

A Few Brief Comments on Selected Episodes or Verses in Torah

"Noah, a preacher of righteousness." In Genesis 3 it's suggestive, but by Chapter 4 it's very clear that all human society is either the seed of the woman and believes God and practices righteousness, or is wicked and following the Serpent. Abel, Seth and Enoch are specifically named as seed of the woman. But by chapter 6, that entire pre-Flood civilization had degenerated so that everyone (except Noah) was the seed of the Serpent. Only Noah was seed of the woman thru whom blessing and defeat of the serpent would come. But whereas it was the role of the seed of the woman to defeat if not destroy all those who oppose God and His will, Noah did something different: he preached grace. The response to grace would identify who also is seed of the woman. I see the work of the Church as analogous to Noah's attempts to persuade his fellow citizens to join him in the ark. Imagine: the ark is finished. It's only a matter of days until God will give the order to enter the ark, and He'll then close the doors so no one else may get in. But until that day, anyone who believed Noah's preaching could have entered that ark and would have been saved. Although not usually recognized as a type, that ark was like the salvation that's freely offered in the Gospel. Jesus, the ultimate and ideal Seed of the woman has made salvation from a far worse judgment available. The Church's work is to reprise what Noah did and appeal to our fellow citizens, to people everywhere, to take advantage of this rescue before it's too late. The Rapture could be any day now, and after that . . . only the horrors of God's wrath upon the people of earth will remain. The issue is the same today as it was then: To be saved, to exercise faith, we have to believe God regarding something He said about the otherwise unknowable future. Noah was faithful; may we be faithful too.

"How long will these people treat Me with contempt?" The Kadesh rebellion narrative in Numbers 14 is familiar. That rebellion was a reprise of the failure of Adam to obey God, to serve God, to honor God by throwing the Serpent out of the Garden when that wicked being sneaked in. Adam was commissioned to protect God's holy space, and he failed. So does Israel. But there are a few details worthy of notice and instruction in the narrative that are easily missed. God's explanation to Moses of what the people were doing is, by not believing Him, they were showing contempt. To refuse or fail to believe something that God has said is in essence treating God contemptuously. Never mind the obvious irony in this. The people experienced more miracles than anyone in the history of humanity could even imagine. Their unbelief is thus absurd. They were scared too, but that's not what God's explanation was; their problem was, they didn't believe Him. Is there something deeper here? Believing, serving, trusting, loving, obeying all these are related. In Scripture, to believe is to love is to obey is to serve is to trust. In these ways, we honor our holy Creator. I suspect that that generation coming from Egypt just didn't want to serve Him. Most church-goers today won't share the Gospel with others. That's a refusal to serve God, but it's a refusal also to believe God. It's what He commanded, it's His will for us, so to refuse to do it is rebellion, or disobedience or, let's say it: unbelief. We suppose that "believe" simply means to agree with the facts of the Gospel for forgiveness of sins and being in heaven. No, believe encompasses every aspect of our relationship with God. Something else, God forgave the people, yet He punished them severely. Ananias and Sapphira had forgiveness of sins, yet they were put to death for lying to the Spirit. Forgiveness of sins doesn't mean we're free to live as we please! Not one of that people except faithful Joshua and Caleb would see the land God had promised. How we live in the here-and-now may determine whether we participate in the future Kingdom, forgiveness of sins notwithstanding. One more detail: In their presumption, that people tried to defeat God's judgment. This time it was blatant disobedience. And of course, it was a disastrous effort. We cannot force our way into blessing. The way to blessing is by obeying God, by serving Him as He instructed, not as we want to.

"I will not let you go unless you bless me." One of the strangest episodes in all Scripture is Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32). How is such a thing even possible? Yet . . . there it is. Jacob struggled with everyone, his brother, his father, his father-in-law, and here he struggles even with God! And he prevailed! So his name was changed to Israel, which means "struggle with God." How appropriate. All thru Scripture, the nation of Israel struggled with their loving God who chose them for blessing. In the end, in the future, the Nation of Israel will be blessed, not as pagan nations seek blessing (power, wealth, etc), but as God blesses. Jacob sought more than anything to be blessed by God. May that same compulsion drive us as well. The over-arching story of the Bible might be, God's blessing of His beloved human creatures despite era upon era of struggle with sinful humanity and with evil. This episode is deeper, however. Jacob getting a new name means a new identity. He's

a new person after this encounter with God. Self-confidence and self-sufficiency are gone; he has to be dependent on God from now on. All his life was supervised and controlled by a loving God but he didn't realize that. All his struggles were in vain because God was in control. Now he knew it. But it's even deeper yet: Jacob is about to enter the Land, the very land in which God was to dwell, a land that was sacred space. Jacob could not enter as the crafty deceiver, but as one who will be trusting in God. Jacob might have been destroyed that night, but by pleading for a blessing, the blessing promised to Abraham, indeed, Creational blessing, he humbled himself and was blessed. Strange, but wonderful.

"Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?'" The conflict between Moses and Pharaoh (Exodus 5-14) is a power encounter. That's why it's so thrilling to read. But it's vastly more significant to the overall Bible story than just that. Adam was created to "subdue" the earth, to fill it and rule it. He was a royal priest, that is, a priest-king. God created the earth and all that's in it, but He began human history at Eden. Adam was to extend the boundaries of the Garden into all the earth so that God's glory would fill the earth and He would be in fellowship with all the holy people filling earth, descendants of Adam and his wife. Adam's job would include dealing as God's viceroy or deputy with anything that interfered with or opposed God's Creation intent. When the Serpent invaded the Garden, Adam should have killed it or thrown it out. He didn't. He failed. And so sin entered the human race as a judicial act. But there was an oracle that the seed of the woman would eventually deal with the Serpent. So conflict is all thru the Bible as the faithful to God battle with the seed of the Serpent, until the promised One, *the* seed of the woman, defeats the Serpent. Moses was a seed of the woman and he was fulfilling his role as priest-king in defeating Pharaoh, a seed of the Serpent. The Nation of Israel was called to continue the creational task given to Adam. Joshua led the Israelites into the Land but first had to cleanse it of the Canaanites who were also Serpent-seed (the Conquest). Because of disobedience, Israel couldn't fulfill their task. As Adam failed, eventually so did Israel. But as the ideal Moses, the ideal and obedient Israel, Jesus fulfilled the Creation task. We who are in Christ are to continue that work of opposing the Serpent by snatching from his iron grip as many as possible before the final and ultimate Conquest. In time, Jesus the ultimate Priest-King will return to cleanse the entire earth of wicked serpent-seed and then the whole earth will be filled with holy people, and God will dwell among them, and His glory will fill all the earth.

"The Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt." This statement in Leviticus 25 couldn't be more explicit: God delivered the people of Israel so that they would serve Him. At Sinai, He called them "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Peter refers to us, Christians, in the same way. So we likewise are called to serve God. Jesus is the ideal, obedient Servant, and we who are in Christ therefore are God's servants too. In Deuteronomy 6, the text says that the Israelites are to love God, fear Him, obey Him and, yes, serve Him. Salvation is misunderstood in today's churches. We suppose it's a free gift of forgiveness of sins and an assured place in heaven when we die -- and that's it! Well no, that's not it. God is on mission, He has great cosmic purposes to accomplish in His creation, and He's chosen us, just as He chose Israel in the past, to participate with Him in carrying out those purposes. We've almost totally lost the concept of servant-hood in our evangelical churches. The reason that servant-hood is not merely an option is, serving Christ as He commanded means we're obeying Him, and without obedience there's really no saving, loving, trusting relationship. (There's no gratitude for what Christ did for us, either.) This verse, by the way, along with similar verses in Deuteronomy, make plain that Jews are God's special people so that anti-Semitism of any kind is really an attack on God.

"When they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them." This verse in Deuteronomy 31 is a cosmic truth that has been confirmed repeatedly in history not only in Israel but in other nations and peoples as well. Prosperity is dangerous! We err in supposing that comforts and prosperity are a blessing from God. Well, maybe, maybe not. Wealth and ease, security and peace are pagan desiderata. Jesus said He came to bring a sword (Matthew 10:34). He warned that His followers would suffer persecution. Paul suffered terribly. Christians in many lands today suffer horribly. Indeed, today, just south of our border in northern Mexico, evangelicals are suffering persecution. Yet the Spirit indwells them to exhibit the fruit of love and joy, etc. The Lord's Prayer includes, "Give us this day our daily bread," because we're in relationship with a loving Father who delights in caring for His children. But we know little to nothing about dependence on God when all we need to do is plunk over some cash and we have whatever pleases us. So our relationship gets

more and more tenuous the wealthier we get until . . . the relationship vanishes. And we may not even be aware that something is missing, we have so much. Prosperity enables us to indulge ourselves in all manner of idolatrous activity if not distractions or outright wickedness (think pornography). Wealth is dangerous.

"Korah . . . became insolent and rose up against Moses." That rebellion in Numbers 16 is scary. As royal priests given the command to "subdue," Adam and his descendants were to uphold God's honor and holiness by removing all threats from within as well as without. So Moses, God's servant, now had to deal decisively if violently with this challenge to God's will. The episode serves as a warning that threats to holiness can arise from within the community and are no less severe than those that occur from outside the community. Rebellions such as this within the sacred community are going to fill the pages of Scripture all thru Israel's future. And into the Church! The warnings Paul and Peter and Jude gave regarding false teachers reprise Korah's rebellion. Followers of Christ need to guard God's holiness and His current holy space, which is the Church, by dealing with opposition to God's revealed will decisively. We cannot be indifferent, because that dishonors God. This is why, for example, Ken Ham (and others) strives to oppose the belief in evolution by Christians.

"Now the people complained . . ." In Numbers 11, the Israelites expressed discontent with God by demanding better food. What God was doing, it seems, was instructing His people in holiness. God was teaching them to rely on Him, to trust Him to take care of them, and be content with His care and love. They were, after all, on their way to a Land of milk and honey. Today, we'd call this sanctification. Their complaining however was really rejecting the Lord (11:20). God miraculously fed them every day, but that's not what they wanted. They wanted what Egypt had on offer. So the text warns us: Be content with God's provision -- or else! Failure or refusal to trust in God's wisdom and goodness leads to disaster. "The anger of the Lord burned against the people" (verse 33) and they suffered a terrible plague. Psalm 106:15 in the KJV comments on this episode, "God gave them the desire of their hearts, and sent leanness into their souls." If we're following Christ, we're still here on earth in order to learn holiness. We need therefore to be content with what God has provided and not seek pleasures or other satisfaction in what the world puts on offer, which is extensive and alluring. I suspect that the Israelites never realized that their soul had become "lean," diminished, because of their discontent and complaining. Nor do we.

"The name of Abram's wife was Sarai." "Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah." After Sarah died, Abraham married again and had lots of offspring thru her. None of those lived in the Land, but instead to the east of the Land. Abraham also had Ishmael, but he wasn't the son of promise and he wasn't to dwell in the Land either. Abraham left everything to his one heir, Isaac, the son of promise, the son of Sarah. And it was Isaac who lived in the Land. Isaac had only one wife, Rebecca. The author of Scripture is God, who is also not only the creator of language but the sovereign ruler of the affairs of men. So the Bible has embedded in it much truth that we can discover to our delight using faith and subsequent revelation. There are only a limited number of types recognized by the church, but as the Scriptures are a supernaturally coherent whole, there's much there for us to discover. We should call them narrative analogies, rather than types. Thus, Abraham represents God the Father and has one Son, Jesus, the anti-type of Isaac. But all those other offspring of Abraham are the Gentile nations that God also loves and wants to have for Himself. The Son has only one bride, the Church, just as Isaac had only Rebecca. Almost everything in Genesis is proleptic in one way or another, which makes study of it so rewarding.

Conclusion: The Bible is a unique book. It is coherent in its revelation of God's truth and His will for us from beginning to end. To be mature, we need to know all Scripture, not just some passages here and there in the New Testament. God loves us and has given us much to reflect on and apply to our lives. It's where we encounter God. And by making His Word come alive by our obeying it, by allowing it to transform us, we glorify Him.