

Study One: The Reality of The Woman

Introduction

Before we do character studies of men and women in the Bible, it will be good for us to look at what we might call 'the true woman' and 'the true man'. We will think of the 'the true woman' in this Study and although it will involve some mention of 'the true man' we will tackle that in our next Study.

The True Woman

- (i) **Eve.** By 'true woman' we do not mean all women are not women, but 'true' is the same as when Jesus said, 'I am the true vine, meaning the archetypal vine, the fine from all vines get their meanings. A vine is not an analogy of Jesus but, at the best, an ectype of Him, the true Vine. So we have some explaining to do. Eve was the first created woman. Before the fall she was a 'true woman', but after the fall not though not 'true' yet still a woman, albeit fallen. A creation of God, she was derived from Adam so that he said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'. She was created to be Adam's 'helpmeet fit for him'. Later Adam named her again, 'Eve, because she was the mother of all living'. Like Adam she was a creature and as well derived from her we know something of her womanhood and motherhood.

At this point we should note there is no such thing as a 'race' of women. Man, created in the image of God, is both male and female, but never male apart from female, or female apart from male. Man is a male-female entity, a unity. We cannot properly think of male apart from female, or female apart from male. Together-and only together-they constitute 'Man'.

- (ii) **God's Spouse, Israel.** In the Old Testament Israel is the wife of God. This can be seen in passages such as Jeremiah 3:1-3; Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23; Hosea 2:16ff.; Isaiah 54:4-8. Sadly enough these passages mainly show Israel as an unfaithful person. According to many Jewish exegetes the *Song of Solomon* was an allegory about Israel and God, as lovers. In the New Testament Sarah represents 'the Jerusalem above and she is our mother' whilst other parts of the New Testament depict the Church as the Bride of Christ. Ephesians 5:21-32 needs to be studied here. Of course Revelation 19 and 21 depict the Bride and the Bridegroom eschatologically. Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17 seems to depict spiritual Israel as the Mother of the Child who must be seen as Christ.

Whatever the failure of Israel as the true Woman, she does appear in Revelation 12 to have become this, and as the Bride of Christ to be the archetypal true woman. I am suggesting that the reading of my book *The Heavenly Vision* (NCPI, 1987) may help us to

see something of the True Woman, especially pages 1-8 which are here attached. In extension of the theme see *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality* (N.C.P.1, 1988), pages 33-57).

The depiction in Proverbs 8:1-38 of Wisdom as a woman is surely tied in with the overall true understanding of womanhood, and is very beautiful. Likewise the Song of Solomon shows the personal beauty and simplicity-yet wisdom also-of the Shulamite woman. Proper womanhood is always depicted in glorious, and practical fashion. This latter is so in Proverbs 3 1:10-3 1.

(iii) **The Eschatological, Teleological Woman.** In Ephesians 5:21-32 we see that the True Woman is the Bride of Christ. She is the archetypal Woman of whom women are ectypes. In Revelation 19 and 21 we see the Bride in all her beauty, and purity. She is glorified ('having the glory of God' 2 1:11). Doubtless she glorifies her Husband (cf. I Cor. 11:7), and we understand Woman only as we see her in her purity and in her union with her Husband. Thus only at the end of this time we will truly know the True Woman and the True Man, but we are shown enough of them, biblically and prophetically, to shape our own womanhood and manhood by them. We may note in passing that a human marriage is an ectype of the great archetype of the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Every marriage is a prophetic foretaste and type of the Marriage-to-come. We may also note that created Man and Woman were not complete, having not yet been glorified.

Women Compared

In Scripture there is always the evil woman. Generally she attempts to seduce godly persons. Proverbs 3 especially tells of her as a dangerous person. In Revelation 17-18 Babylon is the evil woman, the unholy City, 'the mother of harlots'—all opposites to the True Woman, the Wife of Yahweh, the Bride of Christ. In our studies we will see women who are women of faith, godly, and yet not perfect, as we will also see those who have fallen yet many raised to faith and godliness. When we come to study The True Man we will see some of these masculine equivalents.

The Point of our First Study

As we mentioned in our Term Commencement Letter our aim is to derive great personal benefit from seeing the characters of the people we study. We should learn by their failures, be encouraged by their growth, and warned against the kind of evils we can fall into as persons. To see what is 'woman' and to see what is 'man' and to comprehend what is 'Man' altogether can be very helpful for our understanding of life, and especially of the Triune God Who created us, redeemed us, and is presently sanctifying and glorifying us. The Studies, then, should be greatly useful.

CHAPTER ONE

The prophet is visited with a dream, a vision, in which he sees the glory of the Woman, which he discovers to be the glory of Woman also. He understands from the vision that in the End-Time, the Time of Eternity, this Woman will represent the true people of the Human Race, and be the Citadel of Refuge and Healing for the Nations.

Then I saw in my dream—that dream within a dream—such beauty as I had never before, nor since, beheld. In such dreams and visions you do not analyse and classify, or even compare with some precedent. You are the object of the vision, not its subject. It comes upon you, because a vision is a gift, and you see with inward eyes, and when you see you know, although knowing does not mean you can express the truth of the vision in the way you can express non-visionary things.

When, then, I saw the glories which came in this dream. I knew nothing could equal such beauty, so rare was it. I can only make that claim and leave it to you who wish to read and know the vision. It was the beauty of purity, or the purity of beauty: I cannot rightly say which, but both thoughts penetrated me in a strangely wonderful way, for true purity has never been known by the human race, except by some incredible grace. What the human race once knew in nature—its created reality—it has long since lost. So then I was deeply moved by that beauty and purity, and wished I would never cease to behold it. To tell the truth I have never ceased seeing it.

I was seeing a woman whose beauty can only be called glorious. She could not be called handsome or pretty, but simply glorious, for radiance shone forth from her, as though the inner splendour had become free and outwardly visible. It emanated from her, breaking out in shining rays which themselves kept compounding their brilliance, their own pure brilliance.

Her eyes were clear as crystal but of a colour that defied description. They shone as richly as any star, and had within them such regality that I was humbled even to look at them. I did not desire that she should see me, but that I should see her, and never cease seeing her. Her hair was a glory too, about her, flowing in long tresses that I would have called golden except that the brilliance seemed to absorb all colour.

Her arms also were regal, raised in utter joy, the slim fingers stretched and pointing to the heavens, the palms at ease and open, but when I looked to see the heavens to which she was reaching, I saw that the heavens were about her. No less below her than above, and I knew in this dream and vision that she was a heavenly creature, albeit she was by nature a woman, and surely of our human race. That did not mystify me, for nothing in a dream mystifies, 'but often the meaning comes gradually to the dreamer, for understanding is never ultimately withheld from the willing beholder.

As I gazed in awe and delight upon the beauty of her, I found joy in purity which possessed me. It was as though I were in an invisible cocoon of sheer holiness, one felt and recognized rather than seen. I could behold her form without impurity of thought and desire. Oh yes, thought and desire were there, but peerless and impeccable, and the genuine mystery of love was beginning to break over me, and grasp me in its wonder.

I thought to myself, 'Her name is Love, and she is pure love,' but a Voice spoke to me and said, 'She is not Love, for He is Love, but she is "the Beloved," and love has made her what she is, pure in love, for His love has made her pure.' The thought then came to my mind that pure love always makes pure.

'Who, then,' I asked myself, 'is this Beloved, and Who is He Who is Love?' Yet I knew.

I marvelled at the Voice, for it had the strange property of simplicity so that nothing

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which was said was not understood, and the history of the truth was also itself communicated. I knew then, that as there was Woman—the one I beheld—so, too, there was Man, and that he was the Voice, and I had a great longing to see him, but at that point he did not appear, and so I was content to look upon the beauty of the Woman.

I saw, as I looked, that she was arrayed in the most glorious of garments, and my heart told me simply that this Woman was to be wed, and that she was clothed in a garment that epitomized purity, a garment of light, but a garment that had not been made by human hands. I saw it to be soft and gentle linen, flowing about the form of the Woman as though it were alive, and almost an entity in itself, but an entity which worshipped and served the beauty of her femininity.

Then, suddenly, I wept. I wept for the knowledge that until this moment I had not known such purity. My own impurity—and impurities—of the past had been things to me of shame, and—if you will—secret shame. How many shames I had had, and how often! Yet this purity did not confront me. It did not accuse. It was there, but it seemed in the moment of my genuine yearning that I, too, entered into the purity of that Woman. Suddenly I lightened in my heart and my head and my spirit, and cascades of joy came tumbling out of me, and they seemed to go laughing on their way, and joy and pleasure such as I had not hitherto known possessed my whole being, and I understood much—if not all—of the joy and radiance of the Woman, and why she stood steeped in worship and wholly enriched by the devotion to the Man which he—for his part—had evoked by his love for her, and his love to her.

When this came upon me, then I suddenly understood the nature of the Woman, or, I might say, the nature of Woman, not just a woman, but Woman herself. I had always known something of femaleness, as I imagine every person knows—be that person man or woman—but because a man is a man

he knows femininity from the point of view of his own masculinity, and woman knows it from the vantage point of her femininity, but there was a place here—in this vision—that all who watched could know the open secret of true femininity, for it was before the eyes in the beauty and the glory of this holy Bride. The whole of it soaked itself into me, and I was greatly amazed, for I certainly had not known this truth before.

What at first perturbed me, but later emancipated me, was the unmasking that took place within my understanding. I realized how much in error I had lived, and how wrongly I had thought, regarding the truth of femininity. Vivid ideas lost their brightness, and unholy ideas were dredged up and dispatched into a limbo of non-recall. The loss of untruth does something wonderful for the human spirit, as even more does the inrush of pure truth. I was amazed and gratified at this new comprehension.

The wonderful thing about this new knowledge was that I also understood masculinity in a way I had not seen it before. As yet I had not seen the Man, the Bridegroom, but I sensed this was to come, and that then I would know even more of true masculinity; so I bided my time, and greatly enjoyed the new insights that had come to me. Suddenly it seemed to me to be a wonderful thing to be a man, as also it was—for a woman—a wonderful thing to be a woman. I doubted whether any of our race had ever fully known the essential truth of femininity and masculinity, and I greatly longed that they should, for I felt that were we all to know, then we would glory in our humanity.

Then, as I looked, I knew this Bride had a marvellous history, but how I had come to know this history still remains a mystery to me. I can only say that since truth came flooding in, so did all the action of man's history. I knew in some way that Woman had been created with this purity which I now saw, but that this purity had been attacked by a beautiful, sinuous and sinister power, and

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the purity had become defiled, not only through subtle seduction, but through surrender to untruth, the acceptance and pursuit of the lie. Of that I wish to speak later, but the outcome of this pristine purity lay not in the deceit but in the restoration, for the Woman was to become the centre of the Divine Plan for all history.

I saw, then, in my dream, a City of splendour. It was a fair City, and its ramparts glowed warmly, as though the very stones of it were alive. Indeed the whole City seemed sentient and palpable. It appeared to throb with inner life, and that life showed itself in a gentle and strong glory. It was vibrant with the same purity that I had seen in the Woman, and I gazed with great joy. I seemed to see the City and the Woman as one, as though she were the City and it were her.

In my dream I walked around her, and the walking took many days, but the hours of those days were filled with an indescribable joy. The City seemed to fear no besieging, for its gates-high and noble as they were-remained open perpetually. I cannot say 'night and day', for there was no night there. All in that City was light and bright, for there was a pulsing glow that throbbed from its very heart.

At that time I did not enter the City, for it was not in my dream or vision to do so, though later it was so. What, however, I did see was a constant stream of people coming from East and West, from North and South, and often they were led by their monarchs, noble of face, regal in stature, and bringing with them the brilliance, gifts and treasures of their people. It seemed that all humanity—all true humanity—looked to this great City as the goal and home of the only creatures who were ever fashioned in the image of their Creator.

As I looked I knew the Woman and the City to be one. At that point there entered into my heart a yearning not only to look at the Woman, and at this great City, but to penetrate, understand, and know the mystery of both City and Woman.

NCTM. Thursday a.m. Class. 5th. August, 1993. G.C. Bingham

Third Term Course: Men and Women of the Bible

Study Two: The Reality of The Man

Introduction

As we have looked at 'the True Woman' so now we look at 'the True Man'. The true Man was Adam before the Fall. At the end of history the 'True Man' will be Christ, the Son of God. We need now to trace the events of history which brings this about. A reading of Chapter Two of *The Heavenly Vision* (NCPI, 1987), pages 9-14 which are attached, should help to understand Man. In extension it would be good to read *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988) pages 29-57).

The True Man

- (i) **Adam.** Adam as created, was the true man. 'Let us make man in our image and likeness,' God said, and this is what He did (Gen. 1:26f.; cf. 5:1-3; Psa. 8:3-8; 1 Cor. 11:7). We know that he was Man until Eve was taken from his side and formed into Woman, and that the male-female combination then represented Man. To this union a command was given (Gen. 1:28f.). So the male was incomplete without the female and the female without the male. True Man then is the man-woman entity and unity, and they have no point in being created apart from the function of the mandate. In Eden their perfection was seen and exercised. At the fall Adam ceased to be the 'true man' and became 'fallen man', although he was still a man. Likewise Eve's fall indicated that together they were not longer the 'true Man'. The true man-woman entity can only be true and full when Man is fully one with God.
- (ii) **Covenantal Man.** Israel was known as 'the son of God' in the sense that he was my first-born son' and 'my son' (Exod. 4:22-23). All Israelites were known as 'sons of God' (Deut. 14:1-2). This did not mean Covenantal Man was better than 'fallen Man' but it did mean that he lived in the presence of God through covenant, and was therefore a persons-and people-under grace, having the truths (or, oracles) of God as against the other nations who worshipped idols and were 'the sons of-idols'.
- (iii) **Christ, the True Man.** That Christ was truly human is biblically undeniable. He was sent by God (Gal. 4:4), was born of a woman, born under the law, in the *likeness* of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3) though not in sinful flesh. Becoming man (John 1: 14; Heb. 2:14; Phil. 2:8) he is the True Man. Not only without sin, but doing the will of the Father he was thus True Man and we can call him the paradigm of true humanity. All we need to know regarding a human being we can discover from him.
- (iv) **Eschatological, Teleological Man.** To know what Man was as created is difficult for us, that is, what paradisaic Man was, without guilt, fear of death-and so on. The closest we can come to sensing this unfallen Man is when we are justified, that is, without guilt, but since we live not in Eden but a fallen world it is impossible to fully understand Man as originally created, and even how he lived in an unfallen world and by this we mean the creation with the curse upon it. Christ the Man is the closest we

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can come to knowing True Man, but then Christ died, rose and was glorified. From I John 3:13; Phil. 3:21; Romans 8:18-25, 30 we know we will be glorified, and glorified in the image of His Son, but we do not yet know what this will be. We certainly can imagine much, and we have the help of the Book of the Revelation to show us much concerning him in his risen, glorified state, seated and reigning at the right hand of God. The last few chapters of this Book show him as the Bridegroom, and the Lamb seated with the Father on His throne.

In any case we know enough of what we will be, to know how we can be now, and how we should be, by the grace and power of God. Thus when we look at the various men and women we are about to present to ourselves from the Bible we can be helped in understanding them in the light of what it means to be human, and to be human in the Triune God, and by the aid of the Persons of that Godhead.

CHAPTER TWO

As the seer longs to know the mystery of the City and the Woman, he is taken back in time to witness the beginning of the Woman, and to behold, also, the Man.

It may have been because of my desire that I was transported in my vision to the Beginning-Time when the preparations for the mystery of the Woman and the City had been planned. I do not know, but I was suddenly aware that the future had receded from me, and I was in the beginning of the Past. It was a situation of absolute quietness until the Commands issued from the Voice.

I saw in my dream that the heavens and the earth were taking their beginning. Monumental things were happening, such as the movements of great masses of water, and the appearing of vast areas of dry land. Through it all I heard the Voice, and the Voice uttered Commands, so that as the Word went out, what appeared to be chaos and disorder began to take form, showing order.

While this was all happening, I saw and heard celestial creatures of great beauty and dignity. These were so amazed and entranced with the things that were happening that they could not contain themselves for the wonder of what they were witnessing, and suddenly these sons of God shouted for joy! Their thunderous applause seemed almost to rend the heavens and the earth, and their delight was so infectious that I knew all the creation to be a thing of joy, and nothing whatever to be dreaded, even though to me the mighty movements of land and sea were in themselves awesome, and productive of a holy reverent fear of the Voice and His Commands. As I watched, wonderstruck, I saw green things grow and appear, colour emerge and flourish, creatures small and large sporting themselves with utter freedom on land, in the sea and in the air. All the time the shouting choir of celestials spoke the joy of all things. All things seemed to admire all things, and their humility in worship of the

Voice was something rich to behold. Then, when I thought all things were complete, came the creation of Man.

My heart was strangely moved as I gazed upon this event. Man, it seemed, was to be the very essence of all things. His substance was drawn from the earth, but his pure life from the very Breath of God. In a moment of creation he became a living being. Within his being was amassed all that makes him the noblest of living creatures—nobler, even, than the celestials themselves. None of them was made in God's likeness; none of them was in His image. Part of me trembled with fear, and part with joy, that God should create Man as a creature, yet design him to have fellowship with Himself.

What came to me, as I gazed upon Man, was that he was most regal. His nobility was that of one given the highest destiny in history. The Voice spoke and told him to fill up the earth with his kind, to subdue those powerful elements which needed true control and leadership, and at the same time to exercise wise and warm stewardship of all creation. I was breathless with joy and gratitude that humanity had been given so high and lofty a calling.

I saw then, in this vision, that Man sported amongst all the creatures of God. They seemed to delight in him, and he in them; in fact all things seemed to be in concert. Their awe of him contained no dread, and his concern for them no domination. It seemed their very characters comported with his naming of them, so quick he was to discover what they were, and what they were about. In all this my wonder never diminished. I understood wholly what it is to worship Him Who is the Voice and Who created all things. I knew what it was to worship Him with all creation.

Even so, my wonder turned to amazement and then to enraptured astonishment when I saw the creation of Woman. It may well be that she was there, in the depths of the Man,

and that the Holy Creator drew her out of his inner being, but suddenly she was there, and my heart and bones ached with the beauty and splendour that I beheld. The joy and the delight of the Man was no less, and he uttered words that sounded like echoes of the Creator Himself, so noble they were, for he said, '*She is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone.*'

Then he called her 'Woman!', that is, 'She is out of man!'

I knew then, with a deep sweet ache in my heart, that the total union of Man and Woman must arise from their total union with Him Who is the Voice. To be one with each other they must first be one with God. Then their union would be one of indescribable fulfilment, of utter oneness, and the richest of all human experience. For one human to have entire oneness with another seemed to me to be unbelievable, yet 'flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone' could mean no less than that Such union must mean a human being would know no aloneness, and also no loneliness. The joy of such union would spread through all of life, giving it pure meaning and rich living.

So I knew to my never forgetting that the Man and the Woman are ,one, one humanity which is neither male nor female as such, but male-female in the one. This is the true humanity. I trembled with the simplicity and the beauty of this understanding which had not previously come to me, but now came through the vision I was beholding. In a flash-so to speak-my understanding was changed. Now it was one with my understanding of the Woman I had seen at the End-time, and in the situation of the Holy City. I knew all that was male was one with all that was female, and that this was to be for always. To divide these into two streams, even streams that flowed in parallel, would be to do despite to the true unity of the human race in its inseparable male-femaleness.

I watched the Two who were as One sporting themselves within the rich garden, the earthly paradise which was theirs. Every tree was good for food and pleasant to the eyes. No shadow of guilt lay across the life of the Man and the Woman. Fear and dread were wholly absent. Innocence was present in its gentleness, wisdom and power. Colour, movement, emotion and affection-all combined to show unsullied love. Tears of joy started from my eyes as I watched the truth of love between Man and Woman, the unity of purity, and the nature of the image of God as it lived itself in true life. I knew that I really understood the nature of Man, of the truth of Man's masculinity and Woman's femininity. I understood with this the utter oneness, the fusion and union of the two, in the physical consummation.

What came to me with that understanding was that the human race, as a whole, ought to know the dynamic reality and the powerful truth of that union -that utter oneness. This would be the joy that would make the human race to have wholesome unity, i.e. of husband and wife, parents and children, children and children, neighbour and neighbour. This marital love would be the foundation of all true human relationships. I saw too that this utter oneness, expressed by that Primal Couple in marital union, must be the basis of the wider union of all that is male and all that is female across the whole human race. As I understood that creational union of Man and Woman-they constituting the one glorious race-then my joy, again, knew no bounds.

Then in that very moment, as my joy was so full, I saw the darkening of all things, the vast shadows that began to loom across the race of Mankind. Light seemed to be there, as it had come in creation, but the presence of evil in the form of beauty was about to invade the paradise of Man.

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NCTM. Thursday a.m. Class. 12th August, 1993. G.C. Bingham

Third Term Course: Men and Women of the Bible

Study Three: The Woman and the Fountain

Introduction to John 4:1-45

A Contrast of Two Women

When we look at the reality of the Woman who was the spouse of God, the one who brought forth the seed, the Child, and the one who is the Bride of Christ, then we see Woman in all her purity, beauty and service. What a contrast to this one who comes from a Samaritan village to draw water.

- (i) She comes when other women do not draw water.
- (ii) She has had five husbands, and is now living with a man.
- (iii) She is a person who has tried everything in life, without lasting success. Her source of life—marriage—has nothing more to offer.
- (iv) She goes out into the day, hopeless. Her spirit is dried up. See Proverbs 25:26; cf. 4:23. All humanity has a spring. Cf. Jeremiah 2:13; Psalm 87:7.

Two Men Who are the One

The one who is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world and the Bridegroom-to-come, meets this woman.

- (i) He is truly weary and thirsty as is any human being (cf. Heb. 2:17; Heb. 4:15-5:2).
- (ii) He needs human help to drink, but is the fountain of the water of life.
- (iii) He approaches the woman where she is, seeking her help.
- (iv) He points to the gift of God to be given via Messiah (cf. 4:26), (a) the gift of life (4:10), (b) the life that is a perpetual fountain (4:14; cf. 6:36; 7:37-39), (c) the gift of the Spirit (4:14; 4:23), (d) total forgiveness in renewal (4:18, 39, 42), (d) true worship as a child of God in and by the Spirit (4:20-25). NB. 'The prodigal daughter'.
- (v) Although it is not explicitly stated it cost him the Cross to forgive the woman (cf. Matt. 1:21; 9:6; 26:28; John 1:29).

The Woman Being a Fountain

Receiving the gift, believing, she is a changed woman, and now witnesses to her people by (a) telling them who he was and what he had done, (b) be claiming that he was the Saviour of the world. Purified, she could not but be a true woman—a woman under grace. Her past was cleansed, a fountain was springing up in her. She knew she was a daughter of the Father, and could worship Him now by the Spirit he had given her, and from the life which had come to her. By her life of witness she was showing what it was/is to be a true woman, a woman in Christ and the Father.

Study Four: The Poor Wise Man

Introduction: Passage Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

This is a story concerning wisdom, written by a man who was possibly Solomon, and who, in any case was an extremely wise man. His desire to communicate wisdom is evident in the book he wrote—'Ecclesiastes'. He was known as 'The Preacher' which in Hebrew is 'Koheleth'.

The Details of the Story

- (i) There was a little city. We do not know its name or place, or the date of the story.
- (ii) The story Koheleth tells is 'an example of wisdom'.
- (iii) To Koheleth it seemed 'great under the sun', i.e. outstanding in the affairs of mankind.
- (iv) A great king came against the city and set out to destroy it by building siegeworks against it. He was obviously going to succeed.
- (v) One of the citizens of the city was 'a poor wise man'. It seems he gave advice which saved the city. What that advice was we do not know. In II Samuel chapter 20 there is the story of 'a wise woman' who also saved a city, that of Abel, when Sheba the son of Bichri 'a worthless fellow' tried to overthrow David. Some commentators think this was the event Koheleth refers to, but this is unlikely.
- (vi) The city having been saved, no one considered the wise man. They forgot what he had done. He had no recognition, no accolades, and remained poor-but yet wise.

Assessment of the City Populace

- (i) In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes much is made of wisdom. Wisdom is really 'the whole of Man' in fearing God and keeping His commandments (Eccles. 12:13). The fear of the Lord is spoken of as 'the beginning of wisdom' and 'a fountain life'. Doing God's commandments is the whole of life and at the point of doing one is in full wisdom. One knows what God is about.
- (ii) In Ecclesiastes 4:13 it is written, 'Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king. The youth of this statement was to come to be king. In our passage the poor wise man seemed to remain forever just that-wise but poor!
- (iii) The poor wise man's wisdom is despised. His wise words go unheeded. By comparison the city opts for foolishness.
- (iv) In 9:17-18 it may be that the shouting ruler is the same as the 'one sinner' who does enormous damage.

Assessment of the Poor Wise Man

- (i) From 9:18 we see that the poor wise man speaks quietly, and that his utterance is better than the 'shouting of a ruler among fools'. This seems to refer to the poor wise man and the ruler of the city.
- (ii) The poor wise man seems unfazed by the populace despising his wisdom and forgetting what it did to save them from the enemy.
- (iii) Since 'Wisdom is better than weapons of war' the poor wise man is greater in character and action than 'the fool'.
- (iv) The poor wise man is sufficient in his wisdom. Poverty does not seem to distress him. He fears God and keeps His commandments and this is 'the whole of Man' and is practical wisdom wisdom is knowing the will of God.

The personal question is, "Would we be content to be poor if we could wise?"

A Conclusion from the Character of the Great Person, 'the Poor Wise Man'

(i) *We need to read about, seek for, and come to understand biblical wisdom.* Solomon sought this as the greatest gift. If we desire sincerely and then ask we can receive wisdom (James 3:13-18) for God gives it liberally and willingly. A reading of Proverbs will help to bring such wisdom. See especially 4:7-9,

7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.
8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."
10 Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many.

(ii) *God does what He does through His 'weakness'* as in I Corinthians 1:19-2:5 (cf. II Cor. 12:7-10; 13:3-4). Christ is the wisdom and the power of God (I Cor. 1:24, 25, 30).

(iii) *God never lets the foolish*—those who think themselves wise and oppose Him, get away with their so-called wisdom (I Cor. 1: 19; 3:18-2 1).

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.

Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness,' and again, Me Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.' So let no one boast of men.

We conclude that the poor wise man was a man of great greatness. He was content to be weak in the eyes of others, he must have found his wisdom to be authentic in his poverty, and he seems to have been willing to share that wisdom with others. He seems to be gentle, unambitious, and without anger for his state of poverty. Such a living example of true wisdom is rare. This is a paradigm for us knowing that Christ is our true wisdom(I Cor. 1:30; cf. Col. 2:2-3).

NCTM Thursday a.m. Class. 19th August 1993. G.C. Bingham

Third Term Course: Men and Women of the Bible

Study Five: Isaiah, Prophet of Holiness

Introduction: Isaiah 6:1-13. In this passage we see the prophet in the temple. He has a vision of the Lord, and is deeply moved. A conviction of his own uncleanness and the defilement of his people comes to him. In agony because of this revelation of evil he cries out in agony, and is visited by a heavenly creature who relieves him of his misery by the grace of God. He is then ready to hear God's call to preach to the nation, although that call is to bring increasing hardness of heart and rejection of his evangel. Even so, the new, holy remnant will result, and God's salvation history will proceed in pioneer.

The Vision of God's Holiness

Sometimes this 6th. chapter has been titled 'God's Call to Isaiah', and undoubtedly it was a particular call, but it seems certain that Isaiah was already called to be a prophet, and had so worked. It seems that King Uzziah was a friend to the prophet, and it has been thought by some that the two were so close that Isaiah desperately missed his friend, and being lonely and anguished in spirit, went to the temple to pray. We cannot be sure of this was the reason. What we do know is that he had a brilliant but terrifying experience of God's holiness¹. All the elements of transcendent holiness are present in 'high and lifted up', the celestial seraphim-'the burners'-in holy praise, worship and service, hiding their eyes from Him, the song of God's holiness-the Trishagion—and the shaking of the foundations of the thresholds. In that moment all of the prophet's knowledge of God would have come to life, especially from the message with its components of holiness, reference to the Lord of Hosts, and 'the whole earth is the fulness of His glory' (cf. Numb. 11:21; Psa. 72:19; Hab. 2:14). The experience was **not merely noetic but flooded Isaiah** in every part of his being.

The Response to, and Result of, God's Holiness

The prophet is terrified and only he who has had a similar experience could understand². In Exodus 33:20 God had told Moses, 'You cannot see my face and live'. In the RSV Isaiah is presented as saying that as a person of unclean lips he is lost 'for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts,' whilst the NRSV has 'yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts.' He is certainly saying he is finished for ever because as a person he has seen God, but in the NRSV he seems to be marvelling that an unclean person can see the holiness of God. For our part we shiver with dread to think of such a thing happening to us. We do not need to be told that God is Holy. Here we *know* it! We observe that such an experience would—one way or another change a person.

¹ Some commentators of John 12:37-41 believe that John was saying that 'the Lord of Isaiah 6:1 was the one who became Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnated Word and Son of God, and that it was not Yahweh, as such who was seated on the throne. This could well be the case.

² Jessie Forsyth Andrews, the daughter of Peter Taylor Forsyth wrote a memoir of her father when his *The Work of Christ* was republished after his death in which she says that a change took place in her father about the time he preached on 'The Holy Father'. Later Forsyth tells something of this; 'It pleased God by the revelation of His holiness and grace ... to bring home to me my sin in a way that submerged all the school questions in weight, urgency and poignancy. I was turned from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace.'

The Grace of God to the Heart of Isaiah

In verses 6-7 the story is told. The seraphim comes with a white hot coal from the altar of sacrifice and touches the mouth of the prophet, saying, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.' The NRSV has it, '. . . your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.'³ Now the prophet is pure from the propitiating holiness of God Himself. He can be in the Presence of the LORD of Hosts and not be in horrific guilt of pollution.

In verse 8 we read, 'And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?"' 'It seems that in the moment of his purification and great relief the voice of the Lord is heard. To this question the prophet undoubtedly replies eagerly. Why eagerly? Because his life has been transformed. His desire to do the will of God from the heart is full. His yearning to be as one with his Holy Redeemer Lord is intense. He now has a message to give—the good news of God! He replies, 'Here am I! Send me.'

The Transformed Prophet and the Difficult Proclamation

Verses 9-13 spell out the preaching the prophet must do and the message he must give. Quoted four times in the Gospels (Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8: 10; John 12:39-41), once in the Acts (28:26-27) and in Romans 11:8, the principle is that the preaching of the prophetic word will dull the understanding of the hearers and so it will be rejected, and this will bring justifiable judgement to the land until it is only a stump that remains, but then the stump will constitute 'the holy seed', that is, the 'holy remnant' which may henceforth grow as in 11:1 ff. In other words the task of the prophet will be difficult⁴.

Isaiah as a Man of God

Textual critics of Isaiah say the prophecy of Isaiah is in fact a number of prophecies written by a number of authors. Others say there is strong evidence it is a but one prophecy. Whatever the theories the fact remains that the Book is one permeated with the holiness of God, alive with good news, vibrant to the core and filled with evangelical joy and promise. A tradition from the 2nd century AD says that Isaiah was placed in the trunk of a tree and sawn downwards in half. Whatever the case may be, his writings have been the source of great wonder and delight to true readers. The man was not only a great prophet, not only had disciples that followed him, and not only brought a brilliant revelation of God but he was also a great statesman in the land. Isaiah has taught us the holiness of God and His redemption. Only when 'the mysteries of God' are opened to us, can we open them to others. Only he to whom these mysteries have been opened can reveal them as the truth, with power and reality.

³ The NEB has '. . . your iniquity is removed and your sin is wiped away'.

⁴ Some commentators think that the whole idea is the total annihilation of Israel, and that no remnant will remain.

Study Six: The Woman Who Loved Much & The Man Who Didn't

Introduction. The passage of Luke 7:36-50.

The story is simple. A woman known as 'a sinner' arrives at the house of a Pharisee named Simon, who has invited Jesus to a meal. The woman comes into the dining area and begins to weep. Her tears help her to wash his feet, which she dries with her hair, then anointing his feet from a flask of precious ointment. Simon disparages Jesus in his mind, seeing the kind of woman Jesus allows to minister to him. Jesus is aware of all details and tells Simon the story of two debtors, one owing a little the other lot. Jesus asks which one would love him most, the one forgiven the little or the one forgiven a large debt. Simon gives the obvious reply and Jesus points to the woman and explains her love by the fact of the forgiveness of her sins. Implied is Simon's lack of love, seeing he sees little that needs to be forgiven, on his part. Jesus tells the woman to go in peace for her faith has saved her.

The Man Simon, the Pharisee

When we read the story through and get the mind of the Simon we are led to believe he invited Jesus with some view to catching him out for his spirit seems dry and critical. He certainly does not welcome Jesus with any ceremony, and is entirely without affection. He accords the title 'Teacher' to Jesus but does not really respect him for he is critical of Jesus' seeming failure to know the woman is a notorious sinner. Commentators argue that there was no need for any welcoming ceremony, but such do not know the customs of the East. Most hosts would certainly welcome a Teacher as famous as Jesus with some ceremony. We are simply told that Jesus 'went into the Pharisee's, and took his place at table'. The host misinterprets the acts of the woman, he is critical of Jesus for failing to be a prophet, he hears a story about a creditor forgiving debtors and still the message does not reach him. He is a long way from grace and love. A glorious event of love is taking place before his eyes and he cannot recognise it. In the end you wonder at his inability to recognise the transformation of a hopeless sinner into a person of faith and peace.

The Event Which Shows us the Woman of Love

It is sometimes argued that a woman such as she was would have no right to enter a house, particularly that of a Pharisee. If we take it that the meal was a special happening, that there were other guests and that the Teacher who taught publicly would be seated out in a courtyard and that even spectators would be allowed to view the event, then there is no difficulty presented by the story. If custom were against her entering, then she would have been **prevented, but that was not the case**. Often when a special person is invited the place is thrown open to spectators. Perhaps, even, the

Pharisee wished to catch Jesus publicly. We do not know. We know the woman was already deeply affected. Jesus would be seated on a couch, facing the low food table, with his legs tucked behind him. She stood behind him and began her ministrations. Her love was so full that she wept. Perhaps she came with that kind of face and attitude which told all she was a humbled and penitent person. Her tears flowed and so much so that she could wash the feet that had scuffed their way through the Palestinian dust. In letting down her hair she was doing a shameful thing, yet her passion led her to do it. Having wiped his feet with her tresses she broke open an alabaster container of ointment and anointed his feet. The Pharisee was critical of Christ for not being a prophet, not knowing the woman to be a sinner. In fact Jesus not only knew she was—he later said, ‘Her sins which are many’-but he also knew the mind of Simon, a double proof that he was a prophet. It was Simon who was the ignorant one.

Jesus told the story of the two debtors, one owing a little to his creditor and the other quite a lot. Of course if one were forgiven a large debt one would have great affection for the creditor. Doubtless Simon did not get the point because he would have thought of himself as owing little to God: he was not a ‘great’ sinner, if a sinner⁵ at all! Of course the woman was a ‘sinner’! A Jewess, she would be outside the pale. Jesus showed the difference between her love for him and the non-love of Simon. By contrast with her warm love, Simon was cold and dry’.

Jesus’ Exoneration of the Woman.

It is clear that the woman knew her sins were forgiven before she came to the house. That was what impelled her to come. It might be shown that she heard his words of Matthew 11:25-30 and so had laid her burden at Christ’s feet. A chronology of events in the Gospels is difficult to ascertain. In any case her love flowed from forgiveness whilst Simon was as one who seemed-in his own mind-to need no such forgiveness. The story of two debtors clears her. Jesus then pronounces the fact publicly that she is forgiven, thus publicly exonerating her from her past. Elsewhere we read that the Son of Man has authority (from God) on earth to forgive sinners Matt. 9:6; Luke 5:24). The theologians were stunned, debating the incredible fact, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Perhaps few of us really understand this great matter. Jews could have forgiveness only through the blood of the sacrifices.

The Glorious Outcome

The woman went away, justified. Her past was purified. Life was given back to her. She was no longer a notorious sinner. She was as pure as the snow (Isa. 1: 18). Grace had come into her life and given her release. She had no need to hark back to the past. Life **now opened up with** a wonderful vista before her. She was now a ‘true woman’.

We ask, ‘Did her faith really save her?’ The answer is, ‘No: it was Jesus who saved her, but then, yes, her faith in him saved her. Had she not believed her sins were forgiven she would not be saved, nor could she go in peace.’

⁵ In the Temple there was a court for ‘sinners of the Gentiles’ (Gal. 2:15) and excommunicated Jews, and these were not allowed into the court of sacrifice. The term ‘sinner’ was reserved for such people.

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What we need to keep in mind is that it cost Christ the Cross to forgive and transform this woman. He took every one of her sins and bore the guilt and shame of them all, as well as their judgement. His authority to forgive sins was proleptic of the Cross where he would destroy them. Thus her agony was to become his, that her liberation and purification might be complete. No wonder she loved him deeply!

Study Seven: The Two Brothers-One Who Loved Much & One Who Didn't

Introduction: Passages (i) Genesis 4:1-24; (ii) I John 3:8-18; (iii) Hebrews 11:4.

1. The True Worship of God

Whence came the idea of offering sacrifices to God as Cain and Abel did? It must have been taught to them, whether in Eden or not. Sacrifice is a *way* of worship but worship is total, every moment of life for it is giving *worth* to God, as well as to Man and the creation. The idea of the human race being abandoned because of its fall is untrue. Genesis 3:15 shows that hope was a gift from the first. The primal couple was ejected from Eden for its own good (3:22-24). Expelled from Eden, yet they were all-the couple and their children-'in the presence of the Lord' (Gen. 4:14, 16). So then, the primeval family knew of sacrifice and its meaning. Sacrifice has the elements of fellowship with God (cf. I Cor. 10:18-22), propitiation (I John 4:10; Lev. Chs 1-6; 17:11) and thanksgiving. Some insist that Cain should have brought a bloody sacrifice (cf. Heb. 9:22). If so, then Cain-'a tiller of the field'-would not barter with his brother for an animal victim. Perhaps this was from pride, but in any case it would appear it was the *attitude* of Cain that made his offering unacceptable (cf. Psa. 51:16-17).

2. Cain, the Man with the Uneasy Conscience

It is thought by some, that Cain and Abel were twins, much the same as Esau and Jacob. The eldest son had primacy in the filial hierarchy. Cain was born of parents who had rebelled against God to go their own way, but in addition to the curse⁶, they were also given the Proto-Evangel of Genesis 3:16, so that there was hope for them if they would take it. It seems, in the mystery of God's sovereignty that in the one family there can be a prophet-Jesus called Abel that-and a murderer (I John 3: 10-11). That Cain was of Satan is clear from I John 3:10-11. Satan was 'a liar and a murderer from the beginning' (John 8:44). Cain's hatred of his brother was because of the righteousness of Abel (I John 3: 10-11).

3. Abel, the Man With the Clear Conscience

Abel offered up his sacrifice in faith. If he had been tutored by God, through his parents, then he knew the nature of God. I John 3:10 tells us he did works of righteousness and loved his brother. Jesus said that Abel was a prophet (Luke 11:49-51), And spoke of 'the blood of innocent Abel' (Matt. 23:35). Being a man who lived in God's law, worshipped God truly, and carried out his prophetic ministry he can be

⁶ Note that the ground was cursed (Gen. 3:17-19), not Adam and not Eve, although both would suffer in certain ways, Particularly then, both the serpent and the ground were cursed, but tradition has used the term to cover the primal couple, the land and the serpent.

said to have lived with a clear conscience, and I John 3:10-11 tells us this was infuriating to Cain. A prophet is one who knows the mind of God and is His mouthpiece when and where directed to speak (Exod. 28-7:2).

4. Sin, Conscience and Propitiation

Both brothers offered up their worship in order to please God (cf. Rom. 8:5-8). To know and keep the law of God is to offer true sacrifice only if the heart is obedient (Deut 30:6) and broken with its own sin (Psa. 51:16-17) for sacrifice without obedience is detestable to God (I Sam. 15:22). Hebrews 11:4 tells us Abel offered up his sacrifice 'by faith', and infers Cain did not. 'By faith' must mean 'faith in the God who provides propitiation (Lev. 17:11; cf. Luke 18:13, 'God be propitious to me, a sinner!'). 'By faith' must ultimately mean 'By faith in the sacrifice of the Bruiser, the one crushing the serpent under his heel' (Gen. 3:15). It must mean, 'Faith in the propitiating nature of God'. We see the terrible nature of the 'sinful conscience' (cf. Heb. 9:14; 10:2, 22).

Propitiation was the way out for a conscience as evil as Cain's. God informed this first-born of men that if he 'did well' he would be accepted. His offering had been from a bad heart. John later stated what has always been known, 'Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him' (I John 3:15)'. In the same context he shows that the sign of having passed from death to life is that we love the brethren.

All of this brings us to the fact that Abel knew of the true sacrifice from 'the Spirit of Christ within him' (I Pet. 1:10-12). He was martyr to the truth, that is a witness to God's grace in sacrifice, and of not loving one's life unto death' (Rev. 12:11), but the motivation for all this sprang from understanding the mystery of God's nature as love and His provision for propitiation out of that love.

5. The 'Mark of Cain' and the 'Mark of Abel'

In some sense the 'mark of Cain' must have been at once a sign of his being a murderer, but also of the protective grace of God. It was judgement and mercy, and mercy is excruciating to the impenitent. The mark protected him from human justice demands, but marked him for final judgement ('no murderer has eternal life abiding in him'). The number 666 in Revelation is the antithesis to the mark placed on the 144,000, the first being of the Beast ('your father the devil', 13:16-18) and the second being of 'his name and the Father's name' (14:1; cf. 7:3). In Genesis 9:5-6 it is shown that kill a man is to strike the image of God and so strike at God. Striking God through man can be done without bodily murder, by the use of gossip, slander and blasphemy as the New Testament shows.

6. The Variant Witness of the Two Men

So then, these two men go through history as 'armed men', the one marked as a person of sin, anger and hatred against both God and his brother, the other as being innocent (justified) and a person of righteous deeds and true love (*agape*). For one the brother's blood constantly cried from the ground (Lev. 17:11, 'the life is in the blood'), and for the other faith was always in 'the sprinkled blood [of Christ] that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel'. Abel died 'but through his blood he is still speaking'. This is the hour we need his speaking against all forms of homicide fratricide, matricide, patricide, genocide and suicide. It speaks not only against such evils, but it speaks for the supremacy and the eternal nature of true *love—agape*.

Study Eight: The Woman Liberated from Adultery

Introduction: Passages John 7:53-8:1-11; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22; Romans 8: 1.

The Story and its Background

The story is simple. A woman is taken in the very act of adultery and is hauled before Jesus, undoubtedly with a view to testing him. Whilst she stands exposed to shame he does not look at her, but writes in the dirt. Refusing to answer them directly as to her judgement, he then stands and asks who is without sin that he is prepared to stone the woman for her sin. The critics of Jesus, along with others, melt away. No one remains to accuse so the situation is changed. She is free to leave. Jesus warns her against further acts of sin.

Note: Whilst this story is contained in ancient manuscripts of John's Gospel it is thought to be Synoptic rather than Johannine, for very strong reasons. It seems to be Lukan writing. Even so, it is considered an authentic happening.

Points to be Considered

- (i) Jesus was teaching early, but the crowd listening may have melted away prior to the scribes and Pharisees coming to him. He seems to address them in particular, and they seem to have singled him out. We cannot be wholly certain.
- (ii) They are obviously to catch him out in some way.
- (iii) The woman has been caught in the very act of adultery (in coitu) or she could not have been charged with adultery.
- (iv) Since two had committed adultery it is strange that the man is also not present. This seems to prove it was a trick situation. It could have been that the man not present helped to 'set up' the situation.
- (v) Technically the woman could not have been killed by stoning unless she were a 'virgin betrothed to a husband' (Deut. 22:23). It is not said that this was the case.
- (vi) Stoning and killing, it seemed, had fallen into disuse. The adulterous man would pay compensation to the offended husband. If the woman were not the offender she would leave the husband and take her dowry with her. If the woman were stoned, then the offended husband would retain the dowry. We can draw our conclusions from such principles.

The Attack on Jesus

The scribes and Pharisees-not mentioned as such together in John's Gospel, elsewhere-were together, and, as we have observed were setting up the situation to

catch Jesus. If he refused to say she should be stoned they would accuse of him of opposing the law of Moses. If he were to agree to her stoning he would have lost the sympathy of many or be branded as a harsh person and lose those who saw him as a loving and liberating Master. The Jews were not allowed, technically, to kill a person since judgement belonged to the Romans. Jesus was placed by them in a predicament and a dilemma.

Jesus' Method of Dealing with the Matter of the Scribes and Pharisees

We notice that Jesus simply 'doodled in the dust'. It has been surmised he wrote something which might have shamed his opponents. This is speculation. He simply refused to answer them. Then he stood and faced them, undoubtedly staring them in the eyes. He said, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' By saying this he did not deny she should be stoned, nor say that she should. They were to take the initiative.

Guilt undoubtedly came to them under his holy gaze. Some versions have it, 'Each, being convicted in his own conscience, went away, from the eldest to the youngest'. Whilst the word 'conscience' is never used in the Gospels, the idea is often present. None was free from the sin of adultery, and so they were forced to leave. Having spoken to them Jesus knelt again to write in the dust, and this gave them the occasion to leave. They could do nothing else. The charge had been exploded.

Jesus' Dealing with the Woman

- (i) Had the woman been convicted of adultery and not stoned her shame would have been known throughout the city.
- (ii) Had she been killed the matter of shame would be ended but a dastardly death would have been executed as it was not the custom of the day.
- (iii) In either case she would have been left with her guilt, nothing forgiven or healed.
- (iv) Jesus asked, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' If no one had condemned then the matter was finished. Since he was not her accuser or judge, she could have left.
- (v) He gave her the clearance of 'No condemnation' (Rom. 8: 1). As in other cases of forgiveness which he pronounced the woman went free.

The Woman's Situation and Jesus' Healing of it

- (i) She was an adulteress. This was reprehensible in Israel, in Jerusalem. Her reputation was ruined.
- (ii) There is always a cause back of an event such as this. What was the cause? We only know it would be a fearfully wrong one.
- (iii) The woman had no future. Gossip would spread, and her life would be intolerable.
- (iv) She was one who had committed the sin the others were forced to admit had been theirs also. Its effect would go on in her life.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

- (v) She must have burned with shame before him as had the others, yet his attitude to her was not judgemental.
- (vi) His 'no condemnation' cleared her. The gossip would have stopped at this event in the temple courtyard. He had spoken to her conscience and purified her guilt. He had set her free, yes, but only to refuse this sin and others with it. He had killed the sin at the root. He had gone back beyond the cause to the general sinfulness of the human race and dealt with that matter (cf. Rom. 6:12-14), since the power of sin lies in guilt. Thee woman had come under grace.

NCTM. Thursday am. Class. 23rd. September, 1993. G.C. Bingham

Third Term Course: Men and Women of the Bible

Study Nine: The Man Who Saw the Glory

The Things Abraham Saw

Stephen addressed the Jewish Parliament, the Sanhedrin with the words, 'Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, "Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you."' The following are some of things Abraham saw,

- (i) He saw idols all around him and nothing of God (Josh. 24:2).
- (ii) He saw the glory of God in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:1-2). He also saw the glory of God in a number of theophanies as God appeared to him to speak to him. The most awesome, perhaps was scene of the 'cutting of the covenant' recorded in Genesis 15.
- (iii) He saw the coming inheritance God had often promised him (Heb. 11:8-10).
- (iv) He saw 'a city to come whose builder and maker is God'. (Heb. 11: 10).
- (v) He saw with joy the day of Jesus (John 8:56). Whether it was the 'day of Messiah' or not we do not know. Jesus is only making the point that he to whom the Jews talked was prior to Abraham, but Abraham knew the prophecies concerning him.
- (vi) He saw the justification of God which accounted him righteous (Gen. 15:6).
- (vii) He saw, by faith, the birth of his son Isaac through whom all the promises were to be fulfilled (Rom. 4:18-22).
- (viii) He saw by faith the resurrection of his sacrificed son, Isaac, (James 2:21-24: cf. Heb. 11:17-19).

The Things Abraham Rejected

- (i) He rejected all idols by believing only in God and worshipping only Him (Gen. 13:18).
- (ii) He rejected living in the fertile Jordan Valley and dwelt in the less fertile uplands (Gen. 13:8-18).
- (iii) He rejected the spoils of battle the king of Sodom would have given him. He knew the Canaanites in general were doomed for their idolatry and wickedness (Gen. 15:16).
- (iv) He rejected the offer of a piece of land and cave in which to bury Sarah and insisted he pay four hundred shekels for it (Gen. ch. 23) so that it was his ground forever.

Abraham and His Fellowship with God

- (i) His separation from idols was a radical happening. Romans 1:19ff. We must see that idols demean God's glory. When God's glory appeared to Abraham the radical change came about. Man is made in the image of God and when he sees the true 'shape' or glory of God he has to fight hard to resist surrendering to that revelation.
- (ii) Abraham's fellowship with God was not simply for its own enjoyment. Abraham's name was originally Abram 'exalted father' but God changed it to Abraham 'father of a multitude'. 'Exalted father' could have pertained to his own family, perhaps springing from Ishmael, but the promises of Genesis 12:1-3; 15:12-16; 17:6-8; 18:17; 22:15-18 meant he was to be 'the father of a multitude of nations' a point which Paul takes up in Galatians 3 where all persons of faith are the children of Abraham-through his seed, the Messiah. It is to be noted that at the same time Sarai became Sarah for the promise was to her, 'I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her. Sarah and Abraham were to be the parents of many nations as being the parents of faith.
- (iii) In all his travels, his adversities and his actions of faith and obedience God had fellowship with Abraham. Abraham's fellowship with God was a gift.
- (iv) This fellowship was expressed in the sacrifices Abraham offered. The offering of his son on Mount Moriah brought him into the deepest fellowship he could know with God-in the giving of his own son to God, in love and obedience. Was this 'the day of Jesus' which he saw? Certainly it was the day his fatherhood was tested and confirmed, and in which he came to know richly the fatherhood of God.
- (v) It was his fellowship with God which increasingly developed him as a man of faith. Three times he is spoken of as being 'the friend of God' (Isa. 41:8; 1 Chron. 20:7; James 2:23).

Abraham the Husband of Sarah

A key to the life and ministry of Abraham was Sarah. She was faithful to him, endured much because of him, but 'she was not afraid to call him lord' (I Pet. 3:6, AV). Her life is so significant that we will take her as our next study of a person of the Bible. We will also be able to see more of Abraham through her. We may sum up Abraham as a great man of faith but we must remember that it was because 'the glory of God appeared to our forefather Abraham'. He also appeared to Sarah.

Study Ten: Sarah, The Woman Who Saw the Glory

‘Look to Sarah who Bore You’

These words are found in Isaiah 52:2 where Sarah is coupled with Abraham as a person of foundational faith. Hebrews 11: 11 Sarah’s faith is commended, ‘By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised’. As Abraham was a man of faith so Sarah was, with him, a woman of faith, and this must have been the basis of a significant marriage. Just as generations which followed were to remember Abraham and his relationship with God so they were also to remember Sarah also in the same vein. I Peter 3:1-6 Sarah is shown as a true wife and mother, ‘And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you’.

Abram (Abraham) and Sarai (Sarah)

Sarai is first mentioned in Genesis 11:27-31. Here she is the daughter-in-law of Terah the father of Abraham. The intention of the family was to go out of Ur of the Chaldees into Canaan but they stopped short at Haran, which was a place situated between Mesopotamia and the West, above the Euphrates, a city of idolatry. Joshua 24:2 shows that Terah’s family was idolatrous. Sarai would have been an idol-worshipper. She was, in fact, Abraham’s half-sister. Abraham asked her to agree to be called his sister so that he would not be killed and she be taken by Pharaoh for his harem (Genesis 12:10-20), and later by Abimelech king of Gerar for his harem also (Gen. 20:1-7; cf. 26: 1) Pharaoh gave Abraham great gifts but discovered through a visitation of plagues that Sarah was Abraham’s wife and sent him from Egypt but did not take back the gifts given. Abraham was accumulating great riches. Abimelech, being told by God that Sarah was Abraham’s wife rebuked the patriarch and again he was set on his way with further gifts and even liberty to dwell in the kingdom of Gerar..

God called Abraham at seventy-five years of age (cf Acts 7:2) to go to ‘the land that I will show you’. Abraham took his family, including Lot his nephew, and they went into Canaan where, at Bethel, Abraham built an altar to the Lord, so that by this time Sarah must have become a follower of Yahweh and not an idolater. Whilst she would naturally change allegiance with her husband from the idols, it must have had to do with God showing His glory to Abraham, and so to her.

God's Care of Sarah and His Visitation Concerning Her

The two incidents above reveal two things, (i) Sarah was prepared to protect her husband from death, even at the expense of herself, and (ii) that God cared greatly for her, and doubtless this was linked with His plan for the covenant and its people to come. Sarah undoubtedly knew of God's appearances to Abraham, and they would not have been lost on her, especially in regard to the matter of covenant. In Genesis 18 we have the theophany of 'the three men' who appear. God also enquired after Sarah and repeated what He had previously said, that she would have a son by Abraham, and Sarah who was listening laughed (16:9-15). Abraham had done this previously (17:17-21). Her laugh was undoubtedly of unbelief-'the laughter of doubt', but it soon became 'the laughter of delight' when Isaac was born for his name meant 'laughter'. In 17:15f. God changed Sarai's name (at the age of 90) to Sarah, meaning 'princess' for she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.' Abraham's name, we saw, was changed from 'exalted father' to 'father of a multitude of nations'. We can understand why God cared for her. He had shut up her womb, awaiting His miracle of the birth of Isaac. For some 70 years she had borne the reproach of her barrenness.

Sarah and Hagar

Hagar was a slave whom Sarah gave to Abraham as a concubine (16:1-6: cf. 30:1-13) to bring forth a child which she could count as hers in accordance with prevailing custom. Some see this act as one of 'jumping the gun' for the sake of covenant. Hagar despised Sarah for not being fruitful, and in return Sarah 'dealt harshly with her' (16:6). God gave Hagar a special angelic visitation. Ultimately Sarah, having borne and weaned Isaac drove Hagar out with her son Ishmael. God told Abraham that it was not Ishmael ('God hears') but Isaac through whom the covenant promises would be fulfilled. Even so, Ishmael was also to be a great nation (cf. 17:18-21; 21:8-14). It is interesting to note that God said to Abraham, 'Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you.' Sarah's desires coincided with God's will.

An Assessment of Sarah

- (i) In I Peter 3:1-6 we have a picture of Sarah the wife. She called Abraham 'lord' (cf. Gen 18:12). What was there about Abraham that caused Sarah to obey him? Peter pictures her as submissive. She certainly posed as his sister to Pharaoh and Abimelech in obedience to his request. Was it that through Abraham she saw the glory of God? Isaiah 52:1 and Hebrews 11: 11 show her as a woman of faith. People only come to faith then they see God through revelation. Was it that Sarah admired Abraham, even though seeing his faults? Is this the message of I Peter 3:1-6? Note that the relationship of Abraham with God opened the way for her to be a woman of faith. The marriage was strong because they were in the vocation to which God had called them.
- (ii) Sarah must have had regard for the great covenant God made with Abraham. Many times she had heard the message and been told that through her would the promise of many descendants be fulfilled. She wanted to be a mother of those to come and used Hagar as the instrument, but the plan backfired. We can see her jealousy and anger in regard to both Hagar and Ishmael and such were a mixture of personal humiliation and dislike as well as regard for the covenant.. In all this God had care for Hagar as well as for Sarah.
- (iii) Paul pictures her as 'the free woman' in Galatians 4:21-31, even though he does not mention her by name. Ishmael was born of bondage but Isaac was born of the Spirit.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

This must mean that Sarah was a woman of the Spirit. Paul, without mentioning her by name, speaks of her as 'the Jerusalem above' and adds that she is free, and that 'she is our mother'. Sarah was important to the covenant.

- (iv) To a great degree Abraham's greatness and pursuit of the covenant depended upon Sarah. Her 'saving' of Abraham by posing as a sister, was the gesture of love and faithfulness. At the same time she was fallible in her actions with Hagar. In a strange way she was justified in much that she did, even in relation to Hagar.

Study Eleven: The Man of God

A Holy Man in Times of Apostasy

The story is found in I Kings 13, and its sequence in 11 Kings 23:15-20, and II Kings 17:21-23. Jeroboam who had wrenched away the ten tribes of Israel-apart from Judah and Benjamin-from King Rehoboam, Son of Solomon, is now intent on making two altars at which the Israelites will worship, one at Dan and one at Bethel. Bethel had, of course, great patriarchal associations. The king is about to authenticate the altar with significant sacrifices and so keep the ten tribes away from Jerusalem, the only true place of worship. An unknown person of Judah, a prophet called by God, prophesies against the altar whilst Jeroboam is about to initiate it, and predicts that the bones of the priests attending the altar will one day be burnt upon the altar, thus defiling it. Also, as a sign, God will now split the altar and pour out its ashes. Jeroboam commands the people to lay hold of the prophet, and as he points, the king's hand is withered, and the altar breaks, spilling its ashes. Terrified the king asks mercy in the restoration of his hand, and this the prophet does. The king then invites the man of Judah to return with him to the palace and be fed and rewarded. This the prophet refuses, and departs., saying God has commanded him not to eat or drink until he arrives in Judah.

As he is going on his way an old prophet of Bethel apprehends him and telling him a lie persuades the prophet to come home with him. Whilst they are eating and drinking the old prophet receives a message from the Lord that the prophet of Judah has been disobedient and will be killed as he returns home. This happens when a lion kills him but does not eat him. The ass on which the man was riding stood stock still beside the corpse and so did the lion. Hearing a report of this the old prophet saddles up and is assisted in bringing back the prophet whom he lays in his own tomb, commanding that when the day comes he too-the old prophet-should be laid beside the man of Judah. In 11 Kings 23:15-20 the prophecy of the bones being burnt on the altar is fulfilled. In II Kings 17:21-23 there is a summary of Jeroboam's awful deeds.

The Disobedience of Holiness

Prophets were understood to be holy people, and to receive the message of God and deliver it to others. In fact God spoke immediately through them on the prophetic occasion. Obviously the prophet was sent as God's protest against the raising of a false altar and ordaining priests who were not of the lineage of Levi. Jeroboam's raising of the altar was political, designed to keep his people in their own regions. Jeroboam had no right to offer sacrifices, and certainly not to raise an altar. The sending of a person

from Judah, and one who did not belong to the prophetic school was God's word to Jeroboam. This was certified by the prophecy against the altar, the withering of Jeroboam's hand and the healing of it by God through the prophet.

What has puzzled many is (i) how the prophet was deceived by another prophet, (ii) why the old prophet should deceive the man from Judah, and (iii) why punishment should come to one who had been obedient and had simply been beguiled by a fellow prophet. In our modern mores we would have perhaps chastised the beguiled prophet but would not have wished to see him punished by death.

The Reason for the Death of the Prophet

There can be no question about the claim of the man of Judah to be sent by God. The matter was that of the wrongful raising of an altar. The old prophet was out to see whether the prophecy was authentic, and perhaps even, to prove it was so. The man of Judah had said God has told him to return without eating or drinking in Israel. If he were really a prophet and disobeyed the order, then he would be punished by God. This happened, and so the old prophet was convinced the man was a true prophet. He commanded that his body be laid alongside that of the prophet of Judah. Also he mourned for the man, saying over, 'Alas, my brother!' He had sorrow for the death of his fellow-prophet, but both the prophecy and the prophet were proved to be true. This principle is the heart of the story.

The Lesson of the Disobedient Prophet

In I Samuel 15:22 God has told Saul, 'To obey is better than to sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.' The prophet of Judah should have trusted no one but God, and not even another prophet. He failed to obey and was punished. That does not mean he was lost forever, but simply chastised. The prophet lives close to God and should know the mind of God, even in the face a fellow prophet, no matter how old. His sin was not asking God directly.

What of the man of Judah's ministry? Was that lost? No: it was not lost. In a way it was proved. The loss of a man's life in proving the truth is a small price which has to be paid. The point was now made strongly with Jeroboam and his people. They would be judged because of the light given to them, even by the death of the prophet of Judah. Does this authenticate his disobedience as being acceptable? No: no one's disobedience is ever authenticated. At the same time it did not dissolve the ministry he had had. The act of his death remains as a fearful warning to those who would first obey and then disobey. It may well be that the prior ministry of a person who has ministered well may not be lost, but that is God's business. So we are warned against making nothing of a person's ministry because later he falls, and we are warned against presumption in any ministry. We remember that Balaam was a prophet and yet sought to make money through his prophecy, **but God denied** him a prophecy which could harm Israel. Ultimately Balaam tried to destroy Israel by idolatry and fornication with the Moabites. Disobedience leads to judgement and to deterioration of a proper ministry.

Study Twelve: Two Significant Sisters

The Development of Daughters

Perhaps Martha and Mary seems so different that we wonder they could come from the same family. Investigation shows us there is nothing unusual about daughters being different. Today we think we can explain differences by psychological investigation. Primarily we can only really know people by relating and inter-relating to them and not just by observing them. We must also take into account that God makes each person unique and also that He never makes them to be individuals. In relationships we can become what we can be: out of relationships this is impossible. We are given an identity by God (cf. Rev. 2:17; 3:12; cf. 7:3; 14:4; 22:4), especially as we are baptised into Him (Matt. 28:20), and identity relates to vocation and goal (*telos*). We ought not to compare Martha and Mary but see them as sisters and as each having her 'particularity' or 'differentiation' with a view to knowing and serving God and others. The variety of temperaments, dispositions, gifts and talents God gives are for richness in sharing life.

Martha-Woman of Action

The pride women often have in comparing themselves with Martha, although there is no reason why they should, is really a statement by them, such as, 'Action is what counts, and Martha was practical about things'. Martha was, in fact, not all that practical for with her ability was mixed a certain tensions. A truly practical woman is not 'distracted with much serving'. Jesus said, 'Martha, Martha, you are habitually anxious and troubled about many things.' In this there was more than a mild rebuke. Martha seemed not, habitually, to pause to listen and to contemplate: such inner knowledge and richness would have given sweet rich tone to her music of serving. Likewise Martha complained about her sister's seeming indolence. It has been surmised that she too would have liked to have listened, but *she did not*. To have dropped everything may have involved a new approach to life altogether, but was what Jesus really wanted of her. It is not action that counts, but the kind of action that is given. Action is what is called for in these days-all days in fact-but it may be a substitute for deeper, richer action: that of listening to God and hearing His wisdom through the Son.

Mary-Woman of Contemplation

It is all summed up in, 'Mary, who sat at Jesus' feet and listened'. The occasion was rare, the speaker was unique, the teaching was never to be as reach from any other. The Word had become flesh, speaking in the home of the two sisters. Mary had a choice of the two ways, 'Mary has chosen the good portion'. Whatever the figure may have been Mary knew what was the better thing. Jesus said it was better. The words that he spoke were 'spirit and life': what more could any words be? Meditation in the Scriptures is on God, His creation, His law and His works-'the wonderful works of God'. Mary was not simply meditating: she was listening. She was storing up the riches that were coming down from the Father through His Son. 'Never man spoke like this man'. Just as it is not quite true to say that Martha was a woman of action it is not quite correct to say Mary was a woman of contemplation. She was listening to Jesus and what came

out of her listening can be seen in the account in John 12 of the event of her anointing Jesus with the 'pure nard'—an ointment often related to death. Jesus made it clear that in some sense Mary knew of his death and was even celebrating it. So far as we know she was the only person of his company who gave such emphasis to his death. Did she know the 3 sayings of Mark 8:32; 9:31 And 10:32, the thrice repeated saying of Jesus in regard to his death?

Martha and Seeing the Glory

The 11th. chapter of John is a strange one. Jesus, on hearing the news of Lazarus illness deliberately refused to go back to see his friend, even though he knew the illness to be terminal. 'Even though he knew the illness to be terminal'—it was not just that. It was "Because he knew the illness was terminal'. There was purpose in Lazarus' death. It was to at the very least to show the glory of God to Martha. Jesus had to get to her 'on the run'-so to speak. Where else would you have ever found Martha? It was to the Martha who said Lazarus would not have died had Jesus been present to whom he spoke the famous words, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.' We might ask whether Mary had had better words said to her; not that such a question has much meaning. So Jesus took Martha to the very tomb and tested her faith. 'Did I not say that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' She had said she believed him to be the resurrection and the life, but had she known what she had said. Now she did know! She saw the glory as the tomb was opened and radiant Lazarus was liberated from his late death raiment. Martha would never be the same again.

Two Sisters and the Man of Peace with Them

John 12:1-9 portrays a peaceful time and scene. Mary's love action is in the midst of a meal when Martha's serving is not erratic or attention drawing. '*They* made him a supper'. Martha and Mary we suppose. They watched the new Lazarus eat with the Master. Mary celebrated his death with the costly ointment, and fragrance filled with room. 'She has done it to prepare me for my burial', Matthew records. Mark writes it, 'She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for burying'. The story of Mary's act will be told wherever the gospel is told. Martha does not require attention: her victory is her peace in serving. She has seen the glory of God. The two sisters are one, united in the reality and knowledge of that glory-'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'.

Neither Martha Nor Mary

None is Martha, none Mary save they themselves. None is fated by temperament or disposition, locked into an individualistic cell. None is in competition. The Cross and Resurrection have altered that. Each stands before the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit, and each serves and listens, knowing that both actions are the one. Martha would have served him but he came to serve and given his life a ransom for many. 'Ransom for many' was the true service, not a humanly oriented help of another. When we looked compassionately to the needy, the distracted, and the anxious we do them no service with the palliative of social care. They need the glory of God to enter and renew them in the image in which they were made. Mary was no less needy than Martha, but she seemed to know her need and the death of Christ which would fulfil it and take her onwards. Martha came to peace through the glory, not through admonition, psychological correction, or any such thing.

Now we may enjoy and use our 'particularity', our 'differentiation' the identity He has given us, knowing it will grow up into the fullness of the image of His Son.

Study Thirteen: The Woman Who Learned True Love

The Company of Faithful People

The person whose life and ministry we wish to see was called Mary Magdalene or 'Maria Magdala'. We do not know now where Magdala was situated, but probably in Jesus' company this was the name given to distinguish which Mary she was. She heads the list of the women in the company: the others were Jesus' disciples, although we cannot be sure they were limited to the 12. It was a wonderful company because it travelled through villages and cities 'preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God'. This meant (as in Matt. 4:23-24; Acts 10:38; Matt. 12:28) telling the gospel John the Baptist preached, healing and casting out demons, and pointing to the liberty which was to come through the Cross and Resurrection. So it was a purposeful, happy group, sharing and living the good news in the presence of their Lord.

Faithful Because Healed and Convinced

The story of the disciples' calling is a powerful one: the story of the women no less wonderful. 'The women had been delivered from demons and ailments, some of which must have been through demonic possession. They must have loved the liberating ministry, and Jesus for his present liberation of them. An example of such liberation is seen in Luke 7:36-50 just prior to the present event in 8:1-3. Some women were of noble marriage. All loved the work and served the disciples 'out of their means'. It was not the custom of women to travel in such companies. We cannot understand the terror of demonic possession unless it has happened in us. We can gather some understanding from viewing such terrible situations. Demonic seizures come unannounced as with the demoniac of Gadara. In Mark 16:9 it is repeated that Jesus had cast 7 devils from Mary. It was a case of 'complete possession'. In some epilepsy we see something like demon possession. Missionaries witness to the terrible states of such possession. Demons make humans appear obscene: they demean God's beautiful creation of humanity. Jesus was ruthless where demons were concerned: they feared him as they feared 'the abyss'. We must consider the fearful states of all human beings in sinful depravity (Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; Rom. 3:9-18). We are not mere 'onlookers' of terrible states: we live in them until redeemed, forgiven and cleansed.

Jesus' Three Announcements of the Cross and Resurrection.

In Mark 8:31; 9:31, 10:32 Jesus had said he must go to Jerusalem. He was saying that at the end of their journey was a cross. Would they be identified with this? All were uneasy. It seems Mary of Bethany alone knew of the meaning of the death, and so she 'celebrated' it with the anointing of Jesus with the precious and fragrant nard (Cf. John 12: 1.ff.). What, then, was in the mind of Mary Magdalene?

Mary Magdalene at the Cross and the Burial

Matthew 27:55 and Mark 15:40 tell us the women were at the Cross and that they looked on from 'afar off'. In both cases Mary Magdalene is mentioned. In Mark 15:47-49 the women, Mary among them, watched the burial proceedings. In Matthew 27:57-61 the description of the burial event is much the same, ending with, 'Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre'. It takes little to imagine the shock and grief of Mary as she watched the events of the death and burial. She so deeply loved him, and knew his great powers of defeating demons, healing sickness and liberating people from their guilts that she must have mourned what seemed to be a senseless death. That she thought it to be a death without resurrection is clear from the account we read in John 20. We can only image the grief and passionate sorrow that was in her heart from Friday night to Sunday morning. We do not know how long she and the other Mary were sitting opposite the sepulchre, nor her feelings as they rolled the stone over the opening of the tomb and sealed it.

Mary Magdalene and the Resurrection

We are told in John 20:1 that Mary came to the tomb early. It seems from Mark 16:9 that she was probably the first one at the tomb for 'Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom he had cast out demons'. It is not easy to rationalise the accounts of the women's visits to the tomb set out in the four Gospels. From John's account we gather that having seen that the tomb was opened Mary ran to Peter and John and told them what had happened. Matthew's account tells us that Mary Magdalene and 'the other Mary' went to the sepulchre and that an angel from heaven, appearing in splendour told them, 'Be not afraid; for I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here for he has risen,' at which point he invited them to see that Jesus was indeed gone from the tomb. In Luke the women saw 'a vision of angels, who said that he was alive'. All of this should have convinced Mary that Jesus had risen, but the account in John 20 shows that she obviously thought Jesus was dead.

Jesus' Appearance and Revelation to Mary

The facts are simple: at her news of the opened tomb Peter and John had come running, looked into the tomb, being eventually convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. They returned to tell the news to the other disciples. Mary was weeping and she stooped to look into the tomb where she saw two angels where the body of Jesus had lain, but was now not there. They asked her why she wept and she told them it was because they had taken away her Lord and she did not know where they had laid him. At that point she turned around and saw Jesus but did not recognise him as such. He asked why she wept and whom did she seek. She, thinking him to be the gardener of the place, said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away.' She still thought he was dead. It was then that Jesus spoke her name and instantly she knew it was Jesus and cried out 'Rabboni!' In her passion of love she clung to him. He had to lift her out of her past associations and relationship with him, and tell her to cease clinging to him. His tender term 'Mary,' changed to the stronger term, 'Woman,' as he had once used the word with his mother at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. He said, 'I am not yet ascended to my Father.' That sentence told everything. He was, indeed, risen: he was about to ascend. She could not continue as in the past days. She was to go to the disciples and tell them that he was 'ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' The risen Christ had revealed to her that the old days had finished. It must have seemed like a

disappointing change, but she was now lifted to a richer relationship, the warm and proper human elements now transformed into the relationship in which she would serve her Lord in an even more wonderful way. Much of this must have come from the fact that she now knew God to be Father: not only the Father of Christ the Son but also *her* Father!

Mary Magdalene Filled with the Holy Spirit

The Resurrection may have been intensified by the Ascension at which Mary was almost certainly present. Matt. 28:18-20: cf. I Cor. 15:6). We know by Acts 1:12-14 (cf. 2:4ff.) that Mary was amongst those who awaited Pentecost, and who therefore received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit-an event which would have brought her into the fullness of true love (*agape*) and set her up for the service to which she was undoubtedly called. What a transformation from a women with seven demons to one who desired to share the gospel with the world! It was truly 'from demons to delight'!

Study Fourteen: Miriam; Saviour, Prophetess and Great Leader

Miriam, Saviour, Keeper and Trainer of Moses

In the days when a Pharaoh hostile to Israel ruled Egypt, a daughter was born to a man from the house of Levi named Aram whose wife was Jochebed. Because the Israelites were proliferating in numbers, and were becoming a threat to Egypt. Pharaoh's edict was that all male children should be destroyed but female children should be spared. Jochebed had a male child whom she perceived to be very special, 'goodly', 'proper', 'special' (Exod. 2:2; Heb. 11:23). The mother made a special waterproof container and slipped it into the river Nile. Miriam bravely watched for what was to happen and when Pharaoh's daughter decided to save Moses, she presented herself and suggested that Jochebed should be the wet nurse-no small feat. In this way she saved Moses. Doubtless as the child grew-perhaps the couple of years to the time of weaning Miriam would have cared for, trained And taught her brother Moses.

Miriam a Leader and a Prophetess.

In Micah 6:4 God says to Israel, 'For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.' These formed a triumvirate of leadership. Aaron was Moses' brother, and in some ways his record is not the best (cf. Exod. 32:1-35). Of Miriam we read little until the time Israel crossed the Red Sea and the army of Pharaoh perished in its waters. In Exodus 15:1-21 great rejoicing that followed this great miracle. Their has been called 'The Song of Moses' (cf. Rev. 15:3), but it is also called 'The Song of Miriam (Exod. 15:20) 'the Prophetess'. The Song may be looked upon as a prophetic word, but probably she has other history of prophetic utterances. In Numbers 12:1 this is her claim, that God speaks not only by Moses but by her, and by Aaron. That 'All the women went after her' in her timbrel playing seems to indicate she was a leader of the women. 'Sang to them' (Exod. 15:21) may mean prophesied but she was probably as a cantor and they sang with her. In any case she was an unusual woman, and when we remember she was over 80 then she is the cause for admiration. Her mother had sensed the nature of Moses, as it was 'by faith' she hid Moses in the rushes of the Nile.

Miriam and Aaron Attack Moses, Demeaning Him and His Office

Whatever may have been the ministry of Miriam in Israel, a ministry we feel certain was to the women of the great concourse of travelling people, we find something of her problem as a person in Numbers 12:1-16. Moses had married a Cushite woman and because of this Miriam attacked her brother, leader of the twelve tribes, 'Moses, the man of God'. Did Moses do wrong in marrying this Cushite woman? We do not know. We know of his wife Zipporah who he had married after the time he had fled from Egypt, at which time Moses would have been, age-wise, in his forties. She was the daughter of Jethro the priest of Midian and a descendant of Abraham, with whom Moses lived and worked. Her history is an interesting one, and one with which we cannot deal here (see

Exod. 2:15-22; 4:20-26: 18: 2, 6f.). Some assume that Zipporah had died and that Moses had married again. In Habbakuk 3:7 we read, 'I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble', and some claim that 'Cushan' and 'Midian' are synonymous terms. Cush was a son of Ham, and father of Nimrod. It was forbidden that an Israelites should marry a Canaanite, but that was the only prohibition.. The text does not say anything about the rightness or wrongness of Moses' marrying the Cushite woman who would probably have been black-skinned.

For Miriam this marriage-whether right or wrong-brought an attack. We could try to work out the reason for the attack but we would only be speculating. Obviously she thought the marriage was wrong and meant that Moses was no better a person than she and Aaron were, and no higher in the order of leadership God had given to the three (cf. Micah 6:4). Her charge was, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?'

This accusation is somewhat strange, since Moses, taking the advice of Jethro his father-in-law had gathered seventy elders out of the tribes of Israel, and they had been anointed by the Holy Spirit for the task. Moses, then, had not jealously guarded his leadership, but had, indeed, shared it. It was true that Aaron and Miriam had prophesied but Miriam was now making the three leaders 'equal'. She was not under Moses in any sense. Aaron was obviously led by Miriam, perhaps because he was younger, but certainly because he was weaker. Exodus 32 shows how he let the people lead him in the matter of devising the golden calf and worshipping it.

Verse 3 states, 'Now Moses was very meek, more than men that were on the face of the earth'. God was angry with Miriam and Aaron and, having called the three leaders together, he taught them that whilst prophets usually received their message which they were to give via the medium of dreams and visions (cf. Jer. 23; Acts 2:14f.) yet Moses was unique in that God spoke to him 'mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the Lord'. In Deuteronomy 4:15 Israel was told that it had heard God's word but had seen 'no form'. Moses *had* seen 'the form of God'-whatever that may mean. The conclusion is that Moses was in a unique category, and Miriam and Aaron had done wrong to class themselves on the level of Moses as God's ministers. Miriam was punished by being made 'leprous, white as snow'. This was a terrible punishment, and Aaron cried out, Oh, my lord, do not punish us for a sin that we have so foolishly committed. Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb' (NRSV). Moses cried to the LORD to heal her, but the LORD said that if her father had but spat on her face she would need seven days to clear that, and that she was to be for seven days out of the camp before being healed and re-admitted. Moses never forgot it, and in Deuteronomy 24:8-9, shortly before his death, he recalled Miriam's punishment, warning Israel against an outbreak of leprosy, perhaps as a judgement.

Conclusion To Our Study Of Miriam

What then do we make of the incident? Firstly, that Miriam had erred greatly in breaking the hierarchy of leadership, in seeking to level out the prophetic ministry, and in arrogating to herself a role equal to that of Moses. Whatever may have been the rightness or wrongness of Moses' marriage to the Cushite woman God's gifts and calling are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29), and must be understood, accepted and revered. Aaron was stung into addressing Moses as 'my lord' and recognising Miriam's punishment as warranted. In this sense God preserved the ministry of Moses. Secondly, God forgave Miriam because of Moses' intercession. In this He was gracious and Miriam was restored. After that we hear no more of her until her honourable burial (Num. 20:21). Miriam's place in the leadership was not cancelled, and doubtless she learned something of Moses' meekness. She was a remarkable woman: **Moses and Aaron owed** much to her, her prophetic ministry was valuable to Israel, as also her leadership of the women, like us she was fallible—a great lesson for us all to learn.

Study Fifteen: Baruch the Blessed

Baruch's Background'

Baruch means 'blessed'. This was the name Baruch's parents gave him at birth. It seemed he was destined for a life of blessing. All the portents were good. His grandfather was Maseiah the governor of Jerusalem, and his father was Neriah. Neriah meant 'Jehovah is light' indicating the nature of this man. Baruch's brother was Seraiah who became quartermaster to King Zedekiah the last king of Judah who was taken to Babylon. Seraiah was a man of stature, being given a prophetic commission at the last by Jeremiah (51:59-61), which showed Jeremiah's high regard for him. This commission was to be carried out when the Israelite captives reached Babylon. Born into such a family Baruch was indeed blessed.

Baruch and Jeremiah

In 32:6-49 Jeremiah has a prophetic word from God telling him to buy land and tell the people it was a parable of Israel's restoration after God's judgement of exile upon it. The deed was given to Baruch to hold it in trust. The rich and powerful prayer which Jeremiah then prayed to God, plus God's answer to his prayer must have given Baruch (i) a revelation of God, and (ii) a revelation of Jeremiah as God great prophet. Baruch, we can believe thus became a changed man. Associated with Jeremiah he became a great man of God ⁷.

Baruch as Jeremiah's Scribe

Chapter 36 describes the work Baruch did along with Jeremiah. The prophet was commanded to write 'all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you from the days of Josiah until today'. Jeremiah called Baruch and requested him to write the words and then to read them in the house of the LORD to the people, and this he did. He was then called into an assembly of the princes and was told to read the words to them. In turn the princes had it read before the King, Jehoiakim, who listened to the reading but cut up the document page by page and burned it in a brazier before the assembled court. Jeremiah then took another scroll and dictated 'all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them'. We can imagine the disappointment of Baruch, and also see his faithfulness in delivering God's message to the people and the king.

⁷ For a wider study of Baruch see my separate Essay 'Baruch the Blessed'.

Baruch's Complaint and God's Answer

The text of chapter 45 is as follows,

I The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: 2 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: 3 You said, 'Woe is me! for the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.' 4 Thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up -- that is, the whole land. 5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not; for, behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh, says the LORD; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go."

What we have to see is that Baruch was not just some kind of amanuensis to Jeremiah, but was with him in all that he said. Indeed in 43:2-3 the 'insolent men' told Jeremiah, 'You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say, "Do not go to **Egypt**"; **but Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us**, to deliver us into the hands of Chaldeans, that they may kill or take us into exile in Babylon.' Baruch, we assume, eventually wrote down all Jeremiah's prophecies, and so was deeply influenced by them. and in this sense knew the mind of God.

The 45th chapter shows us his difficulties,

- (i) he was tired out with non-success, of having his written prophecies destroyed and of being opposed by those who refused to receive them, and who were persecuting him for his part in them.
- (ii) God needed to reveal to Baruch what were his judgements on Judah, namely that He was breaking down what He had built, and plucking up what He had planted. In other words there was no grand future for Judah, Jeremiah or Baruch.

Baruch Seeking Success,

Baruch was really as a prophet by reason of his total involvement with Jeremiah and his prophetic ministry. So in the passage quoted above God speaks to Baruch through Jeremiah.. His words are interesting, 'And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not' for Baruch was looking for success in his work and life. We must be careful how we interpret the idea here of 'success'. Baruch was not looking for 'great things' for himself, so much as he was wanting success in and for Israel, and—even more the vindication of Jeremiah and himself thereby. 'No,' said God, 'this cannot be. Ahead lies the fact that I am bringing evil upon all flesh.' So the prophet and his scribe are not going to be 'successful'. The work is not going to be vindicated. It is here we are met with the human desire for fame. We are not saying Baruch was out to achieve that, but more often than not *we* are. Milton's lines are famous (Lycidas, 1, 20, 7-73)

Fame is the spur that the proud spirit doth raise (that last infirmity of noble mind) To spurn delights and live laborious days.

We will do anything for fame. We see the cases of Miriam and Aaron wanting to be equal with Moses, of Korah, Dathan and Abiram wanting to be as Moses and Aaron-able to offer up sacrifices-of Jesus' disciples desiring positions of power, and Diotrophes 'who likes to put himself first'. There may be very few who not seek fame in one way or another.

Baruch is promised no fame, no 'great things' for himself. However God does promise him he will not meet an untimely death, and this is a great promise for it means he can carry on in prophetic living and utterance and not be destroyed. The evil that God is bringing upon all flesh will not harm him. What is more, Baruch will have a good life because he has now discovered the full mind of God regarding Israel, Jeremiah and himself. That he was a man of strong character is undeniable, and Josephus, on the basis of Jeremiah 43:1-3, says he influenced Jeremiah to appeal to the residue of the people of Judah to remain in the land and not to go to Egypt.

So well-known was this servant of the great prophet that many apocryphal books are accredited to him, namely *The Apocalypse of Baruch*, *the Book of Baruch*, *The Rest of the Words of Baruch*, the gnostic *Book of Baruch*, and others. Even though it is to be doubted that he wrote any of these, it is a testimony to the wisdom which was attributed to him. Having seen these details we can now trace the story of this splendid person. He was 'Baruch the Blessed' indeed. His name was given prophetically and proved to be true. The judgements of God were not 'the end of the road' but the beginning of a great ministry, In this sense Baruch is an example of the fatuity of ambitious fame, and the richness of life God gives the humble and meek.

Study Sixteen: Elijah The Prophet of Fire and Serenity

The Idea of a Prophet⁸

Sometimes we have an institutional idea of a prophet. The prophet was appointed by God, not by Man, and he was to be the voice of God primarily to his own generation and the situations into which God spoke with exhortation, often linked with prediction. Often there was a 'school of the prophets', and it seems Elijah ('my God is Yahweh') was head of such, passing on his mantle to Elisha.

Elijah's Origins

These are virtually unknown. We know nothing of his age. He is called 'the Tishbite' 'Tishbe' seemingly in Gilead (cf. I Kings 17: 1. He appears suddenly at a time of crisis in Israel—the Northern Kingdom—when King Ahab, though a powerful monarch, had allowed his wife Jezebel to bring Canaanite idolatry fully to the land. She was the daughter of a the king-priest of Sidon who worshipped the Canaanite Baal and his consort Asherah/Astarte, and had 'slain all the prophets [of the Lord] with the sword' (I Kings 19: 1) and established her own 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Asherah. The land was far departed from the pure worship of Yahweh.

Elijah's Training

Elijah suddenly appears To Ahab, telling him a drought will hit the land, and rain will not come except by his—Elijah's—prophetic word. Immediately Elijah is taken by God *outside of Israel* to the brook Cherith where he is fed by ravens (some think 'Arabs') and water comes from Cherith. This then dries up and Elijah is sent to Zarapeth, again outside of Israel, to a Sidonite town or village, where a widow hosts him, he through God helping the woman whose jar of meal and cruse of oil is continually filled. Drought in Israel ('the land of milk and honey') and in Phoenicia where Baal is supposed to make the weather and prosperity shows that God is judge in Israel and also in Phoenicia, Baal being helpless. With the healing of the dead son of the widow Elijah is seen by the mother truly to be 'a man of God' and that 'the word of the Lord is your mouth is truth.' We must not under-estimate the power of training in the Cherith and Zarapeth situations.

Elijah's Ministry of Fire

Elijah returns to Israel, meets Obadiah who had hidden a 100 prophets of the Lord and fed them and tells him to notify Ahab of his—Elijah's—presence. Obadiah tells the king who meets him, calling him 'troubler of Israel' (a reverse conscience!). Elijah demands the gathering of the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 of Asherah to be gathered at Carmel. This happens, and in the events following, Elijah—one against hundreds—tells the multitude of people and prophets, 'You call on the name of your god and I will call on the

⁸ See my little book *Is Prophecy for Today?* (NCPI). This speaks of the nature of the prophet and prophecy.

name of the LORD; and the god who answers by fire he is God'. The people say, 'It is well spoken. Then comes the happening when Baal cannot answer by fire but God does, consuming the water-soaked bull-offering when Elijah prays, 'O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.' When the fire falls on Elijah's sacrifice and consumes it then the people realise who is the true God and worship Him. Elijah commands that the prophets of Baal be killed and they are. This is an incredible victory over the Baal-Asherah cult. He then shows Ahab that God is about to send rain, and when this happens, Ahab rides towards Jezreel. Elijah, strengthened by some special power actually runs towards Jezreel in front of the king. Elijah has proved that the deities of Baal and Asherah are futile. They could not give the rain: they were defunct.

Elijah Powerless: God Renews the Prophet

Jezebel's whole drive had been that of Canaanite idolatry, but with political purpose. She had been about dethroning Yahweh and giving Baal the precedence. She was livid at the news of Baal's and Asherah's defeat and threatened the prophet with death. Without any doubt Elijah became afraid and fled into the wilderness. He was afraid after so high a victory. He had needed much training at Cherith and Zarapeth to be prepared for it. He needed much more training to become the stable and serene prophet he was yet to be. Notice how God did it—be sending an angel who prepared food and drink. Elijah ate and slept and the angel urged him to eat again, so that he needed nothing more in 40 days as he travelled to Horeb 'the mount of God' or Mt. Sinai. He was, perhaps, in the same cave or 'cleft of a rock' where Moses caught his glimpse of God, Elijah had that experience of God which was to stabilise him.

The 'Still, Small Voice'

At Horeb Moses was for Israel. At Horeb Elijah seemed to be against that nation. The Lord's word to Elijah was a question, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Elijah's answer was, 'I have been very jealous for the LORD, the god of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, and left and they seek my life to take it away.' Elijah had come back to the place of covenant and law seemingly to seek Israel's judgement. Israel's evil of course was strong but he had much to learn. Elijah was commanded to stand before 'the mount of the Lord'. 'Mere he saw an indescribable cyclone of wind, and earthquake and finally the fire—modes of action Yahweh often used—and uses. Not this time, for the 'still small voice' ('the sound of gentle quietness', or 'gentle silence') was Elijah's enriching revelation of God. It moved Elijah to wrap his face in his mantle. Again, being asked why he was here, in particular on Mt Horeb, he gave the same answer, but God showed him He would look after Israel, that He would have 7,000 who had never bowed the knee to Baal. The heart of Israel was good! Sinai still signified for the true people. For the rest, Elijah was given a commission to go to Hazael and Jehu for their specific anointings. Elisha was to be his assistant and ultimately to take his place. This new Moses was to have his Joshua!

The Steady Days of the Transformed Prophet

Jezebel shows her colours again in the matter of vineyard—this being against the laws of God. Elijah fearlessly-without dread of Jezebel—confronts Ahab and predicts the doom of the king and Jezebel. This time Ahab repents and God gives him breathing space. His son Ahaziah is the son of his mother and seeks to destroy Elijah whose answer lies in the fire that kills the king's emissaries. The last event is that of Elijah's translation—an amazing happening! A reward of the faithful prophet lies in the attachment of Elisha, and his commission for a further great work, but the greatest reward is that he is translated, as was Enoch. In a way he was a second Moses to Israel. He is later seen at the Mount of Transfiguration, Tabor, but he is spoken highly of in Malachi 4:5 as an eschatological figure of great importance, and John the Baptist appears to be equated with him by Jesus (Matt. 17:12), who used him as a principle (Luke 4:25-26) of himself. Like all the true prophets he learned of God, was faithful to the last and is a great witness to being the powerful voice of God in his days.