

21 April, Easter Sunday

34) And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality 35) but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36) You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37) the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38) how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39) And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40) but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; 41) not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42) And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43) To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10.34-43

“And Peter opened his mouth” follows on the heels of his visit to the centurion Cornelius at Joppa, man who is “well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation” [vs..... 22]. This can have two ramifications: at the beginning of the church Gentiles are accepted on equal footing with the Jews and Peter is speaking with authority as leader of the apostles. The occasion? Those assembled “in the sight of God” at Cornelius’ house who wish to hear “all that you have been commanded by the Lord” [vs..... 33]. I.e., these are seminal beginning of the church. Further background is that Peter had a vision on the rooftop of Cornelius’ house, namely, that all things are lawful or clean to eat, signaling that it’s fine to speak of Jesus Christ with the Gentiles.

What Peter perceives (*katalambano*, to grasp, take hold of) is that no partiality exists with God, the noun being *prosopolemptes*, literally as accepting faces or persons. Obviously he had in mind his recent vision and just as importantly, Pentecost. Not to accept faces or persons, if you will, was a hallmark of Jewish religion at the time, a way of maintaining their own identity, especially vis-a-vis Rome. The universal fear and doing right (*dikaiosune*, righteousness) is the prime uniting force. Those gathered with Cornelius—they must have been Romans as well as Jews, given his high regard—certainly were stunned. Suddenly they found themselves having common ground and must have had some difficulty as well as joy in hearing this. How they worked out relationships can only be imagined.

After having recognized that the Gospel is intended for all people, Peter speaks with what’s most familiar to him as a Jew. That is to say, the word or *logos*, word-as-expression God sent to Israel, the verb being *apostello*, the root for the noun apostle. With this in mind, such

apostle-ness regarding Israel applies to the new apostle-ness to the Gentiles, Jews of course included. Peter claims that Jesus is “Lord of all,” this phraseology certainly striking a sympathetic tone but at the same time somewhat difficult to accept. Reference to Jesus’ divinity is something that they have to reconcile with his words “for God was with him.” While speaking as such, Peter must have realized this, thereby compelling him to tie in Jesus as accomplishing his mission after having been anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Peter now speaks of Christ’s death and resurrection which his audience must have gotten wind of earlier. However, at the time they didn’t realize it would have a direct impact upon their lives. Peter concludes by referring to the prophets who bore witness to Jesus, the verb being *martureo* and root for the noun martyr. More specifically, these noted men of Israel are singled out as proclaiming the forgiveness of sins. Some such references are noted in the critical edition of the Greek NT:

Is 33.24: And no inhabitant will say, “I am sick;” the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.

Is 53.5-6: But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jer 31.34: And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother saying “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Dan 9.24: Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet and to anoint a most holy place.

After having spoken these verses from OT prophets, the text continues with a (lower-case) pentecost in imitation of the original Pentecost which was so recent. That is to say, while still uttering these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard this *logos* or this word-as-expression. Immediately afterwards Peter discerned that these people were ripe for baptism.

28 April, Second Sunday of Easter

12) Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13) None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor. 14) And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women 15) so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and pallets that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16) The people

also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. Acts 5.12-16

Dia de or “now” is a shift from the dreadful incident of Ananias and Sapphira who withheld property from the apostles which caused them to suffer death, an account replete with gory details. Indeed, that was a sign and wonder or *semeion* and *teras* if there ever was one. The first noun applies to that which is indicated or something sent from God as a warning; the second is more along the lines of a portent of things to come. Obviously news of the recent tragic incident spread like wildfire. Although we have no information as to what the two actually refer, hopefully the *semeion* and *teras* spoken here don't follow that pattern.

As for Solomon's Portico, it's mentioned in 3.11 as well, this being a favorite meeting place because it was only natural for the apostles and their immediate followers to cling to the temple as much as they could. In the absence of Jesus it was the one concrete reality they could rely upon. Because of its centrality to Israel's worship of the Lord, Jesus himself visited it frequently. However, the days of the temple are numbered, and everyone had a premonition that some overwhelming disaster was not far off. Due to the death of Ananias and Sapphira at the hands of Peter plus mention of the signs and wonders, no small wonder that nobody dared to join them as vs..... 13 states. The verb *kollao* is more along the lines of clinging. Such isolation made them stand out all the more while at the same time it turned out to be an obstacle that had to be overcome. If the apostles continued that way, no one would join them. That means their message about Jesus Christ would fade away quickly despite them being held in high honor, *megaluno* meaning to make large or expansive.

vs..... 14 says that not just believers were added to the Lord but a multitude (*plethos*) of them. In other words, some change from the apostles' relative isolation to reach out must have occurred. It was a miracle just as great if not greater than the sick being brought to them for healing. At last the isolation in light of the recent Ananias/Sapphira event was overcome. Even though some of the sick brought to Peter had his shadow fall upon them, it was a sufficient blessing for many although nothing that was the agent for curing the sick.

This excerpt concludes with a wider audience having assembled “from the towns around Jerusalem.” Quickly news of the healings and miracles got out, not just of the physical kind those of a spiritual nature, unclean spirits. As for those who had come to the apostles, nothing is said of an increased number of followers. Right away the high priest got ear of these events and had the apostles thrown into prison.

5 May, Third Sunday of Easter

27) And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them 28) saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29) But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30) The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31) God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32) And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."...40) So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41) Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42) And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5.27-32; 40-41

The conjunctive “and” or *de* refers to the apostles in the temple after their miraculous escape from prison through the intercession of an angel. The captain and officers who had been dispatched to re-capture them, if you will, now bring in and set them before the council. Note the verb *histemi* (to set), indicative not just of bringing but of making sure the apostles were placed squarely and firmly before the council. No escape this time, angel or not.

The high priest was summoned which means the situation was worthy of great concern. He reminded them of having been charged strictly, *paraggello* often associated with legal matters along with the noun *paraggelia* (an order, again judicially speaking). Use of the verb and the noun derived from it mirror the *histemi* or placing of the apostles...making sure they don't move and are subject to any proceedings that may follow.

Obviously the high priest, Caiaphas or the same one under whom Jesus had been condemned so recently, was fearful at the apostles having filled Jerusalem with their teaching. At this very early stage or shortly after Pentecost the teaching was rudimentary, fleshing out what so many people had known already about Jesus death and supposed coming back to life. Throw in the descent of the Holy Spirit, and you have a powerful mix to threaten the establishment.

Note that Peter is mentioned as separate as well as with the apostles when giving a response, he being the fearless spokesman of the group. It must have been more amazing since Peter was known to have denied association with Jesus in the court of the high priest (cf. Jn 18.15+). Now here was the same man speaking out in his name. Perhaps Caiaphas found special delight in making sport of the so-called leader of apostles who had denied his master. Peter's response by obeying God than man is the verb *peitharcho* or to obey those in

authority, a kind of retort to Caiaphas by reason of the root *arche* or beginning which applies to a head or ruler and hence intimating the high priest.

Peter (the other apostles included) elaborates upon *peitharcho* by referring to the “God of our fathers,” the same God whom Caiaphas represents in his exalted position. That puts the high priest directly responsible for Jesus’ death. Despite this, God had exalted Jesus (*hupsoo*, not specifically to raise up as from the death) as both leader and savior. *Archegos* as the former is a kind of hint of the obedience...the *peitharcho* with its root *arche*...at issue here. The reason for this? To give Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins, the former being *metanoia* often used for conversion.

Peter concludes by saying that we (first person plural or the apostles) are witnesses of these things, *rhema* fundamentally meaning a word that has been uttered and hence by God. Again the verb *peitharcho* is used as to obey, a way to make clear his position as well as to rub it in before the high priest. This, of course, outrages everyone and sets the stage for what happens next. Unfortunately the intervention of Gamaliel is not presented next Sunday except the conclusion or vs....s. 40-41 when his advice is taken.

Upon release, the apostles went right back to what they had been doing, teaching and preaching about Jesus Christ. Note the use of temple and home used in the same breath, as though both were one and the same, a kind of foreshadowing of the Christian transference of worship from the Jerusalem temple to homes and hence churches.

12 May, Fourth Sunday of Easter

4) but they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down...43) And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. 44) The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. 45) But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy and contradicted what was spoken by Paul and reviled him. 46) And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47) For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'" 48) And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49) And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. 50) But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of

the city and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district. 51) But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52) And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13.14, 43-52

The first verse is incomplete in that the previous one has Paul and his company having set sail from Paphos for Perga after John had left them. As for this passage, it's one of the most important in scripture insofar as it shows the precise between Judaism and what soon is to be called Christianity instead of the latter still being held as a branch or sect of the former.

“They” refers to Paul and his company who sat down in the local synagogue. This was customary, and they must have done it many times in other places before coming to Antioch. Actually it just very well might be their very last time in a synagogue, the way the drama is about to unfold. While doing so they must have thought of Jesus when he did the same at Nazareth as recorded in Lk 4.16+. In other words, that had become their model and pattern of behavior. Between this sitting down and the conclusion of the service nothing is recorded. The new group, welcomed not as strangers but as fellow Jews, must have taught about Jesus using examples from scripture as their master had done when in the Nazareth synagogue. At least for now they weren't driven out but encouraged to elaborate their message which resulted in a number of converts following Paul and Barnabas. However, that lasted for a mere week. Trouble lay ahead on the next sabbath.

In vs..... 43 the verb for speaking is *proslaleo*, the preposition *pros-* (signifying directness) suggests the convincing message. It's followed by another *pros-* verb, *prosmeno* or to remain-toward which, to be in the grace of God permanently and not move from it. Obviously this had an effect on other synagogue-goers, for the entire city of Antioch gathered to hear the word (*logos*) of God from Paul, Barnabas and other companions. All this within a mere week.

Despite this enormous impression in so short a time some Jews became jealous and began to contradict Paul as well as revile him. The verb for contradict here is *antilego* which can be taken as speaking against the *logos* of God, *lego* being the verbal root. Despite this, Paul and Barnabas responded boldly, *parresiazomai* which is the verbal root for *parresia*, freedom or boldness of speech which is the prerogative of a citizen of a city-state. The *parresia* here, of course, has its roots in faith in in preaching the *logos* of God (*logos*, of course, suggestive of Christ as *Logos*). However, in the words of vs..... 46 many thrust it away from themselves (*apothomai*, *apo-* as from), thereby willfully being defrauded of eternal life. With a sense of undisguised rejection, Paul and Barnabas call them as unworthy. Here is the precise point where they turn from the Jews to the Gentiles and set the church on a course that would alter it forever.

The two apostles next quote from Isaiah, possibly again having in mind that Jesus quoted from Isaiah in the synagogue which nearly got him killed. The passage is 49.6 which according to the original runs in full as “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Note the word “servant” which isn’t mentioned in the situation at hand but certainly inferred. That, of course, means Jesus Christ, and everyone realized it. We have no response from the Jews; again the incident at Nazareth may have come very close to being repeated. But with the Gentiles now fired up after hearing they were entitled to the same saving presence of God, at once they sprang to protect Paul, Barnabas and their companions.

Interestingly after this dramatic turn of events we have the rather prosaic words “the word (*logos*) of the Lord spread throughout all the region.” It should read more as “the word of the Lord exploded throughout all the region.” Actually the verb *diaphero* or to carry through (*dia-*) does a good job with the latter in mind. However, just as quickly the Jews started a persecution against Paul and Barnabas. The author is quick to note that such an incitement started at the hands of prominent women. What he’s trying to say is that at the root of this persecution is gossip instigated by rich women with plenty of time on their hands, clearly an un-PC remark to make. No problem, really, for Paul and company. Being filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, they simply made the traditional gesture of contempt and left. At this point nothing is said of the newly converted Gentiles, some if not many of whom must have accompanied them or tired to do so. That in itself must have been a new challenge Paul, Barnabas and company didn’t quite expect.

19 May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

21) When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23) And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. 24) Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25) And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; 26) and from there they sailed to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. 27) And when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28) And they remained no little time with the disciples. Acts 14.21-28

“That city” is Lystra where Jews had stoned Paul and left him for dead. Amazingly, Paul got up and returned though nothing is said of the reception he had received, if any. Apparently his disciples managed to keep him out of sight (not small task, given his character), not wanting to repeat what had just happened. Apparently some of the disciples persuaded him this wasn’t going to work, so he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

Note that the excerpt at hand uses the third person plural. Not a mention of Paul. Even though vs.... 20 says that Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe, we don’t know the identity of anyone else though most likely others accompanied the two. Also note that after having preached the Gospel in that town, they return to Lystra. Nothing is said of Paul’s reception. Perhaps even some thought he had returned from the dead and were terrified. This would be in accord with the people who earlier considered him Hermes after having cured a cripple.

Episterizo is the verb in vs.... 22 meaning literally to strengthen upon, the preposition *epi-* indicative of a certain intensification. Along with this verb the same verse has *parakaleo* or literally to summon alongside of (*para-*). Such *para-*ness takes the *epi-* of *episterizo* a step further for the purpose of having those whom the disciples are addressing to remain in the faith. The verb is *emmeno*, an intensification like *epi-* of *episterizo*, a remaining-in (*em-* or *en-*). The two verb are aimed at preparation for many tribulations before entering the kingdom of heaven.

Thlipsis or tribulation connotes a pressing in upon, a kind of squeezing. Without going into detail—those listening certainly must have Paul’s recent stoning in mind—they are a prerequisite for entry into the kingdom of heaven. Note the two uses of the preposition *eis*: one prefaced to the verb *eiserchomai* and the other free-standing, to enter into. Surely not all could take the prospect of future persecution though they must have been intrigued.

The disciples set up positions of leadership “in every church,” the verb being *cheirotoneo*, literally to elect by a show of hands. Once this had been completed, the disciples continue their missionary activity. Again, Paul isn’t mentioned. This silence almost is a kind of protection placed around him after nearly having lost his life at Lystra. Again, they return to that city after having covered considerable territory. Antioch was dear to the disciples by reason of having been commended to God’s grace. The verb is *paradidomai*, literally to give beside (second instance of *para-*) or to succeed not unlike receiving an inheritance. Here it’s used with *charis*, grace or favor by reason of the work the disciples had fulfilled. Such work or *ergon* means that which is wrought and includes the whole round of visits from Pisidia to Attalia noted in vs....s. 24-25 prior to arriving at Antioch.

In vs.... 27 note the use of two prepositions *para-* and *sun-* or beside and with: *paraginomai* and *sunago*, to arrive (along side or *para-*) and to gather. The first suggests a leading into the

second with regard to the church where “they” told of God’s deeds and used the analogy of a door of faith being opened to the Gentiles. It’s not clear whether the people “they” were addressing are Jews or Gentiles or most likely a mixture of both. If the Jews, this was further proof of the universality of the disciples’ message. If the Gentiles, a real source of delight at the prospect of people like themselves entering the faith. If Jews and Gentiles, proof that both groups could move forward together without hostility.

This excerpt concludes with the places mentioned in vs...s. 24 and 25 in mind, that is, of the need to be on the move as much as possible. The verb *diatribo* means to remain and literally runs as to rub through (*dia*-).

26 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

1) But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2) And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question...22) Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, 23) with the following letter: "The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting. 24) Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25) it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26) men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27) We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28) For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29) that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." Acts 15.1-2 & 22-29

The small word “but” (*kai*) is significant because it signals a change from the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles in 14.28 to those who were sticking to the Jewish custom of circumcision and demanding it of newcomers to the faith. *Ethos* is the word for custom as applied to Moses and signifies the norms he had established. The text at hand omits vs...s. 3-21 which deals with the admission of Gentiles to the budding church, still very much

identified with the Jewish religion. From there it jumps to a letter delivered through Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas as addressed to the Gentiles in Antioch and Cilicia.

A letter as in this case is intended to be read aloud, for example, when the new Christians were gathered for Sunday worship. vs.... 24 gets to the heart of the matter, namely, that reports had reached them concerning those who have caused trouble, *tarasso* meaning to throw into confusion. This was done through words, *logos* either as in written form or most likely as gossip. Also these so-called representatives “from us” or those in leadership positions had caused considerable unease, the verb being *anaskeuazo* which means reversing what had been done. Obviously implied is the missionary work under Paul’s direction. This was done without instruction, *diastellomai* inferring the giving of strict instructions. Interestingly no names are given throughout; everyone knew whom they were, and it seemed better to leave it as this. The last thing on everyone’s minds was scandal.

The letter continues to say that Barnabas and Paul will be sent along, they by now being well known which makes for assurance of a warm welcome. In fact, they have risked their lives, *psuche* being used which fundamentally means soul and here suggests their very being. Note too that Judas and Silas will communicate the same thing through word of mouth, these words suggestive of countering any false reports or rumors.

vs... 28 comes across with a rather general admonition inspired by the Holy Spirit to ask only what’s necessary, this being put as a burden or *baros*. Such a weight or load consists of the following three which are quite nitty-gritty. The key word is *apecho* or to refrain from:

- 1) Anything sacrificed to idols
- 2) From blood which includes animals that have been strangled
- 3) Unchastity or *porneia* which also means fornication as well as prostitution

So with this brief exhortation which largely implies staying away from non-Christian religious practices, those who follow them will do well or *diatereo*, the preposition *dia-* or through suggestive of careful observance. With these three in mind, perhaps those who have come “from us” were insinuating that it’s no problem to engage in pagan sacrifices. Then the letter ends simply with a farewell.

30 May, Ascension of the Lord

1) In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach 2) until the day when he was taken up after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3) To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them

during forty days and speaking of the kingdom of God. 4) And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father which, he said, "you heard from me, 5) for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 6) So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7) He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8) But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." 9) And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10) And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes 11) and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1.1-11

“First book” or first *logos*...word-as-expression, a fitting term for the Gospel or *logos* according to St. Luke. “First” implies that the book at hand is the second *logos*. The first *logos* dealt with the subject of all that Jesus (i.e., the *Logos*) began to do and to teach. *Archo* as to begin also means to rule, have governance over as well as to be the first principle that sets everything else in motion. Here that applies to *poieo* and *didasko*. There’s a specific time frame for these two which fits in with *archo* as to being their source, the day or the Ascension when Jesus ascended into heaven or rather, was taken up, *analambano*. Compare with Lk 24.51: he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” The verb is *anaphero* which is reminiscent of the ascent of Elijah. It’s preceded by Jesus parting from his apostles, *diistemi* not being like the separation of Elijah from Elisha in 2Kg 3.11: “Behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them.”

Prior to his ascension, Jesus gave a singular commandment to his apostles (*entellomai*) through the Holy Spirit which perhaps consists of what he had said during the Last Supper, something still very fresh in the minds of the apostles. So at this juncture he reminded them, possibly repeating much of what he had said then. As for these apostles—note vs.... 2 says that Jesus had chosen them—he presented himself to them after his resurrection. The verb here is *paristemi*, to stand beside or nearby, *para-*. During this time of forty days Jesus is engaged at giving proofs of being alive, *tekmerion* meaning that from which something is known for certain. Note the word “many” compared with the few which are recorded in the Gospels.

As well as giving “many” proofs, Jesus continues pretty much as he had done prior to his death and resurrection, that is, speaking of the kingdom of God, only now with a wholly different and charged meaning. There’s no record as to the apostles’ response. They remain pretty much ignorant as they had been and in need of the Holy Spirit which will come

shortly at Pentecost. Jesus was fully aware of this inveterate ignorance which is why he charged to them to remain in Jerusalem until they are baptized with the Holy Spirit. Analogous to this is Jesus having been baptized by John, something they could relate to. In this way the Spirit's descent wouldn't come as a total surprise.

vs... 6 is demonstrative of the apostles' continued ignorance, asking Jesus about him restoring the kingdom to Israel. Such ignorance is compounded by him having spoken of the kingdom of God in vs... 3. In other words, they simply didn't get it and were in dire need of being baptized, something they felt was necessary albeit vaguely. If Jesus weren't on the verge of ascending into heaven, he'd lay it on them thick. All the more the desire to get out and leave them in charge of the Holy Spirit.

As expected in response to the uninformed question of vs... 6, Jesus repeats the fact that the Holy Spirit will come upon the apostles, giving them power or *dunamis* (the capacity to carry out something) to become witnesses (*martus*). Again, they were virtually clueless at this point and had a lot to ponder until Pentecost some forty days hence.

vs... 9 has the verb *hupolambano* or taken up as from under (*hupo-*); compare with *analambano* and *anaphero* noted in the first paragraph, two verbs with the preposition *ana-* signifying motion upwards compared from below as with *hupo-*.

This excerpt concludes on a somewhat humorous note with two men in white robes¹ posing a rhetorical question with the intent of not receiving an answer. Why are the apostles looking into heaven? The verb is *blepo* (to have the power of sight) compared with two other verbs related to seeing. The first is *atenizo* with respect to gazing into heaven or to look with great intent and the second is *theaomai* or to behold as with a sense of wonder. *Theaomai* applies to seeing Jesus coming at a later time. In other words, *theaomai* with its sense of wonderment should have been applied when they saw Jesus ascending into heaven, not the fixity implied by *atenizo*. *Theaomai* will annul, if you will, this *atenizo* along with *blepo*.

2 June, Seventh Sunday of Easter

55) But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God 56) and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." 57) But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. 58)

1 Compare with Lk 24.4 concerning the women who visited Christ's tomb: "While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel." Then in vs.... 5 they pose a rhetorical question not unlike the one at hand, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59) And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60) And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7.55-60

The conjunctive *de* translated as “but” suggests something that had happened just before, and that is found in vs. 54. That verse also has *de* and is important to understand what follows: “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him.” *Diaprio* is the verb for enraged meaning to saw asunder (*dia-* or through), this being intensified by the noun *kardia* or heart which the RSV doesn’t translate. As for the grinding of teeth, it’s done literally “upon (*epi*) him (Stephen).”

As for Stephen being full (*pleres*) of the Holy Spirit, he mirrors 2.4 or the apostles at Pentecost: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (*Pneuma*).” Such fullness enabled Stephen to know his end was close as he gazed into heaven. The Greek text has the verb *huparcho* (*hupo*: from under) suggestive of this which usually translates as to begin; i.e., he began to gaze into heaven by way of being *pleres* of the *Pneuma*. Thus *hupoarcho* is used with *atenizo* or to gaze, to look intently. The adjective *atenes* which comes from this verb means strained, tight. Thus the alpha privative implies something negative but taken here in a positive sense: to gaze without extension in space and time. Stephen, of course, couldn’t do this without the *Pneuma*. Instead of joining him in this *atenizo*, his murderers refused outrightly and blocked their ears after which they rushed upon him. In a sense, it’d be easy for them to gaze in the same direction as Stephen, a missed opportunity which would work to their detriment.

Chances are that when Stephen was seized and dragged outside the city (Jerusalem), he was completely unaware of the violence being done to him. Once outside, the murderers laid their garments at the feet of Saul which is a sign of acknowledging his leadership and implication in the deed. Nothing is said of him being inside Jerusalem but most likely he was present, even led, those crying out, stopping their ears and rushing upon Stephen. Later in life he would compare his Damascus road conversion with Stephen’s *atenizo*, being haunted by it between now and then. Similarly, it’s possible that while Stephen was caught up in his vision Saul got a glimpse of Jesus in God’s glory, albeit fleetingly, but was as yet unable to acknowledge it. More accurately, he was aware of Jesus’ reverse *atenizo* at him, if you will. It was a sure sign that despite being involved so intensely in his persecution of the Christians, he was bound to become one of them.

At the point of death Stephen committed his *pneuma* or spirit to Jesus, having been filled with the divine *Pneuma*. Then like Jesus at his crucifixion, he asked forgiveness for those stoning him. The verb *histemi* for “hold” means not to have the sin of murder being held

fast or stand against those committing it. While Saul consented (*suneudokeo*: to have the pleasure with), perhaps he did so half-heartedly due to that fleeting *atenizo* by Jesus to him.²

9 June, Pentecost Sunday

1) Now the whole earth had one language and few words. 2) And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3) And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. 4) Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." 5) And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6) And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7) Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech." 8) So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9) Therefore its name was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11.1-9

This excerpt is taken from the Vigil Mass instead of the more familiar account of Pentecost from Acts of the Apostles. The notations are lifted from **Notes on the Book of Genesis**, also on this homepage.

Re. vs.1: Despite the detailed genealogies of Chapter Ten, these various groupings were united as far as language goes. To demonstrate this unity, note the similarity between whole earth (*kal-‘eret*) and one language (*saphah ‘echath*). To counter this unity, cf. the following references in the previous chapter (10): “These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language” [vs... 5]; “These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their languages” [vs... 20]; “These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages” [vs... 31]. Here is the first mention of language (*lashon*) in accord with Noah’s three sons. This term also means “tongue, “speech:” “A people of foreign speech (*lashon*) and hard tongue” [Ezk 3.5]. *Saphah* as used in 11.1 can mean “lip:” “But oh, that God would speak, and open his lips to you” [Job 11.5]. “Few words:” the adjective *‘echad* which basically means “first,” “one;” the latter is used in 1.5: “And there was evening and there was morning, one day (or ‘day one’).” The primeval unity of speech is soon to be lost; Christian tradition sees a recovery of this unity of speech in the Holy Spirit’s decent at Pentecost:” And how is it

² This part about Saul’s consent is 8.1 not included in today’s reading.

that we hear each of us in his own native language” [Acts 2.8]? Also cf. Rev 7.9-10: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!’”

Re. vs. 2: East (*qedem*): this direction is first mentioned in 2.8: “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east.” Also, it was the side of Eden from which God banished the man: “He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim (etc).” Perhaps this migration...it took place after the flood when Eden was destroyed...can be taken as a sign of the innate human tendency to reside as close to paradise lost as possible. Migrated (*nasah*): fundamentally, “to pull up” in the sense of breaking camp; it thus suggests temporary living as opposed to a permanent residence and here describes that movement from the east. I.e., people after the flood had been “camped” in the east and spread out to the three other cardinal points. “Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor” [35.16].

Plain (*biqhah*): from a verbal root meaning “to cleave” and hence, something lying in between two mountains or hills; it can also apply to a valley. “I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys” [Is 41.18]. In the verse at hand, *biqhah* is associated with the “land of Shinar” or Babylon; cf. 10.10: “The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech and Aaccad, all of them in the land of Shinar.” Reference here is to Nimrod, “the first on earth to be a mighty man” [10.8].

Settled (*yashav*): the opposite of *nasah*. Perhaps Shinar/Babylon was an approximation of the Garden of Eden even if dimly perceived. Note that 2.14 has one of the four branches of the river that flowed from Eden as the Euphrates (cf. 2.14), this area which had been chosen and can bridge the connection with Eden.

Re. vs. 3: “To one another” is literally expressed in the Hebrew text as “They said man to his neighbor” which signifies spontaneity or unity at the task about to be accomplished. The exclamation “Come” signals that the migrants have reached a place to settle down permanently. This permanence is expressed by the elements necessary for constructing a building, bricks and mortar. vs... 3 may be paralleled with the hard labor imposed upon the Israelites by the Egyptians in order to construct their buildings: “and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor” [Ex 1.14]. In contrast to this slave labor, the “Come” of vs... 3 represents free service.

Re. vs. 4: A continuation of the previous verse with another exhortation the newly arrived migrants expressed among each other, “Come.” Now that these people had bricks and mortar available they set about the task of building a city and tower; the Hebrew reads, “let us build to ourselves” which further expresses the desire for a permanent dwelling place. This is the third mention in Genesis of a city, the first associated with Enoch (cf. 4.17) and the second (10.11): “(Nimrod) built Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is, the great city.”

Tower (*migdal*): a structure erected along with the city, most likely in its center. This term is often used with regard to fortified cities and castles as well as a watchtower. “He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it” [Is 5.2]. Top (*ro’sh*): in the fundamental sense of “head” which extends into the heavens; the very first verse of Genesis has God making the heavens and the earth. Thus the heavens to can represent the attempt not so much to reach God by human means but the extreme or highest point of his creation. The plural “heavens” may be contrasted with the singular “heaven,” often used to denote God’s dwelling: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision” [Ps 2.4]...a verse which easily applies to the one under consideration. The construction of this city and tower has a two-fold purpose:

1) to obtain renown or “name:” “Children and the building of a city establish a man’s name, but a blameless wife is accounted better than both” [Sir 40.19].

2) to prevent the new migrants from reverting back to their nomadic way of life, that is, to avert being scattered (*puts*). Compare the use of this verb with 9.19: “These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.”

Re. vs. 5: Came down (*yarad*): in the sense of making a descent; cf. Ex 3.8 for a parallel sense and with the same verse: “and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land.” Both verses may be related to 3.8: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Here there is no divine descent; God is on the same horizontal plane, as it were, with Adam and Eve. *Yarad* suggests a greater distance from the human race; it is interesting to keep this verb in mind with regard to the upward-reaching tower which militates against the divine *yarad*. “To see,” an action by God after his descent; it is as though God were walking through the city on the same level with it and gazing up at the tower which he perceived as an affront to his divinity. “Sons of men:” as opposed to plain “men” as in vs... 2; “sons” intimates the earthly origins of the human race in comparison with God’s descent.

Re. vs. 6: The opening words of this verb may be seen as God speaking to himself, a biblical way of expression internal self-reflection in an outward fashion. Behold or hen thus serves to introduce this divine reflection by way of exclamation. One (*echad*): as in “few words” of

vs... 1 and the reference to 1.5 as to a fuller sense of this adjective. In the verse at hand, ‘*echad* is used with “people one” and “language one;” cf. vs... 1 for *lashon* or language.

Beginning (*chalal*): a verb is used here which reads in the Hebrew text, “this they began to do;” past tense in reference to the construction of a city and tower. Cf. 9.20 which uses *chalal*: “Noah was the first (i.e., ‘began’) tiller of the soil.” Propose (*zamam*): connotes murmuring, of proposing in an (often) negative sense: “The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him” [Ps 37.12]. *Zamam* is bound up with the something difficult or impossible to effect (*bastar*) as in Job 42.2 which follows the same structure but in a different sense: “I know that you (God) can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

Re. vs. 7: The conclusion of God’s address or self-reflection. Here we have the third and final “come:” 1) vs... 3 where men propose to make bricks; 2) vs... 4 where they propose to construct a city and tower and 3) the verse at hand. Note that vs... 5 already has the Lord having come down and as present within the city. vs... 7 continues this theme, as though he had returned to his own dwelling and returns again. “Let us” parallels that creative burst of 1.26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Also cf. 18.21 which is more pertinent to the sentiment of the verse at hand: “I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know.”

Confuse (*balal*): fundamentally, “to swallow down,” “to devour.” “You will not let me alone while I swallow down my spittle” [Job 7.19]. *Balal* also means to destroy as in Ps 21.10: “You will destroy their offspring from the earth and their children from among the sons of men.” The object of *balal* is “their language” or *saphah* which was one, ‘*echad* (vs... 1). In a broader sense, this verb is the exact opposite of the harmonizing principle expressed through the adjective; it creates, as it were a flood, of languages after the flood of water from which Noah and his family had recently emerged.

Understand (*shamah*): literally, “to hear.” Contrast this with the positive sense of hearing as in Dt 3.4, “Hear therefore, O Israel, the Lord our God is one (‘*echad*) Lord.” The about to be effected confusion is enhanced by the literal Hebrew text which reads, “not hear man the language of his neighbor.” I.e., the confusion is close and personal by this intimate form of human relationship. Speech: another used of *saphah*; compare with “language” of vs... 1.

Re. vs. 8: Scattered (*puts*): a verb with the same intent as “confuse” and “not understand” of vs... 7. *Puts* brings to fulfillment of the people’s fear which obliged them to build the city and tower, vs... 4: “lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” For another reference: “Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered” [Zech 13.7]. “From there” or the city and tower—two centers of unity and language—which are contrasted with “face of all the earth.”

The verse at hand says that the people ceased construction of the city; no mention is made of the tower (*migdal*) but may be implied by the verb left off or *chadal* since both rhyme. “Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I forbear” [1 Kg 22.6]? The preposition *l-* (to) prefixed to the verb “to build” heightens the sense of disruption with regard to constructing the city.

Re. vs. 9: Babel: the city’s name, not necessarily applied to the tower. When people migrated to the land of Shinar (vs... 1) they did not give a name to their city. The RSV says that Babel is interpreted as “gate of God” and became synonymous with the confusion of language (vs... 7, *balal*). Contrast “(language) of all the earth” with “face of all the earth,” the latter being the place to which the Lord scattered (*puts* again) the builders of the city and tower. “Through Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify her strong height, yet destroyers would come from me upon her, says the Lord” [Jer 51.53]. Also, “So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence and shall be found no more” [Rev 18.21]. Contrast this scattering with the divine injunction given to Noah and his sons right after the flood: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” Despite the scattering of people with one language, there is not mention that the city and tower are destroyed.

16 June, Trinity Sunday

22) The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. 23) Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24) When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25) Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; 26) before he had made the earth with its fields or the first of the dust of the world. 27) When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28) when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29) when he assigned to the sea its limit so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30) then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, 31) rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men. Proverbs 8.22-31

This excerpt is lifted from **Expansions on the Book of Proverbs** also on this homepage.

Re. vs. 22: Starting here and going through vs. 31 wisdom shifts direction, if you will, by speaking of her origins or with God before creation came into being. This is brought out by “at the beginning” or *re’shyth* . The verse at hand automatically makes one think of the

re'shyth of Gen 1.1. That *re'shyth* is unspecified, if you will ('in the beginning') whereas the one at hand is with respect to the Lord's "work" or *derek* (cf. vs. 13) which specifically means a road or way and hence reads "at the beginning of his way." This *derek* enhances the difference between when wisdom was created and the beginning of creation in Genesis. As for the verb "created," it is *qanah*, it is noted last in 4.7 and means to possess, to acquire. In other words, wisdom was already in existence but acquired by the Lord later on, "at the beginning of his *derek*" or way. A contrast between "first" and "of old" or *qedem* and *me'az*, the latter literally meaning "from then" which refers to the beginning at hand in this verse with regard to "acts" or *miphal*, the only use of this noun in the Bible. It derives from the verbal root *pahal* (to make, to fabricate). Thus the making of wisdom which took place at the beginning of his work was immediately prior to it. This protracted interlude through vs. 31 is intended to set the stage for wisdom to address her sons in vs. 32, to make them listen to her through the remainder of Chapter Eight. One can only imagine Solomon sitting on the sidelines, as it were, the most eager listener to wisdom.

Re. vs. 23: Three modes of time stretching back to before human life: 1) "Ages ago" or *hulam* prefaced with the preposition *min* or "from:" "from ages" "When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever" [19.25]. 2) "At the first" or *r'osh* and prefaced with the preposition *min* or "from the first (head)." 3) "Before the beginning" or *qedem* prefaced with *min* or "from the beginning" or literally as "from that which was before," *qedem* differing from *re'shyth* of vs. 22 as being more temporal whereas the latter, a noun, is suggestive almost as a place-where. In the verse at hand, *qedem* is associated with *'erets* or "earth." This earth is more localized than the Lord's "work" of vs. 22 and the beginning of Genesis. *Nasak* is the verb "set up," the only instance in Proverbs and refers to pouring out as a libation or the anointing of a king. "For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes, the prophets" [Is 29.10]. Because *nasak* is fluid, the idea in Proverbs is that wisdom "was set up" with regard to the just mentioned three time frames but continues to be set up...poured forth.

Re. vs. 24: *Chul* is the verb from "brought forth" as in the next verse, a way to emphasize the birth of wisdom prior to creation. "The north wind brings forth rain; and a backbiting tongue, angry looks" [25.23]. *Tehom* and *mahyan* are the nouns for "depths" and "springs" The former are mentioned prior to creation in Gn .12 and the latter for the first time with regard to Noah's flood (cf. Gn 7.11). In the verse at hand *mahyan* are "abounding" or *kavad* with water, that is, heavy with water (cf. 7.23). Because the flood associated with Noah take place after creation, the *mahyan* are manifestations within creation of the *tehom* which caused the earth to become flooded.

Re. vs. 25: The verb *chul* is used again, this time with regard to both mountains and hills. *Chul* with regard to wisdom is contrasted with these two which "had been shaped" or *tavah*, the only use of this verb in Proverbs which means to seal as well as to be plunged. "Now

that your feet are sunk in the mire, they turn away from you” [Jer 38.22]. One gets the impression that the mountains and hills were sunk deeply, if you will, within the earth, an image of an incredibly long period of time.

Re. vs. 26: *Had-lo'*: “before” or literally “still not” or “not yet” which differs from *qedem* of vs. 23, “before.” While both refer to wisdom’s pre-existence to creation, the former intimates a kind of distance between God thinking about creation and their coming into being whereas the latter intimates a time just prior to their coming into being. *Hasah* is the verb for “made” and of all the verbs between vss.22 and 31 is the only one pertaining to actual making. The other verbs apply to creation as already fashioned, of being arranged in one way or another. *Chuts* is translated here as “with its fields” which the RSV says is “uncertain” and can be rendered something as “nor the fields.” *R’osh* is the noun for “first” and suggests the beginning or first principle of something. In the verse at hand, *r’osh* pertains to “dust” or *haphar*, the only mention of this noun in Proverbs. “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground” [Gn 2.7]. *Tevel* pertains more to the inhabited world compared with *’erets* which often refers to a country belonging to a particular group of people. Is 14.21 contains both: “Lest they (sons of evildoers) rise and possess the earth and fill the face of the world with cities.”

Re. vs. 27: *Kun* is the verb for “established” and used with respect to the “heavens” (*shamaym*) and is reminiscent of Gn 1.7-8 which there is also called “firmament” or *raqyah* meaning that which is spread out. And so wisdom is not unlike the *Ruach* of God “hovering over the face of the waters” [Gn 1.2]. The verse at hand doesn’t intimate that wisdom had a hand in creation but was an observer of all that was transpiring. *Chaqaq* is the verb for “drew” here is with regard to a “circle” or *chug*, one of three biblical references and refers to the vault of the sky as well as the horizon. “Thick clouds enwrap him so that he does not see, and he walks on the vault of heaven” [Job 22.14] (the other reference is Is 40.22). The drawing at hand is done “on the face of the deep” or *tehom* which means that wisdom was present when the Lord brought order from the chaos of *tehom*, again hearkening back to the first verses of Genesis.

Re. vs. 28: *Amats* is the verb for “made firm” and suggests that the skies required being strong enough so as not to dissipate. “She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong” [31.17]. In the verse at hand, *amats* concerns the “skies” or *shachaq* more specifically, clouds. At the other extreme of creation, if you will, are the “fountains” or *hayin* which also means eye. Note the difference from *mahyan* (‘springs’) in vs. 24, but both are from the same verbal root. In the verse at hand, *hayin* are associated with *tehom* (cf. vs. 27). They are “established” or *kun* as with the heavens in the previous verse.

Re. vs. 29: *Sum* is the verb for “assigned” and means more a placing or setting, almost on a pre-arranged site or spot. It has the preposition *b-* (‘in’) prefaced to it reading literally “in

setting.” The other Proverbs reference is 30.26: “The badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the rocks.” In the verse at hand, this setting is with regard to the “limit” or *choq* which means an appointed time or portion. “Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful (*choq*) for me” [30.8]. *Choq* serves to prevent the waters of the deep mentioned in the last verse from transgressing or *havar*, that is to go over or go past the Lord’s “command” or *peh* and fundamentally means mouth. Thus the *choq* at hand is not allow primeval waters to pass over the Lord’s mouth, putting it literally but awkwardly. *Chaqaq* is the verb for “marked out” and is used with regard to *mosadoth* (feminine plural), the only use of this noun in Proverbs. In virtually all the other references *mosadoth* refers to basic elements of creation such as the earth: “All the foundations of the earth are shaken” [Ps 82.5].

Vs. 30: ‘*Etsel* or “then” was noted last in 7.12 which in the verse at hand refers to the various uses of “when” (*b-*) prior to creation. However, nothing in those verses is said of wisdom being a “master workman” or ‘*amon*, the only biblical use of this term which derives from the verbal root ‘*aman* (to believe, to trust) and is not unlike the noun ‘*emun* found in 13.17 (and 14,5, 20.6): “A bad messenger plunges men into trouble, but a faithful envoy brings healing.” In the verse at hand, the word “like” is not used; wisdom is the ‘*amon*. *Shahshuhym* is the noun (masculine plural) for “delight” which is found in the next verse and derives from the verbal root *shahah* (to stroke, to delight). “Your testimonies are my delight, they are my counselors” [Ps 119.24]. “Daily” is expressed by *yom yom* or literally “day day.” It is used with “delighting” or *sachaq* fundamentally meaning to laugh and noted last in 1.26. The Hebrew text lacks both “his” and “rejoicing.” “Always” is expressed by “in all times” or *heth* noted last in 6.14.

Re. vs. 31: With this verse wisdom completes her statement begun in vs. 22 as a special companion of the Lord, and his name has not been mentioned specifically since that verse. *Sachaq* is the verb for “rejoicing” used in the previous verse and stated again for emphasis with regard to wisdom “laughing” or enjoying herself as an ‘*aman* (cf. vs. 30). It is used with regard to the Lord’s “world” or *tevel* (cf. vs. 26) which here is joined with “world” or ‘*erets* (cf. vs. 26).

Compare *sachaq* with *shahshuhym* (‘delighting’) as used in the previous verse as well which refers to the “sons of men” (‘*adam*). While wisdom may so delight in men, there is no reference here as to men rejoicing in wisdom. Three modes of time stretching back to before human life: 1) “Ages ago” or *hulam* prefaced with the preposition *min* or “from:” “from ages” “When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever” [19.25]. 2) “At the first” or *r’osh* noted last in 1.21 and here also prefaced with the preposition *min* or “from the first (head).” 3) “Before the beginning” or *qedem* (cf. vs. 22) prefaced with *min* or “from the beginning” or literally as “from that which was before,” *qedem* differing from *re’shyth* of vs. 22 as being more temporal whereas the latter, a noun, is

suggestive almost as a place-where. In the verse at hand, *qedem* is associated with *'erets* or "earth" (cf. 3.19). This earth is more localized than the Lord's "work" of vs. 22 and the beginning of Genesis. *Nasak* is the verb "set up," the only instance in Proverbs and refers to pouring out as a libation or the anointing of a king. "For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes, the prophets" [Is 29.10]. Because *nasak* is fluid, the idea in Proverbs is that wisdom "was set up" with regard to the just mentioned three time frames but continues to be set up...poured forth.

23 June, Corpus Christi

18) And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. 19) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; 20) and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" Genesis 14.18-20

This excerpt is lifted from **Expansions on the Book of Genesis**, also on this homepage.

There is a redeeming aspect to this rescue of Lot and handing him over to the king of Sodom through the medium of Melchizedek, king of Salem who "brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God the Most High" [vs. 18]. As his very name intimates ('righteousness is my king'), Melchizedek is very different from the anonymous king of Sodom, being a priest (*kohen*) besides. This is the first mention of "priest" in the Bible, and Melchizedek is an archetype of priests that will follow in his footsteps. Not only was Melchizedek a priest but was one of "God the Most High (*helyon*)."¹ He received this honor from the Lord which was included in the land of Canaan set aside for Abram. If the Lord can make Canaan as Abram's future inheritance, it's just as easy for him to insert only one king who held righteousness in high regard and who would recognize Abram as the future inheritor. Thus Melchizedek is similar to Enoch and Noah before him, two men singled out for having walked with God while the multitude among which they had lived hadn't a clue as to what was going on. The Epistle to the Hebrews puts this divine walking in terms not dissimilar to that theme: "He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life" [7.3]. By comparison, the king of Sodom brought no offering to Abram; he could have been a priest but certainly not of God Most High, given the already tarnished reputation of his city. Salem refers to *shalom* or peace and refers to the future Jerusalem where Melchizedek reigned. Surely from that high vantage point he and his subjects were able to witness the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that was to come. The offerings of Melchizedek (bread and wine) are modest but significant insofar as they are representative of that the fruit of that land Abram was to inherit, especially Salem which later would become so important.

In vss. 19-20 the king/priest Melchizedek blessed (*barak*; cf. 9.1 where God blesses Noah and his sons) Abram and does so by “God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” This short but significant *barak* has the preposition *l-* prefaced to “God.” That is to say, it reads literally “to God,” that Abram is “to” him, a direct relationship with God, the first divine relationship acknowledged by a person. Despite the summons to leave his native Haran, take the journey into Canaan and then unexpectedly flee into Egypt and back to Canaan, Abram received no confirmation from a fellow human being about this mission. That means Abram had to live by the initial divine summons even though it was re-confirmed while in Canaan. How does Abram share this...or can he? Is there anyone among his family who can comprehend his actions such as erecting an altar? And so Abram is not unlike his predecessor Noah who pretty much kept to himself. The person closest to him is his nephew Lot though he emerges more as an opportunist or hanger-on to Abram than anything else. Even his first rescue just recounted and his more dramatic one from Sodom later on isn’t especially flattering.

Returning to the blessing of vs. 19, we have for “maker” (of heaven and earth) the verb *qanah* which more fundamentally means to acquire, to purchase, as noted earlier with reference to the proper name Cain. In the verse at hand, *qanah* implies that God had acquired heaven and earth meaning that it pre-existed or was just as eternal as he and thus sharing in some type of divine life. It’s a sentiment not entirely unlike the Spirit hovering over the waters in the opening verses of Genesis discussed in that context. We can expect someone like Melchizedek and his predecessors to have an idea like this, quite in line with a proper understanding of the biblical divinity for a person; he and they had lived in relative isolation yet kept the primeval understanding of God alive throughout so many generations. While Melchizedek lacks genealogy (cf. Heb 7.3 already cited), definitely he is a descendant from one of Noah’s three sons and had maintained some semblance of the Lord with whom Noah had walked. That means his descendants going back that far managed to keep alive a spark of divine awareness. Just the fact that human relations with God became so problematic due to the increase of sin and corruption is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in which Abram found himself. At the same time this narrow focus upon a single individual here and there within Genesis is exciting, the reason why it captures our attention.

The second half of Melchizedek’s blessing is a reminder to Abram not to glory in his recent triumph of having rescued Lot but to attribute it to the Lord: “Blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” *Magan* is the verb for “deliver” which occurs two other times in the Bible, Prov 4.9 and Hos 11.8; from it is derived the noun “shield.” In the context at hand Melchizedek wishes Abram to acknowledge that God had acted as his shield...perhaps not so much to destroy his enemies but to protect him from them which accounts for the lack of details concerning how Abram got Lot (i.e., by not

slaying his captors). That would tie in nicely with Abram's earlier division of his forces into two parties, a division that took place deliberately at night or in secret. In sum, Abram would snatch Lot away under cover of darkness with his captors being unaware of what had transpired.

Abram's meeting with Melchizedek took place with the intent of handing over Lot to the jurisdiction of the king of Sodom in whose territory he had resided (cf. 13.12). Once Abram gave him a tenth of his possessions—and this was no mean sum chiefly consisting of animals and perhaps slaves—Melchizedek was overstepped by the king who was observing closely the blessing just pronounced. He intervenes with “Give me the persons but take the goods for yourself” [vs. 21]. Melchizedek is forced out of the picture by the king who demanded Abram's possessions or *rekush* noted in vs. 12: “they also took Lot...and his goods and departed.” As for the word “persons,” the Hebrew has *nephesh* or literally, “soul” which pertains to breath, a fact noted earlier in this document. And so we see a distinction here, one not found in vs. 12, between *rekush* and persons. This king wanted human beings, not *rekush*, to bring back to Sodom for reasons all too easily associated with the name of the city. Since he had the power to do what he wanted and Melchizedek was unable to counter him, the situation became tense very quickly. Melchizedek didn't want to do the king's bidding, trying his best to prevent the handover of these persons...*nephesh*...into his possession. Because *nephesh* implies the very essence of a person, the king wanted to put his intended prey totally under his control and his alone. By saying to Abram that the Lord “has delivered your enemies into your hand,” he was hoping that Abram would get the hint, that one of these enemies was the king of Sodom, a man never to be trusted.

So here we have Melchizedek and the king of Sodom, two diametrically opposed characters, coming out to meet Abram, each with a different purpose. Melchizedek takes the initiative by pronouncing his blessing, thereby hoping to work in Abram's favor. Although his words sounded noble in comparison with the king, his offerings of bread and wine must have looked pathetic to such an ignominious character. Both the blessing and offering didn't work because the king of Sodom had his mind set on taking *nephesh*, not *rekush*. Then we have Lot who remains silent awaiting the fate that will be meted out to him shortly. Vss. 22-23 break the tension of this short but tense situation, a struggle between Abram and a less than desirable representative of the land he had entered and was destined to inherit. Abram says to the king of Sodom with confidence, most likely emboldened by his recent expedition to rescue his nephew, Lot, “I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” The verb for “sworn” is *rum* which fundamentally means to exalt, lift up, and here pertains to the lifting up of Abram's hands in worship. “I have lifted up my voice and cried” [39.15]. That is to say, Abram lifts up his

hands to the “acquirer (*qanah*) of heaven and earth,” this word being used by Melchizedek in his blessing.

28 June Sacred Heart of Jesus

11) "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. 12) As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13) And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14) I will feed them with good pasture and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15) I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. 16) I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. Ezekiel 34.11-16

Excerpt is from **Expansions on the Book of Ezekiel**, also on this homepage.

Vss. 11-16 begin with the third instance of “thus says the Lord” in this chapter, the current words coming on the heels of the previous use in vs. 10. While the Lord still has the shepherds of Israel in mind, in a sense we could say that he has turned away from them. Now he decides to take matters into his own hand, words with which Jesus as well as his listeners must have been familiar. Because the passage (Jn 10.7-18) where Jesus calls himself Good Shepherd has direct bearing on this section, it’s inserted here:

7) So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8) All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. 9) I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12) He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13) He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. 14) I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, 15) as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16) And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. 17) For this reason the Father loves me,

because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. 18) No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father."

In vs. 11 the Lord says that he will both search and seek out his sheep, not those of the shepherds though the flock is the same. The two verbs here are *darash* and *baqar*, the former also means to tread and the latter is an intense form of seeking as in plowing up the earth. In fact, the noun for oxen and cattle (same spelling) is derived from it, these cloven footed animals noted for digging...plowing...up the land in their search for food. "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" [Ps 27.4].

Vs. 12 has a second use of *baqar* with "when some of sheep" have been scattered, the words in parentheses literally as "when he is among (*betok*, cf. 33.33) his sheep." Such sheep have been scattered, *parash* (cf. 17.20 but not noted there). They got lost on a day of clouds and thick darkness, "day" meaning more an occasion which can refer to the flock's neglect by the shepherds. As for the latter, the noun is *haraphel* as in Ex 20.21: "And the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."

Vs. 13 speaks of sheep having been scattered among peoples and countries (*ham* and *'erets* cf. 11.17 and 22.29 respectively), most likely due to the neglect of their rulers. The Lord will gather them from these far-off places and return them to their own land or *'adamah* (cf. 25.3) where accent is upon the physical sense of place which gives the Israelites a greater sense of belonging. Once there, the Lord will feed them, *rahaq* being the word to pasture as in vs. 2 and will this more specifically in two places: 1) upon Israel's mountains where are located fountains or *'aphyq* (cf. 32.6 but not noted there) and 2) in inhabited places, the two being extremes of isolation and habitation.

Vs. 14 continues with the theme of the Lord pasturing his people, words which later would be remembered in terms of Psalm Twenty-Three. Like the passage from John's Gospel above, this psalm is given in full:

1) The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; 2) he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; 3) he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. 6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Vss. 14 and 15 stand out by reason of the verb *ravats* (cf. 19.1) used twice and also mirrored in vs. 2 of Psalm Twenty-Three above which is typical of quadrupeds which put their legs under their bodies when laying down. To do this means that the animal feels completely secure. Note that *ravats* in vs. 15 has a certain force, if you will, by reason of hiphil which means to cause...to cause to lay down. Due to the abuse suffered under shepherds or rulers, the Israelites-as-sheep were reluctant to do this and had, to some extent, be compelled to lay down. Furthermore, the Lord will seek the lost and care for the wounded while the fat and strong he will destroy as vs. 16 has it literally, *shamad* (cf. 14.9) being the verb which connotes laying waste. All this care for the sheep is summed up by true meaning of *rahah*, that is, with regard to justice or *mishpat* (cf. 23.24).

Mention of the destruction of fat and strong sheep in the previous verse sets the tone for a change as brought on by both “as for you” and “thus says the Lord in vs. 17. The flock at hand comprises the entire nation of Israel, shepherds and sheep, they being divided into sheep, rams and he-goats, the latter two being representative of the leaders. There comes to mind the Great Judgment as depicted in Matthew Chapter Twenty-Five: “Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” [vs. 32]. Such is the judgment foreshadowed in the section at hand where the Lord will judge (*shaphat*, cf. 30.19) between these. He addresses the rams and he-goats with a rhetorical question, as to why they didn’t share good pasture and water, following them with their feet. That means they haven’t learned to *ravats* as with the sheep noted in vs. 14.

30 June, Thirteen Sunday in Ordinary Time

16) and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. 17) And him who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. 18) Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." 19) So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him. 20) And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" 21) And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and slew them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah, and ministered to him. 1 Kings 19.16-21

Excerpt is taken from **Expansions on First Kings**, also on this homepage.

In vs. 15 things take a turn for the unexpected. Despite the manifestation of Elijah's close-mindedness, the Lord isn't fazed because he has in mind something much larger. His prophet set in motion a process where the people of Israel reconsidered their relationship with the Lord after the powerful divine display on Mount Carmel. However, that incident leaves us with a certain ambivalence. Will they stay with the Lord or once the excitement dies down and Jezebel starts to wield her influence, will they revert to the worship of Baal? That's what hangs in the balance.

The unexpected turn consists in the Lord having Elijah going to Damascus with the intent of anointing Hazael as king of Syria followed immediately by anointing Jehu as king over Israel. Despite both being arch-enemies, Elijah concurs to being an instrument of the Lord apparently without asking questions as to why this is so. Perhaps he was too embarrassed by his experience on Mount Horeb to ask the Lord. He was, to be sure in a delicate position of dealing with two arch enemies. In addition to these two rival monarchs, Elijah is to anoint someone hitherto unknown to become prophet in his place, Elisha. Again, no questioning on Elijah's part, his obedience to the Lord working in his favor. Note that the formal process of anointing (*mashach*, cf. 2.34) applies equally to kings and to prophets. Although Elijah was sent for this purpose, but it turned out that a delegate of Elisha is the one who did the anointing as recounted in Chapter Nine of Second Kings.

As for the hostile relationship between Hazael and Jehu, if a subject of one tries to make good his escape to the other, he will be put to death. Thus a vicious cycle is established which seems inescapable, all brought about by Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord who saw clearly through the people's superficial conversion on Carmel. On the plus side, the Lord will spare seven thousand in Israel who haven't gone over to Baal, again inferring the influence of Jezebel. As for worship of Baal, it's put in terms of kissing him, that is, a mouth kissing an image of some kind.

In vs. 19 Elijah departs "from there" which seems at odds with having been at a place called Abel-meholah, the home of Elisha. At odds in the sense that Elijah had been anointed prophet-to-be there and now comes across him plowing a field. Immediately Elijah passes by (*havar*, cf. vs. 11) and casts over Elisha his mantle, this '*adereth* being the very same garment with which he had covered himself when approaching the cave's entrance (cf. vs. 13).

As with all these verses, vs. 20 begins with the conjunctive *v-* to show the quick paced action at hand. Elisha asks to kiss his parents before going off on an unknown mission with Elijah to which he responded, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" This unexpected question seems to be a kind of test. However, it failed to stymie Elisha who

proceeded to slay his twelve oxen, a way of manifesting his resolve. Not only did he accomplish that, he gave the meat to his people.

7 July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

10) "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; 11) that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory." 12) For thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her hip and dandled upon her knees. 13) As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. 14) You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies. Isaiah 66.10-14

Excerpt is from **Expansions on the Book of Isaiah**, also on this homepage.

Vs. 10: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her;

Samach (cf. 56.7) and *gyl* (cf. 65.19) or "rejoice and be glad," the latter with the preposition *b-* prefaced to "her" or literally, "in her." Both have as their object those who "love" Jerusalem, *ahav* (cf. 61.8).

Sus (cf. 65.19) and *masus* (cf. 65.18) or "rejoice and joy." This command is aimed toward those who are mourning over Jerusalem, *aval* (cf. 61.3).

Vs. 11: that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory."

Those whom the Lord begins to address in the previous verse here are likened not to children but even younger, babes at the breast. *Savah* is the verb for "be satisfied" (cf. 58.11) which comes from Jerusalem's "consoling" breasts or *tanchumym*, a noun which is rendered literally as "breasts of consolation." It has two other biblical references, Ps 94.19 and Jer 16.7, the former being cited here: "When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul."

Matsats or "drink deeply" is the only occurrence in the Bible and suggests milking out. It is to be done "with delight" or *hanag* (cf. 58.14), a verb which implies neighing like a horse.

Jerusalem's "glory" or *kavod* (cf. 62.2) is not unlike her two breasts just mentioned. From them or more accurately, from their "abundance" or *zyz* those mentioned in vs. 10 are to drink deeply. *Zyz* pertains to anything moving or an abundance and has two other biblical references, Ps 50.11 and Ps 80.13, the former being cited here: "and all that moves in the field is mine."

Vs. 12: For thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her hip and dandled upon her knees.

This is the last "Thus says the Lord" in the Book of Isaiah, so it requires close attention. Furthermore, it's followed by *hineh* (cf. 65.17) or "behold."

Natah (cf. 55.3) and *shalom* (60.20) or "extend and prosperity," use the image of a river. Similar to this example is that of a stream which is "overflowing" or *shataph* noted last in 43.2 as consuming with regard to wealth coming from nations or those subject to Israel.

The last three verbs pertain to a babe, the third being "dandled" or *shahah* (cf. 29.9).

Vs. 13: As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Nacham (cf. 61.2) is the verb for "comforts," hwew in the motherly sense and is applicable to the Lord as well as Jerusalem. In other words, *nacham* suggests that the people are not there yet, possibly in exile, a fact which hasn't come to the fore until now.

Vs. 14: You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.

Rejoicing follows upon seeing or *sus* (cf. vs. 10) upon *yare'* (cf. 64.3). Such rejoicing is more specified, if you will, by the people's bones flourishing or *parach* (cf. 45.8) which connotes sprouting. Such will be indicators of the Lord's presence with his servants and "indignation" against his foes, *zahan* (cf. 30.27).

14 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

10) If you obey the voice of the Lord your God to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with

all your heart and with all your soul. 11) "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. 12) It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?' 13) Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?' 14) But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it. Deuteronomy 30.10-14

Excerpt is from **Expansions on the Book of Deuteronomy** also on this homepage. Vs. 9 is included because vs. 10 is part of it.

Vs. 9 has the word “prosper” twice, the first being the verb *yatar* (cf. 28.11) and the second the adjective *tov* or good, the latter having the verb *sus* or rejoice (cf. 28.63) just as he had done with Israel’s fathers. Vs. 10 adds the triad, if you will, of *shamah*, *qol* and *shamar* plus adding a turning (*shuv*) to the Lord with both *levav* and *nephesh*. Although Israel may find this initially difficult, in vs. 11 the Lord is quick to add that the commandment at hand is not hard, that is, neither far off nor in heaven which is countered by bringing it, hearing it and doing it. Third mention of “the day” in vs. 11 also helps by reason of its immediacy. The same applies to being beyond the sea (i.e., the Mediterranean). Instead, the commandment put in terms of *davar* in vs. 14 is *qarvov* (cf. 22.2 but not noted there) or near in the sense of being at hand. That is to say, this *davar* is both in Israel’s mouth and heart (*levav*, cf. vs. 10).

Vs. 15 contains the fourth “the day” where the Lord sets or gives (*natan*, cf. vs. 1) the two pairs of life and good, death and evil. The fifth “the day” in vs. 16 speaks of obeying, loving, walking and keeping which will result in Israel flourishing in the land of Canaan. Nevertheless, in vs. 17 the Lord is fully aware this could go awry by Israel’s collective heart (*levav*, cf. vs. 14) turning away, not hearing and being drawn (*nadach*, cf. vs. 4) to worship other gods plus serving them. Then in vs. 18, sixth mention of “the day,” Israel will perish. The Lord uses heaven and earth, up and down, as witness to this, *hod* (cf. 8.19) being associated with the seventh and final “the day.” That is to say, Israel is to choose life over death, death being equated with alien divinities.

Vs. 20 concludes Chapter Thirty by the need of Israel to both love, obey and cleave to the Lord, ‘*ahav*, *shamah* and *davaq* (cf. vss. 6, 8 and 28.21 respectively). All three in turn will allow Israel to at last settle or better, re-settle, in the same land as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

21 July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1) And the Lord appeared to him (Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2) He lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth 3) and said, "My Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4) Let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5) while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6) And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it and make cakes." 7) And Abraham ran to the her, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servan, who hastened to prepare it. 8) Then he took curd, and milk and the calf which he had prepare, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. 9) They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." 10) The Lord said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Genesis 18.1-10

Excerpt is from **Expansions on the Book of Genesis** also on this homepage.

“And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day” [vs. 1]. This simple word (‘and’ or *v*) prefaced to the verb *ra’ah* (to see) was noted earlier as an indication of continuous action and here has special meaning for Abraham. It serves to tie in a “seeing” by the Lord, one of a number thus far, with that which the future patriarch has become very familiar. That is to say, his private thoughts, akin to “here-we-are-again-with-another-divine-promise-not-fulfilled,” caught him at a place where he had built an altar to the Lord: “and he came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre which are at Hebron” [13.18]. Perhaps by returning to the altar Abraham might renew one of his earlier contacts with the Lord and see what would happen. So here was Abraham sitting at the entrance to his tent staring at the altar with all the earlier memories of divine encounters passing through his mind. Sarah isn’t mentioned but was within the tent; undoubtedly she had similar thoughts of past events and was not pregnant despite a divine promise. The two didn’t wish to talk with each other, let alone be in each other’s presence, hence the separation. Abraham might have quarreled with his wife about all this so decided that the heat outside the tent was better than the heat inside which their argument had produced. Between his building of the altar and the present Abraham had moved about Canaan, sticking pretty close to Mamre; he was almost a hundred years old and not in a position to move about as freely as before. As with earlier appearances, the Lord had to make himself known—seen (*ra’ah*)—quite clearly due to Abraham’s failing eyesight. As for the “door,” the Hebrew *petach* refers to an entrance and not necessarily a physical door, something not associated with a tent.

“Heat of the day” applies to the time between noon and four in the afternoon, a time when desert dwellers seek refuge from the sun. During these mid-afternoon hours mirages appear on the horizon, so Abraham may have thought the Lord appearing to him was such a mirage. The earlier divine appearances at this point must have appeared equivalent to a mirage both to Abraham and Sarah simply because they weren’t fulfilled. They were too elderly to return to Haran and were stuck in this foreign land of Canaan and worst of all, without an heir. In order to make sure Abraham didn’t mistake the appearance for a mirage, the Lord came in the form of three men who “stood in front of him” [vs. 2]. One would have been taken as a mirage and two as seeing double but three was an unmistakable physical presence. First of all, Abraham “lifted up his eyes”...he lifted up his now ancient eyes, barely able to see, a difficulty compounded by the sun shimmering all around him at the hottest time of day. While making this gesture, Abraham “looked” which is the verb *ra’ah* as used in vs. 1, “appeared.” Immediately afterwards comes “behold” or *hineh* which had been noted earlier as applicable to a sudden astonishment. *Hineh* serves to introduce the three visitors who stood “in front of him,” the preposition being *hal* or better, “upon him.” *Hal* gives the impression that Abraham was pressed down and had to raise his eyes (literally) to see them on top of him. Vs. 2 continues with a second sentence: “Abraham ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth.” What was Abraham thinking when he ran? His first thought was to distinguish reality from a mirage, and the running suggests that he favored the first. It was unusual to see people out and about during this time with the sun directly overhead. Bowing to the ground was a customary greeting and in this particular instance, with the shimmering heat and Abraham’s dim vision, acknowledgment that the visitors were no mirage. *Shachah* is the verb at hand and often used for worship of God: “they bowed their heads and worshiped” [Ex 4.31].

Vs. 3 follows as part of the previous verse with “My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.” Abraham uses the singular ‘*adony* for “lord” despite three men being present. Some Christian commentators say that this applies to the one Lord and three persons of the Trinity but chances are it’s due, as noted above, to the time of day when mirages and reality can be confused with reality. While face down on the ground Abraham bids him...them...not to pass by but to stay. In addition to *shachah* as a sign of respect, it might reveal some fear and doubt concerning the three men. Who would be walking in the desert at the hottest time of day? Were they up to no good? Secretly Abraham was wishing the men would pass him by and go somewhere else, but desert hospitality compelled him to act otherwise. To play it safe, Abraham bids his unexpected visitors “to rest under the tree.” Sarah was alone inside the tent, and he didn’t want her to be exposed to these suspicious men in case they posed a threat. While Abraham busied himself getting some refreshment, he had one ear cocked to the tree in an attempt to listen in on their conversation but to no avail. They remained silent as where they came from

and to where they were going; Abraham complied with their silence and let it go at that. As for his invitation to take some rest, the verb is *sahad* which connotes a propping up or upholding. “You have given me the shield of your salvation and your right hand supported me” [Ps 18.35]. The image fits well, for it’s easy to imagine the three visitors under the tree leaning on their traveling staffs.

Vs. 5 continues with Abraham saying tongue-in-cheek “and after that you may pass on.” In other words, I will take care of you during this the hottest time of day but will be delighted when you leave both me and my wife Sarah. To his relief they said, “Do as you have said.” In other words, “prepare us some refreshment after which we will be on our way.” That’s why Abraham went to such great lengths at having Sarah and a servant prepare a meal despite the intense heat: cakes, a tender calf, curds and milk. To do this was no mean feat on sudden notice which meant the three men had to wait in the tree’s shade a good part of the afternoon. During that time Abraham kept himself busy—not so much that because others were doing the work—with a feigned busyness so as to avoid contact with his visitors as much as possible. We don’t hear about Hagar nor her son Ishmael at this point, but both must have been in the vicinity. Hagar could have approached the mysterious visitors and asked if they knew that angel who intervened on her behalf (cf. 16.7). Perhaps it was one of them. Surely one was responsible but wished to keep this secret from Abraham lest he find out and make life miserable for her. As for the hasty preparation of food, it concludes with “he (Abraham) stood by them under the tree while they ate” [vs. 8]. Abraham was hovering over the three men with one eye on the clock, if you will, hoping they would eat quickly and be on their way. By this time it must have been evening, for to arrange the preparations was no mean feat despite the help. Abraham was hoping the men would get on the road and not stay the night which would have made it more inconvenient for him and his wife.

After the rush of preparing food the men came out with the dreaded words: “Where is your wife” [vs. 9]? During this time Sarah was inside the tent listening in on the conversation with an occasional furtive glance outside the covering. She was trapped in the tent for some time, really, and was eager to escape and get an ear about what was going on. Even though Abraham went inside the tent (vs. 6), it was very quick, just ample time to tell her what to do. Of course, Abraham was in a bind; the men saw him go inside the tent but didn’t realize Sarah was present. Now he was afraid they would enter and do her harm, the time being close to sunset. So after an interval which must have seen a very long time, Abraham was surprised at what happened next. Three men came to visit him but now the text reads (vs. 9), “The Lord said.” Here we have a repetition as in vss. 2-3 (three men and the address ‘My lord’) only now instead of the shimmering heat which Abraham’s failing eyesight could have confused with a mirage, the present form of address remains basically the same. Abraham uses the singular address for three men because it was close to dark

meaning that all the time these visitors were under the tree. They were disguised in the shade, for shade and intense desert sunlight can confuse one's vision. Throughout the duration Abraham didn't know if he had been serving one or three men. Essentially the same confusion would happen later with his son Isaac when he confused Jacob and Esau, 27.22.

As for this singular lord, he said that he will return in the spring "and Sarah your wife shall have a son" [vs. 10]. The Hebrew for "spring" is *heth chayah*, literally "time of life" or the time when life returns to the earth after the passage of winter and its rains. For Sarah, this phrase intimates more than the coming spring season but the time of birth for her future son so often promised to Abraham by the Lord. This time it was different, a definite time when Sarah will give birth, which was nine months away. However, to the aged Sarah it was long and full of doubt as she "was listening at the tent door behind him" or behind her husband. That means the tent was close to the tree under which the three visitors had rested and took their meal. "So Sarah laughed to herself" [vs. 12]. The verb is *tsachaq* and reflects the same attitude of Abraham in 17.17: "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed." However, it intimates the name of his future son, Isaac. "To her self" is *beqirbah*, literally, "in her midst" or deep within herself. Immediately Sarah adds "shall I have pleasure (*hednah*)?" This is the only form in the Bible yet is related to the proper name Eden, *Heden*.

28 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

20) Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21) I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know." 22) So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the Lord. 23) Then Abraham drew near, and said, "Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24) Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25) Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" 26) And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." 27) Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. 28) Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29) Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." 30) Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31) He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to

the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." 32) Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." Genesis 18.20-32

Excerpt is from **Expansions on the Book of Genesis** also on this homepage.

In vs. 17 there's a shift to a singular speaker (the Lord) from vs. 16 ('the men set out'). Such alteration, as had been pointed out, is understandable given Abraham's dim vision and the semi-darkness of the evening hours. "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" This question addressed to himself as well as rhetorically continues into the next verse. Just the fact of asking such a question means that the Lord is tempted to blurt out his intent to Abraham. Although on a number of occasions the Lord had promised Abraham that his descendants will become great, here he refers to Abraham himself becoming such, this at ninety-nine years of age, a seemingly impossible task. The Lord continues musing to himself—this as he is about to set off to Sodom—that he will not reveal his intent. Better to have Abraham's descendants evolve into a "great and mighty nation" instead of swelling him up, if you will, to this status prior to its realization. With respect to this vs. 19 reads "No, I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him." The Hebrew text has "know" instead of "chosen" (*yadah*) which is more intimate. This divine knowledge is transmitted to future generations by the task set before Abraham, namely, to charge both his children and household. The verb for "charge" is *tsawah* or to order, command. "He will give his angels charge over you" [Ps 91.11]. This statement is unique in that it includes the household which is comprised not of family members but of people like Hagar and Eliezer of Damascus (cf. 15.2). Although closely bound up with Abraham's family, chances are that never did the two groups intermarry, let alone associate with each other except for necessary chores, etc.

As for the *tsawah* at hand (vs. 19), it consists of two parts, the first "keeping the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice." The verb at hand is *shamar* which had been noted several times earlier, the first in conjunction with man and his relationship with the garden, a theme easily carried over to a *shamar...a cultivation...of the Torah*: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" [2.15]. In the verse at hand, *shamar* pertains to the "way (*derek*) of the Lord," this being the common term for a road or highway. Abraham's experience of *derek* related to things divine was quite problematic, that is, repeated promises in a land not his own. Although Abraham is uniquely qualified for this type of *shamar*, he's hesitant because not many will be able to hold out as long as he and Sarah had done, including a change of names in their old age. The two qualifications for this are righteousness and justice, more or less equivalent. The next time we see this open-ended type of *shamar* with a long gestation period relative to a

nation is when Israel came into Egypt and remained there some four hundred years followed by forty years of wandering in the Sinai desert.

Vs. 20 continues with the singular Lord speaking within the context of the plural men (vs. 16) and changes tone quite abruptly (it continues into vs. 21): “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave.” This is what the Lord wishes to get off his chest to Abraham, not discussing his descendants, that old and familiar topic which could turn him off because he heard it repeatedly. By bringing up the wickedness of these two cities—and surely Abraham heard about it, even as early as his uneasy encounter with the king of Sodom (14.17)—the Lord wished to bring them before Abraham as a vivid reminder of how his descendants should not comport themselves. This outcry (*zahaqah*) is suggestive of sorrow or the cry for aid, not specifically one demanding retribution. “I cried with a loud and bitter cry” [Est 4.1]. Note that *zahaqah* is not from the cities themselves but against them though the Hebrew lacks a preposition. Since Abraham had been dwelling in Canaan about ten years, he too must have joined in on this *zahaqah*, again having encountered the king of Sodom. As for the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is unspecified but apparently was well known. Given the location of both cities close to the lowest place on earth, the *zahaqah* funneled up and spread throughout the surrounding area, reverberating against the mountains. It was not unlike the “smoke of the land that went up like the smoke of a furnace” [19.28] that was to occur shortly. The sin is “very grave,” the verb *kavad* (to be heavy) being used. And so the cry which funnels up and spreads around returns down to Sodom and Gomorrah, thereby compounding the sin. Hence, everyone had a tacit knowledge of what was going on down there at the lowest point of the earth’s surface, a fitting image of the underworld.

“I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know” [vs. 21]. Anyplace in Canaan relative to Sodom and Gomorrah is down, that is, near the Dead or Salt Sea. So despite the *zahaqah* which had penetrated every corner of the territory, the Lord wants to find out for himself. It’s akin to 11.5 when the Lord decided to check out the city in the land of Shinar: “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.” That city fared much better than the impending fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. At least the inhabitants weren’t destroyed, just their language having been confused, something they could remedy.

Vs. 22 shifts back to the plural or “men” who headed down to Sodom while “Abraham still stood before the Lord.” By now it was past twilight and fully dark with only the stars to guide them. The distance wasn’t great, and the three men wanted to reach the outskirts of Sodom before dawn in order to reconnoiter the place before entering. At least most people would be sleeping, so they would make a discreet arrival. Besides, sinning is often associated with the cover of darkness, and the majority of people would be stone-drunk,

not up until much later in the morning. While the three set off Abraham remained before the Lord even though the same Lord had left for Sodom. Abraham was preparing himself for to intercede for the cities which begins in the next verse and continues to the end of the chapter. He must have been privy to the sin of the two cities both from his visitors as well as persistent rumors. Though his nephew Lot had separated himself some time earlier (cf. Chapter Fourteen), surely they remained in touch. That's why Abraham is persistent for divine mercy toward Sodom and Gomorrah: not just because of Lot and his family but for the people there about whose lives he had greater acquaintance.

“Then Abraham drew near” [vs. 23], the verb being *nagash* which also can refer to the bringing forth of an offering. “Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel” [Am 5.25]? In the case at hand, this *nagash* occurred as Abraham “stood before the Lord.” At first glance you'd think this *nagash* was sufficient but such is not the case. That means Abraham had to move—if not physically then spiritually—to get at another side of the Lord, if you will, one where he would beseech him for Sodom and Gomorrah. At ninety-nine years of age, he had nothing to loose, so why not? Abraham had the advantage of dealing with the Lord since his arrival in Canaan, including his diversion into Egypt. Thus he was familiar with how often the Lord puts people off in order to test them, almost to the point of taunting them. “Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?” Before Abraham posed this question he side-stepped the niceties of obeisance and came right out with showing his confidence and familiarity with the Lord. *Saphah* is the verb which suggests a scraping together as well as putting into a heap. “He shall descend into battle and perish” [1Sam 26.10]. By the way, the Bible has approximately forty-seven different verbs for “to destroy.” As intimated earlier, Abraham got this information about Sodom and Gomorrah through contacts with Lot; thus he did not succumb to the common temptation to blot out the cities, knowing that there had to be at least one righteous (*tsadyq*) person within them (tragically, that turned out different).

Abraham now commences his process of bargaining with the Lord over the *tsadyqim* or righteous ones commencing with fifty and ending with ten in vs. 32. Fifty seems a low enough number to start off with: twenty-five for Sodom and twenty-five for Gomorrah. While the text is concerned with the outcry against two cities (cf. vs. 20), throughout the bargaining process one city is mentioned and that isn't specified until vs. 26 as Sodom. Surely Abraham must have had in mind those *tsadyqim* who were subject to the tyrannical rule of their king as intimated in 14.17-24 when he came in contact with the man himself. Note the position of these supposed *tsadyqim*: first as “within the city” and followed by those “who are in it” [vs. 24]. The first position is *betok* and the second, *qerev*. The former refers to in the middle (not necessarily the geographic center) of something or of persons whereas the latter to in the midst as in the sense of at the heart of something or someone. Thus the fifty *tsadyqim* are in the middle and heart of Sodom (again, Gomorrah not

mentioned). Should they be missing, the city has no reason to exist. As for their presence—and this applies to Abraham starting out with fifty *tsadyqim* and ending with ten—the number is less important than the two-fold position. All shouldn't be thought of as gathered together under one roof but scattered throughout the city unbeknownst to each other. In vs. 24 Sodom is described as a “place” or *maqom* which as noted earlier, is an inhabited area and can extend beyond the city proper to what we'd call today suburbs. As Abraham starts his bargaining process, this larger expanse of territory seems smaller than first glance, i.e., Sodom and satellite areas, and thus a larger population mass.

“Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked. Far be that from you! Shall not the judge of the earth do right” [vs. 25]? Abraham is putting words into the Lord's mouth, even to the point of a rebuke. *Chalylah* is the interrogative used here (‘far be it from you’) and *davar* is the noun for “thing,” a word whose verbal root is to speak. Thus that which is done and exists out there had been spoken, and that implies a source...a speaker...if you will. In this sentence Abraham is reminding the Lord that he is judge of all the earth, presupposing that he will have mercy or better, “do right” or *misphpat* (judgment). To his surprise, the Lord responds immediately: “I will spare the whole city for their (the fifty) sake” [vs. 26]. These fifty are to be found *betok* or in the middle, not necessarily *qerev* or in the city's heart (cf. vs. 24). As in vs. 24, the Lord says that he would spare the city if fifty men were found *qerev* it, the verb there as here being *nasa'* which means “to raise” and was found in 13.6: “the land was not able to bear them.”

And so Abraham discovers that the Lord will “raise” Sodom (again, no mention of Gomorrah) for fifty *tsadyqim*, righteous men. Instead of proceeding downward in number, Abraham must have wished he had started with a higher number...perhaps a hundred or even more. Nevertheless, he is stuck with this reduced number, so the only way he can proceed is by diminution, not increase. With regard to Sodom, the Lord says the “whole place” (*maqom* again) which includes surrounding areas. How to continue now? Abraham figures that a decrease by five *tsadyqim* is adequate; any more would be outright presumption. *Ya'al* is the verb for “take upon” which Abraham uses when speaking with the Lord. It applies to that which comes first and to be willing. “Because it has pleased the Lord” [1Sam 12.22]. Thus *ya'al* is a deferential word, allowing the person addressed to make up his or her mind. The respect implied is enhanced by Abraham calling himself “dust and ashes.” That may be true, but he remains quite presumptuous of divine compassion. Such deference is a lead into asking the Lord if he'll spare the city if forty-five *tsadyqim* are “there,” *betok* not being used. Abraham speaks not directly of sparing Sodom but of the Lord not destroying it, *shachath* being the verb first noted in 6.11: “Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight.” Use of *shachath* was a clever ploy on Abraham's part because it reminded the Lord of that incident just before the flood. If Abraham

persuaded the Lord not to repeat this worldwide flood, generations after him would consider him their greatest hero. Neither the Lord nor Abraham wish to pursue this, so the Lord allows him to continue his bargaining, now at forty *tsadyqim* [vs. 29]. The pace of bargaining picks up now, Abraham being anxious at how things turn out, at what number the Lord will relent. The downward process is interrupted by introduction of the words “I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord,” that is, another use of *ya’al* which reveals Abraham’s tongue-in-cheek deference. It’s that way because while sincere, he is desirous to get the bargaining over with and find out exactly how merciful is the Lord. The Lord, of course, knew this from the beginning yet plays along because of the exceptional situation of Sodom and Gomorrah.

As an introduction to Abraham’s final bargaining with the Lord—he stops at ten *tsadyqim*, figuring that number is more than enough—he bids him not to be angry. The amazing thing about the entire process beginning with vs. 23 is that we don’t pick up even the slightest trace of divine anger. Abraham instinctively knows that he has pushed it as far as he dares, so he relents. That’s why vs. 33 says “And the Lord went his way.” The Hebrew reads literally, “went the Lord as finished to speak to Abraham.” So the entire fate of Sodom and Gomorrah seems up in the air, unresolved. While Abraham started off with fifty *tsadyqim* and went to ten, all the while his mysterious visitors “set out from there” [vs. 16], that is, they set out to Sodom. This advance which begins with twilight and continues into the night hours is the back-drop to Abraham’s bargaining with the Lord. This last verse of Chapter Eighteen, a prelude to the fearful destruction of two cities, ends with “and Abraham returned to his place.” That place or *maqom* was not distance from where he had gone and is to be read in the context of vs. 23, “Then Abraham drew near.” Thus Abraham retreats, if you will, not to a physical *maqom* but to one characterized by his aloneness with Sarah by the tent under the oaks of Mamre. Does he communicate any of this to Sarah? Perhaps not for fear of being made a fool. Sarah had embarrassed herself earlier when she laughed at the prospect of giving birth at an advanced age, so why bother to make things worse? Oh that we had been privy to the conversation both had in their tent that night!

4 August, Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Vs. 2: Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity...20) So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun 21) because sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22) What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath

the sun? 23) For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1.2 & 2.20-23

Excerpt is from **Notations on the Book of Ecclesiastes** also on this homepage.

Vs. 2: Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

-Vanity (*hevel*): the theme of Ecclesiastes which occurs five times in this verse alone. This noun comes from a verbal root meaning to breathe, to exhale and commonly suggests anything transitory. For another sense, cf. two references:

1) Job 7.16: “Let me alone, for my days are a breath.”

2) Is 30.7: “For Egypt’s help is worthless and empty.”

Compare the outward breathing of *hevel* with *ruach* (breath, spirit) which is close in meaning. However, the latter seems to imply breathing from the nostrils as opposed to the mouth and alternately can mean to smell.

-All or everything both in nature and in human affairs which sets the stage for a distinction between these things and that which endures as symbolized in vs. 4 by “the earth remains forever.”

Vs. 20: So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun,

-Turned about (*savav*): connotes a going around, encompassing. “So all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned about and came back” [Jer 41.14]. The verse at hand is reminiscent of King Hezekiah in his despair: “Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord” [2 Kg 20.2].

-Heart (*lev*): also as mind as in 1.13, “And I applied my mind.”

-Despair (*ya’ash*): “You were wearied with the length of your way but you did not say, ‘It is hopeless’” [Is 57.10].

Vs. 21: because sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

-Continuation and conclusion of the sentence begun in the previous verse.

-Skill (*kishron*): only found in Ecclesiastes; as well as 4.4 & 5.11 (as goods). This word derives from a verbal root meaning to be right.

-“For it.” The Hebrew text has the preposition *b-*, literally, in.

-Great evil (*raha*): cf. vs. 17 for the adjective (*rah*): “because what is done under the sun was grievous to me.” “But I cannot flee to the hills lest the disaster overtake me and I die” [Gen 19.19].

Vs. 22: What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun?

-“What has a man.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “What is to a man.”

-Strain (*rahyon*): cf. vs. 11, “all was vanity and a striving after wind.”

Vs. 23: For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity.

-“Full of pain (*makovym*):” the Hebrew text lacks “full of.” “Man is also chastened with pain upon his bed and with continual strife in his bones” [Job 33.19].

-Work (*hinyn*): first found in 1.13, “It is an unhappy business that God has given to the sons of men;” also cf. vs. 26.

-Vexation (*kahas*): cf. 1.18, “For in much wisdom is much vexation.”

-Rest (*shakav*): alternately, “to lie down.” “But before they lay down, the men of the city” [Gen 19.4].

-Mind (*lev*): as often noted, heart.

-This verse is reminiscent of Job 7.4, “When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until the dawn.”

11 August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

6) That night was made known beforehand to our fathers so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted. 7) The deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of their enemies were expected by thy people. 8) For by the same means by which you punished our enemies you called us to yourself and glorify us. 9) For in secret the holy children of good men offered sacrifices, and with one accord agreed to the divine law, that the saints would share alike the same things, both blessings and dangers; and already they were singing the praises of the fathers. Wisdom 18.6-9

Reference, of course, is to the Exodus of which Israel’s fathers had a certain pre-knowledge, *progignosko*. It’s so important that can go by the phrase “that night” which lends a deserved sense of mystery. Although fathers aren’t mentioned by name, obviously there comes to mind Moses and his brother Aaron who must have communicated what they heard from the Lord to the people. Thus every participant in the Exodus may be considered as a father since they were of that generation to witness Israel’s greatest saving event. As for the night at hand, on numerous occasions before the Exodus the Lord said that he was to deliver his people. It was virtually impossible to hide this fact in the context of the extended back-and-forth between Moses, Aaron and pharaoh. Then we have the plagues, visible signs of something ominous about to happen.

The text at hand suggests that even before the actual event the fathers rejoiced as if already it had happened. Such joy, in turn, was communicated to the people because it was no small thing to motivate them to get up and leave Egypt all at once. The verb indicative

of this rejoicing is *epeuthumeo* which is comprised of the preposition *epi-* and the adverbial form *eu-*, upon and well (*euthumeo* being a verb unto itself). In the verse at hand the object of the verb is *orkros* or oath which is modified by the adjective *asphales*, literally safe from falling. In such oaths which are safe-from-falling, Israel's fathers, notably Moses and Aaron, had put their trust, *pisteuo* also as to have faith.

Expectation of *soteria* or deliverance (also means salvation) is presented almost as an understatement in light of what was said above. *Prosdechomai* or to admit, be capable of, is intensified by the preposition *pros-* prefaced to the verbal root, direction towards-which. You'd have to be deaf, dumb and blind not to know that something big...very big...was in the works. *Apoleia* or destruction in the utter sense is at hand for the Egyptians which perhaps many didn't expect but would welcome as a byproduct...byproduct insofar as their chief desire was to be from of Egyptian tyranny and to serve the Lord. As for the expectation at hand, it was so palpable that people could touch it.

Note the parallel found in vs. 8: the punishment of enemies (*timoreo* and *hupenantios*) one one hand and on the other hand, called and glorify (*proskaleo* and *doxazo*) us or the Israelites. *Timoreo* means to exact vengeance towards *hupenantios*, *hupo-* or those who literally are set over and against. The two work in favor for the Israelites, that is, being transformed into the Lord the *pros-* or *proskaleo* suggestive of directness and *doxazo*, to magnify or to extol.

The offering of sacrifices is made by children who are holy, the offspring of those who are good. That is to say, it's done in secret (*kruptos*, hidden) which can parallel "that night" of vs 6, the Passover when all Israelites *were* assembled in their homes with the blood of sheep or goats covering their door lintels to ward off destruction as the Lord passes by. In other words, these people are literally of one mind (*homonoios*) or one *nous* with the *nomos* or law.

As for the saints or those who are holy (*hagios*), they could be descendants of such holy children (*hosios*). *Hagios* applies to those who are devoted directly to the Lord whereas *hosios* applies more to being sanctioned by the law, those who are devout and pious. In other words, the *hosios* of the Passover generation becomes the *hagios* of later generations who celebrate the same Passover. I.e., both share the same reality, *metalambano*, *meta-* here as indicative of with-ness.

This excerpt concludes with the saints (*hagios*) singing praises of their fathers, those who are *hosios*. The verb is *proanamelo* which has two prepositions prefaced to the root meaning to celebrate with song and dance: *pro-* and *ana-*, before or in front of and upon. That is to say, such praise will be intense and most likely enduring.

15 August, Assumption of the Virgin Mary

11.19. Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail... 12.1) And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2) she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth in anguish for delivery. 3) And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems upon his heads. 4) His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; 5) she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6) and the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days...10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. Revelation 11.19, 12.1-6 & 10

Excerpted from **Notations on the Book of Revelation**, also on this homepage.

Vs. 19: Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightening, loud noises, peals of thunder, and earthquake and heavy hail.

An apt conclusion for Chapter Eleven which has the heavenly temple (*naos*) opened in heaven, implying that the one in Jerusalem has been closed or destroyed. The same applies to the ark (*kibotos*) which also applies to Noah: "until the day when Noah entered the ark" [Mt 24.38]. Consider this verse in light of Lk 23.45: "and the curtain of the temple was torn in two." The verse at hand does not specify who or what opens the temple; it is as though a self-actuated motion effects this. The same applies to the ark which remains closed and its contents unseen. King Solomon was the one who brought the ark into the temple which replaced the tent: "Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary, underneath the wings of the cherubim" [1 Kg 8.6].

The ark contained "nothing except the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb (cf. Dt 10.2), where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel when they came out of the land of Egypt" [1 Kg 8.9]. The use of nothing (*'eyn*) is interesting as if to negate human curiosity. It also serves to focus attention upon the stone tables given at Horeb, also known as Sinai. God descended upon this mountain God, and the opening of

the temple to make the ark visible in vs. 19 may be seen as fulfilling this manifestation. “On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightening and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled” [Ex 19.16]. The dramatic elements belonging to the heavenly and earthly manifestations of God may be perceived as a barrier: “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself did charge us saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountains and consecrate it’” [Ex 19.23]. Such boundary making harkens back to John at the beginning of Chapter Eleven: “Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff and I was told, ‘Rise and measure the altar and those who worship there.’”

Vs. 1: And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

Woman or *gune* appears in Revelation a total of nineteen times, this being the first occasion. She seems symbolic of God’s people and/or Israel; Catholic tradition often identifies her with the Virgin Mary. Here *gune* is a portent or *semeion*. In light of Jn 4.48, this word can refer to supernatural events: “Jesus therefore said to him, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’” In the verse at hand, *semeion* has a specific location, heaven. Several times earlier it was noted that events unfold in a passive way, this being yet another example: appeared or *orao* in the sense of having been seen.

Semeion-as-gune may be outlined with three additional features, all of which connote a certain luminosity attributable to the woman: 1) sun with which she is clothed (*periballo*, cf. 7.9) or fully enveloped. “In them he has set a tent for the sun” [Ps 19.4]. 2) moon (*selene*): “Behold...the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me (Joseph, Gen 37.9).” In the verse at hand, the sun is the dominant image; the moon and crown are subordinate. 3) crown (*stephanos*): compare with 4.4: “twenty-four elders clad in white garments with golden crowns upon their heads.” Note use of *periballo* regarding the woman so clothed with the sun. The “twelve stars” may represent the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve disciples; for the latter, cf. Acts 1.14: “All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, with his brothers.” Here Mary is seated with the disciples just before the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Vs. 2: She was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.

Keeping in mind the reference to the Virgin Mary and Pentecost in the last verse, the mother of Jesus may be seen in light of being in “pangs of birth” with respect to the Holy Spirit’s descent. The verse at hand reads “with child” as “having something in (her) stomach” (*gaster*).

“Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now you shall go forth from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon” [Mic 4.10]. Here Revelation’s woman clearly parallels Zion about to leave Israel for Babylon,

traditional place of exile. This verse is similar to the woman's crying out (*krazo*) and anguish (*odino*). For the former: "And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit" [Mt 27.50]. For the latter: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" [Gal 4.19]! Such forming or *morphoo* is Paul's wish for the *morphe* of Christ be present in his listeners. "Though he was in the form of God" [Phil 2.6].

Vs. 3: And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems upon his heads.

Another use of *orao* (appeared): note the similar location (heaven, which here as in vs. 2 can be taken as the sky above) of the "great red dragon" identified in vs. 9 as Satan. *Drakon* (dragon) is derived from the verb *derkomai*, to see clearly, most likely having in mind the way a reptile stares without blinking as is the case with mammals. This Greek word translates the Hebrew *tannin* as found in Ex 7.10: "Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent." This dragon could also have a connection with the serpent of Gen 3.1: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made." With this verse in mind, we have a clue regarding the dragon's character, subtle or *haram*; the verbal root connotes nakedness or an uncovering, most likely to reveal malevolence. "They lay crafty plans against your people" [Ps 83.3]. Note that *therion* is the LXX translation for wild creature as found in 11.7: "the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit."

Four characteristics of this dragon: 1) red or *purros* in the sense of being fiery in color. Cf. 6.4: "And out came another horse, bright red." Also cf. Sg 5.10 where this word is used in the LXX: "My beloved is all radiant and ruddy." The Hebrew adjective is *'adam*, closely related to *'adam* or man and referring to the earth's color from which he had been formed. 2) "seven heads" or *kephale*. Frequent reference had been made in these Notes with regard to the sacred number seven, mostly in connection with the seven churches and as well as with regard to Jericho. *Kephale* can represent the source of authority, and here is the exact opposite of Jesus Christ's authority over his church (of which seven were noted in Revelation): "He is the head of the body, the church" [Col 1.18]. 3) "ten horns" or *keras*. "A fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong...different from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns" [Dan 7.7]. The Chaldean word *qarnayn* closely resembles the Hebrew *qeren* which connotes strength and power. Horns were also used as part of the altar of sacrifice: "And you shall make horns for it on its four corners" [Ex 27.2]. 4) "seven diadems" or *diadema*. Another "anti-seven" number to the seven churches of Revelation. Compare with *stephanos* (crown) in 3.11: "so that no one may seize your crown." *Diadema* differs from *stephanos* in the sense that it represents royal authority; the latter can apply to derived authority. In the verse at hand, *diadema* may signify that the beast shared his authority in imitation (in the sense of mockery) of the

seven churches. That is, this authority is essentially fractured into “seven heads” with one body of a dragon.

Vs. 4: His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth.

This verse reveals the enormous size of the dragon who apparently is positioned on earth by reason of his proximity to the woman. *Oura* or tail is the source of its power. “And the prophet who teaches lies is the tail” [Is 9.15], that is, once the Lord has severed head and tail from Israel (cf. vs. 14).

The dragon brings down one third of the stars to earth; *suro* is the verb used here which implies a dragging. “Saul...dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” [Acts 8.3]. A result of such dragging is a casting of the stars (literally) “into (*eis*) earth,” that is, making them fall and impact the earth similar to meteorites. For a comparable reference: The little horn “cast down to the ground some of the host of the stars and trampled upon them” [Dan 8.10].

Since the dragon had destroyed part of the firmament, we may assume that this occurred at night. Perhaps this is why he was able to be present when the woman was about to give birth; it was easy for him to sneak up on her. As the verbal root for dragon (*derkomai*) suggests, this beast...with all seven heads...is staring at the woman in anticipation of her son’s birth. “Before she was in labor she gave birth; before pain came upon her she was delivered of a son” [Is 66.7]. Contrast the dragon and these stars with the Magi and the singular star at Jesus’ birth: “For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him” [Mt 2.2].

Katethio or to devour: the opposite to the Magi’s act of worship. “Who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation” [Mk 12.40]. King Herod, who inquired about the birth of Jesus Christ from the Magi, is a type of dragon ready to devour him.

Vs. 5: She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.

Compare this verse to Christ’s birth: “And she gave birth to her first-born son” [Lk 2.7]. This verse calls Jesus *prototokos* as in Col 1.15: “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.” *Prototokos* is closely related to Christ as *eikon* (image) of God who remains invisible. Such an image mirrors the activity of the invisible God which in the context of vs. 5 is to rule or *poimaino*; this verb fundamentally means to shepherd (cf. Lk 17.7). This sense is lacking in the context of vs. 5 which is partly lifted from Ps 2.9: “You shall break them with a rod of iron.” Here the **LXX** uses *poimaino* for to break which in Hebrew is *rahaḥ*. In light of this, consider Ps 23.4: “Your rod and your staff, they

comfort me.” Here rod or *shevet* can mean tribe; staff or *mishhan* implies a support of any kind.

In the verse at hand, *rabdos* (rod) signifies rule as found in the LXX of Ps 45.6: “Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity.” Its composition of iron shows that such rule is harsh with respect to the nations (*ethnos* or *goyim*), traditional foes of Israel.

The verb *arpazo* (to snatch) is in the aorist passive, another instance where action is taken with respect to the person or object at hand (here, the male child) to indicate divine intervention. Note the two-fold direction of this snatching: “to (*pros*) God” and “to (*pros*) the throne;” compare with the ascent of Elijah (2 Kg 2.11) and Enoch (Gen 5.24) as well as Christ’s ascension (Acts 1.9).

Thronos (throne) is the place from which this child will wield his “rod of iron.” Cf. Rev 3.21: “He who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my throne as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

Vs. 6: and the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The woman’s flight happens after her son was born, the immediacy of this flight signified by “and” which connects this verse with the previous one. Compare her escape with the Holy Family’s descent into Egypt: “And he (Joseph) rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod” [Mt 2.14]. As noted with regard to vs. 4, the action took place at night; the same may apply to the woman which parallels that of the Holy Family.

Eremos or wilderness in the sense of an uninhabited region. “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness” [Jn 1.23], that is, I, John the Baptist am a voice in an uninhabited region. *Eremos* is comparable to the Hebrew *midbar*: “that they may serve me in the wilderness” [Ex 7.16]. This word is derived from the verbal root *davar*, to speak; implied is the wilderness is a place of speaking, where God communicates himself to prophets, etc. In the verse at hand, *eremos* is a special place (*topos*) “prepared (*etoimazo*) by God” or as this word connotes, a place which stands ready waiting to receive the woman. In conjunction with *eremos* and John the Baptist, cf. Mt 3.3: “Prepare the way of the Lord.”

This prepared place is also one of nourishing (*trephe*), a verb commonly associated with infants. “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them” [Mt 6.26]. Perhaps the woman, like John the Baptist, was nourished in the *midbar*...the place of speaking...by the voice which was crying in that spot. Such nourishing has a temporal duration, 1260 days, the same amount of time (in the sense of *kairos*, a special event or occasion) as the two witnesses who prophesied, 11.3. Thus the woman shares in this capacity of prophesying, again hearkening back to John the Baptist.

Vs. 10: And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

Here John interjects himself as witness, the first time since 11.1 when he was given a measuring rod to measure the temple. The source of this “loud (*megalos*, in the sense of great) voice” is not specified, either coming from God or an angel. Compare this indeterminate voice with the one at Christ’s transfiguration: “and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son’” [Mt 17.5].

Four elements which “have come,” that is, after the dragon has been cast down to earth:

1) salvation (*soteria*): “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” [Rom 13.11]. 2) power (*dunamis*) in the sense of might: “You will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven” [Mk 14.62]. 3) kingdom (*basileia*): “Receive the kingdom of God like a child” [Mk 10.15]. 4) authority (*exousia*): “For I have not spoken on my own authority” [Jn 12.49].

The first three belong to God whereas the fourth belongs to Christ. What effects them is that the “accuser (*kategor*) of our brethren” or the dragon has been cast down (*ballo*, another passive use of a verb). Note the first person plural here as with “our God.” The dragon-as-*kategor* accuses (*kategoreo*) “our brethren” continuously. He does this “before (*enopion*) God.” “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them” [Job 1.6]. The Hebrew for among is *betok* which signifies being right in the midst of a group. The Hebrew for before is *hal*, literally on or right at the presence of someone.

18 August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

4) Then the princes said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city and the hands of all the people by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people but their harm." 5) King Zedekiah said, "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you." 6) So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern but only mire, and Jeremiah sank in the mire. 7) When Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern—the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate—8) Ebed-me'ech went from the king's house and said to the king, 9) "My Lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern; and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city." 10) Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, "Take three men with you from here and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies." Jeremiah 38.4-10

The following is from **Expansions on the Book of Jeremiah**, also on this homepage. The entire set of notations on this chapter is included.

This new chapter is part of a larger whole dealing with Jeremiah's imprisonment which is why vs. 1 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as "now," the usual sign of a close connection between an event that had transpired and one about to take place. Four men are mentioned by name in this opening verse who most likely were visitors, even associates, to see Jeremiah. The text at hand takes pains to say that they had heard (*shamah*, cf. 37.1) the *davar* which their friend had been speaking, *shamah* being the first word of this opening chapter. Such rare obedience suffices to mention their names: Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal and Pashhur. This is joined with the usual "Thus says the Lord." As applied to just four people, *shamah* stands in sharp contrast to the entire nation of Israel not listening to the divine *davar*. I.e., a hint, if you will, at the notion of a remnant that many of the prophets speak of.

The *davar* as treasured by these four men are worth mentioning by reason of their *shamah*. Anyone who remains within Jerusalem shall perish, but whoever goes out to the Chaldeans shall live, his life being a "prize of war," *shalal* as in 21.9. In other words, they will become spoil or booty. It's a foregone conclusion ("Thus says the Lord" again in vs. 3) that Jerusalem will be taken by the Babylonians.

Vs. 4 has the princes asking King Zedekiah for Jeremiah to be put to death because his *davar* were in danger of weakening the resolve of the soldiers defending Jerusalem, *rapha'* (cf. 33.7) implying to be slack, to let down. They were, of course, playing on the king's fear and how Jeremiah had foretold how the Babylonians would capture him. In reality they were more fearful of their own lives. At once Zedekiah concedes, saying that he's unable to do anything against them, for the princes had him just where they wanted him. Right away (this is conveyed by the conjunctive *v-* translated as 'so' in vs. 6) they took Jeremiah and cast him into a cistern dramatically described as empty of water but full of mud into which he had sunk. Nothing is said of a stench, but surely it must have been awful.

However, a eunuch by the name of Ebed-melech sympathetic to Jeremiah and perhaps associated with his four friends mentioned in vs. 1, heard of this. He rushed off to King Zedekiah and begged for Jeremiah's rescue. He relented, telling the eunuch to go ahead with his plan. Apparently Zedekiah had a change of heart somewhere along the line which must have enraged the princes. After all, he said in vs. 5 "the king can do nothing against you."

Vs. 14 begins with the conjunctive *v-* which goes untranslated, intimating that King Zedekiah rushed to see Jeremiah at the third entrance of the temple, a supposedly secret place away from the princes' prying eyes. He posed a question which he had longed to ask to which Jeremiah gave one condition, that he not be put to death. Zedekiah concurred, and Jeremiah responded in vs. 17 with "Thus says the Lord." By now the king was familiar—too much so for his taste—with these words which brought up old, familiar scenarios from the past, ones he'd rather leave there. As he feared, Jeremiah told him to surrender to the king of Babylon who will spare not just his life but those in Jerusalem. The alternative, of course, does not have to be made known. It was very obvious. Zedekiah was thinking primarily of his own life and blurted out that he was more afraid of the Jews who had deserted to the Chaldeans than the Chaldeans themselves. Jeremiah reassured the king, provided that he obey or *shamah* (cf. vs. 1) the voice of the Lord, *qol* (cf. 32.23) being used as a more emphatic expression of *davar*. Again, we have an example of the importance of *shamah* vis-a-vis *davar*, of hearing/obeying the word of the Lord.

In vs. 21 Jeremiah presents King Zedekiah with the option he was aware of fully, that failure to be attentive to this *shamah* will lead to a vision he had which interestingly is put in terms of a *davar*, again stressing the importance of *shamah*. The *davar* consists of women in the house of the king of Judah who were led out to the king of Babylon. Most likely they were concubines very much prone to gossip and palace intrigue. This is reflected in a ditty they expressed in vs. 22, namely, that the king's trusted friends had deserted him, and his feet were stuck in mire, most likely referring to Jeremiah's experience in the cistern. Nothing could be more embarrassing for the king when such women publicly announced what supposedly had been kept secret. Everyone knew, of course, but now it was being played out before everyone.

In vs. 23 Jeremiah gets personal. King Zedekiah's wives and sons will be taken by the Chaldeans as prophesied earlier. Then the king told the prophet to keep quiet about all this in order that the princes discover their meeting. However, should they find out, Jeremiah is to say that the king responded to his plea that he wouldn't return him to the house of Jonathan to die. Obviously the princes got wind of the conversation—it was virtually impossible to hide even under the conditions of a siege—and things worked out well for Jeremiah. However, the Chaldeans were at the gate while this drama was being played out. In the meanwhile, the king, princes and everyone inside Jerusalem were holding their breath awaiting the fate in store for them.