said to them, You see the evil situation that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste and its gates are burned with fire. Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we won't be disgraced- Ez. 40-48 stress the "gates" dozens of times; and Nehemiah's account likewise stresses many times the attention he paid to setting up the "gates" [s.w.], as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel's words. But on the other hand, Nehemiah makes no mention of the restoration prophecies, but rather seems at this point more concerned with their not being shamed in the eyes of others. For as the Proverb says, a city without walls was a disgrace and shame (Prov. 25:28). Nehemiah's motivation was partly related to national pride. Jerusalem was to be inhabited as a city without walls, dwelling without bars and gates (Ez. 38:11; Zech. 2:4), with the Gentiles flowing to her and her God. Nehemiah's desire to build walls was a tacit acceptance that this was not his vision at all. In fact quite the opposite. Rebuilding the walls is what he is famed for, but he perhaps looks back and sees the whole project as actually the wrong thing and not at all what he was potentially capable of- which was leading Zion to freedom from the Gentile downtreading. Nehemiah's "Come let us build" is responded to by the people: "Let us arise and build" (:18). Enthusiasm spreads. God's people who appear depressed, lethargic and unable to be proactive can in fact be inspired, easier than we imagine, by just one other person's attitude.

Nehemiah 2:18 I told them of the hand of my God which was for good upon me, as also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. They said, Let us arise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work- Rather than beginning by telling them of the resources he had at his disposal, he first gets them to see the need- and only then tells them that the resources are available.

"Rise up / arise" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over

Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival. LXX "And their hands were strengthened for the good work" reflects the ambiguity here- they strengthened their hands, and God confirmed this by strengthening their hands. This is how He continues to work. See on Neh. 4:6. Again, Nehemiah is looking back, and perhaps perceiving that what defined his life's work was getting men to arise and build the walls of Jerusalem. But his allusions to the Isaiah prophecies show that he realizes that this was not in fact the arising of Zion and her people that had been potentially possible. He was and is famed for rising and building Zion's walls. But actually that was just fame in the eyes of men. He hadn't achieved what was potentially possible. And true self-examination may well reveal the same about ourselves.

Nehemiah 2:19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it- Geshem may have been the leader of the Arabian community established by Sargon king of Assyria in the depopulated Samaria. Whatever, we see here a coalition of local neighbouring forces against the Jews.

I suggested in Neh. 1:7 that much of the Old Testament was rewritten under inspiration in captivity. The way Deuteronomy refers to cities East of Jordan as being "on this side Jordan" (e.g. Dt. 4:41,49) would suggest that the editor of the book was writing from a location East of Jordan- likely Babylon. The comment in Josh. 15:63 that "the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day" sounds very much as if it were written in the captivity, lamenting the way that the local tribes still lived in Zion. "The children of Judah" is very much a phrase used about the exiles. Thus books like Joshua were written up in the captivity in order to show Judah how they were repeating the sins of their forefathers, and appealing to them thereby to learn the lessons. It's even possible that the lament that "Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel unto this day" (Josh. 13:13 RV) is a reference to "Geshem the Arabian" and Sanballat dwelling amongst Israel at the time of their return (Neh. 2:19 etc.).

They ridiculed us and despised us and said, What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?- This despising of Nehemiah recalls the despised saviour in Is. 53. Is. 53:2 speaks of Messiah, in a restoration context beginning in Is. 52, as ‘growing up’, the same word used to describe the ‘coming up’ from the dry ground of Babylon. This potential Messiah could have been Zerubbabel, but when he failed to fulfill the prophecies, there was the possibility that another man could have fulfilled his role. Nehemiah ‘came up’ from Babylon, and was “the servant” who ‘prospered’ Yahweh’s work (Neh. 1:11; 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (Neh. 5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfill the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion’s gates in Messiah’s Kingdom would be praise. He was “despised” as Messiah would be (Neh. 2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (Neh. 2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and Neh. 2:16 sounds very much like “of the people there was none with me” (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah’s table to eat and drink (Neh. 5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit he

stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected.

So Nehemiah, looking back, saw the similarities between himself and the Messiah figure. But he realized more and more that he had not been that figure whom he could potentially have been. We likewise, as we increasingly appreciate both the character of the Lord Jesus and the depth of our own sins, come to realize ever more strongly: I am not Jesus. I didn't do what He did. I am not Him. I was not Him. I have failed to be like Him. And yet our faith in acceptance by His grace increases the more.

Nehemiah 2:20 Then I answered them and said to them, The God of heaven will prosper us- This prospering was from God (s.w. Neh. 1:11; 2:20). No device formed against the program of rebuilding the Kingdom would prosper (Is. 54:17 s.w.), and the Divine word of restoration would prosper (Is. 55:11 s.w.). Any attempt to bring about the intended reestablishment of the Kingdom would be prospered by God; the fact that ultimately didn't happen was because the exiles ceased to make use of His potential assistance. We put God to endless pain and labour in order to fulfill His wish to save men, if we don't fulfill what in prospect we could fulfill. In the context of the restoration, Yahweh truly said that "...so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Is. 55:11 AV). His word will have fulfilment in the end, but it can have its fulfilment in us, here and now. Nehemiah twice stated that Yahweh was prospering him in his work of restoring Zion [Neh. 1:11; 2:20 s.w.]; but generally, the word of prophecy was deferred in its fulfilment. Let's not be satisficers as Israel were, minimalists happy so long as we have our bit of land to live on, our cieled roof to dwell under... and neglect *His* house.

Therefore we, His servants, will arise and build; but you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem- LXX "and we his servants are pure, and we will build". They were far from pure, and so we may detect here an inappropriate national pride in Nehemiah. This was to have no place at all in the motivation for rebuilding and restoring God's Kingdom, but it seems even Nehemiah's motives were mixed.

It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (Ezra 4:3 cp. Neh. 2:20), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6 and in Isaiah, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion. As with some of us, their quite correct refusal to allow "the adversaries of Judah" (Ezra 4:1) to fellowship with us in the work can lead us to an exclusive approach to fellowship, that actually disallows the essentially outgoing and inclusive spirit of the God we serve. The Jews returned from Babylonian having swung to the opposite extreme from their earlier worldliness; they returned proud and refusing contact with the Gentile world, considering themselves saved by their own strength. And this is perhaps reflected in the way they refused on principle to allow any Gentiles to help them in the building work. Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee [as in the decree of Cyrus]...Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night"; and then as Ez. 43 had also described, "I will glorify the house of my glory" (Is. 60:7). And so Nehemiah ended up making the mistake of Ezra, of being an exclusionist and purist. When as I suggested on Neh. 1:2, he had first been moved by the plight of those Jews

whom Ezra had excluded. Likewise he was going to repeat Ezra's error in the matter of intermarriage. And he looks back in his memoir and appreciates that. "No portion" is the term used by Sheba the Benjamite when he says "We have no share in David" (2 Sam. 20:1). It doesn't mean 'You are not Jews ethnically', but rather is a statement of disfellowship. I have elsewhere discussed how "the Ammnote" is a strange term to use of someone with 'Yah' in their name, and I have suggested these were pejorative terms Nehemiah used for his brethren whom he decided were apostate.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 3

Nehemiah 3:1 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the sheep gate-

Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls is his defining work in his life. These are his memoirs, looking back. I suggest that in this very detailed record of it, he tacitly realizes that all was not so wonderful with his work. Sadly many conservatives have seized upon his account and used it to justify a right wing apparent zeal for God, zealously working for God by excluding apostate brethren and succeeding in doing God's work in a sea of internal apostasy and external opposition- that was possibly quite missing the point, and which was in fact contra the potential God had given him. For starters, the restoration prophecies spoke of Jerusalem being inhabited as a city without walls (Zech. 2:4, a prophecy probably contemporary with Nehemiah), open to the Gentiles to come and worship there. By building a wall around the temple area and seeking to exclude not only Gentiles, but Jews associated with Gentiles, Nehemiah perhaps missed the point. But, he did what he did for God and in prayer to God- just as many conservative Christians do. And we are to respect that and be encouraged by his spiritually minded approach to some things, even if it was a case of misplaced ideals. I will discuss later how the walls he rebuilt were an encirclement of the temple area, with a view to creating a hyper holy space that was Gentile-free. When the king of Persia had given him the resources necessary to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem- something, I will suggest, he didn't actually attempt to do.

Nehemiah's memoir concludes in Neh. 13:28 with Eliashib being rejected by Nehemiah because of his connections with Tobiah. So there was a fall out between them... and on Neh. 4:14 I will argue that the nobles and rulers, which surely included the High Priest, fell out with Nehemiah. "Eliashib" means God returns, a form of the word *shub* commonly used for the intended repentance and return of the exiles. It suggests this man was well motivated spiritually. Indeed he may have gone wrong later, allowing his son or grandson to marry Sanballat's daughter. Or, as discussed elsewhere (on Neh. 3:1,32; 4:1; 6:2), it could be that Nehemiah's falling out with this family was actually wrong, and his claims against them were wildly exaggerated. All we know about them is from Nehemiah's mouth. The description of the rebuilding of the walls starts and finishes with the sheep gate- the gate of the temple [not the whole city] where sacrifices were brought in to the temple area. This confirms the suggestion on :32 that Nehemiah's wall was in fact just around the temple and citadel of David, not the entire city. Many of the names of the builders appear to be Levites or priests. And they repaired outside their own houses- which were likely to be around the temple. Hence :31 "Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants". Hence "the temple servants living on Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east... Above the horse gate, the priests made repairs, each one across from his own house" (:26,28). Some of the words for

"house" really mean 'chambers'. Again, the hint is that this rebuilt wall was around the temple area. The exact geographical locations of the places mentioned is very hard to ascertain, because Jerusalem has been rebuilt so many times. The Dung Gate may refer to a temple gate, where the unclean remains of the sacrificial animals were immediately taken to and cast "outside the camp".

We must be aware that there were gates to Jerusalem, and also "the gates of the house of Yahweh" (1 Chron. 9:23; 22:3; 2 Chron. 23:19; 31:2). I suggest it may be "the gates of the house of Yahweh" that are in view in the descriptions of Nehemiah's gates and walls. This is why it is the Levites who were appointed as the gatekeepers, the watchers of the gates (stressed three times in Neh. 11:19; 12:25; 13:22). That makes more sense if the gates were gates to the temple area. The gates referring to the entrance to the temple area rather than the city of Jerusalem makes sense in passages like Ps. 100:4 "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, into His courts with praise"; and the many references to the gates *of Zion*, which refers to the temple area (Ps. 87:2 etc.). Hence we read of "the gates of this house", the temple (Jer. 22:4). These temple gates are repeatedly mentioned in the plans for the new temple (Ez. 40:18,27 etc.), "They are to be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house, and ministering in the house" (Ez. 44:11). These gates contrast with "the gates of the city" (Ez. 48:31). The Persians had earlier ordered building work in Jerusalem to cease because they accepted the complaint "that if this city is built, and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll" (Ezra 4:13). Building just the walls of the temple, with the Persian governor's tribute house on the temple walls... would seem about the best compromise Nehemiah could have got. Humanly speaking.

Eliashib rose up and built in response to Nehemiah's call to rise up and build. Eliashib was the local religious leader, and his response to the call of a total newcomer is surely commendable. We may hear the call from those we find difficult to hear it from... but still we are to respond. "Rose up / arose" is a word used often of the 'rising up' of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 9:5; Neh. 2:18; 3:1). This was a fulfilment of the command to "Arise... Jerusalem!" (Is. 51:17; 52:2; 61:4). But this 'arising' was to be associated with the dawning of Zion's light in the form of Yahweh's glory literally dwelling over Zion (Is. 60:1). This didn't happen at the time, because the appearance of 'arising' by the exiles was only external and wasn't matched by a spiritual revival.

They sanctified it, and set up its doors; even to the tower of Hammeah they sanctified it, to the tower of Hananel- "Hammeah" is LXX "tower of the hundred". It could be they repaired 100 cubits around the tower of Hananel. The 'sanctifying' of the wall and gates makes sense if in fact these walls are around the temple area, rather than around the entire secular city.

Nehemiah 3:2 Next to him built the men of Jericho. Next to them built Zaccur the son of Imri- The close fellowship between priests and secular people is stressed in the LXX "And they builded by the side of the men of Jericho, and by the side of the sons of Zacchur, the son of Amari".

Nehemiah 3:3 The sons of Hassenaah built the fish gate; they laid its beams, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars- Zech. 2:4 had foretold that “Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein”, seeing that Yahweh Himself would be as a wall of fire around her to protect her from her adversaries (Ezra had recognized this promise, that God would be a wall to them- Ezra 9:9). Note how this prophecy is introduced by an Angel with a measuring reed

measuring out the rebuilt Zion (Zech. 2:1), just as we have in Ezekiel 40. But Judah disbelieved the promise of a Divine wall of fire, and insisted on building a physical wall to protect them; and the record in Nehemiah has plenty of reference to their setting up of bars and gates in their fear (Neh. 3:3,6,13-15). By doing so they disallowed the fulfilment of Ez. 38:11, and thereby precluded what was prophesied as subsequently following. If they had trusted Him and paid their tithes, their cattle would have multiplied, and the Scythian tribes would have come down to seek to take them, as Ezekiel 38:12,13 foretold. But as it happened, their cattle were diseased and their agriculture not blessed because of their dilatory attention to Yahweh's house that lay waste (Haggai 1:11). So therefore there was no invasion, and no victory against the nations, and no Kingdom established at that time.

Nehemiah 3:4 Next to them, Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz made repairs. Next to them, Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel made repairs. Next to them, Zadok the son of Baana made repairs- Although I will suggest that Nehemiah was working on the basis of misplaced ideals, God will still confirm His servants in the service they wish to offer. No matter how muddled their motives and misplaced their understanding. I've done and seen so much of this in my ministry. "Repaired" is the word used for 'strengthened'. They strengthened their hands and their hands were strengthened (s.w. Neh. 2:18 "Let us arise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work"; Zech. 8:9,13 "Let your hands be strong, you who hear in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets who were in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of Armies was laid... Don't be afraid. Let your hands be strong"), and this empowered them to strengthen ("repair") the walls. This in turn could have fulfilled the restoration prophecy of Is. 54:2 "strengthen your stakes", the tent pegs of the revived tabernacle. But sadly this was but tokenistic fulfilment and their abiding disobedience and impenitence precluded the fulfilment of the full prophetic potential at the time. It is all therefore reapplied and reinterpreted with regard to the work of the Lord Jesus.

Meshullam's daughter was married to Jonathan, the son of Tobiah, one of Nehemiah's critics (Neh. 6:18) who was against the rebuilding project. This raises many possibilities. Was Meshullam doing what his own in-laws were against? Or did he participate as a form of infiltration? Or was Nehemiah's fallout with the Tobiah /Sanballat family just plain wrong, and he ended up excluding and vilifying some of the hardest workers?

Nehemiah 3:5 Next to them, the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles didn't put their necks to the work of their Lord- The greater or lesser devotion to the Lord's work has been preserved in the record all these generations. LXX "And next to them the Thecoim took their place; but the Adorim applied not their neck to their service". We could also read this as meaning that they absolutely refused to do the work. Or, that they did it without enthusiasm. We note how the nobles abused the people and later turned against Nehemiah (Neh. 6:10-13,16,17), at least as he presents it; as possibly did others in this list in Neh. 3.

Nehemiah 3:6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the old gate. They laid its beams, and set up its doors, and its bolts, and its bars- Every detail of their work was recorded and has been for millennia, so sensitive was God to every bit of carpentry done for Him and the work of His Kingdom. And He remains so to this day.

Nehemiah 3:7 Next to them, Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, repaired the residence- See on Neh. 2:8. RV "throne". It seems that the governor of the Persian empire to the west of the Euphrates (who was based in Damascus) had a throne on the northern wall of the city, which is where he would typically arrive from Damascus when he visited Jerusalem. This point is seen as the limit of the northern city wall.

Of the governor beyond the River- The fact they were still under the power of the Persian empire is emphasized, in tacit recognition of the fact that they had not received the radical independence and freedom promised in the restoration prophets. Zech. 9:8-10 is a prophecy of Nehemiah, Zerubbabel or Joshua which had to have its real fulfilment deferred until the coming of Jesus: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass [Did Zerubbabel / Joshua like Nehemiah enter Jerusalem on a donkey?]. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem [the opposing Samaritans], and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth”. This latter phrase contrasts with the repeated reminder that the Persians had dominion “on this side the river” (Ezra 4:10,11,16; 5:3,6; 6:13; 8:36; Neh. 3:7). The coming King (and Joshua was prophesied as a king) was to free Judah from Persia’s dominion, and establish God’s Kingdom, with boys and girls playing in the streets of Jerusalem (Zech. 8:5).

Rashi: "A throne for the governor of the land beyond the river". This was part of the deal Nehemiah had offered the king- to build a Persian fortress for the garrison, right next to the temple, and to enforce and strengthen Persian power. Later in Nehemiah we will read that the Persian governors heavily taxed the Jewish people and led them to poverty: "the former governors who were before me were supported by the people, and took bread and wine from them, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants ruled over the people" (Neh. 5:15). And Nehemiah had agreed to build the governor's house, to enforce that power. A very far cry from the prophetic message that Zion was to be free from the Gentiles. What should Nehemiah have been thinking? That Zion must be free of all Gentile power. Instead, he reinforced it, the deal being that the shame of Jerusalem being a city without walls was thus taken away. Because he also got permission to rebuild the walls. Rashi further interprets Neh. 3:7: "The [people of] the land beyond the river built a throne for the governor of the land beyond the river to sit upon". Nehemiah could even have been the Messianic ruler who came to Zion as prophesied by Zechariah and Malachi. He looks back in these his memoirs and reflects that 'I was not Jesus as I should have been'. Just as we do.

Nehemiah 3:8 Next to him, Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, made repairs. Next to him, Hananiah one of the perfumers made repairs, and they fortified Jerusalem even to the broad wall- We note that those unaccustomed to heavy manual work still did it. This is the unity of the Spirit experienced when the body of believers put their hearts to the work of the Kingdom.

Isaiah’s messianic prophecies describe a Saviour coming from both the north and the east (especially in Is. 41). Babylon was to the East of Judah, and yet the approach road came down from the north. This Saviour could have come and brought destruction of the Gentile opposition, and established the Kingdom of God in the land.

The carpenter encouraged the goldsmith (Is. 41:7) in the building of the wall (cp. Neh. 3:8,32), and there are other links with what happened at the restoration (e.g. the way each worker says to his neighbour "be of good courage", the same word used throughout Nehemiah for the 'repairing' or strengthening of the wall). But evidently the intended, possible fulfilment just didn't happen. The fulfilment has been deferred until the return of Jesus. He will come from Heaven, the figurative "north", rather than literal Babylon; the essence will be gloriously fulfilled, but not every literality. And so it may well be with the prophecies of the temple and worship system which was to be restored.

Nehemiah 3:9 Next to them, Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs- It seems that the actual builders are recorded here; and the idea was that the ruler worked next to goldsmiths who likewise were unaccustomed to manual labour (:8). Although Jerusalem was in ruins, there were still civil divisions and rulers over them.

Nehemiah 3:10 Next to them, Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs across from his house. Next to him, Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs- It is always tempting to do God's work insofar as it reinforces our own personality or has some perceived benefit for us or our family. And so it seems it was with Jedaiah; he repaired the wall opposite his own house. "Harumaph" means 'slit nose', "to be disfigured, mutilated, any split portion of the face". We can conjecture that it was a disfigured person who quietly got on with repairing his section of the wall.

Nehemiah 3:11 Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hasshub the son of Pahathmoab, repaired another portion, and the tower of the furnaces-

Malchijah was one of the Jews accused of marrying the people of the land (Ezra 10:31), whom I there suggested may well have been simply the disenfranchised Jews who had remained in the land after the exile. We are invited therefore to wonder whether Ezra's judgment of them had been too harsh. The classical position of course would be that this man repented of his marriage out of the faith and then became zealous for Nehemiah's project.

"Another portion" could suggest that they repaired not only their allotted section but another one as well. And this is noted; and such a person worked next to the one who was apparently more interested just in working for the benefit of their own house (:10). This is the same juxtaposition of motives and personalities which we find amongst God's people today.

Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. "Portion" is the word elsewhere translated "measure". No fewer than 24 times in Ez. 40-48 are we told that the temple was to be built by 'measure' (e.g. Ez. 40:3,5,10,21,22,24,28,29); and the same word occurs frequently in describing how Nehemiah gave various groups of Jews their own 'measure' or "portion" in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem (Neh. 3:11,19,20,22,24,27). See on :31. As he 'measured out' the work of rebuilding Jerusalem, he must have been conscious of the Kingdom prophecy of Jer. 31:38-40: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the city shall be built to the LORD from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath. And the whole valley of the dead bodies,

and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east, shall be holy unto the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever". It *could* have been fulfilled, this could have been the potential Kingdom of God, and he set about to seek to fulfill it; but those places were not kept "holy unto the Lord", and therefore the Jews were to be again plucked up and thrown down. The wall Nehemiah built was not according to the definitions of Jer. 31. Perhaps he is looking back in his memoir and recognizing that he had not lived up to his potential. Just as we all do.

Nehemiah 3:12 Next to him, Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, he and his daughters, made repairs- This continues the theme of the work being done by those unaccustomed to manual work; the use of women connects with how goldsmiths, perfumers (:8) and civil administrative rulers all worked together in the great work.

Nehemiah 3:13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the valley gate. They built it, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and one thousand cubits of the wall to the dung gate- This was a huge amount of work to be done by one group- 1000 cubits of wall. Ez. 48:31-34 envisaged the 12 gates of Jerusalem being named after the 12 tribes of Israel. But it seems no accident that twelve separate gates of the city are mentioned in the restoration record- but they weren't renamed after the tribes of Israel. Here are the names of the city gates in Nehemiah: valley (Neh. 3:13); horse (Neh. 3:28); east (Neh. 3:29); Miphkad (Neh. 3:31); water (Neh. 8:16); dung (Neh. 12:31); fountain (Neh. 12:37); Ephraim, old, fish, sheep and prison gates (Neh. 12:39). No wonder some wept when the rebuilt temple was finally dedicated- the pattern of Ezekiel's vision hadn't been followed, even on such basic matters as the names of the twelve gates of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 3:14 Malchijah the son of Rechab, the ruler of the district of Beth Haccherem, repaired the dung gate. He built it, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars- The dung gate was at the south west corner of the wall. If Malchijah was indeed a Rechabite, then they were forbidden to live in houses (Jer. 35:7). If indeed Jerusalem was in the totally ruined state as Nehemiah presents it, then it was somehow appropriate that a Rechabite ruled over part of those ruins.

Nehemiah 3:15 Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the spring gate. He built it and covered it, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and the wall of the pool of Shelah by the king's garden, even to the stairs that go down from the city of David- The record now moves on to those who repaired the southern part of the wall.

The emphasis in the record on bars, gates and locks (e.g. Neh. 3:15) was perhaps to highlight how the restoration prophecies of Ezekiel, of a people living confidently *without* those things, had actually not been fulfilled; and therefore the prophesied events of Ez. 38-40 didn't happen- i.e. an invasion of a restored Judah, dwelling without bars and gates, which would lead in to the rebuilding of the temple and establishment of the Kingdom. Note how the restoration Psalm Ps. 76:1-5 speaks in the prophetic perfect of a great battle at Jerusalem which Yahweh would win. Perhaps this speaks of the same battle spoken of in Ez. 38, which could have come true in God's prophetic program, had the people rebuilt the city as they should have done.

Nehemiah 3:16 After him, Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of half the district of Beth Zur, made repairs to the place opposite the tombs of David, and to the pool that was made- This work was commendable in that this Nehemiah was from Beth Zur (Josh. 15:58) which was some way out of Jerusalem. So he got no personal benefit from the work, unlike Jedaiah in :10, who repaired the wall directly opposite his own house. And so it seems that some will get apparently more personal benefit from their service of God than others. "The pool" was perhaps that made by Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20; Is. 22:9-11).

And to the house of the mighty men- Perhaps the barracks for David's mighty men (2 Sam. 16:6; 23:8).

Nehemiah 3:17 After him the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani, made repairs. Next to him, Hashabiah, the ruler of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district- Again we see the juxtaposition of personality types within the body of God's people. The Levites, the manual workers associated with the temple service, are working together with a ruler. Keilah was some way out of Jerusalem, so he got no personal benefit from doing this work; see on :16.

Nehemiah 3:18 After him, their brothers, Bavvai the son of Henadad, the ruler of half the district of Keilah, made repairs- Keilah was some way out of Jerusalem, so they got no personal benefit from doing this work; see on :16.

Nehemiah 3:19 Next to him, Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, repaired another portion, across from the ascent to the armoury at the turning of the wall- The people of Mizpah had already been mentioned as repairing another section in :7. The simple truth is that some respond to the call to work more zealously and extensively than others; partly because they are simply wired differently, some being more proactive than others; and partly because of differing levels of faith. There are levels of response to God. We all get salvation by grace, the penny a day of the parable. But then works will also be rewarded. One trades his talents for more than another. One star shines brighter than another. That being the case, surely we should not be minimalists, but seek to serve God to the maximum.

Nehemiah 3:20 After him, Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired another portion, from the turning of the wall to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest- We again note how the extent of zeal was recorded and noted by God; in this case, it is noted that he "earnestly repaired". But the verb means ‘to be angry’, and is used only elsewhere in Job 19:11: "He has also kindled His wrath". People sometimes serve God as an outlet for their anger. This might be a case of it.

"Another portion" seems to mean 'the next section'. I discuss on :32 how it seems the wall was only around the temple area and the ancient, nearby 'city of David'. The sections weren't very long, some are vaguely defined, one extending only the length of Eliashib's house, and other sections only immediately in front of a person's house: "Meremoth... built the next section, up to the far end of Eliashib's house. The following priests rebuilt the next several sections of the wall: Priests from the area around Jerusalem built the next section; Benjamin and Hasshub built the next section, which was in front of their houses; Azariah... built the next section, which was in front of his house" (:21-23 GNB). If the sections were so small, there's no way the wall encircled the whole city. It seems :13 mentions the repairing of "one thousand

cubits of the wall" as if this were unusually large- about 450 meters. Other brigades only repaired what was immediately outside their own houses.

We note that the 41 brigades of workers were unevenly distributed: "the north with eight work outfits (Neh. 3:1-5); the west with ten work outfits (Neh. 3:6-13); the south with two (Neh.3:14-15); the east with twenty-one (Neh. 3:16-32)". Why such little attention to the south? Because south of the temple was the City of David [Ophel], connected to the temple by the Southern Steps. These are mentioned in :15: "even to the stairs that go down from the city of David".

Nehemiah 3:21 After him, Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another portion, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib-Meremoth had done his own allotted portion (:4) and now took on "another portion". There can be no spirit of minimalism amongst those who are truly strengthened to do God's work and who perceive God's hands working with their hands, as was the case with the restoration of the Kingdom at this time.

Nehemiah 3:22 After him, the priests, the men of the Plain, made repairs- These priests presumably had property in the Jordan valley (s.w. Gen. 13:10; 19:17; 2 Sam. 18:23), "the plain"; there were men of Jericho, from the same area, involved in the work (:2). We can too quickly read that the priests and Levites worked to rebuild the wall, and assume they are stellar examples of serving God and Nehemiah was well done in motivating them. But any scripture must be understood in the light of other scripture. Truly, a text without a context is a pretext. Even if the books of Nehemiah, Zechariah and Malachi are separated from each other in the English Bible, they are in fact broadly contemporary with each other. And they are the last books of Biblical history until the New Testament. Malachi records the utter corruption of the priesthood and Levites at this time. These priests and Levites recorded as building were not at all zealously, faithfully doing God's work in a sea of surrounding apostasy. They were seriously far from God and apostate. But they did God's work- yet, I suggest, for their own interests. For the wall was designed to enclose the temple area and make it an area just for priests, Levites and those whom Nehemiah defined as the true "house of Judah". Likewise we must recall that in Neh. 5 we will learn that there was a famine going on, which Haggai explains as being due to their apostacy; and the Jewish ruling class [some of whom are listed as builders] were abusing the poorer Jews because of the desperate need for food. And yet... they were all part of the wall building project...

Nehemiah 3:23 After them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs across from their house. After them, Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah made repairs beside his own house- It is always tempting to do God's work insofar as it reinforces our own personality or has some perceived benefit for us or our family. And so it seems it was with these men; they repaired the wall opposite their own houses. This contrasts with those from outlying towns who came in to work in Jerusalem. And so it seems that some will get apparently more personal benefit from their service of God than others. God alone can judge our motives.

Nehemiah 3:24 After him, Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another portion, from the house of Azariah to the turning of the wall, and to the corner- LXX links this with :25, "to the turning of Phalach [Palal]". "Another portion" as in :21 suggests he had finished his own portion and had taken on another.

Nehemiah 3:25 Palal the son of Uzai made repairs opposite the turning of the wall, and the tower that stands out from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs- The court of the guard was inside the king's house (Jer. 32:2), and was used as a prison, therefore it was near the prison gate (Neh. 12:39). The way these ancient descriptions are internally corroborated is one of those 'ring of truth' impressions we get from the inspired record.

Nehemiah 3:26 (Now the Nethinim lived in Ophel, to the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that stands out.)- The implication may be that the Nethinim, the manual worker servants of the temple and priesthood, were the ones intended to do this kind of manual building work; but apparently they didn't.

Nehemiah 3:27 After him the Tekoites repaired another portion, over against the great tower that stands out, and to the wall of Ophel- Tekoah was outside of Jerusalem; so we have another example here of people coming in to work for the sake of the overall wider good of God's people, as opposed to those who repaired parts of the wall near to their own homes. And they repaired "another" or a "second" portion, in addition to what they had originally repaired.

Nehemiah 3:28 Above the horse gate, the priests made repairs, each one across from his own house- As observed throughout this chapter, some got immediate personal advantage from their work and others didn't. The ideal of course is that the motivation should be the same for us all.

Nehemiah 3:29 After them, Zadok the son of Immer made repairs across from his own house. After him, Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the east gate, made repairs- As noted on :28, some got immediate personal advantage from their work and others didn't, coming in from outside of Jerusalem to work on the project. The ideal of course is that the motivation should be the same for us all. Shemaiah is the one of 1 Chron. 3:22. He must have been an old man, as his son Hattush had returned to Jerusalem with Ezra (Ezra 8:2,3); again we get the impression of those not naturally adequate to the work still doing it (goldsmiths, perfumers, daughters, administrators and now old men). Whilst we are given talents which we should use in God's service, it is also true that His service is a going against the grain of our natural desires and not a mere reinforcement of our natural aptitudes and personalities; ultimately, we are called to carry the cross of the Lord Jesus.

The east gate refers not to the east gate of Jerusalem, but the east gate of the temple, the eastern approach to the temple precincts. Again, the wall was built around the temple area, not the whole city.

Nehemiah 3:30 After him, Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another portion. After him, Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs across from his place- "Place" is the word for 'chamber' (s.w. Neh. 12:44; 13:7), alluding to the chambers around the temple precincts for the priests to stay in and store their things in.

LXX "his treasury". See on :28,29. "After him" is in some versions "after me", as if Nehemiah himself worked on the wall. As the overseer of the work (Neh. 4:13-23), it was appropriate that he led by example.

Nehemiah 3:31 After him, Malchijah one of the goldsmiths to the house of the Nethinim, and of the merchants, made repairs over against the Muster gate, and to the ascent of the corner- See on :11. Nehemiah arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. He built 'miphkad', "the Muster Gate" (Neh. 3:31 RSV), the "appointed place" [s.w.] of Ez. 43:21. But he didn't name the gates as he could have done and didn't appear willing to follow the restoration prophecies as a template for rebuilding the city. He like Ezra was more focused upon restoring the traditional former national glory and the old covenant, rather than accepting the new covenant. 'Miphkad' occurs in Ez. 43:21, where they were to burn "the sin offering... in the appointed place (*miphkad*) of the house, without the sanctuary". Presumably it was the gate through which the bullock of the sin offering was led "without the sanctuary". Again we see that we are dealing with the temple area walls, not those of the whole city.

Nehemiah 3:32 Between the ascent of the corner and the sheep gate- This marks a full circuit back to the sheep gate with which this account began (:1). Commentators on Neh. 3 are divided between those who argue that the various locations mentioned show the entire city of Jerusalem being walled, and those who argue that the locations show a very small and limited wall around the temple and southeastern hill. On the side of the latter is that fact that it has frequently been observed by archaeologists that there is no evidence in the excavations for a wall built around all Jerusalem at the Persian period- only around the smaller area. My review of the various arguments suggests a building or rebuilding of only the walls around the southeastern hill ["the city of David"] and the Temple Mount. Hence the work was done in 52 days; it would stretch credibility to think that the entire walls of the whole city could have been rebuilt so quickly. The wall was clearly to protect the temple, not the whole city. The archaeological evidence is clear about this. Which leads to the suspicion that Nehemiah's concern was to protect the temple area from defilement, to as it were create a hyper holy physical space. This is exactly what the Persians and Egyptians did- they built walls around their temples and holy places, so that they would not be defiled. And Nehemiah now in his memoir is looking back to how he was pained at how the walls and gates of Jerusalem were burnt with fire, how he had got permission to rebuild them (Neh. 2:13)- but in fact he chickened out of the challenge, and despite being acclaimed as the great wall builder, he actually achieved far less- he built the walls of a much smaller area than Jerusalem, just the area around the temple and "city of David" next to it. References later in Nehemiah to the "walls of Jerusalem" are as relevant as the walls of a city today being still referred to as the city walls, although the city extends far beyond them. His self-examination is commendable. He looks back, as we probably have to, and realizes he had God's blessing, all resources guaranteed... to rebuild the entire walls of Jerusalem. But he did something, not nothing- but very far from the potential that was possible. That may be a reason why he gives us so much detail about the work he did. It is a confession of relative failure, not a boast. Tragically it has been misread as a fantastic achievement to 'rebuild the walls of Jerusalem', just as our efforts may receive the approbation of men, but were far short of our Divinely intended and possible potential. And yet we think of those rulers, old men, young women, men not used to manual work, all having their hands strengthened to arise and build. It's a scenario similar to William Golding's novel *The Spire*, where a spire is be built on a cathedral for very wrong motives, but the workers

do it for the glory of God, and one quietly inscribes "to His glory" at the top of the spire, unseen by any human eye.

The goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs- Again we get the impression of those not naturally adequate to the work still doing it (goldsmiths, perfumers, daughters, administrators and now old men). Whilst we are given talents which we should use in God's service, it is also true that His service is a going against the grain of our natural desires and not a mere reinforcement of our natural aptitudes and personalities; ultimately, we are called to carry the cross of the Lord Jesus.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 4

Nehemiah 4:1 But it happened that when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews- It could be that this is looking back to the situation ongoing throughout Neh. 3, which provides a summary of the rebuilding; the idea would be that this was achieved despite all the opposition we now read of. "The Jews" refers to the Jews who had returned from exile. The anger of Sanballat about the wall may have been because [as explained on Neh. 3:32], Nehemiah was intending to wall around the temple and create an exclusive worship space that excluded those he considered non-Jews. A Sanballat is mentioned in inscriptions as the one who laid the foundation of the sanctuary of Mount Gerizim; he is also recorded [and is mentioned by Josephus] as being a governor of Samaria who lived during the second half of the 5th century BC, at about the same time as Nehemiah. [See J. Dušek, Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Mt. Gerizim and Samaria Between Antiochus III and Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 3-4; Y. Magen, “The Dating of the First Phase of the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim in Light of the Archeological Evidence”, O. Lipschits, G. Knoppers, and R. Albertz, eds., Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 176. Sanballat’s sons are mentioned in inscriptions as having the oversight of the Yahweh cult lin the Judean colony in Elephantine. Sanballat was therefore a Yahweh worshipper. Sanballat's association with the sanctuary would show him not to be a total unbeliever, although his name has links to Sin, the moon god. Just as the names Esther and Mordecai were the names of pagan gods.

He is called a Horonite, perhaps meaning from Haran, where the moon god was worshipped. We note however that Abraham was also from Haran. Or it could be that the reference is to one of the Beth Horons in the tribe of Ephraim (Josh. 16:3,5; 1 Kings 9:17). Ephraim of course was not "Judah" and Nehemiah likely considered the 10 tribe kingdom a lost cause and not the true Israel of God. And we ponder whether he is being presented in Nehemiah's memoirs as somewhat worse than he was. He was indeed against Nehemiah's wall rebuilding. We likewise note that Tobiah and his son Jehohanan have very Jewish names, but are called by Nehemiah 'Ammonites'. Which makes us wonder how much of this talk about the evil of the Samaritans is just Nehemiah's take on them in his memoirs. Quite possibly they were Jews who had lived in Ammon, spoken of in Jer. 40:11: "the Jews who were in Moab, and among the children of Ammon, and in Edom, and who were in all the countries". Perhaps this is the Tobiah of "the children of Tobiah" in Neh. 7:62 who couldn't prove their genealogy. And there is a Tobiah, possibly the same person, who is spoken of as supporting the work of Zerubbabel (Zech. 6:9-15). The political rivalry led to spiritual

rivalry, and Nehemiah blackballing them spiritually because of the political jealousy and power struggles. For these people became the Samaritans whom the Lord clearly accepted as Jewish and part of Israel. Eliashib the High Priest, Tobiah and Sanballat were all already intermarried, and it seems they were so some time before Nehemiah arrived from Persia. Eliashib, Meshullam and others in the family worked on the wall project. But after a fall out, Nehemiah takes issue with those marriages.

We must remember that Sanballat and Tobiah were intermarried with Eliashib, Meshullam and other wall builders, of whom Eliashib is mentioned first (Ezra 3:1). It remains an open question whether they did in fact say and do the things Nehemiah claims they did. He was clearly convinced in his own mind they had done them, but that is typical of people in their memoirs. They retain ever stronger their convictions about those with whom they fell out in their lives, false or exaggerated as they may be.

Nehemiah 4:2 He spoke before his brothers and the army of Samaria and said- The army of the Samaritans (Neh. 4:2) suggests they were an organized force. The existence of this army is perhaps the explanation as to how the wall and gates of Jerusalem were broken down, and the news of this catastrophe reached Nehemiah. But we ask whether there really was such an army, and how much of this was in Nehemiah's imagination- imaginations that now in his memoirs have solidified into "fact", in his own mind. LXX "his brethren (that is the army of the Samaritans)". He was effectively the commander of an army, who were responsible for the destruction of the walls which Nehemiah was seeking to rebuild.

What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves?- "Feeble" is the word commonly used of the 'languishing' state of the Jews as a result of their judgment. It's as if they were mocking how those condemned by God were trying to do His work.

Will they sacrifice? Will they finish in a day?- The truth is that God was willing to revive the nation "in a day" (Is. 66:8). I suggested on Neh. 2:10 that the Samaritan opposition included an apostate Jew, Tobiah, who was present at this time (:3) and they may therefore have been aware of this prophecy and were mocking the prophetic word of restoration.

The Hebrew is hard here. We could render "Do they really think they alone are committed to God?". "Will they sacrifice?" may suggest that Nehemiah's intention was to create a walled space around the temple area where only those he considered true Jews could offer sacrifice. If so, this is a far cry from the restoration prophecies which envisaged Gentiles coming to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices.

Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, since they are burned?- The "stones" were laid, but not with colours, as could have been (Is. 54:11-14 s.w.). And neither were the foundation stones gemstones, as could have been. This prophecy was therefore reapplied in Revelation to the things of the Kingdom to be established at the Lord's return. But they did indeed "revive" the stones and thus the potential prophecies of 'revival' could have come true; see on Neh. 2:12. Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd (Jn. 10:16)- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10). When the Lord spoke of His people as being raised up put of the stones, as living stones, He surely had Neh.

4:2 in mind- where the stones of Zion are described as reviving, coming alive, at the restoration.

Nehemiah 4:3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, What they are building? If a fox climbed up it, he would break down their stone wall- LXX "shall not a fox go up and pull down their wall of stones?". If Tobiah was indeed an apostate Jew (see on Neh. 2:10) then this explains how the opposition were mockingly quoting the Hebrew prophets (see on :2). And therefore he may be alluding to the foxes wandering over mount Zion in Lam. 5:18, part of the judgment for Judah's false prophets being as foxes (Ez. 13:4).

Nehemiah 4:4 Hear, our God; for we are despised. Turn back their reproach on their own head, give them up for a spoil in a land of captivity-

This is similar to how Hezekiah laid out the letter from the Assyrians before Yahweh. See on Neh. 4:8. Nehemiah likewise asks God to "hear", in the sense of noting and responding. Nehemiah wants the Samaritans to be sent into captivity as Judah had been. The same word for "reproach" is used of what the Assyrians did to Judah (Is. 37:4,17). Is. 51:7 had urged the returning exiles not to fear the "reproach of men". Is. 51:3-11 is clearly in a restoration context: “For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places... Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men”; and that is the same word used in Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9 about the reproach of the Gentiles against the partially rebuilt Jerusalem. At least, Nehemiah perceived them as Gentiles and took comfort from God's word regarding his own perceptions of his opposition. Nehemiah wishes that those Jews who had been spared the exile now go into exile. Again we see that his perceived adversaries are the Jewish "people of the land".

Nehemiah 4:5 Don’t cover their iniquity, and don’t let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have insulted the builders- Both good and bad works are written in the book of life. Nehemiah however also asks for his good deeds not to be blotted out (Neh. 13:14) just as he asks for the sins of the Samaritan opposition not to be blotted out. He clearly had a legalistic mindset, where good and bad deeds as it were balance each other out. He had not clearly grasped the idea of salvation by pure grace which was offered to sinners who accepted the new covenant which the exiles were being invited to accept. There seems no evidence that Nehemiah looked for the repentance of the Samaritans, nor of Tobiah who appears to have maybe been an apostate Jew; and the reason he cited was that they had insulted and reproached the Jews. But multiple prophetic passages had said that such insult and reproach was the Jews' just desert until they repented- and there seems no evidence they really repented. This same avoidance of issues of personal sin and repentance can be seen in many religious people today. To ask God never to forgive those who sin against us... is a very big and terrible thing to do. And so the reason Nehemiah gives reads as an anticlimax. That huge ask of God... because these men had "insulted the builders".

Nehemiah 4:6 So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to half its height; for the people had a mind to work- "To half its height" may be a tacit admission that the wall built was only half the height of the previous one- again, Nehemiah looking back at his defining achievement in life, and realizing it wasn't so great at all. This joining together of the wall is described in Neh. 3:1,32, starting at

and finishing at the sheep gate. The opposition of :1-5 is therefore being recorded retrospectively. The building of the tabernacle was likewise achieved by men who had a "mind to work", but the mind they had was given them by the Spirit (Ex. 35:35; 36:1 s.w.). It seems that God's Spirit was available to the builders and their hands were confirmed by God's hand or operation, by His Spirit. He gave them a mind to work, He operated directly upon the human heart, as He can do today. See on Neh. 2:18. But they didn't continue to make use of the Spirit, as many don't today.

Nehemiah 4:7 But it happened that when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, and that the breaches began to be filled, then they were very angry- This as previously noted appears to be a retrospective comment, after Neh. 3 described the commencement and finishing of the work. Is. 41:11 had prophesied of the potential at the restoration: "Behold, all those who are incensed against you will be disappointed and confounded. Those who strive with you will be like nothing, and shall perish". And yet Sanballat, Tobiah, the Ammonites and Ashdodites were very angry" [s.w. 'incensed'] against Judah. But they didn't come to nothing, nor to shame, in that those very groups were the ones who married into Jewry, to the extent that Tobiah even shifted the tithes out of one of the chambers of the temple and set up his office there.

His reference to Ashdodites may just mean Jewish people living in Ashdod who had married local women (Neh. 13:23). It was these people whose marriages Nehemiah later tried to break up.

Nehemiah 4:8 They conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion therein- This continues the similarities with the Assyrian invasion to "fight against Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 32:2; Is. 29:7). This is appropriate seeing that Sanballat was an Assyrian, and Tobiah an apostate Jew who was similar to Rabshakeh, who appears to have been the same (see on Neh. 2:10). The situation points forward to that of the last days, when Judah's neighbours will fight against Jerusalem (Zech. 14:3). The connections with the Assyrian crisis suggest that God could have totally wiped out this opposition by dramatic intervention. But this didn't happen because as explained on :7, the Jews actually accepted Tobiah and Sanballat into their midst and precluded it. Or we could reason that Nehemiah was perceiving his own brethren in terms of the Assyrians. These one time workers on the wall never actually came and fought against Jerusalem- that was Nehemiah's fear.

Nehemiah 4:9 But we made our prayer to our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them- Prayer is also described as watching, and those who pray are likened to watchmen upon Zion's walls. So there is a balance between the two halves of this sentence; their prayer to God was matched by a human response, of also watching day and night [a phrase also used of prayer, Lk. 18:7]. The initiative is with us. All this means that *how* we plan to preach and care for others *does* need to be considered. Time and again, God works through humanly devised good strategies (Josh. 8:1,2; Neh. 4:9 etc.). But I love the way Derek Kidner puts it: "Scripture approves of strategy when it is a tool rather than a substitute for God".

Nehemiah 4:10 Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is fading, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall- When "the time to

favour Zion" came, at the end of the 70 years, God's servants Israel were to "take pleasure in her stones, and favour [even] the dust thereof"; and then, "when the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory" (Ps. 102:13-16). But the few Jews who returned chose not to live in Jerusalem, preferring to carve out for themselves farmsteads in the countryside (Neh. 11:1), and the strength of those that shifted the rubble in Jerusalem decayed… they saw her dust and scattered stones as a nuisance, and didn't take pleasure in them (Neh. 4:10). And so the Lord could not then appear in glory. See on Neh. 7:4.

Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Neh. 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness.

Jer. 31:9 had prophesied of the restoration: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". Likewise Is. 63:13 reminded the returnees that when they had been led through the wilderness to Canaan under Moses, they did not stumble [s.w.]. But both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Something was clearly wrong here. Parts of the restoration prophecies were coming true but other parts weren't. And Nehemiah in his memoirs is perhaps perceiving that his work had not been in the spirit of the prophets, but for reasons of national pride, so as not to have Jerusalem a city without walls... and he had made the deal with the Persians that he would receive their support for this in return for establishing their power over Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 4:11 Our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, until we come into their midst, and kill them, and cause the work to cease- Coming to their midst was in fact what Tobiah did by getting his family to marry into the Jews in Jerusalem (see on :7,11). Clearly the 'satan' of Zech. 3 is related to these "adversaries" who tried to stop the restoration of Zion.

Nehemiah 4:12 It happened that when the Jews who lived by them came, they said to us ten times from all places, Wherever you turn, they will attack us- The impression is given that they had local Jews on their side, who totally failed to heed the command of Is. 51:7 not to fear the reproach of men. But more than that, it seems they were involved with Tobiah the apostate Jews (see on Neh. 2:10) who later 'came into the midst' of the Jews by intermarriage (see on :7,11). But again we note that no attacks happened, Nehemiah is saying that ten times [i.e. 'many times'?] he was told by Jews that these others might attack him,

Nehemiah 4:13 Therefore set I in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in the open places, I set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows- The idea is as in GNB "stationed them by clans behind the wall, wherever it was still unfinished". This confirms that Neh. 3 is a summary of the finishing of the wall, and now we are reading of the opposition endured to bring that situation about.

Nehemiah 4:14 I looked, and rose up, and said to the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Don't be afraid of them!- Asking them to heed the command of Is. 51:7 not to fear the reproach of men in the work of the restoration.

Remember the Lord, Who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses- This attempt to inspire the people with the thought that they were fighting for their families came to a sad end, in that as noted on :7, the enemy entered within by marrying into those very families. "The nobles and rulers" is a term found in Neh. 4:14,19 of those who were originally working with Nehemiah to build the wall. But the same term is found later in Nehemiah concerning how Nehemiah conflicted with this very same group, and they apparently turned against him: "! considered the matter, then contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, You exact usury, each one from his brother. I held a great assembly against them" (Neh. 5:7) . In Neh. 6:17 "Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them". "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, What evil thing is this that you do, and profane the Sabbath day?" (Neh. 13:17). Quite possibly Nehemiah then tried to fight back by demanding the nobles and rulers prove by genealogy that they were ethnically pure Jews- making exactly the same mistake as Ezra before him: "My God put into my heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first" (Neh. 7:5). Surely Nehemiah knew the situation with them before the building project started.

Nehemiah 4:15 It happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and God had brought their counsel to nothing, that we returned all of us to the wall, each one to his work- "Counsel brought to nothing" is the phrase used in Ezra 4:5 of similar opposition in Zerubbabel's time. Nehemiah had been inspired by Ezra's account as noted previously, and so God responded in an appropriate way. This is how God works with us; if we are inspired to act as Biblical characters did, then He in turn responds to us in essence as He did to them.

Nehemiah 4:16 It happened from that time onwards, that half of my servants worked in the work, and half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the coats of mail- Nehemiah's personal servants were involved in the work, possibly at his own expense. Or the reference could be to his own bodyguard, whom he sent to work rather than protecting him personally. And there we have an abiding lesson- to sacrifice our own personal comfort and protection for the sake of the wider needs of God's work. We note that "coats of mail" were worn only by senior officers. This is another encouraging indication that the wealthy and leaders worked themselves in the work.

And the rulers were behind all the house of Judah- GNB "And our leaders gave their full support to the people". But the idea may be that the rulers were present with

the workers, standing by them and ready to lead them into battle, encouraging them. He uses "the house of Judah" to refer to those he considered the true Israel of God. For earlier in this chapter we have read of "Jews" who were tired of the work (:10). Whereas "we", the true Jews, as Nehemiah understood it, prayed to "our God". Depending how we translate :12, it seems Nehemiah felt other "Jews" were warning him that they could not withstand the opposition. So we see here a crisis of identity, between being Jewish and being what Nehemiah considered the true "house of Judah". The Lord's attitude to the Samaritans shows He didn't have this view. There can be no such thing as a two-tier church; and yet most denominations have their inner circles and outter circles.

Nehemiah 4:17 They all built the wall while those who bore burdens loaded themselves; each one with one of his hands toiled in the work, and with the other held his weapon- The idea is that there were two groups of builders- actual builders, and those who carried the materials. It was this second group who carried the materials with one hand, whilst in the other hand holding their weapons.

Nehemiah 4:18 and the builders, each one wore his sword at his side, and so built. He who sounded the trumpet was by me- As explained on :17, the actual builders needed both hands for the work, and wore their weapons in their belts. Nehemiah with typical humility doesn't state directly that he was present with them, but that the trumpeter was next to him. His personal presence with the builders was akin to the leaders standing next to the people (:16); his example of leadership inspired the other leaders.

Nehemiah 4:19 I said to the nobles, to the rulers and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated on the wall, one far from another- The greatness of the work was ever in Nehemiah's mind (also Neh. 6:3). The work of restoring Yahweh's Kingdom on earth couldn't be greater; and nothing would distract him from that. Not internal politics, false accusations and claims, nor the size of the work and the apparently great size of the opposition.

Nehemiah 4:20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally there to us. Our God will fight for us- This is quoting the common assurance that God would fight for His people if they were obedient to the covenant, as He had fought for His people against the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:14 cp. Dt. 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; 28:7). But the old covenant, according to the prophets, was broken; they needed to accept the new covenant. But still Nehemiah's faith, even if misdirected, is presented as creditable.

Nehemiah 4:21 So we worked at rebuilding. Half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning until the stars appeared- This is a summary of the situation described in :16. They started at dawn and worked until late in the evening. "We worked" suggests Nehemiah was personally involved, the classic case of leading by example. See on :22.

Nehemiah 4:22 Likewise at the same time said I to the people, Let each one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and may labour in the day- This suggests that it was the more wealthy, able to own servants, who were actually doing the physical work of building. In Ezra 2:64,65 there was one servant to every six exiles who returned with Zerubbabel; now it seems their material

situation had improved. Although in line with the abuses recorded in Neh. 5, it could be that the abundance of servants was because they had wrongly brought their brethren into servitude. I noted earlier that several of the builders were from areas outside of Jerusalem; hence the command for them to remain within Jerusalem. See on Neh. 5:13.

The Jews built a wall and appointed human guards over them (Neh. 4:15,22), even though Yahweh Himself had promised to be their wall and their guard (Zech. 2:4,5). And Zech. 12:8 had repeated it: “In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David”. But they didn’t want to believe it, as they cowered in fear from those who “came to fight against Jerusalem” (Zech. 4:8), whom Zechariah prophesied would be destroyed by Yahweh. And yet He graciously worked with them in their plan to build a physical wall, just as He worked through their desire for human kingship and a physical temple in earlier days, even though it was not His ideal intention. Likewise He had promised support for them if they returned to the land; He would preserve them on the way.

Nehemiah 4:23 So I, my brothers, my servants, and the men of the guard who followed me, did not take off our clothes except to wash- The idea is that they were on non stop shifts either on guard duty, or building. "My brothers" may refer to his literal brothers. The implication seems to be that the others did take their clothes off except to wash, whereas those under Nehemiah's direct personal control did so. The washing may well be a reference to the ritual washings. They would have had many opportunities to become ritually unclean, and despite the urgency and extremity of the situation, Nehemiah ensured that he and his people were still obedient to God's requirements. Whereas, by implication, the other builders weren't.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 5

Nehemiah 5:1 Then there arose a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brothers the Jews-

The account of the building and completion of the wall in Neh. 3 is a summary statement. The following chapters now go back to all the dramas that went on during that period. There was a famine at the time, which Haggai says and Malachi and Zechariah imply was because of God's anger with the peoples' apostacy. The nobles and leaders mentioned as wall builders in Neh. 3 were in fact abusing their brethren at the time this work was going on; and now Neh. 5 explains the details. It is hard to think that Nehemiah was unaware of the abuses by the nobles whilst the same nobles were rebuilding the wall. Back in Persia, he was aware that the Jewish people of the land "were in great affliction and reproach" (Neh. 1:3). We wonder whether even looking back, Nehemiah is still imagining that these abuses only came to his attention after the work was done. Hence he says "Then there arose a great cry...".

"And their wives" is added perhaps because these were women from the people of the land whom Ezra had branded as Gentiles. But the record says that the "Jews", those who had returned from exile, were indeed their brethren. And Nehemiah confirms this by telling the richer Jews that these poorer Jews [including the wives] were indeed their brothers / relatives (:8). "The people", Hebrew *am*, is the term used for the "people of the land" whom the golah Jews [those who had returned from exile] had intermarried. And Ezra had forced them to divorce on pain of losing their lands, wrongly considering them to be not true Jews. Now we read of another attempt to get

their lands from them. The Jews with money were surely those who had returned from the exile in Babylon / Persia, who had been given huge amounts of wealth by the other Jews and also the authorities. The "people of the land" were poor. But they had houses, vineyards and land which were significant enough to have been taken as collateral for debt (:3,4). We are specifically told that these people were given vineyards and land by the Babylonians: "Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, who had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time" (Jer. 39:10). It was clearly the golah Jews who were the lenders of money in order to buy food in the famine. And again, as with Ezra's device, the aim was for them to get the land off the Jews of the land who had remained, the poorest of the poor, to whom the Babylonians had given lands and vineyards. It was exactly the abuse of these Jews which had broken Nehemiah's heart when he heard of it, and he had been moved to begin his project of going to Judah to try to help them. We reflect that the much lauded building of the wall went on with all this background noise. On one hand, we congratulate Nehemiah for his achievement. On the other, we see that apparent zeal and achievement for God don't mean He is pleased with the workers. For according to Haggai, the famine at the time was sent exactly because they valued their own houses above the house of God.

As in Acts 5:1, there is an intentional anticlimax here. The amazing work of God through the hands of His people in Neh. 4 is now contrasted with the fact of the apostasy and weakness of His people. Ez. 45:9 had commanded: “Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people”. Nehemiah 5 records that Judah did the very opposite, and Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all record social injustice as being the order of the day at the time of the restoration. A "great cry of the people" is the phrase used of the cry of the Egyptians when their families were destroyed by the Passover Angel (Ex. 11:6; 12:30). Israel in their apostasy were acting like the Egyptians. See on :2.

Nehemiah 5:2 For there were some that said, We, our sons and our daughters, are many. Let us get grain, that we may eat and live-

The restoration prophecies spoke of Zion multiplying with children. They indeed had "many" children, but they were having to sell them into slavery and couldn't feed them. The point is being made that the prophesied restoration wasn't at all going to plan. There was so much wasted potential. And that is indeed something a man notes in his memoirs, and so it is psychologically credible that Nehemiah does too.

This continues the allusion to the Egyptians noted on :1; for these were the words of the Egyptians during the famine at the time of Joseph. They were being judged like the Egyptians because their hearts were like those of the Egyptians, and they had neglected that great salvation potentially possible.

The withholding of agricultural blessing occurred several times- in Neh. 5:2,3 (as prophesied in Is. 51:19), in Haggai’s time, and later in Malachi 3:10,12; when the restored Zion could have been as the garden of Eden, i.e. paradise restored on earth (Is. 51:3). Here we see frightening similarities with ourselves. We know, but often don’t do. We sense this cycle of failure, crying out for mercy, receiving it, failing again, crying for mercy, receiving it, failing again...we see it in Israel, in our brethren and those around us, and in ourselves. We can expound it, lament it, feel the shame and tragedy of it all...and yet continue to have a part in it. Eventually, the people stayed in this groove so long that they degenerated into how they were at the time of Malachi- self-righteous, with no sense of failure any more, living self-centered lives

of petty materialism, earning wages as they did in Haggai's time, to put into pockets with holes in, life without satisfaction, achieving nothing, passively angry. This is what Malachi clearly portrays. It's a terrible picture, and one which we can sail dangerously close to identifying with.

Nehemiah 5:3 Some also there were that said, We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses. Let us get grain, because of the famine- The princes were to give the rest of the land to the people of Israel (Ez. 45:8). But they made their poor brethren mortgage it to them so that effectively they took it for themselves. It was exactly this kind of abuse which had brought about the captivity in the first place (Jer. 34).

Jer. 31:12,13 had promised great fertility at the restoration: "Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all". But the wheat, wine and oil were all withheld by Yahweh as a result of their selfish materialism, according to Haggai and Malachi. And there was a "famine" even in Nehemiah's time.

Nehemiah 5:4 There were also some who said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute using our fields and our vineyards as collateral- This money was presumably borrowed from their fellow Jews. Those who lent them the money had totally failed to appreciate the grace of their salvation, and the response thereby expected from them. Jeremiah especially reveals the grace which God was so eager to show to the exiles. Jer. 7:3-7 made it clear that Judah's return to the land was to be conditional upon them not oppressing the poor- only "then will I cause you to dwell in this place". Yet in His grace and zeal for His people, it seems God overlooked that condition- for the returned exiles did oppress (Neh. 5:1-5), and yet they returned to the land. And yet they would've dwelt in Zion "for ever and ever" (Jer. 7:7) if they had not been abusive to others and truly loved God.

Nehemiah 5:5 Yet our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children as their children-

Their argument may have been that they were as ethnically Jewish as their brethren who were abusing them. The Jews who had returned from exile considered the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile as somehow not the true Israel. And they were abusing them because of it. Rashi: "like their children are our children. Like their children, who are esteemed and distinguished, so are our children distinguished". Or the idea could be that despite all this sacrifice, they looked as emaciated from famine as those who had nothing to mortgage. They were the middle class, who owned fields and vineyards (:4); and they were now as the lowest classes.

Indeed, we have to bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants- I suggested on Neh. 4 that the large number of "servants" of the builders may refer to these people. On one hand the Spirit of God was working with them, and they showed faith. But their spirituality was of a collective rather than personal nature, as can so easily happen in the church today. For they were abusing their brethren in their own personal lives.

Some of our daughters have already been brought into bondage. Neither is it in our power to get out of it; for other men have our fields and our vineyards- Instead of subduing the nations around them with the victory of Israel's God, they brought their

own brethren into subjection / bondage unto them, that they might gain out of them (Zech. 9:15 s.w. Neh. 5:5). It could've been the Kingdom, Israel could have become the joy of the whole earth and her people a joy. But instead, they were obsessed with their petty, miserable little kingdoms, and the next few centuries had nothing of the joy which Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied as being possible for them.

The princes in the restored kingdom of God were not to oppress the people (Ez. 45:8); "Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession" (Ez. 46:18). But they did (Neh. 5:1-5; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5).

Nehemiah 5:6 I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words- The same words are used of Yahweh being angry with Israel when He heard their cry in Num. 11:1,10. The idea is that this was a very great apostasy, worthy of returning them to captivity, as God's anger likewise considered returning Israel to Egypt. For as noted on :1,2, they were acting as Egypt, oppressing their brethren in slavery and bondage.

Nehemiah 5:7 Then I considered the matter- AV is more accurate: "consulted with myself". We expect him to consult with God or with God's word. Possibly now in his memoirs he is realizing, as we all must do, looking back, that he had advised himself in his self talk- rather than seeking God's guidance. Or maybe he looked inside himself first, and realized he too had lent to these brethren on usury (:10). Perhaps the idea is that he first examined himself, as to whether he himself had done anything like this, before contending with his brethren. A necessary example and principle. This is why he can present himself as an example of how the poorer brethren should have been treated (:10). But see on :10.

Then contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, You exact usury, each one from his brother. I held a great assembly against them- This 'contention' with his weak brethren amongst the leadership was how the book ends (s.w. Neh. 13:11,17,25). It was as if circumstances repeated; his experience of contention with his brethren in Neh. 5:7 was to prepare him for the major contentions of Neh. 13:11,17,25. We pass through one experience to prepare us for another. Nehemiah stresses that these poor Jews, the people of the land, were the "brothers" of the rich Jews who had returned from Persia / Babylon. Nehemiah is holding true to his initial concern for these poor Jews, even though in other ways he doesn't consistently uphold that concern. The golah, the Jews who had returned, were treating the Jews who had remained after the exile as Gentiles; for a Jew could lend on usury to a Gentile, but not to a fellow Jew. Ezra had treated those non-golah Jews likewise, as Gentiles. There can be no two-tier system within the body of believers, and that is a huge challenge in church life. There is plenty of evidence that taking usury in a wrong way, i.e. from fellow Jews, was common amongst the exiles (Ps. 15:5; 37:26; Ez. 18:8,13,17; 22:12). And they continued their wrong behaviour when they arrived in Judah, just as they continued their idolatry. The Mosaic system of sabbath and jubilee years was intended to mitigate the damage caused by usury and indebtedness. Ezra had either totally failed to teach this, or had failed to enforce it. We note later in Nehemiah that the people appeared ignorant even of the feast of Tabernacles. Nehemiah's later appeals to tenuous interpretations of Mosaic law in order to excommunicate the "mixed multitude" appear inconsistent, when basic Mosaic teaching was being ignored. Both in spirit and letter. I discuss on Neh. 5:14 how Persian taxation rates had risen to about 50%. The famine meant they had borrowed money from the wealthy Jews and they were charging abusive interest rates. And yet

Mal. 3:8-11 says that the famine at the time was because the Jews hadn't paid a tithe to the priests: "You rob Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'. In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with the curse... Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field". The temptation to not give that 10% tithe was strong. Seeing they were being so heavily taxed by the Persians, with Nehemiah as the governor being the chief tax collector. But because they didn't put God first, the drought came and they had collapsed into this unbearable situation.

Nehemiah 5:8 I said to them, We, as much as we could, have redeemed our brothers the Jews that were sold to the nations- This may mean that Nehemiah had bought [s.w. "redeemed"] the poor Jews who sold themselves into slavery in order to pay their debts to the rich golah Jews. Nehemiah 'came up' from Babylon, and was "the servant" who 'prospered' Yahweh's work (Neh. 1:11; 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren. And yet it could be that he paid personally to redeem his brothers who had been sold to local Samaritans ["the nations"].

Would you really sell your brothers, and should they be sold to us? Then they held their peace, and found never a word to answer- Putting our brethren in impossible situations from which they need redemption is to act as the Gentile world; rather than as those who have also been redeemed. The restoration prophets had spoken of all those who left Babylon as being redeemed; but the leadership of the exiles had failed to appreciate this.

There could be the implication in the Hebrew of Neh. 1:3 that the majority of those who initially returned to Judah then returned back to Babylon- for Nehemiah speaks of "The remnant that are left of the captives there in the province" [of Judah]". We shouldn't underestimate the seriousness of the famine conditions in Judah as described in Neh. 5. The sheer lack of food led the Jews to sell their children and land to their richer brethren just to get something to eat. Mal. 3:5-15 says that this was directly a result of their lack of zeal to rebuild and care for God's house. What a far cry from the prophecies of plenty and huge harvests which had been made. So much potential was wasted. Neh. 5:8 records Nehemiah's comment that the wealthy Jews were victimizing the poorer Jews just as Babylon once had, and now Nehemiah needed to redeem them from slavery just as God had redeemed His people from servitude in Babylon. God's deliverance of His people simply hadn't been responded to. Tragically, it would appear from Neh. 5:15 that Zerubbabel, the potential Messiah of Israel, had acted in this oppressive way too.

GNB offers "As far as we have been able, we have been buying back our Jewish relatives who had to sell themselves to foreigners. Now you are forcing your own relatives to sell themselves to you, their own people!". Possibly meaning that Nehemiah had been redeeming Jews who had been sold into debt slavery to foreigners as a result of their debts to their richer Jewish brethren. Whatever, Nehemiah is taking the side of the Jews who complained that their "brothers" were abusing them and treating them as if they were Gentiles (:1,2).

Nehemiah 5:9 Also I said, The thing that you do is not good- A verbatim quotation of Ex. 18:17, but apparently out of context. But this kind of thing is to be expected in the

language of a person whose mind is full of God's word; turns of phrase come to mind from the Bible even in our own language usage, even if not completely in context.

Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God- The allusion is to Dt. 10:12; they were to fear God by walking in His ways. And His ways had been those of redemption by grace, and not of abuse. The fear of God therefore requires us to be just, as He is just and yet also the God of salvation by grace (Gen. 20:11; 2 Sam. 23:3).

Because of the reproach of the nations our enemies?- I suggest this isn't saying that they should fear what others might say about this. Rather is the idea 'on account of the reproach wherewith our enemies have reproached us'. They should have ever remembered their abuse at the hands of the Gentiles, and so never have done this to their own brethren. They were to break the cycle whereby the abused abuses.

Nehemiah 5:10 For this reason, I my brothers and my servants lend them money and grain- Again, Nehemiah led by example. He lent money and grain without demanding collateral nor interest. And he presents himself as an example.

Please let us stop this usury- The RV suggests Nehemiah himself had been guilty: "And I likewise, my brethren and my servants do lend them money and corn on usury". This would explain why he pauses to look into his own heart before addressing the issue (:7). Hence the force of "let *us* stop". But in this case we would rather expect a note in :11 to the effect that Nehemiah personally put this right.

Nehemiah 5:11 Please restore to them, even this day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the grain, the new wine, and the oil, that you are charging them-

"Even this day" means 'right now', 'immediately'. We see here the importance of immediate action, "Today, if you will hear His voice". Human nature has a terrible tendency to put off until tomorrow what we should do today. We think of all the appeals to respond "Today" throughout Deuteronomy, and the fast moving pace of Mark's Gospel and Acts, with people responding and being baptized immediately.

The blessings of the restored Kingdom (new wine, grain, oil etc.) were being abused. Hag. 1:8 describes the need to go up onto the mountain and build the temple- as if to recall attention to Ezekiel's opening vision of the temple as built on a mountain. But Judah would not, and therefore the Kingdom blessings of corn, new wine and oil, as well as fruitfulness on the mountains, were all withheld (Hag. 1:11). These are all aspects of the promised Messianic Kingdom (e.g. Joel 2:19,24; Jer. 31:12). The very same sequence of words occurs in Neh. 5:11; 10:37,39; 13:5- instead of giving those things to Yahweh, the Jews stole them from each other, and jibbed about paying them as tithes to Him. And thereby they precluded the possibility of Yahweh richly blessing all His people with those very same things in a Kingdom setting. As with all those who are rejected from God's purpose, they effectively rejected themselves from His Kingdom by their behaviour, rather than Him rejecting them Himself.

This 'hundredth part' was likely per month, amounting to annual interest of 12%.

Nehemiah 5:12 Then they said, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do, even as you say. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them- Maybe the priests were called as witnesses, because accountability is always so

important in situations like this. And yet the priesthood was deeply corrupted, according to Malachi. And only 12 years previously, Ezra had found many priests married to non-Levites. Or the implication could be that the priests were themselves guilty of this abuse. The corruption of the priesthood at the restoration is a major concern of Malachi and Haggai. The possibilities of the restored Kingdom as spoken of in the restoration prophets, especially Ez. 40-48, were precluded by this corruption of the priesthood. And this was the very reason why they went into captivity in the first place.

That they would do according to this promise- There is no specific word for "promise" in Biblical Hebrew. A man's word was to be his promise, just as God's word is so certain of fulfilment that it is His promise. The Lord reflected this in His teaching that we need not embellish our words with oaths. For we should be absolutely truthful.

Nehemiah 5:13 Also I shook out my lap and said, So may God shake out every man from His house and from His work that doesn't perform this promise; even thus may he be shaken out, and emptied. All the assembly said, Amen, and praised Yahweh. The people did according to this promise- The threat to remove such people from "His work" rather confirms my suggestion on Neh. 4:22 that the "servants" involved in the building work were in fact Jews who had been wrongfully made servants by the leadership abusing them. Such workers, significant as they were in the rebuilding work, would not be accepted in the work. For we cannot abuse others in the name of doing God's work. For "promise" see on :12.

But again we note Nehemiah's tendency to exclude people from God's house and thus redefine God's people (see on Neh. 4:16, where he uses the term "house of Judah" to refer to those amongst Israel whom he considered the real people of God). He speaks on God's behalf, when as noted on :7 he had consulted not with God but with himself. He says God will cast them from His house and work- possibly referring to the hyper holy area he had walled off and sought to create around the temple. Or we can read as CEV "He will empty out everything you own, even taking away your houses".

In Neh. 8, Ezra reads the law to all the people. It's hard to be sure, but we could logically assume that that event was at the same time as these events of Neh. 5. Such a public reading of the law was surely to fulfil the command of Dt. 31:10-12, to do so every seventh jubilee year- when there should anyway have been a release: "At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of tents, when all Israel has come to appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women and the little ones and your foreigner who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear Yahweh your God". We note that the reading of the law was to be for the foreigner as well, in the hope he would also come into covenant relationship with "Yahweh your God". And so the release of debts should have been clear to Israel anyway. Tragically, the people heard the law- and were conned into thinking that they had to therefore separate from Gentiles.

Nehemiah 5:14 Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even to the thirty second year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brothers did not eat the bread of the governor- This is inserted later, as Nehemiah looks back upon his 12 years in Jerusalem. This was presumably a second visit, after the exploratory visit of Neh. 1. All that time,

Nehemiah and his immediate family didn't eat the food which he as the governor could have demanded as tax from the local population. He realized they were starving and didn't demand this from them. The description of his 12 years as governor fits well with these being his memoirs at the end of his life. All this begs the question as to where Nehemiah got his income. Clearly he was a well paid civil servant funded by the Persian empire. But "The Satrap had to collect the royal tax from the governors of small provinces as he and his civil servants were not paid by the king... Any cessation of payment was regarded as rebellion" (Gathaka 1992:196). This would mean that Nehemiah for 12 years was responsible for taxing the Jews in Yehud. And taxation rates went up from 20% at the time of Cyrus to around 40-50% at Nehemiah's time. Indeed one of the main reasons for the decline of the Persian empire was overtaxation, to fund the wars in Greece and Egypt and to compensate for the disaster at Marathon. So Nehemiah on one hand is to be commended for using the tax income to pay for the welfare of others. On the other hand, he is tacitly admitting that he was very far from the liberator of Zion which he potentially could have been. He was enforcing and continuing Persian colonial control over God's people.

Nehemiah 5:15 But the former governors who were before me were supported by the people, and took bread and wine from them, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants ruled over the people: but I didn't do so, because of the fear of God-

Zerubbabel was the first Biblically recorded governor of these former governors. We learn here that he had heavily taxed the people. No wonder he failed to be the Messiah figure that he potentially could have been. These former governor "laid burdens upon" the people (RVmg.) and "lorded it over" (RVmg.) them. We recall the complaint about overtaxation concerning Solomon "Your father made our yoke heavy" (2 Chron. 10:10,14). All this certainly portrays Zerubbabel negatively. That Nehemiah relieved the burdens and retracted his own demand of usury is surely a positive about him. Perhaps it is alluded to when Paul likewise says that "in everything I kept myself from being burdensome unto you" (2 Cor. 11:9).

Remember that Nehemiah had offered to build the governor's house in Jerusalem (see on Neh. 2:8); and this was done, right near to the temple (see on Neh. 3:7). Yet those governors impoverished the Jews with their various taxes to fund their own luxury living. There was a forty shekels tax, and additionally it seems they demanded a food tax from the people- which was hard to pay in time of famine. This was surely a compromise too far by Nehemiah. And so in his memoirs he looks back and recognizes his compromises; and what honest man doesn't look back in life and realize he compromised at times when he shouldn't have done.

Is. 58:1,2 is a criticism of Judah in exile and also of those who did return to the land- they sought God daily, and yet abused their brethren (Is. 58:6), just as recorded in Neh. 5:15. If they had ceased from their sins, "*Then* shall your light break forth as the morning", *if* they had fed the hungry etc., *then* would've been fulfilled the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the light of Zion rising above the Gentiles etc. (Is. 58:10,12 cp. Is. 60:1). "The joy of harvest" could have happened at the restoration from Babylon (Ps. 126:5,6). But again it didn't, and we read of the miserable restored exiles suffering famine and poor harvests because they refused to repent and because their brethren abused them.

LXX "But as for the former acts of extortion wherein those who were before me oppressed them, they even took of them their last money, forty didrachms for bread and wine; and the very outcasts of them exercised authority over the people: but I did not so, because of the fear of God". Nehemiah was the governor, and as such could

have demanded tax and food from the local population. But he didn't, because he saw their poverty.

Neh. 5:8 records Nehemiah's comment that the wealthy Jews were victimizing the poorer Jews just as Babylon once had, and now Nehemiah needed to redeem them from slavery just as God had redeemed His people from servitude in Babylon. God's deliverance of His people simply hadn't been responded to. Tragically, it would appear from Neh. 5:15 that Zerubbabel, the potential Messiah of Israel, had acted in this oppressive way too.

Nehemiah 5:16 Yes, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land; and all my servants were gathered there to the work- LXX "Also in the work of the wall I treated them not with rigor, I bought not land: and all that were gathered together came thither to the work". The idea is that the impoverished people were willing to sell their land for food, they were so desperate because of the famine. But Nehemiah didn't buy their land from them. They were not receiving the abundant harvests promised as being part of the restored Kingdom of God; for they had precluded the fulfilment of those prophecies. Instead, Nehemiah put his own servants to the work, presumably implying he himself paid them. The desperation of selling their land for food recalls the situation in Egypt during the famine at the time of Joseph. The people of God had acted like Egyptians and so were being treated like them.

Nehemiah 5:17 Moreover there were at my table, of the Jews and the rulers, one hundred and fifty men, besides those who came to us from among the nations that were around us- Instead of demanding tax and support from the local population as he could have done, as the governor, Nehemiah did the opposite- he gave food to others, including to Gentiles. To eat at the same table was a sign of religious fellowship, and in this there was a small fulfilment of the prophetic vision of a new, multiethnic people of God in the restored Kingdom. But Nehemiah didn't go far enough in this.

Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for the surrounding Gentiles 'came up' to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles 'coming up' to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. Is. 56:6,7 had promised that if the Gentiles accepted the God of Israel and kept the Sabbath, "even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples". But the Sabbath was polluted, as Nehemiah recorded, and the Gentiles were mixed with and affirmed in their idolatry, rather than converted and brought to worship in the temple. And so the revelation of Yahweh's salvation and righteousness in the Kingdom was deferred. The way Jews and Gentiles ate together at Nehemiah's table pointed forward to what was almost possible. But in the end, they mixed with and adopted the ways of the Gentiles, and their leadership arrogantly developed a theology that said that dirty Gentiles could never be saved; for salvation, they reasoned, was only for Jews. The idea that the temple was to be a place for Gentiles also to worship not only didn't come true; but the very opposite happened. The Jews became intolerant of the Gentiles, nationalistically proud, and rejected the Samaritans from worshipping in the rebuilt Jewish temple. And therefore the Samaritans had to build their own temple on Mount Gerazim. Historical records suggest that the

Samaritans dearly wished to worship in the Jews' temple, and only built their own one because the Jews disallowed them. See M. Gaster, *The Samaritans* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1925) p. 28 ff. And now looking back in his memoirs, Nehemiah is recognizing that 'I was not Jesus'. He was not the Messiah figure he could have been.

It could be that "the Jews" here refers to the golah Jews who had returned from Babylon; and the others were the Jews who had not gone into exile, whom they despised: "besides those who came to us from among the nations that were around us". In this case, Nehemiah was using table fellowship in order to bind together these two opposed groups, the abusers and the abused. Just as the Lord's table is intended likewise as a table of grace and unity. Nehemiah did at times mistreat other Jews; I have discussed earlier his dislike of the Sanballat - Eliashib- Meshullam - Tobiah - Jehohanan family, an example of the priestly and ruling families intermarrying; and how after the wall was built, he declared them as apostate as Gentiles. And yet at this point, he does well in standing up for Jews whom other Jews considered as Gentiles. This is the typical contradictory nature of human behaviour. We wrongly assume that we are logical and consistent in our judgments, when in fact we are not. We see it all the time in church life. A brother will refuse fellowship to another brother on very flimsy grounds, and yet exercise amazing grace and acceptance towards someone within his church who is clearly morally and doctrinally astray. And in his memoir, Nehemiah looks back on his life and sees it.

Nehemiah 5:18 Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine. Yet for all this I didn't demand the bread due to the governor, because the bondage was heavy on this people- "The bread due to the governor" was the tax payable in food to the Persian governor, especially meat and wine. We recall that Nehemiah had agreed to be funded in order to rebuild Jerusalem, but the deal was that he built a mansion for the Persian governor. And we saw on Neh. 3:7 that this was built right on the temple wall. But this was all part of a repressive, colonial regime. Very far from the visions of Zion being radically free. Nehemiah should never have made this compromise. God would have provided for His work, without him taking the obvious human source of funding- from the Persian empire. He himself tried to lift the heavy bondage on the people, in the spirit of the Messiah who would say that He came to lift such burdens from the poor. But time and again, Nehemiah failed to be the Messianic figure as he should have been. Just like us, especially as we reconstruct the Lord's death on the cross.

LXX has "yet with these I required not the bread of extortion". He was generous; and didn't demand of others what he legitimately could have done, realizing their impoverished situation. The famine, however, was a punishment for their lack of spirituality. But still Nehemiah didn't demand from them what he could have done. And we too need to be sensitive to the situation of others, even if it is partially their own fault.

Nehemiah 5:19 Remember me, my God, for good, for all that I have done for this people- Again we sense a works based attitude in Nehemiah, considering that good works as it were cancel out sins, and the judgment will be a summary account of the arithmetic. This isn't what judgment day will be about; salvation was to be by grace, as the restoration prophets had taught. And yet for all his faith and good works, it seems Nehemiah failed to appreciate this. And perhaps this was why he failed to be the Messianic ruler figure which he might have been.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 6

Nehemiah 6:1 It was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah, and to Geshem the Arabian, and to the rest of our enemies- See on Neh. 2:10. The account of the building and completion of the wall in Neh. 3 is a summary statement. The following chapters now go back to all the dramas that went on during that period. Thus Neh. 3 speaks of the work involving placing the doors in the gates, whereas Neh. 6:10 speaks of a time before the gates had been built: "until that time, I had not erected doors in the gates". I have discussed elsewhere how Sanballat and Tobiah were likely Israelites, and Nehemiah had fallen out with them. "The Arabian" is literally 'the mixed one', and the same word is used to describe "the mixed multitude" in Neh. 13:3, whom Nehemiah wrongly demanded be separated from. We must too quickly assume as "Arabian" refers to who we might call an "Arab" today. The 'mixing' was that which Ezra had wrongly condemned- golah Jews [the returned exiles] mixing in marriage with the people of the land, the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile.

That I had built the wall- The building of the wall was a partial fulfilment of the restoration prophecies about the rebuilding of Zion. Amos 9:11-15 is most comfortably interpreted when read as referring to the restoration of Judah and the "remnant" of the ten tribes to the land under Ezra: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God". "I will *raise up*" uses a Hebrew word very commonly featured in the records of the restoration, when the people were exhorted to "rise up and build" (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 10:4,15; Neh. 2:18,20). The statement that they would "close up the breaches thereof" is exactly the language of Neh. 6:1, which records that the walls were rebuilt so that there was no breach [s.w.] therein. It was after the Babylonian invasion that Zion was "fallen" and 'ruined' (s.w. Jer. 31:18; 45:4; Lam. 2:2,17). "I will build it" is exactly the theme of the records of the return from Babylon (Ezra 1:2,3,5; 3:2,10; 4:1-4; Neh. 2:5,17,18,20; 3:1-3, 13-15; 4:1,3,5,6,10,17,18; 6:1,6; 7:1). Surely Amos 9 is saying that at the rebuilding at the time of the restoration, God's people could have ushered in the Kingdom age of agricultural plenty and victory over their Arab neighbours. But they intermarried with Edom, and suffered drought because they didn't fulfill the requirements to rebuild Zion correctly. But the words of Amos were still to come true in some form- they are given an application in Acts 15:17 which may appear to be way out of context, i.e. to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus words which could have had a plain fulfilment at the restoration were given a delayed fulfilment; but they were not fulfilled in a literal sense, but in a spiritual one. And so it is with prophecies like Ezekiel 38, and the temple prophecies of Ezekiel. They will be

fulfilled in spiritual essence, but probably not in strict literality, although they *could have been* had God's people been more 'fulfilling' of them.

And that there was no breach left therein (though even to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates)- "No breach" is the language of Ez. 13:5; 22:30, perhaps hinting that Nehemiah and his work could potentially have been the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies of the restoration. The wall of God's vineyard had been broken down (s.w. Is. 5:5) and the rebuilding of it was intended to be in the Messianic Kingdom.

Nehemiah 6:2 Then Sanballat and Geshem sent to me saying, Come, let us meet together in the villages in the plain of Ono. But they intended to harm me- So often "dialogue" is offered with ulterior motives. We have probably all experienced this; and in those moments, passages like this come alive, God's word is a living word to us. For all our human situations have historical precedents, in essence, in the Biblical record. Nehemiah was doubtless inspired by Esther in his requesting the king for help. "Intended to harm" is the very phrase used about Haman's devices against the Jews (Esther 8:3; 9:25). If we are motivated by Biblical characters, then God in essence will respond likewise as He did in their lives, and the connections between our experiences and theirs will be continued by Him.

There is a radically different possibility in reading the accounts of Nehemiah's "enemies". If, as discussed on Neh. 3:32, his aim was to build a wall around the temple area and exclude the Samaritans / Jewish "people of the land" whom Ezra had also excluded, then their opposition to him would be understandable. Even if they went far too far in it. I suggested elsewhere that terms like "Ammonite" may have been the names Nehemiah called Jews like Tobiah and Jehohanan, who had very Jewish names. Sanballat the Horonite, from Haran where Abraham was from, or from Beth Horon in Ephraim, may or may not have been as awful as Nehemiah paints him. We are reading here Nehemiah's take on things; all we know about his enemies is what he tells us in his memoirs, in his perception of things. Rightly or wrongly, he thought they were trying to kill him, he refused to meet with them... and as :17 explains, it resulted in the "nobles" who had worked rebuilding the wall now siding with Tobiah, Sanballat's relative. It's possible that much of what we read here about the adversaries to the work is in fact Nehemiah's exaggerated take on them. We must remember that Sanballat and Tobiah were intermarried with Eliashib, Meshullam and other wall builders, of whom Eliashib is mentioned first (Ezra 3:1). It remains an open question whether they did in fact say and do the things Nehemiah claims they did. He was clearly convinced in his own mind they had done them, but that is typical of people in their memoirs. They retain ever stronger their convictions about those with whom they fell out in their lives, false or exaggerated as they may be. Sanballat indeed has a pagan name, just as did Esther and Mordecai. But he is recorded in inscriptions as founding the Yahweh shrine on Mount Gerizim, as also mentioned by Josephus. The Jewish community at Elephantine had correspondence with priests of Yahweh at the time in both Jerusalem and Samaria. Archeological finds reveal many 'Yah' suffix names in Samaria. The Lord Jesus clearly accepted the Samaritans as "Israel". The Jewish argument was that Yahweh could only be worshipped at Zion, so the Samaritans weren't the true Israel; quietly forgetting that they had worshipped God in Babylon with no temple at all. The Lord cut through all this by saying that the time had come for God to be worshipped in spirit and truth, and not on the mounts of Zion nor Gerizim. God had already told the exiles that He was no longer willing to dwell in a temple, but would dwell in humbled hearts of individuals (Is. 66:1,2).

The 'satan' of Zech. 3 who resisted the rebuilding of Jerusalem doesn't have to refer to these people. I have myself been called an atheist, Muslim, Communist, false prophet, worldling, satan, Sanballat and related terms by my fellow believers, and have been falsely accused of wanting to kill them- simply because I held a more liberal position than they did on some matters. In their minds, as in Nehemiah's, these things were true and I am sure they poured out their [totally untrue] concerns to God. They like Nehemiah were in a bunker mentality, fighting [as they saw it] for God's truth in a sea of apostacy. Nehemiah takes his perceptions of them to God and begs for help, and carries on anyway. And is seen as a great inspiration by those who labour under such delusions in their self professed 'defence of the faith'. It is clear in Nehemiah's case that these people went too far. But it's quite likely that he also went too far in upholding Ezra's exclusivist position, that "the Jews", the community of returned exiles, were the one true Israel, and the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile were apostate and must be avoided and further disenfranchised, and have their lands taken from them. As the text reads, we note that the "enemies" largely use threats; they said they would report Nehemiah for trying to revolt against Persia, but no such report was sent. They threatened to kill Nehemiah, but no attempt was made on his life. Nehemiah implies there were armies of Samaritans threatening his workers and himself personally. But there was no bloodshed recorded nor a single act of violence reported. So we wonder whether Nehemiah is not exaggerating, and had become paranoid and hate filled against those who, like Ezra, he considered apostate. Being a eunuch and a newcomer to Judah, it was almost inevitable that he would conflict with the existing leadership. But he presents as obsessive and quite possibly his behaviour was unbridled autism. Quite possibly he was imagining a lot of these threats, but he pours out his fears to God- for they were very real to him. All this is just so true to experience within various Protestant groups.

Nehemiah 6:3 I sent messengers to them saying, I am doing a great work, so that I can't come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it, and come down to you?- The greatness of the work was ever in Nehemiah's mind (also Neh. 4:19). The work of restoring Yahweh's Kingdom on earth couldn't be greater; and nothing would distract him from that. Not internal politics, false accusations and claims, nor the size of the work and the apparently great size of the opposition. "The work cease" is the phrase of Neh. 4:11; Nehemiah knew their intention was to make "the work cease" through this supposed dialogue, and he makes it clear he sees through their plan. We have to ask whether this whole "work" was in fact God's will anyway... And we have to note that the word "work" is used 22 times in Nehemiah's memoirs. He asks for his good works not to be blotted out of God's book, as if this would justify him. And he asks for the supposed sinful works of his enemies not to be blotted out of that book. He has no conception of grace; it's very much all about works.

Nehemiah 6:4 They sent to me four times in this manner; and I kept giving them the same answer- "In this manner... the same answer... again [AV "in like manner", :5] are all the same phrase. The idea is of a conscious effort to wear him down by saying the same thing. As noted on :2, we have all likely experienced this kind of situation in essence.

Nehemiah 6:5 Then, again- Heb. "in like manner", see on :4.

Sanballat sent his servant to me the fifth time with an open letter in his hand- As noted on :2, we have all probably had this kind of experience. Accusations or statements are 'accidentally on purpose' made public knowledge, designed to spread gossip amongst the opposing side, forcing the leadership to give in to false offers of dialogue.

Nehemiah 6:6 in which was written, It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says it- LXX "It has been reported among the Gentiles". This is the classic way of manipulation by such things: 'Do you know what people are saying about you?'. Nehemiah sets a fine example of focusing upon God's work and ignoring such manipulation by focusing solely upon God's perspective. "Gashmu" is Geshem of Neh. 2:19; 6:1.

That you and the Jews intend to rebel. Because of that, you are building the wall. You would be their king, according to this report- The intention was to spread fear amongst the workers; 'If you follow Nehemiah, you are going to get into big trouble with the Persian empire, because it's now known that Nehemiah wants to be a king'. If Nehemiah was indeed to fulfil the restoration prophecies, then he would indeed have been declared a king and Judah would have become totally independent of Persia. It's likely that this was all a twist of the restoration prophecies. But Nehemiah built the wall and was governor of Judah for 12 years after this. There's no record of the Persians questioning Nehemiah about anything. We wonder how real these accusations were, and whether Nehemiah hadn't invented some of this in his own mind.

Nehemiah 6:7 You have also appointed prophets to speak up for you at Jerusalem saying, 'There is a king in Judah!' Now it will be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together- The prophet Malachi may well have been contemporary with Nehemiah, and he does speak of Yahweh as independent king of Judah. So it seems Tobiah the apostate Jew (see on Neh. 2:10) was willfully twisting the prophetic word. But Nehemiah sets a great example, in refusing to spend his energy putting out the fires of gossip and potential gossip- but gets on with the work in hand. For those fires are humanly speaking unquenchable.

Isaiah's lengthy prophecies of the restoration must be compared against the sad reality of what actually happened. The prophecies exude a wonderfully positive and joyful spirit, which contrasts with the defeatism of the returnees. And one cannot help but wonder whether we as individuals and therefore as a community have really lived the life of joy which the NT promises for those who truly believe. Take Is. 45:20-21 as an example: "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations [i.e. Babylon and all the 127 provinces of Persia]... Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them *take counsel together*". These are the very words used to describe how the Arab opposition 'took counsel together' to frustrate the work of the Jews and wanted Nehemiah to join them in such counsel (Neh. 6:7). Yahweh is exultantly saying: 'Let them do it... let them get on with it, nothing can prosper against you and your work!'. But instead, the Jews took the opposition so seriously.

Nehemiah 6:8 Then I sent to him, saying, 'There are no such things done as you say, but you imagine them out of your own heart'- Here we have another Biblical example of the huge theme- that words and bad behaviour proceed out of the heart (Mk. 7:21-

23). Instead of endlessly worrying about putting out the fires of gossip, a simple, clear denial of untruth is all that is required- and God will do the rest.

Nehemiah 6:9 For they all would have made us afraid, saying, Their hands will be weakened from the work, that it not be done. But now, may my hands be strengthened-

The word "God" isn't used, but we can read this as an instant prayer by Nehemiah, just as he prayed a brief prayer as he stood before the king at the start of his ministry. Possibly Heb. 12:12 alludes here in appealing for believers to strengthen the hands that hang down- as if Nehemiah here is read very positively.

The restoration prophecies had stated clearly that the returned exiles would not be afraid, and that God would strengthen their hands (Is. 35:3). Jer. 30:10: "Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid". Isaiah's restoration prophecies contained not only many clear commands to not fear at the time of the restoration (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4), but also a clear statement that if they were truly the re-established Kingdom, they would not fear: "Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest [s.w. Zech. 7:14 re. how Judah was 'tossed around' by the 70 years captivity] I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires... and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for *thou shalt not fear*: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee... and all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Is. 54:11-14). But the adversaries to the rebuilding *did* make the returned exiles afraid (and also Ezra 3:3). Nehemiah exhorted the people *not* to be afraid perhaps on the basis of Jeremiah's words (Neh. 4:14). Their fear and problem-oriented view of life stopped the Kingdom bursting forth into their experience. That fear was rooted in an obsessive self-interest that eclipsed a true faith in that which is greater and larger than us as individuals. And so it can be with us.

Nehemiah 6:10 I went to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabel- Perhaps a priest, as Delaiah is mentioned in 1 Chron. 24:18.

Who was shut in at his home- Perhaps he shut himself in as an acted parable of how he and Nehemiah ought to go into God's house and shut themselves in there (as in 1 Kings 22:11; Jer. 28:10; Acts 21:11).

And he said, Let us meet together in God's house, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple; for they will come to kill you. Yes, in the night will they come to kill you- Nehemiah in his memoirs clearly clung to the idea that Shemaiah was a false prophet, clearly working for the Samaritan opposition, who had many supporters amongst the Jews. He appealed to the idea that the temple was a place of sanctuary, about which there are some Biblical statements. Clearly the idea was to murder Nehemiah at night in the temple when nobody was around.

Nehemiah 6:11 I said, Should such a man as I flee?- He knew that God's Spirit was with him, and therefore there was no place to flee from that (Ps. 139:7 s.w.). He was not going to flee from his prophetic task as Jonah had attempted to (Jonah 1:10). He had obeyed the call to flee the land of captivity (Is. 48:20) and was not therefore going to flee away from the promised land and flee back to Babylon / Persia as they wished.

Who is there that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in- As the chief butler, Nehemiah was likely a eunuch. It would therefore not have been appropriate for him to go into the temple, and in any case he was not a priest.

Nehemiah 6:12 I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me. Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him- "I perceived" could as well imply that this was how Nehemiah liked to imagine Shemaiah. For how many times have right wing zealots labelled well intentioned people "false prophets". Hireling prophets were one of the reasons Judah had gone into captivity in the first place. And they were acting just the same. They were hiring as it were Balaam against him (s.w. Neh. 13:2). And all this was a repeat of Ezra's experience of counsellors being hired against him (s.w. Ezra 4:5). He had been inspired by Ezra. If we are motivated by Biblical characters, then God in essence will respond likewise as He did in their lives, and the connections between our experiences and theirs will be continued by Him.

Nehemiah 6:13 He was hired so that I would be afraid, follow his advice, and sin. Thus they would have material for an evil report, that they might reproach me- We as believers are not called upon to be naive, but to be "wise as serpents". LXX "had hired against me a multitude" rather sounds like Nehemiah's perception there was a whole "army" seeking to attack him, when no conflict is recorded. Did such an army really just watch Nehemiah rebuilding the wall and do nothing? And was there really a "multitude" of false prophets hired to discourage Nehemiah? The large numbers are typical of exaggerated narratives- in this case, within the mind of Nehemiah.

It is questionable whether entry into the temple would have been a sin. Nehemiah may allude to the fact he was a eunuch, but that only precluded him from performing some rituals. Not from entering the temple. The psalms of the restoration urge Gentiles and all people to enter the temple gates with praise (Ps. 100:4). Nehemiah will later order the gates to be shut to keep out traders on the Sabbath (Neh. 7:3). And I have argued that the gates and wall referred to in Nehemiah is specifically that around the temple area, not the secular city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah himself is recorded [by himself] as setting up the doors and gates. To close them behind him was no sin. So it seems logically false to assume that entering into the "temple" area, closing the doors and having dialogue was in fact a "sin". Rather it seems to reflect Nehemiah's paranoid, OCD mentality. Jumping from one "it logically follows..." to another and another, until he has constructed a quite false narrative.

Nehemiah 6:14 Remember, my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and also the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear- Again we see Nehemiah assuming judgment day would be of works. The false prophet Shemaiah was not acting alone. There were a group of such prophets as well as prophetess who were making false prophecies, in league with the Samaritan opposition. The spiritual state of Judah was indeed very weak. It was only a firm personal belief in the truth of God's actual word which preserved Nehemiah from believing these false prophets. And therefore he didn't fear. Time and again, Isaiah's restoration prophecies told Judah that they should not fear, as Yahweh would mightily be with them in their work (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8,11; 54:7,14; 59:19). But Judah feared the surrounding nations- Ezra and Nehemiah are full of this theme (Ezra

3:3). Nehemiah refused to be put in fear by the Samaritan opposition because of his faith in Isaiah's promises.

Noadiah means 'Meeting of Yah', and the same word for "meeting" has been used in :2,10, where the opposing party urge Nehemiah to "meet" with them. Possibly this name plays on that. As if her message was that such a meeting was indeed of Yahweh. And I would say that there indeed should have been dialogue between the opposing parties. Nehemiah rejects all this as fake and just an excuse to distract him from his work regarding the wall. He presents as having an OCD, out of control autistic obsession with building that wall. Which I have suggested was anyway unnecessary and built in the wrong place for the wrong reasons. But the whole account here in Neh. 6 reads strangely. One possibility is that the opposition to the idea of building a wall around the temple area was because they knew it meant excluding them, the Jews of the land. Their schemes to block the work went too far. Extremes begot extremes. But it's quite likely Nehemiah is imagining a significant amount of what he says here. "They're trying to kill me..." is the kind of thing I have heard in arguments between believers. Accusations of murder just come out of nowhere. Just ask any council estate police officer how many times they're told "He / she's trying to murder me", when there is no basis at all to the accusation. Likewise Nehemiah talks about his opponents having an "army". It's unlikely Persian power would have tolerated the existence of local armies. They are never recorded as doing anything. It was largely, I suggest, all in Nehemiah's mind. Just as in church politics, some will speak of how there is huge danger from very large numbers of opponents... when it's all very small stuff really. But the lesson is, that now in his memoirs, Nehemiah is persuaded of the truth of it all. This is the trouble with believing or creating false narratives. The narrative doesn't remain static, the envelope increases and becomes solidified in the mind as fact. It's why partners become totally persuaded that their ex-partner abused the kids when in fact nothing of the sort happened. That's the sober warning from reading these final memoirs of Nehemiah. Old age or maturity didn't somehow change his perceptions. We note many of those he paints as his worst opponents have 'Yah' in their names, e.g. Tobiah, Yah is good, whom people tried to persuade Nehemiah was indeed 'good'. The classical commentaries claim that these were false prophets just putting "Yah" in their names. But consider the alternative- that these were Godly Jewish people whom Nehemiah and Ezra had classified as 'people of the land', and progressed from seeing them as 'believers second class' to being not of Israel, to being Gentiles [using the term "Ammonite" about them, or lending money to them as if they were Gentiles not Israelites], and then finally, to being purely evil people whom God hated. And this is the path we see trodden by so many, religiously, socially, politically. It is not just life on a council estate. It's what is sociopathic and carcenogenic to all relationships at whatever scale. The Lord's teaching "Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no" is an appeal for radical honesty, realism and truthfulness. That is the only way to live and be in relationships.

Nehemiah becomes so convinced of his narratives that he asks God to eternally judge his opponents "for these their works", when those "works" may have partially been creations in his own mind. And yet within the frames of his own misperceptions, Nehemiah had integrity- he took it all to the Lord in prayer. However mistakenly and misguidedly. It's hard to say he will not be saved. He asks God to remember him for good according to his works (Neh. 5:19; 13:14,22,31), and to remember or think upon his opponents for their evil works (Neh. 6:14; 13:29). His conception of judgment for works was surely wrong. Nor did he have any desire that all men be saved, and be forgiven for their sins at the last day.

Nehemiah considers "the rest of the prophets", i.e. all the prophets, to be against him and to be false prophets. This... makes us wonder. Is. 66:1,2 had been clear that Yahweh was now not interested in the building of a temple. Zech. 2:5 had spoken of Jerusalem being inhabited as a city *without* walls. And multiple prophecies in Isaiah speak of the gates of the city being open to receive Gentiles. There was a strong prophetic argument against what Nehemiah was doing. We wonder if he too quickly assumes all the prophets are wrong because they are trying to discourage him from building that wall. And opposed his policy of redefining Israel as those who were ethnically "pure" Jews and could prove it by genealogical records. We could take Zech. 2:1-5 as being a vision of the rebuke of a man with a measuring line going forth to measure Jerusalem's length, breadth and height, as if he were going to build a wall. The Angel challenges him: "Where are you going?". And then the man planning to build the wall is basically told not to: "Run, speak to this young man, saying, 'Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I', says Yahweh, 'will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the midst of her". In this case, Nehemiah's rebuilding of the wall was in fact his own obsession and not actually what God wanted at that time. As I have argued throughout Nehemiah 3-6. His lack of reference to the prophets and focus on the Mosaic law in Neh. 8 rather than the prophets... again, raises questions. It seems likely that prophets like Malachi were contemporary with him, but he doesn't mention them.

This makes us wonder about his claim that his rebuilding the wall was what God put in his heart (Neh. 2:12). He uses the same phrase about his plan and supposed brainwave about accepting only those with genealogical records as "of Israel" (Neh. 7:5). That for sure was not how God saw the definition of His "Israel". And the prophets insisted that the restoration from Babylon would lead to a multi ethnic people of God, with Gentiles entering Zion and serving as priests. So I tend to wonder whether the wall project was indeed what God put in his heart. For it was apparently forbidden by the prophet Zechariah. This means Nehemiah's judgment wasn't always right, thinking God had said something when He hadn't. And that leads me likewise to doubt his judgment that he "perceived" that in fact all prophets were false prophets, hired by his opponents, and worthy of Divine condemnation because they sought to discourage him from his wall building. Certainly Isaiah and Zechariah were amongst those prophetic voices.

Nehemiah 6:15 So the wall was finished in the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days- This is absolutely credible; Themistocles built a wall around Athens in a similar time span. The roughly 40 lots into which the work of the wall was divided up in Ezra 3 would have averaged about 80 yards (73 meters) for each group. And parts of the wall would have needed less work than others; remember we are not talking about the rebuilding of the walls after the Babylonian destruction, but from the damage done to them by the Samaritans. These fifty-two days were between August 11 and October 2 when the Sabbaths are excluded.

Nehemiah 6:16 It happened that when all our enemies heard of it, then all the nations that were about us were afraid, and were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done of our God- "Our enemies... and all the nations" (KJV) might suggest the "enemies" were not Gentile nations. I have suggested the enemies were largely Jewish "people of the land", although Nehemiah refers to them and treats them as Gentiles. The restoration prophets envisaged the Gentiles joyfully

accepting God's hand in that restoration; e.g. Ps. 126:2, "Then said they among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them". But this wasn't quite the case. The Gentiles did accept the action of Israel's God against all odds, but the Jews intermarried with them and made false prophecies for them. And there was not the repentance intended amongst the Jews and Gentiles. The surrounding nations were intended to note the real presence of Israel's God and then join Him in covenant relationship. But the apostacy of the Jews, as well as Gentile impenitence, precluded this scenario from happening at the time.

Nehemiah 6:17 Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them- I argued on Neh. 4:14 that "the nobles and rulers" were a group that were originally with Nehemiah, but turned against him.

This connection with Tobiah in particular would be understandable if indeed he was an apostate Jew as suggested on :18. The greatness of Nehemiah's achievement was that he did it in the teeth of betrayal amongst his own people, and despite all manner of politics- gossip, threats of gossip, letters going back and forth, family politics (:19), innuendo, intrigue and politics. Despite all those things he focused upon the work.

Nehemiah 6:18 For there were many in Judah sworn to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah; and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as wife- This is tacit recognition of the fact that the apparent repentance of marrying Gentiles and the supposed separations from them in Ezra's time were fictive or not far reaching. Tobiah's name includes the termination 'Yah', suggesting he may have been a renegade Jew (cp. Ezra 2:60; Zech. 6:10). His son's name, Jehohanan also features the 'Yah' prefix. But he self identified as an Ammonite (Neh. 2:10). It seems from Neh. 13:4 that even the high priest was "allied" with Tobiah by marriage. Meshullam was also a priest who had helped in the rebuilding (Neh. 3:4,30). The priesthood and leadership was totally against Nehemiah and his plans, even though Meshullam had helped rebuild the wall. That Nehemiah succeeded in rebuilding the wall despite all the internal and external opposition, and all the murky internal politics, was clearly only the work of the Spirit of God; but we have to commend Nehemiah for his personal tenacity. He is an example of 'the power of one'. And it is so often the case that genuine intention to serve God is derailed by exhaustion with internal church politics. Nehemiah is really the parade example of a man who focused upon God's work and refused to be distracted by all this. But I have elesewhere explained that all this may have been Nehemiah after the event deciding these people were apostate for not going along with him in his legalistic attitudes.

Nehemiah 6:19 Also they spoke of his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear- The essence of this kind of thing is seen today in the bombardment of people by various forms of communication, which is so easy in our age. "Good deeds" is a play on the word "Tobiah" (Heb. *tob* = 'good'). He had paid the false prophets to prophesy for him (:12), so he likely used money as an instrument in his machinations; and this was likely interpreted as charitable donations. Nehemiah must have felt so isolated, with so little support amongst the Jews, and yet doing what he did solely for them rather than himself. Or we can read this as a tacit admission that Tobiah was in fact good before Yah, as his name means. And Nehemiah chose to totally demonize him. We note from Neh. 7:61,62 that Tobiah was

a Jew who could actually prove his genealogy. For he is mentioned in the list of those who could prove their genealogies. And yet Nehemiah calls him an "Ammonite".

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 7

Nehemiah 7:1 Now it happened, once the wall was built and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed- The implication is that they were appointed as keepers of the doors, gatekeepers. The "porters and singers" were Levites. The use of Levites to guard the gates was a conscious attempt to restore the situation in Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 9:17-22; 26:12-19). We should also remember that the Levites and priests accounted for about half the population of Jerusalem (Neh. 11:6-19 cp. 1 Chron. 9:9-22). According *t*o Ez. 44:11-14, the repentant Levites were to be the gatekeepers in the restored temple. But there is no evidence they did repent, indeed the record in Nehemiah shows they were on the side of the Samaritan opposition, intermarrying with them; and so the Kingdom situation possible at the restoration was precluded.

Nehemiah 7:2 that I put my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the governor of the castle, in charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many-

The compromise of offering to build that symbol of Persian dominance (see on Neh. 2:8) was not repented of. Instead Nehemiah considers the Jewish manager of it to be very faithful to Yahweh...

Nehemiah's brother Hanani was given "charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man"- not just because he was the boss's brother, which is how the nepotism of those times would have usually required. It can be that human qualification, e.g. being a successful businessman, or the brother of a leading brother, is related to positions of eldership amongst us. Yet the Nehemiah passage shows that although sometimes there may be overlap between both spiritual and human qualification, it is the spiritual qualification which must be paramount. Because of this the 'leaders' of a healthy ecclesia will not need to give any justification for their authority. They will naturally be respected for who they are, just as a father in a healthy family. This is why the NT gives *all* of us guidelines on how to decide whether a brother should be respected as an elder or not. Even though some may be shepherds, they are still sheep; and they are leading others after the Lord Jesus, "the chief shepherd", not after themselves.

Judah were to keep the charges ['perform the duty'] of God relating to His house (Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16), so that the Kingdom of God might be restored in Israel. Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's vision, tried to get them to "keep the charges" (s.w. Neh. 7:2,3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w.). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realization of His vision.

Nehemiah 7:3 I said to them, Don't let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. While they stand guard, let them shut the doors, and you bar them; and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, everyone in his watch, with everyone near

his house- Is. 60:11 had predicted that at the time of the restoration, these gates would be open continually and not locked. This was all precluded by the Jews' continued apostacy.

Due to the Jews' abuse of the Sabbath and their refusal to believe Yahweh would be the promised wall of protecting fire to them, the gates could not be open continually, and had to be shut at night (Neh. 7:3; 13:19). And Antiochus quite soon after Nehemiah's time destroyed them [which shows how the spirituality involved in what we do, e.g. the building of the wall, is the essential thing, rather than the achievement of anything in itself]. The implication of the prophecies about Zion's open gates was that whosoever would could then come at any time to seek Yahweh. But men were potentially turned away from Him, and His Kingdom not realized... just because greedy, materialistic Jews wanted to have a few more coins in their pocket as a result of their trading on the Sabbath. And so with us, our meanness, our disabling of adverts to be placed, preaching to be done... by our selfishness, our desire to have more than we need to cover us in the case of any eventuality, all this effectively shuts up the Kingdom against men. If the Pharisees could do just this, it is possible for us to do it. The salvation of others has been delegated into our hands.

Nehemiah 7:4 Now the city was wide and large; but the people were few therein, and the houses were not built-

Zerubbabel had already returned with nearly 50,000 people (Ezra 2:64-67). Clearly they weren't really interested in Jerusalem but in grabbing land for themselves, involvement with the things of God's Kingdom insofar as it benefitted them. And no further.

There has been extensive archaeological work done in order to determine the size of the population of Jerusalem after the Babylonian destruction and once the exiles returned. Evidence is that throughout the Persian period, the population was likely never more than 1500 people, and the majority of the inhabitants of Yehud, the province of Judah under the Persians, lived agricultural lives on the hills of Judea. There is evidence of the exiles returning and boosting the population of Yehud, but little evidence Jerusalem's population greatly increased. Is. 65:21 had prophesied that "They shall build houses and inhabit them themselves; and they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit". But very few houses were built in Zion, because the people preferred to live on their farms, in their cieled houses, outside the city. They planted vineyards, but sold the fruit to others- on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15,16). So the record here laments how small was the population of the restored Jerusalem. They had failed to fulfil the restoration prophecy of Zech. 2:4: "And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein". Likewise Ez. 36:10: "And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded". They were happier to settle outside of Jerusalem and concentrate on building up their own farms in the villages and small towns of Judah, rather than sense the importance of Zion. Nehemiah 11:1-3 suggests that so few wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there, that they had to draw lots to get at least a tenth of the total population to live there- in what should have been the capital. *If* more had returned from Babylon, *if* more had lived in Jerusalem, *then* Yahweh would have been a wall of fire to them, and then the Kingdom conditions described in the rest of Zechariah 2 would have come about. Although the restoration prophecies speak as if the increase of Zion's population was to be unconditional, Ez. 36:37 implies that this would only happen if they prayed for it:

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock". But they got on with building their own homes and farms outside Jerusalem, they blessed those who had the courage to live in Zion itself, but didn't earnestly pray for the fulfilment of the prophecies. They figured that the time for their fulfilment hadn't come, as Haggai laments; instead of praying for their fulfilment. And we must assess our attitude to the fulfilment of prophecy in the light of all this.

Mic. 7:11-13 RV explains how the restoration would fail to grasp the prophetic potentials: "In the day that thy walls are to be built [the restoration under Nehemiah], in that day shall the boundary [of Israel] be far removed [the boundaries of Israel would be extended, as noted in several prophecies of the Kingdom]. In that day shall they come unto thee from Assyria [Babylon] and the cities of Egypt…even to the river [Euphrates- i.e. all of scattered Israel, including those who went down to Egypt with Jeremiah 70 years beforehand, would return to the land]… *Notwithstanding*, the land shall be desolate". Despite all this being made potentially possible ("notwithstanding…"), the wonderful Messianic Kingdom was disallowed from coming into existence at that time because of "the fruit of their doings" (Mic. 7:13). Neh. 7:4 obliquely comments on the tragedy: "Now the city was large and great: but the people [who returned from Babylon] were few therein, and the houses were not builded". See on Neh. 4:10; 11:1.

Nehemiah 7:5 My God put into my heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy- This continues the theme throughout Ezra and Nehemiah of God working directly on the human heart, inserting ideas and initiatives into human minds who were willing to respond, as in Neh. 2:12. This is all the work of the Spirit. The same phrase is used of God putting wisdom into the hearts of those who built the tabernacle (Ex. 36:2). It is also used of how God would give (s.w. "put") a new heart to the returned exiles (Jer. 24:7). But they generally didn't make use of that gift of the Spirit and rejected the new covenant which included the promise of the Spirit. Nehemiah was one of the few who did at least partially respond to it. And even he, along with Ezra, seemed intent on keeping hold of the old covenant rather than accepting the new covenant.

I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written therein- The context of the new census was presumably to address the problem of the returnees not wanting to live in Jerusalem (see on :4). Nehemiah was therefore interested in the record of where they had originally come from. Perhaps the idea was that they should only live in their original home area (:6 "each one to his city"). It seems some who were originally from Jerusalem had grabbed land not belonging to them in other areas.

Bullinger comments: "When he says, "I found a book", &c, it does not mean that Nehemiah found or discovered the register at that time; but, writing long after, he says, "I find that the list of names was, so and so"".

I argued on Neh. 4:14 that the "nobles and the rulers" turned against Nehemiah, and so here he is trying to hit back at them by excluding them from the community unless they could prove their [supposed] ethnic purity. NET renders Neh. 7:5 "My God placed it on my heart to gather the leaders, the officials, and the ordinary people so they could be enrolled on the basis of genealogy. I found the genealogical records of those who had formerly returned". Nehemiah was seeking to define the true Israel on the basis of genealogy, knowing that the Jewish "people of the land" had no genealogies. This was a very divisive move, leading to the massive division between

Jews and Samaritans. Being part of the Israel of God was never predicated upon being able to produce a genealogy. Rather was it upon a personal willingness to enter covenant relationship with God. Yet Nehemiah claims God put this on his heart. Did He? So many times I hear this claim in Pentecostal circles, and it means what it may do here. That Nehemiah had a brain wave, from within himself an idea occurred to him; and he conveniently decided this was from God.

Nehemiah 7:6 These are the children of the province, who went up out of the captivity of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and to Judah, each one to his city- "Went up" is literally a 'going up'. Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Nehemiah 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness.

Nehemiah 7:7 They came- When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10). he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7).

With Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel- Zerubbabel was the 'head' of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled king, Zerubbabel would've been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos. 1:11 could have come true: "Judah and… Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel" (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the "David my servant" who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called "the people of Israel" (cp. Ezra 2:2). And yet he let the baton drop. The prophecies and potentials were therefore reapplied and rescheduled for fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

We note their description as "the people of Israel", Israelite men. But the golah Jews were ethnically from Judah and Benjamin. They are defining "Israel" as themselves. We would expect them to describe themselves as "Jews" i.e. people of Judah.

We enquire why this long list of names from Ezra 2 is repeated here. I suggest Nehemiah gave in to the politics of defining "Israel" as the golah Jews, those who had

returned from Persia. These are defined as "the number of the men of the people of Israel". "Israel" are being numbered or defined as those who had returned from Persia- the Jewish "people of the land", those who had remained in the land after the captivity, are thereby excluded. This is why the list ends with the double stress that they are "all Israel... the children of Israel" (:73). "Israel" were being defined as the golah Jews from Persia. Zech. 10:9,10 was a prophecy given after the restoration, and it spoke of God bringing His people from Egypt, Assyria and other places apart from Babylon / Persia. But they too would have been unwelcome by this rigid definition of "all Israel", and so that is why this prophesied regathering didn't fully happen at the time: "they will remember Me in far countries; and they will live with their children, and will return. I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria". Nehemiah has fallen from his initial heartbroken concern at the plight of the Jews who had been left in the land, and their abuse by the returnees. He looks back in his memoirs and sees how he had fallen from that ideal, caving in to the local politics of the time. As a eunuch, he too was excluded from the religious community. But now he operates the same kind of exclusion. And yet he does record how he did try for them in Neh. 5. Faded idealism and departure from principle is indeed something that every man's memoir probably has to include. I would go so far as to say that I find it disappointing that Nehemiah would include these records of the returnees along with his definition of them as "all Israel", purposefully excluding the Jews in the land already, and those from the ten tribes. At least we would hope for some statement of regret about how he had gone along with this redefinition of "Israel" to the exclusion of those whose exclusion he earlier fought against. But there is no regret expressed, indeed we could assume that at the end of his days he had come around to support their exclusion. He concludes by asking God to remember his good works, and save him eternally on that basis. And yet his final words in Neh. 13 don't betray much certain hope of the Kingdom. There is no positive mention of him in later scripture. Possibly he ended his days as many legalists do, clinging on to their exclusive positions and somehow hoping that will maybe save them before God at the last day.

Nehemiah 7:8 The children of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two- "Children of..." can be understood literally; or the 'children of' a geographical area are the people who live in it. It seems that initially we have a list of the literal families who returned. Then those who returned, arranged according to geographical localities; and then the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities; then the families of the Nethinim and of Solomon's servants.

Nehemiah 7:9 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two- The Persian and Babylon practice was to replace Hebrew names with local names, as we see with Daniel and his friends. The fact some retained their Hebrew names, especially a name like "Yah has judged", may be an indication of faith; although it may also have been mere cultural loyalty.

Nehemiah 7:10 The children of Arah, six hundred and fifty-two- "Arah" is 'wandering', perhaps aware that the Jews had been exiled to the east just as Cain was to wander east of Eden.

Nehemiah 7:11 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two

thousand eight hundred and eighteen- 2812 in Ezra 2:6. The numbers in the parallel record in Neh. 7 are sometimes higher. I suggest that that was a list of those who began the journey, or expressed interest in it; whereas Ezra 2 is the list of those who completed it. And there was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today.

Nehemiah 7:12 The children of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four- Elam was the name of a neighbouring nation, so we wonder whether this was a Jew very influenced by secularism who then repented and had a spiritual revival. And he was one of the largest families to return.

Nehemiah 7:13 The children of Zattu, eight hundred and forty-five- Ezra 2:8 says 945. 100 didn't actually make it. There was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today.

Nehemiah 7:14 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty- "Pure", perhaps once a Nazirite (Lam. 4:7 s.w.).

Nehemiah 7:15 The children of Binnui, six hundred and forty-eight- "Builder", perhaps so named because he was keen to rebuild Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 7:16 The children of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-eight- Bebai" isn't a Hebrew word; some of the exiles had so assimilated that they only had local Persian names. To leave all they had known was therefore a major challenge.

Nehemiah 7:17 The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred and twenty-two- The differing sizes of the families may not simply mean that some were larger than others, but that some families divided more than others over this question of returning to Judah. Some stayed, and others went. And of course many families didn't respond at all.

Nehemiah 7:18 The children of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-seven- 'Lord of the sunrise', a pagan, cultic name; again reflecting the extent to which the exiles had assimilated. I have noted on Esther how "Esther" and "Mordecai" were both local names associated with idolatry.

Nehemiah 7:19 The children of Bigvai, two thousand and sixty-seven- A relatively large number. We are again faced with the question of why some families and geographical areas responded to the call more than others.

Nehemiah 7:20 The children of Adin, six hundred and fifty-five- "Adin" is s.w. "given to pleasures" (Is. 47:8). And yet the message of return to restore the Kingdom was somehow attractive even to such a person.

Nehemiah 7:21 The children of Ater, of Hezekiah, ninety-eight- "Ater" is 'maimed'. Perhaps he was an invalid, which might account for the relatively small family size. The call of the Kingdom is going to be more attractive to those in such situations.

Nehemiah 7:22 The children of Hashum, three hundred and twenty-eight- "Hashum"

means "enriched"; Haggai laments that the motivation for many of the returning exiles was the hope of personal enrichment.

Nehemiah 7:23 The children of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-four- Perhaps the same as Besai one of the Nethinim (Ezra 2:49).

Nehemiah 7:24 The children of Hariph, one hundred and twelve- "Hariph" is the common word for "reproach". Perhaps he and his family were those who felt strong "push" factors from their community, and went to Judah because of them, rather than because they were 'pulled' by more spiritual reasons.

Nehemiah 7:25 The children of Gibeon, ninety-five- "Gibbar" of Ezra 2:20 is Gibeon in Benjamin (Neh. 7:25), and we note that a disproportionate number of the returnees were from Benjamin.

Nehemiah 7:26 The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight- The majority of those who returned were from Benjamin and Judah. The prophetic vision of all the tribes of Israel returning didn't come about at the time. These are pathetically small numbers, bearing in mind there were around 1 million Jews in the empire (see on Ezra 2:1).

Nehemiah 7:27 The men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight- The very existence of "men of Anathoth" who returned was a sign of God's grace. For because of their persecution of Jeremiah, Jer. 11:21,23 had prophesied: "There shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth". Perhaps like Nineveh some repented and therefore the threatened judgment didn't come about; or Jeremiah prayed for them his enemies and was heard; or Yahweh simply pitied His people.

Nehemiah 7:28 The men of Beth Azmaveth, forty-two- The small number was because this was known as literally "fields" near to Jerusalem (Neh. 12:29). And yet 42 people returned from this area. Whereas from far larger settlements, not one.

Nehemiah 7:29 The men of Kiriath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three- They may have been listed together because these villages were close to each other, or they travelled together as if one family. The men of Kirjathjearim had looked after the ark previously (1 Sam. 7:1,2) and been blessed for it. There had been a faithful prophet there at the time of the captivity (Jer. 26:20); these considerations may account for the relatively large number who returned from that area.

Nehemiah 7:30 The men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one- "Gaba" is s.w. "Gibeah of Benjamin" (Jud. 20:10). This was a priestly city, given to the Levites, although very few Levites returned (Josh. 21:17).

Nehemiah 7:31 The men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two- The order of the towns appears to be geographical, as "Michmas" was close to "Geba" (s.w. "Gibeah") of :30 (1 Sam. 14:5).

Nehemiah 7:32 The men of Bethel and Ai, a hundred and twenty-three- Mentioned

together because they were geographically close (Josh. 7:2; 8:9). Bethel was in the ten tribe kingdom, so it seems that some of the Israelites did return along with Judah; but not to the extent of the prophetic vision, whereby a repentant Israel and Judah would be united together in a reestablished Kingdom of God in the land.

Nehemiah 7:33 The men of the other Nebo, fifty-two- "The other Nebo", perhaps to differentiate it from Nebo in Moab; or as LXX "Nabia".

Nehemiah 7:34 The children of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four- LXX Elamar. We wonder why so many, relatively speaking, should return from an unknown small village. Perhaps there was a community of faithful there.

Nehemiah 7:35 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty- Whilst in this section we are reading of the names of towns and not people, this location is unknown, and means 'flat nosed' as if referring to a person. Perhaps the interesting case of the person Harim is being emphasized, in that people from his village also returned with him. See on :42.

Nehemiah 7:36 The children of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five- There was a community of "sons of the prophets" there which may account for this (2 Kings 2:5).

Nehemiah 7:37 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-one- Ezra 2:33 gives 725. The fact is noted that even four people began the journey, or were willing to start it, but didn't make it. These details show the abiding value to God of every human person.

Nehemiah 7:38 The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty- A relatively large number. We are again faced with the question of why some families and geographical areas responded to the call more than others. The larger cities such as Lachish had apparently not a single one who returned from there.

Nehemiah 7:39 The priests: The children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three- We have the numbers of the priests, arranged according to families, and then according to their localities. They were not particularly faithful for many of them had married Gentile women by the time Ezra came. Of the original 24 families of priests, only four returned. And very few Levites- there were more priests than Levites. And only 42,000 returned from a population of around 1 million.

Nehemiah 7:40 The children of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two- Only four courses of priests returned, when there were supposed to be 24 of them , namely Pashhur, Jedaiah, Immer, and Hardin (1 Chron. 24:7, 8,14). The priesthood had been deeply corrupt at the time of the exile, and it seems most of them preferred to remain in Babylon.

Nehemiah 7:41 The children of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven- Perhaps descendants of the unfaithful Pashur the priest of Jer. 20:1-3.

Nehemiah 7:42 The children of Harim, one thousand and seventeen- "Harim" means 'snubnosed'; the priest in whom there was a physical defect, such as to exclude him from priestly service. For this is the word used of how a 'flat nosed' man was excluded

from priestly service (Lev. 21:18). Perhaps they were eager at the chance to serve in the restored temple, guessing that the regulations would be relaxed due to the relative lack of priests and Levites returning. Or the idea could simply be that the requirements of the law were not followed by the priests who returned.

Nehemiah 7:43 The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the children of Hodevah, seventy-four- These Levites of :43 are the ordinary Levites; :44 refers to the Levites who sung, and :45 to those who kept the gates. But only two families of the ordinary mass of Levites initially returned- a pathetic response.

Nehemiah 7:44 The singers: the children of Asaph, one hundred and forty-eight- This was very poor response. We note that apparently the famous singing families of Heman and Jeduthin didn't return (1 Chron. 25:1).

Nehemiah 7:45 The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-eight- This is a very small number for the families of the gate keepers. The number of ordinary Levites compared to priests is very low (in the Ezra 2 account, 4289 priests, and 341 Levites). There were far more Levites than there were priests, but it seems the Levites didn't want to return and do the dirty work; everyone wanted to be religious leaders. Hence Ezra's problem in finding Levites to return (Ezra 8:15). We can note that it was this tension between Levites and priests which resulted in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-10).

Nehemiah 7:46 The Nethinim: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth- The Nethinim were grouped beneath the Levites but above "the servants of Solomon" (Ezra 2:55). "Nethinim" is literally 'those who are given' and many presume they were originally the Gibeonites, who were 'given' by Joshua to the Levites to do their more menial work (Josh. 9:3-27). Whenever Gentiles were captured in war, some of them would have been devoted to Yahweh in that they were given to His service through joining the Nethinim (Num. 31:28). Thus in Ezra 8:20 we find mention of some "whom David and the princes had appointed (Heb. ‘given’) for the service of the Levites".

Nehemiah 7:47 the children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon- These names could well be Persian and not Hebrew. The Nethinim were Gentiles (see on :46), and had unsurprisingly adopted Persian names in the exile. But they wanted to return to rebuild Judah. It's hard to guess whether the push or pull factor was strongest. Perhaps they felt they had never been accepted in Persian society just as they hadn't been in Jewish society and therefore felt a 'push' from exile; or perhaps they were truly faithful to the God of Israel they served, and were thereby 'pulled' by that back to His service.

Nehemiah 7:48 the children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Salmai- "Lebana" is "the moon"; "Hagaba" is "the locust". These names suggest a high level of assimilation into Persian society.

Nehemiah 7:49 the children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar- We note the lack of the 'Yah' prefix or suffix in these names. Those who responded were apparently secular people, not known for their devotion to Yahweh. That may

explain why the records of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi complain that they were not well motivated and were largely only looking for personal benefit and advantage through returning to Judah. See on Ezra 2:19.

Nehemiah 7:50 the children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda- "Reaiah", 'Yah has seen', is one of the few names which has the 'Yah' suffix. And he was of the Nethinim, a Gentile, who had retained his devotion to Yahweh despite being made a servant of Yahweh's apostate people.

"Nekoda" is a female name. This female head of house, a Gentile of the Nethinim, meaning literally "speckled" (s.w. Gen. 30:33,35), led her family back to Judah when many Jews wouldn't respond.

Nehemiah 7:51 the children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Paseah- We note that "Uzza" and not "Uzziah" is mentioned; the 'Yah' suffix or prefix is notably missing in these names. "Paseah" means 'limping', suggesting as noted elsewhere that it was those who had some physical infirmity who returned. Thus was fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy of limping Jacob returning from Babylon to Zion. And today likewise, it is those who are marginalized for whatever reason who are more likely to respond to the Gospel of the restored Kingdom.

Nehemiah 7:52 The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephushesim- "Meunim" is literally 'from Maon', a location in the desert where Nabal and Abigail were from (1 Sam. 25:2). Perhaps some of their Gentile servants became Nethinim and remained faithful- despite all the bad examples they saw from God's ethnic people.

Nehemiah 7:53 the children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur- "Hakupha" means bent or crooked; "Harhur" means 'inflamed'- suggesting as noted elsewhere that it was those who had some physical infirmity who returned.

Nehemiah 7:54 the children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha- "Bazluth" means 'peeled skin'; see on :53. "Harsha" is 'magician', confirming the impression that those who returned weren't the religious zealous but generally very secular people.

Nehemiah 7:55 the children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Temah- These names are all non-Hebrew; the Nethinim were originally Gentile, and these ones appear to have retained that despite returning to the land. The question is whether they were as it were pushed or pulled to return to the land; see on Ezra 2:44.

Nehemiah 7:56 the children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha- These names could arguably include the 'Yah' suffix, although most of the Nethinim and even the Jews listed here don't have 'Yah' within them. They were of the Nethinim, Gentiles, who had retained their devotion to Yahweh despite being made servants of Yahweh's apostate people.

Nehemiah 7:57 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida- These appear to have been reckoned beneath the Nethinim. "They have been traditionally understood to be the descendants of those

inhabitants of the land ‘that were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites’ of whom Solomon had hired ‘bondservants’ for the work of building his temple (1 Kings 5:13)". It was therefore the most despised classes who responded to the call of the Kingdom. And it is the same today.

Nehemiah 7:58 the children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel- "Jaalah" is the word for "profit" used of the idols whom Israel believed would profit them (Is. 44:9,10; 47:12; Jer. 2:8,11; 16:19 etc.). This again rather suggests that the majority of those who returned were secular folks who were not doing so from religious, spiritual motives but for secular reasons.

Nehemiah 7:59 the children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth Hazzebaim, the children of Amon- Shephatiah, "Yah has judged", is one of the few names in these lists which includes 'Yah'. Amongst these largely secular people who returned (judging by their names) there were some who were doing so from spiritual reasons. But they were a minority. And that impression accords with the historical information about their later behaviour in the land as found in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi.

Nehemiah 7:60 All the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon’s servants, were three hundred and ninety-two- This figure is exactly the same as that given in Ezra 2:58, whereas the numbers in the parallel record in Ezra 2 are often lower when it comes to the Jews who returned. I suggest that that was a list of those who began the journey, or expressed interest in it; whereas Ezra 2 is the list of those who completed it. And there was far more interest in starting the journey than actually finishing it, as we see in response to the Gospel of the Kingdom today. But the despised Gentile classes of the Nethinim and Solomon's servants were actually more committed.

Nehemiah 7:61 These were those who went up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not prove their fathers’ houses nor their genealogies, whether they were of Israel- These people may have included Gentiles; for it is unlikely that many Jews apart from the Levites could prove their descent, and that is why those who returned are not listed according to their tribes. Indeed it would appear that the genealogical records were destroyed when the temple was burnt. So the reference here may be to those who lived near to the original encampments of the exiles who wanted to return with them. This had been the prophetic vision- that Judah and Israel would repent, Babylon would be judged and fall, and the repentant remnant of the Gentiles would return with the repentant ones of God's people to form a new, multiethnic people of God in His restored Kingdom. But the impenitence of God's people meant that things didn't work out like that. Babylon didn't "fall" in the way that was potentially possible, the majority of God's people chose to remain in exile. And only a handful of Gentiles returned, probably the poorest of the land, perhaps captives from other nations who had been grouped along with the Jews, and likely motivated by the chance of a better life.

Nehemiah is claiming here that only having a written genealogical record made a person "of Israel". He was seeking to redefine Israel as just the wealthier exiles who had returned, who had some written genealogies. The poorer people of the land wouldn't have had such records, and so this was all politically motivated- to declare

them as not "of Israel". We think of all those faithful people who had no genealogy- Melchizedek, Ruth, Rahab etc. Clearly he was wrong to reason like this.

Nehemiah 7:62 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two- As explained on :61, these were likely Gentiles, and their names suggest that. However, "Delaiah" means 'Yah has delivered', so perhaps this was a Gentile who wished to share in Yahweh's deliverance from Babylon / Persia.

Nehemiah 7:63 Of the priests: the children of Hobaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name- Barzillai was famous in Israel from the times of David. This priestly family had taken the name of this family, seeking for kudos and prestige; and thereby had lost their priestly lineage.

Nehemiah 7:64 These searched for their genealogical records, but couldn't find them- Ezra 2:62 records Judah being 'reckoned by genealogies', using the same Hebrew word which is the hallmark of the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chron. 4:33; 5:1,7,17; 7:5,7,9,40; 9:1,22). And in this context, Is. 40:26 compares God's 'bringing out' of Judah from Babylon with His 'bringing out' the stars by their individual names, all wonderfully known to Him. Ps. 87:6 had prophesied something similar about the restoration of Zion's fortunes: "The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there". The Kingdom of God was to be the restoration of Israel's Kingdom- but they had to actually get on and restore it rather than wait for it to come.

Therefore were they deemed polluted and put from the priesthood- There is a clear connection here with Is. 43:28: "Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse, and Israel an insult". They were put forth "as polluted from the priesthood". This is tacit proof enough that the restoration from Babylon failed to be the potential restoration prophesied. Indeed, the behaviour of the Jews at that time attracted further curses and judgment.

Nehemiah 7:65 The governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim- This situation precluded the fulfilment of the restoration prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13: "Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things". The same words are found in Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65- it wasn't possible for the priests to eat of the holy things [signifying God's acceptance of His people], because there was no record of their genealogy. Their names were not written in the "register" in fulfilment of Ezekiel 13:9: "neither shall they be written in the writing [s.w. 'register', Ezra 2:62] of the house of Israel". Only if a priest stood up with urim and thummim could they eat of the holy things. These were two engraven stones carried in a pouch in the breastplate which flashed out Divine decisions (see H.A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul And David* for an excellent study of this). Zechariah 3:9 prophesies that Joshua the High Priest would have the engraven stone with seven eyes- the urim and thummim. It would thereby have been possible for a priesthood who had lost their genealogy record during the sacking of the first temple to eat the holy things, and thus fulfil Ezekiel 42:13. In a restoration context, Is. 66:21 had prophesied that Yahweh would regather Judah, "And I will also take of them for

priests and for Levites, saith the LORD". This implies, surely, that He would accept some as Levites who could not otherwise prove they were. Zechariah 6:11,13 speaks of Joshua being crowned with the High Priestly mitre and 'bearing the glory', i.e. carrying the urim and thummim in the breastplate. But all this was *conditional* on Joshua's obedience: "This shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey" (Zech. 6:15). Because Joshua failed, he didn't have urim and thummim, therefore no decision could be given about who was an acceptable priest, and therefore the 'Kingdom' prophecy of Ezekiel 42:13 was left unfulfilled. So much depended upon that man. And likewise, the eternal destiny of many others depends on us. Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration feature "the servant"- who was a symbol of both the people and a Messianic individual. His success was bound up with theirs. Thus Is. 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed [singular] out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor [singular] of my mountains: and mine elect [plural] shall inherit it, and my servants [plural] shall dwell there". His obedience would enable the peoples' establishment as the Kingdom.

Nehemiah 7:66 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty- As noted on Ezra 2:1, this was but a tiny minority of the 1 million or so exiles in Babylon / Persia; and the prophetic intention that the ten tribes returned at the same time was not realized, because they too preferred the life of exile from God rather than returning to Him.

Nehemiah 7:67 besides their male and their female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven: and they had two hundred and forty-five singing men and singing women- 7337 servants for 42360 people (:66) suggests that on average each family had a servant. We therefore get the impression that those who returned weren't the poorest of society, although as noted with regards to the meanings of their names above in this chapter, many of them were probably slightly marginalized. They returned seeking material benefit (Hag. 1:9), as lower middle class people often do; rather than seeking to do God's work. See on :69.

Nehemiah 7:68 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six; their mules, two hundred and forty-five- See on :69. This picture of the Jews returning on various animals is to be connected with the prophecies of the restoration, where the leaders of the nations of their exile were to also make the journey to Zion, carrying the children of the Jews (Is. 49:22,23); and using all the animals here listed in order to bring the Jews back to Zion, and then help them rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Is. 60:4-10). But this is very different to the scene we have here; of a very few Gentiles returning with a few Jews, and those Jews not even having enough animals for each of them to ride on (see on :69). Comparison with the prophecies of what was potentially possible makes for a rather sad impression. So much Divine potential was wasted; just as it is by the millions who refuse the call to the Kingdom today. See on :71.

Nehemiah 7:69 their camels, four hundred and thirty-five; their donkeys, six thousand seven hundred and twenty- Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the lower classes, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon. It would be fair to infer that only the lower class Jews returned from Babylon. The record speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple- so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded

them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities.

Nehemiah 7:70 Some from among the heads of fathers' households gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand darics of gold, fifty basins and five hundred and thirty priests' garments- Note the stress on "some". It's stressed twice that only "some" of the returned exiles supported the work of the temple (:71)- which was supposed to be the main reason for their return. This hardly sounds like the glorious, positive, confident return of the captives to Zion prophesied in the restoration prophecies.

Nehemiah 7:71 Some of the heads of fathers' households gave into the treasury of the work twenty thousand darics of gold, and two thousand two hundred minas of silver- This may sound significant, but it is nothing compared to the entire wealth of the lands of their exile which was intended to be brought to Jerusalem at the restoration (Is. 60:5-10). See on :68.

Nehemiah 7:72 That which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand darics of gold, and two thousand minas of silver, and sixty-seven priests' garments- It seems some of the priestly garments had been pilfered by non-Levites, or were being used by them perhaps in idol worshipping rituals, performed in the name of Yahweh worship.

Nehemiah 7:73 So the priests, the Levites and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinim, and all Israel, lived in their cities. When the seventh month had come, the children of Israel were in their cities- The priests in the restored Kingdom were to live in one specific area near the temple (Ez. 45:4), whereas under the Mosaic Law, the priests were given land to live on in each of the various tribes of Israel. And yet the record of the restoration stresses that the priests lived not around the temple, but in various cities throughout Judah (Ezra 2:70; Neh. 7:73; 11:3,20; 12:44).

This mention of the 1st of the 7th month (Neh. 7:73; 8:2) follows the reference to the 25th of the 6th month (Neh. 6:15). We are to assume these events occurred in the same year. The feast of Trumpets was on the first day of the seventh month; the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, and the Feast of Tabernacles later in the seventh month. There is no record of the Feast of Trumpets being kept, nor the Day of Atonement. We wonder why this is. The people were all settled in their cities at the start of the seventh month. But surely they should have all been at Jerusalem before the sanctuary, or at least their men. The only "sin" it seems they wanted to 'repent' of was the supposed sin of intermarriage with the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile, whom they considered so second class as not to be the true Israel. Their weeping in Neh. 8:9 may have been genuine, but they were quickly told not to seep but to rejoice- as if to say "This is not the Day of Atonement now, it's the Feast of Tabernacles when we are to be joyful!".

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 8

Nehemiah 8:1 All the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spoke to Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Yahweh had commanded to Israel-

Note the names Nehemiah uses for the community. "All the people" are "the assembly" [LXX *ekklesia*], which is further defined in :17 as "All the assembly of those who had come again out of the captivity". The preceding Nehemiah 7 has shown how Nehemiah sought to define the "people" according to those written in records of those who had returned from Babylon (Neh. 7:6) and could prove their genealogy. All seems well and good if we read this quickly. But we must perceive what's going on. The "people" are being defined as the golah Jews, to the exclusion of all the others. "As one man" shows their unity- behind the wrong walls they had built of separation from their brethren, and their redefinition of "Israel" as solely they who had returned from Persia. So often this is done. It's all cosy behind the walls, but the walls are built in the wrong places... to the exclusion of God's people. The difficulty of life together is leapfrogged by this wrong drawing of walls, and thereby real spiritual development is lost.

This is the first we hear of Ezra since we read of him at the time of his return from Babylon in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7:7) in 458 BC, and Nehemiah arrived in the same king's twentieth year (Neh. 2:1) in 445. Ezra's work over those 13 years isn't recorded. In that time, Jerusalem had gone from a populated city (Ezra 1:1) to a depopulated city with broken down walls (Neh. 7:4; 11:1-3; 13:10-13). Possibly Ezra had returned to Babylon in that period; or perhaps he had a ministry which, like that of so many, produced little fruit. Yet still he kept on, for he reappears in Neh. 8:1 to read the law to the people.

The LXX correctly connects this with the end of Neh. 7, "in the seventh month". This was the time of the feast of trumpets (Lev. 23:24,25). But they were unaware of this feast (:14), so it seems they likely gathered together at the annual new moon festival which would have been at that time- and then discovered that actually, they were intended to be keeping the feast of booths. Perhaps the idea was that God's word was as living waters, hence it was read from "before the water gate", which was at the eastern entrance to the temple (see on :3), into which Ezekiel had prophesied the glory of Yahweh could return- if they were faithful. This is the same "broad place" near the temple of Ezra 10:9, where the Nethinim (the temple servants) lived (Neh. 3:26). However, the restoration prophets had explained that the old covenant had been broken, and Israel's only hope was to accept the new covenant offered in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. And yet they all hankered to keep the old covenant, "the book of the law of Moses", rather than accepting the implications of their actions.

We wonder why Ezra only now appears on the scene in Nehemiah, and has not been mentioned earlier as working with Nehemiah. He may have returned to Babylon in that period; or perhaps his own commitment to the cause had faltered. This calling of Ezra to read the law is presented as a new and unusual move, as if he had not been in the habit of doing this previously. See on :14.

Nehemiah 8:2 Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month- In those days, religion was largely a hobby for adult men. We note that Israel's God sought relationship with both men and women as well as children old enough to understand (cp. Neh. 10:28), and so both men and women were to hear the law. This is repeated in :3. But "the assembly" refers to those referenced in Neh. 7- the golah Jews who had returned from exile, and who were defining themselves as the true

Israel. So whilst the presence of women and young people is commendable, what is so wrong is the exclusion of all the other Jews, the so called people of the land. Ezra had forced anyone married to them to divorce them, and now Nehemiah goes along with this attitude. The law was to be read every seven years to all people in Israel, including the foreigner who lived with them. It's all very well being 'inclusive' of women and children, but if the boundary lines around the 'inclusive' community are wrongly drawn, then it all becomes quite meaningless. This is, again, so true to observation of human and spiritual communities.

Although the first day of the seventh month was the day of the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23-25; Num. 29:1-6), there is no reference to the people keeping it. And yet they will go on to make decisions made about divorce and marriage which were based on hyper legalistic, quirky interpretations of God's law that were sold to them by their elders. When they apparently were themselves ignorant of the basics; they apparently didn't even know about the Feast of Tabernacles.

Nehemiah 8:3 He read therein before the broad place- "Before" means therefore 'to the east' of it; see on :1.

That was before the water gate from early morning until noon, in the presence of the men and the women, and of those who could understand. The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law- "All the people" included both men and women; see on :2. We note the commendable desire to hear the actual text of God's word for itself, when it is a human tendency to shy away from that and to prefer listening to someone else's interpretation of it without the text itself.

Nehemiah 8:4 Ezra the scribe stood on a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose- Literally, "for the word". This confirms the observation made on :1 that this was not a regular occurrence; it was a special reading of the law. And they had not been taught the law as they should have been, for they were unaware of the feast of booths (:14).

And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam- "The parallel passage in 1 Esdras gives seven on the right hand, inserting an Azariah between Anaiah and Uriah, but six only on the left, omitting the last name Meshullam". This would mean that if 1 Esdras is correct about only six on the left, we have a total of twelve; surely appropriate for the 12 tribes of Israel. Although mostly only those of Judah and Benjamin were present, it was God's prophetic intention that the repentant remnants of both Israel and Judah, along with converted Gentiles, would unite as a new, multiethnic people of God in the land. This didn't come about, but it was the prophetic potential. We note too that the High Priest is absent here. He was perhaps spiritually corrupted by intermarriage with the Samaritans.

These are the names of Levites found later in Nehemiah (Neh. 9:5; 10:9-14). We note that it was Levites, not priests, who read and interpreted the law (:7). It was the priests' duty to interpret the law, the Levites did the practical work of the sanctuary (Lev. 10:11). And there is a glaring lack of reference to the High Priest being present. It seems this was foisted on the people by Ezra and Nehemiah, and the repentance was done in their name according to an agreed script which was read out. Later we will read of Nehemiah denouncing the High Priest and his family for marrying the wrong women. Even now at this point we can see that there were tensions. Nehemiah was getting an agreement apparently agreed to separate from marriages to the Jewish

"people of the land". The priesthood was indeed corrupt at this time, as Malachi shows. But it seems to me that Nehemiah had decided to get rid of the High Priestly family and so he unilaterally sets up a gathering that would confirm Ezra's wrongful exclusion of people on the basis of their marriages. He gets this signed up to. And then, later, uses it as a basis for excluding the High Priestly family who were intermarried with the local ruling class. Because... he wanted, or felt he needed, all the power.

Nehemiah 8:5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; for he was above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up- We note their respect of God's word. The Jews typically sat to hear and stood up to pray. But here they stand to hear the word of God. We wonder from where this great interest in God's word and respect for it came from; for it was on their initiative that the scrolls were called for (:1). Perhaps Ezra and Nehemiah had urged them to desire this. Or maybe this was all the movement of God's Spirit. Or maybe they realized that the time of the feast of trumpets (see on :1) ought to be the time of reading God's word together. But it seems to me that they were exalting the law of Moses because they wanted to argue that the golah Jews were now the only true Israel, and they were re-entering the old covenant which was centered on the Mosaic law. They failed to accept Zechariah's teaching that the covenant had been broken; and Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered a new covenant, not based on the Mosaic law. But they weren't interested in that. Instead of reading the law they should've been reading the prophetic criticism of them through Isaiah, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi... It was this de-emphasis of the prophets compared to the Torah which continued into the Lord's time and is seen in Judaism today. And it led to them misunderstanding Messiah.

Nehemiah 8:6 Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God. All the people answered, Amen, Amen, with the lifting up of their hands. They bowed their heads, and worshipped Yahweh with their faces to the ground- Ezra may have been praising God for their interest in His word which had suddenly appeared (see on :5). Their worshipping with faces to the ground recalls the scene at the inauguration of Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 7:3). On one hand we must allow that they may have been totally sincere; but the nationalistic desire to replicate past glory was surely also there, and as with all worship, God alone knows the motivations of every heart.

Nehemiah 8:7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah and the Levites caused the people to understand the law; and the people stayed in their place- Probably what is in view is the names of Levitical families, rather than individual Levites (cp. Neh. 9:4,5; 10:10-13; 12:8). Four of these names are found in the list of Levites in Neh. 9:5, and seven in the list of Levites in Neh. 10:9-14. I have noted earlier the tension between priests and Levites, and how few Levites there were relative to the priests amongst those who returned. The idea seems to be that there were few willing to do the work of humble service, without possessing land, which the Levites were called to. The fact they are presented here as teaching the people the law, when this was the job of the priests, is another indication that the priesthood had failed in their duty of teaching the law; see on :14.

Nehemiah 8:8 They read in the book, in the law of God, with interpretation; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading- LXX "And they read in the book

of the law of God, and Ezra taught, and instructed them distinctly in the knowledge of the Lord, and the people understood the law in the reading". As noted on :7, it was Levites and not priests who were explaining the law. The priesthood had failed pathetically, and thus precluded the possibilities envisioned in the restoration prophets; because they wouldn't even read them, let alone believe them and share the message with the people. Possibly this giving the sense was because some of the younger ones didn't fluently understand Hebrew any more, so it was more a question of translation into contemporary language, than exposition. However, the result all the same was that the people wept and then repented by separating from wives who were considered "the peoples of the land" (Neh. 10:28,30). I have argued on Ezra 10 that this was not right. And Ezra concludes his memoir haunted by the fact there were kids involved in all this family breakup... And yet here, he does it again. And Nehemiah fails to learn any lesson. He who first came to Judah because he was so heartbroken at the abuse of those Jews who had remained after the captivity. And now they are being spiritually abused. On one hand, we can argue for the power of God's word, eliciting tears and practical repentance as the people heard the word read and explained to them on those September mornings in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes. On the other hand, we have here a classic example of false guilt and spiritual abuse of those ignorant of God's word, telling them they are guilty and breaking up families in a way God's law never asked for. It was this practice of making the interpretation of the scribes equal to God's word which led to the halachah, and the Lord's crucifixion. Remember we are at this point at the end of Old Testament history. The Gospel records will pick up the story, and show where all this ultimately led to. From this passage in Neh. 8 began the Jewish idea of an 'Oral Torah', their interpretations as opposed to the written Torah we have in the Bible. This oral Torah was handed down by word of mouth until it was codified in 200 A.D in the Mishnah, and completely codified in 500 A.D in the Gemara. The Mishnah and Gemara is what constitutes the text of the Talmud.

Nehemiah 8:9 Nehemiah, who was the governor- Nehemiah himself only uses the less significant word *pechah* about himself (Neh. 5:14,15,18). He had a commendable humility.

And Ezra the priest, the scribe, and the Levites who taught the people, said to all the people, This day is holy to Yahweh your God. Don't mourn, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law- As noted on :1, this was the time of the feast of trumpets (Lev. 23:24,25). But they were unaware of this feast (:14), so it seems they likely gathered together at the annual new moon festival which would have been at that time- and then discovered that actually, they were intended to be keeping the feast of booths. This is the force of "This day is holy to Yahweh"- it was His feast, and not the new moon festival.

The reason why man should not keep weeping for his sins is because he has been forgiven, by God's grace. But the reason given here and in :11 is that they shouldn't be weeping on a feast day, a holy day. Clearly, religion was squashing personal spirituality. God's word had pierced their souls and led them to weep in contrition. And the religious leaders tell them there should be no tears on a feast day!

We read in Neh. 7:73 that the people were all settled in their cities at the start of the seventh month. But surely they should have all been at Jerusalem before the sanctuary, or at least their men. There is no record of the Feast of Trumpets being kept [on the first day of the seventh month], nor the Day of Atonement on the tenth day. We wonder why this is. The only "sin" it seems they wanted to 'repent' of was the

supposed sin of intermarriage with the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile, whom they considered so second class as not to be the true Israel. Their weeping in Neh. 8:9 may have been genuine, but they were quickly told not to weep but to rejoice- as if to say "This is not the Day of Atonement now, it's the Feast of Tabernacles when we are to be joyful!".

Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, Go your way. Eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Don't be grieved; for the joy of Yahweh is your strength- These gifts to the poor must be connected with the fact it was the Jewish "people of the land" who were poor; the very group who were abused by the wealthy Jerusalem golah Jews in Neh. 5. This was surely an attempt from Nehemiah to unite the community. It ultimately failed, with the Samaritans developing as a totally separate community, with Sanballat founding the Yahweh sanctuary at Mount Gerizim. Nehemiah in his memoirs, like many men, looks back at his efforts to unite people... and has to recognize it largely failed.

Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied that Judah would come with joy to Zion (e.g. Is. 51:11), and would continue there with an everlasting joy. But the records give little indication that they were joyful; Neh. 8:9,10 shows Nehemiah encouraging them to be joyful, because "the joy of the Lord is your strength". They didn't want to have all joy and peace through believing; and so the Kingdom of joy didn't come. They didn't live the Kingdom life of joy, and so they didn't possess or experience the Kingdom. The lowness of their petty concerns deprived them of it. They were intended to send portions to the Gentiles and the poor (Dt. 16:14), recalling the spirit of Purim and the great salvation worked for them through Esther. The idea was that they would bring the Gentiles into covenant relationship with Yahweh; but as Nehemiah finally has to lament, they actually did the very opposite. Like Hezekiah, instead of doing this, they adopted their ways, and married their women. Or we could note that sending portions to the poor was a conscious imitation of Purim, a feast originating in the exile community, where the gifts had been given to those within the exiled community. We get the hint that this was all done solely within their community, whom they were defining as the one true Israel.

Nehemiah 8:11 So the Levites stilled all the people saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be grieved- The idea is that the new moon feast they thought they were celebrating was indeed to be a holy day to Yahweh, and they were permitted to celebrate that- even though they were doing so some days earlier than written in the law (see on :15). I have several times lamented that Ezra, Nehemiah and the people seemed unaware of the restoration prophets; but they were unaware even of the most basic principles of the law of Moses concerning the feast. It is a picture of really pathetic ignorance, due to the failure of the priesthood to teach them God's word.

Nehemiah 8:12 All the people went their way to eat and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great joy, because they had understood the words that were declared to them- The intention was that portions be sent to the surrounding Gentiles (Dt. 16:14). Seeing the Samaritans had been so bitterly opposed to them, this would have been an act of great grace; if in fact they obeyed it by sending to the Gentiles too. We wonder which "words" they understood that they so rejoiced. Perhaps it was the assurance of the passages in the law of Moses which speak of Israel always being able to repent and to accept God's grace.

However, we can assume too quickly that the sorrow of the people was because they realized they had sinned, and their joy was because they realized they were forgiven. This memoir of Nehemiah is I suggest highly choreographed by him. It gives the impression all Israel as one man were present (:1) and all did what he records as being done. There was no confession of sin nor statement of forgiveness. Their joy wasn't because of forgiveness. Instead I suggest Nehemiah is saying that they wept because they didn't understand (:9) and rejoiced when they did. Painting this picture gives power to the Levites and religious leaders. They are presented as vital for the people to have understanding of God, and the source of their joy. And understanding is elevated as supreme. What should they have done? Taught them the new covenant, so they need not ask each other for teaching but instead God would write His law on their hearts through the Spirit.

Nehemiah 8:13 On the second day were gathered together the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, to Ezra the scribe, even to give attention to the words of the law- The priests were intended to teach the law; and yet realizing their ignorance even of basic commandments about the feast, they come to Ezra asking him to read and explain more to them. We can now better understand Malachi's deep criticism of the priesthood at this time.

Nehemiah 8:14 They found written in the law- They had not been instructed about keeping the feast of tabernacles- a tacit reflection of how little Bible teaching they had received and the utter failure of the priesthood, and raising the question discussed on :1 as to where Ezra was all this time. Ezra 3:4 records that they had kept the feast of tabernacles when Ezra first arrived, but it seems that had been forgotten about; or at least, the command to dwell in booths had not been taught to them: "They kept the feast of tents, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the ordinance, as the duty of every day required". So much for Ezra the zealous scribe of God's law. Nehemiah is right at the end of Old Testament history, and the next we will read of the scribes, his spiritual descendants, will be in the Gospels.

The golah Jews were keeping the feast of Tabernacles as if they alone were the true Israel, excluding those they though ethnically impure. But the restored kingdom was intended to feature Gentiles keeping the feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14:16).

The attention to living in booths was to obey Lev. 23:42 "all that are homeborn in Israel shall dwell in booths". This was specifically something to be done by those born in the land. But now we have all the golah community keeping this, as if to make the point that they (born in Persia, :17) were now the true, born in the land Israel.

How that Yahweh had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month- Keeping the feast of the seventh month was required in the restored Kingdom: Ez. 45:25: "In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, shall he [the prince] do the like in the feast of the seven days, according to the sin offering, according to the burnt offering, and according to the meat offering, and according to the oil". Zech. 7:5 criticized the Jews for keeping this feast only externally, but not "unto me". Hag. 2:1 records how on the 21st day of the 7th month- i.e. once the seven day feast that began on the 15th had finished- Haggai was sent to rebuke "the prince", Zerubbabel, for being so slack in fulfilling Ezekiel's vision. Even by the time of Neh. 8:14-17, it was so that the feast of the 7th month had not been kept by Judah since the time of Joshua. They subconsciously switched off to Ezekiel's words; just as we can all do. They reasoned that "the time" of which he

spoke hadn't come- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:13 "not for price nor reward"). They felt that all the prophecies were "marvellous" in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience (Zech. 8:6). This is why Hag. 1:2 rebuked them for saying "the time is not come…that the Lord's house should be built". They didn't want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean 'going up' from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple.

Nehemiah 8:15 and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem saying, Go out to the mountain, and get olive branches, and branches of wild olive, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written- It was not written in the law that Jerusalem must be where these things were done! Lev. 23:1,4 tell the Israelites to 'proclaim the set feasts of the Lord'. But they insert their interpretation- that the proclamation should be in "all their cities and in Jerusalem". Likewise they took myrtle and palm branches "as it is written". But consider Lev. 23:40: "And you shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook". So their "quotation" isn't at all precise, the only common words between text and interpretation are 'palm' and 'thick trees' . They added "wild olive" [cypress / pine trees] as if those were words they were quoting from the law. They were doing what so many do, confusing God's word with its interpretation, making the interpretation as inspired as the original word of God. So many groups do this with the writings of their founders. This way of thinking led to the Rabbinic commentaries becoming seen as God's actual word. Again, we turn the page to the New Testament and see how Ezra and Nehemiah's examples led to the legalism of first century Judaism, and the Lord's crucifixion.

The commandment about the feast of tabernacles was that it should be kept on the 15th day of the 7th month (Lev. 23:34). It seems that they were permitted to keep the feast a few days earlier, seeing they were all gathered together and were eager to keep it (see on :11). The trees mentioned were those which were to blossom in the restored Kingdom (Is. 41:19; 55:13). And God has caused them to grow; all the preconditions were set up for the people to repent and reestablish His Kingdom on earth in Judah. But such huge potential was wasted by them.

Nehemiah 8:16 So the people went out, and brought them, and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of God's house- Perhaps the idea was that they had 13 days to prepare. Verse 13 may refer to the 2nd day of the 7th month, and the feast was to begin on the 15th, according to the law. But I suggested above that they were permitted to keep the feast immediately.

And in the broad place of the water gate, and in the broad place of the gate of Ephraim- Ez. 48:31-34 envisaged the 12 gates of Jerusalem being named after the 12 tribes of Israel. But it seems no accident that twelve separate gates of the city are mentioned in the restoration record- but they weren't renamed after the tribes of Israel. Here are the names of the city gates in Nehemiah: valley (Neh. 3:13); horse (Neh. 3:28); east (Neh. 3:29); Miphkad (Neh. 3:31); water (Neh. 8:16); dung (Neh. 12:31); fountain (Neh. 12:37); Ephraim, old, fish, sheep and prison gates (Neh. 12:39). No wonder some wept when the rebuilt temple was finally dedicated- the pattern of

Ezekiel's vision hadn't been followed, even on such basic matters as the names of the twelve gates of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 8:17 All the assembly of those who had come again out of the captivity-
So often we read in this chapter of "all the people". But the idea is here made specific, that "all the people" were all the community who had returned from exile. And they were being defined as "the children of Israel". Jer. 31:8 uses the same word for "congregation " in describing how it would include God's people gathered not only from "the north country" but from all parts of the earth. But the golah community wanted to define themselves exclusively as the "congregation ". The LXX uses *ekklesia* for "congregation". Clearly the church of the Lord Jesus must likewise be perceived as indivisible. Yet denominationalism has divided it into exclusive congregations, all claiming to be the one true body and church of the Lord.

Time and again, Jeremiah had prophesied how Yahweh would *bring again* His people and the vessels of the temple back to the land (Jer. 28:3,4,6; 30:3,18; 31:23); and this all had a fulfilment in the return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. It was then that in some sense Yahweh 'brought again Zion' (Is. 52:8). The very same word used by Joel [translated "bring again"] is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8 and 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. As if knowing this, Hos. 6:11 had prophesied [otherwise strangely] that Judah would reap their punishment, *when* they returned from captivity. They returned [s.w. 'bring again'], but not to the Most High (Hos. 7:16). Joel 3, however, speaks from the perspective that Judah would be 'brought again' from Babylon under Ezra; and then Joel 3:2 "I will also gather all nations...and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land".

Made booths, and lived in the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day the children of Israel had not done so. There was very great gladness- See on Ezra 3:4. They had kept the feast of tabernacles, but not in this way, to this extent. And they had apparently forgotten all about the feast since the time of Ezra 3:4, which presumably they kept in a ritualistic sense, as we can keep the breaking of bread meeting- and then forgot all about it. We see here the paucity of Israel's attention to God's law, and the failure of the priesthood in their intended teaching ministry- which Malachi condemned so strongly at this time.

Nehemiah 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. They kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance- Hos. 12:9 had prophesied that keeping this feast was to be a feature of the restored Kingdom when the exiles returned. Their ignorance of it therefore reflects how the restoration prophets had just not been taken seriously. It's hard to be sure, but we could logically assume that that event was at the same time as the events of Neh. 5, when Nehemiah urged them to release their wrongly enslaved brethren and stop demanding usury from them. Such a public reading of the law was surely to fulfil the command of Dt. 31:10-12, to do so every seventh jubilee year- when there should anyway have been a release: "At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of tents, when all Israel has come to appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He shall

choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women and the little ones and your foreigner who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear Yahweh your God". We note that the reading of the law was to be for the foreigner as well, in the hope he would also come into covenant relationship with "Yahweh your God". And so the release of debts should have been clear to Israel anyway. Tragically, the people heard the law- and were conned into thinking that they had to therefore separate from Gentiles.

The emphasis upon reading and accepting the law of Moses may appear commendable. But the prophets had made it clear that the old covenant had been broken, and the returned exiles were offered a new covenant. Likewise the words of the prophets, especially Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, were given by God to guide the exiles and lead them to repentance. But these weren't read. It's the omission of reading these prophets which is significant. The law of Moses was presented as the defining document between God and the exiles, now redefining themselves as the one true Israel. His criticisms of them and appeals for their repentance were quietly ignored. And Ezra and Nehemiah surely bear responsibility for this. They were limiting God's word to His people as being simply the law of Moses- not the prophets. Hence we keep reading “the book, the law of God” (Neh. 8:8,18; 9:3 “the book of the law of Yahweh their God”). The words of the prophets, so critical of them, were ignored. They 'sold' relationship with God as simply trying to keep the law of Moses- and that law as interpreted to them by the scribes / priestly class, including the extra laws they proclaim in order to obey the Divine law. Which resulted in the situation in the first century, leading to the crucifixion of their own Messiah and their ignoring all the prophecies about Him. The synagogue readings were of the Law, with some smaller sections from the prophets read afterwards only as illustration of the Mosaic law. But the emphasis was upon the Mosaic Law. This began here in Nehemiah. All God's other words to them, especially the offer of the new covenant, were ignored. So we have here the huge significance of what is omitted... which was the prophets. The pulpit built for Ezra to read the law from is significant in this- the law of Moses was being elevated above the people. And we see this sort of thing happening all the time, in essence. Parts of the Bible are elevated and interpreted to God's people, whilst ignoring so much else.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 9

Nehemiah 9:1 Now in the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth, and earth on them-

They ought to have been keeping the Day of Atonement in that month, mourning their personal sins that needed atonement by the scapegoat that looked ahead to the Lord Jesus. Instead they kept a feast of their own device to mourn the sins of their ancestors. For the Jews in exile, who were now the golah Jews, those who had returned to Judah and were seeking to define themselves as the only true Israel, had instituted a feast in the seventh month to mourn the destruction of the temple. It's quite possible that this mourning in the seventh month is what is referred to here. It is not the Day of Atonement, for that had already passed. The Jews preferred to celebrate their own tradition over God's feast. They mourned for the sins of their fathers, and not for their personal sins, as the Day of Atonement required. The feast they had instituted in the seventh month was not pleasing to God, according to Zech. 7:3-6: "[You] mourn because of the destruction of the Temple, by fasting... Tell the people of the land and the priests that when they fasted and mourned in the fifth and

seventh months during these seventy years, it was not in honour of Me. And when they ate and drank, it was for their own satisfaction".

We ponder how Ezra 3:4 describes the returned exiles keeping the same feast of tabernacles by making the required sacrifices on the new altar "day by day". In Neh. 8:18 we read that Ezra read the law to them every day, but there is no mention of the sacrifices being offered. Perhaps because Nehemiah realizes that the sacrifice of true confession is what God wants, and not animals on a temple altar. We notice in Neh. 9:1 that the people gather together but the place of gathering is unspecified. Possibly we see here a marked omission of the temple. After all the work rebuilding it, and walling it in... it actually wasn't much used. The peoples' confession of sin in Neh. 9 was surely pleasing to God, but it was done without any help from having a temple. The account of their history makes no mention of the temple. Nehemiah concludes his memoirs with the comment that he had to cleanse the temple chambers of the supposed uncleanness of Eliashib the High Priest, and Tobiah (Neh. 13:4-9). It's as if he sees the temple as having been defiled anyway, and all his work to fence it in to keep it holy by a wall had simply not worked. Possibly Nehemiah is looking back and realizing the truth of Is. 66:1-3, that God actually isn't interested in physical temples but dwells in hearts humble to His word. We too need to be honest and realistic enough to realize that our life's path and work may have taken us down a rabbit hole, or at least, have been a following of misplaced ideals. Possibly every life has elements of that, and throws us back on the fact salvation is not of works but of grace.

This is behaviour associated with the day of atonement. But it is done a few weeks after the event. And there is no record of the day of atonement being kept by them at this time. This is very strange. So this fasting and confession of sin (:2) is appropriate to the day of atonement, but this would have been on the wrong date. I noted on Neh. 8:14 the lamentable lack of knowledge of the law of Moses. Perhaps they were unaware of the date of the day of atonement; or perhaps given their genuine spirit, they were permitted to keep it on a different date. They were being taught thereby that the letter of the law was not so crucially important.

It has been well argued that the prayers of Dan. 9 and Neh. 9 alludes heavily to Zechariah and Haggai's calls for repentance in order that the Kingdom be reestablished. "In both we see the key role of the prophets in warning the earlier generation (Zech. 1:4, 5, 6; 7:7, 12; cf. Neh 9:26, 30; Ezra 9:10–11; Dan. 9:6, 10) and the use of the construction of ביד to speak of the agency of these prophets (Zech. 7:12; cf. Neh 9:30; Ezra 9:11; Dan 9:10). In both we see the function of the law as the standard rejected by the earlier generation (Zech. 7:12; cf. Neh 9:16, 29, 34; Ezra 9:10, 14; Neh 1:7; Dan 9:5, 10–11) and the near identity of the words of the prophets and the law (Zech. 7:12; 1:6a; cf. Neh 9:29, 34; Dan. 9:10–11). In both the earlier generation is identified as אבות (Zech. 1:2, 4, 5, 6; 8:14; cf. Neh 9:2, 9, 34, 36; Ezra 9:7; Neh 1:6; Dan 9:16; Ps 106:6, 7) and the sin of that generation is linked with the present generation (Zech. 1:6b, 8:14; cf. Neh. 9:32–37; Ezra 9:6–7; Neh 1:6–7; Dan 9; Ps 106:6). Finally, in both there is an admission of the justice of God (Zech. 1:6b; cf. Neh 9:33; Ezra 9:15; Dan 9:6,14)".

Nehemiah 9:2 The seed of Israel- A similar phrase, "the holy seed", is used in Ezra 9:2, also in the context of marriage with Gentiles. Malachi wrote at this time, and pointed out that the purpose of marriage is to "seek a Godly seed" (Mal. 2:15). Marriage to unbelievers is not easily going to achieve this. But I argued on Ezra 9:2 that the idea of a "holy seed" suggested Ezra, and now Nehemiah, thought that intermarriage was wrong per se. Their argument assumed the Jews who returned from

exile were the pure seed. But they were not. He describes those men of Judah and Benjamin as "the seed of Israel", redefining "Israel" as the golah Jews. Yet they are addressed by God through Malachi as they were, "Judah". And they are reminded that they themselves had divorced the wives of their youth, thereby stopping God's intention in marriage- to create a Godly seed. As it was, their ethnic purity didn't make them the true seed. "Aren't you children of disobedience, a seed of falsehood" (Is. 56:7). The true "seed" of Yahweh were those who trembled at His word, and not the temple builders (Is. 65:23 "they are the seed of the blessed of Yahweh, and their offspring with them"; Is. 66:22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, says Yahweh, so your seed and your name shall remain"). Jer. 2:21 says that they were no longer the true seed: "I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed. How then have you turned into the degenerate branches of a foreign vine to Me?". "Behold, I will rebuke your seed" (Mal. 2:3). The enigmatic Jer. 31:27 seems to be saying that the seed of Judah and also the ten tribes, "Israel", would be sown by Him together in the land, so that men and animals sprung up together very quickly: "Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man". This would be the time of Ez. 36:11, when Yahweh would multiply both man and animal upon His land. So the attempts to keep the "seed" of Judah "pure" were plain wrong; nor were the golah Jews exclusively "the seed of Israel" as they liked to think. The prophets of the time frequently address God's people as if the ten tribes and Judah were all part of His people, e.g. Zech. 8:13 "People of Judah and Israel...". So often they are paralleled, e.g. in Zech. 9:13 "I will use Judah like a soldier's bow and Israel like the arrows. I will use the men of Zion like a sword"; Zech. 10:6 "I will make the people of Judah strong; I will rescue the people of Israel. I will have compassion on them and bring them all back home". And this included not just Jews from Babylon: "From Egypt and Assyria I will bring them home and settle them in their own country" (Zech. 10:10). So the Babylonian / Persian golah Jews were quite wrong to try to redefine "Israel" as just them.

Separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers-

"From all strangers" is literally 'children of the foreigner'. This could be a call to separate from the children of mixed marriages, thus repeating the error of Ezra which haunted him at the end of his memoirs- that he had broken up many marriages, and children were involved.

The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Neh. 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Neh. 10:28). There was a powerful logic- either separate from the world around, or be separated from the people of God (Ezra 10:8). It's a separation- one way or the other.

The confession of the sins of their fathers was not because the son suffers for the sins of the father. Rather was this a reversal of the attitude which Ezekiel encountered amongst the exiles- that their fathers had not sinned according to the great punishment given them. Instead of minimizing the sins of their fathers, in accordance with the oriental way of glorifying ancestors as perfect and wonderful- they accepted that their fathers had indeed sinned.

This confession of sin appears to be like that of Ezra 10:11: "make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives". Remember that the prayer of Neh. 9 that now follows is by the Levites in the name of the people, or by Ezra (so the LXX). It is what Ezra and Nehemiah think they ought to be saying. They are saying that the people confessed their sins in that they separated from the original Jewish people of the land. Nehemiah has learnt nothing from Ezra's mistake. Indeed the prayer is so similar to that of Ezra 9, confessing the supposed sin of intermarriage. His concern for the poor Jews of the land in Neh. 1 is evaporating. He has bought into the politics of the time and situation. The abuses which had broken Nehemiah's heart in Neh. 1 had been caused by the golah Jews and Ezra's policies. As the book of Nehemiah progresses, Nehemiah is no longer outraged but instead goes along with those attitudes and policies. We too can slip back, imperceptibly but slowly and surely, until we have lost our early idealism and moral spine. Our heart no longer bleeds for others because we have become caught up in narratives which falsely blame them for their sufferings. And even when some suffering is indeed self inflicted, we fail to see that we too are in the same position. We too act foolishly and are saved from eternal death, the ultimate consequence, by God's grace alone. Nehemiah too had been excluded from the community because he was a eunuch, and this had made him have a heart of compassion for these people. But as time went by, he no longer felt his own frailty nor pain, and so his compassion for others in their rejection and exclusion dissipated. This so easily can be the path we too slip down.

This separation from Gentiles is reversed in Is. 56:3, where the same word is used in comfort to the Gentiles at the time of the restoration who had been "separated from" God's people by an unspiritual leadership: "Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree". Nehemiah as a eunuch himself really ought to have had more of a heart for these Gentile or mixed race believers who were being separated from. And he should have paid far more attention to the many restoration Psalms that expect Gentiles to be allowed into the temple, such as Ps. 99:9 "Exalt Yahweh our God. Worship at His holy hill". And Isaiah foresaw Gentiles being priests in the restored temple

Nehemiah 9:3 They stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of Yahweh their God a fourth part of the day; and a fourth part they confessed, and worshipped Yahweh their God- Confession of sin is directly connected here to hearing God's word. This is one intended outcome of all Bible reading- conviction of sin and repentance. There is a play on the word 'confess' meaning both to confess sins (:2) and to worship (:3). True worship is upon the basis of confession of sin. In Neh. 8:18, Ezra had read the law to them. Now they read it themselves. This could be another of Ezra's strange absences. Or we could look at it as an encouraging example of how a Bible teacher inspires others to read the Bible for themselves.

We must follow the pronouns carefully. In :2, "they" confessed their sins and then in :3 "they" read from the law. But the "they" who are reading are the Levites. It seems the Levites acted on behalf of the people in this confession. "In their place" might mean that indeed the Levites stood in the place of the people.

Nehemiah 9:4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani of the Levites stood up on the stairs, and cried with a loud voice to Yahweh

their God- See on :5. We note the continued emphasis upon the fact that Yahweh was still Israel's God (:3,5 and often). Despite their woeful lack of awareness of His word (see on Neh. 8:14) and deep apostasy. Still He kept His side of the covenant with Abraham, to be the God of his seed for ever (:5 "from everlasting to everlasting"). Hence the reference to Abraham in :7.

Nehemiah 9:5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah said, Stand up and bless Yahweh your God from everlasting to everlasting!- See on :4. Again we note that it is the Levites and not the priests who are prominent. The priesthood had disgraced themselves by not teaching even the basic knowledge of God's law (see on Neh. 8:14). The Levites, who focused more upon menial practical service, were the ones who are given prominence instead of the corrupt priesthood.

Blessed be Your glorious name- Nehemiah here encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), possibly in a conscious effort to fulfil the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion's gates in Messiah's Kingdom would be praise.

Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!- Only 'Yahweh' was exalted above every other name (Neh. 9:5; Ps. 148:13). But 'Jesus' in the NT becomes the Name above every Name (Phil. 2:9,10; Eph. 1:21); Heb. 12:8: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to day, and for ever" suggests that the three tenses of the Yahweh Name were supremely manifest in the Lord Jesus.

The idea is that God's Name is beyond ["above"] our praising. We could put it: "I feel I just can't thank and praise you enough for who You are and how You have been with me".

We note that this prayer is spoken by the Levites, and yet on behalf of the people. Surely a penitential prayer should come from the repentant individual. We have here the development of mere religion- religious leaders praying for others. LXX says that Ezra prayed this prayer. Which would make sense, seeing he had forced out of the community of [his version of] "Israel" any who had married the local Jewish people of the land. He now leads a prayer of repentance which specifically mentions this supposed sin. And yet the prayer clearly has spiritual insight, and a genuine perception of Israel's sin and Yahweh's loving grace to them. Which is why on balance I would never consider Ezra as a totally bad guy. Although he was a legalist, who broke up 112 families, was haunted by that sin at the end of his memoir... and yet without doubt had some level of integrity and spirituality before God.

Nehemiah 9:6 You are Yahweh, even You alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their army, the earth and all things that are on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The army of heaven worships You- "The heavenly host bows down before you"- a reference to the court of Heaven (1 Kings 22:19). Nehemiah was aware of Angelic involvement in bringing about the restoration; this was one aspect of the promised work of the Spirit at that time. He notes that the areas around the *eretz* or land of Israel, the "seas" of the Gentiles, are no less given life by God; even the Samaritan opposition.

Nehemiah 9:7 You are Yahweh, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees-

Ezra and Nehemiah thought that the Jews were "the holy seed" by some kind of intrinsic ethnic purity. But the idea of God having chosen Abram is an allusion to Dt.

4:37, which should have taught them otherwise. They were the chosen seed not because of intrinsic ethnic purity (which as a mongrel race they never had anyway), but "because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them". They were quoting and alluding to Bible verses with no attention to their real implications, just as happens today.

The taking of Abram out of Ur was by grace; for Abram didn't of himself leave neither his family nor his land. "*God* removed him from there into this land" (Acts 7:4). Just as the taking of Judah out of Babylon was done not because they fulfilled the required conditions for it, but exactly because they didn't. It was pure grace. See on :4. The idea of God bringing Abraham out from Ur speaks of His grace. Gen. 20:13 made the same point: "God caused me to wander from my father's house". We see the emphasis upon God bringing him out to separation from his relatives, rather than his obedience to the call to do so. By saying this, he would be growing closer to appreciating grace; that God caused him to be obedient when he of himself was not. This is the same work of the Spirit which continues in our days. The Gentile believers are in this sense 'made obedient' by the Spirit's work (Rom. 15:18; 1 Pet. 1:2). Truly our salvation is not of works of obedience, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:9). "Terah *took* Abram his son... and Sarai his daughter in law" (Gen. 11:31). Abram had been called to leave Ur and go into Canaan. But instead he followed his father to Haran, and lived there (for some years, it seems) until his father died, and then he responded to his earlier call to journey towards Canaan. The Genesis record certainly reads as if Abram was dominated by his father and family, and this militated against an immediate response to the call he received to leave Ur and journey to Canaan. At best his father's decision enabled him to obey the command to leave Ur without having to break with his family. And yet, according to Heb. 11:8, Abram immediately responded, as an act of faith. Thus Abram had faith in God's promise, yet may have balked at the command to leave his country and family. Providentially arranged circumstances then resulted in his aging father taking him, implying some degree of compulsion, and leading him out of his native country. Whilst not fully understanding how he could leave his father's household whilst they looked set to be accompanying him on this journey to a strange land, he went ahead in faith. It is emphasized that *God* "brought out" (s.w. to lead, pluck or pull out) Abram from Ur (Neh. 9:7; Gen. 15:6,7). The calling came through Abram's hearing of the word of promise, and providentially arranged circumstances encouraging his faithful response to it.

And gave him the name of Abraham- By grace inserting the central syllable of the Yahweh Name into the midst of Abram's name, to make 'Abraham'. The way 'Abram' was changed to 'AbraHAm' and 'Sarah' to 'SarAH' shows how God wishes to mix syllables of His Name with that of men. Jacob was changed to Isra-el, mixing God's name with that of his father. This is indeed mutuality between God and man- and it demands so much. No longer was Abram all about exalting his own father; he was himself to be a father. We too as Abraham's children pass through this sense of redefinition; we are new creations, no longer just defined by our place in a line of genetics or ancestors, but making a radically new start, producing spiritual children who in that sense shall continue the line which we begin by the sowing of the Gospel seed.

It has been pointed out that Abram or Abiram was one of the most common names in the near East- it was common in Babylon as Abirami, and in Egypt as Abu-reheni or Abram (J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1950) p. 242, p. 329 note 9). Into this very common name- as normal and common as the names we bear in our societies- was added the

Name of Yahweh. Abram became Abraham. The central letter of Yahweh's Name became the central letter of Abraham's. But Abram means 'my father is exalted', or more strictly as W.F. Albright suggests 'I am exalted with regard to / because of my father'. To jettison this name was to trash all Abraham and his culture held so dear- definition in terms of their father, where they came from. The call of the Lord Jesus in our age is in essence no different- to reject father and mother and instead follow Him, to be His. Not in the sense of hating them, but in being new persons, carved out as a totally new family. The 'h' in the middle of Yahweh's Name was now inserted into the middle of Abraham's name; Abram became Abraham, father of a multitude, a new family. Some miserable philological critics have claimed that 'h' was an unknown sound in the near East of Abraham's time (Angel Gonzales, *Abraham: Father of Believers* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) p. 26). And maybe they're right, in which case 'h' would've been a new sound. It would be rather like importing the single Russian letter pronounced 'shch' into the English alphabet. The answer to the question 'What's your name?' would've been arresting and challenging to Abraham's contemporaries: 'Abraham' would've sounded strange and new to them. There will be something equally challenging and arresting to the world surrounding Abraham's seed as people come to know our name, to perceive who we really are.

Nehemiah 9:8 and found his heart faithful before You- Because God found Abraham's heart faithful, He made the covenant. Possibly in view is Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac, which preceded the covenant. In this case, God's focus was upon the state of heart/mind, rather than the act of taking Isaac to sacrifice. And yet on the other hand, God's first promise to Abraham was in Ur, at a time when Abram's heart wasn't very full of faith, and God had to force his obedience.

Just as God "found" David to have a heart like His, so He searches hearts and minds to this day. But the emphasis is upon the state of the heart and not upon legalistic obedience. This was relevant to the exiles who had returned, having not kept the law of Moses for a long time, and were still not keeping every letter of it. "Faithful" is the word for 'belief' in Gen. 15:6. Genesis 15 is clearly in view as it lists the same nations of which we now read. By grace and in accordance with the Abrahamic covenant, his seed were to rise above the Samaritan opposition and the dominance of the Persian empire, and possess the land for themselves. But Judah refused to accept the new covenant offered to them, which was in turn based upon those Abrahamic promises.

And made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, to give it to his seed; and have performed Your words- The covenant to inherit the land was given outside of the old covenant, and to an Abram who was very weak in faith (see on :7). Again we see the relevance to the spiritually weak exiles who had returned to inherit the land of promise, and who were being invited through the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to accept a new covenant relationship with their God.

It was all very well going on about having Abraham as their father. But we know what our Lord had to say about that attitude. God's perspective is that the seed of Abraham are believers, regardless of ethnicity: "they which be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3:9). "They are not all Israel that are of Israel".

They were too quickly assuming that the fulfilment of the Abrahamic land promise was to his seed there and then at the time of Nehemiah. It wasn't, because they were not given eternal inheritance of the land at that point, neither was Abraham then resurrected to receive his inheritance of it. And they assume that the seed of

Abraham was solely the golah Jews. God's view of Abraham's seed is very different. The promises to Abraham are part of the new covenant, which they didn't want a part in because they were obsessed with trying to keep the old covenant.

For You are righteous- It was that same justice / righteousness which saved His people which was related to God's judgment of His people (:33). The judgment and salvation by grace were all part of the same character of God.

Nehemiah 9:9 You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea- Just as God had seen their affliction in Babylon. But that affliction wasn't physical, for the book of Esther concludes with the Jews popular and wealthy. The similarities were only in spiritual terms; and "their cry" was hardly heard, for we don't get the impression that any Jews were praying for the restoration to happen and for deliverance from Persia. The "cry" of Moses was heard as their cry ["And the Lord said unto Moses, Why do you cry unto Me?", Ex. 14:10], and so Ezra and Daniel hoped that their prayers would likewise be heard as that of all God's people. The point is that God brought them out of Egypt just as He brought Abram out of Ur- not because they had fulfilled the preconditions, but because of His love and grace. And it was this likewise why and how He had brought Judah back from Babylon. He had repeatedly said that they would be returned when they returned to Him. They didn't return /repent to Him- and yet He still made them return.

Nehemiah 9:10 You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, and against all his servants, and against all the people of his land; for You knew that they dealt arrogantly against them- Egypt were brought down for their pride (Ex. 18:11), and the pride of Persia and the Samaritan opposition was likewise to be brought down. But Israel were just as proud against God (:16).

And made a name for Yourself, as it is this day- The idea was that God through the restoration was still making Himself a Name. We learn here that His Name is not simply the lexical item "Yahweh", but His Name is associated with His salvation history and personality, which climaxes in His saving by grace. In this sense God's Name is made or created in an ever ongoing sense as history progresses (Is. 63:12).

"As it is this day" quotes the words of Ezra 9:7 "as it is this day". The prayers are so similar. Ezra (according to the LXX) is now praying the same prayer 12 years later, or the Levites and Nehemiah are using his text. They have learnt nothing, still thinking that the true seed of Abraham are solely golah Jews and that the sin that needs confession is that of marrying second class Jews of the land. Likewise we find Ezra's prayer phraseology repeated verbatim in :36. This prayer is supposed to be the prayer of confession and penitence from the people of the time. But it is in fact largely the words of Ezra's prayer of 12 years previously. Reading a pro forma text, and in the name of others, is hardly heartfelt confession of sin by the individuals.

GNB "You worked amazing miracles against the king, against his officials and the people of his land, because you knew how they oppressed your people". And yet Nehemiah was an official of the oppressing power of Persia! Yet the prayer seems to hope that as the king and officials of Egypt were overthrown, so would be those of Persia. But Nehemiah was the King's senior servant and chief official over Judah. Definitely Nehemiah should not have been in this position, and was intended to lead Judah to radical independence and actually, to dominance over Persia and all the Gentiles. Verse 15 will lament that God's people hadn't taken control of the land as they were intended to; but that was exactly the mistake being made by Nehemiah and the Jews; God "told them to take control of the land which you had promised to give

them" (:15). But they didn't. And neither did Nehemiah and the golah Jews of that time. "You gave your people the power to do as they pleased with the people and kings of Canaan" (:24). But they didn't use that power. And neither did Nehemiah. But he doesn't get the personal relevance to himself. All he sees is the issue of intermarriage.

Nehemiah 9:11 You divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land- The sea was divided at creation and also at the flood (s.w. Gen. 7:11), and the "dry land" likewise appeared at creation and at the flood. There was likewise the possibility of a new creation of Zion and the restored Kingdom at the time of the restoration, as the prophets had made clear. And all opposition to that, like the Egyptians, would be cast into the sea, just as the opposition to Noah had been. And yet Judah preferred to intermarry with the Samaritan opposition and, at least initially, worship their gods.

And You cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into the mighty waters- The Egyptians themselves charged in there, but this was used by God, so that He as it were threw them into the waters. Here again we see God's work with human minds, confirming them in the path they choose to go. This image of a stone thrown into the waters is that used for the fall of Babylon (Jer. 51:63). The idea was that God intended Babylon / Persia to fall, and Judah to become His Kingdom in their land, no longer a mere province of another empire. This didn't happen as Divinely intended and empowered, because Judah at that time preferred the culture and ways of the old empire and didn't want to fulfil the restoration prophecies. Their sins could have been cast into the sea, as it were, at the restoration (s.w. Mic. 7:19); but although at this moment they confessed their sins, and perhaps believed God had dealt with them, yet they didn't accept that reality in any abiding sense.

Nehemiah 9:12 Moreover, You led them by day in a pillar of cloud; and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light in the way in which they should go- This leading of Israel to the land had been seen in the miraculous protection of the groups of exiles led by Ezra and Nehemiah back to the land. Clearly the same Angels in the pillars of fire and cloud were equally active. The 'leading' then had been a sign of God's grace ("in Your mercy You led them", Ex. 15:13), a people still carrying the idols of Egypt and the tabernacle of Remphan; and His grace had been no less to the mixed up, Biblically ignorant exiles whom Yahweh had likewise led back.

The gift of light is mentioned here and in :19 perhaps to connect with how the word is used of the gift of light to the exiles in Ezra 9:8 "Our God may lighten our eyes".

Nehemiah 9:13 You came down also on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments- Nehemiah continues to forget, or be ignorant, of the fact that the restoration prophets including Zechariah, who was roughly contemporary with him, had explained that the old covenant given at Sinai had been broken by Israel, and the only hope was acceptance of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This appeal to history and the implied need to keep that covenant- was therefore somewhat misplaced. The pole of traditional nationalism had become stronger than that of God's word and spirituality.

Nehemiah 9:14 You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them

commandments, and statutes, and a law, by Moses Your servant- The Sabbath was specifically "a sign between them (Israel) and Me (God), that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them" (Ez. 20:12). As such, it has never been intended to be binding on Gentiles (non-Jews). "... the Lord has given *you* [not all mankind] the Sabbath (Ex. 16:29); "... You [God] made known to them [Israel] Your holy Sabbath" (Neh. 9:14). The continual breaking of the Sabbath which Nehemiah will later address was therefore yet another sign that Israel had broken their covenant relationship with God; and they needed to seek a new covenant (see on :13). All arguments for Sabbath keeping today need to give due weight to these considerations. Sabbath observance was common among the surrounding peoples; they kept the day unto their gods. Hence the command was to keep the Sabbath holy *unto Yahweh*, not other gods.

Nehemiah 9:15 You gave them bread from the sky for their hunger, and brought forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and commanded them that they should go in to possess the land which You had sworn to give them- They would "go in to possess the land" if they were obedient (Dt. 6:18; 11:8; 30:16 s.w.). They weren't; but still God brought them into the land and gave them possession of it, not because they had been obedient as required, but by grace (Dt. 9:5 s.w.). This was precisely the situation with the returned exiles. The same grace was being shown to them.

Nehemiah 9:16 But they and our fathers dealt proudly- Exactly the phrase used about the pride of the Egyptians which led to their destruction (s.w. Ex. 18:11). We noted on :10 that it was exactly because of this pride that Egypt was destroyed at the Red Sea, but Israel were in fact no better (:16,29)- they acted as the Egyptians, and were hardened just as Pharaoh and his leadership were hardened. Israel's salvation out of Babylon / Egypt was therefore by pure grace and not because they at all deserved it.

And hardened their neck, didn't listen to Your commandments- We would likely have focused upon their idolatry and desire to return to the Egypt life. But the essential problem, as always, was human pride. The hardening of the neck was in order to refuse the yoke of Yahweh's covenant which was placed upon them; they refused to cooperate and work with Him. It was for this reason that they were taken into captivity (s.w. Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15).

Time and again the focus is upon "them", rather than the current situation of those praying this prayer: "But *they* and our fathers dealt proudly... neither were *they* mindful of Your wonders that You did among *them*, but hardened *their* neck, and in *their* rebellion appointed a captain to return to *their* bondage. But You... didn't forsake *them*. Yes, *they* had made *them* a molten calf... *they* have not served You... neither did *they* turn from *their* wicked works" (:16-18,35). I am not a fan of national days of repentance which seem popular in the modern world. If a group of Christians pray a prayer of repentance for their entire nation, at the end of the prayer- does God forgive every member of that nation? Surely penitence and the experience of forgiveness happens on a purely personal level, not a collective level. And what did these Jews expect to happen after they had prayed? That God would somehow retrospectively forgive the sins of people in previous generations, because they had now prayed for that to happen? That's not how God operates. It's akin to the Mormon heresy of 'baptism for the dead'. It's a significant contrast with how Daniel spoke of both "our sins and the iniquities of our fathers" (Dan. 9:16), "confessing *my* sin and the sin of my people Israel" (Dan. 9:20), and how he spoke of how "I prayed unto the LORD *my* God, and made *my* confession" (Dan. 9:4). And yet the prayer of Daniel 9 is clearly a template for that of Nehemiah 9 [along with Ezra 9]. But it was a dry,

academic template. You can't really confess your sins in any other words apart from your own. Every tongue shall confess to God (Rom. 14:11), both as we encounter the cross, and at the last day. We begin that process now. The word for "confess", used of confession of sin, is also used for praise. Confession of sin merges into praise afterwards.

Most commentators and preachers love to quote this chapter as an example of people hearing God's word and then repenting. But I am unsure it is that at all. It's rather an example of how not to repent. For the confession of sin is not personal. It is a [supposed] confession of the sins of their ancestors. And [inappropriately, in my view] asking for them to be forgiven. Instead of confessing their own sins. What flows out of it is the agreements made in Neh. 10 about materially supporting the work of the temple, not marrying outside the golah community etc. And when Nehemiah returns in Neh. 13, he finds none of those agreements have been kept. Every one of them, every part of the covenant, was broken. And very quickly. So even if it is an example of people repenting and resolving upon hearing God's word, the lesson would be that it didn't last for very long. And therefore Nehemiah comes to the end of his days a disappointed man, just hoping God will smile on him at the last day because he did do some things "for Him", as he saw it. Nehemiah is also now slipping back from his initial awareness of personal sin in his earlier days: "the sins that we Israelites have committed against You, sins that I and my father's house have committed" (Neh. 1:6). We all need to ask ourselves whether over the years we have no become old and brave to sin, and no longer feel our sins as we once did.

Nehemiah 9:17 and refused to obey, neither were they mindful of Your wonders that You did among them- The daily miracles of the pillar of fire and cloud, the manna, quails and water from the rock, the visible presence of the glory of Yahweh in the tabernacle- were all psychologically ignored by them. This is proof enough that miracles and visible signs from God are not the basis for faith.

But hardened their neck, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage- Nehemiah may possibly be drawing a parallel with some who wished to return to Persia and abandon the entire restoration project. This is omitted in the historical record; it simply says that this is what they *thought* of doing (Num. 14:4 "They said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt"). Perhaps they did appoint a captain; or maybe the thought is counted as the action.

But You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in grace, and didn't forsake them- The punishment for a hardened neck was to be sudden destruction without remedy (Prov. 29:1 s.w.). But that deserved destruction without further amelioration wasn't practiced by God because of His abundant grace; the people were not forsaken in captivity just as they were not forsaken in the wilderness, even when they rebelled and attempted to return to Egypt.

We note however that this prayer makes no mention of the critical role played by Moses in interceding for the people [likewise in :19]. The impression is given that God was committed to His people and therefore their behaviour would never change that. The record, however, describes His decisions to end His relationship with Israel and destroy them- from which He only relented because of Moses' mediation. Possibly the idea is that come what may, God will always have an "Israel" and those praying the prayer assumed they would participate in that same grace. Without factoring in the crucial work of Moses as mediator. Indeed, :27,28 twice give the impression that Israel prayed to God, and He heard them- with no mention of Moses'

mediation: "When they cried to You, You heard from heaven... when they returned and cried to You, You heard from heaven".

Nehemiah 9:18 Yes, they had made them a molten calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt' and had committed awful blasphemies- The blasphemies of the Gentiles were punished (s.w. Is. 37:3; Ez. 35:12); but Israel's blasphemies were met with yet more grace and the continued presence of Yahweh amongst them. Ex. 32:4,8 is specific that they said "These are your gods" (plural). It seems they said to the effect "These are your gods, this is your God". The idea of many gods within one God is paganic, the kind of thing that came to full fruition in the heresy of the Trinity.

Nehemiah 9:19 yet You in Your many mercies didn't forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud didn't depart from over them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way in which they should go- There was an Angel within those pillars. Haggai 2:5 had likewise encouraged the returned exiles to recall Israel's history at this time: "This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and My Spirit dwelt among you. 'Don't be afraid'". "My Spirit (Angel- Ps. 104:4) remaineth among you" (AV), just as the same Angel was with them "when you came out of Egypt". And with us too. God encourages those rebuilding Jerusalem to have faith because the Angel is still among them: "Yet now be strong... and work: for I (the Angel) am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts (Angels): according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt (the Angel made that covenant) so My Spirit (Angel) remaineth among you; fear ye not". And so Nehemiah recounts the past activities of God's Angel here in Neh. 9:19-24 as a stimulus to faith in God bringing them through immediate problems.

Nehemiah 9:20 You gave also Your good Spirit to instruct them, and didn't withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst- see on 1 Sam. 10:9. The Spirit (Angel- Ps. 104:4) was "also" with the exiles bringing them from Babylon to Judah as it had been with the Israelites coming from Egypt to the same land. He gave a "good" Spirit / Angel, when it was in His power to send an Angel / Spirit of evil (not a sinful Angel but an Angel bringing evil / disaster, as was brought upon Saul (1 Sam. 16:14) and the Egyptians (Ps. 78:49). Although Israel had acted as the Egyptians, hardening their hearts and 'dealing proudly' (see on :16), yet by grace, God dealt with them by sending "good" upon them and not "evil", as He sent upon the Egyptians. The Spirit was given to "instruct" them, but the same word is used in lament over how Israel refused to "understand" or be instructed (Dt. 32:29). The Corinthians likewise were given the Spirit, but were not "spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). And with many Christians today likewise. "Instruct" is the word just used in Neh. 8:13 of Nehemiah's instruction of the people at this time. This instruction was a sign of grace, as it was in the wilderness; for the people deserved destruction. The gift of the Spirit was in order to teach and instruct them. This would not be even mentioned if God's intention was solely that man reads His word, applies his mind, and takes away Divine instruction. There is the role of the Spirit as teacher and instructor, which comes to full term in the Comforter.

But again, we suspect that this prayer has a subtext. The allusion is to the gift of the Spirit to the 70 elders in Num. 11:16-30. And the hint was that God's Spirit was likewise upon the Levites and elders who were now instructing the people as to the

meaning of His word. Even though my conclusion is that what they were teaching the people was politically motivated and not entirely correct. Even worse, it was divisive and destructive of the community. This is not a 'from the heart' prayer of confession and begging for forgiveness from individuals. Much of it is word for word from Ezra's prayer of Ezra 9, and in any case it is pronounced by the Levites, and is a prelude for the religious and civil leaders of Judah to sign the covenant of Neh. 10, where they vow to enforce separation from the other Jewish "people of the land".

Nehemiah 9:21 Yes, forty years You sustained them in the wilderness- God was gracious and considerate even those whom He had condemned. A far cry from the idea of a God rejoicing over torturing those He condemns. In contrast to the priesthood of Nehemiah's time who did not feed / sustain the people (s.w. Zech. 11:16). Yet Psalm 95 says that throughout those same 40 years, God was grieved and His soul cut down because of their behaviour. Yet still He lovingly, sensitively cared for them at the same time. Just like a true parent.

They lacked nothing- The promise that they would "lack nothing" on the wilderness journey was repeated in the promise that once in the land, they would "lack nothing" (Dt. 2:7; 8:9 s.w.). The returned exiles were in lack but this was because they refused to be obedient to God's plan for them; Is. 51:14 uses the same phrase, although masked in many translations, to say that "the captive exile" would "lack nothing" on leaving captivity. But they had precluded the restoration prophecies from coming about.

Their clothes didn't grow old, and their feet didn't swell- Just as all materially necessary was provided, so through the various decrees of the Persian kings, all had been given to enable the exiles' journey to the promised land. But they had likewise abused such grace. This is a quotation from Dt. 29:5, which makes this statement in the context of lamenting that "Yet Yahweh has not given you a heart to perceive nor eyes to see nor ears to hear" (Dt. 29:4). They refused to perceive His great and daily grace to them as witnessed in His daily provision of food and clothing, just as we can fail to perceive it today. Regular prayers of thanksgiving before food are a good way of guarding against this human tendency to not perceive such grace. The returned exiles likewise had been miraculously provided for by the decrees of the Persian kings, but refused to perceive the grace of all that provision (Neh. 9:21). The other source of this saying about their clothes not growing old is Dt. 3:4, which again is in the context of telling Israel that this had happened so that they would be humbled before God and would consider in their humbled hearts that God intended them to inherit the land be obedient within it (Dt. 8:3-5). This again is relevant to the returned exiles and the grace they too had received on their journey to it.

Nehemiah 9:22 Moreover You gave them kingdoms and peoples which You allotted according to their portions. So they possessed the land of Sihon, even the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan- The intention here is to demonstrate God's extreme grace to His people despite their spiritual weakness. He had given them the territories in Palestine listed in :8, but He additionally gave them portions to the east of the Jordan river, in Sihon and Bashan.

Nehemiah 9:23 You also multiplied their children as the stars of the sky, and brought them into the land concerning which You had said to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it- This was a fulfilment of the promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:5; 22:17)

which were the basis of the new covenant. And the returning exiles had been told in the restoration prophets that they had broken the old covenant, and were invited to accept this new covenant. Israel multiplied in Egypt (Ex. 1:7,12) and yet they were idolaters there. Again we see the idea of this potted history is to demonstrate the Divine grace which ran throughout it.

Nehemiah 9:24 So the children went in and possessed the land, and You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings, and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they pleased- "The people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not. Instead of subduing them, they intermarried with them and accepted their gods. Just as Adam should have brought the serpent as part of the animal creation into subjection to him; but instead he obeyed its voice and fell away from God.

"That they might do with them as they pleased" is another hint of a subtext in this "prayer". That is interpretation; the texts about dominating enemies never actually say this. The argument of the golah Jews was that the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile were so apostate that they were "the peoples of the land". And therefore, I have suggested, Nehemiah calls a Yahweh worshipped like Tobiah ['Yah is good'] an "Ammonite". This prayer is suggesting that the true Israel would "do with them as they pleased". And indeed they had, using the cash they brought from Persia to enslave and abuse those poorer Jews by lending to them on usury, and then seizing their lands and properties (Neh. 5). This subtext is repeated in :25, where reference is made to the Israelites obtaining the "houses... vineyards, olive groves" of the people of the land. But it was exactly the same things that they had taken from their poorer Jewish brethren, by treating them as "people of the land" and lending money to them on usury, and then grabbing their collateral when they couldn't pay- their "houses... vineyards, olive groves" (Neh. 5:3,11). Perhaps the allusion is to Esther 9:5 "the Jews did what they wanted to those who hated them". And the regret is that the Persians were doing with the Jews in Judah what *they* pleased (:37 "the kings whom You have set over us... have power over [us] *at their pleasure*"). There's nothing worse than when we hear a prayer to God which clearly has a subtext and human political agenda to it. And that, I suggest, is what we have here in Neh. 9. So much of it may be good, valid and true on one level. But turns of phrase and small interjections are all used to make some other point, which may be quite wrong. A prayer that says "Give us the strength to resist false teaching and keep ourselves unspotted from the world" may be fair enough and Biblically faithful. But then might be added something like "and those in our church who wish to lead us all astray". Because there has been an argument at the recent church business meeting about... what colour to paint the church, whether to accept someone into fellowship who... is divorced, is gay, smokes, or whatever. I suggest that's what's going on here. As discussed on :20, this prayer is definitely not a heartfelt confession of sin and begging for forgiveness by individuals.

Nehemiah 9:25 They took fortified cities, and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all good things, cisterns dug out, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance-

A quotation from Dt. 6:11. Perhaps Deuteronomy was the part of the law which was read to the people.

So they ate, were filled, became fat, and delighted themselves in Your great grace- LXX "rioted in thy great goodness". The potted history of God's dealings with His people is to demonstrate this great grace. However, the Hebrew can be translated quite the opposite- alluding to Dt. 32:15 and Jer. 5:28, they became fat and kicked against God, rioting against Him. What should have been a riot of joy at God's grace became a riot against that grace. I suggest the ambiguity of the language is intentional. The abuse of Divine grace is an abiding temptation (Rom. 6:1).

We note there is no mention of the subsequent history- Samuel, David and the kings after him. This was likely because the people were labouring under the idea that the five books of Moses were the basis of covenant relationship with Yahweh, and so this is where the bulk of the history comes from. They were arguing that they, the golah Jews, were now the sole Israel of God, and their relationship with Him depended on the Torah alone. Not the other writings. At this time, Mal. 4:4 had reminded them that God gave the law to all Israel. The specific word "all" is surely to counter the idea that it was just given to the golah Jews from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Nehemiah 9:26 Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their back, and killed your prophets that testified against them to turn them again to You, and they committed awful blasphemies- The Jews murdered Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, according to Jewish tradition; Ahab and Jezebel slew Yahweh's prophets (1 Kings 18:4); Joah murdered Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:22). And the Lord alludes to this in Mt. 23:37 and Lk. 11:47. The idea is that despite being given the blessings of obedience to the covenant when they were disobedient to that covenant, they abused that grace and rebelled against Yahweh just as they had done in the wilderness, when they lived under the same grace. And Nehemiah is accusing the people of his time of despising and abiding Divine grace in just the same way.

Nehemiah 9:27 Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their adversaries, who distressed them. In the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your many mercies You gave them saviours who saved them out of the hand of their adversaries- The Hebrew phrase for "many mercies" is perhaps about the closest equivalent in the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament concept of Divine grace- see the usage in 2 Sam. 24:14; Ps. 119:156; Is. 63:7; Dan. 9:18. And it is a major realization of Nehemiah, being used four times in this chapter: Neh. 9:19,27,28,31.

The "saviours" in view are the judges. And yet often those judges were sent to save the people by grace; Samson would be an example. Israel's deliverance at the hands of the judges was related to their crying to Yahweh in faith and repentance (Neh. 9:27,28). But it seems that they did precious little of this during the time of Samson, from what we know of them from the record. Again, the picture is of salvation by grace all the way through. The restoration was to be empowered by God if the exiles repented; they had not done so, and yet God was still seeking to save them.

Nehemiah 9:28 But after they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them- Neh.

9:28,31 use the same Hebrew word for forsake / abandon in two senses. “You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies... but in your great mercy you did not abandon them” (N.I.V.). God forsook Israel, but heard them when they cried and came back to them; but in the ultimate sense He did not forsake them because of His grace and mercy. Thus Zion feels forsaken by God, but ultimately realizes this was never the case (Is. 49:14). It will then seem as just for a small moment that God forsook her (Is. 54:6,7). So when we read in Neh. 9:28 that “You abandoned them”, it may be that this is God talking through the perceptions of His people- they thought He had abandoned them, He appeared to have abandoned them, when He ultimately hadn’t. And this was one of Israel’s experiences which God’s Son suffered on the cross.

Yet, when they returned and cried to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies- The intention was that Israel were delivered when they cried and repented before God. The Jews in Persia hadn't done this and yet by utter grace God had still delivered them from the land of their enemies. But by intermarrying with Gentiles they were demonstrating that they didn't even define their enemies as God did.

Nehemiah 9:29 and testified against them, that You might bring them again to Your law. Yet they dealt proudly, and didn’t listen to Your commandments- "Dealt proudly" is exactly the phrase used about the pride of the Egyptians which led to their destruction (s.w. Ex. 18:11). We noted on :10 that it was exactly because of this pride that Egypt was destroyed at the Red Sea, but Israel were in fact no better (:16,29)- they acted as the Egyptians, and were hardened just as Pharaoh and his leadership were hardened. Israel's salvation out of Babylon / Egypt was therefore by pure grace and not because they at all deserved it.

But sinned against Your ordinances, which, if a man does, he shall live in them, turned their backs, stiffened their neck, and would not hear- They were intended to have the yoke of the covenant upon them, but they like a difficult beast of burden refused it. They didn't want covenant relationship with Yahweh. They "did" the ordinances as a matter of casuistic legal obedience, but didn't live in their spirit. Or we could read this as saying that living in the land was to be predicated upon doing the commandments (Dt. 4:1; 6:24; 8:1). The exiles had been returned to the land, but by grace; for they were not 'doing' the commandments; see on Ez. 20:11,12. Indeed it seems they were largely ignorant of them at Nehemiah's time.

Nehemiah 9:30 Yet many years You put up with them- This is a poor translation. The same Hebrew phrase is translated 'drawn to', in speaking of how God would attempt to draw the exiles back into a new covenant with Him, seeing they had broken the old covenant (s.w. Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:4).

And testified against them by Your spirit through Your prophets- I noted in :20 that the "good spirit" in view there may have been an Angel, seeing that God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). And that may be the reference here too. Or it may simply be a reference to how the prophets were inspired by the Spirit of God, "inspired" so that their words and pleas were those of God Himself. We note that this supposed confession of disobedience mentions only the prophets before the exile. Clearly they ignored the post exilic prophets, who were so critical of those supposedly praying this prayer. Zechariah three times specifically makes the point that his generation, more or less those praying these words of Neh. 9:30, had not listened

neither to him nor these "former prophets" (Zech. 1:4; 7:7,12). But here, they lament that their ancestors hadn't listened to the "former prophets". Zechariah's point is that neither had they; for the words of the former prophets were relevant to them and to all generations.

Yet would they not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands- The prophets were appealing to the people, Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel already in Babylon, right up to the eve of the destruction of the temple.

Nehemiah 9:31 Nevertheless in Your many mercies- The Hebrew phrase for "many mercies" is perhaps about the closest equivalent in the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament concept of Divine grace- see the usage in 2 Sam. 24:14; Ps. 119:156; Is. 63:7; Dan. 9:18. And it is a major realization of Nehemiah, being used four times in this chapter: Neh. 9:19,27,28,31.

You did not make a full end of them, nor forsake them; for You are a gracious and merciful God- The grace of all this was that God had indeed promised to "make a full end of them" for their sins (s.w. Is. 10:23; 28:22; Ez. 13:13; Zeph. 1:18). It was only the new covenant which promised that God would not make a full end with Israel (Jer. 30:11 s.w.). And they needed to accept this. It's like the wages of sin being death, but God finds a way to give sinners eternal life. We naturally enquire why this history of God's people doesn't make any specific reference to the destruction of the temple, the exile and restoration. I suggest it is because those praying it didn't want to associate themselves however obliquely with the idea that they were suffering for their own personal sins. They were confessing the sins of their distant ancestors, but didn't want to mention those of their great grandparents. That was getting rather too close to themselves.

Nehemiah 9:32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and grace- This is quoting from Ps. 89:28 about God's keeping of covenant with David's seed, Messiah. This means that this grace was being shown to Israel on behalf of God's future Messianic Son.

Don't let all the travail seem little before You, that has come on us, on our kings, on our princes, priests, prophets, and on our fathers, and on all Your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria to this day- The rulership, civil and religious, had been punished for their actual sins, as the prophets make very clear, as the prayer admits (:34). There had been no injustice, and so the plea appears somewhat morally compromised. Assyria was the first empire to take God's people into captivity, and was followed by Babylon and Persia in keeping them in captivity.

Verse 32 describes the various groups who have suffered because of Israel's historical sins which are being confessed, and it includes "us", the current generation praying this prayer: "don't let all the travail seem little before You, that has come on us, on our kings, on our princes, priests, prophets, and on our fathers, and on all Your people". But then verse 34 lists the groups who have sinned, resulting in the people of :32 being punished. But the "us" is carefully excluded from the groups whose sins have caused the present distress: "Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers kept Your law, nor listened to Your commandments". As discussed on :33,36, those praying this prayer are careful not to state that they personally have sinned, and thus they disclaim any responsibility for their sufferings. Whereas the prophets [Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi] continually criticize that generation

for their sins, and attribute their miserable situation to the sins of that generation- not only their ancestors.

Nehemiah 9:33 However You are just in all that has come on us; for You have dealt truly, but we have done wickedly- Having given a history of God's grace, the Levites or Ezra [LXX has him praying this prayer] now throws himself upon that grace; recognizing that their judgment had been just, but still asking God to view the human experience side of it with pity. He is quoting Daniel's prayer (Dan. 9:14); we wonder if copies of the book of Daniel (which was from only a generation or so previously) were available in Persia, and Nehemiah had read it- and been influenced by it. He is quite right of course, that declaration of sin means declaring God as right. We think of Achan's confession of sin, and David, and Pharaoh in Ex. 9:27: “I have sinned this time; Yahweh is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones”. In this is the huge significance of the Lord Jesus being made "Yahweh *our* righteousness". We are justified or made right in Him. He is made unto us righteousness.

"We have done wickedly" and the reference to "our sins" in :37 are statements made within this long historical context of their fathers' sins. This prayer is a confession of the sins of their fathers. The prophets after the exile [later Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi] are full of scathing criticism of Nehemiah's generation. But there is no confession of any of the many sins mentioned there. The only sin of their generation they mention is marriage to the people of the land, to second class Jews who had remained in the land after the exile. The language of lengthy "confession" is not, therefore, confession of their own sins- but of the sins of their fathers. This was exactly the problem Ezekiel had with the exiles in Ez. 18. They considered that they were innocent, and were suffering for the sake of their fathers' sins. They "use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ez. 18:2). This proverb and this attitude was so widespread amongst the exiles that Jer. 31 makes rejection of this proverb a condition of entering the new covenant: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But [they shall accept that] every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eats the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jer. 31:29,30). But in the prayer Neh. 9 we don't see this. There is a very weak acknowledgment of personal sin, and a blaming of everything on their ancestors, "the fathers". They confessed *their* sins, the sins of their fathers. And a rejection of the new covenant, and an attempt to reaffirm their loyalty to the old covenant instead. For that is what flows out of this prayer of Neh. 9.

Nehemiah 9:34 Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers kept Your law, nor listened to Your commandments and Your testimonies that You pronounced against them- This was the more shameful for the priests, who were responsible for teaching God's law to others.

The reference to the priests is clearly not to those priests who authored this prayer. It is to the priests at the time of the kings. They were confessing their sins, but not the sins of the contemporary priesthood- which is the theme of Zechariah and Malachi.

Nehemiah 9:35 For they have not served You in their kingdom- This therefore appears relevant to the "kings" just mentioned in :34. They didn't want to be kings of God's Kingdom, instead they had hijacked His Kingdom and turned it into "their" own

kingdom; just as the temple of Yahweh and feasts of Yahweh became "the temple of the Jews" and 'feasts of the Jews'. And we too can hijack the one true faith for our own ends.

And in Your great goodness that You gave them, and in the large and rich land which You gave before them, neither did they turn from their wicked works- See on :37. The land of Palestine was not "large", but the *eretz* promised to Abraham was- from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates. Likewise, as at Nehemiah's time, the land was not always "rich", because they were punished with famines for their disobedience. So we read here of the potential which God had enabled, even though they didn't realize it.

Nehemiah 9:36 Indeed, we are servants this day, and as for the land that You gave to our fathers to eat its fruit and its good, we are servants in it-

"We are servants this day" flows right on from the confession of the sins of their fathers in the previous verses. They will not confess any personal sin, but like the proverb they used during the exile, they were blaming their personal current situation upon the sins of their ancestors.

As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's go'el , redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this day in the land you gave…" (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren? The truth is that the exiles weren't interested in Isaiah's prophecies, and were wrongly focused on claiming obedience to the law of Moses.

We enquire how they could say this about their fruitful land- in the midst of a famine so severe it led them to sell their children into slavery. Something isn't right here. The famine was because of their sins. But they speak as if it hadn't happened. The only sin they want to confess is the sin of intermarriage with other Israelites. Again, despite some fine spiritual insights, this prayer seems choreographed and presented by Nehemiah to fit his agenda of redefining Israel as the golah Jews, and enforcing separation from the other Jews. Neh. 5 explains that they were slaves because the wealthy golah Jews had forced the poorer Jews to sell themselves into slavery. The heavy taxation was operationalized by none less than Nehemiah the Persian tax collector. So these complaints sound like the "poor darling" syndrome and rather lack integrity.

Nehemiah 9:37 It yields much increase to the kings whom You have set over us because of our sins. They also have power over our bodies, and over our livestock, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress-

On one hand, they were insistent that they were eagerly obeying the law and abiding in the old covenant. But the allusion to Dt. 28:33 is evidence enough that God was still cursing them. For it was a curse of disobedience that "The fruit of your

ground, and all your labours shall a nation which you know not eat up" (Dt. 28:33). And yet Nehemiah was the Persian governor and chief tax collectors over Judah! By doing so he was in effect enabling and operationalizing this curse upon God's people. All for the sake of liking to think that he would have Persian money available to build a nice wall around Jerusalem and fix some social problems, at the cost of reinforcing their power and taxation.

Ez. 34:14 had prophesied of a far greater potential: “I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel”. The restored Judah did live in a “fat” pasture land (:35), but the fatness of the land was still given to the kings of Persia because of Judah’s spiritual weakness. The fact they were paying tribute in cash and kind to their overlords was proof enough that they were still under judgment for sin (Dt. 28:33; Is. 26:13). And Neh. 5 makes it clear that the people were indeed under "great distress" in order to pay the tribute.

The "great distress" was due to the Jewish, golah leadership abusing the poorer Jews, treating them like Gentiles by demanding heavy interest and then taking their lands off them. But this prayer makes no repentance for that, it just laments the result of their sin. Complaining they were under Persian power rather ignores the reason why God allowed that: "I will no longer pity anyone on earth / in the land. I myself will put all the people in the power of their rulers. These rulers will devastate the earth, and I will not save it from their power"" (Zech. 11:6). The context is that this was God's punishment of His people because of their false shepherds, the scribes, priests and Levites. The very ones arguing that their group alone were the true Israel and excluding all others.

We note that the prayer makes no specific request. We would expect any genuine confession of personal sin to be continually and specifically asking for the grant of forgiveness to the person praying the prayer. We don't find that here. It is a confession of the sins of their ancestors, and a somewhat exaggerated description of their present situation. With no request for forgiveness. At most, they ask that God "not treat lightly all the suffering that has overtaken us" (:32). On one hand, this might seem a commendable resignation of themselves to God. But on the other, given all the prophetic pictures of independence from Gentile power, we do wonder whether this lack of specific request for anything to change is for a more selfish reason. Namely, that those praying this prayer [the religious and spiritual leaders] had most to gain from continuing in their current status quo as a Persian colony. Freedom from Persia was clearly prophesied, and should have been what Nehemiah and the true Israel were working towards. Instead, Nehemiah was ruler on Persia's behalf, and built a Persian fortress on the temple walls. What a contrast with Zech. 10:3: "I am angry with those foreigners who rule my people, and I am going to punish them. The people of Judah are mine, and I, Yahweh Almighty, will take care of them".

This "prayer" is not a request for anything, just a statement of history. And there is no such thing as pure history, the story over the chosen timeline is always told with a particular slant and background narrative. This confession of the sins of their fathers was all part of a game plan- to make a covenant defining themselves as the true Israel, thereby disfellowshipping and disenfranchising all the other Jews and Israelites who were already in the land. And to declare themselves personally innocent for Judah's situation, having placed total blame on their ancestors, ignoring all the appeals of the post-exilic prophets to them, to repent and change.

We note also that they are exaggerating their position, presenting themselves as suffering under the hands of the Persians. But the Persians were not abusive to the

Jews. Indeed, they helped them restore their city, temple and wall far more than they helped other subject peoples. Ezra gives a quite different take: "For bondsmen we are, though even in our bondage God has not forsaken us, but has disposed the king of Persia favorably towards us" (Ezra 9:9)". Neither Ezra nor this prayer show any desire for total independence from Persia. In line with the restoration prophecies, this surely should have been the prayer at this point, some generations now after the decree of Cyrus. There is no mention of the hope of restoring the kingdom of David (Hag. 2:23; Zech. 6:12). Despite revolts and independence movements breaking out throughout the Persian empire at this time, Judah remained loyal to Persia. Because the religious and spiritual leadership were personally on a good thing. They wanted to read the law of Moses, not be reminded of the words of their recent prophets: "I will overturn the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the might of the kingdoms of the nations" (Hag. 2:22).

Nehemiah 9:38 Yet for all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, our Levites, and our priests, seal it- The referent of "for all this" is unclear. The "yet" can be dispensed with as in AV. This would then connect the covenant with the entire potted history of Israel which has occupied Neh. 9; and that has been the history of God's grace to a repeatedly impenitent and disbelieving people. In this case, "for all this", on the basis of accepting that grace, those who had just been convicted of sin, the priests, Levites and princes, made a covenant expressing their repentance. They would thereby become a parade example of how the goodness of God, in this case His grace exhibited in history, leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Nehemiah led the people to make a covenant that they would keep the old covenant. What should he have done? The people have stated in :8 that God made a covenant with Abraham. Their response should have been to re-affirm that by making a covenant with God on that basis. And the promises to Abraham are the basis of the new covenant. But instead, the people wanted to keep the old covenant. Zechariah had clearly stated that the old covenant was broken. They had broken it, and Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered the people a new covenant with God. Nehemiah should have led the people into that new covenant. Instead he tried to cement them back into the old covenant. From this viewpoint, his covenant was on one hand not a bad thing- to urge people to obedience to God. But it was not the covenant he should have led them to. Perhaps looking back on his life in this memoir, he realizes that. This covenant he got them to sign up to was at best misplaced idealism, urging God's people to obedience to that which could not save them and had been abrogated, carefully avoiding the new covenant which had been so clearly offered to them.

The extent of apostasy amongst the golah Jews is hard to fathom. Third Isaiah, Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi are all clear. Zechariah 5 gives a vision of the whole land covered by a curse, for theft [practiced against their fellow Jews whom they considered Gentiles, see Zech. 5], and for making a false oath and covenant. Quite possibly it is this hypocritical covenant which is in view. And the vision expresses God's desire to reverse the restoration, and take them all back to Shinar [Babylon].

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 10

Nehemiah 10:1 Now those who sealed were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah-

If Neh. 9 was genuine personal repentance by the ordinary people, it is strange that it is signed off on by just 84 men- all of them Levites, Priests or leaders. It all seems very choreographed. And you can't choreograph repentance. The High Priest Eliashib isn't mentioned, nor are any of the prophets, even though there were prophets active at this time. We have the impression of a politically motivated agreement being foisted upon the people, and signed off on their behalf by religious leaders. "Zedekiah" is listed right after Nehemiah, as if he were as it were second in command. We note Ezra's name is absent, but "Zedekiah" is a form of "Zadok", called "the scribe" in Neh. 13:13. We turn the page to the New Testament, and see what this system of scribes turned into...

"These [who sealed] are stated by the Talmudical writings, and the unanimous voice of tradition, to have formed "The Great Synagogue". It consisted at first of 120 members, but was afterward reduced to seventy. It represented the five divisions of the nation. The Great Synagogue lasted 110 years: from Nehemiah to Simon the Just, when, having completed its work, it became known as the Sanhedrin of the NT., the supreme council of the Jewish nation; which rejected the kingdom, and crucified the King (Messiah)". Again we see that we just turn the page from Nehemiah to the New Testament. And we find the bad fruit of Nehemiah and Ezra's mindsets. We find scribes, tax collectors for the Romans needing to repent as Nehemiah had been for the Persians, despising of the Samaritans, hypocrisy, reading the Torah by the priests who largely ignored the prophets and history, enforcing quirky interpretations on the people whilst ignoring the rest of God's revelation.

Nehemiah was presumably not personally guilty of intermarriage with Gentiles which is the context of this covenant (Neh. 9:2). But like the Lord Jesus, He was so personally identified with His people that He identified with them and their failures that Nehemiah signed the covenant. "Zedekiah" is a form of "Zadok", perhaps the scribe of Neh. 13:13. The restoration prophecies of Ez. 40-48 emphasized that the Zadokites were to work in the restored temple; but it seems they too had corrupted themselves and thus precluded the prophecy from being fulfilled at that time.

Nehemiah 10:2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah- These are the heads of families, similar to the list in Neh. 12 of those of a previous generation who went up with Zerubbabel; so far more were involved in intermarriage than just those listed here. Seraiah was the family of Eliashib the High Priest, so the corruption was throughout. Seraiah's name is given first; both Eliashib the high priest and Ezra the scribe were in this family. The absence of certain people from this list suggests not all were happy with signing off on this covenant, which was effectively going to divide the golah Jews from the rest of the Jews "of the land". See on :26.

Nehemiah 10:3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah- We note how even those priestly families with "Yah" in their names had intermarried with the world around them; they had a name that they lived but were dead, as we too can have.

Nehemiah 10:4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch- Shebaniah is the Shechaniah of Neh. 12:3.

Nehemiah 10:5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah- We would expect to read "Iddo" in this list, according to the list in Neh. 12:4,16. Perhaps he refused to sign, felt he wasn't guilty, or refused to repent.

Nehemiah 10:6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch- "Ginnethon" means "gardener" and reads strangely amongst the other priestly names, most of which have spiritual overtones. Yet the priests were not intended to do agricultural work but to be supported by the tithes. It could be that this name is a reflection of the way that some priestly families were just so in name only and had no real dedication to spiritual things. The failure of the priesthood to teach and even know God's word is evidence enough of that.

Nehemiah 10:7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin- "Meshullam" means "allied to", perhaps reflecting how this family were guilty of being allied to Gentile enemies of Israel in marriage (Neh. 6:18).

Nehemiah 10:8 Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these were the priests- There are 21 names listed here, of which 15 are found listed as heads of priestly houses who returned with Joshua and Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:2-7). They are also in Neh. 12:11-20 as heads of priestly families so these are not individuals as much as families. Perhaps there was an effort to restore the 24 courses of priests used in Solomon's temple, but there are only 21 listed here, as if to say that they never quite got to the full restoration intended.

This re-dedication covenant was signed up to by many priests. But note God's response in Mal. 2:8 "But now you priests have turned away from the right path. Your teaching has led many to do wrong. You have broken the covenant I made with you". This was not the covenant which had been foretold in Mal. 3:1 "I will send my messenger to prepare the way for me. Then the Lord you are looking for will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger you long to see will come and proclaim my covenant". The reality is that God broke His covenant relationship with His people, and broke their potential unity. He did this through the divisive policies of Ezra and Nehemiah. The prophecy of the two broken sticks in Zech. 11 speaks of the breaking of the covenant with Israel, and also the breaking of the brotherhood between Israel and Judah. The covenant they should have accepted was the new covenant, not an attempt to keep the old covenant.

Nehemiah 10:9 The Levites: namely, Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel- As noted on :2, these are the names of the heads of families who had returned in previous generations with Zerubbabel and then Ezra (Ezra 2:40; 3:9; Neh. 7:43,44; 9:5). So far more were involved in intermarriage than just those listed here.

Nehemiah 10:10 and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan- "Kelita" means 'maimed'; perhaps the family were distinguished by some congenital defect which precluded them from priestly service, and yet they chose to still work as Levites and to return and be involved in the work as far as possible. Clearly an example for us today. See on :17.

Nehemiah 10:11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah- "Rehob" is a Syrian name, not a Hebrew name. Perhaps this reflects the degree of assimilation; or perhaps there were some Gentiles who had been accepted into the Levitical clans by previous intermarriage. The idea of marrying only within the family of God would therefore have been hard for them to accept; the failures of previous generations lead to weakness in later generations.

Nehemiah 10:12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah- "Zaccur", 'to bring to remembrance', is exactly what Nehemiah wanted God to do to the exiles (s.w. Neh. 1:8); and indeed He did passionately 'remember' them (s.w. Jer. 31:20). But they didn't respond, for the most part, for they did not remember Yahweh from afar off as they were intended to (Jer. 51:50; Ez. 6:9).

Nehemiah 10:13 Hodiah, Bani, Beninu- Only a very few of the family of Hodiah had returned initially, but they had apparently grown into a significant family at this time (Ezra 2:40). Increase in numbers was at those times perceived as a sign of Divine blessing, so perhaps this individual family was faithful.

Nehemiah 10:14 The chiefs of the people: Parosh, Pahathmoab, Elam, Zattu, Bani- The family of Pahathmoab also features in those who returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:6) and were later noted for their work in rebuilding the walls (Neh. 3:11). And yet the founder of this family apparently had Gentile connections- "the pit of Moab". This might explain their tendency towards marriage out of the faith. But see on Ezra 8:4.

Nehemiah 10:15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai- "Bebai" isn't a Hebrew word; some of the exiles had so assimilated that they only had local Persian names. And so the attraction to Gentile women in Judah was in turn hard to resist. They failed to appreciate their high calling in one context and so failed in later contexts.

Nehemiah 10:16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin- "Adin" is s.w. "given to pleasures" (Is. 47:8). And yet the message of return to restore the Kingdom was somehow attractive even to such a person.

Nehemiah 10:17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur- "Ater" means handicapped. Perhaps the family were distinguished by some congenital defect which precluded them from priestly service, and yet they chose to still work as Levites and to return and be involved in the work as far as possible. Clearly an example for us today. See on :10,27.

Nehemiah 10:18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai- "Hashum" is "wealthy"; a strange name for a family of Levites who were supposed to be humble servants of the sanctuary. As strange a paradox as wealthy Christians in a world of need. The wealth was however typical of the golah Jews, who returned from exile with wealth and used it to abuse and get power over the local Jews of the land. For the covenant being signed was to effectively exclude those local Jews from the community of what they were calling "Israel".

Nehemiah 10:19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nobai- The meaning of these names all seem to have more relevance to place names than people. The lists in Ezra 2 are clearly divided between the names of families and the geographical names of the areas they came from. It's possible that here the two ways of listing have been somehow merged.

Nehemiah 10:20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir- "Hezir" is the word translated "pig" or "swine" in Lev. 11:7; Dt. 14:8; Ps. 80:13; Prov. 11:22 etc. A strange name for a

family of Levites who were supposed to be sanctified to God's service. As strange a paradox as worldly Christians.

Nehemiah 10:21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua- "Meshezabel" is a Babylonian word meaning 'delivered by God'; the Chaldee word for "delivered" used in Dan. 6:14,16,20 etc. We see here how some were so assimilated into Babylonian culture, and yet still had a sense of Divine deliverance.

Nehemiah 10:22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah- Pelatiah, 'Yah has delivered', appears to be the Hebrew form of the Babylonian "Meshezabel" noted on :21. Clearly some retained the sense of Yahweh [as opposed to the more generic 'el'] more than others.

Nehemiah 10:23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub- "Hoshea" is the word just used for how Yahweh had 'saved' His people through 'saviours' by pure grace (Neh. 9:27).

Nehemiah 10:24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek- "Hallohesh" means enchanter or magician- a reflection of how corrupted the Levites had become. Zechariah 5 and other passages lament the deep corruption of the priesthood at this time.

Nehemiah 10:25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah- "Rehum" is a Babylonian name, shared by one of the Samaritan opposition (Ezra 4:8,9); again reflecting how thoroughly some of the Levites had assimilated into Babylonian culture.

Nehemiah 10:26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan- Some of these Levitical families such as Anan are mentioned nowhere else; they may have been more recently arrived families who had come from Persia. The names of some priestly houses found in the lists of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 (like Shephatiah, Arah and Zaccai) aren't found as signatories here; perhaps they refused to sign. As discussed on :1,2, the list of signatories omits quite a few we'd expect to be listed. There was at least minority resistance to this divisive, judgmental covenant.

Nehemiah 10:27 Malluch, Harim and Baanah- "Harim" means 'snub nosed'. Perhaps the family were distinguished by some congenital defect which precluded them from priestly service, and yet they chose to still work as Levites and to return and be involved in the work as far as possible. Clearly an example for us today. See on :10,17.

Nehemiah 10:28 The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, each one who had knowledge, and understanding-- The people "separated themselves *from* the peoples of the lands *unto* the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters… they *clave to* [NEV "joined with"] their brethren" (:29). Close fellowship with one's brethren arises from having gone out *from* the surrounding world, *unto* the things of God's word. That, at least, was the theory. In reality, those exiles who returned found this separation very difficult. In fact, the account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings.

The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similar to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged,

and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Nehemiah 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Nehemiah 10:28). There was a powerful logic- either separate from the world around, or be separated from the people of God (Ezra 10:8). It's a separation- one way or the other.

As discussed on Neh. 7:7; 8:2, the participants in this renewal of the covenant were the golah Jews alone, who had redefined "Israel" as just they who had returned from Babylon / Persia. They were stating that they alone were in covenant with God. And this was plain wrong. They were willfully excluding the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile, the ten tribes and the foreigners who wished to join themselves to Yahweh. In any case, Zechariah and other prophets had urged them to accept the new covenant- because the old covenant was permanently broken by them. In a sense, this renewal of the old covenant between [as they supposed] just them and Yahweh was pointless. We note it was proposed solely by themselves, not by Yahweh.

If we understand the peoples of the land as the non golah Jews, then this is Nehemiah losing the heart he initially had for the suffering of that excluded group. Now he classifies those who separated from them, in the spirit of the divorces demanded by Ezra, as somehow wise and understanding. Likewise the worst legalism is often spoken of as "depth in the word" and so forth. He is praising those who had separated *from* the Jewish, supposedly second class "people of the land", *unto* the law of Moses. This is why there is so much stress on the law of Moses being read to the people, and their promise to obey it. I suggested in Neh. 8 that this was misplaced idealism. Instead of reading the law of Moses and attempted to re-enter that covenant, they should have been entering the new covenant. And reading Haggai, Ezekiel, Isaiah 40-66, Zechariah, maybe Malachi... But so grew the Jewish focus upon the law over the prophets. And they should have heard Malachi [and other prophets] calling them out for abusing Gentiles and not letting them into covenant relationship with Yahweh (Is. 56:3,6; Zech. 7:10 "oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor"; Mal. 3:5 "that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me").

Here we read that they separated from the "people of the lands", whereas in Neh. 13:3 the same word is used for how "they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude". The supposed "people of the lands" and "mixed multitude" were in "Israel", but they separated them out from Israel. This was a redefinition of "Israel", as really only the golah Jews, achieved by kicking out of fellowship any judged to not be pure enough. "The people of the land" was a phrased later used by the Jewish leadership of the Jewish majority "which knows not the law", "this people..." (Jn. 7:49).

The true people of God, as they saw it, separated themselves not "from the peoples of the lands to the people of Israel,' but "unto the law of Moses". The impression is given that they separated from those who didn't obey the law of Moses properly. It is not a separation from Gentiles to Israel, but from (as they imagined) spiritually second class Jews to total obedience to the law of Moses, the old covenant. Which they wrongly understood as the defining document of the true Israel.

Nehemiah 10:29 they joined with their brothers, their nobles-

Some, not all, of the leaders signed (see on :1,2,26), but this is taken by Nehemiah's narrative as meaning that all the people signed up to it. Again we see politics here. And as we will learn from Neh. 13, the people didn't keep the covenant anyway and broke it soon after supposedly signing up to it. Nehemiah here claims that they clave to their leaders, in order to keep God's law. Whereas God asks His individual people to leave to Him personally. As Israel preferred to have Moses mediate God's word to them rather than hear His voice directly, so again the people went the path of religion rather than personal spirituality. They wanted something between God and themselves. Likewise in :39 they vow not to forsake the house of God, using the word also used for others forsaking God. Their loyalty was pledged more to the temple than to the God who dwelt in it. The Lord made this same observation about the Israel of His day.

The nobles are mentioned as the brothers of the humble Levites. The common experience of conviction of sin, repentance and forgiveness is the greatest basis for unity in practice between persons of varying social status.

And entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of Yahweh our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes- The restoration prophets, including more recently Zechariah, had explained consistently that Judah had broken the old covenant. The only way to reconnection with Yahweh was through accepting the new covenant which was offered. So this attempt to reestablish their loyalty to the old covenant, the law of Moses, was misplaced. And they didn't keep it in any case.

Nehemiah 10:30 and that we would not give our daughters to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons- "The people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not. This agreement not to intermarry was agreed in the passion of the moment; for once Nehemiah returned to Persia, we read that the people began doing so again. This agreement to not intermarry with the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile was really cementing a hard boundary- and it would come to full fruit in the division from the Samaritans. Which the Lord Jesus clearly disagreed with. They were misusing the Mosaic law to justify their natural desire, in terms of basic sociology and psychology, to create a hard boundary against those they considered second tier members of their community. There was no grace in it, and no attempt to follow the prophecies of the restoration which spoke of a multiethnic people of God.

Nehemiah 10:31 and if the peoples of the land bring wares or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy of them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and that we would forego the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt- The book of Nehemiah ends with the record of how they did exactly this. These agreements were therefore made on the cusp of a wave of religious enthusiasm, doubtless fuelled by a group mentality. We learn from this that God is looking for personal relationship and loyalty; and that great promises of devotion made in a group setting on the cusp

of waves of emotional dedication are not lasting. Spirituality and personal relationship with Yahweh is far more profound than this.

The word for "exaction" is that for usury, and they were forbidden to exaction any usury from their brethren. This sounds like they only agreed not to do so every seventh year. And we see a very legalistic definition of not working on the Sabbath, extending it to not buying anything. Sunday trading laws forbid selling at certain times- but to buy at those times isn't breaking any law. So we see an increasing legalism.

Nehemiah 10:32 Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God-

They reduced the half shekel sanctuary tax, called "a ransom for their souls" (Ex. 30:11-16). Quite arbitrarily. And Ex. 30:12 says that this tax was to be "when you take a census of the children of Israel". But they make this an annual tax. So in one breath, Nehemiah is arguing for a strict, literalistic reading of God's law. The argument against intermarriage was based upon the High Priest having to marry only a virgin of Israel. But they expanded this to cover all Israelites, and demanded they divorce any non Israelite wife. But now he thinks he has the power to just change the law of Moses on some points when it gets personally demanding. We note that in the Lord's time, this half shekel temple tax had to be paid to the Romans; the coin with which the Lord paid for Himself and Peter was a stater, two half shekels (Mt. 17:24-27).

Or we could argue that the Mosaic Law had required a half shekel temple tax, but God reduced it- again, such was His desire to work with them and have them as His people (Ex. 30:11-16 cp. Neh. 10:32,33). But still they feared, still they didn't fully believe, still they saw the establishment of God's Kingdom as only their concern insofar as it coincided with their self-interest; and so the promised establishment of the Messianic Kingdom just didn't come. Or it could be that the famine in the land meant that Nehemiah realized that the half shekel couldn't be paid so he was driven to amend the Mosaic law on his own initiative. The situation was therefore driving him to realize that the old covenant just couldn't be kept by them; as noted on :29, they were intended to look to the new covenant.

This all sounds excellent- until we consider that these things were only to be done for those in the community. The local Jews were treated as Gentiles, so their land could be seized and interest charged to them.

Nehemiah 10:33 for the show bread, and for the continual meal offering, and for the continual burnt offering, for the Sabbaths, for the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God- The implication is that these things had not been done up to this point by the returned exiles. The restoration prophets, including more recently Zechariah, had explained consistently that Judah had broken the old covenant. The only way to reconnection with Yahweh was through accepting the new covenant which was offered. So this attempt to reestablish their loyalty to the old covenant, the law of Moses, was misplaced. And they didn't keep it in any case.

Nehemiah 10:34 We cast lots, the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of Yahweh our God, as it is written in the law- LXX "And we cast lots for the office of wood-bearing, we the priests, and

the Levites, and the people, to bring wood into the house of our God, according to the house of our families". The bearing of wood and drawing of water was to be done by the Levites and Nethinim. But clearly there was no interest in doing the humble duties of God's house. We noted on Ezra 2 and elsewhere how few Levites returned, and how later Ezra had no Levites come forward to return with him. This lack of interest in humble service led to the situation later where in Malachi's time, nobody would even close the doors unless they were paid. Attitudes to menial service are significant and are highlighted here. The humble service of wood carrying was clearly unpopular, perhaps because it was perceived as women's work, as it is in much of the developing world today. At the very end of his ministry, Nehemiah still had to try to arrange for it (Neh. 13:31). As it is to this day; for there are very few real 'workers' amongst the people of God.

There was no "wood-offering" under Moses' law. It was the work of the Nethinim to gather wood- much work, seeing the trees around Jerusalem would have been destroyed during the Babylonian invasion. The Nethinim were "hewers of wood and drawers of water to the congregation". Nethinim did return with the exiles. But apparently they didn't do their job. Again and again we see that the supposed hyper obedience to Mosaic law just doesn't stack up against realities. Josephus records how in the Lord's day, bringing the wood to the temple was turned into a feast, called "the carrying of the wood". These things became set in stone and replaced God's law.

Setting up the sacrificial system may sound all well and good. But Malachi was contemporary with Nehemiah, and his commentary is quite different: "I am not pleased with you; I will not accept the offerings you bring Me. People from one end of the world to the other honour Me. Everywhere they burn incense to Me and offer acceptable sacrifices. All of them honour Me!" (Mal. 1:10,11). Instead, the Jewish leadership were excluding Gentiles from the temple. We note the continual reference to "the house of *our* God" (:32,33,34,36,37,38,39); like "Yahweh *our* Lord", "Yahweh *our* God" (:29,34), the idea was that only those who signed the covenant, the golah Jews, had Yahweh as their Lord, and only they had the temple as the house of their God. Their God wasn't the God of the other Jews, as they saw it. That's why Nehemiah had built a wall around the temple area and David's palace [remember that the temple started as a sanctuary built in David's back yard, directly connected to his personal residence]. And put gates, doors and guards on it so that nobody apart from the golah Jews could enter it.

Nehemiah 10:35 and to bring the first fruits of our ground, and the first fruits of all fruit of all kinds of trees, year by year, to the house of Yahweh- It was a common pagan idea to offer the first fruits of harvest to their gods, and this was also practiced later amongst the Greeks and Romans. It can be inferred from this commitment to Yahweh that this had not been done by Israel. We see their sad and tragic situation; they gave their first fruits to nobody. They had been so tragically adrift, not with Yahweh nor fully with other gods.

Nehemiah 10:36 also the first born of our sons, and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the first born of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God- Again we note that there was an attempt to return to the law of Moses; whereas the restoration prophets had explained consistently that Judah had broken the old covenant. The only way to reconnection with Yahweh was through accepting the new covenant which was

offered. So this attempt to reestablish their loyalty to the old covenant, the law of Moses, was misplaced. And they didn't keep it in any case.

Nehemiah 10:37 and that we should bring the first fruits of our dough, and our wave offerings, and the fruit of all kinds of trees, the new wine and the oil, to the priests, to the rooms of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground to the Levites; for they, the Levites, take the tithes in all the cities of our tillage- Hag. 1:8 describes the need to go up onto the mountain and build the temple- as if to recall attention to Ezekiel's opening vision of the temple as built on a mountain. But Judah would not, and therefore the Kingdom blessings of corn, new wine and oil, as well as fruitfulness on the mountains, were all withheld (Hag. 1:11). These are all aspects of the promised Messianic Kingdom (e.g. Joel 2:19,24; Jer. 31:12). The very same sequence of words occurs in Neh. 5:11; 10:37,39; 13:5- instead of giving those things to Yahweh, the Jews stole them from each other, and jibbed about paying them as tithes to Him. And thereby they precluded the possibility of Yahweh richly blessing all His people with those very same things in a Kingdom setting. As with all those who are rejected from God's purpose, they effectively rejected themselves from His Kingdom by their behaviour, rather than Him rejecting them Himself.

The command to tithe the fruits of trees, clearly aimed at vine and olive trees, was not technically required by the law of Moses. "The produce of the ground" is the term used in Dt. 26:2. Possibly this is another example of the law being slightly changed.

The tithing to support the priesthood may sound all well and good. But we must factor in Mal. 2:1,2: "Yahweh Almighty says to the priests, "This command is for you: You must honour me by what you do. If you will not listen to what I say, then I will bring a curse on you. I will put a curse on the things you receive for your support. In fact, I have already put a curse on them, because you do not take my command seriously". No surprises, then, that the promises to support the Levites in Neh. 10 didn't come to anything- by the time of Neh. 13, Nehemiah laments they were not supported and had returned to farming.

Nehemiah 10:38 The priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes; and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms, into the treasure house-

Giving a tithe of the tithes to the priests was indeed in strict obedience to Num. 18:26. But remember this covenant was drawn up and signed by the priests. They wanted to ensure obedience to this detail of the law, as it meant income for themselves.

GNB "Priests who are descended from Aaron are to be with the Levites when tithes are collected, and for use in the Temple the Levites are to take to the Temple storerooms one-tenth of all the tithes they collect". This hints at distrust between Levites and priests and tensions between them. In Ezra 2:42, the number of ordinary Levites compared to priests is very low (4289 priests, and 341 Levites). There were far more Levites than there were priests in the overall population, but it seems the Levites didn't want to return and do the dirty work; everyone wanted to be religious leaders. Hence Ezra's problem in finding Levites to return (Ezra 8:15). We can note that it was this tension between Levites and priests which resulted in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-10).

Nehemiah 10:39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the wave offering of the grain, of the new wine, and of the oil, to the rooms, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests who minister, and the porters, and the singers. We will not forsake the house of our God-

They vowed not to forsake the house of their God, and yet Nehemiah concludes with the record that this is exactly what they did (Neh. 10:39; 13:11). The repeated phrase "house of *our* God" in :32-39 is their way of saying that the temple was for them, the golah Jews. And not for the other Jews, nor the Gentiles. That's why Nehemiah built a wall all around the temple area and put gates and guards on it. Control of the Jerusalem temple thus became central to the identity of the golah Jews, who saw themselves as the true "Israel", who alone had a covenant with Yahweh on the basis of the Torah and the temple. This is what led to the alternative sanctuary to Yahweh being built on Mount Gerizim and the division between Jews and Samaritans which we find when we turn the page and come to the New Testament. This is all the stuff of identity creation. Exclusion of non-golah Jews from the community, and the reservation of the Jerusalem temple only for that community, led to strong boundaries. All quite opposite to the teaching of later Isaiah, which envisioned the temple and priesthood as open to all, even Gentiles, and defined the "seed" as those with hearts humble to the words of the prophets, and not just the law of Moses.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 11

Nehemiah 11:1 The princes of the people lived in Jerusalem. The rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one-tenth to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine-tenths in the other cities-

As discussed on Neh. 10:39, the golah Jews [those who had returned from Babylon / Persia] were defining themselves uniquely as "Israel". They speak repeatedly of "the house of our God", with the implication that Yahweh could only be worshipped in the Jerusalem temple. And yet they excluded Gentile and all other Jews from that temple. Rather like "closed table" communities wrongly claim that the Lord Jesus can only share communion at their "table of the Lord" but exclude others from coming there. Neh. 11:1,18 continue this formation of identity based around Jerusalem by calling it "the holy city". All so different to Isaiah's visions of an open Zion, a city with its gates always open so the Gentiles can pour into it, with Gentiles working as priests there (Is. 66:21 "Of them also will I take for priests and for Levites"). Now, in contrast to that vision, Nehemiah seeks to populate Jerusalem with more golah Jews.

"The holy city" reflects Nehemiah's project- of having built walls around the temple area, and his idea that a super holy space had been created, into which the Jewish 'people of the land' couldn't enter. The idea of sanctifying or declaring the walls holy had no real blessing from God. The Jews simply declared that wall holy. The city was to be declared holy by Yahweh when it was sanctified by the shekinah glory dwelling there (Ez. 48:35; Zech. 14:20). But that never happened. *They* declared Zion "holy", not God.

When “the time to favour Zion” came, at the end of the 70 years, God’s servants Israel were to “take pleasure in her stones, and favour [even] the dust thereof”; and

then, “when the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory” (Ps. 102:13-16). But the few Jews who returned chose not to live in Jerusalem, preferring to carve out for themselves farmsteads in the countryside (Neh. 11:1), and the strength of those that shifted the rubble in Jerusalem decayed… they saw her dust and scattered stones as a nuisance, and didn’t take pleasure in them (Neh. 4:10). And so the Lord could not then appear in glory. See on Neh. 7:4.

Is. 62:12 had prophesied that "They shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of Yahweh: and you shall be called Sought out, A city not forsaken". But Nehemiah’s record concludes on this negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion (Neh. 13:10). Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had “fields”, because they weren’t given their tithes. Lots had to be drawn to get people to live there (Nehemiah 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (Zechariah 2:5). It was God’s intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple (Zechariah 8:23). But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to go and live in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:1). And the ten tribes didn’t really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

Nehemiah 11:2 The people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem- These are to be contrasted with those who were compelled to come because the lot had fallen upon them (:1). Neh. 7:4 laments how small was the population of the restored Jerusalem. They had failed to fulfil the restoration prophecy of Zech. 2:4: “And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein”. Likewise Ez. 36:10: “And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded”. They were happier to settle outside of Jerusalem and concentrate on building up their own farms in the villages and small towns of Judah, rather than sense the importance of Zion. Nehemiah 11:1-3 suggests that so few wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there, that they had to draw lots to get at least a tenth of the total population to live there- in what should have been the capital. *If* more had returned from Babylon, *if* more had lived in Jerusalem, *then* Yahweh would have been a wall of fire to them, and then the Kingdom conditions described in the rest of Zechariah 2 would have come about. Although the restoration prophecies speak as if the increase of Zion’s population was to be unconditional, Ez. 36:37 implies that this would only happen if they prayed for it: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock”. But they got on with building their own homes and farms outside Jerusalem, they blessed those who had the courage to live in Zion itself, but didn’t earnestly pray for the fulfilment of the prophecies. They figured that the time for their fulfilment hadn’t come, as Haggai laments; instead of praying for their fulfilment. And we must assess our attitude to the fulfilment of prophecy in the light of all this.

Nehemiah 11:3 Now these are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem. However, in the cities of Judah each person lived in his possession in their cities: Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon’s servants- The priests in the restored Kingdom were to live in one specific area near

the temple (Ez. 45:4), whereas under the Mosaic Law, the priests were given land to live on in each of the various tribes of Israel. And yet the record of the restoration stresses that the priests lived not around the temple, but in various cities throughout Judah (Ezra 2:70; Neh. 7:73; 11:3,20; 12:44). Those who had possessions in Judah were ethnic Judeans who had their family lot in Judah. But they are then called "Israel". Again we see Nehemiah's constant attempt to redefine "Israel" as the people of Judah; he does the same in :20, again using "Israel" to mean 'the people of Judah'.

Nehemiah 11:4 In Jerusalem lived some of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the children of Perez- The fact some of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh also lived there is omitted (1 Chron. 9:2,3 "Now the first inhabitants who lived in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites and the Nethinim. In Jerusalem lived of the children of Judah, of the children of Benjamin and of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh"). It seems to me that the people of Ephraim and Manasseh who had first settled in Jerusalem were driven out by the golah Jews. Or perhaps Nehemiah recognizes in this edited version that the prophetic intention of Israel and Judah reuniting in Zion hadn't come about as intended. There had been no repentance, and most of them preferred to remain in exile. So he didn't even want to give the impression that the intended restoration had happened in this respect.

Nehemiah 11:5 and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of the Shilonite- Related not to the town of Shiloh, but to the descendants of Shelah in the line of Judah (Num. 26:20). Shelah had a very shady beginning and might have seemed doomed to spiritual failure (Gen. 38:5,11,14); he was half Canaanite. But from shaky spiritual beginnings, some do make good. And now we are reading of his descendants as those living in Jerusalem as the vanguard of the restoration of God's Kingdom.

Nehemiah 11:6 All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men- At this point the list in 1 Chron. 9 gives the number of the sons of Zerah, 690. It is clear therefore that neither list is complete.

Nehemiah 11:7 These are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiah- Nehemiah omits the significant mention made of the sons of Zerah in the parallel 1 Chron. 9:6. They numbered 690 soldiers, about half of the Jewish population in Jerusalem. The omission is surely intentional; perhaps Nehemiah considered them somehow apostate, or in reality they left Jerusalem and lived elsewhere.

Nehemiah 11:8 After him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred and twenty-eight- Not mentioned in the parallel 1 Chron. 9:8 where the chiefs of Benjamin inferior to Sallu are Ibneiah, Elah and Meshullam. There is no contradiction; it's simply that neither of the lists are exhaustive.

Nehemiah 11:9 Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah the son of Hassenuah was second over the city- He was second in command to Joel. In this case,

the overseers of the city of Neh. 7:2 had been replaced by Joel. However, it could be translated with reference to "the city", as if he was overseer over the part of the city called "the second", as in Neh. 3:9,12.

Nehemiah 11:10 Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin- "Son of" may need to be omitted as it is in some texts. Because the parallel 1 Chron. 9:10 has "Jedaiah, and Jehoiarib, Jachin". Those three are names of the priestly orders in 1 Chron. 24:7.

Nehemiah 11:11 Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth- The grandfather, in fact (Ezra 7:3). "Son of" means simply 'descendant of'.

The son of Ahitub, the ruler of God's house- GNB "was the High Priest".

Nehemiah 11:12 and their brothers who did the work of the house, eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah- These 822 were apparently divided into 22 courses (Neh. 12:2-7), meaning that only about 37 of them were serving at any one time. The scale of operations was therefore not that great.

Nehemiah 11:13 and his brothers, chiefs of fathers' households, two hundred and forty-two; and Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer- AV: "Amashai (R.V. Amashsai) the son of Azareel (R.V. Azarel), the son of Ahasai (R.V. Ahzai), the son of Meshillemoth]". Compare the parallel in 1 Chron. 9:12, "Maasai the son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemith". The same person is in view. Comparing the names we see how the Biblical genealogies omit some names and generations, and also how the same name is rendered slightly differently. This is partly because of the difficulty of transliterating letters from non-Latin languages, especially ancient ones. But there are also substantive differences. Names in non-literate societies were pronounced differently and spelt differently in different contexts. See on :21.

Nehemiah 11:14 and their brothers, mighty men of valour, one hundred and twenty-eight; and their overseer was Zabdiel- 1 Chron. 9:13 "Very able men". Their "valour" was in their ability to serve.

The son of Haggedolim- RVmg. "the son of one of the great men".

Nehemiah 11:15 Of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni- 1 Chron. 9:14 adds the detail that they were "of the sons of Merari".

Nehemiah 11:16 and Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chiefs of the Levites, who had the oversight of the outside business of God's house- This "business" is in contrast to the "work" of God's house, the actual rituals performed by the priests (Neh. 11:22; 1 Chron. 23:4).

Nehemiah 11:17 and Mattaniah the son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, who was the praise leader who began the thanksgiving in prayer, and Bakbukiah, the second among his brothers; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun- These praise leaders are inserted in the list as more senior than the

singers (:22). Much of the worship would have been through choruses led by one or two leaders who began the chorus and then the "singers" joined in; several of the Psalms were intended to be used like this.

Nehemiah 11:18 All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred and eighty-four- "The holy city" (as in :1) may refer to Jerusalem or particularly to the area around Zion, the temple mount. Sadly the city was anything but "holy" to Yahweh as the rest of Nehemiah makes clear.

Nehemiah 11:19 Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brothers, who kept watch at the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two- 1 Chron. 9:22 gives 212. It depends exactly what time 1 Chron. 9 refers to. And guards of the gates may have included others who were not in this particular list of "porters", for as noted several times, neither of the lists are exhaustive. The "porters" were temple servants, so this confirms our line of exposition on Neh. 3 that the "walls" and gates Nehemiah built were around the temple areas, not around the whole city. In order to create a kind of hyper holy area which would exclude those considered unclean.

This setting up of a wall and gates with guards to keep out second rate Jews and Gentiles was all so foreign to the restoration prophecies. Latter Isaiah has so many of them, and Zechariah too, e.g. Zech. 8:22,23 "Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh Almighty and to pray for His blessing. In those days ten foreigners will come to one Jew and say, 'We want to share in your destiny, because we have heard that God is with you". Instead, they were being excluded.

Nehemiah 11:20 The rest of Israel, of the priests, the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, each one in his inheritance- We note that the community is now called "Israel" even though the majority of the returned exiles were from the two tribe kingdom of Judah. However the unity envisioned by the restoration prophets was intended to be upon the basis of a joint experience of conviction of sin, repentance and forgiveness. But in reality most of the Jews and Israelites remained in exile, by their choice; and what unity was achieved in the restoration was of a national, secular nature, rather than spiritual. And we need to beware of such a semblance of "unity" in the church of today.

Nehemiah 11:21 But the Nethinim lived in Ophel; and Ziha and Gishpa were over the Nethinim- "Gishpa" is the "Hasupha" of Ezra 2:43; Neh. 7:46. See on :13.

Nehemiah 11:22 The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica, of the sons of Asaph, the singers, over the business of God's house- This is in contrast to the "outward business" of the temple (:16); these were the ones who actually served in performing or assisting the performance of the Mosaic rituals.

Nehemiah 11:23 For there was a commandment from the king- "The king" is surely Artaxerxes (cp. Neh. 2:8; 11:24; Ezra 7:20-24). He wanted the Levites and priests to be provided for so that they might pray for him- and so Persian control over them was established. This is a far cry from the picture of an independent Zion in the restoration prophecies. And the Jewish religious leaders went along with this Persian control, because it meant income for them. See on :24.

Concerning them- The Levites.

And a settled provision for the singers, as every day required- Presumably there was a daily allowance from the Persian government for the singers. This ought to have been provided by the tithes of the people but clearly these were lacking, and the famine (see in Neh. 5) was such that it was hard for them to pay them. Heb. 'the thing of a day on its day,' as LXX. This is the idea behind the Lord's model prayer asking us to pray to be given "our daily bread". Just enough for today- with the implication being, so that we might serve God as the singers and Levites did in the temple.

Nehemiah 11:24 Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people- This is noted in the context of the special imperial edict regarding the daily allowance for the Levites (:23). "At the king's hand" suggests this Pethahiah was literally with the king Artaxerxes in Persia (Neh. 13:13; 1 Chron. 18:17; 23:28), and we can assume it was due to his good offices that this was arranged.

This again shows how much Judah was a willingly submissive colony of Persia, with a Jew appointed to be the King's representing and contact point for the Jews of Judah.

Nehemiah 11:25 As for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its towns, and in Dibon and its towns, and in Jekabzeel and its villages- These were all immediately around Jerusalem. This is the old name for Hebron, the early capital of Judah. Perhaps the old name is used because this is how it was written in the Persian records; these genealogies and lists we have in this part of the book of Nehemiah appear to have been appended by Nehemiah to his own autobiography.

The list of villages and towns inhabited by "the children of Judah" is a way of saying that the Jerusalem temple was 'in fellowship' only with these towns and villages. They were following the Persian concept of a temple community, whereby a temple had a defined list of those families supporting and worshipping in it, even if that community had members located far from the temple. This was the model which the golah Jews were wrongly following. The lists of Judahites outside of Jerusalem is very similar in structure to other temple community lists; the members make a covenant with the temple and agree to pay some regular money towards it. It was like setting up some kind of exclusive Christian fellowship, where the main church has satellites elsewhere in the country who are 'in fellowship'. And the rest of the country is seen as a spiritual wasteland, despite there being many other true believers located all over. It was this which led to the shameful division between "the Jews" and their brethren the Samaritans- a division the Lord clearly didn't respect. The towns listed here are in the very same order as they appear in the description of Judah's territory in Josh. 15. Clearly the idea was that this was a re-establishment of God's former kingdom. But it was a kingdom without a king, and not even independent from Persian rule. It was an attempt to appeal to historical tradition, but with no spirit to it and far out of context. We can see so many similarities with the church of today.

Nehemiah 11:26 and in Jeshua, and in Moladah, and Beth Pelet- This sounds similar to the list in Josh. 15:26,27, in which case "Jeshua" would be a form of "Shema"; see on :13.

Nehemiah 11:27 and in Hazar Shual, and in Beersheba and its towns- This was the southern border; perhaps the idea of this list is to demonstrate how widely the people scattered. There is no mention of opposition to their reclaiming ancestral lands all over Judah. Perhaps the population was low, further diminished by the terrible famine of Neh. 5.

Nehemiah 11:28 and in Ziklag, and in Meconah and in its towns- Larger settlements aren't mentioned, but those which are often have historical associations with the life of David (Ziklag = 1 Sam. 30:1) and the conquest of the land at the time of Joshua. The impression may be that there was an attempt to reestablish David's kingdom. But the restoration of the Davidic kingdom was linked by the prophets to repentance and the appearance of his Messianic "son", which didn't happen. It was but an outward appearance of restoration.

Nehemiah 11:29 and in En Rimmon, and in Zorah, and in Jarmuth- As noted on :28 the places mentioned had association with the conquest of Joshua (here, referring to Josh. 15:32,33,35). But it was but an external appearance of restoration, for the promised "Joshua" figure, the Messiah, didn't appear at the time.

Nehemiah 11:30 Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, Azekah and its towns. So they encamped from Beersheba to the valley of Hinnom- The idea is from the most southern point of Judah to Judah's northern boundary at the valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna, outside Jerusalem (Josh. 15:8). But within that large territory, only the 17 towns listed were seen as the true "Judah".

Nehemiah 11:31 The children of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, at Michmash and Aija, and at Bethel and its towns- "Aija" is Ai; Michmash was the scene of one of David's victories. See on :28.

Nehemiah 11:32 at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah- The very existence of "men of Anathoth" who returned was a sign of God's grace. For because of their persecution of Jeremiah, Jer. 11:21,23 had prophesied: "There shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth". Perhaps like Nineveh some repented and therefore the threatened judgment didn't come about; or Jeremiah prayed for them his enemies and was heard; or Yahweh simply pitied His people.

For Nob, see on :28.

Nehemiah 11:33 Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim- Ramah recalls Samuel; see on :28.

Nehemiah 11:34 Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat- The people from these areas returned (Ezra 2:33), but it's not clear whether they actually went to live there. The record wishes to give that impression, of a total restoration to how things were previously, on a national and cultural level. But the spiritual aspect was sadly lacking.

Nehemiah 11:35 Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen- 1 Chron. 4:14 "Joab the father of Gehaharashim; for they were craftsmen".

Nehemiah 11:36 Of the Levites, certain divisions in Judah settled in Benjamin's territory- GNB "Some groups of Levites that had lived in the territory of Judah were

assigned to live with the people of Benjamin". This suggests there were simply not enough Levites, and instead of remaining around the temple in Judah where they were needed, they instead went to live in Benjamin.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 12

Nehemiah 12:1 Now these are the priests and the Levites who went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra- Those who truly waited upon Yahweh would renew their strength; they would "mount up as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31), the s.w. used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah for the 'going up' ["went up"] to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:3,5,11; 2:1,59; 7:6,7,28; 8:1; Neh. 7:5,6,61; 12:1). The idea of mounting up with wings as eagles also connects with Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, mounting up from the captives by the rivers of Babylon, and returning to the land. But the reality was as in Neh. 4:10: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". Examination of the context shows that they had just had plenty of strength; they lost physical stamina because of their spiritual weakness.

Zerubbabel and Joshua between them were intended to be the king-priest of the restoration, according to Zechariah's prophecy, who would between them fulfil the requirements for a messianic figure in the restored Kingdom. But they failed in this, and despite other possible fulfillments, as Zechariah offers, this figure never appeared.

We have here a list of those who had returned from Persia under Zerubbabel a few generations previously. Nehemiah as it were copies and pastes it at this point because he is seeking to define the true "Israel", Ezra's "holy seed", as the golah Jews, those who had returned from Babylon / Persia. Those Jews who had remained in the land after the exile were the poor, who couldn't prove their genealogies. And so they were cast out of the community or at least, excluded from leadership within it.

Nehemiah 12:2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush- There were more priests than this who returned, these are the heads of houses listed here. All these names are repeated in :12-21 with the exception of Hattush; perhaps he failed in some way and was excluded, although he signed the covenant in Neh. 10:4.

Nehemiah 12:3 Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth- The Shebaniah of Neh. 10:4.

Nehemiah 12:4 Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah- 'Ginnethoi' means "gardener" and reads strangely amongst the other priestly names, most of which have spiritual overtones. Yet the priests were not intended to do agricultural work but to be supported by the tithes. It could be that this name is a reflection of the way that some priestly families were just so in name only and had no real dedication to spiritual things. The failure of the priesthood to teach and even know God's word is evidence enough of that.

Nehemiah 12:5 Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah- "Maadiah", 'ornament of Yah' or 'adorned by Yah', could be one of the few names which connect with the hope of the restoration prophets; that the restored Israel would be adorned by Yah (s.w. Is. 61:10; Jer. 31:4). I have noted that generally the situation in Nehemiah's time had very little connection with the restoration prophets; they were simply focused upon restoring the situation as it had been under the old covenant, which was now permanently broken.

Nehemiah 12:6 Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah- Joiarib was drawn to serve first in 1 Chron. 24:7, but presumably the lots came out differently when they were drawn at the restoration, and he is now drawn 17th out of 22 orders.

Nehemiah 12:7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brothers in the days of Jeshua- The 22 names in this list fall short of the 24 courses of priests in the original temple.

Nehemiah 12:8 Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who was the praise leader, he and his brothers- "Praise leader" is the word used in Jer. 25:30; 51:14 of the 'shouting' or 'praise' which was to be heard in the restored Kingdom. But those who were to be making it intermarried with Gentiles and failed to act as intended for the restored Kingdom, and so the potential fulfillment didn't happen. Just as so many situations in our own lives.

Nehemiah 12:9 Also Bakbukiah and Unno, their brothers, were over against them- The same Hebrew in 2 Chron. 7:6, "The priests sounded trumpets before them", the idea perhaps being that they answered the Levites in choral praise (see :24).

According to their offices- "Offices" could be translated "watches", as if even at this stage the community were under threat of disruption and attack- from the very people with whom they had intermarried. Or at least, that was how Nehemiah perceived it and painted it. In reality, he set guards on the wall he had built around Zion to keep out non-golah Jews and Gentiles. When it was God's prophetic intention that they should flow into Zion.

Nehemiah 12:10 Jeshua became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada- We now have a brief genealogy of the high priest. The list follows right on from the list of high priests in 1 Chron. 6:3-15 which concluded with Jehozadak father of Jeshua / Joshua, who "went into captivity when the Lord carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar".

Nehemiah 12:11 and Joiada became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua- In :22, 'Johanan' comes between Joiada and Jaddua. He is stated to be son of Eliashib in :23. Perhaps Jonathan is a form of Johanan; or maybe Jonathan was briefly high priest, before Johanan took over.

Nehemiah 12:12 In the days of Joiakim there were priests, heads of fathers' households: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah- Joiakim would have been contemporary with the events of the book of Esther and king Xerxes. Perhaps he compiled the following list of the courses of the priests which were in existence at the time of high priest Joiakim (:10).

Nehemiah 12:13 of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan- Generally the names of the priests feature more names with the 'Yah' suffix than the names of the priests who first returned. That may have been a sign of increasing spirituality, or maybe just simply a return to their cultural roots. This is ever an issue in western Christianity; for one can be culturally Christian without being spiritually Christian.

Nehemiah 12:14 of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph- "Malluchi" is a form of the common word for "king". Perhaps in this man an family the kingly line of Judah and the priestly line mixed- preparing yet more potential fulfillments of the king-priest Messiah who could have appeared at the restoration, according to Isaiah and Zechariah; but nobody rose up to it.

Nehemiah 12:15 of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai- "Harim" means 'snub nosed'. Perhaps the family were distinguished by some congenital defect which precluded them from priestly service, and yet they chose to still work as Levites and to return and be involved in the work as far as possible. Clearly an example for us today. See on Neh. 10:10,17.

Nehemiah 12:16 of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam- Ginnethoi' means "gardener" and reads strangely amongst the other priestly names, most of which have spiritual overtones. Yet the priests were not intended to do agricultural work but to be supported by the tithes. It could be that this name is a reflection of the way that some priestly families were just so in name only and had no real dedication to spiritual things. The failure of the priesthood to teach and even know God's word is evidence enough of that.

Nehemiah 12:17 of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai- "Maadiah", 'ornament of Yah' or 'adorned by Yah', could be one of the few names which connect with the hope of the restoration prophets; that the restored Israel would be adorned by Yah (s.w. Is. 61:10; Jer. 31:4). I have noted that generally the situation in Nehemiah's time had very little connection with the restoration prophets; they were simply focused upon restoring the situation as it had been under the old covenant, which was now permanently broken.

*Nehemiah 12:18 of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan- "*Shammua" is the word used of the 'desolation' of the land during the exile (Lev. 26:22,31,32,35,43; 2 Chron. 36:21; Is. 49:8; Jer. 33:10). This would indicate in this name at least a mourning for the situation in the land just as Nehemiah did in Neh. 1, in contrast to the majority who preferred to remain in Persia.

Nehemiah 12:19 and of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi- The relatively low place in the list of Joiarib and Jedaiah may be because they didn't seal the covenant of repentance.

Nehemiah 12:20 of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber- "Kallai" means 'frivolous' and is the word used of how the priesthood had 'made itself vile' (1 Sam. 3:13). The word is translated "curse" in Neh. 13:2,25. It contrasts with the generally spiritual names recorded here.

Nehemiah 12:21 of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel- "Hashabiah" means 'Yah has counted', the same words used of how Yahweh counted Abraham righteous (Gen. 15:6). As noted on :20, there is a wide range in the meanings of the names, as if to give the impression that some were spiritual and others were far from spirituality.

Nehemiah 12:22 As for the Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and

Jaddua, there were recorded the heads of fathers' households; also the priests, in the reign of Darius the Persian- See on :11. "In the reign..." would be better "to the reign of Darius". The Darius in view is likely Darius Codomannus, who fought with Alexander the Great, and would have been contemporary with Jaddua the high priest.

Nehemiah 12:23 The sons of Levi, heads of fathers' households, were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib- For Johanan, see on :11.

Nehemiah 12:24 The chiefs of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers over against them, to praise and give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, watch next to watch- LXX "Course by course". But all 24 courses of priests didn't return from exile; only four of them initially, according to Ezra 2:37, although others likely came later. Like Ezra, Nehemiah seemed more concerned with restoring the religion as it was under the old covenant, than accepting the new covenant promised in the restoration prophets. For in that, according to Ezekiel, the priests were not to be the Levites and Aaronites but the sons of Zadok.

Nehemiah 12:25 Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters keeping the watch at the storehouses of the gates- Again there is the implication that there was still much opposition and potential risk of theft. "Porters" is literally sentries. They were more importantly guarding the holy space from any non golah Jews entering.

Nehemiah 12:26 These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest the scribe- The book of Nehemiah appears to be the autobiography of Nehemiah, perhaps written in a hope that God would thereby take note of his good deeds- not an altogether spiritually mature approach. However in chapters 10-12 he appears to have appended various genealogical records. Now he returns to the narrative for the rest of the book.

Nehemiah 12:27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with giving thanks, and with singing, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and with harps- The *seeking* of the Levites to come in from the fields they were farming outside of Jerusalem (Neh. 1:36)... rather suggests they weren't that willing. The entire picture is so negative.

Nehemiah 12:28 The sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathite- This gathering together on their own initiative contrasts with the seeking of the Levites in :27; as if the Levites had to be cajoled to come, but the singers came themselves. We marvel at how degrees of human response are noted and recorded by God; and He is no less sensitive to our responses today.

Nehemiah 12:29 also from Beth Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth. The singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem- The singers were supposed to be supported by direct grant from the King of Persia (Neh. 11:23) but the

mention of them living in fields and villages suggests things went missing along the path and they had to support themselves.

Nehemiah 12:30 The priests and the Levites purified themselves; and they purified the people, and the gates, and the wall-

The idea of wall purification was that it declared holy whatever was within the walls. This makes little sense if a secular city was within the wall that is in view. This is part of Nehemiah making holy the community in the sense of separating them from anything he considered unholy- keeping out the Gentiles and non-golah Jews. All so contrary to the prophetic picture of the restored Zion. The purifying / sanctifying / dedication of the wall and gates makes better sense if the wall was in fact around the temple, not the entire secular city; see on Neh. 3:1. On Neh. 11:1 I have discussed how this was their wrong attempt to declare holy what God had not in fact sanctified.

Ez. 36:24-29 had prophesied: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh". The captives were taken from among the many nations that comprised Babylon / Persia; they were brought, as many as could be bothered to go, to their own land. They were cleansed there (s.w. Ezra 6:20; Neh. 12:30). But they became un-cleansed through allowing Tobiah into the temple chambers, by trading on the Sabbath, and by marrying Gentiles (Neh. 13:9,22,30). The priesthood needed to be "cleansed" again (Mal. 3:3 s.w.). The promise of Ezekiel 36 sounds unconditional- as if, whoosh, God would make His sinful people righteous regardless of their own will. And so some have misunderstood the operation of God's Spirit in our own days. But although not directly stated, the promise of entry into the new covenant, whereby God would encourage obedience through the work of His Spirit, was conditional. Judah could have entered the new covenant there and then, with all its requirements for a Messiah figure to abrogate the Mosaic law. But they turned back to their uncleannesses, they would not keep God's statutes, and their potential Messiah figures failed to appear. Yet again, the promise of entry into a new covenant was deferred, to be fulfilled in a new Israel who are sprinkled through the waters of baptism. The promise was fulfilled, but in a far different context to that intended.

Nehemiah 12:31 Then I brought up the princes of Judah on the wall, and appointed two great companies who gave thanks and went in procession. One went on the right hand on the wall- One group went around the northern wall and the other around the southern wall. They would have met in the open space to the east of the temple. See on :38.

Toward the dung gate- Ez. 48:31-34 envisaged the 12 gates of Jerusalem being named after the 12 tribes of Israel. But it seems no accident that twelve separate gates of the city are mentioned in the restoration record- but they weren't renamed after the tribes of Israel. Here are the names of the city gates in Nehemiah: valley (Neh. 3:13); horse (Neh. 3:28); east (Neh. 3:29); Miphkad (Neh. 3:31); water (Neh. 8:16); dung (Neh. 12:31); fountain (Neh. 12:37); Ephraim, old, fish, sheep and prison gates (Neh. 12:39). No wonder some wept when the rebuilt temple was finally dedicated- the pattern of Ezekiel's vision hadn't been followed, even on such basic matters as the names of the twelve gates of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 12:32 and after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah- We wonder why Judah is emphasized, when the idea of the restoration was that "Israel" was to now be comprised of all the tribes. Again we get a sense of parochialism and a yearning for how things had once been, which dwarfed any spiritual aspect. And above all, a redefinition of "Israel" as in fact the leaders of Judah who had returned from the exile. There is no representation of the Jews who had remained in the land after the exile, and the Israelites from the 10 tribes who had remained after the Assyrian exile

Nehemiah 12:33 and Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam- They were priests (Neh. 10:2 cp. Neh. 12:1,13); there was a mixture of princes of Judah and priests, as if they were vaguely aware that the intended Messiah of the restoration was pictured by Isaiah and Zechariah as a king-priest in whom would meet the lines of Judah and Levi.

Nehemiah 12:34 Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah- Jerusalem was clearly still being seen as the city of "Judah and Benjamin", situated on the borders of those two tribes; rather than a city of all Israel and indeed the Gentile world. Again we note the sense of parochialism.

Nehemiah 12:35 and some of the priests' sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph- This confirms the impression that groups of priests were followed by groups of men of Judah and Benjamin, and then again more priests. The fuller list of the priests' sons is in :41.

Nehemiah 12:36 and his brothers, Shemaiah, and Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and Ezra the scribe was before them- LXX "the hymns of David", i.e. the Psalms. "Was before them" suggests Ezra went with one group and Nehemiah with the other (:38).

*Nehemiah 12:37 By the spring gate, and straight before them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, even to the water gate eastward- "*Instead of following the wall round the spurs of the Ophel, the procession went straight on up the steps ascending the brow of the hill".

Nehemiah 12:38 The other company of those who gave thanks went to meet them, and I after them, with the half of the people, on the wall, above the tower of the furnaces, even to the broad wall- "I after them" suggests Ezra went with one group and Nehemiah with the other (cp. :36). "To meet them" translates a Hebrew word which with one consonant different would mean "to the left hand", the intention being to give the other hand of the scene of :31 "at the right hand".

Nehemiah 12:39 and above the gate of Ephraim- A gate not mentioned as ever being rebuilt in Neh. 3. Maybe it was a new gate built at the restoration, on the road leading to Ephraim, perhaps intended to symbolize the unity with the ten tribes; or as a redefinition of "Ephraim" as now controlled by Judah.

And by the old gate, and by the fish gate, and the tower of Hananel, and the tower of Hammeah, even to the sheep gate; and they stood still in the gate of the guard- At the eastern entrance to the temple.

Nehemiah 12:40 So stood the two companies of those who gave thanks in God's house, and I, and the half of the rulers with me- Ezra went with one group and Nehemiah with the other (:36 cp. :38).

Nehemiah 12:41 and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets- These presumably are the equivalent of the priests' sons with trumpets of :35.

Nehemiah 12:42 and Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer- LXX "And the singers were heard, and were numbered". It is axiomatic that singers are heard, so the idea is that they sang loudly and their message was heard / understood. In the parallel group which went around the temple walls, Zechariah was the overseer (:35).

Nehemiah 12:43 They offered great sacrifices that day, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy; and the women also and the children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off- God's psychological influencing of people is a parade example of how His Spirit works upon the human spirit (as in 2 Chron. 20:27). The joy of the restored Zion was intended to be a witness to the Gentiles. But those who made this great and loud witness were to yet again intermarry with the Gentiles rather than bring them to Israel's God. Or we can read this as Nehemiah's exaggerated account of his political masterpiece, as he saw it, redefining "Israel" as Judah, and claiming God and everyone else was happy about it.

Nehemiah 12:44 On that day were men appointed over the rooms for the treasures, for the wave offerings, for the first fruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them, according to the fields of the cities, the portions appointed by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites who waited- The idea is that they were glad that the priests and Levites were 'waiting' i.e. doing God's service. It could be that as happens today, people were happy to pay others to do the work for God which they ought to be doing, and are made somehow happy by having parted with their money for the sake of others doing the work.

The priests in the restored Kingdom were to live in one specific area near the temple (Ez. 45:4), whereas under the Mosaic Law, the priests were given land to live on in each of the various tribes of Israel. And yet the record of the restoration stresses that the priests lived not around the temple, but in various cities throughout Judah (Ezra 2:70; Neh. 7:73; 11:3,20; 12:44).

Nehemiah 12:45 They performed the duty of their God, and the duty of the purification, and so did the singers and the porters, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son- Judah were to keep the charges ['perform the duty'] of God relating to His house (Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16), so that the Kingdom of God might be restored in Israel. Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's vision, tried to get them to "keep the charges" (s.w. Neh.7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges

(Mal. 3:14 s.w. "You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge"). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God’s Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God’s law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realization of His vision.

Nehemiah 12:46 For in the days of David and Asaph of old there was a chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God- See on Neh. 9:5. LXX "For in the days of David Asaph was originally first of the singers, and they sang hymns and praise to God". There seemed far more interest in replicating the past than in seeking to obey the prophecies of the restored Kingdom; see on :44,45.

Nehemiah 12:47 All Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, as every day required: and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron- There had been tensions between Levites and priests in Ezra's time. We can note that it was this tension between Levites and priests which resulted in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1-10). But things were arranged so that the Levites, who were the manual workers, collected the tithes and then paid these to the priests ("the sons of Aaron"). This was an attempt to overcome these tensions and the sense that the priests were superior to the Levites; for the Levites were to as it were pay the priests, and the priests were thereby dependent upon the Levites for their food and income.

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 13

Nehemiah 13:1 On that day- This could mean just "at that time", but it may refer to the day of the dedication of the wall (Neh. 12:27) when they brought the Levites to Jerusalem. But the priests and Levites were the teachers of the people. The fact they were not living in Jerusalem because tithes hadn't been given them meant that there was little teaching of God's word, with the result that the masses were Biblically ignorant.

They read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that an Ammonite and a Moabite should not enter into the assembly of God forever- Possibly this too was all choreographed, as if to give the impression that in their Bible study, they discovered a gem. When the reality was that Nehemiah, following Ezra, wanted to get all non-golah Jews excluded from the community and presented this part of the Mosaic law as justification for it. As noted above, it seems there was a huge Biblical ignorance, partly due to the Levites not teaching the people. They "found written" what they ought surely to have been aware of. The prohibition was actually for 10 generations- and that period had passed since Dt. 23:4-7 was spoken. In any case, Nehemiah uses this legislation as an excuse to exclude any mixed race person (:3). And that is not what was written "in the book of Moses". Here we have a classic case of 'finding' something in God's law which is not there; and turning our interpretation of God's word into God's word itself. And this is a classic case of seizing upon a phrase from scripture, and then expanding from the specific (Moabites

and Ammonites were to be excluded for ten generations) to the universal [all mixed race were to be excluded]. Whilst at the same time carefully ignoring all the other evidence that a interracial marriage was not of itself condemned by God [the consequent idolatry was], and the offspring of such marriages were never excluded by the Mosaic law. The "mixed multitude" were allowed to be part of Israel and were redeemed by God from Egypt (Ex. 12:48,49), Hebrew soldiers could marry Gentile virgins whom they captured, "the stranger who lives as a foreigner among you" was to be accepted so long as they followed God's laws (Lev. 18:26), "You shall have one law for him... who is native-born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger who lives as a foreigner among them" (Num. 15:29).

I have earlier discussed how Ammonites and Moabites didn't hardly exist as ethnic identities at this time. Tobiah, meaning Yah is good, was married to a Judean woman and had a son and grandson who had 'Yah' in their names. I suggested earlier that Nehemiah calls him an Ammonite when he may simply have been a non-golah Jew who was more open to Gentile involvement in Yahweh worship. This definition of "Ammonite" may simply mean someone whom Nehemiah considered someone who shouldn't enter the congregation, that is, be counted within the definition of the new "Israel" that he and the golah Jews were creating. In any case, Nehemiah eagerly interprets the already expired "ten generations" as "forever". So a verse from Dt. 23 is used out of context to expel all the "mixed multitude" (:3).

The prohibition on Moabites and Ammonites entering the congregation is in the same context as saying that a eunuch cannot either: "He who is wounded in the testicles, or has his privy member cut off, must not enter into the assembly of Yahweh... An Ammonite or a Moabite must not enter into the assembly of Yahweh" (Dt. 23:1,3). But Nehemiah was a eunuch, and his initial passion for those excluded from the assembly was because of his own experience- excluded, but still very much with Yahweh. But the years of politics had eroded this. And now he excludes Ammonites and Moabites, and their Jewish wives and children, when he himself was equally excluded. This is indeed hypocrisy, and hypocrisy is always the outcome of focusing on one stream of spirituality without seeing the fuller picture. Sadly it seems he dies impenitent, for he even asks God to reward him for his supposed good deeds in doing this. And even worse, there is evidence that Tobiah wasn't even an Ammonite, he was just called an Ammonite by Nehemiah. And he twists this prohibition of Ammonites beyond the tenth generation, and applies it to any Gentile or anyone married to a Gentile, or even, it seems, to anyone married to a non-golah Jew.

Nehemiah 13:2 Because they didn't meet the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, to curse them; however our God turned the curse into a blessing- The interpretation or additional comment was added by the Levites as they read the law, as a kind of midrash. See on :1. The turning of curse into blessing was what had been the intended result of Judah's exile; the intention was that they would return and work with God in reestablishing His Kingdom in Israel with all the attendant blessings.

Nehemiah 13:3 It came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude- This reads as if they heard what they hadn't realized before in God's law, and then obeyed it immediately. The idea isn't that they threw these foreigners out of the territory of Judah, but rather that they didn't allow them to participate in the signs of covenant relationship (as in Neh. 9:2).

The accounts of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similarly to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Nehemiah 9:2; 13:3. They obviously found it extremely difficult to be separated *from* the surrounding world *unto* God's law (Nehemiah 10:28). There was a powerful logic- either separate from the world around, or be separated from the people of God (Ezra 10:8). It's a separation- one way or the other.

The Gentiles or racially mixed were separated from "Israel", i.e. those counted as in the community of God's people. But God comforts the sons of Gentiles whose had been separated from His people (s.w.) that He did in fact accept them. And they in fact were His people, unlike those who had excluded them (s.w. Is. 56:3 "Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people").

I argued on Neh. 3:1,32; 4:1; 6:2 that Nehemiah built the wall around the temple area in order to try to create a ritually pure space that would not be contaminated. But at the end of his life he realizes that this had done nothing to make God's people separate from sin or from Gentiles. They had married them, and neglected God's law. His life's great project had not in fact achieved anything spiritual. And many lives lived sadly yield the same conclusion. The separation was done after hearing the reading and explanation of the law. But Moses' law never required separation if a Gentile was married. That was the interpretation, that got confused in the minds of illiterate people with the "law" itself. Just as many today who are Biblically illiterate will confuse interpretation of God's word with His word itself. Nehemiah is repeating the mistake of Ezra, and has ended up losing his initial passion for the rejected Jews (as discussed in Neh. 1). Separation from the "mixed multitude" naturally invites unfavourable comparison with the way Israel left Egypt together with a "mixed multitude" of Gentiles and intermarried Gentiles. All Israel had intermarried over the generations, so the argument about preserving ethnic purity was wrong from the start. The same word for "mixed" is found in Ps. 106:34,35: "They didn't destroy the peoples as Yahweh commanded them, but *mixed themselves* with the nations, and learned their works". I suggested on Neh. 1:2 that Nehemiah originally had a passion to undo the bad behaviour of Ezra in 'disfellowshipping' for intermarriage and marginalizing the Jews who had remained in the land after the Babylonian invasion. I discussed this in depth on Ezra 9,10. But he ends up doing just the same. This explains why the account of Nehemiah's dealing with intermarriage reads so similarly to that of Ezra's dealings with the issue. The point is that Nehemiah, like many men, ended up doing that which he earlier hated. Just as the young reformers in a church end up in later years acting just like the brethren whose behaviour they once realized was so wrong. And as people who start on the far left of politics in their youth end up on the far right, and vice versa. This is a human trait. In spiritual contexts, it reflects a lack of attention to and respect of God's word as the sole guiding light and source of principle.

Nehemiah 13:4 Now before this- This may refer to the "this" of :6, the interval between Nehemiah's first and second rulerships in Jerusalem.

Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the rooms of the house of our God, being allied to Tobiah- The same high priest of :28 and Neh. 3:1. His name is

significantly absent from the list of those who signed the covenant of purity in Neh. 10. The alliance (s.w. Ruth 2:20) to Tobiah was presumably through marriage of a family member; Tobiah had married a daughter of Shecaniah; and his son Jehohanan had married a daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Both Shecaniah and Meshullam are mentioned in Neh. 3:20,30 as high ranking priests.

Nehemiah 13:5 had prepared for him a great room, where before they laid the meal offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the grain, the new wine, and the oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the wave offerings for the priests- This "great room", LXX "treasury", was the storehouse and vault for all the valuable things. As explained on :8, Tobiah turned this into his own private residence. The tithes were effectively given to him and not to the Levites; and so this discouraged people from paying them, and the Levites left Jerusalem to farm land which could give them subsistence food. And so the great potentials of Ez. 40-48, where the holiness of the temple chambers is emphasized, were all precluded from fulfilment.

Nehemiah 13:6 But in all this, I was not at Jerusalem; for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king: and after certain days asked I leave of the king- Whilst Nehemiah writes this to clear himself of any wrong doing, it is also a tacit admission that the reforms and such spirituality as there was were due to his sole influence. Without his personal presence, the people returned to their usual sins.

Nehemiah 13:7 When I returned to Jerusalem-

It is possible that Malachi's prophecy fits between Nehemiah 12 and 13. Malachi means messenger, and he presents as the messenger of the Lord who would suddenly come to his temple and judge Israel (Mal. 3:1). Possibly the coming of that "lord" to the temple was in a way fulfilled in Nehemiah. But Nehemiah didn't bring the people the new covenant, instead he made a covenant with the people that they would continue keeping the old covenant. Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure, but he wasn't. He was not so much a "type of Christ" as a man who failed to live up to his Christ-like potential. And looking back on his life in these memoirs, he realized that. Just as looking back at our lives, we say time and again: "I was not Christ-like in that. I am not and was not Jesus. I was not the Christ to you... and you, and them". And we throw ourselves upon His grace.

"Returned" is literally "came". When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh's "strong hand" (Neh. 1:10), he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come to Zion and save Israel from Babylon and restore them to the land "with strong hand". Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as 'coming to Jerusalem' may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yahweh to Zion; they *could have been* Messianic figures (Neh. 2:11; 13:7).

And understood the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing him a room in the courts of God's house- As Nehemiah understood it, or wanted to understand it, Tobiah the Ammonite was given a chamber in the temple for him to use as an office for undermining God's people (Neh. 13:7). This precluded the fulfilment of the restoration prophecies. There were to be "holy chambers" in the temple for the

Levites (Ez. 46:19 and very often in Ezekiel 40-48). The uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be brought into the sanctuary (Ez. 44:7). It was God's intention that when Judah returned from Babylon, the uncircumcised would not come into Zion (the temple), and the Kingdom would be established (Is. 52:1,11). There was to be no Canaanite in the house of Yahweh (Zech. 14:21).

Nehemiah 13:8 it grieved me severely- Hearts that bleed will feel not only for the world, but for our brethren too. Think of Nehemiah: "I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And it *grieved* me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber (Neh. 13:8). His *grief* led him to discipline Tobiah. Grief should likewise be the motive for ecclesial discipline today (as in 1 Cor. 5:2). The same word is translated "sad" in Neh. 2:3: "Why should not my countenance be sad [grieved], when the city, the place of my fathers sepulchers, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?". The King observed that his "sorrow of heart" was written all over his face, even though he was trying to conceal it. His sadness for His weak people was engraven in His body language. It could not be hidden, even though he became as it were a fool for Christ's sake.

Therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the room- He had created a large room out of the temple chambers, and had made it the treasury; and yet he himself lived there. It's rather like a bank manager declaring his own private home as the money storage vault for the bank. Clearly there was an element of corruption involved. "Household stuff" is the same phrase as in the common term "vessels of the house" of Yahweh (e.g. 2 Chron. 24:14). He had made Yahweh's house his house. See on :11.

But another take is possible. Nehemiah himself literally threw Tobiah's household stuff out of his room. This is the first of a series of angry physical and verbal outbursts from Nehemiah, with which the book concludes. He is clearly angry and frustrated at the end of his ministry. It hadn't worked out. And I have elsewhere argued that Tobiah may not have been the bad guy Nehemiah paints him as. Remember that Nehemiah was the Persian governor- certainly of Jerusalem, possibly of all the Persian colony of Yehud [Judah]. To do things with his own hands, like tearing mens' hair out, throwing their things out of their apartment, beating men, chasing them and cursing them... is all inappropriate behaviour for a man of his gravitas and position. He does all this with no judicial process, no granting any opportunity for another narrative to be expressed. His memoirs present only his view and his actions, taken unilaterally, with no appeal to the relevant parts of the Mosaic law which he claims he is upholding. Nor does he record the reactions of those whom he attacked, nor does he record any counter arguments to his actions. He records his actions as taken by him alone, as if he had actually no support for them from anyone. He is clearly feeling out of control, out of his depth, flaunting his absolute power as the Persian governor, perhaps in his dying days, and hardly comes to the end of his days at peace. Neither with man nor God. This chapter is his last memoir, as he perhaps faces death and asks God to remember him for good. And it is not much more than a record of a series of his own temper tantrums. Nor is he at all penitent for these outbursts- he in fact asks God to remember such supposedly "good deeds" as the basis for his salvation.

We note that Nehemiah could only throw the household stuff of Tobiah out of the apartment. He wasn't powerful enough to throw out Tobiah himself. I noted likewise on :16 that he was powerless to stop the men of Tyre living within Jerusalem. His lack

of total power and failed final agenda would explain his temper tantrums and anger issues which this chapter is full of. Even his reforms of Neh. 5 were not that thoroughgoing. He stops the demanding of interest, but he doesn't get the actual debts of the poor to the rich actually forgiven- when by then they should have been, according to Mosaic law.

Nehemiah 13:9 Then I commanded, and they cleansed the rooms; and there brought I again the vessels of God's house, with the meal offerings and the frankincense- But there is no mention of the tithes being brought back there (cp. :5) because they were not being paid. This was an attempt to cleanse the temple to try to obey the principle that the house of the restored Kingdom was not to be profaned (Ez. 44:7). But Judah profaned the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:17,18), and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their "weariness" with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it. And so the possibility of the fulfilment of Ez. 40-48 was precluded despite Nehemiah's efforts. "Vessels of [God's] house" is the same Hebrew phrase translated "household stuff" in :8. Nehemiah is contrasting the household vessels ["stuff"] of Tobiah with those of God's house. But he seems to me to overstate his case; for the vessels of the temple were not stored there; those chambers were for storing the tithes. But he wishes to present Tobiah's pots and pans as the antithesis of the holy vessels of Yahweh.

Nehemiah 13:10 I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them; so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled everyone to his field- I suggested on :5 that this was because Tobiah was keeping them for himself. The priests returned to mind their own fields because the tithes weren't paid to them, and so this precluded the fulfilment of the restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:14: "And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness".

Is. 62:12 had prophesied that "They shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of Yahweh: and you shall be called Sought out, A city not forsaken". But Nehemiah's record concludes on this negative note that Judah had forsaken Zion. Nobody wanted to live in Jerusalem because of the persecution there; the Levites even went and lived outside it where they had "fields", because they weren't given their tithes. Lots had to be drawn to get people to live there (Nehemiah 11:1). It became a ghost town, when it should have been inhabited as a town without walls for the multitudes of returned exiles joyfully dwelling there (Zechariah 2:5). It was God's intention that ten men (a reference to Israelites of the ten tribes?) would take hold of the skirts of a Jew (i.e. one of Judah) and come with him to worship in the new temple (Zechariah 8:23). But in fact the opposite happened. So few wanted to live in Jerusalem, that the rulers had to cast lots to force one in ten Jews to go and live in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:1). And the ten tribes didn't really unite with Judah, but went off and got lost in the Gentile world.

Nehemiah 13:11 Then I contended with the rulers and said, Why is God's house forsaken?- I suggested on :8 that Tobiah had effectively turned God's house into his own house. The people had allowed this to happen, thinking that loyalty to Tobiah was better than strict loyalty to Yahweh. They vowed not to forsake the house of their God, and yet Nehemiah concludes with the record that this is exactly what they did (Neh. 10:39; 13:11). Nehemiah was heartbroken that the temple was "forsaken", because the "Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his

field" because the tithes weren't paid to them. Thus they had precluded the fulfilment of the restoration potential of Jer. 33:18: "Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually".

I gathered them together, and set them in their place- GNB interprets this as meaning "I brought the Levites and musicians back to the Temple and put them to work again". With the tithes no longer going to Tobiah, they went to the Levites.

But as discussed on :8, Nehemiah is recording what he did to these people and the accusations he made against them. Here in :11 and also in his contention with the nobles in :17,18, there is no record of their responses. They didn't plead guilty. Nehemiah just accuses them and lashes out at them. Their response, according to his memoirs, was silence. There was an obvious answer as to why the people hadn't paid their tithes. They were overtaxed by the Persians, and Nehemiah was the Persian tax collector / governor who is not recorded as trying to ease the tax burden for Judah. And there was a famine, because of the peoples' disobedience and lack of Godly spirit- for which Nehemiah had to also bear some blame. And so they had hardly enough to eat, let alone to pay tithes. Hence the silence from those whom Nehemiah now scolds.

Nehemiah 13:12 Then brought all Judah the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the treasuries- This can be read positively, or negatively, in that perhaps the hint is that there were tithes of other things which ought to have been brought, but weren't. This is Nehemiah's imagination of the people's obedience, for Mal. 3:10 challenges them to actually bring the tithes into the storehouse- and see if God would not hugely bless them for doing so. As soon as Nehemiah returned to Persia, the people stopped even any pretence of doing it.

Nehemiah 13:13 I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah. Next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were counted faithful, and their business was to distribute to their brothers- This was instead of the tithes coming to the treasury, which Tobiah had made his personal home; and the obvious implication is that he had *not* been faithful in these things. Effectively this was a rejection of Eliashib the high priest who had previously been over the treasuries (:4). The corruption of the high priest meant that again, the potentials of the high priest in Zechariah's prophecies were being disallowed.

Nehemiah 13:14 Remember me, my God, concerning this, and don't wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its observances-

"Remember me" (Neh. 5:19; 13:14,22,31) could appear rather selfish and self congratulatory. Especially when he asks for his good deeds to be remembered. He hopes he will be saved because of his good works, done for the temple and its "observances", although the Hebrew word more means "defence" or "guarding". He alludes to his building a wall around the house of God to defend its holiness. This is an incidental confirmation of my repeated suggestion that his wall was around the temple area, and not around the entire secular city. In Neh. 5:19 he asks God to remember him for all he has done for "this people", the golah Jews. His work for the temple and for the creation of a new definition of "Israel" was all either wrong or at best misplaced idealism. Just as so often think that their misguided 'defence of the faith' is all they have to really show to God at the end of their days. And Nehemiah

hardly comes over as very positive in his hope for salvation; quite unlike David in the psalms. There is no sense of salvation by grace, or of the irrelevance of works in relation to salvation. He prays for those who had not been reformed [or, more to the point, had not agreed with his ideas] to be remembered for evil. And for him to be remembered for good. There is no appeal to God's saving grace, no begging for forgiveness for sinners, nothing of the spirit of Moses, David, Paul or the Lord Jesus. Nehemiah begins: "I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned" (Neh. 1:6). But unlike Paul, whose awareness of personal sinfulness increased over the course of his ministry, Nehemiah ends up commending his good works to God and making no serious confession of sin. It could be that in the two "Remember me..." passages of :14 and :31, with another "remember me" exactly in the middle of that section (:22), we have Nehemiah's final appeal for his own salvation- and he appeals on the basis of what he recalls of his exclusion of people, breaking up of marriages and dividing God's people.

The central part appears to be an appeal to grace, but putting it all together, he sees the receipt of God's grace as dependent upon his works: "Remember me, my God, for this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your loving grace [*hesed*]" (:22). But he makes this appeal for God's "grace" on the basis that he has done "grace", *hesed:* "don't wipe out my good deeds *[hesed]* that I have done for the house of my God, and for its observances" (:14). He sees *hesed* as something he has done through his works. He really doesn't get it.

It is utterly facile to consider Nehemiah as a success story. He is wrongly held up as a wonderful example of an effective leader who achieved so much. By those who surface read the first few chapters of his memoirs. But his final memoir show that he didn't see himself like this. He was a failure in terms of his life's work. He fought the wrong battles, built his walls in the wrong places, and left a legacy of division, pride and legalism that would morph into the system that crucified God's Son. He himself may well be saved. But he went so far away from his original broken heart for the excluded Jews who were suffering and were excluded from the community, as he was as a eunuch. Those who insist on reading Bible characters as all so awesome and positive are missing the way that the Biblical record presents us with problem based learning, asking us to learn from failure, and to see in the Lord alone the example of perfect humanity. Those who read the Bible like this tend to be very self congratulatory themselves, seeing their church friends and denomination as also of awesome spiritual success. This 'plastic', unrealistic view of Bible characters leads them to themselves present as plastic, goody two shoes people and churches. And this has turned off countless secular people from the church, seeing it as plastic, irrelevant, hypocritical, self congratulatory, self righteous and unrealistic.

Nehemiah seems to have been personally fearful of his own salvation, concluding by throwing himself upon God's grace in :22. He was very works oriented, and it could be that he wrote up his memoirs or autobiography in this book almost to as it were remind God of all his good works. This at best is a spiritually immature attitude. Or we could assume that he here understood that although salvation is by grace, in that we all receive the same penny of salvation no matter how hard we work; it is all the same true that the nature of our eternity will reflect our works. And therefore he asks that his works be remembered. For this principle is true; who we shall eternally be is a reflection of our works in this life. We now in this tiny fraction of eternity are

molding the nature of our eternity. Which is a truth to live by absolutely every moment.

Nehemiah asks for his good deeds not to be blotted out just as he asks for the sins of the Samaritan opposition not to be blotted out (Neh. 4:5). He clearly had a legalistic mindset, where good and bad deeds as it were balance each other out. He had not clearly grasped the idea of salvation by pure grace which was offered to sinners who accepted the new covenant which the exiles were being invited to accept.

Nehemiah 13:15 In those days I saw in Judah some men treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day in which they sold food-

We note that what was being harvested and processed on the Sabbath was the very same produce that was being paid as "the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil" (:12; confirmed in Neh. 10:33,39, and Ezra 6:9; 7:17).). Quite possibly they justified this working on the Sabbath to process these things as being because they were going to give it as their tithe or offering to the temple. And Jer. 17:25-27 suggests that in the restored Kingdom, restored as God intended, Gentiles would bring or carry their offerings into the temple on the Sabbath: "bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, meal offerings and frankincense, and bringing sacrifices of thanksgiving to the house of Yahweh". So the bearing of burdens into Jerusalem on the Sabbath was not of itself an issue- if they were indeed tithes and offerings. Quite possibly, the poorer majority of people were so strapped by the Persian taxes that this was the best they could do in order to also pay tithes to the temple. But Nehemiah appears not to care for this; he objects to this liberal interpretation of Sabbath law- for always, the principle had been in Jewish interpretation that work for God could be done on the Sabbath. And the Lord upheld that view. So we see Nehemiah operating a hyper legalistic standard on some things, whereas on others he goes to a lower standard. Such as reducing the half shekel temple tax to a third of a shekel. All done arbitrarily, when he wasn't even an active priest.

Isaiah repeatedly stated that the surrounding nation would come to Zion and share in her joy. Ex. 23:12 had commanded that the Gentile who lived with Israel must keep the Sabbath. *If* the Jews had not done *their* pleasure on the Sabbath, *then* the Messianic Kingdom could have come (Is. 58:13,14). But instead the Gentiles who lived around Jerusalem traded with the Jews on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:16 RSV), they intermarried, and Israel / Zion was *not* a city set on a hill to enlighten the surrounding world; because they preferred to be influenced by the world around them, rather than vice versa.

Is. 65:21 had prophesied that "They shall build houses and inhabit them themselves; and they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit". But very few houses were built in Zion, because the people preferred to live on their farms, in their cieled houses, outside the city (Nehemiah 7:4). They planted vineyards, but sold the fruit to others- on the Sabbath. Jer. 31:5 had prophesied of the restoration: “Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy its fruit”. They did this at the restoration, but became so obsessed with treading out the grapes that they did it even on the Sabbath, and thereby disallowed the fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies which were dependent upon them keeping the Sabbath (Is. 58:13).

Nehemiah 13:16 There also lived men of Tyre therein, who brought in fish and all

kinds of wares, and sold on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem- The prophesied abundance of fertility in the land, according to the restoration prophecies, would have removed the need or even attraction of buying delicacies from Gentiles. But they were not interested in obeying the restoration prophecies nor making them come about, and so they were prone to these temptations to trade in luxuries on the Sabbath.

The men of Tyre lived within the city. They were perhaps trading partners of other men of Tyre who brought their goods outside the city. This surely shows that Nehemiah's power was compromised. He couldn't actually throw all Gentiles out of Jerusalem as he surely wanted to. Likewise we note that in :8, Nehemiah was powerless to throw Tobiah himself out of the apartment. He just threw his stuff out. This lack of power would explain his anger outbursts and frustration.

We note that there was a "Fish gate" built in the temple walls by Nehemiah, presumably named because this was where the imported fish was regularly brought. The sea was some way away, and fish was a luxury, imported item- only for the wealthy. And yet there was a famine at the time, according to Haggai and Malachi. So we are left with the impression of the wealthy, golah Jews, supported by money from Persia, enjoying a luxurious standard of living. Whilst at the same time apparently arguing for a hyper conservative application of Mosaic law.

Nehemiah 13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, What evil thing is this that you do, and profane the Sabbath day?-

I argued on Neh. 4:14 that "the nobles and rulers" were a group that were originally with Nehemiah, but turned against him. The wealthier nobles were particularly involved because it was luxury items such as fish (:16), wine and figs (:15) which were being traded. Judah profaned the Sabbath (:18), and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their “weariness” with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it. For the house of the restored Kingdom was not to be profaned (Ez. 44:7).

Nehemiah 13:18 Didn’t your fathers do thus, and didn’t our God bring all this evil on us, and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath- Here and in :26, Nehemiah appeals to historical precedent as a reason not to repeat mistakes. This is how the Bible, which is largely history, becomes a living word to us. The breaking of the Sabbath is repeatedly listed as a major reason for the exile (Jer. 17:21-27; Ez. 20:13; 22:8,26); the land had to lay desolate 70 years to enjoy the Sabbaths she had been denied by such disobedience (Lev. 26:34,43). This emphasis is perhaps because the Sabbath taught the rejection of all trust in human works, and total faith and trust in God's saving grace. Thus the Sabbath became a unique sign between God and His people; to desecrate it was to deny His grace.

Throughout Nehemiah 9, I argued that the prayer composed by Nehemiah and the Levites for "Israel" to pray is seriously deficient. It asks for nothing, not even for forgiveness, and laments the sins of their ancestors, blaming them for the exile. Just as the exiles had done in Ez. 18. Now Nehemiah is driven in :18 and :26 to accept that the generation before him had themselves sinned just as their ancestors had done. This, perhaps, is some final progress by Nehemiah. Although it was good for his personal spiritual path, it was a realization all too late. The memoir closes with his realization that his generation were sinning just like their ancestors. But with no

recognition of that by them. Turn the page, and you are in the hypocritical Judaism of the first century that crucified the Lord.

As discussed on :11, all this is Nehemiah's narrative. His record makes no note of their response. They are silent. We get the impression they considered any reasoning with him to be pointless. This confirms my suggestion that Nehemiah railroaded the people into the covenant of Neh. 10. Therefore, as soon as he left, they broke every aspect of it. Unsurprisingly. The "nobles" had worked hard to support his wall rebuilding project. But it seems he didn't like their power. And now he ends his ministry by ranting and raving at them. As discussed on :11, he now comes to the end of his days with no allies, no friends. Just an angry older man. With no family. And leaving a legacy that led to the crucifixion of God's Son, their Messiah; after having divided God's people into "Jews" and Samaritans. When the Samaritans were upholding a community far closer to the picture given in the prophets of how God wanted the post-exilic community to look.

Nehemiah 13:19 It came to pass that, when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut, and commanded that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. I set some of my servants over the gates, so that no burden should be brought in on the Sabbath day-

The allusion is to Jer. 17:27 "If you will not listen to Me to make the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem". The terms "sabbath day" and "gates of Jerusalem" each occur seven times in Jer. 17:19-27. The point is that the gates were destroyed because of abuse of the sabbath. So they had rebuilt the walls that had been burnt exactly because of what they were now doing. They were no better than their ancestors, and were only still in the land by grace. The period of the exile had been structured in order to as it were pay back to the land the 70 sabbath years that had not been kept (2 Chron. 36:21). The exile was therefore related to sabbath breaking. To return to the land and again break the sabbath was just not learning anything at all. All their lamenting of their ancestors' sins in Neh. 9 is now shown to be fake. And Nehemiah realizes this- at the end of his life.

An indication that Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure is to be found in Mal. 1:10 RV, which laments that even if *one* man could be found to shut the temple doors properly, then God's pleasure would have returned to Israel. It was Nehemiah who shut the doors (Neh. 13:19- i.e. organized the temple services?), but presumably the implication is that he didn't continue as required.

"The people of the land" hung around the gates of the city on the Sabbath in order to do some trading of goods. By allowing this, the Jews precluded the fulfilment of Ez. 46:3: "Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the LORD in the Sabbaths and in the new moons". Is. 60:10 had prophesied that "Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you". The reality was that the walls were built from a motive not of glorifying Zion in fulfilment of prophecy, but for defence *against* the Gentiles. But the gates had to be shut to keep the Gentiles out, lest they yet further corrupted the Jews who were eager to trade with them on the Sabbath rather than convert them to the God of Israel. Instead of bringing their goods through the gates to lay before Yahweh, they brought in their goods to sell to His people in trade. But returned Judah didn't act as a nation of priests, the food the Gentiles brought in to Zion was to be sold for profit to the Jews. They failed to be a missionary nation, and rather were mere trading / economic partners on an equal

footing [cp. the church today?]. The prophecy that the gates would be always open will now only come true in the future Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 21:25,26).

Due to the Jews' abuse of the Sabbath and their refusal to believe Yahweh would be the promised wall of protecting fire to them, the gates could not be open continually, and had to be shut at night (Neh. 7:3; 13:19). And Antiochus quite soon after Nehemiah's time destroyed them [which shows how the spirituality involved in what we do, e.g. the building of the wall, is the essential thing, rather than the achievement of anything in itself]. The implication of the prophecies about Zion's open gates was that whosoever would could then come at any time to seek Yahweh. But men were potentially turned away from Him, and His Kingdom not realized... just because greedy, materialistic Jews wanted to have a few more coins in their pocket as a result of their trading on the Sabbath. And so with us, our meanness, our disabling of adverts to be placed, preaching to be done... by our selfishness, our desire to have more than we need to cover us in the case of any eventuality, all this effectively shuts up the Kingdom against men. If the Pharisees could do just this, it is possible for us to do it. The salvation of others has been delegated into our hands.

Nehemiah 13:20 So the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside of Jerusalem once or twice- The impression we get from here and :21 is that Nehemiah alone scared these people away; again we sense that there was little real spirituality amongst the returned exiles, and Nehemiah was a singular force in reforming things.

Nehemiah 13:21 Then I testified against them and said to them, Why do you stay around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time on, they didn't come on the Sabbath- "I will lay hands..." again suggests as on :20 that Nehemiah alone was threatening action. He appears to have had no significant group of spiritual supporters in the community of returned exiles, again reflecting how the great potentials of the restoration prophecies weren't fulfilled.

We may well ask, What should Nehemiah have done? I suggest he should have told them not to trade on the Sabbath, but instead of chasing them away, invited them to enter the temple and worship Yahweh. Instead he threatens them with physical violence.

Nehemiah 13:22 I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day-

The Levites were concerned with the temple and sanctuary. Here they are told to act as guards at the "gates". Clearly the wall [in which were the gates] was around the temple area, not the entire city of Jerusalem. This confirms my earlier argument that the wall Nehemiah built was around the temple area and not the entire secular city.

They were to "come" and live in Jerusalem, abandoning the lands they were farming for themselves. This was perhaps why the Levites needed reminding here to keep the Sabbath. The majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They 'went up' to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Is. 40:9, "get up to the high mountain" of Zion, Hag 1:7-9 exhorted them: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. *Go up to the mountain*, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house". Their focus was on their own

lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion. They stood related to the things of God's kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

Remember me, my God, for this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your loving grace- Nehemiah was inspired by Samson (Jud. 16:28 = Neh. 13:22,31), implying that despite his tendency to judgmentalism and self-righteousness, he did also appreciate his own desperate weakness and need for grace- perhaps because he finally recognized his self-righteousness.

Nehemiah 13:23 In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab- The Jews who returned from exile were not spiritually strong. These Gentile peoples had perhaps been moved into Palestine by the Babylonians, or came there to trade. Although I have suggested on Ezra 9:1 that the "Jews" guilty of intermarriage refer to the Jewish community who had remained in the land after the exile. Quite possibly the real concern was not at all spiritual; but rather that in line with the rulings in Num. 27,36 about Zelophehad's daughters, and the records of the practice of the Jewish community in Elephantine, a woman could inherit her husband's land. The fear was that land now in the possession of golah Jews could possibly pass over to their wife as an inheritance. The archives of Elephantine record the case of an Egyptian woman named Tamut who married a Judean man and inherited his land when he died. We recall that the "wives" in Neh. 5 complain that "we are having to pledge *our* fields, *our* vineyards, and *our* houses". Women clearly could own property. Most cultures or ethnic groups who disallowed 'marriage out' [exogamy] did so exactly because of this concern about losing land. The Jerusalem temple system had excluded all non golah Jews. It relied upon the tithes from the golah Jews, produced on their farmland. If that land passed to non golah Jews, who perhaps were already supporting the sanctuary at Gerizim, there would be serious financial impact for them. No wonder they didn't want that land going to other Jews whom they had excluded. Malachi's concern about marital matters at this time was that the golah Jews and priests were having affairs with women other than the wife of their youth (Mal. 2:10-16); not with who the issue of who you married. Again we have to remember that the prohibition on marriage to Gentiles was because this would lead to worshipping their gods. Marriage to Gentiles alone was not a problem. We think of Moses, Ruth, Rahab, the laws allowing Israelite soldiers to marry Gentile captives. There was no need to reject people from Ashdod on a racial level. Those people were specifically mentioned as becoming part of "Judah" as God defined it: "Ashkelon... Gaza... Ekron… Ashkelon will be left deserted. People of mixed race will live in Ashdod... I will humble all these proud Philistines... All the survivors will become part of my people and be like a clan in the tribe of Judah. Ekron will become part of my people, as the Jebusites did" (Zech. 9:5-7).

Nehemiah 13:24 And their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people- This would imply that the Jewish men had married women whose language they didn't understand. There is also the implication that only speaking broken Hebrew was counted as not speaking Hebrew. This language issue would have precluded them from hearing the law of Moses explained or hearing the history of Israel read. This issue of language would suggest that the "Jews" in view are those who had been several generations in the land- the Jews who had remained there after the exile, not

those who had returned from Babylon. Another possibility arises from reflecting that there was no language of Ashdod. Quite possibly, it was a matter of dialect [or perhaps, a form of Aramaic] rather than a totally different language to Hebrew. And Nehemiah is inflating this in order to prove that division was necessary.

Nehemiah 13:25 I contended with them and cursed them, and struck certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves- To have hair plucked off was if Nehemiah was trying to force them to repent; but we cannot force repentance in others, even if we try to force them to go through the external motions of it, in this case, the plucking off of hair as repentance for marriage out of the faith. Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off *his* hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; likewise the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Jeremiah too speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). The Lord would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people.

But on what basis did Nehemiah think he use physical violence? He who claimed such careful obedience to Mosaic law could only be forcing an interpretation of Dt. 25:1,2: "If there is a controversy between men, and they come to judgment and the judges judge them, then they must justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. If the wicked man is worthy to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence according to his wickedness, by number". But there is no record of judges judging and then deciding upon a judgment of a certain number of beatings. And is marriage out of the faith really in this context of "a controversy between men"? And where was the Mosaic justification for pulling out another man's hair? It seems to me that Nehemiah's lashing out, now at the end of his life and as an old man, was all because he died angry and frustrated. As do so many legalists, bitterly disappointed in the state of their community and their own failure to have reformed it. Those who read Nehemiah as a wonderful reformer are simply not taking all this into account.

Nehemiah 13:26 Didn't Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him that was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless foreign women caused even him to sin- Here and in *:*18, Nehemiah appeals to historical precedent as a reason not to repeat mistakes. This is how the Bible, which is largely history, becomes a living word to us. And this was the tragedy of the children of the intermarried Jews being unable to read or hear Hebrew; this history wouldn't be available to them. The power of women is here emphasized, as if unbelieving wives are as it were stronger than all the special love of God poured out upon a man. This stands in stark contrast to the prevailing culture, which viewed women as powerless and the man as supremely dominant in a marriage. God's continual warning about the influence of wives is actually a deconstruction of this; and the Jewish men who married Gentile women likely believed in their cultural views of women more than they did God's word. They assumed those women were powerless to influence them. God's word accords far more value and meaning to every human person, including Gentile females.

Nehemiah 13:27 Shall we then listen to you to do all this great evil, in breaking covenant with our God in marrying foreign wives?- See on :26. Perhaps the nobles

had made some official statement that marrying Gentile women was acceptable, and Nehemiah is saying that this should not be listened to. Or perhaps he was saying that their example in marrying these women was effectively a voice beckoning others to do likewise, which should be ignored. For in marital and moral matters, the voice of example is indeed very loud. This verse is in my view the strongest single argument against marriage out of the faith, because it seems to state that in this case, these men would be breaking covenant with Yahweh by marrying those not in that covenant.

Nehemiah's argument is that because these men had married those whom he considered foreigners, even though they were likely just non-golah Jews, they were teaching Israel to break covenant with Yahweh. He casts them as false teachers, who must not be listened to, because they were enticing Israel to commit a "great evil". I have previously argued that marriage to Gentiles wasn't wrong in itself; we think of Moses, Ruth, Rahab etc. The Samaritan community included Jews and Gentiles in a multi-ethnic community, worshipping Yahweh and following Torah. That in fact is the picture we have of God's intention for the restored Kingdom after the exile. What was wrong with intermarriage was the idolatry which this could lead to. No idolatry is recorded, the only accusation is that their children didn't speak the pure Hebrew of the golah Jews. I suggest that Nehemiah is framing these men as false teachers, leading Israel to commit heinous evil and to break covenant with Yahweh. According to the Mosaic law, such people should be killed by stoning (Dt. 13:6-10). Nehemiah likes to present himself as gracious in not having these men executed. But he is imputing sin to them; just as religious legalists tend to. 'You did this, which implies this, and it logically follows that you therefore believe that, and so that implies you are this... terrible person'. I saw the same in my own life's path. I disagreed with a position on baptism and fellowship... and this led to a series of other conclusions about me, concluding I was an atheist, Muslim, homosexual, Communist, sociopath etc. None of which were at all true. And I saw so many treated likewise. And I discern in all of us a tendency to demonize the one we disagree with, imputing sin- whereas we are saved by the grace of imputed righteousness. And we must reflect that in our dealings with our brethren.

Nehemiah 13:28 One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me- Eliashib and his sons were originally supportive of Nehemiah's wall rebuilding (Neh. 3:1). But here we learn that Eliashib himself was connected by marriage with Tobiah. We have presented here the apostasy of the high priestly family. They had broken covenant with God (:27) and yet were the spiritual leaders of the returned exiles. We are given the impression of deep corruption of the people. This man was chased from Nehemiah, perhaps meaning he was not allowed any place in the leadership. Yet Nehemiah's overly physically aggressive attitude to people (see on :25) leads us to imagine Nehemiah physically threatening this man so that he ran away from Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 13:29 Remember them, my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites-

In Mal. 2:8, Malachi's comment is that they had indeed broken the priestly covenant- but not because of who they let their children or grandchildren marry: "You are turned aside out of the way; you have caused many to stumble in the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi".

LXX "for their false connection with the priesthood". The son of Joiada who had married Sanballat's Gentile daughter therefore had no connection with the priesthood, in God's eyes. The "covenant of the priesthood" was "everlasting" (Num. 25:13), just as the old covenant was; but it was eternal from God's side. The fact is that the Levites broke the eternal covenant by their sins. We may query whether Nehemiah's request that their sins be "remembered" was in fact in harmony with God's way of not wishing to "remember" sin against people. And even if He does, why would Nehemiah ask Him to do so? It seems another indication of a somewhat legalistic and judgmental attitude in Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 13:30 Thus I cleansed them from all foreigners, and appointed duties for the priests and for the Levites, each one in his work- The cleansing seems to have involved making the spiritual leadership break up from their foreign wives. But the idea here may also be that despite the apostasy of the leadership, Nehemiah organized the ordinary priests and Levites to get on with the Lord's work- which is a lesson for us all when spiritual leadership goes wrong morally, or becomes dysfunctional. We note that Nehemiah thought that divorcing a Gentile wife meant being cleansed from foreigners (Neh. 13:30 "Thus I cleansed them from all foreigners"). This implies he thought interracial marriage was a defilement of itself. He wrongly assumed that the Jewish blood line was pure- when it never was. For intermarriage had been so common. No mention is made of whether these Gentiles were idolatrous or not. He considered that the Levites and priests who had done this had thus defiled the priesthood. But the law of Moses doesn't actually stipulate what should happen to a Levite who married a Gentile. All we know is that priests were prohibited from marrying prostitutes or divorced women (Lev. 21:7). In the restored temple, the sons of Zadok were to marry Israelites: "Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her who is divorced; but they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel" (Ez. 44:22). But Nehemiah applies this to all Priests and Levites, not just Zadokites, and simply ignores the fact that in no way had the Jews rebuilt the temple according to the scenario in Ezekiel 40-48. He was twisting scripture, seeking to extract a principle from a highly specific ruling. He wrongly assumed that the Jewish blood line was pure- when it never was. For intermarriage had been so common. The Jews came to teach that intermarriage was wrong because the blood line to Messiah must be kept pure. Quite ignoring all the previous Gentile intermarriage in the Jewish gene pool. The Lord's genealogy includes Gentiles and whores... how wrong they were.

Nehemiah 13:31 And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the first fruits- It was this humble service, which was supposed to be the work of the Nethinim, which nobody much wanted to do. Ezra had had huge problems getting any Levites to come to Jerusalem to do such menial work. Nehemiah had already tried to sort out who would gather firewood in Neh. 10:34; but clearly it remained an abiding problem. As it is to this day; for there are very few real 'workers' amongst the people of God.

Remember me, my God, for good- This repeated and even desperate request to be remembered for good in the last day was perhaps what influenced the penitent thief to ask the same of the dying Lord Jesus. Nehemiah is the last book of the Old Testament. In my judgment, Nehemiah has set up the situation that came to full climax at the Lord's time- an Israel dominated by a legalistic elite who were misteaching God's law, spiritually abusing the mass of the people, and despising the Samaritans. That legalism, like all legalism, came to full term in the crucifixion of God's Son. This is

not to say that Nehemiah will not be saved, nor that no legalist can be saved. For we all have elements of legalism. But this is where legalism leads in its full term. The Jews of the Lord's day argued that "This people who know not the law are cursed"- because they thought Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah and Saviour. This is how far wrong Bible students can go... and it is a sober lesson.

On Neh. 7:7 I commented that I would go so far as to say that I find it disappointing that Nehemiah would include the records of the returnees along with his definition of them as "all Israel", purposefully excluding the Jews in the land already, and those from the ten tribes. At least we would hope for some later statement of regret about how he had gone along with this redefinition of "Israel" to the exclusion of those whose exclusion he earlier fought against. But there is no regret expressed, indeed we could assume that at the end of his days he had come around to support their exclusion. He concludes by asking God to remember his good works, and save him eternally on that basis. And yet his final words in Neh. 13 don't betray much certain hope of the Kingdom. There is no positive mention of him in later scripture. Possibly he ended his days as many legalists do, clinging on to their exclusive positions and somehow hoping that will maybe save them before God at the last day. Not the best ending of a life lived as the recipient of God's grace...

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: ESTHER

ESTHER

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

ESTHER CHAPTER 1

Esther 1:1 Now it happened in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus who reigned from India even to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces)-

Persia was divided into 20 satrapies, so we have here the theme of exaggeration which is common in Esther. There are still 127 provinces in Esther 8:9 some years later, when historical records claim that Persia lost some of those provinces in those years. Likewise a banquet could hardly last for 184 days, six months, continually attended by so many local leaders. Historically it would seem that at this time he was fighting hard against the Greeks, Egyptians and others, and losing territory- so a celebration of his power was inappropriate, and surely it didn't last six months. Haman's offer of 10,000 talents of silver if the king lets him kill the Jews is unreal; as is his building a massive 50 cubit high gallows on which to hang Mordecai. I suggest we are being given an insight into how Middle Eastern peoples spoke in grossly exaggerated terms. Or we could see this as the Divinely inspired record being satirical, using caricature to poke fun at the apparent opulence of the kingdoms of this world. Just as the opulence of this world makes exaggerated claims. The same effect is produced by the irony of Haman assuming the king wants to honour him, and having to parade Mordecai in glory; and being hung on the gallows he had built to hang Mordecai on. Through all this, God worked and achieved real and actual results. That's the lesson.

The LXX adds at this point: "In the second year of the reign of Artaxerxes the great king, on the first day of Nisan, Mardochaeus the son of Jarius, the son of Semeias, the son of Cisaus, of the tribe of Benjamine, a Jew dwelling in the city Susa, a great man, serving in the king's palace, saw a vision. Now he was of the captivity which Nabuchodonosor king of Babylon had carried captive from Jerusalem, with Jachonias the king of Judea. And this was his dream: Behold, voices and a noise, thunders and earthquake, tumult upon the earth. And, behold, two great serpents came forth, both ready for conflict, and there came from them a great voice, and by their voice every nation was prepared for battle, even to fight against the nation of the just. And, behold, a day of darkness and blackness, tribulation and anguish, affection and tumult upon the earth. And all the righteous nation was troubled, fearing their own afflictions; and they prepared to die, and cried to God: and from their cry there came as it were a great river from a little fountain, even much water. And light and the sun arose, and the lowly were exalted, and devoured the honorable. And Mardochaeus

who had seen this vision and what God desired to do, having awoke, kept it in his heart, and desired by all means to interpret it, even till night. And Mardochaeus rested quiet in the palace with Gabatha and Tharrha the king's two chamberlains, eunuchs who guarded the palace. And he heard their reasoning and searched out their plans, and learnt that they were preparing to lay hands on king Artaxerxes: and he informed the king concerning them. And the king examined the two chamberlains, and they confessed, and were executed. And the king wrote these things for a memorial: also Mardochaeus wrote concerning these matters".

Esther 1:2 that in those days, when the King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom which was in Shushan the palace- The impression is given that he had recently ascended the throne and was seeking to demonstrate his power and authority. "Shushan" is the Hebrew word for "lily", which was iconicly associated with the Jerusalem temple (s.w. 1 Kings 7:19,22,26; 2 Chron. 4:5). This sets the scene for the impression discussed on :7 that we have here a fake, imitation kingdom and temple of Yahweh.

Esther 1:3 in the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all his princes and his servants; the powerful ones of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him- The impression is given of a man with huge power "before him". And this powerful man is set to be manipulated by the invisible hand of God working through a nervous, not very spiritually strong Jewish refugee teenager.

Esther 1:4 He displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even one hundred and eighty days- This was the kind of thing Hezekiah did after his deliverance, giving all glory to himself rather than Yahweh and His Kingdom. Riches, glory, honour, majesty and Kingdom are words and ideas all associated with Yahweh's Kingdom, which is the ultimate Kingdom; and which will be displayed eternally and not for 180 days. Again this sets the scene for the impression discussed on :7 that we have here a fake, imitation kingdom of Yahweh; just as Rabshakeh described the kingdom of Assyria in identical language to the description of Yahweh's Kingdom, where Jews would dwell with confidence under their own vine and fig tree. The kingdoms of the world continue to present themselves to us as God's Kingdom, enjoyable now if we submit to them. It seems all the more wrong for Mordecai to want Esther married to such a man and queen of such a blasphemous kingdom. And yet from his initial weakness, that man was made strong and even a Saviour of God's people. The book of Esther continually pokes fun at Ahasuerus. For it seems [depending upon which Persian king he is identified with] this feast either immediately preceded or followed his loss of significant battles and territory to the Greeks.

Esther 1:5 When those days were fulfilled, the king made a seven day feast for all the people who were present in Shushan the palace, both great and small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace- LXX adds in various different details: "Then, I say, the days of the marriage feast were completed, the king made a banquet to the nations who were present in the city six days, in the court of the king's house". This would imply that his queen was a new queen; and that he was kindly disposed towards foreigners. See on :11.

We enquire what is the connection with the other mention of the palace garden in Esther (Esther 1:5; 7:7). It was in the palace garden that Vashti had shamed the king at the banquet; and after Haman's plot is revealed, he goes alone to the same place,

again after drinking wine and after a private banquet, presumably with the garden strangely empty now. Again he has been shamed and made to look foolish, this time by Haman. Considering the similarities, he would surely have reflected that now he has a good woman. And this would have made him yet more open to Esther's subsequent requests regarding her people.

Esther 1:6 There were hangings of white, green and blue material, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars. The couches were of gold and silver, on a pavement of red, white, yellow and black marble- The LXX brings out the similarities with the tabernacle and the pavement of emerald upon which Yahweh was manifest to Moses in Ex. 24:10 and which becomes the picture of the Heavenly throne room in Rev. 4:3: "On a pavement of emerald stone, and of pearl, and of Parian stone, and open-worked coverings variously flowered, having roses worked round about". The motif of flowers was likewise found in some of the tabernacle furnishings and equipment (Ex. 25:31 etc.). See on :7 for the significance of all this.

Esther 1:7 They gave them ample drinks in golden vessels of various kinds, including the wine of the kingdom, according to the bounty of the king-

The golden vessels beg for identification with those used by Belteshazzar. Surely the hint is that they were the temple vessels taken from Yahweh's temple. Only some of them were returned under Cyrus as by the time of Darius in Ezra 6:5 there were still some more to be returned. This yet further highlights the glaring spiritual problem presented by a Jew wanting his daughter married to such a blasphemer. And it shows Esther's weakness in being at least willing to go along with the idea, rather than violently objecting as Vashti had done. The story of Vashti is surely included in order to highlight Esther's weakness in not objecting to being part of such immorality.

The focus is upon the alcohol solely, although such Persian feasts were famed for their food. Herodotus claims Ahasuerus was an alcoholic; he loses Vashti as a result of his own shameful alcoholic behaviour, and sits down to drink with Haman after signing the command for a pogrom of all the Jews, including his loyal servant Mordecai and his own wife. These golden cups may well have been those looted from the temple and used by Belshazzar. For Cyrus to order them sent back to Jerusalem would be a fair statement of repentance by him. Again the impression is given as in :6 that this was a fake tabernacle and temple; see on :2,4,8,9,10,14. And yet even within that, the glory of God was being worked out by the God who is invisible in Esther, "God" never being mentioned in the Hebrew text. This was to teach that God was not inactive with the Jews in exile, although He was not visible as He had been in the time of the tabernacle and temple. And that is a lesson for us today.

Esther 1:8 In accordance with the law- This undefined reference to "the law" may be another hint as in :6,7 that we are being given here a picture of a fake tabernacle / temple system.

The drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had instructed all the officials of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure- The LXX changes the sense: "And this banquet was not according to the appointed law; but so the king would have it". This was to nudge him towards accepting that his law could be broken or ammended, as it was to be later with the destruction of the Jews. But the AV sums up the apparent tension between drinking according to a law, but not needing to obey that law: "the drinking was according to the law; none did compel".

"None did compel" could as well be translated "There was no restraint". As if the king's law allowed unrestrained drinking. The next sentence clarifies and confirms this: "for so the king had instructed all the officials of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure". The "law" or instruction was that each man could do as he wished with alcohol. It was a shambles, as the king's own drunken behaviour with his wife exemplified.

Esther 1:9 Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus- "The royal house" is literally "the house of the kingdom", the term used for the temple in 2 Chron. 2:1,12. This extends the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have here a fake, imitation temple of Yahweh. Vashti presents as a proto feminist; holding a women's meeting, and then refusing to obey her husband and publically shaming him. This possibly led the king to now desire a woman whom he perceived as totally submissive, unlike Vashti. Esther, we will suggest on Esther 2:3, was a young woman [possibly a teenager] who had been railroaded and used by Mordecai and who appears not at all confident in herself- unlike Vashti. And yet this would have psychologically made the king highly sensitive to her requests for anything- for we are left to imagine she as the cowed, submissive young woman never asked for anything. But when she did ask for something- for the salvation of the Jews- the king was psychologically likely to respond to her. All this was set up by God. According to Jewish tradition, Vashti was the daughter of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian ruler. The marriage was therefore political and lacked love, whereas Ahasuerus is said to have loved Esther. So he was being set up by God's higher hand to be influenced by her request for the Jews' salvation.

Although "God" is never mentioned in Esther and there are no dramatic miracles or Divine interventions, just as there may not be in our lives- the record clearly leaves us marvelling at how active God in fact is, for the salvation of His people. And that is the abiding relevance of the Esther story for us today. Indeed one root meaning of the Hebrew word "Esther", from the root STR, is 'hidden / concealed'. The Septuagint version of Esther contains various additions and mentions of "God" specifically; it seems to me that these additions were added to try to make the book more somehow spiritual. Yet these attempts fail to perceive the *Deus ex machina*, the invisible hand of God.

Of the 167 verses in the book of Esther, around 120 mention "the king". He in fact is the largest character in the story. The book is all about this hugely powerful man being in fact powerless in the hands of Divine providence. This explains the juxtaposition of Vashti's disobedience (his powerlessness over her) with the description of his power over all the known world. The apparently huge and powerful issues and people in our lives can likewise be removed and controlled by God's hand, quite without visible miracles.

Esther 1:10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcass, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king- This may continue the theme of a fake imitation of the heavenly throne room, which has seven spirits (Angels?) standing before the throne of God. The names of at least four of these eunuchs are very similar to the names of the advisor princes in :14. They may well be the same people.

Esther 1:11 To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was beautiful- The LXX confirms the impression of :5 LXX that Vashti was only now becoming queen: "to enthrone her, and crown her with the diadem". But we can also understand that he asked her to appear wearing only the royal crown- and this display her beauty. Remember that women in those times appeared veiled and heavily covered whenever in the presence of other men, thus screening their beauty. A command to show her beauty would therefore have involved the removal of such clothing.

Esther 1:12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by the eunuchs. Therefore the king was very angry, and his anger burned in him- Seeing the king was drunk and he had this idea whilst he was drunk (:10), the intention was surely to have her strip or dance naked.

Esther 1:13 Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times, (for it was the king's custom to consult those who knew law and judgement- Her refusal probably broke no law; see on :15; Esther 3:5. Here the king finds himself trapped by his own laws; he obviously wanted to have her slain, but he could find no law which prescribed death. The only law relevant was the law which said the queen could be killed if she came to the king without an invitation. There was apparently no law regarding what would happen if she refused an invitation. God wanted to save that drunk man, with his hurt pride. And so He was nudging him to realize that his own laws were going to have to be broken if he really wanted to have his way; which meant that he was not in fact divine. For divine beings were imagined to be unchanging, and to never change their laws. This was going to be developed when later he wishes to change his law to destroy the Jews. God likewise works with us.

Esther 1:14 and those next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom)- The idea of some in the throne room who see the king's face is another of the suggestions listed on :7 which suggest we have here an imitation of the Heavenly throne room. These seven had right of free access to the king. Even his queen could not approach him unless invited by him. Why this emphasis on all these names? Quite possibly it is satirical; to show that the greatest wisdom of man at this time was all being used by God's invisible hand. They knew the times, law and judgment (:13), but such secular knowledge was overridden by God's hand.

Esther 1:15 What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to law, because she has not done the bidding of the King Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?- As explained on :13, "according to law" she couldn't be punished; for there was likely no law governing such a refusal.

Esther 1:16 Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen has not done wrong to only the king, but also to all the princes, and to all the people who are in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus- If there was a law prescribing death in this case, it would have been cited. But there was none. See on :13. And so Memucan comforts the king that indeed they considered she had "done wrong" and labours the implications of what she had done.

Esther 1:17 For this deed of the queen will become known to all women, causing them to show contempt for their husbands when it is reported, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she didn't come'- The male assumption of female obedience was such that there was no law prescribing what should be done if a queen refused to come to a king's party. This was God beginning to nudge the king towards obedience and perception of His principles, and to resign his claims to be divine. We would likely not have bothered even trying to work with such a drunken megalomaniac. We would write him off as too hard a case. But God works so gently and persistently with all kinds of people, to lead them to repentance.

Esther 1:18 Today, the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's deed will likewise tell all the king's princes. This will cause much contempt and wrath- The execution of Vashti would have put an end to such fears. And the king surely wanted to do this; but he was trapped by his own legal system, just as he was to be later on when he makes the law to kill the Jews. He was going to end up killing his queen whom he loved, which he had earlier wanted to do to his former queen but couldn't. This paradox was to try to teach him the folly of his own laws and respect of them. It was to help him realize he was not divine, and God's invisible grace was more powerful than any legal system.

Esther 1:19 If it please the king, let a royal commandment go from him and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it cannot be altered, that Vashti may never again come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate to another who is better than she- Kingship and power were thought to be expressed by making laws and not changing them. The God of Israel however does change His position on things, alters His purpose in accordance with human response (Jer. 18:8-10), and annulled His own eternal law. He does so unashamedly, in reflection of His sensitivity. The LXX has "and let him not alter it". The king could change his own laws but it would involve a loss of face and an admission he was not divine; for they thought that God cannot change in any way. Hence the refusal of Darius to change his law about Daniel was not because he was unable to, but because he lacked humility.

"Better than she" alludes to the meaning of 'Vashti', 'the best'.

Esther 1:20 When the king's decree which he shall make is published throughout all his kingdom (for it is great), all the wives will give their husbands honour, both great and small- The reminder of the greatness of the kingdom was an appeal to his vanity. Their solution was actually very weak. It amounted to: 'If a woman refuses to dance naked before her husband's friends, then he can divorce her and take another wife'. This was fairly mild for the Persians; the death penalty wasn't in view. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7). Acrostics work both with the first letters of words forming the YHWH Name, or with the last letters of the words likewise. Thus the first letters of the words in the sentence "David Understands Nothing Concerning Andy Norris" spells 'Duncan'. Duncan is in fact stamped upon an apparently random statement about David and Andy Norris. Likewise 'Duncan' is stamped on the line "When a diabetic can menu read", taking the last letters of each

word backwards. But when we look at those places where this is done in the Hebrew text of Esther, there seems no particular purpose for the Yahweh Name being alluded to there. And that is the point- in the apparently Godless narrative of human life, God's Name, God, is stamped at apparently random points. To remind us that He is very much there, and is not a God afar off. We note that when YHWH is spelt forwards, with the first letters of words forming the YHWH Name, the speaker is an Jew; and when it is spelt with the last letters of the words, the speaker is a Gentile. These things were clearly intentional and designed. But this hiding of God in the text reflects how God was hiding His face from His people because of their sins and refusal to return to Him, and the association with idolatry which Mordecai and Esther demonstrated by their names and Esther's hiding of her Jewish religion. Dt. 31:18 comes to mind: "On that day I will surely hide my face on account of all the evil they have done by turning to other gods".

Esther 1:21 This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan- Again the king is being nudged towards realizing that he is not sovereign and all wise and powerful, as he was addressed. He did the word of an adviser, who came up with a plan he didn't conceive; and the lesson was repeated to him in Esther 2:4. He was being prepared to agree to do the words of Esther and Mordecai later. And God likewise works with people today, using one situation or experience to prepare them for another.

Esther 1:22 for he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language, that every man should rule his own house, and that it should be published in the language of each people- This idea is alluded to in 1 Tim. 3:5, where a brother is supposed to "rule his own house" spiritually. And yet in the same letter (1 Tim. 5:14) a woman is supposed to rule the household (Gk.); perhaps subverting the expectation of male rulership in practical matters, and yet saying in 1 Tim. 3:5 that the cultural expectation that a man should "rule the household" be reinterpreted in spiritual terms.

ESTHER CHAPTER 2

Esther 2:1 After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was pacified, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what was decreed against her- The LXX reverses this: "he no more mentioned Astin, bearing in mind what she had said, and how he had condemned her". This is perhaps painting a picture of the king as generally living for the moment and forgetting the past and its implications. It would explain why he agrees to Haman's request in an irresponsible manner, forgetting that his servant Mordecai was a Jew. And it fits with his forgetting of how Mordecai had saved him from assassination, and he had forgotten to reward him.

Esther 2:2 Then the king's servants who served him said, Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king- As explained on :1, he had forgotten the whole issue with Vashti, perhaps because he was drunk for many days whilst it was all going on (Esther 1:10). He likely had many wives and concubines and may literally have forgotten about the whole business. He is now as it were reminded by his servants of his publicized intention to replace Vashti, as if he needed to get on with it. The long period of time in the program for finding a replacement for her (:12), five years after Vashti was fired (:16), would suggest that he had many wives and was not seeking as

it were a singular wife; it was just one of his wives who was being replaced by another.

Esther 2:3 Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the beautiful young virgins to the citadel of Susa, to the women's house, to the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, keeper of the women. Let cosmetics be given them- This house of the women and "keeper of the women" would suggest that Vashti was far from his only wife / queen and he had a special harem of women. The prospect of being chosen was hardly appealing, surely. There was at least a four year gap between Vashti being demoted [or executed] and the new queen being chosen (Esther 1:3 cp. 2:16). It seems for much of this time, the king was away fighting Greece. The number of nights he spent in Susa was perhaps no more than say 800. And did he have sex every night? We could guess that around 500 girls were used. If they weren't chosen after their one night with the king, they entered the house of the concubines, not allowed to ever marry again, probably never having children of their own, and condemned to living together with a few hundred other loser women who had likewise failed to impress. Both Artaxerxes and Darius III are said to have had such harems of 360 concubines. The job of Hegai was to pander to the king's sexual preferences. He would have been little more than a pimp for the king. And the excessively proud king was a man who when drunk asked his wife to strip for the guests [for women were always veiled in public, and so to display her beauty would have meant removing her modest public clothing]. His princes / advisors all had to become eunuchs, i.e. he had had them castrated (see on Esther 1:10). And he had a law that if his wife came to see him uninvited, he might have her beheaded. Esther would be secluded from the outside world, to the extent that she didn't even know of Haman's decree and had to communicate with Mordecai through Hatach her servant. Being Queen of Persia was an awful life for the woman. It would be every good father's worst nightmare for his daughter to be sucked into such a situation with such a man, let alone in all the ritzy idolatrous pomp of a Gentile court- which was perhaps abusing Yahweh's temple vessels in their orgies. Clearly the king was an alcoholic (see on Esther 1:7); not a great choice for a son in law. He had major anger issues; Herodotus gives many examples, like him commanding his soldiers to whip the sea because a storm had destroyed a bridge. And yet Mordecai we can assume pushes Esther forward, knowing all this. For virgins were kept at home and all discussion about their marriage was strictly through the father. We are mistaken to imagine pretty young women serving behind shop counters or going around in life displaying their beauty and being noticed. That's not how it was; virgins were kept veiled and at home. This wasn't life on a council estate. The appeal for candidates to be Queen would have been responded to by fathers, not the girls. Mordecai lived in Shushan and the girls were brought to Shushan- and it seems we are meant to understand that he pushed her forward into the contest, even though the candidates were specifically not to be from Shushan. There were 30 - 50 million people in the Persian empire, and candidates were being sought for the role of queen, not simply a sex object. So the idea of beauty contests being held throughout the empire is mythical. Men in power put their daughters forward. And this was set up as a sex show, not a beauty pageant. She only had at best a 1:500 chance of being chosen. Quite possibly she was given the name "Esther" after becoming queen, a form of Astarte, goddess of sex. She was trained for her one night chance by Hegai, sexual advisor to the candidates. The whole thing is of the flesh and not spiritual. And Mordecai paces outside the palace so anxious Esther win the contest. There were massive chances of her being left a

miserable, rejected, childless, kept woman, losing her freedom in the house of the concubines. Mordecai presents as extremely weak in wanting to risk Esther for this. He hardly presents as loving her. He should surely have known anyway that marriage to a Gentile pagan and sex outside of marriage was sinful, let alone sex of this nature- a man sleeping with hundreds of women, the vast majority of whom he knew he wouldn't marry. And yet through this great act of weakness, coupled with his stubborn cultural insistence on displaying his traditional Judaism by not bowing to Haman, God brought about His peoples' salvation, through such weak vessels. And this is the abiding wonder of it all. The weak Mordecai is presented in Esther 9,10 as the equivalent of a Joseph or Daniel, exalted to greatness amongst the Gentiles; from which position he brought blessing to God's people. And yet he and Esther had refused the calls to return to the land under Cyrus, and instead had remained in the pagan pomp of Persia. But God worked through even that, and the story was to spiritually encourage the many other Jews who were in Mordecai and Esther's position.

Esther 2:4 and let the maiden who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. The thing pleased the king, and he did so- Again the king is being nudged towards realizing that he is not sovereign and all wise and powerful, as he was addressed. He did the word of an adviser, who came up with a plan he didn't conceive; and this is a repeat of the lesson given to him in Esther 1:21 when again he is obedient to the words of others. He was being prepared to agree to do the words of Esther and Mordecai later. And God likewise works with people today, using one situation or experience to prepare them for another.

Esther 2:5 There was a certain Jew in the citadel of Susa, whose name was Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish a Benjamite- Mordecai is a take on 'Marduk', whose temple had been rebuilt by Cyrus. Instead of responding to the decree of Cyrus for Jews to return home, Mordecai had instead gone with the flow of assimilating to Cyrus' religion. So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. We know from Ez. 8, Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of ridiculing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon. Mordecai was a descendant of the family of Saul; he isn't presented as a particularly spiritual man to start with. The fact he worked in the palace also indicates that, seeing he would have to go along with much paganism to do his job. If the LXX is correct, he sacrificed his own intended wife because he loved the idea of having power and prestige more than he did his wife. Again, not a very spiritual impression.

The Biblical character Shimei was the one who cursed David and supported his overthrow. The Shimei mentioned here was either the same person, or someone named in his honour. Immediately we don't get a positive spiritual impression of Mordecai's ancestry- nor Esther's, who was related to the same line. "Kish" likewise suggests Saul's father. Haman was an Agagite, and Saul had had war and victory

against the Agagites. So again we see how from the get go, the higher hand of God was involved, repeating history.

Esther 2:6 who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away- Note the triple repetition of "carried away". This is to set up the similarity but spiritual contrast with Daniel who is described in the same way. "Who had been carried away" grammatically has a relative pronoun that should refer to Mordecai, not Kish. If Mordecai was one of the captives carried away, this means he was either a very old man, or the "Ahasuerus" of the story is a name for one of the early kings of Persia during the exile. We note that those taken captive with Jeconiah were the ruling classes (2 Kings 24:15). Possibly the reference of "Who had been carried away" is to Kish, making him a fourth generation exile. But the logical reference is to Mordecai himself. At this time, he is established in the kingdom, and the exiled Jews are wealthy. So we are now some way into the exile. If he had been carried away captive, this would make him an old man, and his intention to raise the virgin Esther as his wife (:7 LXX) presents him as somewhat perverted. And yet it was this dysfunctional family that God chose to use to save His people. Not an Ezra or Nehemiah, but a man like Mordecai. And it is he who out of left field, in spiritual terms, is so highly exalted. Esther 2:5 introduces him as "a man, a Judean" ('ish Yehudi). This very phrase is found in Zech. 8:23: "In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a man, a Judean ('ish Yehudi), saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'". And that happened in that "many peoples (nations) from the land declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them" (Esther 8:17).

Esther 2:7 He brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother- "Myrtle" ['Hadassah'] is a plant native to Persia and not Palestine, suggesting her assimilation; and the group of myrtle trees in Zech. 1:8,10,11 appears to represent Persia. She doesn't have a name that references Yahweh or in fact anything directly spiritual. The myrtle was associated by the prophets with Judah's return from exile (Is. 41:19,20; 55:13; Zech. 1:8-11; Neh. 8:15). The fact Esther didn't return, and her life's work didn't result in her people returning but rather remaining in exile... rather suggests that she failed to live up to her potential. Esther, "Star", is another reference to Marduk (see on :5); or "Esther" could be a form of 'Ishtar', goddess of sex, and the title given to the woman who won the sex contest. "Uncle's daughter" is an interpretation; the idea is, a relative. Some versions give "cousin", and Marduk [=Mordecai] and Ishtar [= Esther] were cousins. Yet "Esther", Ishtar / Astarte, the queen of sex, was I suggest the title given to Hadassah when she won the sex context to become the queen. If indeed she was Mordecai's cousin, we again see the invisible hand of God at work. Especially considering that she apparently hid from the king her relationship to Mordecai. She is hardly presented as a spiritually minded young woman, but as a Jewess who had totally assimilated into Persia.

The maiden was fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter-

"Daughter" is 'bat' and "house" is 'bet'. This confusion and unclarity in the Hebrew led the LXX to assume 'bet', and that this means he took her with the intention to be his wife. LXX "And he had a foster child, daughter of Aminadab his father's brother, and her name was Esther; and when her parents were dead, he

brought her up for a wife for himself". This would be rather similar to how Uriah raised Bathsheba (according to Nathan's parable of the man with the lamb) to become his wife, and she did so. Seeing Mordecai hadn't yet married Esther, she would have been very young, perhaps still in her mid teens. That God should use such a youngster is typical of how He uses the meek and weak for His great purposes. And quite possibly if Mordecai had been taken into exile, he was now very old. "Took her" usually refers to a man taking a wife. It has been claimed that "'Hadassah' is the Aramaized form of Akkadian *hadashshatu*, 'bride', a common epithet of Ishtar". In this case, naming the orphan "bride" spoke of what Mordecai intended doing with her. Raising an orphan girl in order to marry her... doesn't speak well of him really. Quite possibly he is presented as a nonce. And yet the book of Esther has more to say about Mordecai than about Esther, and concludes speaking extensively of his glory- whilst Esther isn't mentioned. He certainly came a very long way spiritually- and very quickly. We notice twice that Esther was "taken"- by Mordecai, as his daughter; and into the harem (Esther 2:7,8). Esther's passivity will be changed by the hand of providence into her being a proactive worker on her own initiative for the salvation of God's people.

Esther 2:8 So it happened that when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together to the citadel of Susa, to the custody of Hegai, Esther was taken into the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women- Hegai and his college of women was not simply a safe place for the women to stay. It was effectively a college for sex workers. And Esther willingly entered it, on Mordecai's arrangement. The whole intention was to produce women who could fulfil the king's various desires.

Esther 2:9 The maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness from him. He quickly gave her cosmetics and her portions of food- "Pleased him" is literally, found grace in his eyes- the same language used of Joseph finding grace before Potiphar (Gen. 39:4). And there are many such similarities. But in many ways the similarities break down, because Esther wasn't Joseph. Thus Pharaoh gave his signet ring to Joseph, but in the Esther story, the king gives it to Haman (Gen. 41:42; Esther 3:10). She is contrasted with young Daniel, who in this situation refused to eat such food. She is presented as spiritually weak.

And the seven choice maidens who were to be given her out of the king's house. He moved her and her maidens to the best place in the women's house- These maidens were likely to be used in the sex show she was being trained to put on. Hegai clearly had a big influence upon who was finally accepted. He knew the king's taste in women as it was his job to pander to it and arrange fulfilment for him. His instinctive liking of Esther amongst the many competitors was therefore providentially arranged.

Esther 2:10 Esther had not made known her people nor her relatives, because Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make it known- God's people were intended to be a light to the Gentile world (Ex. 19:6). And marriage to Gentiles and sex outside of marriage was wrong according to God's law. This was surely an indication of spiritual weakness; and yet God worked through it, just as He may use marriage *out of* the faith to bring someone *to* the faith. She stands in stark contrast to Daniel and his friends who risked death for the sake of keeping the Jewish law (Dan. 1:8-16; 6:8-10), and yet similar to Jonah who in his weakness did not tell / make

know his people to the sailors (Jonah 1:8 s.w.)- and at that point, he was representative of a spiritually weak Judah in exile.

Esther 2:11 Mordecai walked every day in front of the court of the women's house, to find out how Esther was doing, and what would become of her- He paced up and down in agitation. Mordecai really wanted his plan to succeed, but for the wrong reasons. But God chose to work through it, rather than turn away from a poorly motivated man and his weak daughter.

Esther 2:12 Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after her purification for twelve months (for so were the days of their purification accomplished, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet fragrances and with preparations for beautifying women)- The ultimate opulence of the court scene in chapter 1 is matched by the king sleeping with hundreds of virgins, who had each been preparing for their night with him for a whole year. Herodotus claimed that a Persian king could only marry a queen from one of the seven Persian royal families; that was typical of most monarchs in whatever empire or nation. And so this appeal for the most sexual women to be gathered to him to marry was a departure from tradition. Driven by his extreme hedonism. The fragrances mentioned here are those already noted in the Bible for their use in a specifically sexual and immoral context (Prov. 7:17; Song 1:13; 5:5,13), and this obviously raises questions as to whether Esther was morally right to go along with this. The long period of time in the program for finding a replacement for her (:2) was possibly because he was away fighting the Greeks; but it might also suggest that he had many wives and was not seeking as it were a singular wife; it was just one of his wives who was being replaced by another. 'Going in to the king' surely is the familiar euphemism for the sexual act. To be willing to do this with a Gentile outside of marriage is surely an indication of spiritual weakness.

Esther 2:13 The young woman then came to the king like this: whatever she desired was given her to go with her out of the women's house to the king's house- This doesn't just refer to whatever cosmetics or clothing she desired. She had been given seven female assistants. The idea was that she would conceive and put on a sex show for the king; for the idea was that she was to do what Vashti had refused to do. But see on :15. The Gentile Vashti thereby appears as more moral and ethical than the Jewish Esther, as we find so often in Biblical history.

Esther 2:14 In the evening she went, and on the next day she returned into the second women's house, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who kept the concubines. She came in to the king no more, unless the king delighted in her, and she was called by name- That Esther 'went in' to the king in the evening and then returned in the morning, having spent the night with the king, to the separate dwelling, of women with whom the king had slept and who were no longer virgins, indicates clearly enough that she slept with him. She knew this was to be the procedure and that statistically he was unlikely to 'marry' her seeing there were many such competitors. To participate in this, let alone with the enthusiasm for it which Mordecai showed, was clearly sinful and a betrayal of all the moral principles Israel were supposed to be committed to. If Vashti had refused to be sexually immoral on pain of death, Esther surely could have done likewise.

Esther 2:15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, came to go in to the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the keeper of the women, advised. Esther obtained favour in the sight of all those who looked at her- I suggested on :13 that she had been given the seven other young women in order to prepare a sex show for the king. But it could appear that she didn't take them with her, and only used the cosmetics and clothing provided. Perhaps it was this unusual departure from the norm which focused the king's attention singularly upon her. So perhaps she too was being taught that her even slight attention to some level of morality was being blessed. However we notice her obedience to Hegai, her trainer and handler. This totally contrasts with Daniel and his friends, whose example was surely known to Esther. They too had a handler and trainer, another eunuch; but they refused what they were given. She contrasts weakly and poorly with Daniel.

Esther 2:16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign- "The royal house" is literally "the house of the kingdom", the term used for the temple in 2 Chron. 2:1,12. This extends the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have here a fake, imitation temple of Yahweh. This was about five years after the Vashti incident; see on :2.

Esther 2:17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she obtained favour and kindness in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown on her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti- This was also from God; He worked on the tastes and perceptions of the king so that he favoured Esther. For all such attraction is subjective and deeply personal. But God worked through this. For four years, the king had been sleeping with beautiful virgins, trained by the pimp Hegai to sexually gratify him. He therefore hardly knew what it was to truly "love" a woman. We can read this as meaning that he didn't truly love her. Or, we see something abnormal here- something from the God who is never specifically mentioned. A man who had had all this sexual experience for the previous four years... actually loved one woman, Esther. And God was going to work through that, to the salvation of His people.

Esther 2:18 Then the king made a great feast for all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces, and gave gifts according to the king's bounty- "Holiday" is literally "release"- from taxation, or from military service, or from both, for a specified period. The invisible hand of God was working to make Esther popular with the Persian people.

Esther 2:19 When the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate- It would seem that the gathering of virgins to the king for him to choose a queen was a regular occurrence. The houses for the girls were already built and the system of preparing them was already organized. But it could be that there was an attempt to replace Esther with the puppet of some other group. Esther had won the conquest because (under God's hand) the king preferred her. But there were likely other men and interest groups like Mordecai who wanted their daughters to be chosen. The repetition of Mordecai being "In the king's gate" in :21 would suggest that it was because of his position there that he uncovered the assassination

plot. And this would have solidified his position, when perhaps it was under threat from other pretenders who were aware that Esther was his daughter, even though the king seems unaware of it. Or we could read this as his appointment to sit in the king's gate; and the implication might be that Esther was somehow behind it. The second gathering of the virgins was perhaps to witness Esther's coronation. They would all have been seething with jealousy and frustration.

Esther 2:20 Esther had not yet made known her relatives nor her people, as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai, like she did when she was brought up by him- LXX "and Esther changed not her manner of life" may suggest she did not have any spiritual transformation whilst in the palace. She was still a spiritually weak young woman who rose up to the situation. She presents as always obedient- and likewise obedient to whatever Hegai told her to wear and what sex to do, the night she went in to the king. It is only the need of her people that was the call for her to individuate, and suddenly initiate a plan to save her people. And we see such growth, not only spiritually but also of persons, as they mature under the guidance of God's invisible hand.

It is observable that many believers start their walk with the Lord by keeping their commitment to Him somewhat secret. Yet we are a city set on a hill, a candle lit by the Lord to give light to others. Salvation requires us to "declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord'" (Rom. 10:9). There must be public confession. And so the Lord often works through providence to create situations where a believer has to 'come out'. Esther is a classic case of this, and we see it in the spiritual paths of many Muslim background believers. Mordecai quite possibly justified his command to Esther by reflecting that Moses had likewise concealed his Hebrew ethnicity until he was 40 years old, when he likewise served in the court of a Gentile despot. And yet those years weren't Moses at his best, and again, God providentially orchestrated situations so that Moses too had to come out as Hebrew, and save his people.

Esther 2:21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, Bigthan and Teresh, were angry, and sought to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus- LXX claims they were angry because Mordecai had been promoted.

Esther 2:22 This thing became known to Mordecai, who informed Esther the queen; and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name- This was clearly the invisible hand of God working to set up Esther and Mordecai positively in the king's eyes.

Esther 2:23 When this matter was investigated, and it was found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the king's presence- And yet the king seems to have forgotten about Mordecai, who was well known as a Jew, because he signs the decree for killing all the Jews without thinking about that. He comes over as a superficial man with no interest in the past or its consequences. And yet God was working to nudge even such a person towards Him.

ESTHER CHAPTER 3

Esther 3:1 After these things- Between the seventh (Esther 2:16) and the twelfth (Esther 3:7) years of Xerxes' reign.

King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes who were with him- "Hammedatha" is a female proper noun. Possibly the Jewish Queen Hammutal of 2 Kings 23:31; 24:18. And yet he was essentially an Agagite through his father. Unless we read "the captive" instead of "the Agagite". If this connection is valid, then we can better understand the jealousy between Mordecai and Haman.

The lifting up of Haman will end with his being lifted up on his own gallows. Time and again, the record pokes fun at the high and mighty of this world. Again we see the superficial nature of the king, to promote such a person to the greatest position of power. "Agagite" is a form of "Gog", and so he is set up as the representative of the latter day attempted persecutor of God's people. But Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jew*s xi. 6. 5) and the Targum understand this to mean that Haman was descended from Agag, king of Amalek. But Mordecai was a descendant of Kish (Esther 2:5), and thus connected with Saul, who had conquered Agag. This would partly account for the natural personality clash between Haman and Mordecai. It would also mean that the people killed by the Jews towards the end of the story would likely have been Amalekites, and this would therefore have been a fulfilment of the prophecies about Yahweh's unceasing war with Amalek (Ex. 17:16) and Israel's final victory over them through Messiah (Num. 24:7 "higher than Agag"). We note the Biblical repetition of the curse against Amalek (Ex. 17:8-16; Num. 24:7; Dt. 25:17-19; 1 Sam. 15; 1 Chron. 4:42). King Saul took the spoil of Agag but failed to kill him; the Jews effectively result in Haman the Agagite's death, but refuse to take the spoil.

Mordecai is a form of Marduk, and Esther a form of Ishtar. "Haman" is a form of the god Humban. But the irony is that in Persian mythology, Marduk and Ishtar overcome Humban; and Marduk becomes the greatest of the gods in the pantheon, just as Mordecai was highly exalted. Time and again we conclude, "You just can't make this stuff up". There was clearly a higher hand at work- that of the one and only true God.

And yet we may well ask at this point, Why was Haman exalted and not Mordecai? Had Esther spoken up for her Jewishness and stated her relationship with Mordecai, surely he would have been exalted at this time? Because the family of the queen were typically exalted, which was exactly why Mordecai wanted Esther to become queen. Her failure led to the exaltation of Haman, and yet that exaltation led to his pride and fall- and thereby the salvation and security of God's people. Again and again we marvel at how God works through human weakness. Thus some personality types thrive on opposition, and opposition to the spreading of the Gospel [from within or without God's people] often leads to the further spreading of it. The exaltation of Haman rather than Mordecai set Mordecai up to have the jealousy and personality complex against Haman which led to him refusing to bow to him. And this in turn led to the planned pogrom and then the salvation and exaltation of the Jews. It's truly amazing how God works.

Esther 3:2 All the king's servants who were in the king's gate bowed down, and paid homage to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai didn't bow down or pay him homage- Although I have painted Mordecai as spiritually weak, he remained devoted to his insistent belief in Yahweh as the only God. And yet we get the impression that he harnessed this religious belief to augment his side of a personality clash with Haman- as we see so often in church life. However, the exiles had been told to bow their neck under the yoke of their Babylonian captors (Jer. 27:8). Jeremiah had even made a yoke and made this an acted parable. The false prophet

Hananiah had broken it and urged the Jews not to bow their neck beneath that yoke- and he was slain as a result. Mordecai presents as being on the side of Hananiah. As a first generation exile, Mordecai was well aware of this prophecy and command. It was pride and pig headedness, according to Jeremiah's prophecies, that made him refuse. Not fierce loyalty to Israel's God. There was no specific Mosaic command that forbad bowing before a Gentile official. And the Persian kings did not consider themselves divine, unlike the Roman Caesars. "Abraham rose up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth" (Gen. 23:7). Esther herself bowed to the king and "fell down at his feet" (Esther 8:3). So this was not a case of refusing to bow down to another god. In fact, Mordecai's refusal to bow is typical of observable reality in many Christian groups- those not famed for their spirituality, apparently not highly committed to the Lord, will suddenly rise up and make a huge issue [even to their own cost] over a matter of church tradition or external appearance. Like the timings of a church meeting, colour of the chairs, the type of wine to be used for communion etc. There was a personality clash between Mordecai and Haman, spurred by perhaps Mordecai not getting the exaltation which Haman did.

Esther 3:3 Then the king's servants who were in the king's gate said to Mordecai, Why do you disobey the king's commandment?- This question may have been from inquisitive interest; they were surprised a Jew wouldn't bow down to a man. And yet there were many Jews in Shushan, as archeology also bears out; enough to kill hundreds of men as recorded later in Esther 9:15. They hadn't see any other Jew articulate their belief in this way- a tacit reflection upon the spiritual weakness of the Jews generally, highlighting all the more the sensitive conscience of Daniel. For it is so hard to uphold principles when our own brethren don't uphold them or consider them merely cosmetic issues. Not bowing down to men was however not specifically commanded in the Mosaic law, and there are accounts of Israelites bowing down to men (at least 12 occasions- Gen. 23:12; 27:29; 33:3; 37:7,8; 42:6; 43:26; Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam. 24:8; 1 Kings 1:16; 2 Sam. 14:4; 18:28 Bathsheba, Ahimaaz and the wise woman of Tekoa bowed to king David). It would be a reflection of a very sensitive conscience toward God to refuse to do so. Perhaps he reasoned that the Messianic king would be higher than Agag (Num. 24:7) or that Haman was setting himself as a divine figure. And yet Mordecai was clearly not such a high sensitized believer; the very fact he worked in the palace was evidence enough. For whenever Daniel was promoted to power, he seems to have slipped out of the job and is only later recalled. This confirms my suggestion on :2 that Mordecai was using religious issues as part of a personality struggle with Haman. And we must beware we don't do the same. See on Esther 6:10.

Esther 3:4 Now it came to pass, when they spoke daily to him and he didn't listen to them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's position would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew- Haman was apparently unaware Mordecai was a Jew; it was the servants who told him of this. Again we are left with the impression that Mordecai was not a particularly strong believer, and was using the issue of not bowing down to any apart from Yahweh as an excuse to legitimize his native despising of Haman. See on Esther 4:1. If he told Esther not to reveal her Jewishness, he likely had followed the same policy. Zeresh, Haman's wife, changes her position on Mordecai as soon as she realizes he is Jewish. It seems Mordecai said he was a Jew in a moment of frustration and anger... and this hot headed moment triggered the plans for the pogrom. Just as the king's drunken, hot headed demand that his wife

appear naked before the drunk dinner guests led to him divorcing her and marrying Esther. Yet the hidden hand of God worked through these things. "They told Haman.... for he had told them that he was a Jew" uses the word "told" twice. The implication is surely that he told them he was a Jew, and they then immediately told Haman. All implying he had hidden his Jewishness from them all until this point.

Esther 3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai didn't bow down nor pay him homage, Haman was full of wrath- Circumstances repeat in human lives, both within the same life and between persons. This was just the response of the king when Vashti refused to expose herself. Like the king, Haman wanted to have the disrespectful person murdered. But there was no law in place, apparently, which allowed him to do this. It was just assumed that all bowed down to the first minister, just as it was assumed that wives must obey their husbands, especially if he was the divine king. See on Esther 1:13.

Esther 3:6 But he scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone, for they had made known to him Mordecai's people. Therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even Mordecai's people- Had Esther revealed her Jewishness, it's unlikely Haman would have thought up this massive pogrom. She kept her Jewishness secret, unlike Daniel who habitually prayed toward Jerusalem with his windows open. Again, her weakness in this was used by God, in order to set up all the anti-Jewish forces and destroy them. We have here an insight into the thought processes of Haman which only an inspired record could give. Haman thought for a moment of just destroying Haman, but scorned that thought, and instead went on to thinking of destroying all the Jews. Again we see how sin starts from within the human mind and not due to any possession by demons or a cosmic Satan figure. See on Esther 4:13.

Esther 3:7 In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, and chose the twelfth month, which is the month Adar- Some think that the idea is that every day they cast lots to see which month and day they should do it on, but the date given was about as far distant within the course of a year as possible. There was therefore going to be maximum time for the Jews to defend themselves, and for the king to change his mind. As Ahasuerus felt bound by his own law and couldn't kill Vashti as he wanted to, so was Haman. He obviously wanted to execute the massacre as soon as possible; but he was disallowed from doing this by his own structures of superstitions and laws.

However a more natural reading is that in one session, they cast lots for every day ["from day to day" NEV] to see which day would come out positive. And they got negative until the very end- the 13th day of the 12th month, a year's time. For they did this on the 13th day of the first month. This run of negatives was surely to warn Haman that luck, or the gods, were against him. It's like flipping a coin 364 times and it always lands on the same side, when you have agreed that that side means "no". And you keep doing it until eventually you get a "yes". And they likely had the idea that 13 was an unlucky number. In this incident we see a typical theme of the book- what seems total chance, and chance directed towards evil, is in fact overruled by God for good. If LXX is correct, "So Haman went to his gods to learn the day of their death", the gods are shown to be fools and totally manipulated by Yahweh's higher hand. For the Jews were given maximum time to prepare for the pogrom. The whole

incident shouts out to be connected with Prov. 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord”. The Lord simply had to be in this, the "every decision" over the 364 days when the lot said "no", had to be "from the Lord"- although it is not specifically stated.

Esther 3:8 Haman said to King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are different from other people’s. They don’t keep the king’s laws. Therefore it is not for the king’s profit to allow them to remain- There is the implication that the king was so dim witted or befuddled by alcohol that he didn't even ask for the "people" to be defined, and just gave his signet ring to Haman to do as he wished. It could well be that he made these decisions whilst drunk (see on :15; Esther 7:2), and his personality was such that he didn't worry about the past but just lived for the present, with no thought to the implications of what he had done or agreed in the past. For surely he knew that Mordecai was a Jew (Esther 6:10) and that the Jews were in positions of power throughout the empire.

The restoration prophecies speak of how “all nations” are to be gathered to Zion; they are those who scattered Judah amongst the nations; not every literal nation. And who “scattered” Israel? The Hebrew word is used in Jer. 50:17 to describe how Babylon scattered Judah amongst the nations. And most significantly, the same word occurs again in Est. 3:8: “And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people *scattered abroad* and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom...”. It is quite wrong for us to imagine Judah sitting quietly by the rivers of Babylon, all huddled together. They were scattered throughout all the many provinces / colonies of the Babylonian empire. This was why Cyrus’ decree bidding the Jews return to rebuild Jerusalem had to be published “throughout all his kingdom” (Ezra 1:1), and Jews living “in any place” of that kingdom were included in the invitation. It was Babylon who had “parted my land” by dividing it up amongst the various ‘Samaritan’ peoples who were transported there from other conquered territories. And their being in Babylon is paralleled with being scattered to the four corners of the world as it was known to them: “Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, says the LORD. Deliver yourself, O Zion, that dwells with the daughter of Babylon” (Zech. 2:6-7). And consider Zech. 7:14: “But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them [i.e. this concerns the Babylonian invasion], that no man passed through nor returned”. Indeed, Zech. 8:7,8 speaks of the restoration as coming from both West and East of Israel, implying that the Babylonians had sold some of the Jews as slaves in Greece and north Africa.

Esther 3:9 If it pleases the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who are in charge of the king’s business, to bring it into the king’s treasuries- Meaning apparently that he would pay this if he had permission to plunder the Jews (Esther 4:7). This meant they had acquired significant wealth; and this was doubtless why most of them didn't return to the land under Cyrus, and thereby precluded the reestablishment of God's Kingdom which was then possible. They therefore chose their little kingdom rather than the things of God's kingdom. And this is the problem with wealth. The huge financial offer was perhaps attractive for the king because of the need to prepare for the upcoming war with Greece which was then looming. Herodotus claimed that the total

revenue of the Persian Empire under Darius had been 14,560 talents; so this offer suggests the enormous wealth of the Jews, attained so relatively quickly since arriving as exiles.

The word for "destroy" has a very wide meaning. It is used of expulsion or fleeing. The words for "enslave" and "destroy" have only one small letter different; quite possibly Haman gave the impression he spoke of enslaving, not destroying. The king agreed to this, but he may have understood it as no more than the expulsion / deportation of an ethnic group from his empire. Perhaps Esther alludes to this when she later comments: "if we had been sold for bondservants and bondmaids, I would have held my peace" (Esther 7:4). The actual decree is far harsher- to destroy, kill and spoil. We see how the king presents as forgetful, self absorbed, distant, disinterested and so easily manipulated. When he finally realizes Haman has done this, he is therefore the more angry- transferring his anger with himself onto Haman. And again this was all in God's good plan for His people. Of course, had the Jews returned as commanded- they wouldn't have been in Persia and the whole situation with Haman need never to have occurred. And with 12 months notice, they ought to have made a deal with the Persian authorities and returned to Judah. For the king was apparently good with the idea of them being deported. Instead they remain and God has to save them, although with the spiritual cost of their becoming wealthy and popular, and thus even less likely to heed the call to return and reestablish the Kingdom.

"When this became known..." (Esther 9:25) suggests that the king was ignorant of the intention to destroy the Jews, until Esther pointed it out to him. This may just be a simplified form of the story. But if these words are a true reflection of how things really were, we are again left with the impression of a king with limited awareness of reality, who never actually read the decree Haman issued in his name to destroy the Jews and only realized what it implied some time later. Being an alcoholic could explain this; but so could super narcissism and perhaps a total focus upon international political and military matters.

Esther 3:10 The king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy- To give Haman authority to act in his name was surely unwise. Especially when it would not surely have been hard to perceive that Haman had his personal agendas for wanting the Jews destroyed, and was a man obsessed. Again the king comes over as seriously lacking judgment, perhaps due to making these decisions when drunk (:15).

Esther 3:11 The king said to Haman, The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you- This may be a reference to the assumption that the "silver" or wealth of executed persons went to the state; rather than saying Haman could keep it all for himself; for the intention was still to pay the money to the king's treasuries (Esther 4:7). But again this sounds like the wild kind of promise made when drunk (see on :15).

Esther 3:12 Then the king's scribes were called in on the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month; and all that Haman commanded was written to the king's satraps and to the governors who were over every province, and to the princes of every people, to every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus, and it was sealed with the king's ring-

The decree to kill the Jews was given on the 13th day of the first month, the night before Passover, when the Jews would have been reciting the narrative of their deliverance from Egypt. Again we see the hidden hand of God- for this ought to have reminded the Jews of their Passover deliverance. Just as we read nothing of "God" nor prayer in Esther [forgetting the LXX additions], so too the connection with Passover is not made explicit. Possibly the Jews weren't keeping it anyway; and effectively, they replaced it with Purim, a feast not commanded by God. And perhaps they consciously did this, because they kept Purim on the 14th day of the 12th month whereas Passover was on the 14th day of the first month. And they command that Purim is to be kept "for ever" (Esther 9:19), in the very language used of the Passover (Ex. 12: 24-27). We must read their instigation of Purim in the context of Zechariah and Haggai criticizing the returned exiles for establishing at least three other feasts, whilst not keeping God's commands properly if at all. It was a way to escape their obligations to their God, through creating their own set of legalistic traditions.

"The thirteenth having been found to be a lucky day for the massacre itself, Haman may have thought it advisable to choose the same day of the first month for entering upon the preparation for it". The word for "princes" is a technical terms referring to the chiefs of the various conquered peoples.

Esther 3:13 Letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to plunder their possessions-

There are connections between characters within Biblical history, just as there are between our lives and theirs, and between the lives of believers. This is so clear in the Bible that we are to accept this as a Divine principle, and look for these connections with other believers. This is in reality the basis of fellowship between believers. We have a worked example here. The situation is very similar, and allusive to, Jezebel sending letters in the king's name, ordering Naboth's death: "She wrote letters in Ahab's name and signed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles who were in his city" (1 Kings 21:8). The allusion presents the king as the weak and manipulated Ahab, despite all his power. He was weak and manipulated ultimately by God's hand, and the show of power with which the Esther story opens is thus subverted. Just as is all human show of strength. Just as Ahab returned home miserable because he couldn't have Naboth's vineyard, to be encouraged by his wife to destroy Naboth and grab his property, so the wife of Haman acts identically (Esther 5:14 cp. 1 Kings 21:7).

The LXX claims to report a copy of the letter: "And the message was sent by posts throughout the kingdom of Artaxerxes, to destroy utterly the race of the Jews on the first day of the twelfth month, which is Adar, and to plunder their goods. And the following is the copy of the letter; The great king Artaxerxes writes thus to the rulers and inferior governors of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India even to Ethiopia, who hold authority under him. Ruling over many nations and having obtained dominion over the whole world, I was minded (not elated by the confidence of power, but ever conducting myself with great moderation and gentleness) to make the lives of my subjects continually tranquil, desiring both to maintain the kingdom quiet and orderly to its utmost limits, and to restore the peace desired by all men. But when I had enquired of my counsellors how this should be brought to pass. Aman, who excels in soundness of judgment among us, and has been manifestly well inclined without wavering and with unshaken fidelity, and had obtained the second

post in the kingdom, informed us that a certain ill-disposed people is mixed up with all the tribes throughout the world, opposed in their law to every other nation, and continually neglecting the commands of the king, so that the united government blamelessly administered by us is not quietly established. Having then conceived that this nation alone of all others is continually set in opposition to every man, introducing as a change a foreign code of laws, and injuriously plotting to accomplish the worst of evils against our interests, and against the happy establishment of the monarchy; we signified to you in the letter written by Aman, who is set over the public affairs and is our second governor, to destroy them all utterly with their wives and children by the swords of the enemies, without pitying or sparing any, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month Adar, of the present year; that the people aforetime and now ill-disposed to us having been violently consigned to death in one day, may hereafter secure to us continually a well constituted and quiet state of affairs".

Esther 3:14 A copy of the letter, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published to all the peoples, that they should be prepared against that day- LXX "all the nations", looking ahead to the day when "all nations" will be gathered against the Jews. The stress upon all provinces and languages (:12) is a reflection of how widely the Jews had been scattered in the previous 70 years.

Esther 3:15 The couriers went forth in haste by the king's commandment, and the decree was given out in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed- The haste was no doubt ordered by Haman because he feared the king might change his mind. if the king was an alcoholic, this would explain his apparent memory loss and acting as if he was unaware of the consequences of his past actions and decisions.

ESTHER CHAPTER 4

Esther 4:1 Now when Mordecai found out all that was done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and wailed loudly and a bitterly- Mordecai*'s* sinful personality clash with Haman now forced him to 'come out' as a Jew, and this shows God's hand in leading His people forward. He wished to now come out openly as a Jew. He doubtless realized that so much suffering was going to come on God's people because of his refusal to bow to Haman, due to his personality clash with him (see on Esther 3). And this in itself was good for him spiritually- for he openly identified himself now with God's people, instead of teaching Esther not to do so, and not being known to Haman as a Jew initially (Esther 3:4). His wailing is recorded in the LXX: "A nation that has done no wrong is going to be destroyed". If this is indeed so, he was far from understanding the persistent prophetic message- that Judah had indeed done wrong and were therefore in exile, and were worthy of complete destruction.

The cry of Mordecai is a direct quote from that of Esau when he realizes that his blessings have been taken away and he has been rejected: "When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a loud and a bitter cry" (Gen. 27:34). I have pointed out elsewhere that it was God's intention to slay the Jews in dispersion, unless they repented and returned to their land. And it seems that through Haman, He is now going to do this. And so the connection between Mordecai's cry and the cry of

rejected, cursed Esau is absolutely on point relevant. The fact Judah are saved from this is therefore a case of extreme grace from God. Likewise, Amalek- apparently represented by Haman the Agag man, king of Amalek- is descended from Esau (Gen. 36:11-16). Yet it is Haman the descendant of Esau who is judged- by Mordecai's plot, a man who also has the characteristics of Esau. The destruction of Haman at Mordecai's hand was therefore by grace alone. It was Esau vs. Esau. Note too how Haman "disdained to lay his hands on Mordecai alone" (Esther 6:3), making Mordecai the one "disdained". But this Hebrew verb appears in this form in only one other place in the Bible; when we read that "Esau disdained the birthright" (Gen. 25:34). Again there is the connection between the rejected Esau and Mordecai.

Esther 4:2 He came even before the king's gate; for no one was allowed inside the king's gate clothed with sackcloth- He was hoping to thereby be noticed and the message relayed somehow to Esther, with whom he didn't have constant contact. He wanted her to "come out" and do as he was doing. The final phrase of :2 and the first phrase of :3 in Hebrew contains words where every seventh letter spells 'El Shaddai'. Another example of God being stamped onto the record- in this case, at the apparent nadir of Judah's fortune. Even then, God was subtly stamped as still present.

I suggest that Mordecai had kept his Jewishness hidden. For it would make no sense to tell Esther to hide her Jewishness if he had not previously hidden his. We reflect too how later, Vashti changes her attitude about Mordecai the moment she learns Mordecai is Jewishness. Mordecai could well have reasoned that he would not call upon Esther to 'come out' and appeal to the king, because as his adopted daughter [rather than a blood descendant] she could have argued she was not in fact Jewish. But instead he makes a public scene outside Esther's window, as it were, forcing her to 'come out' as Jewish. Because he believes that only she could save him from Haman, seeing that he reasons in :14 that 'God' might save the Jewish people, but [by implication] He would not save the non-observant Mordecai and Esther. Only Esther's charming of the king could secure that. And so he as it were dumps her in it, by advertising so publically his connection with her.

Esther 4:3 In every province, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes- This may well be the language of repentance. God's plan had been that the exiles would repent and then return to restore the Kingdom. But they generally didn't return, preferring the kingdom of Babylon and their own wealth to that of Yahweh. This persecution was the sending of "hunters" to chase them back, and bring them to repentance (Jer. 16:16). And they did repent- but when their destruction was averted by the prayer and repentance of a minority, they returned to their old position. Which is why the book of Esther finishes rather sadly, with the Jews again wealthy and even more prosperous and established within their local societies, and thereby even less likely to return to the land.

Esther 4:4 Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her this, and the queen was exceedingly grieved. She sent clothing to Mordecai, to replace his sackcloth; but he didn't receive it- She thus began to openly identify herself with Mordecai and the Jews, although at this point she had not heard about the decree; for it was known that Mordecai was a Jew, and now she is moved to identify with him. This first response from her was then developed by God until she totally "came out" in self-identification as a Jewess. She did what was not worldly-wise, because of her grief for people. God

likewise gives us opportunities to make small responses to Him, He develops our consciences until we are then given larger opportunities to respond. She could of course have disowned any knowledge of Mordecai or stressed she was only his adopted daughter. There are many such stories from the holocaust of secular Jews doing just this. But we must ask how we would have responded; how emotionally do we feel connected to the rest of God's people?

Esther 4:5 Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, whom he had appointed to attend her, and commanded him to go to Mordecai, to find out what this was, and why it was- As noted on :4, Esther at this point didn't know about the decree; but she had been moved to identify with the Jews by deciding to openly care for Mordecai and thus identify herself with him. And God was going to move her further along the path of "coming out" for Him.

Esther 4:6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai, to the city square which was before the king's gate- See on :10.

Esther 4:7 Mordecai told him of all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews- Meaning apparently that he would pay this if he had permission to plunder the Jews (Esther 3:9). This meant they had acquired significant wealth; and this was doubtless why most of them didn't return to the land under Cyrus, and thereby precluded the reestablishment of God's Kingdom which was then possible. They therefore chose their little kingdom rather than the things of God's kingdom. And this is the problem with wealth. The huge financial offer was perhaps attractive for the king because of the need to prepare for the upcoming war with Greece which was then looming.

Esther 4:8 He also gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, to show it to Esther, and to declare it to her, and to urge her to go in to the king to make supplication to him, to make request before him for her people- These are the Hebrew words for Daniel 'making supplication' and 'making request' before *God* (Dan. 9:3), whereas here Mordecai urges Esther to do this before the human king. Again, as with eating the food of captivity, Daniel is presented as far spiritually superior to Mordecai and Esther.

Heb. 'ask for favour'. The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. She was to ask the king for favour, but clearly she was asking God for favour, even though they were unworthy of it. And God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9), and their deliverance from Haman is an example of it. But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). This double recompense was perhaps at the hands of the Babylonians in Judah the first time, and the second time was intended to be when the sword followed them into

captivity, at the hands of Haman. But God graciously relented, despite Judah's impenitence. But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know My hand… and they shall now that My name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Your lovers shall go into captivity: *surely* then shall you be ashamed and confounded for all your wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

Esther 4:9 Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai- LXX adds that Mordecai appealed to her to respond, "remembering, said he, the days of thy low estate, how thou wert nursed by my hand: because Aman who holds the next place to the king has spoken against us for death". Her own salvation by grace was to move her to save others; and this again is a timeless principle for us all.

Esther 4:10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message to Mordecai- All this communication through a messenger meant that surely the news of the Esther-Mordecai relationship and her intended actions would have not been secret and would have started to spread within the palace and further. We think of all the messages between David and Bathsheba by the hand of messengers. Mordecai perhaps made such a scene and then made communications with Esther precisely so that she now could not hide her Jewishness. He saw her as the only hope for reversing the decree. He is ensuring that she is now identified as a Jewess. This is why he will reason that even if all Israel are spared, he and therefore she will for sure be slain unless she does something to change the situation. He was now using her to save his own skin. He could have hoped, as did many in the Holocaust, that somehow she would survive where she was, since she had concealed her Jewishness so far. Whatever his motives, Mordecai forces Esther to come out as one of God's people.

Esther 4:11 All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that whoever, whether man or woman, comes to the king into the inner court without being invited, there is one law for him, that he be put to death; except those to whom the king might hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live. I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days- Not having been called to come in to her husband for 30 days gives us another insight into the miserable lot Esther had as queen. This lack of invitation would have made her wonder whether she had fallen out of favour with him; although he had many wives and concubines. "To come in to the king" could possibly allude to the sexual act; and "thirty days" might suggest she was menstruating. There is a purposefully ambiguity in these things. Because we are being invited to imagine how it might have been, to enter thereby into her angst. She was initially unwilling to risk death in order to save her people. She needed to be persuaded by the later reflection of Mordecai that she would be found out as a Jewess

and also be slain herself; and that God would indeed deliver His people but her refusal to cooperate with His plan would result in her death anyway (:13,14). We see again her development; from selfish self-preservation to a wider sense of responsibility for her entire people. And in broad outline terms, this is something we are all to pass through. See on Esther 6:4; 8:3.

This response was effectively a "no" from Esther to Mordecai. Previously she had always obeyed him; now she is led towards individuation.

Esther 4:12 They told to Mordecai Esther's words- See on :10.

Esther 4:13 Then Mordecai asked them to return answer to Esther, Don't think to yourself that you will escape in the king's house any more than all the Jews- As noted on Esther 3:6, we have here an insight into the thought processes of Esther which only an inspired record could give. The Bible continually emphasizes the importance of self-talk and how we think in our hearts. She was tempted to adopt a path of thought which was effectively saying that she would be the only Jew who would survive; and that was not going to happen. The 'house of the kingdom' of Babylon would not save her from death.

Esther 4:14 For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?- "Silent now" is AV "at this time"; the same words at the end of the verse, "a time as this". This was her time. "Who knows if...?" is surely rhetorical, as if to say, 'Anyone could surely realize / know that you became queen for this time'. I do wonder whether some people are born to achieve one thing at one time in God's purpose. This could be such a case. And yet "Who knows if?" has an answer: God. Again, God isn't mentioned, but Mordecai is brought to seeing and implying God's presence and knowledge. "Place" is Hebrew *maqom*, usually used of a holy place. He implies "God" but can't bring himself to say so in so many words. Mordecai speaks with authority, but he is only making assumptions; that if help came from another quarter, then Esther and her family, including Mordecai, would "perish" even if the other Jews didn't. And the source of that 'perishing' would be God's judgment, not Haman. Mordecai also seems confident that deliverance would arise from "another place". "From another place" clearly means "God", but God is never mentioned in the book of Esther. Perhaps at the time Mordecai just had a distinct hunch that deliverance would come, but when he thought about who else, humanly, apart from Esther, could effect this deliverance... he would conclude that it would have to be God alone. So we see this otherwise secular, weak believer being provoked by circumstance to have a greater faith. Everyone in the story is being nudged towards greater faith and spirituality through the dysfunction of them all. This is the marvel of God's working. But the basis for Mordecai's confidence that "deliverance" would arise is because the same word was used by the prophets for how God's people would be "delivered" from the lands of their exile to return and reestablish His Kingdom in Zion (e.g. Ez. 34:10,12,27). Mordecai was taken into exile as a young man and would have heard or known these words of Ezekiel.

The text can legitimately be translated: "Will then relief and deliverance come to the Jews from another place? You and your father's house will perish". There is no "but..." in the original. This opens up the question of whether God automatically reassigns a task and possibility to another; or whether if we let the ball drop, His

intention will not be realized. The lack of clarity is intentional. We are to appreciate the degree to which we matter. The Lord's parables speak of Him giving His wealth to His servants to trade with. How far His work prospers is over to them; for He has 'gone into a far country', He is far away in the sense that He has delegated to us authority to do His work on His behalf, and will review that work at His return.

But to return once more to the text. We can also read this as Mordecai saying that if Esther doesn't intercede, then the Jews generally will be saved from "another place". He seems not spiritual enough to say "God" in so many words. Although there was no other source of deliverance apart from Yahweh. But, he is confident that she and he will perish, even though God would save the Jews generally. He felt that for sure, Haman would ensure that he died, and he was sure that Haman would soon figure [if not already] that Esther was his relative- so she for sure would also be slain. Mordecai therefore doesn't have the faith to believe that God ["from another place"] will save him personally; salvation is indeed for God's people, He is the God of Israel, His promise to preserve Abraham's seed will come true; but not for me personally. I can't believe it for myself. We've all encountered this mentality, it is psychologically credible. And Mordecai may well imply that he knows that Esther likewise is not exactly much of a believer in Yahweh. So she also cannot expect any salvation from Him. And yet he considers that she might be able to save him, and herself, by a special appeal to her husband the king. By implication, this salvation would not be from God ["from another place"], but by dint of her feminine charms. He sees that perhaps it was meant to be that she had become queen, to save him and herself from death. 'It was meant to be' is hardly strong faith in God, but it at least veers that way. But nothing more. It is at least a recognition that there is at least something above the ordinary going on in human life.

There is the element of uncertainty in Mordecai's words. We as readers surely perceive that of course Esther had come to the throne for this time. But that is only a possibility for Mordecai. Again he presents as without full faith and limited spiritual perception. We would rather him exhort her about the clear hand of God in their lives, urging her in faith to make full use of where she had been placed by God. All this further reflects a selfish and weak spiritual streak in Mordecai. He presents as more concerned with his own salvation than that of his people. When Esther's personal salvation is assured, she to her credit then begs the king to save her people. In a very short time, a day or so, she matures beyond her adopted father very quickly.

Esther 4:15 Then Esther asked them to answer Mordecai- LXX "Esther sent the man that came to her to Mordecai, saying"; see on :10.

Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I and my maidens will also fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law-

Daniel's request to his friends to pray for him as he went before the king (Dan. 2:17,18), so that they should not die, contrasts with Esther asking her friends to simply fast for her- with no reference to God. Just as Daniel and his friends were greatly exalted, so were Esther and Mordecai.

Mordecai's sackcloth and ashes, and now a total fast without water ["do not drink" = Jonah 3:7 "shall not drink"], all recalls Nineveh's repentance and the altering of the Divine decree of destruction. Jonah was fairly recent history in Esther's time. We wonder whether consciously or unconsciously, she was influenced by this. “Who knows but that God may turn and relent… so that we do not perish” (Jonah 3:9 NJPS) may be the basis for Esther's similar fatalism mixed with faith, when she too uses the

word "perish": "If I perish, I perish". Both Nineveh and the Jews had a period defined before they would be destroyed- 40 days for Nineveh, 12 months for the Jews in Persia. "Who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis" (Esther 4:13,14) recalls "Who knows but that God may turn and relent?" (Jonah 3:9). "When the news ['the word'] reached the king of Nineveh" (Jonah 3:6) parallels "When Mordecai learned all that had happened" (Esther 4:1) and the word reaching the Jews (Esther 4:3- the same Hebrew words are used). And yet the king of Nineveh cries out and fasts to God, openly repenting, urging others to do so. Mordecai apparently only laments the pain of Divine judgment. And he seeks Esther's help in getting out of that pain. For the prophets had said that Judah in captivity would suffer if they refused to repent. This was to be the curse for breaking the covenant.

The people would not only be sent into captivity, but God would send a sword to pursue them there: Lev. 26:33 "I will scatter you among the nations, and I will draw out the sword after you; and your land will be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste"; "I will scatter them also among the nations... and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them", (Jer. 9:16); "I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of horror, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations where I have driven them" (Jer. 29:18). It was God's intention to destroy them in the lands where they were sent captive: "You will perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies will eat you up" (Lev. 26:38). Only a very small remnant of the captives would "escape the sword among the peoples, when you shall be scattered through the nations" (Ez. 6:8); "I will preserve a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they come" (Ez. 12:16). Yahweh will scatter you among the nations [cp. the Jews being present is all 127 provinces of the Persian empire] and you shall be left few in number among the nations where Yahweh shall lead you away" (Dt. 4:27); "Among these nations you shall find no ease and there shall be no rest for the sole of your foot. Yahweh will give you there a trembling heart and failing of eyes and pining of soul" (Dt. 28:65); "He would overthrow their seed among the nations, and scatter them in the gentile lands" (Ps. 106:27). The Psalms frequently appeal for God's people to remember Him and declare His glory "among the nations", and "among the nations" is the language of the curse for breaking the covenant (Ps. 18:49; 44:11,14; 46:10; 57:9; 67:2; 79:10; 96:3,10; 106:47; 108:3; 110:6; 126:2). This is all some evidence that God intended to destroy the majority of Jews in exile who didn't return. He didn't carry this out- by grace alone. The Esther story is an example of His desperate attempt to get them to return, giving them 12 months from the edict of Haman so that they had time to go.

Just as the Gentile Vashti presents as more sexually moral than Esther, the king of Nineveh and his people present as more spiritual than Mordecai and the Jews. Mordecai mourns not from repentance but from lament at the prospect of loss of life. Nineveh repented (Jonah 3:4), but the same word is used of how the decree to kill the Jews is turned about (Esther 9:1). Nineveh's repentance was the basis of God turning back or re-thinking their judgment; He likewise turned back the judgment of the Jews but by grace and His gracious manipulation of Esther to that end. Again, as often in Esther, we are not left with a great picture of Esther's faith nor spirituality; but rather of God's sovereign grace. The whole Haman incident was a case of fishers and hunters being sent to make the Jews return to Judah. But the book of Esther shows

they refused to take the prod, and yet in love and pity God saved them even from the pain of that prod when they refused it.

The decree to kill the Jews was issued on the 13th day of the month Nisan, the day before Passover. We can assume that the news spread immediately, and that the Jews in Shushan heard of it immediately (Esther 3:12,15). The dialogues between Esther and Mordecai therefore took place on the 13th or 14th of Nisan- Passover. Yet Esther commands a total fast from both food and water. This would have meant that those fasting would not have celebrated Passover. She realized, or was made to realize, that cultural, technical obedience to religious laws was overshadowed by the urgent need to intensely connect with God. Although she doesn't ask for prayer, surely that is the implication of her asking Jews to fast immediately and thus not keep Passover. To fast "for me" suggests the fasting was to be no mere lament, but to somehow empower her to success; and that implies appeal to a higher power. On the other hand, seeing the date for destruction was still 12 months off, she could have put God's law first and called for the fast [and approached the king] a few days later, after Passover. For after all, the person who didn't keep it was to be cut off from amongst God's people...

So far in the story, Esther has been the passive, obedient young woman. Now for the first time she takes the initiative. No longer does she wear and do what Hegai suggests to charm the king, nor dumbly follow Mordecai's script. As for so many, the need becomes the call... to find and be themselves, and to turn to God. Albeit in the spirit of there being no atheist on a plane that's going down. Fasting of itself implies an attempt to flag the attention of a higher power. This was not fasting as mere lament over a situation. It was to be done before Esther went in to the king- so clearly, the implication was that help was being sought from a Divine being. Although there is no mention of prayer, which usually accompanies such fasting in the Bible. It's as if the record is at pains to avoid any mention of prayer or God... it is intentional. Exactly in order to flag up the ways of providence. God is so present, but as it were God is hiding in plain sight. Indeed this omission of God and prayer is so strong, that we could posit that it is a Divinely inspired rework of some official chronicle of the Kings of Persia, mentioned in Esther 10:2. This would explain the references to "Jews" in the third person and the title "Mordecai the Jew". And also the way the record focuses on events rather than motives. It would also make sense of the detailed listing of the king's advisors.

The text carefully omits any mention of prayer to God, perhaps because of His statement that He would hide His face from them in the captivity. She was being taught what the king had been taught in Esther 1:15 (see note there); that law could not save. She had to go outside the law for salvation, which meant a total casting of herself upon grace. She clearly feels her inadequacy; she feels the need for the fasting of others. And she is now unashamed to identify herself with the Jews, for this message was sent through a messenger (:15) which would have meant that her identification with the Jews was now going to be spread around everywhere. There was a large Jewish community in Shushan; able to kill 300 men (Esther 9:15).

And if I perish, I perish- The idea may be that she was going to perish anyway, if the decree wasn't changed. She had accepted Mordecai's warning about this in :13,14. And yet it is hard to avoid a sense of fatalism, using the same construction as in Gen. 43:14. She had faith and weakness at the same time, as we would likewise have had. Again we are left wondering whether she had faith, or was merely fatalistic. This is to help us enter deeper into her possible feelings and to identify with her.

Her fatalism rather than faith appears greater when we consider that the "if..." is more commonly translated "when", "where" or "how". "If..." in the sense of *possibility* isn't the usual meaning of this Hebrew word. It isn't the same word translated "if" in :14 "If you keep quiet...". The word suggests she felt she would perish either by going to the king uninvited, or in the pogrom. This saying of Esther is often referred to in Jewish thinking, as it is the basis of the Jewish principle of *galut*- choosing the least bad solution or outcome. It is hardly faith, but more a resigned fatalism. It was death or death, so she chose the death that had at least some chance of leading to life. Contrary to the image of Sunday School Christianity, or Shabbat school Judaism, this is not a case of heroic faith in God, nor of willingness to make some stellar self-sacrifice. And yet God worked through it; that's the point. It's rather a case of "out of weakness made strong", as Paul would put it. Indeed a relevant question could be: 'Would any person of whatever faith background have done anything other than what Esther did?'.

Esther 4:17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him-

"Went his way" is literally 'passed over', i.e. over the river Ulai, on which Shushan was built, to the Jewish quarter. The allusion to the Ulai river is another point of unfavourable comparison with Daniel, who was apparently in prayer by the river Ulai, presumably because he also lived in the Jewish quarter where Mordecai lived, and was rewarded with a Divine vision: "I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision, and I was by the river Ulai... I sought to understand it [presumably by praying]; and behold... I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision" (Dan. 8:2,15,16).

The need was the call, and now the once dumbly obedient, passive Esther is taking the initiative and has men doing what she tells them, rather than the other way around. We notice twice that Esther was "taken"- by Mordecai, as his daughter; and into the harem (Esther 2:7,8). Esther's passivity will be changed by the hand of providence into her being a proactive worker on her own initiative for the salvation of God's people. Again we see a breaking of the paradigm that a woman was always to be obedient to a man. LXX adds various exaggerated claims about Esther's righteousness and prayers to God, e.g. "And having taken off her glorious apparel, she put on garments of distress and mourning; and instead of grand perfumes she filled her head with ashes and dung, and she greatly brought down her body, and she filled every place of her glad adorning with the torn curls of her hair".

ESTHER CHAPTER 5

Esther 5:1 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal clothing- Perhaps because as stated in Esther 4:17 she had taken it off in order to mourn and cover herself in sackcloth.

And stood in the inner court of the king's house, next to the king's house. The king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, next to the entrance of the house- "The royal house" is literally "the house of the kingdom", the term used for the temple in 2 Chron. 2:1,12. This extends the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have here a fake, imitation temple of Yahweh. Esther would surely have recalled how she had first entered the king's house, to sleep with him whilst in the contest for becoming

Queen. She surely would have looked back and realized that was all of God, somehow, that she 'won' against amazing odds. And this would have been designed to encourage her that God could do the same again. For that is how life is structured.

Esther 5:2 When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favour in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther came near, and touched the top of the sceptre- The record is as it were a video shot by the Divine cameraman. We see her standing there, see her fingers touching the very tip of the sceptre. And we get the feeling that the outcome finally will be good for her.

Esther 5:3 Then the king asked her, What would you like, queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you even to the half of the kingdom- Esther was breaking paradigms here; it was the king who always gave invitations, and not his wife. She effectively comes to dominate him, although in a very humble and nervous way, used by God.

An offer "to the half of the kingdom" was a serious offer, and the king makes it three times to Esther (Esther 5:3,6; 7:2). Hearing those words, she could have blurted out her request. Instead, she invites him to the banquet. Why did she not just state her request there and then, seeing he had given the green light to whatever she wanted and would find it hard to retract? We could argue she was cunning and thought a banquet setting, with him drunk, was the better way to go. The banquet is a "banquet of wine" (the wine is stressed in Esther 5:6; 7:2,7,8). He had previously made epic decisions whilst drunk, concerning Vashti and then in signing the pogrom decree for Haman. He was known for his rage and extreme emotionalism. And she knows that effectively rescinding that decree will be hard for him to do if sober and rational. Again we enquire, whether this is the way a faithful Jewish woman would think- to get your husband drunk in order to get them to do a favour for you. It is the behaviour of Lot's daughters, but surely it shouldn't have been the way of a believer in Yahweh. But still God works through it. Or we could see her as overcome by circumstance, not knowing how to respond to the unexpected open cheque he was offering her... and stuck with her plan. For she had already prepared the banquet (:4).

Esther 5:4 Esther said, If it seems good to the king, let the king come with Haman today to the banquet that I have prepared for him- It seems to me that she intended to ask for mercy for the Jews. But her nerve fails here, and she asks them to come to a banquet. And when they come, her nerve fails her again, and she asks them to come to another banquet. And God worked through that weakness. Because the final request was made the night after he had recalled how Mordecai had saved him. And the intrigue and suspense was built up, his attention was particularly focused upon this one of his many wives, who was demanding his attention two or three days running. I don't personally interpret Esther here as the cleverly calculating, amateur psychologist female. Rather do I see a nervous teenager who gets stage fright at the last minute, twice. And God worked through her nervousness. Perhaps after each failure to make the request, she beat herself up for her weakness. But God worked through it. This is His style, right up to this day. LXX "To-day is my great day"; probably the king didn't even know Esther's birthday, just as he didn't know her family or relationship to Mordecai (Esther 8:1). Maybe it wasn't her birthday, and she just blurted out whatever came into her mind. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various

forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7). The four Hebrew words in the phrase "may the king and Haman come today", yavo ha-melech v'haman ha-yom, begin with the letters which make up the Yahweh Name: 'yod – hey – vav – hey'. On one hand, Esther was scheming in a very human way, and hoping to get the king drunk so that he would more easily agree to her request. Yet God puts the stamp of His Name in that- not necessarily of His total approval of her methods.

We may well ask, Why did Esther invite Haman to the banquet? Perhaps because she knew he had the king's signet ring, and the reversal of the decree required that. Possibly because she was a shrewd psychologist who figured that the king would be angry with Haman if he were present. Maybe she believed that pride comes before a fall, and she rightly guessed that inviting Haman would make him proud (Prov. 16:18). But none of these reasons match the Divine hand in it all- that whatever reason, God made Haman faint from a panic attack and collapse on Esther's couch, looking to the king as if he had tried to rape her.

Esther 5:5 Then the king said, Bring Haman quickly, so that it may be done as Esther has said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared- The command to bring Haman "quickly" was because such invitations were usually given well in advance, and Esther was breaking all the paradigms by wanting everything quickly, throwing last minute parties. We see in this how she was now thinking fast and on her own initiative, outside the box- whereas previously she is presented as having been dumbly obedient to Mordecai and Hegai. We note from Esther 1:9 that Vashti made a separate feast for the women at the time of the king's great feast. Why is that detail included in the record? Possibly to remind us that the genders were segregated at such feasts / drinking parties. The way Esther invites two men to a private drinking feast with her is therefore paradigm breaking. She is really thinking outside the box, driven to initiative by the extremity of the situation. And so the need is the call in our lives and spiritual growth, time and again. Perhaps her insistence upon the private banquet, rather than grabbing the opportunity to get the king to give her anything, was because she was ambitious enough to actually want Haman killed. And she knew that the drinking party was more likely to achieve that than asking the king for such a favour in a more rational and formal setting.

Esther 5:6 The king said to Esther at the banquet of wine, What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed- This apparently unlimited offer leads us to expect that Esther is now going to seize the moment and ask for the Jews not to be destroyed. The Biblical text often works like this, setting up expectations in the mind of the reader or hearer, and then presenting an unexpected outcome. We are all expecting now for her to make the request, and the next verse heightens that sense of expectation- and we are then the more involved in the plot when again, Esther doesn't make the request as she maybe intended to.

Esther 5:7 Then Esther answered and said, My petition and my request is this- The pause implied in the text heightens our sense of suspense as to whether she will find the strength to make her true request. And again her nerve fails and she rather dumbly asks for more time. Earlier, she had "asked" or 'requested' [s.w.] nothing from Hegai, but had just been dumbly obedient and submissive (Esther 2:15). The king's agents had "sought" or 'requested' brides for the king (Esther 2:2 s.w.) and she had agreed.

Haman had asked or requested for the death of all Jews (Esther 3:6 s.w.). But now Esther is taking the initiative and asking / requesting the king- and she is recorded as doing so multiple times. For meetings with him, for the life of the Jews, and for further favours for the Jews. Again we see a previously passive person being moved by God to be proactive and work on her own initiative. For she had nobody to advise her at this point. Her requests for banquets and her actual requests for the Jews were not advised by anyone; she took the initiative. The need was the call, to quit passivity and become proactive for God's people and His cause.

Esther 5:8 If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king has said- This could be read as saying 'I do have a petition; but your attendance at my banquet tomorrow will mean that you have agreed to the petition I have in my heart, but which I'm not telling you right now'. This would perhaps be the best support for an argument that Esther calculated all this, rather than just getting stage fright each time she was asked to tell her petition. The ambiguity and difficulty of interpretation is intentional- to direct our thinking to her motivations, to get the reader into the mind of Esther. It could also be that she judged her husband not sufficiently drunk in order to press home her request. This doesn't exactly score very highly for her in spiritual terms. This is no Nehemiah desperately praying to God for favour in the eyes of the king as he makes a request for God's people. But the king was busy, as ruler of most of the known world. To devote two evenings one after the other to some mysterious domestic drinking party with his wife whom he had not asked to see him for the last month... was strange indeed. Esther had her request answered- he had attended her banquet. Then, surely, was the time to act. I suggest therefore that on balance, her idea of a second banquet was indeed from stage fright.

In all these things, we see the hand of God. What if Vashti had agreed to come in to the king? What if the king hadn't asked her to flaunt her beauty before his men? What if the king had married a standard Persian beauty queen, and not Esther? What if the king hadn't had a sleepless night? What if Mordecai hadn't overheard the plot to kill the king? What if the king hadn't forgotten to reward Mordecai and had done as usual and rewarded him immediately? What if he hadn't have had a sleepless night? What if Mordecai had not fallen into a personality clash with Haman? What if Haman had drawn a lot to kill all the Jews more quickly? What if Esther hadn't had stage fright and begged the king to come to a second banquet? All this is of God, of His grace, of His higher hand.

Esther 5:9 Then Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart, but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he didn't stand up nor move for him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai- Here we have a profound insight into the processes going on within Haman's mind. This is far from a simple court tale. The record juxtaposes his prideful joy with the jealousy which then beclouds him as he sees Mordecai, dressed in sackcloth, refusing to stand up. The Esther record gives wonderful insight into the feelings and thought processes of the characters in a way in which contemporary literature of the time doesn't; the stories are full of unrealistic exaggerations, whereas the Bible focuses upon real situations and upon the state of the heart. And here we see the typical power of jealousy; a focus upon one man and his actions, eclipsing all other blessings.

Mordecai has gone beyond not bowing to Haman. He now will not even stand up in his presence. We wonder if this was related to his faith that Esther was going to somehow succeed in her entreaty. If so, we see the first beginnings of actual faith in him. The idea isn't that Haman simply noticed Mordecai in the gate area. To sit in the gate meant to have a position of authority, often associated with being a judge (Job 5:9; 31:21; Prov. 31:23; Ruth 4:1,11). It was Mordecai's senior position which irked Haman so much. Mordecai had presumably removed his mourning garments because it wasn't allowed to sit in the king's gate dressed like that (Esther 4:2). That just possibly might imply that he was living in hope that Esther's appeal would succeed. But I suggest more like he had to return to work, and so he had no option but to remove his mourning garments. In which case again we see the higher hand of God, making Mordecai act as if his mourning was over- because a resolution to the grief had been made possible. He may not have believed that, but the hand of providence made him act like it, to coax him towards faith. It's like finding yourself singing a hymn in church, the words of which are actually far beyond your personal faith at that point. But you reflect afterwards that actually, you sung those words to God.

Haman is twice described as being full of wrath against Mordecai (Esther 3:6; 5:9). Prov. 6:34 uses the same word in saying that jealousy is the wrath of a man. Haman was jealous of Mordecai, even though I suggested that Mordecai was jealous of Haman's promotion, believing he ought to have had it because his relative Esther was now queen. Haman had it all, but was still jealous. It's again that human trait of 'I need just one more thing'. Which we must recognise and avoid.

Esther 5:10 Nevertheless Haman restrained himself, and went home. There, he sent and called for his friends and Zeresh his wife- The impression is given that he wanted to murder Haman immediately, or at least ask the king to authorize it. But he waits for another day, because of the desire to do nothing without first seeking advice. And it was that day which altered the entire outcome. Again we see a man of great power, but bound by his own traditions and legal structures; just as was the king when Vashti refused to come and he wanted to kill her. The same occurred when he took counsel as to the date on which to murder the Jews. And the answer came out as in 11 months' time. The folly of human wisdom and counsel is a big theme in Esther and Daniel.

Esther 5:11 Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, all the things in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king- He had ten sons (Esther 9:7). Here again we see a connection with the situation in Esther 1, where the glory of Ahasuerus is presented and then he is manipulated and circumscribed by a woman and his own laws and culture.

Esther 5:12 Haman also said, Yes, Esther the queen let no man come in with the king to the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow I am also invited by her together with the king- His overweening pride is being set up for a mighty fall; and this is typical of the Biblical record, to focus upon pride as the reason for judgment. What he was most proud of turned out to be the very point of his destruction.

Esther 5:13 Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate- He kept seeing Mordecai, i.e., in his own mind. Just as people are conned by advertising to keep seeing images of things which then become 'must

haves' for them. This is the power of jealousy; a focus upon one man and his actions, eclipsing all other blessings. He kept in his mind the image of this man "sitting" instead of standing up and bowing. It is such mental images which are the root of so much jealousy. See on Esther 7:7; 6:13. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7). In this verse 13, it is the final letters of the four Hebrew words which spell YHWH. The term "the king" occurs 190 times in Esther's 167 verses. So often, that we are surely being asked 'Who really is the king here?'. Because the earthly king was so clearly being manipulated by others, and above all by God. *The* King is clearly Yahweh. We note the similarities with Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel's advice. He had everything but like Haman, he wanted just that one more thing. And his wife gave evil advice as to how to get it, which ultimately went wrong for him. The Hebrew for "friends" in Esther 5:10 is 'ahab'. Again and again we feel that 'you just can't make this stuff up'. We see how psychologically credible are the Biblical records; for the 'just that one more thing' mentality is deeply engrained in the unreformed human psyche.

Esther 5:14 Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and in the morning speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on it. Then go in merrily with the king to the banquet. This pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made- Zeresh presents as the classic case of a wife who encourages her husband in an evil path for the glory of her family, and thus ends up destroying her family. The ten sons were killed but nothing is said of her death. We wonder if she committed suicide, or was left alive by God to spend the rest of her miserable life reflecting on her gross sin, perhaps like Delilah. All this is so true to observation of life situations today. There is no agreed meaning for her name, but one option is "Star of adoration", and we reflect that 'Esther' means 'star', alluding to Ishtar. She was likely jealous of Esther. She was her opposite number as it were, and wanted her husband to be exalted rather than Esther's relative Mordecai.

We also note the irony of how Esther opens with male concern at wives becoming too dominant. And yet as the story unfolds, we see Esther and Zeresh taking charge of the situations. An unseen supernatural hand is clearly working out that irony- and it is the hand of God. This is one function of the irony within Esther. It is so intense that it becomes a pointer to an invisible, Divine hand at work.

The gallows was huge, 25 meters / 75 feet high. "According to Persian law the power of life and death resided in the king alone". So Haman was assuming that he could get Mordecai executed, even though there was apparently no legal apparatus for him to do so. Again we see a theme of Esther continued- that the characters are all forced to act outside of the law. This was surely to prepare the Jewish audience of the book to realize the limitations of Mosaic law, especially in the casuistic sense in which they liked to use it.

Daniel's prophecy that there would be a time of trouble for Israel, followed by a resurrection and judgment, may have had a potential fulfilment in Haman's persecution. The LXX of Esther 5 at this point includes her prayer to God, in which she says that Haman was seeking to hinder the work of the temple. This would explain why initially the Samaritans persuaded the Persians to make the work cease, but then (humanly inexplicably) another edict is given for it to resume. The people were delivered (Dan. 12:1), as they were by Michael the Angel manipulating Esther. But the resurrection, judgment and Kingdom didn't follow, because Israel weren't

ready for it. Then those who turned many to righteousness- i.e. the priesthood, in the primary context- would be rewarded (Dan. 12:3). But Malachi and Haggai repeatedly criticized the priesthood at the time of the restoration for being selfish and not teaching Israel (Mal. 2:7). Daniel and Jeremiah were heartbroken that there had to be such a delay to the full fulfilment of the Messianic restoration of the Kingdom.

ESTHER CHAPTER 6

Esther 6:1 On that night, sleep fled from the king. He commanded the book of records of the chronicles to be brought, and they were read to the king- We naturally wonder why the King was sleepless. Quite possibly it was because of the strange actions of his wife, taking the unheard of initiative of inviting him and Haman to a drinking party just with her- when women didn't drink with men, as Vashti's party for the women made clear. And we think of the "Lady's bar" in British pubs back in the day. Clearly she wanted a big favour but couldn't bring herself to ask him. And now she had invited him to yet another such party, promising to then make her request. What was it? And why was she so specific about Haman attending? And alone? It'd be enough to more than pique the curiosity of any husband.

Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book, e.g. as acrostics (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7), and several times in this chapter. The message is clearly that God was active, but in a subtle, hidden way. His insomnia was due to an unconscious sense that something wasn't right, that a payback hadn't been made, or that a payback against himself was now due. Grammatically, there seems a word missing here. Literally, his sleep was taken from him; but the grammar requires the definition of who took it from him. And that isn't stated. Some versions have supplied "God" or "the Lord", but this isn't in the original. The name of God never occurs in Esther. We are to understand only by implication that it was God. The book of records is that alluded to in Mal. 3:16, the "book of remembrance" kept before God concerning His servants.

A fair case can be made that when we read in Esther of simply "the king" rather than "King Ahasuerus", sometimes there is an intentional ambiguity as to whether King Ahasuerus is referenced, or Yahweh, the one true King. The Hebrew scroll of Esther read at Purim, the Megillah, is punctuated with decorative words stating "THE KING". As if the Jews saw the one true King, God, stamped throughout the book in some of the places when we read simply of "the king"- which is very often. And so here we read that "the king" couldn't sleep and so had his diary read to him. But Yahweh is presented as a king who does apparently sleep, and is, as it were, awakened by prayer. We think of Ps. 121:4: "Behold, the guardian of Israel will neither sleep nor slumber". Likewise Ps. 44:24: "Awake, why do you sleep, Lord?". God was as it were awoken from sleep by the prayers of His people. Although that is implied very indirectly, and not stated explicitly.

Esther 6:2 It was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who were doorkeepers, who had tried to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus- The fact the king had forgotten this reflects his superficial character, focusing only upon the present. But even such a person still has a conscience and a fear of judgment which keeps them awake at night.

Esther 6:3 The king said, What honour and dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this? Then the king's servants who attended him said, Nothing has been done for him- Again we get the impression that the king was forgetful, because he lived only for the immediate present and forgot his responsibilities and undertakings, perhaps resultant from his alcoholism. Likewise he had divorced Vashti and agreed to search for a replacement for her, but had to be reminded five years later to get on and do so. The recollection of having been saved by grace led him to naturally feel that he should do something positive for this man Mordecai. Any move against that man was not going to be well received by him. The entire situation is true to life and has the ring of psychological credibility to it- in contrast to the histories written at the time by uninspired writers.

Esther 6:4 The king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman had come into the outer court of the king's house, to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him- Hebrew, "for himself". Again we see the theme of ironic mocking of those in power, evidence of the Higher Hand and the total reversal of things. We learnt from Esther 4:11 that anyone entering the inner court without invitation was risking their life. Haman's bitterness and jealousy was enough to lead him to risk his life by entering into the court on his own initiative to ask the king to let him kill Mordecai. The proud, self confident Haman approaching the king on his own initiative is set up in parallel to the nervous, humble Esther doing the same- risking her life to save, rather than to destroy. "Who is in the court?" could be read as the king enquiring who was in the court who could practically arrange to reward Mordecai. But we can also read this [and the ambiguity is maybe purposeful] as meaning that he was aware someone had come into the court uninvited to talk to him. And he asks who this person is. And then ignores having a meeting with Haman but instead just tells him to reward Mordecai.

Esther 6:5 The king's servants said to him, Behold, Haman stands in the court. The king said, Let him come in- Haman was risking his life to enter uninvited, but such was his obsessive jealousy.

Esther 6:6 So Haman came in. The king said to him, What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?- It is tempting to imagine that the king was aware of Haman's antipathy toward Mordecai, and already suspected foul play in the plan to exterminate the Jews. At least, it seems he may well have asked the question knowing that Haman would reply as he did, assuming that he was in view.

Now Haman said in his heart, Who would the king delight to honour more than myself?- Again we see the focus of the record upon the human heart and its self-talk. The self talk of a man's heart is recorded for us to review, many centuries later. "Said in his heart" is a phrase used multiple times in the Bible, but the vast majority of them are about evil men saying wrong things in their heart- confirming the Lord's teaching that sin comes from the heart's self-talk (Mk. 7:21-23). The irony of the situation is of course huge, and intended. The extent of the irony makes us realize that there is a higher hand orchestrating everything- and God is hiding in plain sight, although never mentioned.

Esther 6:7 Haman said to the king, For the man whom the king delights to honour- Haman's eyes were on the throne, and so he asks that this person be set up as the

successor of the king; thinking it should be himself. See on :8. The irony of the situation is so strong that again we are left asking ourselves how it could have arisen... were it not for God's invisible hand.

Esther 6:8 Let royal clothing be brought which the king wears, and the horse that the king rides on, and on the head of which a crown royal is set- "Royal clothing" is LXX "the robe of fine linen". As noted on Esther 1, the palace and regal system is being set up as a fake temple and Kingdom of God. But the impression given here is that Mordecai is being set up as the king, wearing the king's own clothing, riding the king's horse with a royal crown upon it. David's command for Solomon to ride upon his own horse meant that he wanted Solomon to be the next king after him (1 Kings 1:33). See on :9. This grossly exaggerated response to Mordecai's faithfulness was typical of powerful eastern monarchs; we recall how Pharaoh made the prisoner Joseph to be the Prime Minister of Egypt when just hours before he had been wallowing in a dungeon, and was totally unknown to Pharaoh. This would have been shocking to Haman; that Mordecai was suddenly being declared the successor to Ahasuerus. It seems typical of his irresponsible behaviour. But it was tantamount to replacing Haman with Mordecai; for surely Haman's eyes were on the throne for himself.

Esther 6:9 Let the clothing and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man whom the king delights to honour with them, and have him ride on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour!'- The man of the king's "delight" is a way of saying 'Whom he wishes to set upon his throne'; it is used in that sense in 2 Chron. 9:8 and possibly 1 Sam. 18:22. The woman whom the king 'delighted in' was made queen (Esther 2:14 s.w.). See on :8.

Esther 6:10 Then the king said to Haman, Hurry and take the clothing and the horse, as you have said, and do this for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken- "The Jew" means that now Mordecai has declared his Jewishness; or perhaps a note had been made of this in the chronicles, and the king was thereby reminded of it. It could be that the king was unaware that the nation to be destroyed were the Jews; or that he had agreed to it whilst drunk (see on Esther 3:8) and was unaware of what he had really agreed to. The paradox was that a man who was publically disobedient to the king's command to bow before Haman (Esther 3:3) was now being exalted. Again the king is being nudged towards realizing the trap of his own legalism. He had made a law which a man whom he was deeply indebted to- had broken! He likely had heard of Mordecai's disobedience, because it was performed publically and was known by the king's servants.

Esther 6:11 Then Haman took the clothing and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and had him ride through the city square, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour!- The record naturally invites us to imagine the tone of voice in which he said this. Haman felt he had to be obedient to the king's commandment- to honour a man who was disobedient to the king's commandment (Esther 3:3 "Why do you disobey the king's commandment?").

Esther 6:12 Mordecai came back to the king's gate, but Haman hurried to his house, mourning and having his head covered- The roles are now reversed; recently

Mordecai had been weeping with covered head in the king's gate, and now Haman was. Esther mourns before going to the first banquet; and now Haman does before the second banquet. The way God brings about justice reflects His full awareness of all that has gone on in the past; unlike human justice. See on :14.

Esther 6:13 Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him, but you will surely fall before him-

The very same words are used of how Mordecai recounted to Esther "everything that had happened to ['befallen'] him" with regard to Haman's planned pogrom (Esther 4:7). He was being made to understand what he had done to Mordecai and the Jews. Not solely as punishment, but perhaps in the hope he would therefore repent. But he didn't.

These "wise men" were those who had thrown the lots in order to choose the day of the massacre (Esther 3:7). Suddenly their wisdom changed- from advising to massacre the Jews and kill Mordecai, to now predicting that Haman was not going to succeed but would himself perish. Again, the folly of Persian customs, traditions and wisdom is being developed. Zeresh, his friends and wise men had only yesterday been joining him in glorying over his enemy; and now they change completely, and he is left awfully alone. The book of Esther perhaps functioned as a means of telling the Jews in exile that they were preferring the kingdom of Persia over that of Yahweh; and the kingdom they preferred was terribly weak and compromised at its very foundations. They say that he is going to "fall" before Mordecai; and it was exactly Mordecai's refusal to "fall" before Haman which had been so engraved in Haman's memory (see on Esther 5:13). And again we find repeated the theme of a wife being wiser than her husband and willing to be separate from his positions, as Vashti and Esther were before Zeresh; and what she says comes to pass.

Zeresh has a strong belief that any conflict against the Jews will end in victory for the Jews. It seems she was previously ignorant of Mordecai's Jewish connections, because he like Esther had hidden them and was a non-practicing Jew. Otherwise her sudden *volte face* is not understandable. Perhaps Zeresh knew the prophecies that Israel would finally triumph over Amalek and their descendants the Agagites, from whom her husband was descended (Ex. 17:16; Num. 24:20; Dt. 25:17-19; 1 Sam. 15). She had a very strong premonition about the power of Israel's God for His people, just as Mordecai is sure that the God of Israel will come through for the Jews generally, but he can't believe that Israel's God will come through for him personally. Perhaps this is why although her husband and sons were slain, there is no record that she was. The statements of both Zeresh and Mordecai definitely imply the existence of the God of Israel, and that He will come through for His people. But this is not explicitly stated by either of them. It is only our careful reflection on the implications of their words that reveals this. And so it is, time and again, with the fact that our God will come through for us in the end. The truth of it is there, so clearly, but it is not explicitly stated to us.

Esther 6:14 While they were yet talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hurried to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared- Just as Haman had "hurried" the messengers carrying his decree to kill the Jews, so he was "hurried" by the messengers to come to the banquet; see on :12.

ESTHER CHAPTER 7

Esther 7:1 So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen- The record helps us see it all happening as if in a video. Haman went first to the king and then together they two came to Esther. Remember that "banquet" means 'a drinking'. For men and women to drink alcohol together was unusual. I have suggested that Esther's plan was to get the king drunk and then make her request. I suggest she gave the impression that she too was drinking wine, perhaps pouring her drinks from a non-alcoholic wine she had carefully prepared. Again and again we have to comment, that all this was not the most spiritual way to achieve the salvation of God's people. It does indicate a high degree of initiative on her part; for she had nobody to take advice with. She had seen the pattern of wine-wrath-decree of death or exile followed by anger abating, with Vashti; and she thought the same could happen with Haman. And it did. Until now she had been mutely obedient; but now the need was the call. And this is typical of how God works in human life. Perhaps her insistence upon the private banquet, rather than grabbing the opportunity to get the king to give her anything, was because she was ambitious enough to actually want Haman killed. And she knew that the drinking party was more likely to achieve that than asking the king for such a favour in a more rational and formal setting.

Esther 7:2 The king said again to Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is your petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed- "The banquet of wine" confirms the connection between the king and alcohol discussed on Esther 3:8. "Banquet" is literally "the drinking". But in Yahweh's system of things, "wine is not for kings" (Prov. 31:4). The kingdom of Persia is set up as most definitely not the kingdom of God, to which the exiles ought to have aspired rather than to prosperity in Persia's kingdom. Again we the readership wait with baited breath, knowing that surely now Esther has to overcome her stage fright and speak. And she does.

But I will argue on Esther 8-10 that although Esther is indeed heroic and a commendable example of the triumph of good over evil, neither she nor Mordecai go far enough. For they do not seek the restoration of the Jews to Judah. She is set up in conscious contrast with Nehemiah, also a Jew in the palace at Shushan. He too asked for a favour, and whilst also very nervous is asked by the king "What is your request?" (Neh. 2:4). His request was for the restoration of the Jews to their land. Esther by contrast says nothing about the restoration, but asks only for short term deliverance.

Esther 7:3 Then Esther the queen answered, If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request- "My request" reflects her understanding that their salvation was being made to depend upon her requesting it. The same words are used in Ezra 7:6, the only time outside of the book of Esther, to describe how "the king granted [Ezra's] request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him". Perhaps Esther had been encouraged by Ezra's example, knowing that the invisible hand of God made kings of Persia grant requests. We too should be directed and inspired by Biblical examples, and those within our own experience of the brotherhood. The ideas of 'finding favour in your sight' and asking for petitions / requests being granted are more commonly associated with people praying to God; indeed the whole verse is intended to recall

Moses' plea to Yahweh to save the people, if indeed Moses has "found favour in Your sight" (Ex. 33:12,13,17). This young, nervous, not very spiritually strong teenager was suddenly catapulted into the place of Moses, Judaism's most revered figure. We are surely intended to conclude that her begging the king was a reflection of her prayers to God, or at least, she would have perceived that her petitioning the king was effectively petitioning Yahweh. Again, she was led closer to God by her experience.

It simply can't be that we rejoice in our own salvation, and don't want to breathe a whimper of that good news to others. Esther made her request for "my life… my people" in parallel; and when her own safety was assured, she didn't just relax and mop her brow with relief, she went on to petition for them- with all the risks this involved for her (see on Esther 8:3). We can't possibly just rejoice in our own salvation, that we have found the Lord and are secured in Him; if we have truly experienced this, we will wish to share it with others.

Esther 7:4 For we are sold- This could mean that the huge sum of money offered by Haman if the Jews were destroyed may not have been a reference to their goods being plundered; but rather to Haman 'buying' the Jews through a huge donation to the treasury. Esther here is an eloquent type of the Lord's mediation for us, risked her life because she felt that "*we* are sold, *I* and my people, to be destroyed". She was tempted to reason that if she'd have kept her mouth shut, *she* wouldn't have been destroyed. But she fought and won the same battle as we have daily or weekly before us: to identify ourselves with our weaker and more suffering brethren. The Lord Jesus didn't sin Himself but He took upon Himself our sins- to the extent that He *felt* a sinner, even though He wasn't. Our response to this utter and saving grace is to likewise take upon ourselves the infirmities and sins of our brethren. If one is offended, we burn too; if one is weak, we are weak; we bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1).

I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish- Esther had apparently concealed her Jewishness for five years, clearly eating unclean food and going along with idolatry. That's a long time, and we can only conclude that she had not been an observant Jewess. She didn't only eat and dress like a Persian, but worshipped like one. She was hardly like Daniel who prayed regularly towards Jerusalem with his windows open for all to see. This is Esther 'coming out' as a Jewess; she seems to emphasize the point: "we... I and my people... we...". It appears only later that she stated her relationship to Mordecai (Esther 8:1). We reflect how little the king knew about his wives; he didn't know her nationality, her parents nor even her birthday (see on Esther 5:4). It's rather like Moses coming out as a Hebrew at age 40 to save his people.

But if we had been sold for bondservants and bondmaids, I would have held my peace, although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's loss- Haman the adversary [LXX *ho diabolos*, the devil] had offered to compensate for the lives of the Jews by paying money to the treasury. But she is saying that even if the Jews had been enslaved and not killed, the loss to the king would never have been compensated by money. She argues for the value not only of human life, but of that human life being lived in freedom and not slavery. And we note her usage of the word "we" in reflection of her connection with her people. LXX "for the slanderer is not worthy of the king's palace". As discussed on Esther 3:9, Esther alludes to how Haman had sold his plan to the king as a plan to possibly deport or enslave the Jews rather than necessarily exterminate them all. Once the king agreed to the principle, Haman wrote

the decree to command their actual extermination. The word for "destroy" in Esther 3:9 has a very wide meaning. It is used of expulsion or fleeing. The words for "enslave" and "destroy" have only one small letter different; quite possibly Haman gave the impression he spoke of enslaving, not destroying. The king agreed to this, but he may have understood it as no more than the expulsion / deportation of an ethnic group from his empire. Esther is cleverly getting the king to see that Haman had misled him. She was working to a plan, drawn up it seems purely on her initiative.

Esther 7:5 Then King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he who dared presume in his heart to do so?- Again we note the emphasis of the record upon "his heart". Surely the king knew the answer. "Where is he" could as well be translated "How could he...", as if the king is now angry with himself for letting this happen. Or perhaps he really was so disconnected from reality that he didn't guess it was Haman. We notice this disconnection from reality several times in the record (not least his not enquiring which people were to be destroyed before agreeing, and failing to make the connection between the Jews being destroyed and Mordecai being a Jew). Through all this, God was revealing His Name. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7). Although whenever a Gentile is speaking, the Y-H-V-H is formed by the letters at the end of the words.

Esther 7:6 Esther said, The adversary and the enemy is even this wicked Haman!- These words "adversary and enemy" are frequently used together in the Psalms, in prayers that the adversary and enemy would not triumph but that God would triumph over them. Surely Esther was alluding to them. She could have tried to tactfully point out that the destruction of the Jews would involve her and Mordecai being killed, and work towards some negotiated solution, without wishing to offend Haman. But she calls him "this wicked Haman!". It was all or nothing. If the king took Haman's side, she would lose her life. For this was not a tactful approach. It was an outburst of accusation. But it worked. Likewise in standing up for God's people, it is all or nothing; nicespeak and negotiated solutions cannot be the answer.

I imagine that Esther could have resolved her personal problem in a quite different way. She had invited Haman and the king to a banquet / drinking of wine. She could have chatted them up nicely, waited until they were drunk, and then said to the effect: "Gents, I have a slight problem with this decree about killing the Jews; because actually, I'm a bit Jewish. Can't you just kindly resolve that little problem for me?". And her two guests would likely have proudly chuckled and said to the effect "Sure, no problem, we can just easily fix that, don't you worry, just relax, really it's nothing, sure, sleep easy tonight about that. The whole thing's under our control, nobody will touch you, all's good. And just... bring us the next pink champagne on ice". This was the kind of thing the holocaust was full of. But she didn't take that path. Her spiritual growth was very fast, as it can be in all people. She realized now that it wasn't a case of merely her salvation, but that of the body of God's people. To focus solely upon "me being saved" would be selfish. There is more to relationship with God than that. It's about His glory and the larger picture of His purpose rather than only "me". It takes some decades to realize this; but Esther got there in the course of a few days.

Esther 7:7 The king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the

palace garden- Circumstances again repeated in his life; for he had arisen in fury from the banquet in Esther 1, seeking to have Vashti killed; and he was circumscribed by his own laws, as discussed there. Likewise here, he was angry because he was circumscribed by his own laws. It would be hard to change the law without resigning his own supposed divinity. We enquire what is the connection with the other mention of the palace garden in Esther (Esther 1:5; 7:7). It was in the palace garden that Vashti had shamed the king at the banquet; and after Haman's plot is revealed, he goes alone to the same place, again after drinking wine and after a private banquet, presumably with the garden strangely empty now. Again he has been shamed and made to look foolish, this time by Haman. Considering the similarities, he would surely have reflected that now he has a good woman. And this would have made him yet more open to Esther's subsequent requests regarding her people. We note the stress that the king arose from his wine feast and made a decision. The connection is made clear between the alcohol and his subsequent behaviour. Again we have to comment that Esther doesn't present ideally by getting him drunk before pressing her request. A spiritual woman would surely have done otherwise; and yet God worked through this to save His people, from the results of Mordecai's own pigheaded actions.

Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king- We recall that Haman fixed the picture in his mind of Mordecai not standing up before him in respect, and it led to terrible jealousy complexes (Esther 5:13). And now he stood up and bowed in desperate respect for his life before Mordecai's Jewish daughter. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7). The same word for "make request" is used of Esther. She too 'stood up' before the king and 'made request' for her life and the lives of her people. "Evil" had been likewise determined against her and her people. We wonder whether Esther thought that therefore she ought to show Haman grace. We too at times have those same difficulties. We who have been shown grace wonder as to the degree and nature of grace we ought to show others who clearly have been abusive. In this case, as also can happen in our lives, the decision can be taken out of our hands. For Haman has a panic attack and collapses on Esther's bed, the king walks in and assumes Haman has tried to rape Esther, and therefore immediately orders his death.

Esther 7:8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman had fallen on the couch where Esther was- The Esther story is full of the hand of providence. It seems Haman had collapsed, perhaps suffered a heart attack from the stress on top of the alcohol from the "banquet / drinking of wine" (:2). And he fell unconscious onto Esther's couch. That was surely from God, because the king was greeted by the sight of Haman's prostrate body on his wife's couch.

Then the king said, Will he even assault the queen in front of me in the house?- "Assault" is AV "force", and the idea is not only of force but more manipulation. The word choice reflects the king's anger at how he had been manipulated.

As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face- Condemned criminals were not allowed to see the king's face. The courtiers knew that Haman was condemned to death. This was all a strange fulfilment of Ps. 71:13 "Let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek [s.w. Esther 3:6 of Haman

seeking the destruction of the Jews] my hurt ["evil", s.w. "the evil of Haman" Esther 8:3]". The circumstance in David's life now repeated in the life of Esther.

Esther 7:9 Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were with the king said, Behold, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman has made for Mordecai, who spoke good for the king, is standing at Haman's house. The king said, Hang him on it!- This may have been one of the eunuchs sent to collect Haman from his house, who had seen the gallows at Haman's home and heard from the surrounding folks what it was intended for.

Esther 7:10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified- The irony is huge; the reversal of fortune absolutely 180 degrees. To such an extent that we can only see "God" here yet again, even though He is not specifically mentioned. Just as we see in our own lives. Earlier, the king's wrath had demanded pacification in killing Vashti. But he was caught by his own legal system, and had been unable to do that. We wonder whether there was any legal basis for the execution of Haman; probably there wasn't. By the letter of the law, he had done everything right. So the execution of Haman was the king departing from the letter of the law; and as discussed on Esther 1:15, this is a major theme of the book. God was nudging the king beyond legalism, and also to a realization that his laws weren't actually very good and needed to be changed. And therefore, he was not the divine being he liked to think he was, who made perfect laws that could never be changed because to do so would be to question his divinity and rightness.

ESTHER CHAPTER 8

Esther 8:1 On that day, King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, to Esther the queen- "Enemy" here is LXX *diabolos*, the slanderer / enemy. Clearly he is set up as representative of the organized opposition to God's people, although we have here another example of how the word refers simply to a human being and not an external cosmic being. The presence of the article, *the* slanderer / *diabolos*, is significant in that it torpedoes the position of those who argue that every reference to *ho diabolos* refers to the cosmic being of popular theology. It doesn't, for here it refers simply to the man Haman.

Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was to her- The king was ignorant of this, apparently not knowing much about the personal history of his wives; see on Esther 5:4. We now see them both 'coming out' even more. We are intended to shine as candles not under a bucket but set on a hill. And God gently works to lead us all to a situation where our faith isn't solely personal but is made public. And yet we struggle to believe that the king married a woman without knowing anything of her background. We are surely led to believe, given the characterization of the king as forgetful and distant from domestic reality, that rather he had clean forgotten her relationship to Mordecai, and that Mordecai was a Jew.

Esther 8:2 The king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman- The gift of a "house" to a woman and this decision making by a woman was unusual; but the whole story is about the overthrow of traditional, conservative paradigms and legalistic approaches

by the movement of God's invisible Spirit. For the very young, previously passive Esther suddenly becomes a head of house. It is also a story of the subdued, obedient young woman, always obedient to Mordecai and Hegai, being faced with a case of "the need is the call". And this transformed her. She takes initiative, and becomes the initiator rather than the manipulated and used. Such transformations in character are often worked by God in a similar way today.

Esther 8:3 Esther spoke yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and begged him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews- This presumably involved risking death again by going in to the king's audience uninvited. But she had learnt the lesson- that she was not to merely seek her own salvation but to continue to risk her life for that of others. She begs "with tears", apparently more emotionally and passionately than she did when she first asked about the matter. Her passion for the salvation of others had now become stronger than her desire for personal salvation; when according to our reflections on Esther 4:11 her initial reaction to the news of the decree was to consider that she could save herself by keeping quiet, and she had been unwilling to go to see the king uninvited. Such spiritual growth over such a short period can be seen in the lives of God's people today and is possible for each of us. Esther now intercedes with tears, unlike in her first nervous request for her own life. Her passion for the salvation of her people was greater than her passion to save her own life. This is psychologically credible, and yet is a pattern for us all- to not be spiritually selfish. Too many sit within the bubble of church or denominational life, and are effectively spiritually selfish. It could be argued that Esther's request for her people is the only thing she does on her own initiative; and the only thing she did that was not motivated by personal benefit for herself. Although she does express it in terms of not wanting to see her own people suffer.

Esther 8:4 Then the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre. So Esther arose, and stood before the king- The use of the sceptre shows she was still approaching him uninvited and at the risk of her life.

Esther 8:5 She said, If it pleases the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right to the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces-

Esther's appeal failed. The letters were not reversed or withdrawn [Heb. *shub*]. Although the laws of the Persians could not change, there was also a law that said the king was sovereign and could do as he wished, above any laws. The laws of the Persians could be overridden by the king, and Esther clearly knew this, hence her request. It was only pride that stopped them exercising this right. Cambyses, desiring to marry his sister, was advised by his advisers that, although there was no law permitting such an act, yet there was one to the effect that the king might do as he pleased. But all the same, the king didn't reverse the letters of Haman. He simply gave another law that allowed the Jews to defend themselves. This consideration militates against any view of Esther as a gloriously successful heroine. And we ponder the lack of later allusion in scripture to Esther. There are Proverbs which allude to Haman's folly and pride coming before a fall (Prov. 27:1; 29:23), and possibly to the king's folly in listening to unwise advisors and acting hastily (Prov. 12:23; 29:20; Ecc. 10:1 are alluding to both the king and Haman). But there are no such allusions to Esther

nor Mordecai. I find that significant. Christians are raised with the image of Esther winning a beauty contest [rather than a sex competition, as it actually was], and heroically saving her people through her faithful devotion to God. But she acted for her own salvation from force of circumstance and with fatalism more than faith. Getting the king drunk before making her request for her own life. And her attempt to save her people failed insofar as the decree about the pogrom was not reversed, as she asked for.

She stresses that Haman wrote the letters- even though they were written in the king's name. But laws of the Persians couldn't be reversed- unless the king was going to admit he wasn't actually divine. And it could be that she was asking him to make this radical step of realization and humility. To "reverse" the decree, or turn it back, was the same idea as 'repenting'. But he refuses, and instead tries to get around the problem by issuing another decree.

Clearly Esther did find favour before both the king and her God. But this apparently contradicts earlier statements in the prophets. But the passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know mine hand… and they shall now that my name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

Esther 8:6 For how can I endure to see the evil that would come to my people? How can I endure to see the destruction of my relatives?- Life lived solely for ourselves, even eternal life, is not endurable if our brethren are not living it with us. This had multiple implications. LXX "How can I survive the destruction...?" suggests she felt she would die with those who died. Her life was bound up with the life of her Jewish people, although previously she was but an ethnic Jewess who had totally assimilated into the life of the Persians. But she in her heart would live and die with them. Just as part of us dies in the death of those we love, and the Lord died and dies in our deaths

and we in His.

Esther 8:7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, If I have freely granted you all that was Haman's, because he laid his hand on the Jews, and hanged him on a gallows, what do you further seek?- We begin to tremour a little with Esther, wondering if the king's patience has worn thin. But we see again the king's shortsightedness and lack of empathy and appreciation of the implication of events and statements. He considered that if Haman was dead, and he had given the wealth of Haman to Mordecai, then there could be no other problem. The king is basically saying that Esther has an open cheque, just as he gave to Haman. Again and again, he is characterized as being hasty and distant from actual issues. This would fit very well with our earlier suggestion that he was alcoholic.

Esther 8:8 Write also to the Jews, as it pleases you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may not be reversed by any man- The idea is that the first decree could not be reversed, but the king could issue a second decree empowering the Jews to defend themselves. Again, as explained on Esther 1:15, the king was caught up in his own legalism. God was trying to nudge him towards realizing that he was not in fact God; for that was the basis upon which they considered that royal laws couldn't be changed, because they thought 'gods' were unchanging. But he is repeatedly taught, and the readership are taught, that any such system of legalism ends up limiting freedom of movement and ends up in contradiction. What is being highlighted is that the God of Israel isn't like that; He can and does change, even His own laws. Casuistic approaches to law were bound to fail, because God Himself is dynamic; the only point at which He doesn't change is His constant love for the sons of Jacob and not punishing them as their sins deserve (Mal. 3:6). His comment that the king's decree could not be reversed "by any *man*" may suggest that he was slightly moving towards the acceptance of a personal God far mightier than himself; for he may mean that "man" couldn't reverse it, not even himself, but God could.

Esther 8:9 Then the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month Sivan, on the twenty-third day of the first month, which is Nisan; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, and to the satraps, the governors and princes of the provinces which are from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language, and to the Jews in their writing and in their language- It seems better to go with AV and GNB "This happened on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan". Seventy days have elapsed since the decree was given on 13 Nisan. The persecution intended by Haman was part of the 'fishers and hunters' sent to return Israel to their land. These 70 days surely connect with the 70 years of intended captivity before they returned. The connection is surely to suggest that the response of the Jews should have been to return to their land. But like men ignore bush fire evacuation orders in order to remain with their property in the vain hope of saving it, so the Jews remained in Persia.

Again we have a tacit recognition of the degree to which the Jews had been scattered, throughout the 127 provinces of the empire- exactly in fulfilment of the prophecies of scattering. For the proud king to do this was also a tacit recognition that his laws and decision making were not infallible and he had been set up to make a

major decision which was wrong. It is perhaps to his credit that he allowed the second decree to be written and sent.

Esther 8:10 He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by courier on horseback, riding on royal horses that were bred from swift steeds- There may have been an attempt to outrun the carriers of the earlier decree, even though they were also "hasted".

Esther 8:11 In those letters, the king granted the Jews who were in every city to gather themselves together, and to defend their life, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to plunder their possessions- The second edict is worded in the terms of the first; the Jews were empowered to do to their enemies what those enemies had wished to do to them. This is the repeated basis for judgment in the last day; thus throughout Revelation, the seals of judgment upon latter Israel are then brought upon their abusers in the form of the trumpets and vials. The LXX adds some detail; "he charged them to use their own laws in every city, and to help each other". Haman had previously made a fuss about the Jews' laws. Now they were encouraged to use their own laws, and to use them as they were intended- to help each other, after the pattern of Esther not thinking only of her own salvation. This was another prod of the exiles towards obedience to the law as intended, and to turn to their God more fully.

However we could comment that such extreme measure for measure judgment, killing the women and children, was not exactly spiritually correct. Self defence is one thing, but murder of women and children because of their association with aggressors is surely another. Perhaps we see here another hint that Mordecai was not a very spiritual person, although he evolved quickly.

Esther 8:12 on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar- This was the date which Haman had chosen by casting lots. And again the hand of God was invisibly in that, for now the Jews had plenty of time to prepare themselves.

Esther 8:13 A copy of the letter, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published to all the peoples, that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies- Vengeance on Israel's enemies was the language of the restoration prophecies and the reestablishment of the Kingdom which was potentially possible at the restoration. But the Jews in Persia were those who hadn't responded to that. And yet it is as if God so eagerly tries to by all means achieve at least a partial fulfilment of those prophecies. They were intended, of course, to see the similarities and return both to their God and His land. But they were content with the very partial fulfilment of what was at that time potentially possible. See on :14; Esther 9:22.

Esther 8:14 So the couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. The decree was given out in the citadel of Susa- The parallel is clearly with the hasting of the king's commandment to destroy the Jews. Esther is full of such inversions. The impression given is that there was to be a complete reversal of their fortunes. But this was the language of the restoration prophecies and the reestablishment of the Kingdom which was potentially possible at the restoration; see on :13.

Esther 8:15 Mordecai went out of the presence of the king in royal clothing of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and was glad- The colours and materials are those mentioned in the description of the scene at the king's palace in Esther 1:6. Mordecai is, on one hand, totally absorbed into the way of the Persian empire. Rather than being back in Jerusalem where he ought to have been. The descriptions of his clothing however recall some elements of the High Priestly clothing; he too wore a crown. Zechariah's visions were of a king-priest dressed in the garments of both king and priest, who would reign in Jerusalem when the Kingdom was restored (Zech. 6:11,14; the "crown" is s.w. Esther 8:15). Zerubbabel disappears from the record, as does Joshua the High Priest. They were the intended fulfillments, but failed. I suggest Mordecai may have been set up as another potential fulfilment; but he too failed, preferring to remain in the secular glory of the Persian court.

The joy of Susa is in conscious contrast with how at the first decree, the city of Shushan was perplexed (Esther 3:15; 4:1). As noted on :13,14, the impression given is that there was to be a complete reversal of their fortunes. But they didn't take this theme further, and realize that it was in Zion where their fortunes were to be finally and more totally reversed. They were experiencing a foretaste of what would be possible far more fully if they repented and returned to Zion; but they refused to take that Divine nudge.

Esther 8:16 The Jews had light, gladness, joy, and honour- This is the image of Ps. 97:11: "There is sprung up a light for the righteous". The springing up of Judah's light is spoken of in Isaiah as happening at the restoration, in terms of Zion's light coming to Jerusalem in the person of Messiah. Likewise joy and gladness was to be Judah's experience in Zion. But it seems what could have been the breaking in of the Messianic kingdom for them even in captivity didn't lead to that Kingdom. For they preferred their own kingdom of wealth in Persia. They remained there; and the true light and joy of Zion wasn't experienced by them. See on :13-15.

The final chapters of Esther have much to say about the joy of the Jews. It is a consistent theme. But the same words are used of the joy Judah were intended to have at their return from Persia / Babylon and restoration of the Kingdom- which they refused to do. The rejoicing of Judah is to be contrasted with the consistent teaching that Israel and Judah were to rejoice and be glad when their exile was ended, when their "captivity returned" (Ps. 14:7; 53:6; Jer. 31:13), with their rejoicing being in their God (Ps. 85:6), rejoicing "in My [restored] house" (Is. 56:7; Zech. 4:10), when Judah's mourning would be turned to joy at the restoration (Jer. 31:13; Zech. 2:10); and then the nations would be glad and rejoice (Ps. 67:4). The Gentiles in Persia rejoiced [s.w.] at the outcome for the Jews and the exaltation of Mordecai (Esther 8:15 "the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad"). But all this joy was misplaced; the joy of Judah and the nations was intended to be in the restoration of God's Kingdom and the return of His people from captivity. But their joy was of a purely secular nature.

Esther 8:17 In every province, and in every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had gladness, joy, a feast, and a good day. Many from among the peoples of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen on them- Although the ideal was that they returned to Zion and experienced light and joy there (:16), it seems God was willing to amend that plan so that their experience of it

in captivity led to the Gentiles becoming Jews (as in Esther 9:27). For this is the consistent prophetic picture of the restored Kingdom of God- that Gentiles would join with repentant Judah in forming a multiethnic Kingdom of God in Zion. Just as some Egyptians joined the Jews in their exodus from Egypt, which is constantly alluded to in the restoration prophecies as the prototype for Judah's exodus from captivity, so it began to happen. But they didn't make the exodus; they remained where they were, although all was now set up for them to return. See on :13-16 and Esther 2:6.

The raising up of Haman's pogrom was of God; it was part of the threatened punishment of sending them into exile and sending a sword after them to destroy them there. And it was part of Jeremiah's "fishers and hunters" sent to drive God's people back to their land. On one hand, it failed to achieve this, and God cut short the pogrom from sheer pity. And yet through this whole exercise, the fact many Gentiles "became Jews" [which surely implies they became Jews in a religious sense] shows that God used even this failure to further His saving purpose. Quite possibly in the Kingdom we will share eternal fellowship with some random Persian Gentile who became a Jew because of all this experience. Absolutely nothing can foil God's purpose to save man, not even the failure of His plans to bring about Israel's repentance. He works to save in every way and through every situation. Such is His saving grace and His core, essential personality as a Saviour.

ESTHER CHAPTER 9

Esther 9:1 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the month, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put into effect, on the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to conquer them, (but it was turned about so that the opposite happened- the Jews conquered those who hated them)-

"To conquer" is the same word used in Dan. 6:24 for the lions having the mastery over those Persians who wished to kill Daniel by throwing him to the mastery or conquering of the lions in the den of lions. We have noted the many spiritually unfavourable contrasts between Daniel's spirituality and Esther and Mordecai's unspirituality. But the connection with Daniel's deliverance from the lions shows that by grace, God treated them the same as He did Daniel.

This theme of 'turning about so the opposite happens' is a major theme of Esther. The fasting of Esther is contrasted with the feasting of Haman and the king; and now it is the Jews who are feasting. Instead of the Jews being destroyed by their enemies, they destroy their enemies. The impression given is that there was to be a complete reversal of their fortunes. But this was the language of the restoration prophecies and the reestablishment of the Kingdom which was potentially possible at the restoration; see on Esther 8:13. The turning of curse into blessing is simply because God loves Israel (s.w. Dt. 23:5; Neh. 13:2). But the exiles had doubted His love, as Ez. 18 makes clear. But through this whole incident, God seeks to display His love to His people, and His grace.

One great theme of Esther is of reversal of fortune. Esther 9:1 spells this out: "It was turned about so that the opposite happened- the Jews conquered those who hated them". The same word is found in Esther 9:22; the day of their destruction "was turned to them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day". The book opens with a parade of the greatness of the king and the Persian empire; it closes with the greatness of Mordecai the Jew. The Persian banquets of the opening are

matched by those of the celebrating, victorious Jews. Esther begins by identifying as a Gentile, but the book closes with Gentiles identifying as Jews (Esther 8:17). The elevation of Haman (Esther 3:1) is matched by Mordecai's elevation and granting of the king's signet ring as once given to Haman. The command to destroy the Jews ends up with a command to destroy the enemies of the Jews. And it is this great reversal of all things which is stamped throughout God's dealings with man. The poor become rich, the weak become the strong, the despised become the glorified, with the Lord's death on the cross and subsequent glorification being the parade worked example.

Dramatic reversal of fortune in this way is typical of what happens when God is at work for His people. Although God isn't mentioned here specifically, how else could things have been 'turned around' like this? The implication is that someone turned things around. And who, if not God? We think of the songs rejoicing at the victory over Egypt at the Red Sea (Ex. 15), Hannah's song of rejoicing (1 Sam. 2), the David and Goliath story... the underdogs amongst God's people come out on top. Because of God. Here, the reversal of fortune is clearly stated. But we are left to join the dots, and see that God has to be the source of that. But this isn't specifically mentioned, because we are left to reflect that God achieved this in this case without miracle but through His unseen hand. It is the difference between what Robert Roberts called "The Visible Hand of God", as seen at the Red Sea and David's conquest of Goliath; and "The Ways of Providence".

This theme of Divine reversal of things in Esther contrasts with how the laws of the Persians could supposedly not be reversed: "Let it be written into the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be revoked / reversed" (Esther 1:19). The decree to destroy the Jews likewise appeared unable to be reversed. But the invisible hand of God totally reversed the apparently irreversible decree. The evil of Haman was overturned or reversed, because Esther "beseeched him to overturn the evil plotted by Haman" (Esther 8:3).

This theme of ultimate reversal is at the core of the Gospel. The Beatitudes spell it out, spoken as they were as the Lord's opening statement of the Christian message. The weepers will rejoice, the poor will become rich, the mocked will be praised, the weak and sickly become immortally strong, the renters and homeless become eternal owners etc. This theme is so major that it is absolutely logical that we now must be the underdogs. We cannot have it both ways- being the great ones now and also eternally. Otherwise this massive theme of reversal cannot be played out in our personal experience.

Esther 9:2 The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus, to lay hands on those who wanted to harm them. No one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen on all the people- Their gathering together to help each other was after the pattern of Esther not thinking only of her own salvation. Her example would have been inspirational in the mending of so many interpersonal relationship issues amongst the Jews, just as the Lord's example of mediation and sacrifice to achieve it should likewise for us. For "the fear..." see on :3.

"To lay hand on such as sought their hurt" can be read as more than self defence, but rather a command to kill those who had shown support for the decree to kill the Jews. Thus it was open to the Jews to assume the offensive, and not necessarily await an attack. In this case, we reflect that there was some providence in there being a gap between the decrees. The overall result was that all anti-Jewish opposition was revealed and destroyed, and the Jews exalted. This was clearly brought about by some unseen hand- that of the God of Israel. "Withstand" suggests the Jews were not just

fighting in self defence, but twisted the permission to do so in order to go on the attack. Again the morality of the whole thing is called into question; and yet it resulted in the exaltation of God's people.

Esther 9:3 All the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and those who did the king's business helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them- The fear of Israel falling upon the peoples (also in :2) uses the very same phrase used about the effect of the Exodus miracles upon the Egyptians (Ex. 15:16; Ps. 105:38), with Mordecai functioning as Moses. And yet the same effect as the visible miracles was achieved by the invisible, non-miraculous hand of God working in human and national lives. The implication was that this was all to prepare the exiles for their intended exodus out of Persia and back to their land- but they refused to make good on what was set up for them.

Esther 9:4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai grew greater and greater- LXX "For the order of the king was in force, that he should be celebrated in all the kingdom". The king was obviously deeply impressed by Esther and Mordecai, and surely was being himself nudged towards accepting the God of Israel by the transformation he witnessed in these secular Jews towards truly spiritual, brave people of principle. "The man Mordecai" suggests this was all rather human and secular rather than spiritual. After Isaac had sinned in unfaithfulness to his wife, we read the same phrase: "The man grew great, and grew more and more until he became very great" (Gen. 26:13). This is identical language now used about Mordecai. We find "the man" used about Jacob when again he is blessed undeservedly, by grace, after a "low" spiritual period also outside the promised land: "The man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks" (Gen. 30:43). The connection with Isaac and Jacob shows this was by grace alone, and quite undeserved blessing which came right after moral failure.

Esther 9:5 The Jews struck all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they wanted to those who hated them- This suggests a primary fulfilment of the prophecy that the exiles in Babylon / Persia would become God's weapons of war with which to judge the nations where they had been taken captive (Jer. 51:20). The intention was that they would judge their captors, return to the land and be part of the reestablished Kingdom of God. But the exiles only allowed a partial fulfilment of this, and remained with their wealth in Persia; see on Esther 8:13-16.

Esther 9:6 In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men- AV "In Shushan the palace". The extent of opposition to the Jews was therefore significant (800 killed in all, :15), despite Mordecai now being the prime minister, and the king clearly pro-Jewish. The pre-existing anti-Jewish sentiment was significant in the palace, and therefore Esther is revealed as the more brave for coming out as Jewish. Haman knew that his plan was tapping in to widespread support. If indeed Haman was the descendant of Agag the Amalekite (see on Esther 3:1) this would mean that the people killed here by the Jews would likely have been Amalekites. This would therefore have been a fulfilment of the prophecies about Yahweh's unceasing war with Amalek (Ex. 17:16) and Israel's final victory over them through Messiah (Num. 24:7 "higher than Agag"). No Messiah figure was in view; but had they

returned to the land in faith and repentance, then the restoration prophecies stated that one would have arisen. And so we find here a partial fulfilment of the prophecies about Amalek and Agag, and not a complete one. See on :11.

Esther 9:7 They killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha- The "ten sons" of Haman is a phrase stressed four times in :10-14, and although ten are indeed listed here, the idea may mean "all his children" as in 1 Sam. 1:8. The Jews interpret Haman as representative of the *yetzer ha rah*, the evil inclination, which the New Testament at times understands as the great satan / adversary to spiritual life. The Jews then see in the meanings of the names of his sons the various characteristics of the flesh. Each of the names of the sons apparently contain the word “self” in the Persian language. Although the meaning of these names is hard to define, the Jewish view is that these first three names stand respectively for 'distance [from God]', 'door to bad intentions', 'gathering of money'.

Esther 9:8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha- See on :7. The Jews define these names as meaning respectively 'a woman's private parts' [if spelt backwards]; 'pride' and 'preying like a lion to destroy others'.

Esther 9:9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha- See on :7. The Jews define these names as meaning respectively 'ripping into division', 'subjugation of the righteous' and 'bitterness', the end result of all these various features of the fleshly life.

Esther 9:10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jew’s enemy; but they didn’t lay their hand on the plunder- This is emphasized, because they had been given the right to do this (Esther 8:11). They were following the example of Abraham who refused to add to his wealth by taking the spoil of his enemies (Gen. 14:23). This can be read as a politically astute decision, so as not to give the impression they had orchestrated all this for their benefit; but there was surely thereby a nudge from God towards remembering that they were Abraham's seed, and ought to return to the land promised them as his seed. We can also read this refusal to take the spoil to themselves as an implication that it was not theirs but God's, seeing He had given them the victory. Possibly in this case they burnt the spoil rather than take it to themselves, as in Josh. 6:17,18; or sent it to the newly rebuilt temple, thus partially fulfilling prophecies about the wealth of the Gentiles flowing to Zion. And thus they reversed the sin of Saul who took the spoil to himself (1 Sam. 15)- recalling that Mordecai was in the direct line of Saul. The destruction of all Haman's sons but not his wife was perhaps an attempt to fulfil what their ancestor Saul failed to do- to destroy the rulership of Agag / Amalek. And yet ten sons of Saul were slain and hung, three on the wall of Bethshan (1 Sam. 31) and then seven when revenge was taken on Saul's family by the Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21). Saul's descendant Mordecai had effectively slain and hung 10 sons of the Agagite, doing what Saul should have done. And yet ten of Saul's sons were slain and hung. This is again one of those strange twists in the story which may not have specific meaning, and yet the very existence of which shows the higher hand of God somehow involved.

Esther 9:11 On that day, the number of those who were slain in the citadel of Susa was brought before the king- A king would surely be concerned about the outbreak of civil war. The fact he allowed the slaughter to continue right on his doorstep in Susa

would suggest that he perceived that those killed were not his own people, but the supporters of Haman, Amalekites. See on :6.

Esther 9:12 The king said to Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in the citadel of Susa, including the ten sons of Haman; what then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your further request? It shall be done- Her first intercession had brought her to a position where now the king came to her, guessing what she would like and offering it. She doesn't come to him, he perceives what she wants and offers it to her. We possibly see here some insight into the nature of the Lord's relationship with the Father after He interceded for us on the cross. Rom. 8 describes all this as the intercession of the spirit, as if the Father and Son have a meeting of minds / spirit, and the Father knows and automatically grants what He knows His Son wants for His people. The question "What is your further request?" implies that the king perceives that Esther is not yet satisfied. We see Esther now as the initiator and controller, a far cry from the cowed, submissive youngster she once was. Transformed by the principle of 'The need is the call'.

Esther 9:13 Then Esther said, If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according to this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows- We see here how circumstances repeat. Esther had previously come to the king with a request to come to a banquet, and then repeated that same request, to come "tomorrow". The Esther story shows clearly how things work according to a Divine plan which is multidimensional and yet has internal consistencies and similarities. See on :12. We are left wondering whether Esther was not just seeking maximum damage upon her enemies. For to fight in self defence is one thing; but to ask for another day of fighting rather suggests the Jews were on the offensive and not the defensive. Is Esther not being simply bloodthirsty? After all, at this point no Jewish blood has been shed. Nor, apparently, will it be. We are tempted to see similarities with Israeli desire to abuse others as they were abused during the holocaust. Such suggestions of course read difficultly to those who have been raised to think of Esther as a heroine of faith. I suggest that the Bible is full of examples of failure and partial success, with very few of the characters presented as totally positive [Joseph, Daniel, the Lord Jesus]. We are to find ourselves in the stories and autobiographies, and to perceive the connections and lessons. For we too are mixed and impure. We are not so much as awed by the peerless examples we meet [which is often unfruitful], as challenged by the similarities between our weakness and those of others who all the same were the historical people of God.

Esther 9:14 The king commanded this to be done. A decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons- We have just read in :10 of the murder of his sons. Perhaps the LXX is therefore to be preferred here: "And he permitted it to be so done; and he gave up to the Jews of the city the bodies of the sons of Aman to hang".

Esther 9:15 The Jews who were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and killed three hundred men in Shushan; but they didn't lay their hand on the spoil- This makes a total of 800 killed over the two days. See on :6 for the significance of this anti-Jewish sentiment in Shushan. For "spoil", see on :10. For "gathered themselves together" see on :16. Their refusal to take the spoil is mentioned three times (:10,15,16), and stands in contrast to the

intention of taking their property as spoil under Haman's plan (Esther 3:13). The Jews had been empowered to take the spoil and also kill the women and children of their attackers (Esther 8:11). But they only kill the men, and don't touch the spoil (also :12). We too have apparent rights to treat others as they treated us... but the way of the Spirit is not to do so. We noted earlier the clear connections between Haman and Agag king of Amalek, and the way Mordecai is a direct descendant of Saul. All Agag's spoil was to be taken and dedicated to Yahweh (1 Sam. 15), and the command of Esther 8:11 allowed the Jews to do so. But they didn't. They could have legitimately seized the spoil of the 75000 they slew and sent it to the temple community in Jerusalem. Lesson: the fact we can legitimately do something, even according to God's word, doesn't mean we have to. There may be a higher way of wisdom.

Esther 9:16 The other Jews who were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, defended their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them; but they didn't lay their hand on the plunder- LXX renders "gathered themselves together" as "and helped one another". They were learning the lesson from the nervous teenager Esther, who didn't just seek her own salvation, but risked her life in order to bring about the salvation of all God's people. We see here how good spiritual attitudes can spread quickly and effectively.

The edict of Esther 8:11 allowed the Jews to "cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to plunder their possessions". It is noted they didn't make use of the provision to plunder. But we can surely infer that they made use of the other provisions- to kill their enemies and also their women and children. To achieve this, the Jews would have spent months arming themselves. Instead, they ought to have moved to Judah, which was the Divine intention of the pogrom.

Esther 9:17 This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of that month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness- Israel being given "rest" from their enemies was the sign that they should now inherit the promised land (s.w. Dt. 12:10); rest from their enemies meant that they were to blot out the name of Amalek (s.w. Dt. 25:19). Clearly these things were coming about, seeing that Haman was an Amalekite and those they were killing were likely Amalekites (see on Esther 3:1). But they failed to go further with these Divine possibilities, just as we can fail to; see on Esther 8:13-16. Being given rest meant they could inherit the land (Josh. 1:13 s.w.) but they preferred to remain in Persia. Tellingly, the same word is used in Neh. 9:28, addressed to the exiles: "But after they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies".

Esther 9:18 But the Jews who were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth and on the fourteenth days of the month; and on the fifteenth day of that month, they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness- The subtext to this otherwise positive picture of good triumphing over evil is that their day of feasting and gladness was prophetically intended to be in Zion (Is. 25:6 s.w.). They went into exile exactly because they had days of 'feasting' and didn't respond to the prophetic message (s.w. Is. 5:12). It was in Zion that they were to experience "gladness" (Is. 35:10) when they returned (Is. 51:11). They were to leave the lands of their captivity in "gladness" and thus come to Zion (Is. 55:12 s.w.). But they didn't return. They were to have eternal

"gladness... *in their land*" (s.w. Is. 61:7), the day of Jer. 31:7 (s.w.). The "day of gladness" was to be accompanied by the blowing of trumpets (s.w. Num. 10:10), summoning them to Zion. But there is no mention of this; because they didn't want to return there, but to remain in prosperous Persia. See on :21.

Esther 9:19 Therefore the Jews of the villages, who lived in the unwalled towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, a good day-

The decree to kill the Jews was given on the 13th day of the first month, the night before Passover, when the Jews would have been reciting the narrative of their deliverance from Egypt. Again we see the hidden hand of God- for this ought to have reminded the Jews of their Passover deliverance. Just as we read nothing of "God" nor prayer in Esther [forgetting the LXX additions], so too the connection with Passover is not made explicit. Possibly the Jews weren't keeping it anyway; and effectively, they replaced it with Purim, a feast not commanded by God. And perhaps they consciously did this, because they kept Purim on the 14th day of the 12th month whereas Passover was on the 14th day of the first month. And they command that Purim is to be kept "for ever" (Esther 9:19), in the very language used of the Passover (Ex. 12:24-27). We must read their instigation of Purim in the context of Zechariah and Haggai criticizing the returned exiles for establishing at least three other feasts, whilst not keeping God's commands properly if at all. It was a way to escape their obligations to their God, through creating their own set of legalistic traditions. We note there is no later Biblical allusion to Purim; it was man-made, and not part of God's original intention nor command.

The existence of Jews even in villages and remote settlements of the Persian empire reflects the degree of their scattering, in fulfilment of the prophecies about this.

And a day of sending presents of food to one another-Generosity to others was a reflection of their personal experience of grace. We are to be generous to others and concern ourselves with their salvation, as God did to us. "Grace" literally means a gift, and the giving of gifts ought to reflect that. As noted on :16, they were learning the lesson from the nervous teenager Esther, who didn't just seek her own salvation, but risked her life in order to bring about the salvation of all God's people.

One thing we learn from the book of Esther is that we must look beneath the surface of the text, meditate upon it, and see a subtext. The clearest example is that such meditation reveals that the apparently absent God is in fact hiding in plain sight. And so we here think about the implication of sending presents "to one another" [repeated in :22]. But not to the Gentiles. Surely the Jews ought to have responded to God's grace to them by reflecting that grace to the Gentile world, and bringing them to their gracious God. But there is not a word of gratitude to God. Just celebrating their good luck, and celebrating it selfishly amongst themselves.

Esther 9:20 Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both near and far- LXX "wrote these things in a book". Perhaps here we have the origin of the book of Esther; it was an account by Mordecai of how he, a secular and not very religious Jew, had seen his weaknesses used by God in order to save others; it was written as a testament to grace. But on :29 I will note that the book could equally have been written by Esther.

Esther 9:21 To enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar yearly- Whilst this was understandable it could be argued that the

subtext of the history is negative; there is no mention of them keeping the Mosaic feasts, but instead they created a new one to celebrate in the lands of exile. Instead, they ought to have returned from those lands and not remained there; see on :18.

Esther 9:22 as the days in which the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned to them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy- LXX "a change was made for them, from mourning to joy, and from sorrow to a good day". This change from mourning to joy connects with the prophecies of the restored kingdom, when mourning would be turned to joy for Zion (Is. 51:11; 60:20; 61:3). But Judah hadn't repented nor returned to the land as intended. And yet it is as if God so eagerly tries to by all means achieve at least a partial fulfilment of those prophecies. They were intended, of course, to see the similarities and return both to their God and His land. But they were content with the very partial fulfilment of what was at that time potentially possible. See on Esther 8:13. For "turned...", see on :1.

Thanks to Esther's mediation and Haman's death, the Jews "had rest from their enemies". But this is the phrase used for how Israel in the promised land would finally have "rest from their enemies" (Josh. 11:23). Significantly, it is the phrase used in Dt. 12:10,11 for the precondition required before the a permanent tabernacle [cp. the temple] could be established: "*When*... He gives you rest from all your enemies around you, so that you dwell in safety, *then* to the place which Yahweh your God shall choose, to cause His name to dwell there, you must bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices". This "when... then" is quite clear. The 'rest from enemies' should have led them back to the land. As they had been commanded. But still they refused, and to this day Judaism continues to use their self-declared feast of Purim as an excuse to get drunk and party. God sent Haman's persecution as the 'fishers and hunters' of Jeremiah, to prod them back to their land. They were given 11 months notice of their destruction, during which they could have emigrated back. Their materialism and attachment to Persia meant that they didn't. So God by grace saved them, despite His promises to chase and pursue them to death amongst the nations. He changed this intention by grace alone; for there is no record of the peoples' prayer nor repentance, simply their lament as to their persecution. This 'rest from their enemies' should have provoked them to return to the land and establish the temple. And again they refused, as they refused all His various ways of coaxing and appeal. Even worse, we don't read of any thanksgiving to God for the amazing deliverance by grace. It went unperceived. If some did make or feel some gratitude to God, it isn't recorded... because presumably it wasn't more than skin deep.

This serves as a bookend, connecting with how the Esther story opens with the Persians feasting. Now everything is reversed, and it is God's people who feast with joy. We begin reading of the "greatness" of the king (Esther 1:4; 6:3) and conclude with the "greatness" of Mordecai (Esther 10:2). It seems to me that God's gracious salvation of His people was more powerfully shown by all the invisible miracles, than if He had acted by visible miracles. We thereby see more clearly the extra-ordinary in the ordinary, the vast scale of the invisible miracles. And such things happen in our lives today, so there is no disjuncture between the book of Esther and our own lives.

Esther 9:23 The Jews accepted the custom that they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them- What is specifically in view is the command to keep the 15th day as well. The abiding weakness of the exiles was their attempt to have a foot in both

camps and to compromise with the world of their exile- rather than returning to Judah and worshipping Yahweh exclusively. Zechariah criticizes them for not keeping God's laws as required, and yet establishing various new feast days to memorialize the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple and the captivity. I suggest their inauguration of Purim was likewise not God's will, and was a compromise with the world of their exile. The Babylonians also had a feast to celebrate "pur", the lot; reflecting their belief that on New Year's Day, the gods met and cast lots to determine the destinies of man for the next year. It has also been suggested that "Purim" is a corruption of Phruraia or Phurdaia, a word derived from the Persian "Farwadigan", a festival celebrated at the end of the year. The LXX and Josephus confirm this. The Farwadigan festival and Purim were both in the month of Adar.

Esther 9:24 because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them- LXX has "the Macedonian" for "Agagite", as if to encourage the reading of the whole story as applicable to the abuse of the Jews by Alexander of Macedon.

Esther 9:25 but when this became known to the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows-

"When this became known..." (Esther 9:25) suggests that the king was ignorant of the intention to destroy the Jews, until Esther pointed it out to him. This may just be a simplified form of the story. But if these words are a true reflection of how things really were, we are again left with the impression of a king with limited awareness of reality, who never actually read the decree Haman issued in his name to destroy the Jews and only realized what it implied some time later. Being an alcoholic could explain this; but so could super narcissism and perhaps a total focus upon international political and military matters.

"Wicked device" is literally wicked thoughts (s.w. Gen. 6:5; Is. 59:7); perhaps some of the Proverbs which use the phrase to speak of wicked plans have Haman in view (Prov. 6:18; 15:26). Again we see the theme continued that it was for his thoughts that Haman was condemned; for the state of the heart is of paramount importance to God. But the phrase is used in Jer. 18:11 of how a "wicked device" against God's people was intended to elicit their repentance: "Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return you now each one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings". It didn't, and so they went into captivity in Babylon / Persia; and now again, repentance was not elicited as intended.

Esther 9:26 Therefore they called these days Purim, from the word 'Pur'. Therefore because of all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and that which had come to them- They wanted to especially remember how the lots ["pur"] drawn by Haman were overruled by God to fall in nearly a year's time, so that there was time for Esther's mediation and their preparation. The Divine overruling of the lots was therefore felt to be the parade example of Divine providence in their salvation. But again, this seems rather a case of mistaken focus; the Divine grace of it all and the brave mediation of Esther were not the focus. It could be argued that it was more of a celebration of Jewish good luck than of Divine grace. The root meaning of *pur*, "lots", is 'a thing of nothing' (s.w. Ps. 33:10). Drawing lots was based upon astrology, and the fact the drawing of lots was to the

Jews' favour hardly seems an appropriate thing to celebrate. And we are left with the impression that the Jews in Persia would now celebrate Purim religiously; whilst no mention is made of keeping Yahweh's feasts. Again, there is a subtext here that we have to read. But as ever with the book of Esther, it is below the surface.

Esther 9:27 The Jews established and imposed on themselves and on their descendants, and on all those who joined themselves to them, so that it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to what was written, and according to its appointed time, every year- Note the reference to the Gentiles who "joined themselves to them". Although the ideal was that they returned to Zion and experienced light and joy there (Esther 8:16), it seems God was willing to amend that plan so that their experience of it in captivity led to the Gentiles becoming Jews (as in Esther 8:17). For this is the consistent prophetic picture of the restored Kingdom of God- that Gentiles would join with repentant Judah in forming a multiethnic Kingdom of God in Zion. Just as some Egyptians joined the Jews in their exodus from Egypt, which is constantly alluded to in the restoration prophecies as the prototype for Judah's exodus from captivity, so it began to happen. But they didn't make the exodus; they remained where they were, although all was now set up for them to return.

Esther 9:28 and that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor their memory perish from their seed- This sadly presupposes ["every province"] that Judah were to remain in the lands of their exile. The Divine intention was that they should be provoked by what had happened to return to Judah; see on :18,21.

Esther 9:29 Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim- LXX "wrote all that they had done". Perhaps here we have the origin of the book of Esther; it was an account by Esther of how she, a secular and not very religious Jewess, had seen her weaknesses used by God in order to save others; it was written as a testament to grace. But on :20 I will note that the book could equally have been written by Mordecai. See on :32. The powerful Esther, giving commands with such authority and initiative, is a transformed character from the girl totally submissive to Mordecai and Hegai. "The need is the call" transformed her personality, as it can for so many today who are otherwise caught in a submissive, bubble mentality.

Esther 9:30 He sent letters to all the Jews, to the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth- This sadly presupposes that Judah were to remain in the lands of their exile. The Divine intention was that they should be provoked by what had happened to return to Judah; see on :18,21. "Peace and truth" is the language of the restored kingdom of God (Jer. 33:6); and it is the same term used by Hezekiah when he failed to grasp the potential of the Kingdom being reestablished in his times; he was content with peace and truth in his times alone (Is. 39:8). Likewise the Jews of Esther's time were content with "peace and truth" in their times, rather than seeing that what had happened was to lead them towards the eternal peace and truth with God of His Kingdom and not their own (see on Esther 8:13-16; 9:30). And this is the abiding temptation for all believers; to be satisfied with some degree of "peace and truth" emotionally and intellectually in their

lives now, but resign the far greater realities of the Kingdom to come when "peace and truth" shall be in eternal reality.

Esther 9:31 to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times, as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had decreed, and as they had imposed upon themselves and their descendants, in the matter of the fastings and their cry- LXX suggests differently, to the effect that Mordecai and Esther fasted at the time of Purim, perhaps in recognition of their own weaknesses at the time, asking forgiveness for how they had lived as secular believers before they were forced to give their whole lives to their God and their people: "And Mardochaeus and Esther the queen appointed a fast for themselves privately".

Here and :27 stress that the Jews "imposed upon themselves" this feast. It was not of God, and must be seen in the context of Zechariah's condemnation of the Jews at this time for creating extra feasts as mere ritualism, whilst their hearts were far from God and the spirit of His feasts.

Esther 9:32 The commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book- Confirming my suggestion on :29 that Esther was the author of the book.

ESTHER CHAPTER 10

Esther 10:1 King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land, and on the islands of the sea- The idea is of imposed forced labour, such as Solomon ordered, and which caused much resentment. Why mention this? Perhaps it is included to signal that all was not well, although the story is to end with good triumphing over evil; see on :3. Or we can understand that Haman's offer to make the king rich by killing the Jews and taking their spoil was matched by this taxation policy of Mordecai. For the implication of :2 is that this tribute was one of the "acts" of Mordecai.

Esther 10:2 All the acts of his power and of his might, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?- As noted on :1, the story ends positively, but with the subtext that all was not as it could have been. A Jew and a Jewish queen become almost the most influential people on earth at the time, with huge power and might. But still they did not lead their people back to their God and to their land. That is the unspoken conclusion which any spiritually minded, sensitive reader or hearer will come to. Again it is a story of so much potential and Divine grace being as it were wasted. Mordecai and Esther contrast unfavourably not only with Daniel, but also with Nehemiah. Although cup bearer to the Persian king, he used that permission to beg the king to let him go and assist the returned exiles in Jerusalem, and he grieved because of their situation. There is nothing like that recorded of Mordecai and Esther. Admittedly it is an argument against them from silence, but the silence is quite deafening.

Esther 10:3 For Mordecai the Jew was next to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted by the multitude of his brothers, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his descendants- Even though Mordecai was so highly respected amongst the Jews, there is the implication noted on :2 that Mordecai failed

to realize his full potential before God, even if he died respected by his own people. Not only did Cyrus and the other various potential fulfillments of the servant songs fail to rise up to their potential; Judah preferred to stay in the soft life. The sad ending of the book of Esther leaves Judah prosperous in Babylon, having declined the potential exodus back to Zion which God had set them up with. Mordecai and Esther ought surely to have used their huge power to move the Jews to return to the land, as was clearly the wish of God as expressed in the prophets. But they didn't; it seems the secularism which characterized their earlier lives may have returned in later life, and tradition has it that Esther was murdered when the Persian empire fell to the Greeks. And perhaps that is why there is no mention of God's Name in the book, nor any further allusion to Esther nor Mordecai in the Bible. We note that this epilogue makes no mention of Esther. She remained married to an alcoholic, abusive man. There is no happy ending for Esther. And that was to some degree, of her own making. Her willingness to go along with Mordecai's immoral usage of her had consequences, to the end of her days. It worked for Mordecai- he indeed achieved glory through the marriage of his adopted daughter. He got what he dreamt of. Haman got what he deserved, the king remained foolish and distant from domestic reality. But for her... ?

The story ends with the greatness of Mordecai, who out of such initial weakness was made strong. The account of him is full of reference to the Babylonian tales of the god Marduk, recorded in the Enuma Elish. Especially his glorification in Esther 8:15. Mordecai is a form of "Marduk", and so maybe the idea was to show Persia that in fact Marduk had no real existence; rather does God work through His weak people by His invisible hand, to exalt them. But again we are left with open questions at the very end here. Persia was about to fall to the Greeks, and so we wonder how long Mordecai's "descendants" went on for. Surrounded by the glory of his family and his own exaltation by the king, we see the similarities with Haman who had just the same experience. For a short while. And we are left wondering whether this too happened to Mordecai. For as always with the book of Esther, we are intended to read the subtext.