

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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The Ordinances of the Altar

“And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord Jehovah: These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon” (Ezekiel 43:18).

Ezekiel's Temple is a glorious structure found in Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48. It is primarily a picture of Christ's Millennial Kingdom, conveying various aspects of how the Kingdom will operate. The symbols are consistent with similar symbology used throughout the Bible. Instructions for building the temple begin immediately after the Armageddon prophecy relating to the nation of Israel in chapters 38 and 39. This suggests a sequential prophetic time line and emphasizes the Kingdom application.

When God specified the building of an altar, he usually required that special sacrifices be made on that altar to prepare it to serve the people in their day-to-day offerings. Perhaps the greatest of these was with Solomon's Temple. In 1 Kings chapter 8, the number of sacrifices was so great that they “could not be counted.” The great altar in Ezekiel's Temple also required preparatory sacrifices. Ezekiel 43 describes the sin-offering sacrifices that prepared the altar to accept the further offerings of the people.

As we look at the details of these preparatory sin-offerings we notice that there are many parallels to the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. This similarity is appropriate, as both rituals picture the Gospel Age sacrifices of Christ and the Church. These sacrifices will prepare the altar for the future offerings of the world in Christ's mediatorial rule.

If Ezekiel 43 is so similar to Leviticus 16, why is another picture provided for us? Since types and shadows depict later realities, these pictures have limitations. No single type can capture every detail of the antitype. Consequently, God, in his wisdom, provided multiple pictures in order that we might find details in one that are left out in the other. Each type simply offers different perspectives or emphasizes different features of God's plan.

This article will focus on Ezekiel 43, verses 18 to the end of the chapter.

Verse 18 — “And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord Jehovah: These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon.”

Jehovah indicates in this verse that the point of the ordinances was to provide a place where acceptable offerings could be made to God.

Verse 19 — “Thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that are of the seed of Zadok, who are near unto me, to minister unto me, saith the Lord Jehovah, a young bullock for a sin offering.”

The first ordinance of the altar was to give the priesthood a young bullock for a sin offering. The Atonement Day sacrifices begin in the same manner — with a bullock for a sin offering. The interpretation in each case is also the same. The bullock represents Jesus as a perfect man. All of the blessings that God has in store for both the church, in this age, and the world of mankind, in the next age, are dependent upon the ransom sacrifice of Jesus! He is the starting point where justice is satisfied, allowing God's love to flow unimpeded.

The bullock is given to the priests and not to Israel. In the outworking of God's plan, He provides atonement

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first for the followers of Jesus during the Gospel Age. They are the prospective members of the antitypical priesthood. We see the same lesson in Leviticus 16:6. “And Aaron shall present the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself, and for his house.”

Notice that the atonement is “for himself, and for his house.” Those in the Gospel Age who are drawn of God and approach Him through Christ are a special class. They are favored with the invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in leading a life of sacrifice unto death. We have been given the merit of Christ! And so it was that the bullock was given to the priests and offered on their behalf.

The account describes the priests as “the Levites that are of the seed of Zadok.” The name Zadok means “just,” or “righteous.” It is certainly a fitting name to describe the justified followers of Christ! There are several men with the name of Zadok in the scriptures. The most eminent was the priest who served during the kingships of Saul and David. A descendent of Aaron, through the lineage of Eleazar, he was a zealous supporter of King David. He was also a dedicated defender of the Ark of the Covenant when David’s Son, Absalom, attempted to usurp the throne, and later, when David’s other son, Adonijah, did the same.

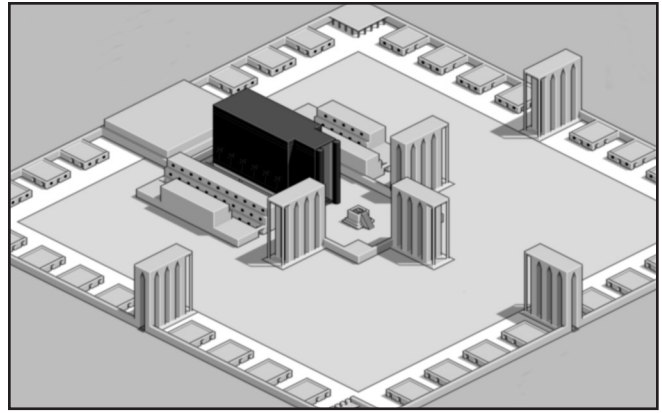
The high priest, Abiathar, sided with Adonijah in his failed attempt to become king. It was the priest Zadok, not the high priest Abiathar, who anointed Solomon King of Israel. Later, when Abiathar’s treachery was discovered, Solomon expelled him from Jerusalem and made Zadok high priest! Zadok left a beautiful legacy of unwavering loyalty to God and to his servants. So it is that the followers of Jesus, the faithful church, are characterized as the “seed of Zadok,” those possessing the same wonderful traits.¹

In verse 20, instructions are provided for treatment of the bullock’s blood.

Verse 20 — “And thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the ledge, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse it and make atonement for it.”

This procedure is different from Leviticus 16. Because the focus of Ezekiel’s temple is primarily on kingdom work and preparing the altar, it is clear why the blood is not taken into the Most Holy.

In the Day of Atonement picture the emphasis is on that which is antitypically accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ and the church. It has immediate application to consecrated lives. In the Ezekiel picture, the focus is on opening the way of worship for the world of mankind in the Millennium. This is consistent with the understanding that Ezekiel’s temple is a picture of the functioning Kingdom of God under King Jesus. As the Apostle John wrote: “He is the propitiation for our



A depiction of Ezekiel's Temple

sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

The altar represents the access that the world will have in their worship of God. This access will have been created by the life-giving blood of Christ. In this case the blood of the bullock is placed on the horns, the corners, and the borders of the altar, in order to cleanse it and make atonement for it. Horns represent power, so placing blood on the horns shows that the altar will be empowered to receive the offerings of the people. Likewise, placing blood on the corners and borders shows that the entire human race will be affected by the power of the blood.

Verse 21 — “Thou shalt also take the bullock of the sin offering, and it shall be burnt in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary.”

This last detail respecting the bullock is identical to the procedure found in Leviticus 16. The skin and hide of the bullock are burned outside of the camp. The antitype is likewise the same. The sacrifice of Jesus, so esteemed and precious in the eyes of God, is, in this age, a stinking and repulsive thing to the world.

Verse 22 — “And on the second day thou shalt offer a kid of the goats without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they did cleanse it with the bullock.”

The Lord’s goat on the Day of Atonement represented the church sacrificially following in the footsteps and experiences of their Lord and Master. The same is true here. The goat is without blemish because the church has been justified by the blood of Jesus and can therefore, as seen earlier, offer an acceptable sacrifice.

Interestingly, the blood of the goat is also used to cleanse the altar. This deserves closer attention because the blood of the church has no atoning value. However, their consecrated lives do have value. The object of a life of sacrifice is to be trained as sympathetic priests who can judge and guide mankind up the “highway of holiness” (Isaiah 35:8). Furthermore, the blood of Christ does give our sacrifices value. Whatever merit we bring

is, in reality, the merit of Christ. This is seen in the symbol of the very next verse.

Verse 23 — “When thou hast made an end of cleansing it, thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish.”

After the blood of the bullock and the goat is placed on the altar, another young bullock and a ram are offered as burnt offerings. Burnt offerings show God’s acceptance of a previous sin offering. A burnt offering is entirely consumed on the altar. Using a bullock as the burnt offering gives us the basis for the goat’s acceptance. The bullock again represents Jesus. The burnt offering of this bullock shows that the sin offering of the goat is acceptable **because** of the bullock. That is, our sacrifices are acceptable because of the merit of Christ.

The addition of a ram, as one of the burnt offerings, emphasizes this lesson further. A ram for burnt offering takes our minds to the scene at Mount Moriah, where Abraham prepared to slay his son Isaac in obedience to God’s command. But the act was interrupted while the knife was raised. God then provided a ram as a burnt offering! By providing a burnt offering, God was saying that the offering of Isaac was acceptable, though not actually carried out.

“And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of Jehovah it shall be provided” (Genesis 22:13, 14).

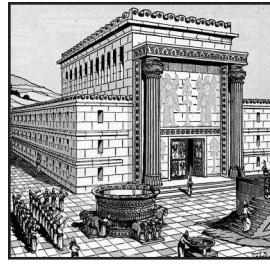
Thus a ram is associated with the Abrahamic Covenant! The Apostle Paul makes it clear that we are heirs in the covenant. “If ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29).

The church is developed under the Abrahamic Covenant. The phrase, “The Sarah, or Grace Feature” of the Abrahamic Covenant is sometimes used by brethren to describe the particular blessing that God intends for the church. As Paul stated in the text above, if we are in Christ, then we are heirs to that covenant. So the burnt offering of a ram is a reminder of the promise God made to Abraham, under which the church offers her sacrifice.

Verse 24 — “Thou shalt bring them near before Jehovah, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering unto Jehovah.”

The priests cast salt on the burnt offerings. Salt is a preservative as well as a seasoning. This suggests that there will be a preserved memory of the sacrifices that were made on behalf of the world of mankind. The world will come to understand that the previous sin offerings were appropriate and good, fully fitted to help them attain human perfection.

In the next verses there is another departure from the Day of Atonement type.



Another view of the temple

Verses 25, 26 — “Seven days shalt thou prepare every day a goat for a sin offering: they shall also prepare a young bullock, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish. Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it.”

The sacrifice of the goat and the accompanying burnt offerings of the bullock and the ram were to be repeated for seven days! This seems to point to the seven stages of the Gospel Age church as it continues to faithfully lay down its life in consecration. The seven repetitions also emphasize that God’s perfect divine oath is fully achieved with these whom he called out from the world to be Christ’s.

Verse 27 — “And when they have accomplished the days, it shall be that upon the eighth day, and forward, the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord Jehovah.”

This verse has now progressed to the time when the Gospel Age sacrificing is complete and the altar is sanctified. The opportunity to bring acceptable offerings is now available to the willing of the world.

This occurs on the eighth day. Eight represents a new beginning or newness of life. So this eighth day, following the seven days of the Gospel Age, is now the time for sin and death to end. It is a new beginning for the human race. Christ and the church have been fully equipped to be a sympathetic priesthood, intensely interested in bringing everyone who has ever lived into full harmony with God.

Every individual brought back from the grave will have to make a consecration to God if they are to receive eternal life. The blessings of the Kingdom will compel all of the willing to make progress, all the way to human perfection.

The bullock which represented the perfect humanity of Jesus in the Gospel Age types, will then represent the perfection of mankind, as shown in Psalms. “Then will thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt offering and in whole burnt offering: Then will they offer bullocks upon thine altar” (Psalms 51:19).

— Br. David Stein

(1) The identification of “the sons of Zadok” is further confirmed in Ezekiel 44:10-14, 15-16. The Levites who had gone far from God, and had been a stumbling block to the whole house of Israel, even ministering to them before their idols, will nevertheless be ministers in the sanctuary; they will not be cut off in second death, but they shall not execute the office of priest. Like the departure (scape) goat of Leviticus 16, they shall bear their iniquity. But the sons of Zadok will offer “the fat and the blood” of the sin offering. In Jehovah’s treatment of the Levites there is a practical lesson for us.

Redemption as Shown in the Tabernacle

The ransom is the foundation of God's plan for the redemption of mankind. It contains the fundamental idea of a corresponding price — Jesus for Adam, that is, substitutionary atonement. As explained in *Tabernacle Shadows*, pages 51-52:

“The bullock represented Jesus at the age of thirty years — the *perfect man* who gave himself and died on our behalf. The High Priest, as we have already seen, represented the ‘new’ nature of Jesus, the anointed Head and all the members of his Body foreknown of God. The distinction which is here made between the *human* and ‘new creature’ should be clearly understood and remembered. ‘The *man* Christ Jesus who gave himself’ at thirty years of age, was he who previously was rich (of a higher nature), but who for our sakes became poor; that is, became a *man*, that he might give the only possible ransom for men — a perfect man's life (1 Corinthians 15:21).

“Since the penalty of man's sin was death, it was necessary that our Redeemer become a man, be ‘*made flesh*,’ otherwise he could not redeem mankind. A man had sinned, and the penalty was *death*; and if our Lord would pay the penalty it was essential that he should be of the same nature (but undefiled, separate from sin and from the race of sinners), and die as Adam's *substitute*, else mankind could never be liberated from death. To do this the man Jesus made sacrifice ‘*of all that he had*’ — glory as a perfect man, honor as a perfect man could claim it, and, finally, *life as a perfect man*. And this was all that he had, (except God's promise of a *new* nature, and the *hope* which that promise generated); for he had exchanged his spiritual being or existence for the human, which he made ‘a sin offering,’ and which was typified by the Atonement Day bullock (John 1:14, Isaiah 53:10).”

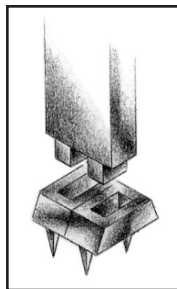
Hence, strictly speaking, sin offering and atonement are shown and the ransom is not shown in the Tabernacle, because no corresponding price is shown: a bullock does not die for another bullock, and a goat does not die for another goat. However, the idea of the ransom is subtly shown.

SILVER SOCKETS

Consider the following from Exodus 26:15-25 about the construction of the Tabernacle itself. Of particular interest is the **foundation** of the Tabernacle — the silver sockets.

“And thou shalt make boards for the tabernacle of shittim wood standing up. Ten cubits shall be the length of a board, and a cubit and a half shall be the breadth of one board. Two tenons shall there be in one board, set in order one against another: thus shalt thou make for all

the boards of the tabernacle. And thou shalt make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards on the south side southward. And thou shalt make forty **sockets of silver** under the twenty boards; two sockets under one board for his two tenons, and two sockets under another board for his two tenons. And for the second side of the tabernacle on the north side there shall be twenty boards: And their forty sockets of silver; two sockets under one board, and two sockets under another board. And for the sides of the tabernacle westward thou shalt make six boards. And two boards shalt thou make for the corners of the tabernacle in the two sides. And they shall be coupled together beneath, and they shall be coupled together above the head of it unto one ring: thus shall it be for them both; they shall be for the two corners. And they shall be eight boards, and their sockets of silver; sixteen sockets; two sockets under one board, and two sockets under another board.”



Artist's conception of tenons and silver sockets

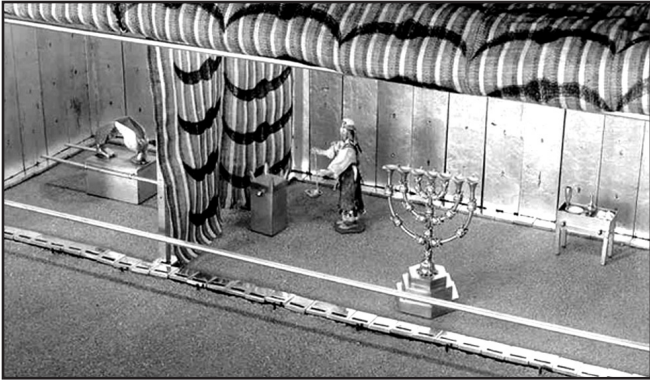
Each of the forty-eight boards of the Tabernacle had two tenons, extensions of wood. Each of which plugged into a silver socket. Two sockets for each board gave the structure a firm, unmovable setting. Thus there were two times forty-eight, or ninety-six silver sockets supporting the outer walls of the Tabernacle.

There were also four more silver sockets under the four pillars within the Tabernacle that held the inner vail, dividing the Holy from the Most Holy. Thus the total number of silver sockets, for the boards and pillars, was **one hundred**.

SOURCE OF THE SILVER

The source of the silver that was used to make the sockets gives us a clue to their meaning. We first observe in Exodus 30:11-16 that a collection is taken from Israel. Rotherham translates these verses as follows:

“Then spake Yahweh unto Moses, saying — When thou takest the sum of the sons of Israel, by their numberings, then shall they give every man a propitiatory-covering¹ for his soul to Yahweh, when they are numbered — that there may be among them no plague when they are numbered. This, shall they give — every one that passeth over to them that have been numbered — a half-shekel by the shekel of the sanctuary — the shekel is twenty gerahs — the half-shekel, shalt be a heave-offering to Yahweh. All who pass over to the numbered, from twenty years old and upwards, shall give the heave-offering of Yahweh. The rich, shall not give more, and the poor, shall not give less, than the half-shekel, when they give the heave-offering of Yahweh, to put a propitiatory-covering over your souls. So then thou shalt take the silver for the propitiatory-coverings from the sons of



Cutaway view showing boards and sockets

Israel, and shalt expend it upon the service of the tent of meeting — thus shall it be for the sons of Israel as a memorial before Yahweh, to put a propitiatory-covering over your souls.”

In verse 16 this collection of silver is called “atonement money” in the King James Version, and a “propitiatory-covering” by Rotherham. Both of these expressions remind us of the atonement price Jesus paid with his life. How was this “atonement money” used? The context tells us that it was to be used for the service of the Tabernacle. But a more specific answer is given in Exodus 38:25-27.

“And the silver of them that were numbered of the congregation was an **hundred talents**, and a thousand seven hundred and threescore and fifteen shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary: A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for every one that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men. And of the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of the sanctuary, and the sockets of the vail; an hundred sockets of the hundred talents, a talent for a socket.”

Most of this “atonement money” was used to make the hundred silver sockets! So they are scripturally associated with the related concepts of ransom and atonement. The Tabernacle foundation beautifully connects with Jesus as the foundation of the church.

The lesson does not stop there. We saw from those texts that each silver socket weighed one talent. This weight or quantity of silver also connects with the value of a man’s life.

“And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a **talent of silver**” (1 Kings 20:39).

In this text a prophet of God spoke to King Ahab and stated that the value of a man’s life was one talent of silver. Thus the value of each silver socket relates to the

value of a man’s life. In the case of the lesson we are examining, the life can be none other than Jesus’ life, especially as a ransom for the life forfeited by Adam — another man’s life.

THE NUMBER 100

There is yet one more lesson that relates the silver sockets to Jesus. We observed that there are exactly 100 sockets. The number 100 is another symbol of Jesus and his atonement work. This is seen in the price of redemption for the firstborn. While Israel was in the wilderness, the Levites were to be exchanged for the firstborn. Since the number of firstborn exceeded the number of Levites, the remainder were to be redeemed with 100 gerahs (Numbers 3:46, 47, 18:16). After entering the land there was also a price of redemption for every new firstborn. The price was one lamb (Exodus 13:13). Thus the Bible provides an equation that 100 gerahs is equivalent to one lamb. This authenticates the symbol that the number 100 pictures Jesus and the redemptive price he paid.

We may support this further by noting that the gate to the courtyard contained an area of 100 square cubits (20 cubits wide by 5 cubits high). The door to the Tabernacle was also 100 square cubits (10 cubits wide by 10 cubits high). In each case, the portals represent Jesus as the **way** into a new condition. Through him we first enter the court condition of tentative justification, and then into the holy condition of consecrated living.^{2,3}

Seeing the ransom pictured in the foundation sockets is consistent in yet another way. Each board fit snugly into the sockets by means of two tenons. The heavy silver sockets would act as a firm foundation for the Tabernacle. The boards may represent the individual members of the church and their two-fold standing in Christ. Our foundation in Jesus is by virtue of our justification. We stand in **his** righteousness. Secondly, his blood also sanctifies us. Sanctification is the process by which we are set apart to do God’s holy service and be prepared for our station beyond the veil.

Silver is also a symbol of truth. So the silver sockets not only depict the value of the ransom sacrifice — the perfect life of Jesus — but it also suggests that this is a precious truth to us.

HAILSTONES OF A TALENT WEIGHT

One concluding note regarding the use of a talent is found in Revelation 16:21. There, we read about mighty hailstones bombarding the earth, each the weight of a talent. This picture combines two symbols. Hail is water that has frozen. Water is a symbol of truth. Hard water, ice, is then a picture of “hard” truths. These are truths that are not particularly appreciated because of the pain they cause. What truths would they be? Perhaps they would be truths associated with the value of life,

the weight of a talent. The life of Jesus is a vital part of our redemption. But it is also true that the lives of every human being are precious to God. To their shame, the rulers and governments of this world have shown little regard for the value of the life of others. In the final stages of the Armageddon battle they may be compelled to face this hard truth.

— David Stein

(1) Though the King James Version uses the word “ransom” here, Rotherham used the more correct translation of *kopher*, which means “to atone” or “atonement.” The proper Hebrew word for ransom, *gaal*, is not used here, and Rotherham seems careful in the matter. In fact the word *gaal*, ransom, is used in Leviticus only in chapters 25 and 27.

(2) It is of further interest to note that there are also exactly 100 stones in the Kings Chamber of the Great Pyramid of Cheops! This chamber has been suggested to be a symbolic parallel of the Most Holy — representing the attainment of the divine nature. If so, the number 100 again reminds us that Jesus has opened this way for us.

(3) It is interesting to note that in the King James Version, the word “lamb” occurs 100 times.

A Bloody Husband

“It came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision” (Exodus 4:24-26).

These verses have been the subject of conjecture and uncertainty for centuries. On the surface, they certainly are confusing. Jonathan Kirsch calls it “The single most bizarre passage in all of the Bible.”¹ We will ask a few questions about these texts with a goal of finding some explanation that seems plausible. Here are a few questions to be answered:

- Who was Jehovah threatening to slay?
- Why was Jehovah threatening to slay that one?
- Why was it Zipporah who acted and not Moses?
- Whose feet was the foreskin laid at?
- What is the meaning of the phrase “husband of blood”?

It seems necessary to interpret “Jehovah” as referring to an angel sent by Jehovah.² The Septuagint version gives the following: “And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord met him by the way in the inn, and sought to slay him.”

So God sent an angel to kill “him.” Who is “him”? It appears that the intended victim was Moses’ son, not Moses himself. The action that resolves the problem is the circumcision of the son. So we conclude that it was the son who is in jeopardy.

That Moses is not the intended victim³ seems conclusive by the fact the God Himself, in the verses immediately preceding (19-23), had sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt. It would make no sense to dispatch Moses to deliver Israel, and then slay him on the way. So why was Jehovah seeking to slay Moses’ son? To answer this, we will read those verses (19-23) for a clue.

“And the LORD said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life. And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand. And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.”

First, Jehovah assured Moses that it was safe to return when he said “all the men are dead which sought thy life.” Again, we take this as evidence that God Himself was not seeking Moses’ life.

Second, Moses now loads up his wife and sons to take them with him.

Third, God told Moses what the threat will be if Pharaoh will not let Israel go. He would forfeit his own firstborn son. Obedience to God is the only thing that would save the firstborn son of Pharaoh.

Now note something important respecting Moses’ obedience. He had not obeyed God by having his own firstborn son circumcised! The clear command of God that was still incumbent upon Moses is in Genesis 17:10-14:

“This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant

betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the **uncircumcised** man child whose flesh of his



Zipporah meets Moses at a well

foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be **cut off** from his people; he hath broken my covenant.”

Note that this was a command given to Abraham as part of the Abrahamic covenant and that it would apply to his whole family and onto subsequent generations. Also note the severe penalty — a “man child” not circumcised according to this law was to be “cut off from his people.” This was not a mere excommunication. This was to be an execution! Circumcision is very serious business as it relates to the covenant God was making with Abraham!

So we suggest that the son of Moses that was in danger was his firstborn — Gershom. He had not yet been circumcised as required by God according to the Abrahamic covenant. And, since Moses was traveling to Egypt to threaten the firstborn son of Pharaoh if Pharaoh was disobedient, it seems an appropriate time to remind Moses of his failure to obey the requirements of the covenant in regard to his own firstborn son.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

So why did not Moses act in the face of this angel of Jehovah? Why did Zipporah carry out the circumcision?

We do not have a good answer for this. Perhaps Moses was not present at the moment when the angel came.⁴ If that is so, then perhaps the delay in circumcising Gershom was due to reticence on the part of Zipporah to have her son circumcised. Evidently it was not part of Midianite custom, though as Midian was a descendent of Abraham, circumcision should have been practiced. But the fact that Zipporah knew what to do tells us that Moses had discussed it with her. If Moses was present, it would have been his duty as the father to carry out the circumcision.

We note one other point in this narrative. We are told in verse 24 that the angel sought to kill Moses’ son. How? Evidently the angel had hold of the boy are some point in order to kill him. Note one point in verses 25 and 26: “Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.”

“He let him go” — Who let who go? We conclude it was the angel (“he”) who let go of Moses’ son (“him”) now that the circumcision had taken place. If the “he” is in fact the angel of Jehovah, then we surmise that Zipporah was addressing this angel, and that it was this angel at whose feet she cast the foreskin, and whom she called “a bloody husband.” What does this mean? Here are a few other translations of this enigmatic phrase:

- “Surely a bridegroom by rites of blood art thou to me” (Rotherham).
- “Surely a bridegroom of blood art thou to me” (ASV).
- “Surely a bloody relative art thou to me” (Leeser).
- “The blood of the circumcision of my son is staunch’d” (Septuagint).



Zipporah with her sons

- “I have a bloody husband ... You are a bloody husband, because of the circumcision” (Lamsa, Aramaic).

We might understand this by noting that Zipporah is not an Israelite. As we already noted, she was a daughter of Midian. In Numbers 12:1 she is called “an Ethiopian,” evidently as a pejorative.⁵ She appears to be aware of this

fact since by her act of obedience to the requirement of the Abrahamic covenant, she now claims the rights due to Abraham’s descendants. In speaking to the angel, she is claiming relationship now with God himself.

Her thinking might be illustrated by Jehovah’s comment about his relationship with Israel in Jeremiah 31:32: “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD.”

The covenant relationship Israel had with God is likened to a marriage. So Zipporah might have thought the same was established by her actions of circumcision. If this be the right view, she is an audacious woman. But she did the right thing at the right time and saved the life of her son.

We hear no more of Zipporah or of Moses’ sons during the whole experience of Moses in Egypt. It is not until Israel left Egypt and began their journey in the wilderness that we see Jethro bringing Moses’ family to him.

“When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses’ father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses ... and that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt; Then Jethro ... took Zipporah, Moses’ wife, after he had sent her back, And her two sons; of which the name of the one was Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land: And the name of the other was Eliezer; for the God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh: And Jethro, Moses’ father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God: And he said unto Moses, I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her” (Exodus 18:1-6).

Note that at some point Moses had sent her back to Jethro. When did that happen? We don’t know for sure, but it is possible that it occurred right after the circumcision incident. We surmise that this reinforced a reverential fear on the part of Moses as he was about to step into Egypt and perhaps did not want to expose his family to the dangers he knew would be present.

We are still left with an open question: why is this strange incident included in sacred writ? Might there be some prophetic application of the lesson to the church? We leave this to other thoughtful students of prophecy.

(1) Jonathan Kirsch, *Moses: A Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), page 12.

(2) Some might call it The Principle of Agency — God’s agent.

(3) Many commentators believe God was seeking the life of Moses.

(4) Most commentators think Moses was present during this experience. This article suggests that Moses was **not** present at the time of the incident as an explanation for several details in the narrative.

(5) Some think that Moses had a second wife who was from Ethiopia, and that is who Miriam referred to. Much has been written about this idea, worthy of review, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

Between the Lines

Unbelievers constantly seek to find fault with the Bible. One of their criticisms is when the Bible reports different versions of the same event. These critics overlook the fact that different witnesses see events from different perspectives. That can be seen when multiple witnesses give their version of a particular event. The differences are sometimes considerable! But they all saw the same event!

For Christians who believe the Bible is inspired, taking note of differences can open up some lovely discoveries! For example, there is something wonderful about our Lord Jesus when we look at the different accounts of his betrayal and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew Account, Matthew 26:47-50. “While he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.”

Mark Account, Mark 14:43-46. “Immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him. And they laid their hands on him, and took him.”

Luke Account, Luke 22:47, 48. “While he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

John Account, John 18:47, 48. “Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him ... said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith

unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.”

John’s report is different than the others. Judas is present in all of them. But only in John’s gospel is the betraying kiss omitted. But John includes some interesting details. In his account, Jesus addressed the mob as soon as they entered the garden. He then immediately identified himself to them. In fact, so powerful was his declaration that it knocked them all down! His demeanor, and the unexpected admission that he was Jesus, must have confused them for a moment. Jesus asked a second time who they sought and again reiterated that he was the one.

To the skeptic, it might seem that John’s account is contradictory to the others. But if the scriptures are correct, in faith, we search for answers to harmonize the apparent contradictions.

Piecing the accounts together, we begin with John’s unique observations. Jesus saw the mob, confronted them, and told them twice that he was Jesus. **Then** Judas approached Jesus to apply the betraying kiss, as described by Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Reflecting upon this full set of facts, we see that Jesus, in identifying himself right away, was caring for his disciples. As he said in John 18:43, “let these go their way.” But Jesus may also have been trying to prevent Judas from taking the final, irrevocable, step of betrayal! Possibly Jesus’ aggressive approach to the mob was also for Judas’ sake! If Jesus admitted to being the one they were looking for, what need would there have been for further action on Judas’ part? The loving kindness of our Savior extended even to the one who would betray him.

But Judas was not to be stopped. Perhaps the payment of the 30 pieces of silver hinged on Judas sealing the betrayal with a kiss. Whatever the reason, Judas stepped forward and offered the fateful kiss. We wonder in awe at the patience and kindness of Jesus in this circumstance. There is no possible responsibility on Jesus for the conduct of Judas.

Would that we, as followers of Christ, could have the same benevolence of heart toward our enemies as Jesus did toward his!

Financial Report

1,237.52	Balance January 1, 2012
6,095.00	Donations
-1,989.97	Expenses
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5,342.55	Balance January 1, 2013
515	Current subscribers