

# WRITINGS OF MICHAEL HARDT

by Michael Hardt

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*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Michael Hardt, compiled for study and devotional reading.*

23 Chapters

# Table of Contents

1. 00A.00 Lessons From Ezra
2. 00A.00i Introduction
3. 00A.01 Ezra 1
4. 00A.02 Ezra 2
5. 00A.03 Ezra 3
6. 00A.04 Ezra 4
7. 00A.05 Ezra 5
8. 00A.06 Ezra 6
9. 00A.07 Ezra 7
10. 00A.08 Ezra 8
11. 00A.09 Ezra 9
12. 00A.10 Ezra 10
13. 1.00. Shadows of the Church
14. 1.000. Table of Contents
15. 1.01. Isha
16. 1.02. Enoch
17. 1.03. Rebecca
18. 1.04. Asenath
19. 1.05. Zipporah
20. 1.06. Aaron and His Sons
21. 1.07. The two leavened loaves
22. 1.08. The Tabernacle
23. S. Lessons on Discipline from the Book of Jeremiah

## 00A.00 Lessons From Ezra

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Lessons From Ezra For believers today

Michael Hardt

Contents

Introduction

Ezra 1:1-11

Ezra 2:1-70

Ezra 3:1-13

Ezra 4:1-24

Ezra 5:1-17

Ezra 6:1-22

Ezra 7:1-28

Ezra 8:1-36

Ezra 9:1-15

Ezra 10:1-44

## 00A.00i Introduction

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### Introduction

Ezra means 'help', or 'helper'. There is no doubt that Ezra, personally, was a great help to his people. The account of his mission which is described in Ezra 7:1-28, Ezra 8:1-36, Ezra 9:1-15, Ezra 10:1-44 proves the point. Not only did He teach the people as a ready scribe but he also humbled himself under their sins and shortcomings (Ezra 9:1-15). This was echoed by a confession of the people and it led to a great restoration. But the book of Ezra can also be a great 'help' for Christians today. Let me explain why. Ezra gives us a historical account of the return of some of God's people to Jerusalem. Many of the events that happen are fitting illustrations for God's people today. As we go through the book, we will discover many parallels between the time it speaks of and ours. In this sense, Ezra is very up to date and pertinent in relation to many issues we face in our Christian testimony today. This old book sheds so much light on many questions which Christians ask today, such as - How should Christians gather?

- Can a minority be right?

- The unity of the church, what does it mean for us today?

- What do we do when many turn their back on biblical teaching?

- Separation from evil and the unity of the church, a contradiction?

- How can we recognise a true revival?

- Etc. The book of Ezra describes a wonderful revival which occurred after 70 of the darkest years of the history of God's people. What had happened? In 722 BC the 10 tribes had been led captive into Assyria (2 Kings 17:6). Over time, they vanished completely, and we still do not know where they are today. Only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were left in the country. Just over one hundred years later, in 606 BC, Nebucadnezzar came and took the vessels of the temple, as well as the most promising young people as captives (2 Chronicles 36:6-7). A captivity of 70 years followed, just as Jeremiah had predicted (Jeremiah 25:12; Jeremiah 29:10). Here they were, far from Jerusalem, without temple, without sacrifices, without their national feasts, and unable to sing the songs of Zion (Psalms 137:1-4). At the end of these 70 years, a Persian king, Cyrus, conquered the Babylonian Empire and founded the Medo-Persian Empire. This new king made a proclamation stating that all the Jews who wished to do so were free to go back to Jerusalem and to build the house of the Lord there.

About 43,000 people responded to this call and went up to Jerusalem. Their experiences are extremely instructive for believers today. Their return to Jerusalem encourages us to return to first principles, that is New Testament teaching, not modified by the ideas of men. The faith of those who returned, their failure, their work, their 'ups and downs' all speak volumes to the believer today. To the extent that we, similarly, are not satisfied with 'Babylon' but have a heart for the place God has chosen, we will be able to derive much 'help' from this book of Ezra.

## 00A.01 Ezra 1

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Ezra 1:1-11 When hearts are stirred up by God. The very first verse leaves us in no doubt. Something was seriously wrong. The time of events is given as "the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia.", quite different from the books of Kings and Chronicles where the time was given according to the years of the kings of Israel and Judah. Why this change? The throne of God had been removed from Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 29:23). The 'times of the Gentiles' had begun (Luke 21:24), and had been running for 70 years now - and they will continue to run until Israel is restored to the Lord, after the tribulation period. But God still acts. Through Jeremiah He had told the people in advance that the captivity in Babylon would be limited to 70 years (you will recall that it had a profound effect on Daniel when he read about this and found out that the time of captivity was almost over (see Daniel 9:2 ff)). Now that the time was come, God uses a heathen king, Cyrus, as His instrument to bring about the promised return.

King Cyrus is an extremely interesting character. In secular history, he is renowned for his humane way of dealing with those he conquered. His objective was to bring peace to mankind. He set out his policies in a famous decree - which later became known as the 'First charter of Human Rights'. Today, the famous 'Cyrus Cylinder' - made of clay - can be admired in the British Museum in London. Allowing captives to return to their home land was very much in line with his humane policies. This is the secular, or human, side. God's side is much more interesting. Long before Cyrus was born, Isaiah prophesied about this king, even mentioning him by name! ".that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isaiah 44:28). We are not implying that Cyrus had living faith in God, but God in His sovereignty used him as an instrument. Cyrus had opportunity to read Isaiah's prophecy, and it appears that he was conscious of his mission. Hence he says "The Lord, God of heaven, hath given me., and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem." (Ezra 1:2).

It is remarkable how God works. First He 'stirs up the spirit' of this heathen king, so that he passes a decree inviting the Jews to return to Jerusalem. He then stirs up the spirit of those who did so (Ezra 1:1, Ezra 1:5). Whatever men do, a true revival is always a work of God. So the call goes out "Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem... and build the house of the Lord." In a sense, king Cyrus is still alive. The same call still goes out. Who is there among you? Who is there, who is not content with Babylon? Who is there who values Jerusalem? Who is there, who takes an interest in the house of God? To see the significance of this call, bear in mind that places speak of principles.

'Eden' is Paradise

'Sodom' is moral depravity

'Egypt' speaks of the world in its enslaving power

'Sinai' the place of the terror of the law

'Jordan' is the river of death

'Gilgal' is the judgement of the flesh.

And so on. Many more examples could be given. It is extremely instructive to see the meaning of places in the Bible. So how about Babylon and Jerusalem?

Babylon, if we can identify it with the Babel of Genesis 11:1-32, reminds us of two things: firstly confusion, as the languages were confounded there. Secondly, of idolatry (see Zechariah 5:5-11). This is very much like Christendom today. There is much confusion, all sorts of teaching, general deviation from the sound doctrine, in fact, as Paul said, people no longer bear sound teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-22). All sorts of teaching can be found on prophecy, on the church, and on Christ Himself. There is idolatry as well: worship directed to that which is not God, namely to so-called 'saints', to 'Virgin Mary', etc.. What is the believer to do? The answer to this question takes us to the meaning of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the place God had chosen, out of all places. Deuteronomy 12:1-32 makes the point again and again, Jerusalem was 'the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there'. It was only in this place that the temple could be built, the people had to assemble, the national feasts had to be celebrated, the sacrifices had to be given, the offerings had to be brought. And it was in this place that the people would rejoice before the Lord.

Today, there is still a place He has chosen to 'put His name there', to be present in Person. This is, of course, not a geographical place but a spiritual place. The Lord Himself disclosed it. He said to Peter that He would build His church (Matthew 16:1-28). A little later we read that, where two or three are gathered unto His name, he would be in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). Gathered 'unto' his name is more than 'in His name'. Whatever a believer does, he should do it 'in His name', even eating and drinking (Colossians 3:17). But when two or three are gathered unto His name, they make Him the centre, they give Him the authority, the attention and focus is on Him. His authority is recognised, His rights are respected, His will is done. This spiritual Jerusalem still exists today. It is still open, even to small numbers, to enjoy His presence. So how about you? Have you returned from Babylon, the place of confusion and idolatry, to Jerusalem, the place where Christ is honoured and where His rights are recognised, where He is the centre? The proclamation of king Cyrus still goes out today: who is there among you.?

Those whose spirits were raised up, were to go up (Ezra 1:5), and others who would not go up themselves, are told to support them through material help (Ezra 1:4) and it is beautiful to read that they did so (Ezra 1:6).

Even the king contributed, and in a very significant way: "Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods" (Ezra 1:7). This matter of the vessels is extremely important. There had been three deportations, one in the days of king Jehoiakim (2 Kings 36:6), then in the days of his son Jehoiakin (2 Kings 36:10), and finally in the days of Zedekiah (2 Kings 36:11-21). The last of these three was the most significant one in terms of the damage done. The temple was burnt, and very large numbers led captive. But the 70 years of captivity count from the first, relatively insignificant (we would say), deportation. Why was this first one the important one in God's eyes? Well, it's because of the vessels. Nebuchadnezzar had taken the vessels of the

Temple, took them to Babylon, and even put them into the house of his idols. Such a thing had never happened before. True, some kings had taken silver from the treasure and even from the wings of the doors of the temple (Ahas and Hezekiah) to appease the king of Assyria. But the holy vessels had never been touched.

Without vessels, it was impossible to bring sacrifices as prescribed. No vessels, no worship! This is the tragedy. Does it not remind us of the sad fact that the concept of worship, especially collective worship, has been lost in wide parts of Christendom. Meetings for worship have been replaced by concerts, performances, and all manner of things. Do you know a place where you can meet with Christians in full liberty of collective worship to the Father and the Son? This is the one thing the Father 'seeks': worshippers.

## 00A.02 Ezra 2

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Ezra 2:1-70 This very long chapter mainly consists of lists of names, most of them completely unknown to us. But God is pleased to take account of those who took this great step, those who went up out of the captivity, to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1). No doubt it was a very difficult decision to take. Much spoke against it. Just think about these arguments:

First of all, there was the comfort argument. You might also call it the argument of tradition and custom. It runs as follows:

"We are settled in Babylon. We have been brought up here and, for some of us, our parents have been brought up here. We have got used to things. How can we leave everything behind, just to go to what is a strange place to us?" But is it comfort and custom that should tip the balance, or should we ask what God's will is?

Then there is the minority argument. This argument is still very popular today, especially in large religious institutions:

"How can a minority be right? When Israel left Egypt, they were 600,000 men plus families. When they entered the land of Canaan, they were about the same number[1]. Since then, the people must have grown. And now there were just 43,000 who think Jerusalem is the place to be". But faith does not look to the numbers for guidance, but at God's word. The unity argument sounds particularly spiritual. It runs along the following lines:

"You cannot leave in the name of unity. It is clear that not all will go to Jerusalem, some just can't and some just won't. Therefore, if you leave for Jerusalem you cause a division."

Well, we will see later that the unity of the people of God was expressed at Jerusalem. The first priority is to do God's will. If everybody does, there will be unity. If some don't, then those who are in Jerusalem still take account of the whole people (they offer 12 he-goats for 12 tribes although only two tribes were represented, Ezra 6:17 and Ezra 8:35). The unity of the people of God is most valuable, but this objective does not justify disobedience to Christ. The 'why Jerusalem' argument, again, has a voice for our time. This is how it goes:

"After all, what is so special about Jerusalem? Nowadays, it is just a place of ruins, full of rubble. It would be far easier to start from scratch, somewhere on a green field site."

Admittedly, this argument has a lot going for it. It sounds so logical and pragmatic. Things have gone badly wrong, so why not start a new church, why not found an organisation that does not suffer from the same shortcomings? But is this the voice of faith? If God has chosen Jerusalem, then faith does not attempt to find something 'better' or 'easier'. Likewise, it may seem easier today to start 'something new'. But God's thoughts are unchanged and all He wants us to do is to return to the old principles first set out by Him, even if there is much 'rubble' in the way. But for those whose spirits God raised up, all of these arguments were defeated by the faith argument: God has chosen Jerusalem, and that is where we want to be!!! And God took note carefully of all

those who overcame the many counter-arguments and who went up. It is good to see that there were priests among them (Ezra 2:36), and also Levites (Ezra 2:40). It is good to see a recovery of priestly activity among the people, as well as of levitical service. But Levites always seem to be in short supply. Here we find just 74 Levites for about 4,000 priests (and we will find an even greater shortage in Ezra 8:1-36). Those who are willing to be engaged in practical work for the benefit of the people of God are notoriously few. But praise the Lord there are some!

There were also singers (Ezra 2:41), so that praise could be given to God, and porters (Ezra 2:42) who would be responsible to keep everything out that would interfere with the Lord's glory. And God even takes account of those we might have forgotten: the Nethinim (Ezra 2:43) and Solomon's servants (Ezra 2:55). These may not have been of Jewish descent, and they were occupied with lowly service. But God is pleased to mention all the names of the fathers of those who went up to Jerusalem. Similarly, in the body of Christ, members have different tasks, duties, and abilities, and the most prominent ones may not be the most important ones (1 Corinthians 12:1-31).

Then a difficult situation arose. There were priests who sought their registers (Ezra 2:61) and who were not able to prove their descent. Without genealogies, they were not able to prove that they were entitled to be priests. What was to be done?

First of all, it is important to see that this sort of problem would not have arisen in the early days, the reason being that, back then, everyone knew who the priests and their families were. It is only because the exercise of priestly service had been interrupted for 70 years and because of all the confusion that had come with the Babylonian captivity, that this problem could arise. In other words, it was a consequence of the ruin of the people (and, of course, a certain negligence on the part of these priests - if indeed they were priests - to keep their documents together). An added difficulty was that they no longer possessed the Urim and Thummim, as they used to, which would have allowed them to find out the truth.

It is essential to realise that the church, as far as its practical testimony and state go, is in ruins today. We no longer live in the early days when no 'strange elements' would have dared to try to join themselves to the Christians (Acts 5:13). We no longer live in days where 3,000 are converted by one sermon (Acts 2:41), or in a day where God confirms the message through sign gifts (Hebrews 2:4). Under the circumstances, the best course of action is to take account of our weakness and not to pretend to have what we do not have (Ezra 2:63). It must have been hard to refuse those priests but doing so just demonstrated that they put God first, not human feelings.

It is beautiful to read in Ezra 2:68 that "they came to the house of God". What house, one might ask. The temple had been burnt many years ago and nothing had been rebuilt. But they had come to the right place, and in God's eyes this is where His house has to be and is. And when they got there, "they offered freely" (Ezra 2:69). This is another feature of this revival. There is a genuine interest in the things of God, in His work. And we read that "they gave after their ability" (Ezra 2:70).

## 00A.03 Ezra 3

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Ezra 3:1-13 The first day of the 7th month was a significant date. According to Numbers 29:1, this was the time of the feast of trumpets. In fact, we find three feasts are relevant to this chapter:

the feast of trumpets (Ezra 3:1 - compare with Leviticus 23:24)

the feast of new moons (Ezra 3:5), and

the feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3:4).

It is beautiful to see the significance of these feasts. Wonderful unity is displayed, all the people gather together in Jerusalem on the first day of the seventh month. This is exactly the meaning of the feast of trumpets. It foreshadows a time when the people of Israel, now dispersed all over the globe, will be gathered together again.

Second, there was the feast of the new moon at the beginning of that month. Oh, how the moon of Israel had ceased shining during the 70 years of captivity. What sort of testimony had they given? God had brought them out of Egypt to the Promised Land, and they left Him and gave themselves up to idolatry. But now, we have a new beginning. It is not yet the time of the full moon, but a thin stripe appears on the firmament - the new moon (Psalms 81:3).

Finally, the feast of tabernacles is celebrated (Ezra 3:4). This was a feast of joy. It involved dwelling in huts made of fresh twigs and leaves. It was impossible, of course, to celebrate this feast in the wilderness. Where should they have obtained the fresh branches in the desert? Clearly, it was a feast that was connected with the land of Canaan. And this joy of the land is restored to them. Even today, God wants to grant us a revival of our heavenly position: seated with Christ in heavenly places - are we enjoying the feast of tabernacles in this way?

It is interesting that the first thing the returned remnant did was not to build themselves houses, or to build a big city wall, not even to rebuild the temple. Their very first priority was to rebuild the altar (Ezra 3:2). Building the altar speaks of the recovery of worship. How empty their lives must have been in Babylon, without altar, without sacrifices for their God, and without worship. And again, this is a feature of revival, and God wants to restore this today to anyone who has lost the privilege of worship. In Christendom, as noted earlier, many have replaced worship meetings through performances and so forth but it is still possible today to approach the Father, and to speak to Him of the things concerning Christ which we have learned to appreciate.

Note another feature of this revival: the repeated confirmation that everything was done according to the Word of God:

their aim was to offer burnt offerings 'as it is written' (Ezra 3:2)

they celebrated the feast of tabernacles 'as it is written' (Ezra 3:4)

they offered daily sacrifices 'according to the ordinance' (Ezra 3:4)

and even their worship is conducted according to the old pattern 'after the ordinance of David, king of Israel' (Ezra 3:10)

What is needed among the people of God today is not so much innovation, but a return to the fundamental principles which were there from the beginning, a return to the Scriptures (although this may well be an innovative idea to us if we have got used to traditions or to types of 'worship' that aim to please people, not God). If there is a genuine revival it will be marked by the discovery of the Scriptures (Josiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc.). Not that the Scriptures could not have been known before, but through negligence they had been forgotten. The altar was set 'upon its bases' (Ezra 3:3). There was only one place where the altar could be, according to the mind of God. It was where Abraham had offered his son Isaac (this is how God viewed it, Hebrews 11:1-40), the threshing floor of Ornan where the judgement was halted after David's sin (1 Chronicles 21:15-18; 2 Chronicles 3:1), and the place where around 550 years after the time of Ezra 3:1-13, the ultimate sacrifice would be offered.

Setting up the altar in its place was the right thing to do, but why was it a good defence strategy? It says "they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries". The only protection of this weak remnant (without army, city wall, etc.) was full confidence in the God Whom they built the altar.

It is beautiful to see that they began on the very first day with their sacrifices (Ezra 3:6). There were continual sacrifices and also free will offerings. The beginning was made. They had an altar, but not yet a temple, not even the foundation. But their generosity extended to the preparations for the building of the house as well (Ezekiel 3:7). At the same time, the remnant humbly relied on the decree made by the heathen king Cyrus. In the second year, the Levites were appointed, the building work started, and finally the foundation of the Temple was laid. What a recovery God had granted! After 70 years in exile, they had now recovered worship (the altar) and the foundation for the Temple was laid. There was singing, there was praise for God. But at the same time there was weeping. So much so that 'the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people'.

How could this be, and who was right? The younger ones were shouting for joy because they saw what God had recovered to them. But the older ones, who remembered the magnificence of the Temple of Solomon, were saddened by the comparison of what they saw now with that which had been in the old days. Are not both feelings justified in their place? Considering the glorious beginning of the church on the day of Pentecost, thinking of the thousands converted then, and the powerful testimony of the early believers (Acts 2:1-47, Acts 3:1-26, Acts 4:1-37), are we not saddened by what we see today? On the other hand, we have the right and duty to take account of the things God has recovered to us. There is much ruin, fewness of numbers, etc, but the altar is there (we can worship), the new moon is there (we can give some light), the feast of Tabernacles is there (we have a heavenly position to enjoy), and the foundation of the house of God is there (we can gather to the Lord's name). Truths which had been forgotten about for centuries have been re-discovered from God's Word, e.g.

- the truth of the rapture - the truth of the unity of the body of Christ - the distinction between Israel and the church - the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies

- etc.

Bearing this in mind, there is indeed cause for joy, even today.

Years later, Haggai confirmed the merits of both, weeping and rejoicing. On the one hand, he said regarding the current building in progress 'is it not as nothing before your eyes' (Haggai 2:3). On the other hand, he pointed out that this same house would be filled with greater glory than the first (Haggai 2:7 - New Translation). The millennial glory of the temple would exceed that of Solomon, and in God's eyes there is only one house of God. Likewise, the future glory of the assembly (Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21) will exceed its first glory in the days of the Acts. And the weak testimony we see today is identified with this church which Christ will present glorious unto Himself.

## 00A.04 Ezra 4

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Ezra 4:1-24 When positive work goes on, the opposition of the enemy will never be lacking. At first sight, one wonders why these people are called 'the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin' (Ezra 4:1). They seem rather friendly and supportive: 'Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do' (Ezra 4:2). What more could one wish?

However, their next phrase betrays them: 'and we do sacrifice unto him, since the days of Esar-Haddon, king of Assur, which brought us up hither'. A comparison with 2 Kings 17:1-41 will show what had happened. The 10 tribes had been deported to Assyria, and the king of Assyria repopulated the land of Samaria with people from Assyria. But God sent lions who killed some of these people. Having taken advice, the king of Assyria sent them a priest to instruct them in Jewish ways, hoping to appease the God of Israel. The result was a strange mixture of the divinely established worship and idolatry. The kind offer therefore had to be rejected, and so it was. Now the adversaries drop their friendly mask and start 'weakening' and 'troubling' those who were building. They hired counsellors against them, and this went on during the reign of three Persian kings: Cyrus, Ahasuerus, and Darius (Ezra 4:5-6). In other words, there was constant opposition.

Until today, the work of God must be done by the people of God. If the world offers co-operation we have to refuse. If we do, then those who made the offer will soon show their true colours. But if we don't we will soon spoil the work. We end up being governed by the world's principles in the work we wanted to do for God.

Incidentally: I recently heard of a group of Christians who were offered money from the local Council for their 'good work'. They gladly accepted the contribution. A little later the Council informed them that, to remain eligible for this 'grant' they would have to consent to the Council's policy regarding "same sex marriages". They quickly learned., and returned the grant. In a measure, the same principle applies to co-operation with believers who do not gather according to Scripture and with whom we cannot have fellowship in the Lord's Supper. If I cannot have fellowship in the Lord's Supper, can I really co-operate with them without running a serious risk of having to compromise the message I bring? The remainder of the chapter is tragic. We learn that one of these many attacks was fruitful. During the reign of Ahasuerus, a letter is written against the Jews and Jerusalem. As it happens, some negative evidence is found and adduced against them. Now the enemies had full authority, and they used it. They 'made them to cease by force and power' (Ezra 4:23). The consequence was fatal: 'then ceased the work .' (Ezra 4:24).

## 00A.05 Ezra 5

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Ezra 5:1-17 On the face of it, the interruption of the work described in Ezra 4:1-24 was due to circumstances beyond the builders' powers. What could they do if they were stopped by force, and with authority? And yet, in the light of the prophecies uttered by the two prophets referred to at the start of Ezra 5:1-17, especially Haggai, we learn that there were reasons beneath the surface. The people had actually lost interest in the house of God and started concentrating on their own houses. Haggai had to deliver a stern message, addressing the consciences. Only after this could he deliver a message of comfort, assuring the people of God's presence and support (Haggai 1:1-15). So Haggai and Zechariah prophesied (Ezra 5:1), and the result was that the building work was resumed (Ezra 5:2). This did not mean that opposition would cease. Again, the enemies come, ask questions, require justification for the building work. The leaders of the people give a beautiful answer, stating that

they served the God of heaven

they were under God's discipline because their fathers had sinned, and that

Cyrus had passed a decree entitling them to build.

They were firm but humble. The enemies write another letter, this time to King Darius. What would the result be?

## 00A.06 Ezra 6

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Ezra 6:1-22 The opponents had written to Darius with the ultimate objective of stopping the building of the temple and of the city. But their strategy backfires. Through God's providence, the old decree of King Cyrus is discovered at Achmetha, somewhere in the province. This decree also stated that expenses for the project should be paid for out of the king's treasure. As a result of this attack on the work, the work is facilitated. Darius passes a decree strictly prohibiting that anyone should interfere with this work, or hinder it.

Again, Ezra 6:14 allows us to look behind the scenes: 'they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah.. And they builded, and finished it'. The prophets had reached the consciences of the people. A divine work happened in their hearts. And once their hearts were right, God also ensured, governmentally, that the work could not be stopped through the enemies.

If one looks at Ezra 4:1-24, Ezra 5:1-17, Ezra 6:1-22 as a whole, an important lesson emerges: where there is no exercise, God may allow circumstances to make the work impossible. Outwardly, it will look as though the work ceased due to "Force Majeure", but the deeper reason is that there was little or no exercise in the hearts of God's people. On the other hand, God intervenes, for instance, by sending prophets who speak to the heart of the people. Then, when hearts turn to God, He will also take care of the circumstances. And then nobody will be able to stop the work, until it is finished, 'according to the commandment of the God of Israel'. So we come to the moment when the house of God is finished and dedicated to God with sacrifices (Ezra 6:17). One sacrifice arrests our attention in a special way. They offer 'for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel'

There they were, a minority from two tribes out of 12. And yet they are conscious of the whole people. They offer 12 he goats, making the point that the people was composed of 12 tribes and that all the 12 tribes had sinned and that the only way for God to bless and forgive them would be on the basis of the sin offering. The fact that 10 tribes were completely absent and the fact that many who belonged to Judah and Benjamin had remained in Babylon did not prevent them from remembering the whole people before God. Does this not have a voice for today, does it not give orientation in a time of ruin? We cannot undo the dispersion of God's people, we cannot force everyone to return to the fundamental principles that Jerusalem stands for (although we want to encourage as many as we can to do so). But we can act on the basis that the people of God is one. We do not form churches, introduce memberships etc. but simply take account of the fact that there is one body. When we receive someone for the breaking of the bread, we do not receive him or her because he or she is a member of an organisation, but we do so because (i) he or she is a member of the body of Christ and (ii) not disqualified from this privilege by things that dishonour the Lord. This latter aspect is also seen in the way they celebrated the Passover here. All of the priests and the Levites were purified (Ezra 6:20) and those who had separated themselves 'from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel' ate of the Passover. Nothing that dishonours God was to be associated with the feast which reminded them of that

night when God spared those who were sheltered by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1-51). No wonder that the feast of the unleavened bread was kept, and was kept with joy (Ezra 6:22) and the king of Assyria was supportive of the work of the house of God. It is a timeless principle: obedience brings joy and blessing.

## 00A.07 Ezra 7

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Ezra 7:1-28 The second part of the book of Ezra (i.e. Ezra 7:1-28, Ezra 8:1-36, Ezra 9:1-15, Ezra 10:1-44) deals with Ezra's mission. To appreciate the significance of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem, we need to bear in mind that 80 years had passed since the first return from Babylon (Ezra 1:1-11, Ezra 2:1-70) and about 60 years since the reconstruction of the temple had been finished. We are now in the days of the reign of King Artaxerxes I (465-424). You may wonder how things were going in Jerusalem among those who had rebuilt the temple and among their families and children. Sad to say, things had not only developed in a positive way. This is where Ezra's mission comes in. He had been prepared by God as a well suited tool to bring the much needed help to those in Jerusalem. His credentials were excellent:

Ø He was a priest who could prove his genealogy (Ezra 7:1-6; comp. Ezra 2:59-63);

Ø He was a knowledgeable scribe (Ezra 7:6);

Ø His purpose of heart was to first seek, then do, and then teach the law (Ezra 7:10).

Sending such a man was a great proof of God's grace towards the Jews in Jerusalem who, meanwhile, had meddled so badly with evil! And Ezra obeys the call of God. This time, there are only around 1,500 men plus families who went up, not 43,000 as in chapter 2. But it was God's work and His good hand was upon Ezra (Ezra 7:6, Ezra 7:9, Ezra 7:28; Ezra 8:18, Ezra 8:22, Ezra 8:31). This was the secret of his success. The rest of the chapter contains a copy of the king's letter authorising Ezra's mission (Ezra 7:11-26) and Ezra's response to it in praise and worship (Ezra 7:27-28). And we can see why Ezra was overwhelmed by this letter. It gave Ø Authorization for any Israelite who wanted to accompany Ezra to do so (Ezra 7:13);

Ø Funding for the sacrifices, the temple instruments and other temple requirements (Ezra 7:17-23);

Ø Tax exemption in respect of all payments of road tolls and custom duties (Ezra 7:24); and Ø Judicial powers including capital punishment in respect of anyone hindering Ezra's mission. This was in fact more than Ezra might have thought or asked (Ephesians 3:20) but so it goes with someone who knows 'the good hand of God' upon him (Ezra 7:28).

## 00A.08 Ezra 8

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Ezra 8:1-36 The men listed in Ezra 8:1-14, together with their families, went with Ezra. It would have been so much easier for them to settle in Mesopotamia where they had grown up but they return to the place of God's choice (Deuteronomy 12:1-32) and God is with them.

It may seem strange though, at first sight, that Ezra makes them stop at river Ahava (Ezra 8:15). But before proceeding to Jerusalem, important preparation had to be made, in at least two ways:

- First, there was a lack of Levites and Ezra sends 11 men to find Levites to come with them. Only 38 are found, and 220 servants (Nethinim), but at least this small number join Ezra and those with him. There seems to be a chronic shortage of 'Levites', people who take care of the house and people of God (Numbers 3:7) - may many hear the call today!

- Second, Ezra called for fasting, humiliation and prayer (Ezra 8:21). Instead of relying on the armed escort offered by the heathen king, Ezra wanted to rely on God and to depend on Him.

You see that we do not have a scribe here (in Ezra) who 'knows it all' and goes to 'sort them out' in Jerusalem. His frame of mind is quite different. The time in prayer at the river Ahava was well spent (Ezra 8:23).

Finally, Ezra entrusts the silver and gold, the vessels for the house of God, to 12 of the chief priests and gives them instruction to look after these treasures. They do so faithfully. Everything is weighed and numbered and, good to see, when they arrive everything is accounted for, nothing has gone missing. May it be so with the things the Lord entrusted to us, whether material or otherwise (1 Timothy 6:20). The Lord protected them from enemies and robbers (Ezra 8:31). Arrived in Jerusalem, they offer a sacrifice. Again (compare Ezra 6:1-22), it is striking that they offered '12 bullocks for all Israel'. Only a minority of only two tribes were present. But they were in the right place and they realised that they were not the people of God but only formed part of it. In their burnt offering as well as in their sin offering (12 he goats) they took account of the whole people of God, 12 tribes.

## 00A.09 Ezra 9

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### Ezra 9:1-15

How must Ezra have felt about the news that reached him right after this! Here he was, a 'ready scribe', well taught in the law and ready to instruct the people in it. But the first thing he learns is that the very law he had come to teach had been disregarded in a blatant way, by not a few, and rulers, respected people, taking a leading role in the matter. They had married Canaanite wives, against God's express command (Deuteronomy 7:1-6).

Ezra is devastated. He rends his garments, plucks out his hair and sits down 'overwhelmed'. Only at the time of the evening sacrifice (reminding us of the value of the sacrifice of Christ and that God sees His people in Him) Ezra finds the courage to turn to God, not in accusation of others, but in confession of failure. And in this confession, it is always 'we' have sinned, not 'they'.

Reading Ezra's prayer you get the impression that what disturbed him most was this: the people who had sinned in this way were people who had experienced God's grace in a special way. God had led them back to Jerusalem, granted them help, given them a temple, an altar and sacrifices. But despite of God's grace and mercy with them, they insulted Him in this way (Ezra 9:8-11).

God's work cannot be done by people who mix with the world. The church has been 'called out' ('ecclesia'). When the church sought the protection of the world (under Constantine) it was the start of a dangerous marriage ('Pergamos', Revelation 2:12). Until today, the Lord is pleased with those who put Him first, who 'keep his word' and 'do not deny His name' (Revelation 3:8). He does not want a mixture of things that have nothing in common (2 Corinthians 6:14-18), whether in marriage or otherwise.

Many arguments may have spoken for linking up with the neighbouring peoples (not enough suitable Jewish women, good peaceful relationships with the Canaanites, etc.) but God had forbidden it and obedience would have been better.

## 00A.10 Ezra 10

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### Ezra 10:1-44

How good to see that Ezra rises to the challenge, and that he does so in a good and humble spirit! His humiliation was the start of restoration for the people. He had been praying, those who trembled before the word of God had joined him (Ezra 9:4), and in the beginning of Ezra 10:1-44 we find a 'very great congregation', assembled with Ezra. Where there is confession of failure there is hope. Shechaniah put it well: "We have trespassed against our God. yet now there is hope in Israel.". I do not think he took it lightly. In fact, his father was among the 'problem cases' (Ezra 10:26). He suggests that the confession and prayer should be accompanied by action (Ezra 10:3), what an encouragement for Ezra (Ezra 10:4)! A genuine commitment to implement God's order is required (Ezra 10:5). A proclamation is made and, within three days, all of Judah and Benjamin assemble together at Jerusalem (Ezra 10:9). They tremble because of 'this matter' and because of the inclement weather (it was in the middle of the rainy season). Perhaps the heavy rainfalls reminded them of God's judgement, but in any case they certainly added to their discomfort.

Ezra's stern words 'you have transgressed' and 'make confession' are quite appropriate as he had humbled himself and now needs to reach the consciences of all. They have to correct the matter in which they had dishonoured their God, and they agree to do so (Ezra 10:10-12).

Frequently, it is admitted that things have to be put right, but it is pointed out that (i) this would be a very complex thing to do, and (ii) that doing so would hurt (and, in fact, some voices - even though few - were raised in objection here, too (Ezra 10:15)).

Well, the matter before Ezra certainly was complex. It could not be 'sorted out' in a day. It took thorough examination (Ezra 10:16) three months. So the complexity meant that the matter would take time to resolve, not that it should not be addressed in the first place. And who would say it did not hurt? Over 100 men had offended in this way, and some of the women had born children (Ezra 10:44). But it was better to obey God now and to bear the governmental consequences of their sin than to continue in it.

How sad, you may say, that a book of revival should end on such a sombre note! Ezra closes with a list of offenders (Ezra 10:18-44). It was a matter that split families apart. It was sad indeed that there had been such failure among the remnant, the minority who had returned to the place of God's choice! But on the other hand, we should not overlook that this list contains the names of those who 'offered a ram for their trespass' and 'gave their hand' to put right that which was wrong (Ezra 10:19). In other words, the book of Ezra ends with a list of people who have been restored! We are reminded of the words of James:

".if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20)

What a success for Ezra's mission! It would have been so much easier for him (and those with him) to settle down in Babylon. But he went. And God used him for the blessing and restoration of not a few among His people.

Michael Hardt

[1] To see this, compare Numbers 1:1-54 with Numbers 26:1-65. Some tribes had increased in number, others decreased, but the overall number of the people remained roughly the same.

## 1.00. Shadows of the Church

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### Shadows of the Church Old Testament Types

Michael Hardt The truth of the church is a mystery 'which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed.' (Ephesians 3:5). However, the Old Testament contains a number of striking types of the church which may be discovered in the light of New Testament revelation.

## 1.000. Table of Contents

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Table of Contents

Isha

Enoch

Rebecca

Asenath

Zipporah

Aaron and His Sons

The Two Leavened Loaves

The Tabernacle

## 1.01. Isha

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Isha Please read Genesis 2:18-24

Few readers will be surprised by the statement that women such as Eve (or Isha), Rebekah, Asenath etc. are types of the church. In fact, unmistakable quotations and allusions such as Ephesians 5:30-31 provide sufficient proof. However, familiarity with this fact should not breed contempt of the truth illustrated. Both, the depth of God's counsel hidden in these figures as well as the variety and beauty of the details of these types are most remarkable - forcing us, in fact, to limit this article to just one of them. And Jehovah Elohim said, It is not good that Man should be alone; I will make him a helpmate, his like. And out of the ground Jehovah Elohim had formed every animal of the field and all fowl of the heavens, and brought them to Man, to see what he would call them; and whatever Man called each living soul, that was its name. And Man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the heavens, and to every beast of the field; but as for Adam, he found no helpmate, his like (Genesis 2:18-20). The fact that God created man, male and female, is already stated in Genesis 1:26. Genesis 2:1-25 deals with man's relationships<sup>1</sup> (to God, creation, and 'woman'). With regard to Adam's relationship to Eve, a very interesting fact comes out here, namely that the reason for her very existence would be his happiness. Naturally, the church is entitled to find all joy and satisfaction in Christ, but her *raison d'être* (reason for existence) is His joy, not her's. He is the object in view; she is created because of His desire. This simple consideration, already, may well change the way we sometimes think about the church of God. It is a company of people who are richly blessed, yes, and who find their joy in the Lord - but this is not why the church was formed. It was for Him.

Adam was alone. And so was Christ as man on earth. Speaking about Himself in figure, He indicated that He would remain alone - unless he died (John 12:24). His disciples' inability to comprehend him further contributed to His being alone (just think of Gethsemane). And even as the risen Man, He would be alone - in the sense of incomplete - if it was not for the church, his 'fullness'. So it was, in figure, with Adam: despite his high mental capabilities - enabling him to describe all created animals in a suitable way by naming them - he was incomplete. He was alone and God stated that this was not good. There was nothing in creation that could have shared his thoughts, understood his feelings or reciprocated his love. In this sense Christ, as man, was incomplete. We would not dare to state it if Scripture did not tell us plainly that the church is 'the fullness of him that fills all in all' (Ephesians 1:23). Can there be a more elevated position than belonging to this group,<sup>2</sup> the church?

Having looked at just these few details, do we not feel how we need to allow God to shape our thinking? The church was not formed for her own sake but for Christ's. Those belonging to her are given to Him as complement, as those who have the capability of feeling as He does with respect to everything in this world (and even with respect to things beyond it). Do we reciprocate his love in a practical way, and are our thoughts, feelings and aspirations in harmony with His? A further detail strikes us. Both Adam and Eve were to occupy a place of dominion over the world including

all animal creation: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over the whole earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth.' (Genesis 1:26). This statement certainly referred to both, Adam and Eve. The next verse says, 'And God created Man in his image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them'. However, in our scripture, Adam is seen as taking this place of dominion over creation without Eve, before she existed. This detail beautifully illustrates two further points regarding Christ and the church:

1. Christ alone is worthy in Himself (intrinsically) to take dominion over the earth as Son of man (Psalms 8:1-9), and 2. the church will do it with Him, but only due to her association with Him.

Christ is the heir, and we are co-heirs because, and only because, we are associated with Him (Romans 8:17). At the same time, we realise that Eve was distinct from the sphere of creation put under Adam's dominion. Many true believers today assume for themselves the role of the King's subjects (as can be verified from a large number of modern hymns). This will indeed be the position of believing Jews during the Millennium, but it falls short of the true calling of believers today. For us, it is not a matter of Christ reigning over us, but that He wants us to reign with Him when the time for His reign has come. Again, this interpretation is borne out by scripture itself when it says that Christ has been given as 'head over all things to (not over) the church' (Ephesians 1:22). And Jehovah Elohim caused a deep sleep to fall upon Man; and he slept. And he took one of his ribs and closed up flesh in its stead. (Genesis 2:21)

If the omnipotent Creator - having created Adam out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7) - chooses this remarkably different way of creating a suitable companion for him, surely, it is not without reason.

God made Adam fall into a 'deep sleep' - no doubt a figure of the death of Christ which was necessary for the formation of the church. Again we refer to the grain of wheat that had to fall into the ground and die if it was not to remain alone. So Christ entered into a state that was entirely foreign to Him as the author of life, that of death, in order to bring into being the church, His fullness. This picture reminds us that 1. the church is the fruit of Christ's sufferings and death on the cross, and that 2. the formation of the church could take place only after the death of Christ.

It might be well to mention in passing that we do not use types to derive truth from them but to illustrate truths we find in the New Testament. So we know, for instance, that the church was formed at Pentecost when believers were baptised into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13) and that she is the fruit of His work (e.g. Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25). It is true that Old Testament believers were born again and redeemed on account of the Lord's work on the cross, but the church was formed only after the true 'Adam' had fallen into a 'deep sleep'.

It has often been pointed out that Adam's companion was formed out of his rib to illustrate her place of affection at his side (as opposed to the place of one being ruled by Him). And Jehovah Elohim built the rib that he had taken from Man into a woman; and brought her to Man. (Genesis 2:22) When it comes to the way in which God's act of creating Eve is described the word 'built' arrests our attention. Certainly, it was an act of creation. Yet, the expression used is peculiar - stating that God 'built the rib. into a woman'. This is the first occurrence of this verb (to build) in the Bible. Strikingly, the word used for the building of the church in Ephesians 2:20; Ephesians 2:22 is

derived from the same root as the word used here (in its Greek translation in the Septuagint). Although the church is presented as companion here the mention of the fact that God 'built' Eve is designed to confirm the truth that the builder of the church is a divine One. The Lord Himself said to Peter: 'Upon this rock will I build my church' (Matthew 16:18). This is not to say that believers do not have a role in the building up of the church. Edification is not formation. In God's grace, He allows every member of the body to work towards the edification of the church (Ephesians 4:16). But as far as formation goes, God is the builder.

Further, this verse tells us that God, having 'built' Eve, presents her to Adam. As with most types, there is a parallel as well as a contrast. In the case of Christ and the church, we read that Christ will present the church to Himself glorious. The obvious explanation for this difference is that Adam was not divine -but Christ is. 'He is the true God' (1 John 5:20). And Man said, This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: this shall be called Woman, because this was taken out of a man. (Genesis 2:23)

'This time' shows the contrast with all that had happened before when no counterpart, no intelligent and empathising being was found among the whole animal creation. This time, it was different. Adam recognises Eve as 'bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh'. This interesting expression shows us that, 1. Eve derived her very existence from Adam, and that

2. she exhibited features which were his own - he identifies her as 'woman' (- Isha), that is being taken out of man (- Ish). In applying this verse to the church we are on safe ground as the phrase is applied to the church by the Apostle Paul: 'we are of his flesh, and of his bones' (Ephesians 5:30). Paul uses this picture to illustrate the way in which husbands should care for their wives ('for no one has ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it') and the way in which Christ cares for the church ('even as also the Christ the assembly').

We are left to marvel at God's wisdom in creating Eve in this peculiar way - providing us with a beautiful picture (on the very first pages of His Word!) of His counsel and its present effect: the church. She,

derives her existence from Christ (whose death, resurrection and ascension were necessary for the giving of the Holy Spirit through Whom she was formed),

exhibits features of Christ (for instance, she is 'from God', 'out of heaven' and 'has the glory of God' Revelation 21:10-11),

is linked with Christ in the closest conceivable way and, being of His flesh and bones, can therefore be assured of His care even now (before she is presented to Him 'without spot and wrinkle').

With regard to Isha<sup>[3]</sup> being acknowledged by Adam as being 'of man', and the one who at last was the perfect companion and complement for man, we quote the words of another:<sup>[4]</sup> 'Eden could not, with all its delights for the senses, nor could his vast and unrivalled dominion abroad, as 'king of all he surveyed' do what Eve did for him. She unsealed his lips with a confession that now he was satisfied'. What a privilege it is to belong to the company (of all believers from Pentecost to the rapture) that represents the object of the Lord's full satisfaction, the fruit of the travail of His soul, the harvest of the One who sowed with tears but reaps with rejoicing (cf. Isaiah 53:11;

Psalms 126:4-5; Hebrews 12:2). Surely, the Lord is the suitable object of our love, but the truth illustrated here is that, in the church, a company has been formed that is the suitable object of His love.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

Again, the application to Christ and the church can be made. Christ, as man, forsook that which was His, by way of relationship to His earthly people, Israel, in order to acquire and possess the church. This verse is quoted by Paul in Ephesians 5:30 : 'Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This mystery is great' but He then unmistakably applies it to the church: 'but I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly'. The marriage bond, therefore, becomes the picture of the union of the church with Christ. The fact of the two being one takes us back to the first chapter of Genesis where both, man and woman, are referred to as 'Adam' (Genesis 1:26). Again, this is not an imprecision, but a distinct analogy with New Testament teaching. When speaking about the church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, the Apostle Paul confirms the meaning of this peculiarity when he refers to Christ and the assembly, together, as 'the Christ': 'For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:12).

If God's wisdom is visible in creation - God's 'all-varied wisdom' is made known through the church. It is perfectly expressed, as a matter of fact, in God's counsel as described in Ephesians 1:1-23; Ephesians 2:1-22; Ephesians 3:1-21; and it should be visible practically where this church finds expressions in the various towns and villages where Christians are gathered to the Lord's name.

M Hardt

[1] This account for the change of God's name from 'Elohim' in Genesis 1:1-31 to 'Jehovah' in Genesis 2:1-25.

[2] Men and women who lived in Old Testament times or who will live during the tribulation period - some of them extremely faithful and devoted - will not share this privilege, which is reserved to those who believe in Christ during the time of grace, i.e. between Pentecost and the rapture.

[3] She is only called 'Eve' after the fall.

[4] 'Heaven and Earth' by J G Bellett.

## 1.02. Enoch

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### Enoch

Very little is said in the Scriptures about this interesting man, but the few facts we do know provide us with a number of striking features. Some of these are typical of the Church and others, though not directly typical, are deeply instructive for every believer composing the Church[1]. Both groups are listed briefly below.

#### 1. Enoch was a descendent of Seth

After Abel had been slain by his brother Cain, God provided a replacement: Eve had another son. She called him Seth 'for God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew' (Genesis 4:25). If Abel was a picture of Christ as the martyr, being slain for his faithful witness, Seth typifies Christ as risen, the One given 'instead' of the One who was slain. As Enoch was a descendent of Seth, so the origin of the Church goes back to Christ risen and glorified (who received the promise of the Spirit (Acts 2:33) and 'built' the Church (Matthew 16:18).

2. And Enoch walked with God This brief statement is found twice (Genesis 5:22; Genesis 5:24). How was it possible that a man should walk with God, and that in a world already filled with violence and corruption? It seems that the answer is given in Hebrews 11:5 where it says that it was 'by faith'. He believed in God, acted on His Word and trusted Him. This should be true of every believer composing the Church.

#### 3. Enoch was translated

Genesis 5:24 reports that Enoch 'was not'. Suddenly, this man had disappeared. The reason was that 'God took him'. We can only mention in passing (but it is too beautiful to be skipped over) that this verse, in the early chapters of Genesis (!), opens up heaven as a place for man to be. So, Enoch never went through death. This is so much more remarkable as the constantly repeated phrase of the chapter is 'and he died'. More light is shed on this in Hebrews 11:5 which says that 'Enoch was translated that he should not see death' and that 'God had translated him'. Does this not remind us of Paul's words: 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds' (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The terms 'caught up' and 'alive' are aptly illustrated in Enoch. This is the hope of the Church: not to die, but to be caught up, or raptured, out of a scene to which she never belonged, to be with Christ for ever. The timing of Enoch's 'rapture' is interesting in that it happened before the flood (Genesis 6:1-22; Genesis 7:1-24; Genesis 8:1-22), just as the Church will be 'caught up' before the great tribulation that will come over the whole earth (Revelation 3:9). Noah was preserved from the flood as well, but in quite a different manner. He was saved during the flood (by being in the ark), just as the Jewish remnant will be preserved by God during the tribulation (Matthew 24:22-31; Revelation 12:6).

#### 4. Enoch was not found

Hebrews 11:5 adds that 'he was not found'. Why is this piece of information given? Does it not beg the question whether others looked for him? One is also struck by the fact that he only lived about half as long, or less, as most others mentioned in this chapter. Perhaps this faithful man was persecuted (see 2 Timothy 3:12) but 'translated' by God so that those who pursued him could not 'find' him. If this is so, it would be another parallel with the Church, which has been persecuted from very early days (founded in Acts 2:1-47 and persecuted as soon as Acts 3:1-26; Acts 4:1-37!). And it is still the case in many countries today.

5. Enoch lived by faith This statement is a monument to Enoch's faith that still stands today, recorded in God's Word (Hebrews 11:1-40). While - as Hebrews 11:1-40 demonstrates - a life of faith has been the part of believers at all times it is also true that the Church dispensation is characterised by faith in a special way. Thomas, in John 20:1-31, typifies the remnant of Israel who will 'see and believe' whereas the Church has the special blessedness of 'not seeing and believing'.

#### 6. Enoch pleased God

It is also stated in Hebrews 11:1-40 that Enoch 'before his translation had this testimony, that he pleased God.' The family of Cain (Genesis 4:1-26) had a record of achievements, ranging from architecture to agriculture and music. They had done something to make the world a better place (without God). The lives of those who belonged to the family of God (Genesis 5:1-32) seem pale and insignificant by contrast. They lived, had a family and died; no claims to fame and no monument of a material kind. But there is a monument to Enoch's faith and life in Hebrews 11:1-40. Enoch might have been a disturbing man in the sight of his contemporaries, but he pleased God. Can you think of a higher commendation? This little phrase 'pleased God' is pertinent to the Church in three ways:

- in God's counsels the Church is always perfect and beautiful. She is the perfect complement for Christ as Man - the 'fullness of Him who fills all in all' (Ephesians 1:23). Christ saw her as the 'goodly pearl', sufficiently valuable in His sight that He should 'sell all he had' to possess her.
- practically, the Church should also please God. Christ uses the water of the Word of God to purify and cleanse her (Ephesians 5:25) to remove anything that might be there that would not please God.
- in the future, Christ will present the Church unto Himself - glorious, without spot and wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25).

#### 7. Enoch witnessed of Christ's coming

We would not know about this from Enoch's short biography in Genesis 5:1-32. It is only once we reach the Epistle of Jude that we find out:

'And Enoch also prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.' (Jude 1:14) The fact that Jude wrote this without it having been revealed in Genesis should not worry us. The writers of the New (and Old) Testament were inspired, and if it pleased God only to reveal this piece of information a few thousand years later

then this was good and is no reason for concern. But one is amazed by the amount of truth Enoch knew, no doubt from God Himself. He spoke about Christ's appearing. And when He says that the Lord would come 'with then thousands of his saints' this, really, supposes a rapture before that time. However, the central point of Enoch's prophecy is that judgment will be executed on this world. Again, this is the position of the Church in the world today: her task is not to try to improve a world that rejects Christ but to warn others of the judgment to come and to point them to the salvation that is offered in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

#### 8. Enoch was the seventh from Adam

It is interesting that we read of two men who were 'the seventh of Adam' (Jude 1:14) in the sense of the 'seventh' generation. The first one was Lamech, and we read of him in Genesis 4:19-24. He was the first bigamist and his song shows a remarkable degree of arrogance. He is the seventh - the full manifestation - of man in the line of Cain, in the line of the flesh. On the other hand there is Enoch, a man of faith, pleasing God, walking with God and then taken by God out of a scene to which he never belonged. Is this not the full manifestation of the family of faith? And this should, and to a degree is, seen in the Church.

9. Enoch means 'dedicated' The lessons above leave little doubt that Enoch's dedication was not divided between God and the world, but was for God only. Should this not be true of the Church practically, that she should be here, dedicated to Christ? Paul said, 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ ' (2 Corinthians 11:2).

[1] Just for the avoidance of doubt: Enoch was not part of the Church (it did not even exist before Pentecost) but his life shows features that are, or in some cases should be, true of believers composing the Church.

## 1.03. Rebecca

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Rebecca Why another article on this well-known chapter?

Genesis 24:1-67 is a chapter on which many have written much. So much profitable expository material on Rebecca abounds that one hardly dares to add another article on the subject, but two reasons encourage me to do so. Firstly, an overview of Old Testament types foreshadowing of the church would be extremely incomplete if this particular type – undisputedly the fullest of all – were to be omitted. Second, a brief and easy-to-read summary of typical aspects may be helpful to some who have not yet had opportunity to review the many detailed expositions.

Introductory comments The narrative of Rebecca's call to leave her family and country in order to become the wife of Abraham's son, Isaac, illustrates a number of features of the church which are not covered by the other types. The main ones are:

the call of the bride, out of a heathen environment, to travel to meet the absent bridegroom;

the involvement of all three Divine Persons in securing the bride and in giving her a most dignified place: the Father's counsel (see Genesis 24:1-9), the Spirit's mission and activity (see Genesis 24:1-61), and the Son's love for the church (see Genesis 24:62-67);

the emphasis on the work brought about in the bride: how she reaches the stage where she is willing to abandon all in order to go and meet one she had never seen;

the character of Christ as the heavenly Head; a number of beautiful details (e.g. the gifts given to the church illustrated in the gifts received by Rebecca). In order to see the full beauty of the picture presented in Genesis 24:1-67 one has to look at the whole panorama of Genesis 22:1-24, Genesis 23:1-20, Genesis 24:1-67, Genesis 25:1-7 reports how Isaac, in a figure, went through death. We already noticed in the section on Adam and Eve (Isha) that Adam had to fall into a 'deep sleep' before Eve could be presented to him. Likewise, Isaac has to be offered up on Mount Moriah before a bride could be called for him. Rebecca's call illustrates further that it would not have been possible for the church to be called out unless the death of Christ was an accomplished fact. The middle wall of partition, separating Jews from other nations, first had to be broken down and both, Jew and Gentile, formed into one new man. But this could only be achieved by the cross: 'that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross' (Ephesians 2:16).

- Then, in Genesis 23:1-20, we learn that Sarah died. She was, of course, the mother of the child of promise, Isaac. She therefore stands for the people of Israel because Christ, 'concerning the flesh', came out of Israel (Romans 9:5). So Sarah's death gives us a hint regarding the point in time when the church would be formed and called out, namely when Israel was set aside. The New Testament confirms this. Just think of the formation of the church related in Acts 2:1-47 and Israel refusing to repent in Acts 3:1-26 (see also Acts 7:1-60 for Israel's final refusal).

- In Genesis 24:1-67, the bride for the son is called.

- Genesis 25:1-34 confirms (in Genesis 25:1-6) the unique position of the son as the one and only heir of all things. Abraham's other children are given presents and sent away to the east country, foreshadowing millennial blessings.

Verse notes Genesis 24:3 : A firm basis

There was a firm basis for the call of Rebecca: it was founded on an oath between Abraham and the eldest servant of his house (not named here but generally assumed to be Eliezer of Damascus, see Genesis 15:2). The call of the church is founded on God's eternal counsel (Ephesians 1:3-4; Romans 8:20; Romans 8:30) and effected by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-47; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Just as Rebecca was unaware of this plan, so God's counsel regarding the church dates back to a time when the church had no consciousness of it, long before it even existed.

Genesis 24:4 : Her call and His glory The striking sentence 'thou shalt go ...and take a wife unto my son' illustrates a point which is beautiful and fundamental at the same time: God's counsel regarding the church cannot be separated from God's desire to honour His Son. We are reminded of 'a certain king, which made a marriage for his son' (Matthew 22:2). Notwithstanding the refusal of the workers in the vineyard to reverence the son, the King ensured that He was honoured. A second point to note in this verse is the suitability of the wife-to-be: a wife from the daughters of the Canaanites (Genesis 25:3) would not have been acceptable. Abraham states that she would have to be from 'his kindred'. Whereas Asenath, the heathen wife given to Joseph, illustrates the fact that men and women from Gentile nations are brought into the church, Isaac's wife had to be of the same kindred. Only those in whom God has done a divine work, producing faith in Christ, can be part of the church. The Lord Jesus Himself said, 'My mother, and my brethren are those which hear the word of God and do it' (Luke 8:21). Through God's grace we have been made morally suitable, of 'his kindred'.

Genesis 24:5-7 : the heavenly Head, or: a 'conditio sine qua non 2' The condition that Isaac's wife had to be – of the same kindred –raised a further difficulty. Given that Abraham lived about 400 miles away from the rest of his family (probably a more daunting distance at the time than London to New Zealand today) there was a strong possibility that, even if she consented to the marriage proposal, she might not be willing to leave her country to be joined to Isaac. In this case, would Isaac then go to live in her country? Abraham's response is decisive. It was what we would call today, a 'conditio sine qua non' namely that Isaac's wife would be willing to leave all, her family, friends, country, etc., in order to be with him. It is a striking illustration of the need for the church to be willing to become a stranger to her surroundings. Under no circumstances would Isaac move to Mesopotamia in order to live there with his wife. A well-known lesson, but how well has it been learned? The answer is very little whether we look at church history (e.g. the church losing her character of a stranger in the period of Pergamos, Revelation 2:12-17), or at modern multi-faceted endeavours to link Christ's name with earthly or even worldly initiatives. These start with 'Christian Socialism' and 'Christian' political parties, and there is no end to them. The Head of the body is a heavenly one. Christ, the risen Man is the heavenly Man, so the church should be a stranger and identified with Him. This is not only illustrated by the fact that Isaac was not to return to Mesopotamia, but clearly stated in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 15:48). Those who compose the church are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), seated

in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), and have warfare, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). Even when the church is presented as the 'new Jerusalem' or the 'holy Jerusalem' she is presented as coming 'from heaven' (Revelation 21:2; Revelation 21:10). The reason for all this is simple: union of the church with Christ demands that she should be heavenly as He is heavenly (Ephesians 5:25-32). A practical question for Christians today, therefore, is to what extent their minds are 'in sync', in harmony, with God's eternal counsel. Do they see their role in Christianising the world (bringing Isaac back to Mesopotamia) or does the heavenly Head have such attraction for them that they are willing to become heavenly strangers? Abraham's prohibition is recorded twice (Genesis 25:6 and Genesis 25:8) to emphasise its weight.

Genesis 24:8: a willing response A woman without an attitude of free-will would not be suitable: 'and if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath'. The church must be marked by grace, not by legal obedience or requirements, in contrast to the Jewish system. Nor does she resemble the Gentile nations marked by lust and attempts to satisfy their own desires. Willingness to give up and to follow was to be looked for by the servant. The church is marked by grace.

Genesis 24:10 : well equipped, or the power of attraction From Genesis 24:10-61 the servant is the main active character. Having considered the Father's counsel in the first nine verses, we now learn, by way of typical teaching, that the Holy Spirit has been entrusted with the mission of calling the church out of this world for Christ. The church was formed through Him (Acts 2:1-47, 1 Corinthians 12:13) and He works during the time of the church (dispensation) to reach this objective: to kindle, strengthen, and encourage her affections for Christ. How exactly does He do this?

We read of the servant that 'all the goods of his master were in his hand'. He was well equipped to tell Isaac's future wife about him. In the first instance 'all the goods of his master' would have been the possessions of Abraham. However, Abraham had given all things to Isaac as the only heir whereas his other children were only given presents and sent to the east country (Genesis 24:36 and Genesis 25:5-6). Therefore, all the treasures really belonged to Isaac. So it is with Christ who could say, 'All things that the Father hath are mine' (John 16:15) and, 'The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand' (John 3:35). This is how the Spirit works: He shows us the things of Christ. We read in John 16:14 : 'he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you'. It has been said, 'God works by the power of attraction'. The rather comprehensive expression: 'all the goods', reminds us that the Spirit has come to teach us 'all things' (John 14:26), to guide us into 'all truth' (John 16:13) and to show us 'all things that the Father hath' (John 16:15).

Genesis 24:12-14 : prayer, dependence and grace The first two of these features (prayer and dependence) mark the servant; the latter one (grace) marks Rebecca. She is not only willing to give Abraham's servant to drink, but also freely provides for his camels (which must have been hard work given the quantities these animals can drink, especially after a long journey), without negotiating conditions or asking a price. This is another indication that the church is marked by grace. Rebecca demonstrates the same feature later on when the servant asks for 'room' and she offers 'straw' and 'provender enough' and 'room to lodge in' (Genesis 24:25).

What may be less obvious to some is that the spirit of prayer and dependence that marked the servant should also mark the church. We are not mixing up types by simply applying everything to the church. However, the Spirit who indwells the church (1 Corinthians 3:16) wants to form His mind in her. The well-known Bible expositor William Kelly points out that a spirit is identified with the person he indwells (whether the spirit is good or evil):

'Indeed the case is equally true of those possessed by evil spirits. Thus the two demoniacs in Matthew 8:29 cried out, saying, 'What have we to do with thee, Son of God? Didst thou come here before the season to torment us?' Still clearer is this quasi-identification expressed in Mark 5:2, where, when asked his name, the chief of the two answers, 'Legion is my name, because we are many.' No less plainly does it appear in Luke 8:28-29 where the possessed said, 'I beseech thee torment me not'; and the evangelist continues: 'For He had commanded the unclean spirit to go out from the man.' Hence we see how profoundly correct it is in the history that Eliezer, typifying the Holy Spirit's action, should represent the church and the Christian also'.

God is not looking for a church that dominates the world, but rather a spirit in the church that is prayerful, as illustrated in Eliezer.

Genesis 24:15-16 : 'Rebecca came out' The servant did not have long to wait. He had hardly finished his prayer when Rebecca came out. Genesis 24:15 shows that she was a daughter of Bethuel who, in turn, was Abraham's nephew. Rebecca therefore met the requirement of being of Abraham's kindred (Genesis 24:4). She is further described as 'very fair to look upon', a comment which will remind the reader of the beauty which the church has in the eyes of Christ (Matthew 13:45-46). The fact that she was a chaste virgin brings to mind Paul's words: 'For I am jealous as to you with a jealousy which is of God; for I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ' (2 Corinthians 11:2). The professing church is far away from this state of heart where affections are reserved for Christ and forbidden associations are avoided. Finally, it will degenerate to be the very opposite of a chaste virgin. John has to describe the professing church that remains on earth after the rapture as 'the great harlot' (Revelation 17:15-16), which God has to judge (Revelation 9:2). But the true church will be presented to Christ, glorious (Ephesians 5:27). In eternity, she will be seen prepared 'as a bride adorned for her husband' (Revelation 21:2).

Genesis 24:17-22 : left wondering...

Genesis 24:17-20 show how the servant's prayer appears to have been answered to the letter. Rebecca fully demonstrated the unusual willingness that could hardly have been expected to occur by chance. She even 'hasted' and, having given him to drink, says, 'I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking...'

Observing this, the servant is left 'wondering'. As far as I can see, the thought is not that the 'wondering' attitude reflects badly on the servant, but that, in antitype, the church is marvellous and something that is very much an object of wonder. Even the Lord Jesus wondered when considering the faith shown by a Gentile (Luke 7:9). And who would not wonder at the way the Spirit worked in forming the church and producing godly characteristics in the multitudes that believed (Acts 2:1-47; Acts 3:1-26; Acts 4:1-37)?

Genesis 24:22 relates how Rebecca received gifts, namely a golden earring and golden bracelets. These initial gifts, early tokens of grace, were followed by further ones later-on (Genesis 24:53). Some have suggested that the initial gifts in Genesis 24:22 stand for the redemption we receive in Christ (Ephesians 1:7) whereas those in Genesis 24:53 are an illustration of the fact that Christ has given gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8). The latter ones are only brought in once the matter of Rebecca's new privilege of being united with Isaac has been established, just as it is from Christ 'ascended' and 'descended' that gifts are given for the edification of the church (Ephesians 4:8-16). But through the initial gifts (the earring and bracelets) Rebecca was clearly marked out and distinguished from all others. As has been said: 'The hand and face bear witness to the work of grace'.

Genesis 24:23-27 : ... and worshipping The servant asks Rebecca two questions: who she was and whether there would be room in her father's house for him to stay. The Spirit of God is not intrusive and does not force Himself upon anyone but asks whether there is 'room'. Do we make 'room' for Him or do we 'grieve' Him (Ephesians 4:30)?

Having heard Rebecca's answer (Genesis 24:24-25) there was no doubt that God had indeed sent His angel to prepare the way (Genesis 24:7), and to lead Eliezer in the right way (Genesis 24:48). His immediate response is worship. Bearing in mind earlier comments (on Genesis 24:12-14) explaining why the Spirit's features should mark the church, it will be easy to see the point: worship is characteristic for Christianity (John 4:24). This incident of worship is mentioned again in Genesis 24:48 (and hence was one of the significant things that had occurred). Further, once Rebecca's brother Laban and her father Bethuel had given their consent, we read again: 'when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth' (Genesis 24:52).

We hear that, in some places, opportunities for free collective worship are being replaced by all sorts of performances etc. Do we still know worship in our personal as well as in our collective lives? It is not just a matter of emotion but a state of heart where one is so overwhelmed with what God has done, and with what God is that one can only 'bow' and worship.

Genesis 24:28-49 This passage, which mainly reports how the servant explains the situation to Rebecca's family, illustrates a number of further features of the Holy Spirit and His work.

Firstly, we notice that the servant refuses to eat. Given the length of the journey he had made this was surprising. But he only allows his feet to be washed and the camels to be ungirded and looked after (Genesis 24:32). 'And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand' (Genesis 24:33). The servant knew what his mission was, his priorities were right, and he did not allow himself to be deflected from his mission. Perhaps we sometimes only have a weak impression of the Holy Spirit's relentless efforts in drawing out our affections for Christ. And how exactly the Spirit does this is again illustrated by the servant's report. After a very brief introduction he comes to the core of the matter: Abraham's son, the heir of all things: 'unto him hath he given all that he hath' (Genesis 24:36). Are you looking for evidence of the Spirit's working? Then the thing to look for is that hearts are being occupied with Christ. Are you trying to discourage believers from worldliness and to encourage devotion and heavenly mindedness? Again, occupation with Christ is the answer.

Genesis 24:50-56 : 'Hinder me not'

Only after full consent has been received, after the servant had worshipped 3 again, and after the gifts 4 had been given, is the servant ready to eat and to stay overnight, but only for one night (Genesis 24:54). How many of us would travel for many days in order to stay somewhere for only one night? Understandably, from a natural perspective, Rebecca's brother and mother ask the servant to prolong his stay (and Rebecca's) for ten or so days (Genesis 24:55). But this suggestion is categorically rejected by Eliezer who says, 'hinder me not' (Genesis 24:56). For the church, there are always a thousand factors to hinder her in going (and the Spirit in drawing her). Natural relationships may be one of the most potent and powerful influences. Yet, the Spirit knows His mission and does not rest until His aim is reached and the bride is fully detached from her previous environment. What are the factors in our lives where the Spirit has to say 'hinder me not'?

Genesis 24:57-60 : 'I will go' The decision must come from Rebecca's own lips. In a way, we reach the climax of the whole story here. We have seen the Father's counsel, and the Spirit's mission and its careful and untiring execution. The call has gone out, and it is unequivocal (she would have to come and Isaac would not go). What will the response be? In Rebecca's case it was just as unequivocal: 'I will go' (Genesis 24:58). This is what the Spirit looks for in the hearts of those who form the church: that they might willingly and consciously decide that the link with the true Heir and Son, the heavenly Head, is worth more to them than anything else.

Rebecca's affection for the absent bridegroom decided the matter. She took a decision of faith: if the report about Isaac, about her future and her high destiny was true, then nothing would keep her where she was. What was her former occupation of looking after Laban's sheep compared to the place of the wife of the son who was the heir of all things? The expectation of meeting the Lord will have an immediate and strong influence in our lives. This hope, and this hope only, will detach us from everything that wants to hold us back; it will make us live and serve the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:10), and enable us to purify ourselves from all that is unclean (1 John 3:3). As has been said: 'It is one thing to speak of the peculiar glories of the church, and quite another thing to be practically influenced by those glories'.

Genesis 24:61-67 : the journey and the meeting

Genesis 24:61 provides a beautiful picture of the present situation of the church. Rebecca arose and 'followed the man'. So the church is on a journey, in a desert where she will not find anything of interest to her. Guidance on this journey is given by the Spirit of God (not, of course, against or even without the written Word of God). As Rebecca, the church has never seen the One whom she is travelling to meet, but she follows the Spirit by faith. As long as she is occupied with the Lord Jesus the journey will not be hard; otherwise it would be unbearable. Returning to Mesopotamia was not an option for Rebecca. Going back was giving up Isaac.

Genesis 24:62-63 : the patience of Christ But Rebecca is not the only one waiting in expectation. There is also Isaac who 'went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming'. The church may be unsteady in her expectation – and so indeed may you or I – but the true Isaac is 'meditating', waiting, and 'lifting up his eyes'. A verse such as this reminds us of Paul's wish expressed in 2 Thessalonians 3:5 : 'But the Lord direct your hearts ... to the patience of the Christ' (JND). Christ is waiting, in patience, to receive

those who are His to be with Him: 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory' (John 17:24).

Why is it mentioned here that Isaac had just returned from the well 'Beer-lahai-roi'? This well is known to the Bible student from Genesis 16:13-14 where we learn why it had been given this name. Hagar had experienced God as a God who 'sees' and may be 'seen' and experienced. Even if, during the church's journey, Christ often does not intervene, the assurance is there that He 'sees' and is conscious of every difficulty on the way. His interest in every detail of the journey may also be seen in verse 66 where we learn that the servant told Isaac 'all things he had done' (although Christ, of course, has no need to be 'told').

Perhaps this is what makes the journey appear so short. At any rate, no duration, days or nights, are mentioned. They left 'in the morning' (Genesis 24:54), and Isaac saw them arriving 'toward the beginning of the evening' (Genesis 24:63).

Genesis 24:64-67 : the meeting Not only did Isaac 'lift up his eyes' (Genesis 24:63), but so did Rebecca (Genesis 24:64). And when she did 'she saw Isaac', the one whom she had been longing to meet and for whom she had followed the call and made the journey. This is the hope of the church, to see the Lord Jesus face to face: 'For we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). This hope corresponds to what I believe is the highest blessing of those in the holy city, Jerusalem : 'and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face' (Revelation 22:4). Rebecca sees Isaac and knows that the journey is over. She alights from the camel and veils herself, demonstrating that her beauty is reserved for him.

Genesis 24:67 tells us that Isaac led her into his mother Sarah's tent, and that she became his wife and he loved her. This is the second mention of love in the Bible, the first being the mention in Genesis 22:2 where Abraham's love for his son speaks of the Father's love for His only-begotten Son. Here, we have a picture of Christ's love for the church (Ephesians 5:25). Through Rebecca, Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. As pointed out in the introduction, Sarah stands for the people of Israel , set aside for a while. But the church has been called out in the meantime and Christ has found joy, comfort and satisfaction in her (Matthew 13:45-46, Isaiah 53:11. Hebrews 12:2).

Conclusion The narrative of Rebecca's call is the fullest and most complete type of Christ and the church in the Old Testament, showing an abundance of beautiful details as well as stimulating challenges for every Christian.

1 J N Darby (Synopsis), W Kelly (Isaac), F B Hole (Genesis), Hamilton Smith (Call of the Bride), J G Bellett (The Patriarchs), L M Grant (Genesis), F W Grant (Numerical Bible, Genesis in the Light of the NT, C H Mackintosh (Notes on the Pentateuch, Genesis).

2 An essential condition without which nothing could be done at all.

3 See earlier comments on 'worship' (v.52, see v.26).

4 See earlier comments on 'gifts' (v.53, see v.22).

## 1.04. Asenath

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Asenath Study in Genesis 41:45-54; Genesis 47:11 In Asenath, we find a fresh Old Testament picture of the church, distinct from the one given by Eve and others considered in previous articles. The timing The point in time at which Asenath appears on the scene is highly interesting, for a number of reasons. Before her name is mentioned, we read that Joseph is called out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream. Overwhelmed with Joseph's interpretation, Pharaoh can only say: 'Shall we find one as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?' (Genesis 41:38). He decides to give Joseph the highest place next to himself (Genesis 41:39-40). In short. Asenath is given to Joseph (1) after the time of his suffering and (2) subsequent to his exaltation. Likewise, the church was formed after Christ had suffered and had been exalted (Ephesians 4:8). But how about Joseph's family, and his brethren who had sold him? When Asenath was given to Joseph, they knew nothing about his exaltation. As far as they were concerned, he was still a slave, sold to the Gentiles. Again, this illustrates beautifully that the Lord received His bride when He was still rejected by His earthly people.

Also note the words Pharaoh addressed to Joseph: 'See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt' (Genesis 41:41). Are they not echoed in a wonderful way in Paul's words in Ephesians 1:1-23 where he states that God, in a display of greatest power, raised Christ from among the dead, 'and he set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come; and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly' (Ephesians 1:20-22). Asenath is the wife given to Joseph in his exaltation.

Joseph's path to Egypt where he obtained his wife was a path Of suffering; but no suffering whatsoever was involved for Asenath. For her, the association with Joseph meant joy and glory only. Likewise, the church has no share in the sufferings that led to her association with Christ. It is true that the church shares Christ's rejection but the sufferings on the cross where He secured His bride were His alone (Ephesians 5:25 and Matthew 13:46).

Just visualise for a moment how Joseph was made to ride in the second chariot, 'and they cried before him, Bow the knee!' This is the appropriate motto. 'Bow the knee' is the universally suitable command today, in the time after Christ suffered, the time when the church has been given to Him. The resistance of many to follow that command will not stop them, ultimately, from bowing their knee to Him (Php 2:9-10). The name The change of Joseph's name indicates that he assumed a special and distinct character at this stage in his life: 'And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah, and gave him as wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah the priest in On' (Genesis 41:56). The two alternative interpretations of this name are particularly relevant to the Lord's character during the time of the church. The Hebrew interpretation - 'revealer of secrets' - presents Him as the One who has told us the secrets nobody ever knew before the time of the church. Just think of the secrets of the Father's love and of His name that have been revealed and declared to us (John 17:6; John 17:26). The Christian age is the time during which the mystery of

Christ and the church is made known (Ephesians 5:32; Romans 16:25; Colossians 1:26-27). The mystery of God's will has now been declared to be the objective to 'head up all things in the Christ' (Ephesians 1:9-10).

Following the Egyptian interpretation of the name - Zaphnath-paaneah - the message is no less compelling. 'Saviour of the world' is the title under which the Lord Jesus is presented to the world in the gospel today. It is no longer merely, 'Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21) but the Saviour of the whole world[1] (1 John 4:14 and John 4:42).

During the church period (that is, from Pentecost to the time Of the rapture), the Lord no longer takes the character of 'Jehovah' or the 'Almighty' but that of the Saviour Of the world and the Revealer of Secrets.

### Asenath

Asenath herself is presented as 'the daughter of Potipherah the priest in On' (v. 45). This is in great contrast with Rebecca where Abraham had insisted that only one of his family would be suitable as a bride for Isaac. Whereas Rebecca illustrates the fact that the church is the one 'called-out' ('ecclesia') from her surrounding in order to travel and to meet Isaac at the end of her journey, Asenath illustrates a different truth. Asenath is the Gentile, the stranger to the promises of Israel. She gives a picture of the church as the bride that has come from among the Gentile nations and not from Israel exclusively.

Further, Pharaoh 'gave him as wife' Asenath. It is true that the Lord laboured and suffered in order to obtain His bride. But it is also true that the church was given to Him by the Father. So the Lord prayed: 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me' and 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am' (John 17:6; John 17:26). It is attractive to think of the church as composed of those who have been given to the Lord - as a gift - by God, His Father. The next verse (Genesis 41:46) mentions that 'Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh'. Some have taken the timing of this remark (after the mention of Asenath) to illustrate the fact that the church was already in the Lord's mind and in God's mind before He commenced His public ministry (at age 30), and before He gave Himself for her on the cross. Whether or not this is directly intended in the type before us, we leave to the consideration of our readers - but the fact is certainly true. The time of plenty and the time of famine

We already noted that Asenath was presented to Joseph after His suffering, consequent upon his exaltation, and during the time when he still was a stranger to his brethren. Genesis 41:47 brings out another highly interesting detail with regard to timing: 'And in the seven years of plenty the land brought forth by handfuls'. The time of the church corresponds to the 'years of plenty' in which men and women are blessed as nobody has ever been blessed before (Ephesians 1:3). Outside the church age, no believer has ever been entitled to claim that he Or she was 'chosen before the foundation of the world', or 'made acceptable in the beloved'. Not even the greatest men of God, not even Adam innocent, could have claimed to be linked with Christ, or to have Christ as head, or to possess any of the many blessings that belong to Christians only. Having said this, the question remains whether we enjoy these riches or whether we live as beggars - in the time of plenty.

It was during this time of plenty that Asenath bore two sons; and it is stated explicitly that this occurred 'before the year of famine came' (Genesis 41:50). The order of events is perfectly suited

to illustrate that the church and the time of her fruitfulness belong into the 'years of plenty' before the time of tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 3:10; Revelation 6:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17; Revelation 8:1-13; Revelation 9:1-21; Revelation 10:1-11; Revelation 11:1-19; Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-8; Revelation 16:1-21; Revelation 17:1-18; Revelation 18:1-24; Revelation 19:1-21). The names of the two sons (Genesis 41:51-52) convey something of what the church means to the Lord Jesus. Manasseh means 'to make forget' which illustrates the fact that, during the church dispensation, the Lord has set Israel aside as if He had no relationship with them as the chosen earthly nation. He will only re-establish this relationship and lead them to repentance after He has taken the church to be with Him. So it is that only Joseph's relationship with Asenath is described before he leads his brethren to repentance.

Ephraim means 'double fruitfulness' which speaks of the double part the sons of Joseph will have due to his birthright (as first born). This double fruitfulness illustrates prosperity of the current family, the church, awaiting the restoration of the family of Israel. The land The final point to be made in this article about Asenath is a negative one in the sense that it draws instruction from what is not said about her.

Prompted by the years of famine, Joseph's brothers come to Egypt and, finally, are restored when they confess their sin. SO they move, together with their father, to Egypt and receive the best portion of the land: 'And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land Of Raemeses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.' (Genesis 47:11). No mention is made of Asenath here. Why? The solution is simple. While Joseph's brothers (and father) are a picture of the nation of Israel receiving rich earthly blessing under the reign of the true Joseph, no such portion is given to Asenath, that is, to the church. She enjoys a better lot - united with Joseph who is head over all things. During the millennium, Israel will enjoy blessings on earth, in the land that had been promised to their ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in particular). The role of the church during this time is illustrated most remarkably in the figure of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1-27 - which no doubt merits a separate study. Suffice it to say here, that the church is not the earthly nation under the reign of the king but the heavenly wife of the One who wants her to share His exaltation. Let us not trade in our high calling and privilege for a lower one (for example, by getting involved in attempts to improve society, to make the earth a better place, etc.). This would only demonstrate that we do not really appreciate our close link and relationship with the true Joseph, Who is the revealer of secrets to us and the Saviour of the world offering salvation to all who believe.

Michael Hardt From Truth & Testimony 2002

[1] This is the universal aspect of His work, not universalism. In Him salvation is offered to the whole world, but it is only those who believe on Him who are saved (Romans 3:22).

## 1.05. Zipporah

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### Zipporah

If Rebecca is one of the best known and fullest types of the church in the Old Testament, Zipporah is one of the least known ones. There are a number of aspects in the account of her life that lend themselves to a typical interpretation but they are relatively few and perhaps less obvious than in cases such as Eve, Asenath, etc. As has been said in relation to Zipporah: "In her we see a faint type of the church." (J. N. Darby).

Zipporah is mentioned in Exodus 2:1-25, Genesis 4:1-31, and Genesis 18:1-27. And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.

### Exodus 2:21

Zipporah was one of the seven daughters of a Midianite priest called Reuel (Exodus 2:16; Exodus 2:18). Moses met her when he fled to Midian to live there (Exodus 2:15). It is interesting to consider why Moses had to flee. It does say the Moses fled from Pharaoh (Exodus 2:15) but the context brings out a further aspect, namely that his brethren had rejected him. When Moses saw two Hebrew men who were quarrelling and reprimanded the guilty one he was told: "Who made thee ruler and judge over us? dost thou intend to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?". It was, as a matter of fact, this opposition from the side of his own people that put him in danger with Pharaoh. At that point in time, Moses had not been recognised as leader of Israel who would liberate the people, and this brings us to the first point in relation to Zipporah: she was the bride given to Moses in the days of his rejection. Similarly, the church now [1] is the bride given to the Lord Jesus during the time in which He is rejected by Israel. And she bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said, I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.

Exodus 2:22 This verse sheds some light on Moses' own feelings while he was in Midian. He was keenly aware that he was a stranger, living in a foreign land and alienated from his brethren. Typically, the emphasis is therefore on the feelings of Moses in relation to Israel, not so much on the comfort derived from his wife and son as in the case of Joseph – who while a stranger to his brethren – "called the name of the firstborn Manasseh - For God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second he called Ephraim -For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." (Genesis 41:51-52). Hence we have another indication here that Zipporah is a less explicit type of the church than others. The next occurrence of Zipporah is found in Exodus 4:1-31. Moses tells his father-in-law that he is to go back to Egypt to see his brethren (Genesis 4:18). It is then stated explicitly that Moses "took his wife and his sons [2], and set them riding upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt". The account then takes us back to an incident that happened 'on the way': And Jehovah said to Moses, When thou goest to return to Egypt, see that thou do all the wonders before Pharaoh that I have put in thy hand... And it came to pass on the way, in the inn, that Jehovah came upon him, and sought to slay him. Then Zipporah took a stone and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and

said, A bloody husband indeed art thou to me!

Exodus 4:21; Exodus 4:23-24 No doubt, there are important practical lessons in this passage, namely that the judgement of the flesh is painful, and more so if it is delayed, that God cannot overlook this matter, etc. However, given the focus of this article on the typical meaning of Zipporah we only want to point out that the movements of Moses and Zipporah during this period are significant.

It appears that Zipporah left Moses either directly after this incident or a little later and returned to Midian. We read a little later: And Jethro the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law [3] , heard of all that God had done to Moses, and to Israel his people; that Jehovah had brought Israel out of Egypt . And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back...And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to Moses with his sons and his wife into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mountain of God. And he sent word to Moses: I, thy father-in-law Jethro, am come to thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her.

Exodus 18:1-6 The fact that Zipporah was hidden in her father's house and not with Moses during the time when he administered the judgements on Egypt and liberated the people of Israel , is significant. The Lord is the true Moses who will deliver His people with might and power and who will execute the judgement on the world. It is true that when the Lord appears in power for the judgement of the Western nations the 'armies in heaven' (heavenly saints) will follow Him. But even then it is His garment that is dipped in blood and the two edged sword proceeds out of His mouth. In the judgements related to the Assyrian we read that "the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, as a lion among the beasts of the forest as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, treadeth down, and teareth in pieces..." (Micah 5:7) but this is not the role of the church.

Having administered these judgements Moses is reunited to his wife. The picture we get in Exodus 18:1-27 is that the following 'parties' are assembled together: Moses (picture of the Lord), and Zipporah (picture of the church), are together with Reuel (picture of the nations) and speak about the subject of how God has delivered his people Israel and the ways he has gone with the enemies of His people in order to bring this about. And Moses told his father-in-law all that Jehovah had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel 's sake; all the trouble that had befallen them on the way, and how Jehovah had delivered them.

Exodus 18:8 The result is an outburst of praise on Jethro's part: And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness that Jehovah had done to Israel ; that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be Jehovah, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians.... Now I know that Jehovah is greater than all gods; ... And Jethro, ...took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel , to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

Exodus 18:10-12

Israel has been delivered. The marvellous ways of God with them are rehearsed. The nations marvel at this and start to acknowledge that the God of Israel is the true God 'greater than all gods'. There are even sacrifices brought by Jethro (the nations). The company is then joined by representatives of the people of Israel (Aaron and the elders) who come to have fellowship ('eat

bread'). But although these different 'parties' are together, in mutual fellowship and 'in the presence of God' there is one who is closer to Moses, the great deliverer, than anyone else. This is Zipporah, his wife. And so it will be during the Millennium: there will be blessing for delivered Israel, the nations will join in and praise God and bring worship but the place at the Lord's side, so to speak, is reserved for the church, His bride and wife.

#### Summary and comparison with Joseph and Asenath

There are a number of parallels between Moses and Zipporah on the one hand and Joseph and Asenath on the other. Both, Joseph and Moses, were rejected by their brethren, they were strangers in a foreign land, and both received a wife there. But there are differences. The following table may serve as a little summary.

Christ seen as

The church seen as

Joseph & Asenath

- Glorified - hated by His brethren – due to who He was, in His person - the Saviour of the world
- Associated with Christ – who is glorified and ruling over the world

Moses & Zipporah (Exodus 4:1-31)

- Hidden from the eyes of the world and rejected by Israel - Hated by His brethren – due to what He was, in His offices
- His companion in His rejection.

Moses & Zipporah (Exodus 18:1-27)

- The Deliverer - The King – Deuteronomy 33:5 - Associated with His people (while the Gentiles sacrifice, as they will to in the Millennium) - His glory manifested in the various spheres (Jew, Gentiles, church)
- Reunited with the great Deliverer who has administered to the judgement to the world - The one who is closest to Him (still in the Millennium)

[1] Some Bible teachers regard the church as bride only after the rapture (Revelation 21:2; Revelation 21:9 etc.). However, we do read that "the Spirit and the bride say 'Come!'" (Revelation 22:17). Clearly, this is the desire of the church during the present time, longing for the coming of the bridegroom, the rapture.

[2] The name of the second son, Eliezer ('the Lord is my helper'), is only mentioned in Exodus 18:1-27, once Moses had fully experienced God as the true helper.

[3] Moses's father-in-law is called Reuel in Exodus 2:18 and in Numbers 10:29 . It may be a question of two names for the same person or 'father' signifying grand-father in one case.

## 1.06. Aaron and His Sons

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Aaron and His Sons The Old Testament contains a number of types of the church, each illustrating various features of the assembly long before it existed in fact and long before it was revealed in doctrine.

Some readers might object that Aaron is a type of the Lord Jesus as High Priest and that the sons of Aaron stand for individual believers today. They would recognise that Christians are priests but not that a collective picture is intended. Such readers might be referred to 1 Peter 2:5 : "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". Few would contend that this verse does not present the church under the figure of the 'spiritual house'. However, if the church is meant by the spiritual house, how can anything but the church be referred to by the 'holy priesthood'?

Based on this scripture, we believe to be on firm ground in arguing that Aaron and his sons are a type of the New Testament priestly family, the church.

Aaron himself, when he is mentioned alone, is a type of the Lord Jesus in his high priestly office; but when Aaron is mentioned in conjunction with his sons then they - Aaron and his sons - provide a picture of the church as priestly family, in their association with Christ.

### Priestly privilege

Considering, then, the church as foreshadowed by the priestly family in the Old Testament, the first feature that comes to mind is that Aaron's family possessed a great privilege. It was forbidden - under penalty of death - for a stranger to 'wait on the priest's office' (see Numbers 3:10; Numbers 3:38). When king Uzziah, presumptuously, aspired to this office and tried to burn incense, he was smitten with leprosy. He remained a leper unto the day of his death (see 2 Chronicles 26:18-21). This privilege had not been earned by Aaron and by his sons. It was conferred on them by pure grace. It is stated explicitly in Hebrews 5:4 that "no one takes the honour to himself but as called by God, even as Aaron also". Hence the privilege of priestly status and service comes by divine appointment.

It is attractive and heart-warming to think of the church today as a company enjoying highest privilege, being able to come near to God in worship. Nobody who does not belong to this company - the church composed of all true believers - has the right to come near to God and bring Him an acceptable sacrifice. The immediate practical challenge, then, is whether we are conscious of this privilege and whether we make use of it, in personal and collective worship.

Another point to stress is that there is nobody who belongs to the church and who does not have the right to come near to God. What may appear obvious to the Bible student has, sadly, been reversed in Christendom. So-called 'churches' have appointed so-called 'priests' and given them a place of supposed mediation between God and 'ordinary' believers. Once we have considered the consecration of priests, we will see the seriousness of such practices.

Priestly garments The interested reader will find many instructive details relation to the garments and consecration of Aaron and his sons in Exodus 28:1-43; Exodus 29:1-46. Here, we confine ourselves to drawing attention to some aspects of the garments and of the consecration ceremony that appear to be particularly relevant for the study of church types.

It is striking that about 90% of Exodus 28:1-43 deal with Aaron's garments and only few verses are devoted to the garments for Aaron's sons. The beautiful garment or items worn by Aaron exclusively were the following:

Ephod and its girdle (Exodus 28:5 ff)

Breastplate (Exodus 28:15 ff)

Robe of the ephod (blue) (Exodus 28:31 ff)

Plate of pure gold ('Holiness unto the Lord' - Exodus 28:36 ff)

In addition, there were a number of relatively simple linen garments that were worn by both Aaron and by his sons:

Broidered coat (Exodus 28:39)

Mitre (Exodus 28:39)

Girdle (Exodus 28:39)

Breeches (Exodus 28:42)

If we consider the first class of garments - those that belonged to Aaron only - in detail, we can well understand that they were 'for glory and for beauty' (Exodus 28:2). Surprisingly though, at first sight, the same comment is passed on the far simpler items worn by both Aaron and his sons (Exodus 28:40). And yet, we can understand that there was beauty and meaning in these linen garments.

Firstly, the very fact that they were worn by Aaron as well as by his sons shows us, in type, that just as the priests at the time were associated with the High Priest, so are we associated with the Lord today in our priestly service.

Secondly, the material of linen is known to the Bible student as symbolic for practical purity and righteousness (see Revelation 19:8). These features belonged to our true High Priest in perfection (Hebrews 1:9; Hebrews 7:26 ); and it is an essential pre-requisite for anyone today - and this should be every Christian - who aspires to and is involved in priestly service.

Thirdly, it is explicitly stated that the linen breeches were to cover the flesh 'from the loins even unto the thighs' (Exodus 28:42). Carnal activity (=visibility of flesh) and priestly service are incompatible. We should note here in passing that the Lord Jesus had no sinful flesh: 'and in him is no sin' (1 John 3:5). This shows again that Aaron is only a picture of the Lord Jesus when he is mentioned alone, not when he is mentioned together with his sons.

Priestly consecration Further, a number of details can be gleaned from the actual ceremony of consecration described in Exodus 29:1-46.

Aaron and his sons were washed with water on the day of their consecration (Exodus 29:4). Only such who have been born again 'of water and of Spirit' (John 3:5) can be part of the priestly family.

Another interesting contrast between Aaron on the one hand and 'Aaron and his sons' on the other hand can be observed from the procedure of anointing them. Aaron was anointed without blood (Exodus 29:7), but when his sons are brought into the picture (Exodus 29:21) we read that blood and oil was sprinkled on Aaron and his sons. The Lord Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit before the work of redemption was completed, but believers today can only be anointed with the Spirit on the basis of the efficacy of the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Further, Aaron and his sons had to identify with the sin offering (Exodus 29:10-14) and with the burnt offering (Exodus 29:15-18) by laying their hands on them. This is another prerequisite for priestly service, and it is characteristic for the church: a sin offering was necessary to atone for the sins of those who are now priests, and at the same time they stand before God in the full acceptability of the burnt offering. The third animal to be given in sacrifice was the ram of consecration which was offered together with the meat offering (Exodus 29:19-22). The blood of this ram was applied to the ear, the finger, and the foot of Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29:20). Similarly, those who form the church today have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:1-20) and should present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-21).

Parts of the ram, as well as the meat offering, were then put in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons (Exodus 29:24). This part of the ceremony beautifully illustrates the meaning of consecration (= 'filling the hands'). These elements were then taken from their hands and burnt on the altar as burnt offering, for a sweet savour before the Lord (Exodus 29:25). It is hardly possible to think of a more beautiful illustration of the verse in Peter's first epistle, where he says that the church, as a holy priesthood, can "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

Finally, we note that Aaron and his sons were to 'eat those things wherewith the atonement was made' (Exodus 29:33). Dwelling upon the death of the Lord, this is the kind of food that will sustain priests in their service.

#### Priestly sacrifice

Leviticus 16:1-34 distinguishes 'Aaron and his house' from the 'people'. Aaron and his house, again, stand for the church. 'The people' stands for the people of Israel (as such, not only those alive at the time). The great day of atonement was for both, but their respective sacrifices differ from each other in a striking way. The sacrifices brought on this special occasion (the great atonement day has been called 'the moral climax of the book of Leviticus) may be summarised as follows:

For Aaron and his house

For the people

Sin offering

One bullock

Two goats

Burnt offering

A ram

A ram

Incense

Both hands full

– n/a –

Bearing this in mind, we can draw a number of striking lessons from the differences in the offerings brought for ‘the people’ on the one hand, and for ‘Aaron and his house’ on the other.

- Sin and burnt offering: both, Aaron and his house as well as the people bring a sin offering; and both bring a burnt offering. These are the two great aspects of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross: it solves the sin problem (sin offering) because the Lord endured the wrath and judgement of God; and it results in a sweet smelling savour ascending to God – showing the full satisfaction of God in respect of the sacrifice and those associated with it.

- One vs. two animals for the sin offering: the people brings two animals as a sin offering, the priestly family brings one. The first goat presented for the people (Israel) is ‘for Jehovah’ and hence speaks of propitiation: God is enabled to (righteously) offer remission of sins on the basis of the work of Christ (whether men accept it or not). The second goat, figuratively, carries the sins of the people into a desert place. This speaks of substitution. The Lord has taken ‘our’ place on the cross (this only applies to those who accept His work (1 Peter 2:24; Matthew 20:28). For Israel , there is a time difference of at least around 2,000 years between the two: propitiation was made when Christ died on the cross. But Israel will only accept that work as being for them in a future day when they will confess their sins and will be restored (Zechariah 12:10 ). Their feelings at that point in time when it dawns on them that the Christ who was despised and rejected actually suffered for them (!) are beautifully expressed in Isaiah 53:1-12. For the church, there is no such time interval. Both blessings, propitiation and substitution, are enjoyed at the present time by those who compose the church.

- Bullock vs. goat: the priestly family brings a bullock, the ‘people’ offers goats. The bullock is an animal of far higher value than goats and therefore indicates that the priestly family, the church, has a higher appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ than Israel will ever have. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ and presents them to believers today is a privilege that is characteristic for the church. No doubt this work of the Holy will result in an enhanced appreciation of Christ’s work. It is not our merit but a special blessing given to believers during the church period.

- The incense: it is only in the case of the priestly family that we read of incense presented. In the church there is (and there should be practically) worship that is brought to God, ascending as a sweet savour. If the bullock, in comparison to the goats, speaks of increased appreciation, the incense speaks of adoration. The Lord Jesus had said “ But the hour cometh, and now is, when

the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth..." (John 4:23). This 'hour that cometh and now is' speaks of the Christian or church period. The Apostle Paul confirms this in Php 3:3 where he says that Christians, in contrast to Jews, worship God in the Spirit: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh". What a blessing it is to live during the time period when God is worshipped in this way.

It says in Leviticus 16:12 that Aaron had to take 'his hands full of incense' when he went into the holy place. The new translation says 'both hands', emphasising the amount of incense to be taken into God's presence. God demands no less than 'both hands full' and the priestly family today should be encouraged to approach God with prepared hearts ready to give a full measure of worship to Him.

Conclusion and priestly practice Is it not attractive to think of the church as of a holy priesthood, such who have 'put on Christ', who are identified with Him in His death (sin and burnt offering), have fellowship with Him (peace offering of consecration), and are anointed for and sustained in their priestly service which, through Christ, is acceptable to God?

What are the practical implications of all this? Is it a mere curiosity for typology specialists? By no means. The type of the church as priestly family should stir us to enjoy our privilege and to practise priestly service. If the church is typified by the priestly family then, surely, each local expression of this church should be characterised by priestly service of worship and intercession, led by the true Aaron.

Many Christians tell us today that free worship in Spirit and in truth is being replaced by performances or by 'church services' led by one or more individuals. Prompted by such changes, some have searched and have asked the Lord to show them Christian gatherings where every brother[1] is free to worship and pray audibly in exercise of priestly privilege, and have told us what a discovery it was when they found such gatherings. For the others - who have known such liberty for years - let us ask the Lord for renewed appreciation of it and for renewed freshness in the exercise of this priestly service.

[1]Sisters are priests as well. Some have heralded the idea of 'women priests' as a novelty - yet it has long been the privilege of every believer (1 Peter 2:5). However, audible worship, prayer and ministry in the assembly is left to men, other tasks are given to women alone, and yet others to both.

## 1.07. The two leavened loaves

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The two leavened loaves Leviticus 23:15-22 The truth of the church is a mystery 'which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed.' (Ephesians 3:5). However, the Old Testament contains a number of striking types of the church which may be discovered in the light of New Testament revelation. This article examines one of them in order to show how features of the church are illustrated in this type and, at the same time, how the shadow falls short of the full truth 'now revealed'.

'And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven sabbaths shall be completed' (Leviticus 23:15).

One of the seven feasts or 'set times' in Leviticus 23:1-44 is the 'feast of wave loaves'. It has also been called 'feast of weeks', because it was to be observed seven weeks after the feast of the sheaf of the wave offering - type of the Lord Jesus in resurrection. This very fact shows us a first feature of the assembly: as the number seven indicates, it is a matter of divine fullness and completeness. If Adam was blessed in paradise, if Israel had abundant blessing in Canaan, the time of the church is a time of fullness of blessing - unparalleled in any other epoch (or dispensation). Within the outline of God's plan of salvation illustrated in the feasts of Leviticus 23:1-44, the feast of the wave loaves speaks of a period of fullness. A second point to note from this verse is that the feast of the wave loaves follows (and is linked to) the feast of the wave sheaf (Leviticus 23:10-14). Likewise, the church (all believers at this time) is associated with the risen Lord (John 20:17), in contrast to Adam, the people of Israel, or any other Old Testament saints. This thought is confirmed by the next verse where we read:

'Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the lord' (Leviticus 23:16).

Although the period of seven weeks (or sabbaths) is explicitly mentioned in Leviticus 23:15, it now speaks of fifty days. The reason why the people had to wait for one additional day before bringing the wave loaves is made very clear. The offering had to be made on 'the day after the . Sabbath', the first day of the week. Again, the sphere of resurrection is indicated.

Further, it had to be a 'new' grain offering (or meal offering). New, not because the people were at liberty to modify the regulations laid down for the meal offering in Leviticus 2:1-16, but rather because it was a new harvest. If the wave sheaf was the 'firstling' or first fruit of the barley harvest, the 'new' meal offering was 'the first fruits of wheat harvest' (Exodus 34:22). The first harvest speaks of the Lord's resurrection. The wheat harvest is the new harvest that characterises these wave loaves. As the next verse shows, they were to be of fine flour. Further, it was a new meal offering because leaven was involved (see notes on Leviticus 23:17). The church is also 'new' - different from preceding dispensations and without precedent. It started, not with Abraham or Adam, but on the day of Pentecost when believers were baptised into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). It was completely new that Jews and Gentiles should be formed into 'one new man'

(Ephesians 2:15).

'You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the first fruits to the lord' (Leviticus 23:17). This verse takes us to the heart of our section and subject: the wave loaves.

First of all, let us note that the loaves were 'of fine flour' and 'with leaven'. Both ingredients have a clear meaning in God's word, but their respective significance could hardly be further removed from each other: one speaking of Christ, His purity, the perfect Man, the One who pleased God at all times and showed perfect evenness, whether under pressure or not; the other speaking of evil in each and every occurrence in the Old Testament as well as in the New. One might well ask how anyone aware of the symbolism of these two substances could possibly combine them in one, and then think of presenting them to the Lord as an offering. Yet this is exactly what God demands here. A first step towards solving this riddle can be taken by observing that the loaves had to be 'baked' with leaven. The well-known corrupting influence of leaven ceases as soon as the lump is exposed to the heat of fire. Is this not a well-suited type of what the church is? It is composed of (all) believers - men, women and children who, on the one hand, have received a new nature (partakers of divine nature). This new nature enables them to show features of Christ in their life: fine flour. On the other hand, they still have the old nature, the flesh. However, they must not allow the flesh to be active in them; they must not be carnal. The phrase 'they are the first fruits unto the Lord', on the one hand, associates them with Christ, the first fruit. Christ is the first fruit of those who slept (1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Corinthians 15:23): just as He was raised for glory, not having to die ever again, so will the others be who fall asleep in Christ. Here, the same idea applies: many will be saved in this dispensation and thereafter. The church is the first fruit, the first company to be saved after the cross (James 1:18) just as the very first fruit reaped from a tree or other plant gives a foretaste of the harvest that is to follow. But others will follow in the course of the general harvest (see remarks below on Leviticus 23:22). On the other hand, there is an interesting difference we should note: the word used for 'first fruit' in Leviticus 23:10 means 'first in place, time, order or rank', also the 'chief' or 'principal' (Strong). This is the term used to prefigure Christ, the one who is above all. The word used here in Leviticus 23:20 is a different one, designating 'first fruit of the crop' or 'hasty fruit' (Strong). It, therefore, seems that Christ is the first in rank and time the thought here is that the church is the first in time.

Finally, this verse teaches us that two loaves had to be presented. On the positive side, we might say that the number two speaks of witness, and this is exactly what the church is meant to be. On the negative side, we see how the type falls short of the anti-type: the church is one body, represented by one loaf (1 Corinthians 10:17). Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, etc., are all joined into one. This cannot be seen from the type before us, which, after all, is only a shadow.

'And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the Lord' (Leviticus 23:18). This verse describes three offerings that had to be brought when the loaves were presented: a burnt offering, a meal offering and a drink offering. The same kinds of offering were also brought when the wave sheaf was presented (see Leviticus 23:12-13). This fact in itself teaches us a valuable lesson: namely that the acceptance of the Lord's work and the pleasure it brought to God as the burnt

offering now apply to us. We are associated with Him and His perfections. However, there is also a marked difference, which will be observed from the following verse.

'Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering' (Leviticus 23:19). In contrast to the feast of the wave sheaf (Leviticus 23:12-13), a sin offering and a peace offering had to be brought on the feast of weeks (or wave loaves). The Lord did not need to bring a sacrifice for his own sins. Neither did He ever commit any sin nor did he have a sinful nature. Therefore, we read that he 'needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins.' (Hebrews 7:27). For the church, on the other hand, a sin offering has been made available, as the second half of Hebrews 7:27 shows: 'and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself'. The offerings, then, reflect the truth that has already been indicated though the lack of leaven in any meal offering speaking of the Lord, and through its presence in the meal offering speaking of the church. The peace offering reminds us of the fact that there is fellowship between God and those who belong to the church. Speaking in the figure of the peace offering, God and man can eat the same meat, enjoy the same food, namely the Person of God's Son who is infinitely precious to God, and who has become precious to us.

'The priest shall wave them with the bread of the first fruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest' (Leviticus 23:20). The act of waving indicates that the offering was given to the Lord. Some also see in it an indication of ascension (cf. Leviticus 23:11). Christ risen ascended to heaven, and the church is a heavenly people that also has a heavenly destination.

'And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations' (Leviticus 23:21). No work was to be done on this feast. Man could add nothing to the great work that God accomplished in forming the church. We are His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10).

'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 23:22).

Once the wave loaves had been presented to the Lord, the harvest would follow. There would still be wheat, which would not be part of the wave loaves. The corners of the field, however, were not to be wholly reaped but were to be left for the poor and for the stranger. These two groups would receive a blessing at a point in time when the wave loaves would have disappeared from the scene. What does this mean? Surely, God's thought in this verse goes far beyond social issues. We believe the meaning is as follows. When the harvest comes, the wave loaves will have disappeared (the church will have been raptured), but then, blessing will be made available to the remnant of Israel, the poor of the flock (Zechariah 11:7; Zechariah 11:11) -represented here by the 'poor'. These will spread the gospel of the kingdom, and multitudes will be saved among the Gentiles -represented here by the 'strangers'. The climax of blessing is reached in the church, but after the rapture, some blessing will continue to flow. May the Lord use these lines to help us appreciate better some of the features of the church for which He gave Himself, among which are:

fullness of blessing (7 weeks Leviticus 23:15)

association with Christ in resurrection (day after sabbath Leviticus 23:16)

newness (new grain offering Leviticus 23:16)

new and old nature (fine flour and leaven - baked Leviticus 23:17)

first fruit character (Leviticus 23:17)

testimony (two give witness Leviticus 23:17)

accepted in Christ (foreshadowed in the burnt offering Leviticus 23:18)

sin offering necessary (Leviticus 23:19)

heavenly character (Leviticus 23:20)

God's work (no contribution from man, Leviticus 23:21)

blessing available to others (Leviticus 23:22).

1 See Leviticus 2:1; Leviticus 2:4; Leviticus 2:7 etc.

## 1.08. The Tabernacle

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The Tabernacle The first article in this issue [1] (by Arend Remmers) explains that the tabernacle points forward (to the church) and upward (to heaven). It then goes on to explore the latter of these two meanings – as does the article by Jeff Brett that follows it. Here, we are concerned with the other direction: the tabernacle as pointing forward to the church.

Most of the previous articles in this series ('Shadows of the Church') looked at women in the Old Testament as types of the church (Isha, Rebecca, Asenath, etc.). We also looked at the feast of weeks (Leviticus 23:1-44) and at the priestly family (Aaron and his sons) as foreshadowing that company of believers, the church, which could only be formed and revealed once Christ had died, risen, ascended and had sent the Holy Spirit to form believers into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). With the tabernacle we come to a different type of shadow of the church. Clearly, the thought here is that God dwells among His people: 'And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them' (Exodus 25:8).

If the picture of the bride of Christ is connected with the thoughts of pure and undivided affection, the thought of the house or dwelling place of God is connected with attributes which are quite different but just as relevant:

The order to be observed in the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15)

The display of the glory of God and honour given to Him (Psalms 26:8) ('glory' in JND, 'honour' in AV)

The holiness that becomes the presence of God (Psalms 93:5).

Two of the three references above are from the Old Testament, and, in the first instance, refer to the sanctuary at the time, that is the temple. However, the church of God is called the 'habitation of God in the Spirit' (N Tr.). If holiness and display of glory were paramount in the context of God's material dwelling place in the Old Testament, how much more in connection with His 'spiritual house' (1 Peter 2:5) in the New.

These features also come out in the description of the wilderness tabernacle in Exodus 25:1-40; Exodus 26:1-37; Exodus 27:1-21; Exodus 28:1-43; Exodus 29:1-46; Exodus 30:1-38; Exodus 31:1-18; Exodus 32:1-35; Exodus 33:1-23; Exodus 34:1-35; Exodus 35:1-35; Exodus 36:1-38; Exodus 37:1-29; Exodus 38:1-31; Exodus 39:1-43; Exodus 40:1-38. The order

Everything had to be made according to the pattern God had showed Moses on the mountain: 'According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it' (Exodus 25:9) – see also Exodus 25:40. In Exodus 39:1-43 and Exodus 40:1-38 which report how the tabernacle was set up we read the phrase 'as Jehovah had commanded Moses'. This phrase occurs 14 times in these two chapters alone.

Today, we can make two types of mistakes in respect of church order. The first one is to ignore God-given instructions (see 1 Corinthians 11:1-34; 1 Corinthians 14:1-40), the second is to add human 'order' by determining things the word of God leaves open. Examples here would be ordination, liturgies, prescriptions regulating who participates and/or what can be said and when during assembly meetings.

#### Display of the glory of God

All the materials of the tabernacle speak of the glories of Christ. But the one material that dominated God's dwelling place at the time was gold – which speaks of divine glory (divine righteousness is only one of the facets of divine glory). First of all, gold (or 'pure gold') was used for the ark: its lid, its rings, its staves, the cherubim. Then the table of shewbread had to be overlaid with gold and its rings, its dishes and bowls were of gold. The candlestick was of gold, including its knobs and branches, the tongs and snuffdishes. And these are only the references in Exodus 25:1-40! Reading on, one discovers that gold was used for many other things in connection with the tabernacle: the 50 tacks (or clasps) of gold (to hold the curtains together), the overlay of the boards, the rings, the bars, the four pillars and their hooks (Exodus 26:1-37). Gold was also used for the ephod, the girdle, the ouches, the chains, the breastplate, its rings and the bells (Exodus 28:1-43). Then there is the altar of incense overlaid with gold, including its staves and rings, and horns, and then a crown of pure gold.

If one is impressed with the extent to which this precious metal was used (one kg of gold costs over £ 15,000 today) it only brings home to us how important it is in God's eyes that glory is brought to Him in the church. The ministry that is characteristic for the church period 'excels in glory' (2 Corinthians 3:9). The glory of Christ and His work is such that we should not glory at all except in Him and His work (Galatians 6:14). We are for the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:12; Ephesians 1:14), and it says explicitly of the church: 'to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen' (Ephesians 3:21). In Revelation 21:1-27 the church (during the millennium) is still described as having 'the glory of God' (Revelation 21:11). This should encourage us in respect of assembly meetings to focus on the glory of God as revealed in Christ. We like to see large meetings and to hear pleasant singing (and these things are good) but what matters most is that His glory is seen.

Holiness The tabernacle consisted of two parts, both characterised by holiness: there was the 'holy' and the 'holy of holies' (Exodus 26:33). A recurrent phrase in the tabernacle chapters of Exodus is 'the holy place'. Aaron and His sons had to wear 'holy garments' (Exodus 28:2-4). Engraved on a plate of gold on Aaron's mitre were the words 'Holiness to the Lord' (Exodus 28:36). Then there were the 'holy things', 'hallowed' by the children of Israel as 'holy gifts' (Exodus 28:38). And so we could go on: the word 'holy' occurs 70 times in Exodus, and 64 of these occurrences are in the tabernacle section (Exodus 25:1-40, Exodus 26:1-37, Exodus 27:1-21, Exodus 28:1-43, Exodus 29:1-46, Exodus 30:1-38, Exodus 31:1-18, Exodus 32:1-35, Exodus 33:1-23, Exodus 34:1-35, Exodus 35:1-35, Exodus 36:1-38, Exodus 37:1-29, Exodus 38:1-31, Exodus 39:1-43, Exodus 40:1-38). In Christianity God is revealed as a God of love. His love has been shed forth into our hearts and we should act in love towards fellow believers. In order to exercise true love (as opposed to amiability) we need to take account of God's holiness: 'for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye' (1 Corinthians 3:17).

Other parallels In addition to the three features of Gods dwelling place discussed above (order, glory, holiness) there are a number of further parallels between the tabernacle and the church, which we have only space to list briefly:

Redemption and deliverance: the tabernacle could only be built once God's people had been redeemed by the Passover lamb and delivered from Egypt. So the church could only be formed after Christ's work of redemption had been accomplished and accepted as such in the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ at God's right hand, from where the Holy Spirit was sent (Acts 2:33).

Unity: golden tacks (or clasps) were used to hold the curtains together 'that the tabernacle may be one whole' (Exodus 26:6). How much more this is true of the church that it is one whole: we have been joined into one body, a truth not known in Old Testament times – and we should act accordingly, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3).

Gifts: whereas all the people were invited to (and did) contribute, there were some who were specially gifted to perform the difficult work of crafting the instruments and other items: Bezaleel and Aholiab (Exodus 35:29-35). So it is today: all members of the body have a task as joints of supply (Ephesians 4:16) but some among them have received special gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:11). His presence: when the tabernacle was completed 'according to the pattern' the cloud filled the house (Exodus 40:34). Until today, there is the promise of the Lord's presence where two or three are gathered unto His name (Matthew 18:20).

Surely this list is not exhaustive. The reader will discover further parallels. May these shadows help us to discern and follow God's mind in respect of assembly life today.

[1] Appeared in Truth & Testimony 2008

## S. Lessons on Discipline from the Book of Jeremiah

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### Lessons on Discipline from the Book of Jeremiah

Michael Hardt

Jeremiah may not be the first book that comes to mind when we speak of discipline, and yet discipline is at the centre of the book. In this article we focus on seven symbolical actions Jeremiah had to perform,[1] each of which teaches us an important aspect of discipline and an important message for us as Christians today.

#### Background

Jeremiah prophesied during the sunset decades of the Jewish kingdom: over the course of the last 40 years, starting in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah (629 BC). He had to show up the deplorably low state of the people even under godly king Josiah (Jeremiah 3:6 ff). He then had to experience the ungodly kings Jehoahaz, Johoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. He had to witness the beginning of the 'times of the Gentiles' (Luke 21:24) under Nebuchadnezzar and the three deportations that ensued (606 BC, 599 BC, 588 BC), the last of which occurred under Zedekiah and resulted in the complete destruction of Jerusalem.

Against this sad backdrop Jeremiah was called to present an unwelcome message: the king of Babylon will come; it is no use even trying to fight his armies or even to escape. What was the reason? God had determined to discipline His people for their sins and the best thing they could do was accept this and trust Him that if they repented then He in His grace would yet lead them into blessing.

#### 1. The Potter and the Clay

One of the actions Jeremiah had to perform to illustrate his message was to go to the potter's house and watch him produce a vessel (Jeremiah 18:1-10). Jeremiah witnessed how the potter produced a vessel on the wheel and how it was 'marred'. The potter then used the same clay to produce another vessel. What was the lesson Jeremiah was meant to learn from this? God Himself gives the answer: 'At the moment that I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to break down, and to destroy, if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, then I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at the moment that I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant, if it do evil in my sight, that it hearken not unto my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.' The message was clear: there was still time for Judah to repent. If so, God would 'repent'. Otherwise, He would need to chasten and discipline them. God 'is not a man ... that he should repent' (Numbers 23:19) but He does repent when man changes, especially when man repents.

Things had gone wrong with Israel. Idolatry had become prevalent. The vessel had been marred. But the clay was still soft. There was still time to turn to God.

2. The Broken Vessel In the next chapter (Jeremiah 19:1-15), Jeremiah has to perform another symbolic action. This time his assignment involves buying an earthen vessel, taking some of the elders of the people with him and going to the valley of the son of Hinnom. This dreadful place was renowned for the idolatry that involved sending children through the fire and sacrificing them to Molech (see 2 Kings 23:10). Jeremiah had to announce judgment there: 'Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle' (Jeremiah 19:3). Then he had to break the vessel: 'Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, and shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again' (Jeremiah 19:10-11). This time it is not clay that can still be formed but an earthen vessel that has been hardened in the fire. It can only be broken. The message is a clear but solemn one: there is a time when discipline can be accepted for profit and there is a time when it is too late. The warning not to harden the heart (Hebrews 4:7) applies.

Prophetically, God announces in this way that He will judge Israel (the earthen vessel) but also that he will form a people that He will 'build' and 'plant' again (the Jewish remnant: see Isaiah 10:20-22; Jeremiah 23:3; Jeremiah 31:7; Romans 9:27).

These first two symbolic incidents (the clay and the vessel) have a solemn application to unbelievers as well. There is an acceptable time when God gives opportunity to repent but when the heart is hardened (or death intervenes) it is too late and the inevitable consequence is the smashing of the potter's vessel ('as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again' (Jeremiah 19:11)). Yet, the same principle applies to discipline — and this appears to be the primary thought here.

3. The Baskets of Figs In Jeremiah 24:1-10, Jeremiah is shown two baskets of figs. This happened after the second deportation. The first one had occurred under Jehoiakim. Now, around ten years later, 'Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah[2] the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon' (Jeremiah 24:1), and Zedekiah was king. It is at this time that Jeremiah is shown the two baskets of figs: 'one basket had very good figs, like the figs first ripe; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten for badness' (Jeremiah 24:2). What did this mean? Again, God provides the explanation. Regarding the good figs He says, 'Like these good figs, so will I regard for good them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans; and I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up' (Jeremiah 24:5-6). The bad figs, on the other hand, are compared to 'Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the remnant of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt' (v. 8).

How could this be? Surely, one might have thought, those who remain in Jerusalem are the better Jews and those in Babylon are the bad ones. Why does God say the opposite? Because those who wanted to stay in Jerusalem were refusing to accept God's discipline. They thought they could evade it, either by staying in Jerusalem to fight or by fleeing to Egypt. One needs to bear in mind that, since the first deportation in 606 BC, God had entrusted government in the world to Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 28:14; Daniel 2:37-38; Daniel 5:18-19). The only right course of action

was to acknowledge this fact and to confess the sins that had led to it.

There were no intermediate figs. They were either 'very good' or 'very bad'. This shows that God would not accept a middle ground or a neutral position. The good figs were the ones that accepted the discipline and bowed under it. God would bless them and bring about a complete change in their hearts: 'And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am Jehovah; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart' (Jeremiah 24:7). As has been said: 'In a day of ruin faith always recognises the chastening of God and bows to it. Unbelief always resists.'<sup>[3]</sup> 4.The Bonds and the Yokes

Jeremiah 27:1-22 This message is reinforced and illustrated by the next symbolical action, when Jeremiah has to take 'bonds and yokes' and put them around his neck (Jeremiah 27:2). Zedekiah<sup>[4]</sup> and the kings of other nations nearby (Jeremiah 27:3) were given an unambiguous demonstration: 'the nation ... which will not ... put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I visit, saith Jehovah, with the sword ...' (Jeremiah 27:8). This message was not popular and opposition was not lacking. Hananiah, one of the many false prophets plaguing the people of God at the time, 'took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and broke it. And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith Jehovah: So will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon within two full years from off the neck of all the nations' (Jeremiah 28:10-11). Jeremiah did not take it upon himself to answer this lie. We simply read: 'and the prophet Jeremiah went his way.' But God spoke: 'Thou hast broken the yokes of wood, and thou hast made in their place yokes of iron. ... I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him' (Jeremiah 28:13-14). And the false prophet was judged for his opposition. He 'died in the same year in the seventh month' (Jeremiah 28:17).

We can make two mistakes in relation to discipline. One is to 'faint' under it, the other is to 'despise' discipline (Hebrews 12:5). Hananiah, and many others with him, clearly despised it. The only right course of action is to be exercised by it. This is the message of the 'bonds and yokes'. When God acts in discipline and we are exercised by it, it will bring the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).

5.The Purchase of the Field In Jeremiah 32:1-44, Jeremiah is given a task that seems the most unreasonable of all. It was the tenth year of Zedekiah — just months before the final destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem was besieged. The Chaldean army was encamped around the city. As Jeremiah himself knew: 'Behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it' (Jeremiah 32:24). To make things worse, if that is at all possible, Jeremiah was a prisoner (Jeremiah 32:2) — a prisoner within an imprisoned city. In this dire situation, the prophet is told by the Lord that Hanameel, Jeremiah's cousin, would come and offer him a piece of land for sale (Jeremiah 32:6-7). If there ever was a bad time to invest in land it was then. Jeremiah knew the outcome of the battle. The enemies would win and take the city and the land of Judaea. What use was it to buy a plot of land? We should not imagine that this was an easy thing for him to do (read his prayer in Jeremiah 32:17-25). But Jeremiah obeyed. In all this there was there was a beautiful message of grace. God would put an end to the dominion of the Gentiles. A time of blessing would come. Land should be bought and sold again. Jeremiah had spoken about the new covenant

(Jeremiah 31:31-40) and how God would act with His people in grace (in a day that is still future), following the repentance of a remnant of the people. Now God puts him to the test by making him buy the land. If Jeremiah believed his own prophecy he should act on it and 'put his money where his mouth was', and he did. In this way, the seemingly unreasonable task of buying a field had a wonderful significance: 'Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the Lord; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord' (Jeremiah 32:37-44). This remarkable incident illustrates one of the most beautiful aspects of discipline: grace. Whilst it is true that, in God's governmental ways, 'whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap' (Galatians 6:7), even in government and discipline God acts in grace.[5] Whilst there may be inevitable consequences from failure (like the 70 years of captivity) God's design is to bless.

#### 6.The Stones in the Brick-kiln

After the destruction of Jerusalem (the occasion for his composition of the Lamentations), Jeremiah, ironically, ended up the only free man in the country. Some were taken by Nebuzaradan and some were ordered to stay but Jeremiah was given the choice (Jeremiah 40:4). At one point, those who were told to stay in the city decided to escape the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar by fleeing to Egypt. The background was that Gedaliah, the governor whom the Babylonians had set over the few who remained in Jerusalem, had been murdered (Jeremiah 41:16-18). At the last minute, it occurred to them that they had not asked the Lord whether this was His way for them. So they quickly asked Jeremiah to consult Him. When the answer came, and was negative, they refused to listen (you can read this interesting story in Jeremiah 42:1-22).

Then, in Egypt, where he had been taken, apparently by force, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah again. This time he was asked to fix largestones in mortar: 'Take great stones in thy hand, and hide them in the clay in the brick-kiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes' (Jeremiah 43:9). He had to do this in the sight of the Jews, and to say to them, 'Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones which I have hidden, and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them. And he shall come and smite the land of Egypt ...' (Jeremiah 42:10-11). Is this not a striking message? The stones would have been well fixed in the mortar as a solemn witness of these words. Some time later[6] Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar came and took Egypt — the same Nebuchadnezzar they had been afraid of in Jerusalem so that they ran away from him.

God's discipline is not always immediate but it is always perfectly designed, proportionate and effective. If we run away from discipline the problem that caused it will catch up with us (and the outcome is likely to be even worse). Had these people remained in Jerusalem and accepted the Babylonian yoke, they could have lived quietly in their own country. But, having fled to Egypt, they were still in Nebuchadnezzar's reach and would die (Jeremiah 42:22).

## 7. The Book in the River

Finally, we come to the book in the river. Jeremiah 51 takes us back in time to the fourth year of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 51:59). Jeremiah was still in Jerusalem. When King Zedekiah travelled to Babylon (which took place before his revolt against Nebuchadnezzar as recorded in 2 Kings 24:20) he was accompanied by his travel organiser, Seraiah.

Jeremiah received a message from the Lord concerning Babylon and wrote this message in a book. It concerned all the judgments God was going to bring on Babylon — the nation He had chosen to use to discipline His people. 'And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When thou comest to Babylon, see that thou read all these words; and say, Jehovah, thou hast spoken concerning this place, that thou wilt cut it off, so that none shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever. And it shall be, when thou hast ended reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates; and shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise, because of the evil that I will bring upon it' (Jeremiah 51:61-64). The judgment on Babylon was going to be final. It would 'sink, and shall not rise'. How different are God's dealings with Babylon from His dealings with His own people. His own people He chastened with a view to restoring them (or, more precisely, the part of the people with whom the discipline would be effective, i.e. the remnant). Babylon, on the other hand, would receive a final judgment.

Here it is by way of contrast that we learn an important feature of discipline: it is not designed to destroy but designed to restore and to lead to blessing (see the section on the purchase of the field). Believers may be disciplined, but they are not condemned like the world. Paul expresses this very pointedly: 'But if we judged ourselves, so were we not judged. But being judged, we are disciplined of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world' (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). The Word 'Discipline' in Jeremiah In addition to these symbolical actions and God's use of Nebuchadnezzar to discipline His people, Jeremiah also refers to God 'correcting', 'chastising' or 'instructing' — i.e. disciplining — them. The same Hebrew word for this occurs seven times in the book: Jeremiah 2:19; Jeremiah 6:8; Jeremiah 10:24; Jeremiah 30:11; Jeremiah 31:18 (twice); and Jeremiah 46:28. Jeremiah 30:11 states: 'For I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to save thee: for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee; yet of thee will I not make a full end, but I will correct thee with judgment, and will not hold thee altogether guiltless.'

Conclusion The book of Jeremiah teaches us a number of moral lessons in relation to discipline:

When the hearts of His people turn away from Him God may have to act in discipline.

The objective of discipline is to restore, correct and bring about repentance.

The correct reaction to God's discipline is to accept it (not by being indifferent but by learning the lesson God wants to teach).

Running away from discipline will only make it worse.

Bowing under God's discipline brings blessing.

God condemns the world but disciplines His own.

Even in discipline God shows grace.

[1] There are a number of other symbolical actions in Jeremiah which we do not refer to in this article (see, for instance, Jeremiah 13:1-10; Jeremiah 16:1-2; Jeremiah 35:2).

[2] This is Jehoiachin (compare 2 Chronicles 36:9-10).

[3] William Kelly, Jeremiah.

[4] Some translations refer to 'Jehoiakim' in verse 1 but it is clear from verse 3 and the report that follows that Zedekiah is meant.

[5] This was the case with Jacob, the patriarch whose life gives a most vivid illustration of God's ways in discipline. After deceiving his father he was deceived, but he saw Joseph again. After deceiving Esau he had to flee the country, but God brought him back.

[6] A clay tablet, now in the British Museum, states: 'In the 37th year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the country of Babylon, he went to Mitzraim (Egypt) to wage war. Amasis, king of Egypt, collected [his army], and marched and spread abroad.' (Wikipedia)

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