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**A Chosen People:
Election in the Pentateuch and in 1Peter**

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Submitted for the degree of MA
to the University of Durham
Department of Theology
1999



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A Chosen People:

Election in the Pentateuch and in 1Peter

Joan CROOKS
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Abstract

In the first Epistle of Peter, Gentile Christians are addressed as aliens and exiles (1Pet.1.1) but also as 'a Chosen People, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, God's Own People' (1Pet.2.9). The epithets are drawn from Is.43.20,21 and Ex.19.6 referring to Israel.

◊ In this thesis I have traced the roots of the exiles' new identity to Israel's position in the OT, called in the Exodus to find her identity as The Chosen People of JHWH.

According to O.T. presentation, Israel agreed at Sinai to her designation as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Ex.19.6), titles underlining her separateness and responsibility as witnesses to God's glory.

Dt. restates this covenant. Israel was to find her true life and joy in wholehearted love for JHWH through the keeping of His laws, worked out in the everyday, to the exclusion of all idolatry.

Balaam's story recalls God's promise to Abraham in Gen.12.3. Israel's identity as the blessed of JHWH remains intact. She cannot be cursed.

Yet the holy image was blurred. At Qumran in a highly exclusive context the Community sought to reestablish the Sinai tradition of holiness, linked to an understanding of themselves as spiritual Temple with strict law-keeping as sacrifice.

The way was thus prepared for Christ to be Himself Temple, sacrifice and atonement, opening the way for all believers - such as Peter's addressees - to know themselves as inheritors of the elect status of Israel.

I argue that 1Peter demonstrates to a marked degree the continuity of significant aspects of NT Christianity with the faith of Israel, in particular in its emphasis on the finding of identity in the context of exile and trial and in its call to holiness, both to be a means of showing forth God's glory.

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Note:

Quotations from the Bible are taken from the Revised Standard Version(substituting JHWH for 'the Lord') unless otherwise stated.

Abbreviations

<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> (ed. J.B.Pritchard, 3 rd edit. with Supps. Princeton 1969)
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Bible Quarterly</i>
DLT	Darton, Longman and Todd
ER	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion</i> (ed. Mircea Eliade London: Collier Macmillan 1987)
EJR	<i>Encyclopaedia of Jewish Religion</i> (eds. R.&Z. Werblowsky & G.W.Goder London: Phoenix House 1967)
<i>ERT</i>	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
ET	English Translation
<i>EVQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>GOTR</i>	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
HBD	<i>Harpers Bible Dictionary</i> (ed. P.J.Achtemeier, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985)
HDB	<i>Hastings Dictionary of the Bible</i> (ed. J.Hastings, Edinburgh: T.&T.Clark, 1 st edit.1909)
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
ICC	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> (ed. E.S.Bucke, Nashville: Abingdon 1962)
<i>INT</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITL	International Theological Library
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of theological Studies</i>
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	Massoretic Text
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJBC	New Jerome Bible Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum Supplements</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology Series
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library

<i>RQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumrán</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in late Antiquity
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SNT</i>	<i>Society for New Testament Study</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (ed. G.Kittel & G.Friedrich, tr. G.W.Bromiley; Grand Rapids, 1964-76)
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (ed. G.J.Botterweck & H.Rinngren; Grand Rapids, 1990 -)
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	<i>Supplement to Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Chapter 1

Introduction to 1 Peter 2.9

1.1 Preliminary considerations

The purpose of this study is an examination of the text of 1Peter 2.9. For simplicity, I will throughout refer mainly to the author in the singular or as Peter. This does not preclude the possibility of authorship by a school of writers or one other than the Apostle Peter, as will become clear below.

I will suggest that the writer was a person deeply immersed in the Old Testament and in Israel and its concepts of God, to the extent that these governed in a particular way his expectations of what the new Israel, as embodied in the community being addressed in the Epistle, was to be.

This is not to dismiss the extent to which he may have been dependent on the kerygma of Early Church teaching or even the ideas of other Christian leaders of the time but to suggest that his own particular use of these and his reworking of Jewish traditions in the light of Christ, which give an individuality to the Epistle noted by many scholars¹, express conditioning by Judaism to a marked degree.

In the light of that it is my aim to examine Israel's concept of herself as a chosen people and to ask how this emerged, how she stood among her neighbours - in so many ways like them, yet always drawn on towards a different concept through the voices of the prophets, priests, historians, psalmists and others, to an acknowledgement of a living, holy God, who had chosen her, worked in her history and called for response in holiness of life, purity of worship and to expectation of a Coming One who would be the harbinger of a new age of glory; and to seek to discern how Peter, linked to the old, yet essentially of the new and writing to those of the new, incorporated that concept into his Epistle. Before embarking upon such a study I propose to take a brief overview of the Epistle as a whole, considering in particular the situation that led to its writing and what the author's purpose was. As adjunct to this, and to be dealt with first,

¹ E.g. Kelly (1969: 25).



questions of destination, authorship, unity, composition, date, and place of writing will also arise.

Many scholars have produced a plethora of ideas related to these themes. Within the limits of this thesis it has been possible to draw attention to only a few of these in an effort to create some sense of the likely background of the letter.² The simple fact is that in most cases we do not know. Secular literature of the period sheds little reliable light and such evidence as we might glean from the Scriptures is always slender and can lead only to conjecture. Nevertheless, one benefit of a situation of ignorance is that it invites creative imagination and disciplined reconstruction based on the possibilities which lead, hopefully, to a deeper probing into the situations and life of the ancient world in which the Early Church began.³

The questions are themselves closely linked and not easily separated. We may start however with one factor that is clearly determined - the letter's destination (1.1,2). It is addressed to God's Elect - *eklektois* (cf.2.9) who are nevertheless *parepidemois diasporas* - sojourners⁴ of the Dispersion - scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Nowhere else, Grudem notes in Jewish or Christian literature, is 'sojourners' qualified by 'election'.⁵ Peter thus sets the scene for what is to be the principle theme of his letter - that his addressees have been taken up by God as the new Elect, even though, like Israel herself, they are in some way (and what this is, I explore below) exiles, marginalised, in a foreign land.

1.2 Destination

A glance at the map highlights a feature which has puzzled all commentators. Pontus-Bithynia constituted together, a double province, so why are they separated in the designation? The suggestion of Ewald, Hort and others,⁶ that it probably defines the route to be taken by the bearer of the letter (or letters if there were duplicate copies, one for each area) as he travelled through the successive provinces, could be valid whether

² The detailed commentary of Selwyn, (1949) has been invaluable as a main source.

³ Kelly (1969: 1).

⁴ Cf. 1Pet.2.11 - aliens; NIV - strangers; Goppelt (1993: 3) - foreigners. Grudem (1988: 48ff.) notes Gen.23.4 LXX - Abraham among the Hittites, and Heb.1.13 - the heroes of faith from Abel to Abraham who were also aliens and sojourners - *parepidemoi*. See also Selwyn (1949: 118,169).

⁵ 1988: 48.

⁶ Cited Beare (1970: 42).

the letters originated in Babylon in the east (5.13) or much more likely, that Babylon is taken to mean Rome, in which case the bearer may have travelled first via the Black Sea to Sinope or else through Northern Greece along the Via Egnatia.

If this is the case then it suggests, contrary to Hort and Beare, that for Galatia we are to read Galatian Pontus i.e. Northern Galatia and for Asia, the main political region around Pergamum,⁷ rather than regions further south.

This provides a neat solution, particularly as Best points out that while Pontus-Bithynia was the name of the Roman Province extant in the years that the letter would have been written, it had been formed from two areas separate at an earlier stage, whose individual names may still have been in use by some, and so be used by Peter also.

If this is indeed the solution it is an important one in that it enhances the possibility that the letter may have been directed to an area largely not evangelised by Paul. We recall that in Acts, Luke records that Paul and his companions were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia (16.6) and again similarly when they attempted to go into Bithynia (16.7), causing them to go instead to Troas and hence to Macedonia. What lay behind this forbiddenness? Paul is elsewhere recorded as saying that he desired to labour where others had not (Rom.15.20). But is there more to this than meets the eye?

In his book 'The Partings of the Ways' Prof. J.D.G.Dunn⁸ suggests that, contrary to usual supposition, Paul in his confrontation with Peter at Antioch (Gal. 2.11-15) probably lost. He believes that the difference between them may have been sharper than Luke chooses to record, that Peter did not give way and resume fellowship as before. Paul does not say he did and probably would have done, had it been so, as he did in referring to the Jerusalem agreement (Gal. 2.1-10). Rather the rebuke 'tails off into a restatement of Paul's own position'. Dunn suggests that the reasons for Peter's withdrawal in the first place may have been more weighty than has been supposed and that the Antioch episode may well have marked the beginning of Paul's increasing isolation from main-stream Judaism, leaving him functioning largely as an independent missionary from then on. Might there lie here some background reason why there is no

⁷ So Selwyn (1949: 45) and Best (1971: 14ff.).

⁸ 1991: 131-135. Also 1990: 235ff.

mention of Paul in the Petrine Epistle or of Peter in those of Paul, apart from Galatians (above) - a fact which has puzzled some scholars?

So what of Peter? Selwyn observes⁹ that, whilst the biblical record tells us much about him in the initial stages of the church, he virtually disappears from the record later. Peter must have been *somewhere* in those years, so why not, following Selwyn's train of thought, here in northern Asia Minor? I.H.Marshall does not find any suggestion in the letter that the area was evangelised by Peter.¹⁰ He rightly notes its impersonal nature,¹¹ unlikely he feels, if Peter had had close personal dealings with the recipients. Nevertheless, I suggest that it remains a possibility that Peter had at least dealings of some sort with these young Christians, if not as evangelist then as teacher, and that this lay in some way behind the eventual writing of the letter under his name.

Wherever Peter was at the earlier stage of his life, there is a strong tradition - too strong to be lightly dismissed - that he spent his latter years in Rome and died there, possibly in the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64. We may again speculate as to what he did there. It is scarcely conceivable that he did not gather round him a group of worshipping Christians to encourage and teach in the faith. Did a link develop in ways not clear to us between them and the Christians of Northern Asia Minor with whom Peter already had some links, and does this present some alternative possibilities regarding authorship? This possibility is explored later.

One obstacle to that possibility may be the evidence, traced later¹² of strong Qumranic influence upon the writer/s. However, as later in this chapter we also note the extent of the Diaspora, there seems no good reason why Qumran's influence should not have been present in Rome.

1.3 Authorship

There continues a considerable body of scholarship claiming that Peter was the author.¹³ Some arguments in the past against this carry less weight today. These ranged around the area of the quality of the Greek prose, 'some of the richest and most cultured in the New Testament', unthinkable it was said, for a fisherman of Palestine

⁹ 1949: 61.

¹⁰ 1991: 23.

¹¹ 1991: 19.

¹² Chapter 5.

described as among the unlearned and ignorant (Acts 4.13);¹⁴ also the fact that, in common with the rest of NT writers, in his extensive use of OT Peter always uses LXX, unlikely it was claimed, in some one born, bred and brought up in Palestine.¹⁵ In contrast, modern scholarship acknowledges the widespread effects of Hellenism even among the everyday population of Palestine and is more likely to accept that Petrine authorship cannot be ruled out¹⁶, despite Beare's somewhat confident claim that 'there can be no possible doubt that Peter is a pseudonym.'¹⁷ But again we simply do not know.

The post-script at 5.12 opens the possibility of Silvanus, (whether Paul's companion [Acts 15.40ff.] or a different Silvanus), as amanuensis and some have suggested his being given considerable freedom of expression to account for the fine style¹⁸ (though we must note here I.H.Marshall's caution against over emphasising this style).¹⁹

The third (and I feel most likely) possibility is that the letter came from Peter's own group or their successors who, following Peter's martyrdom, heard of the trials of these young churches in Asia Minor. Fearing that they might be driven to fall away from the faith, they were constrained to write pseudonymously, a letter of teaching, encouragement and exhortation, which gathered together elements of NT tradition, possibly using some liturgical forms but which in its emphasis and nuances bore the marks of their own strong Judeo-Christian orientation, in continuation with 1Peter.

1.4 Unity

A number of scholars have found it difficult to see the letter as a unity. Notably, in 1911, R. Perdelwitz suggested that the document as it stands is not a letter at all, that between the parts of an original letter at 1.1,2 and 4.12 has been interspersed a baptismal address used on the occasion of a baptismal celebration (1.3-4.11). F. W.

¹³ Listed in Marshall (1991: 21) also those seeing otherwise.

¹⁴ E.g. Beare (1970: 47). Beare writes with a certainty and confidence remarkable when we know so little.

¹⁵ Beare (1970: 45).

¹⁶ E.g. Marshall (1991: 23); Kelly (1969: 27).

¹⁷ 1970: 44).

¹⁸ Selwyn (1949: 61).

¹⁹ 1991: 22.

Beare took up this idea and developed it,²⁰ but in general it has not found a great deal of support among scholars.²¹

Most do, however see the letter as composed of a number of different elements which may indicate that the writer was drawing on various traditions or collections. Selwyn identifies four different styles all of which he found present in the NT Church.²²

The four possibilities are:-

- 1) liturgical (he makes the surprising suggestion that 2.6-10 may be part of a hymn).
- 2) persecution fragments indicating increasing opposition to Christianity.
- 3) catechetical forms (perhaps a primary Christian catechism is here).
- 4) baptismal (possibly an early form of a Baptismal liturgy).

One particular unifying element which emerges and which will be noted later is that of suffering /glory.²³ The theme is found throughout the letter as a pervasive atmosphere and whilst this is in line with NT tradition it is noteworthy that in its expression in 1Peter it links more readily with OT than with Pauline understanding. This is especially notable in light of those scholars who see Peter as drawing largely from Paul,²⁴ and adds weight to the alternative understanding that each was drawing on what was developing NT tradition and using it according to his purposes and in line with his leanings and understanding.

Goppelt perhaps best expresses the conclusions echoed by many with regard to unity when he writes 'The style of the letter is surprisingly unified and precise even though it continuously appropriates diverse traditions'²⁵ and Marshall sees 'A creative and free use of material for different teaching situations in the early church.'²⁶

²⁰ 1970: 27.

²¹ Kelly (1969: 18). Goppelt and Moule argue that the theory assumes a lack of rational processes of thought and that it is unnecessary.

²² 1949: 17-19.

²³ Cf. Schutter (1989: 108f.).

²⁴ Particularly Beare (1970: 44).

²⁵ 1993: 2.

1.5 Date

The question of date is of course linked to at least some of the above, and to the question of persecution. Beare²⁷ opts unequivocally for a later date (c. early 2nd Century) because:-

1) he sees 1Peter as dependent to a large extent on other NT writings, especially Paul.

2) the first writer to have clear acquaintance with it is Polycarp, dated AD 135.²⁸

3) he sees the suffering spoken of from 4.12ff. as indicating serious political persecution²⁹, such as that of which we have some evidence as happening in Bithynia in the famous letter of Pliny the Younger (AD 111). For Beare the situation described by Pliny matches exactly that indicated in 1Peter³⁰.

An earlier date, however, has strong claimants. Kelly like a number of other scholars sees even the later allusions to sufferings (4.12ff.) as far more likely to refer to an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility on the part of the local population than politically motivated state-organised persecution in which case the linking with Pliny is not necessary.³¹ Further, the teaching being offered suggests that the addressees were largely recent converts. There is no hint of second generation Christianity - note the archaic Trinitarian formula at 1.1,2; the type of undeveloped church order with oversight in the hands of the elders (5.1); the identification of Jesus with Deutero-Isaiah's Suffering Servant (2.21-25) an element which soon receded from the Church, and the eschatological structure of thought, where future hope and present realisation are closely inter-penetrating (e.g.1.5).³²

For those who believe that Peter was probably the author then the date is determined by his likely martyrdom in AD 64. The letter would appear shortly before that. If Peter's followers wrote the letter it may have appeared soon or some few years after his death, perhaps around AD 70 or shortly after. This date has some significance, being the year of the fall of Jerusalem which may have indirectly affected adversely the

²⁷ 1970: 28-38 for an interesting and exhaustive discussion.

²⁸ He observes that Ignatius, on his way to martyrdom, made much use of Paul, but did not mention 1Peter.

²⁹ Though he accepts that earlier references probably relate to general Christian living.

³⁰ 1970: 33.

³¹ Kelly (1969: 30) and Selwyn (1949: 53-56).

³² Some scholars, however draw opposite conclusions from the first two items.

position of Christians even in the distant provinces,³³ though Christian links with the Diaspora may have been weakening for some years before that, leaving the Christians more vulnerable to oppression at local level, as happened ultimately at the wider religio-political one.

1.6 Place of writing

All the possibilities of authorship mentioned above point to Rome as the most likely place of writing with Babylon (5.12) being understood to be its code name. The weight of consensus lies here.

1.7 The situation of the addressees and the purpose of the letter

Important as the above questions are as background to the letter, more important for us are those concerning its purpose and the situation which provoked its writing. If it was not primarily addressing a major situation of politically-motivated persecution, what then were the likely situations facing the addressees which drew forth such anxious concern on the part of the writer? I turn again to 1Pet.1.1 (cf. again 2.11) where though *eklektōis* the addressees are also designated *parepidemois diasporas*.

J.H.Elliott in his book 'A Home for the Homeless'³⁴ suggests that the term *parepidemois* is primarily a sociological one. It implies that the addressees are literal aliens in their community and that the purpose of the letter was to offer strong assurance, that they are nevertheless members of the *oikos tou theou*,³⁵ and not *par-oikos*, a related term (cf.2.11) - people *not* at home, sojourners in another's house.³⁶ Elliott extends the interpretation of the word to mean those who lack native roots in the language, customs and culture or in the political, social and religious allegiances of the people among whom they dwell. More technically it denotes the position of a resident alien without civil or native rights.³⁷

³³ So Ramsey cited Selwyn (1949: 58), who also sees the martyrdom of James as significantly affecting the position of Christians in marking the repudiating of Christianity by Judaism.

³⁴ 1982.

³⁵ Elliott (1982: 23) cf. Grundmann who understands the word metaphorically - Christians are not to allow themselves to be shaped by the things which largely determine their life on this earth. It is in this sense they belong to the diaspora - the Jewish concept applied to Christians (TDNT II: 64). Selwyn on the other hand suggests that Christians may be aliens *in the midst of* the Jewish Diaspora (1949: 51, 118).

³⁶ K.L.Schmidt gives extensive coverage especially of the use of the term in relation to Israel (TDNT V: 842-853).

³⁷ 1982: 25ff.

Such a position was not infrequent in the ancient World. The Jews themselves, in diaspora, fell to a certain extent into such a category.³⁸ Numbering at a conservative estimate, some 250,000, they were scattered throughout the Mediterranean area including Asia Minor which was easy of access to their homeland. They were seen as a people apart. The history of their people Israel, wrought out of alienness and exile was unique in its monotheism, its testimony to election and the consequent requirement of holiness. In diaspora the pursuit of this ideal had led to a measure of exclusivism and sect-like life-style which had won for them respect in the main, from their neighbours, and considerable freedom from the Roman authorities in the worship associated with their religion, including a dispensation allowing them not to participate in Roman religious cults.³⁹

It is likely that the Jewish synagogues attracted considerable interest from Gentile aliens so that the tenets of Judaism were widely known. It was from the synagogues too that the earliest Christian believers came, before the Gospel spilled out into the wider Gentile world, so that congregations tended to be a mix of Jewish and Gentile believers. Hence the strong Jewish nuances found in the letter are not out of place, even though it seems likely that the recipients were more Gentile than Jew. Hence too the degree to which early Christian traditions draw so deeply on Judaism.⁴⁰

Turning to Gentile aliens, following his general introduction to the phenomenon, Elliot goes on to draw a 'social profile' of the *paroikoi*.⁴¹ He notes the enormous cultural diversity in land, and peoples of Asia Minor,⁴² brought about by vast movements of human traffic within the area and by mass deportations⁴³ as well as banishments. In some cases ethnic and other situations meant social restrictions and disadvantages for those involved. In other cases it may have brought upgrading; even

³⁸ Safrai & Stern (1974: 117ff. 143ff.).

³⁹ Feldman & Rheinhold.(1996: 305ff.). They also point to occasions when hostility was aroused, e.g. if a Jew attempted to gain citizenship whilst at the same time claiming exemption from the requirements of normal citizens; if Jews showed aggressive attitudes in attempts to convert non-Jews or if they insisted that only Judaism was the true religion. They stress the protection, as noted elsewhere, that Jewish general acceptability brought to Christians as long as they were deemed part of Judaism. Schürer (1979: 81) notes that in course of time a measure of Graeco-Roman culture had been 'quietly assimilated' by Jews.

⁴⁰ 'Diaspora Judaism provided a blue-print precise to the finest detail for adaptation to Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world.'--'Christianity is Hellenistic Judaism's new religion.' Baron (1952: 162-9).

⁴¹ 1982: 59-100.

⁴² Elliott (1982: 61). He quotes D.Magie: 'Galatia was "a fantastic conglomeration of territories" whose inhabitants "were as varied as the districts of which the provinces were composed."'[n.9]. See also Selwyn (1949: 47-50).

so, though no longer reckoned as strangers they yet did not have full citizenship. The *paroikoi* were in fact an institution recognised by the state, to which individuals and underprivileged groups could be admitted with official consent. Hence the group contained a large number of the otherwise *declassè*, those who had lacked citizenship in their former homeland and still did so here. As a result they tended to become the servant and working class of the Roman Empire,⁴⁴ the backbone in fact, providing foods required by citizens and army (the chief consumers).

In everyday life there was often little *apparent* difference between the *paroikoi* and full citizens but in times of political turmoil or economic adversity these ‘outsiders’ tended to be targets and scapegoats of social suspicion.⁴⁵ It was from such, Elliot claims, that the likely addressees of 1Peter had come.⁴⁶ Thus the letter should be read as addressing that situation.⁴⁷ As a critique of some earlier commentators e.g. Beare,⁴⁸ he suggests that ‘As little as Israel’s alien residence in Egypt and Babylon is figurative so little is that of the Christians of Asia Minor.’⁴⁹ Elliot goes on to cite sociological analysis in his identification of the problems being addressed.⁵⁰ From Peter’s exhortation he deduces that the groups exhibited all the characteristics of a sect in their exclusiveness, thus inevitably drawing upon themselves opposition, even persecution from the ‘outsider communities’ of which they had formerly been a part. He deduces also that in their ethnic diversity they were not finding it easy to cohere together as a united community. Thus he concludes that ‘the central focus of 1Peter concerns the

⁴³ An interesting earlier example of deportation is found in IIKi.17.24-31.

⁴⁴ A similar situation exists today in Israel, where cleaners, caretakers, servants, sweepers etc. are frequently Palestinians who travel in from the West Bank and who do not have citizenship. Hence in difficult times e.g. if an Israeli is killed or maybe attacked, they come under suspicion and the West Bank is closed off, so preventing the work force from travelling in. Educated Palestinians living in Israel usually have citizenship.

⁴⁵ See further Elliott (1982: 71ff. n.44) quoting S.Dickey. The same was true of the Jewish Diaspora.

⁴⁶ There is considerable evidence from other sources suggesting that it was the poor and underprivileged, in particular, who embraced Christianity as in Corinth (1Cor.1.26-7). More than a century later Minucius Felix spoke of poverty being not a Christian’s disgrace but his glory (Octavius 36). Celsus’ scathing derision of the lowly character of most Christians is well known cf. Origen (Contra Celsum. 3.44).

⁴⁷ The majority of commentators take a different view.

⁴⁸ Beare (1970: 135) takes the term ‘alien’ to be figurative, contrasting the addressees present earthly state with their true home in heaven.

⁴⁹ (1982: 48).

⁵⁰ (1982: 73-4) quoting from Robin Scroggs (n.56) and B.R.Wilson, an authority on the sociological study of sectarian phenomena (n.57). Note that such sect-like response is seen to be in the category of a protest movement. It compares favourably with other protest movements where overcoming evil is sought in revolution, manipulation, reformation or withdrawal. In contrast the supernaturally-wrought transformation of the self is seen as enabling the believer to live in hope and to engage confidently with the world.

interaction of Christians and society, the social contrasts and conflicts which have created a crisis for the Christian Movement in Asia Minor.⁵¹

Elliott's study is detailed and valuable. Should he be correct it helps clarify the possible situation being addressed by 1Peter and the purpose of its writer. However, as is frequently true with sociological approaches, its focus tends to preclude other approaches and to push into the background some of the richness of 1Peter's theology, reducing its depth of meaning. I propose therefore to look at 1Peter from a somewhat different angle.

It is most significant that Peter selects Ex.19.5-6 as the focus of the election theme in his epistle. This together with the emphasis on election itself, indicates most clearly his position, for as we will see, that text was foundational for Israel's image and nationhood. In using it as significantly as he does Peter was stating in the strongest terms that the addressees were inheritors of all that pertained to Israel, and as such had become a holy priesthood consecrated to God through Christ⁵².

In a recent reflection on God's image N.T.Wright wrote:-

Deep inside classic Jewish monotheism there lies a strange swirling sense of a rhythm of mutual relations within the very being of the one God: a to-and-fro, a give-and-take, a command-and-obey, a sense of love poured out and love received. God's Spirit broods over the waters, God's Word goes forth to produce new life, God's Law guides his people, God's Presence or Glory dwells with them in fiery cloud, in tabernacle and Temple. These four ways of speaking move to and fro from metaphor to trembling reality-claim and back again. They enable people to speak simultaneously of God's sovereign supremacy and his intimate presence, of his unapproachable holiness and his self-giving love

This rich seam of thought, visible at many points in pre-Christian Jewish tradition, is where the early Christians went quarrying for language to deal with the phenomena before them. Long before secular philosophy was used to describe the inner being of the one God, and the relation of this God to Jesus and the Spirit, a vigorous and very Jewish new tradition took the language and imagery of Spirit, Word, Law, Presence (and/or Glory) and Wisdom, and developed them in relation to the Jesus of recent memory and to the strange personal presence of the Spirit.⁵³

This 'new Jewish tradition' had evidently been the source of 1Peter's writing, taken up and distinctively reworked to meet the particular needs of his addressees. I

⁵¹ 1982: 49.

⁵² In his earlier work (1966), Elliott accepts this, and provides invaluable material in an exhaustive study (see ch.6), but this later work represents a change of position.

⁵³ 1998.

will explore more fully in chs.5-6, the possibility that much of the tradition links closely with that of Qumran and that the dominant themes of the letter reflect that fact.

Whether or not the addressees were themselves initially social aliens, it was clearly a phenomenon well enough known to them and provides an immediate analogy. They had come to experience alien-ness since their conversion, by the antagonistic attitude towards them of the outsiders with whom they once identified. Peter takes up the analogy to be found in his own Jewish heritage, to underline a fundamental truth that no matter what their present situation they, like the earlier exiled Israel, are Elect, God's Chosen ones.⁵⁴ They have been drawn, through the Resurrection of Christ - and their new birth into its reality - into the realm of God's elected ones, and the orbit of his love. In that orbit they now have an unfading inheritance (1.4) on reserve in heaven (1.5), and a living hope for the future (1.3). Not only so, this had been planned for them by God from of old (1.2,10-12,20).

It will be clear in the ensuing chapters that this is exactly how Israel was bidden to see herself - *in order to make possible* the holiness of life required by YHWH. Her whole dependence, reliance and certainty had to rest on the nature of her God. Given she complied with that, all else was possible. Peter expresses the same fervent desire for his addressees, and tied to that, the same deep desire for their holiness and purity.

This is worked out in five principle themes recurring through the letter:-

a) Because they are Elect (2.9), they are called as a Christian Community to recognise themselves as the dwelling place of God, a Holy Temple, and to function within it as a Holy Priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices (2.5), i.e. as a worshipping group whose lives are wholly orientated towards God.

b) Such living places them at one and the same time in a specialised position of belonging - drawing sustenance from the one to whom they now owe allegiance, defined as the Living Stone - and in a position of considerable vulnerability towards the 'outsiders' who cannot understand them, who resent their change of position and are perhaps afflicted by a measure of hidden envy, factors inevitably drawing upon Christians antagonisms, amounting even to persecution. But they are not to fear. Their persecutors will in the end find that what they are seeking to overcome and destroy will

⁵⁴ Selwyn (1949: 169) is useful here.

overcome and destroy them (2.6-8; 4.4,5,18), whilst they themselves will rejoice in the light of God as his own people (2.9,10).

c) What may be seen as, in measure paradoxical, a counter-balancing facet to the above, yet equally a part of the central truth of holiness, concerns their exemplary attitude to outsiders. *Because* of their high calling they are to be beyond reproach, in their general living, in their attitude to the state and its rulers and to their neighbours (2.11-12; 2.15; 2.13-15; 4.2-3,6).⁵⁵

d) Such a position also embraces their attitudes within the Community both as members and leaders - they are to show love and humility, functioning as a true brotherhood, in particular showing submissiveness to each other (1.22; 2.17; 4.7-11; 5.2-4).

There is in all the above a strong insider/outsider concept, fundamental to the Christians' position, because it is in seeing themselves as chosen and Christ-indwelt that their power to endure lies.⁵⁶ In the pursuit of holiness there can be no compromise. Yet the other side of the uncompromising coin is love, equally uncompromising in upholding the lawful, required structures of society and in even going *beyond* what may be generally accepted as the norm, because it is God inspired.

One dominant theme remains, woven into the rest and acting as its supporting structure:-

e) Their new birth and privileged elect position have been won for them at great cost, not in terms of gold and silver (1.18,19) but in terms of the shed blood of Christ, God's Chosen One. (The contrast between earthly and spiritual treasure is a recurring theme surfacing here and there throughout the letter (1.7,11; 3.3,4). Their consecration was through Christ's blood which demanded their holiness, but much more, the shedding of his blood was the measure of His suffering - suffering on their behalf (1.10-12; 2.21-24; 3.18; 4.1; 5.1). Consequently in their own suffering they may identify with him, and see it, not as a cause of sorrow but of joy, because through it honour (a minor recurring theme, contrasted with shame 1.7; 2.6; 3.16) and glory are found, even as Christ's glory was revealed through his suffering (1.6,7; 2.19-21; 3.14-17; 4.1,2,12-16,19; 5.9-11).

⁵⁵ Cf. Goppelt (1993: 20).

⁵⁶ Sociologically such a concept is a mark of sects, as Elliott has pointed out. (1982: 102ff.).

Suffering and glory are thus seen to be very much at the heart of 1Peter. Schutter traces the theme from 1.10-12 which he suggests as a hermeneutical key to an understanding of the Epistle's main thrust. It is a theme deeply rooted in OT spirituality, seen at its bleakest in Psalm 88 where there is no glimmer of glory and again in Psalm 22 with its triumphant note of glory at the end (vv.22-31). Both prefigure the Lord's cry of dereliction in Mark 15.34. It is seen also at Is.53 which pre-eminently appears to be 1Peter's point of reference at 2.21-25; 3.17,18, and may be also at 1.10-12, though Selwyn prefers to see NT prophets as intended.⁵⁷

Each of the above elements may be seen to resonate with elements evident in the Qumran Community, to be considered at chapter 5.

1.8 Conclusion

It is thus that we see Peter exhorting his addressees towards the building up and strengthening of their community life. But this is contingent upon what undergirds and has preceded it - their elect status in Christ as chosen, inheritors of the deposited wealth of Israel, won for them through the sprinkling of Christ's blood, appropriated by their response in obedience and activated through the power of the Holy Spirit (1.1,2). Whilst the interaction between Christians and society may indeed be a central focus of 1Peter it is so only in conjunction with a yet stronger one - that of the entry of these Christians into Israel's heritage of Election. How far 1Peter's understanding follows the track of OT tradition will be explored in the following chapters.

⁵⁷ (1949: 260).

Chapter two

A kingdom of priests and a holy nation: Exodus chapter 19. 1-6

2.1 Introduction

We have already, in the previous chapter, referred to the significance of Peter's use of Ex.19.6 as the focus of his election theme. No verse was more important to Israel than this one in propounding, together with 19.5, her election status and covenant relationship with JHWH. It is the purpose of this chapter to consider the verse and its context.

2.2 The book of Exodus

Umberto Cassuto writes of the book of Exodus that it is not only a sublime religious document: it is also a literary masterpiece¹. J. I. Durham conveys a sense of treading on holy ground², whilst A. H. McNeile notes the extraordinary multiplicity of its interests as it brings us into contact with a nation 'whose genius was religion.'³

Such comments suggest that in Exodus we are dealing with a complex book which does not readily yield its treasures to investigators of its sources, compilation, redactions and so on. Notwithstanding, its material has been foundational for Israel's faith and status as a nation. Richard Clifford writes⁴ 'Exodus is an indelible portrait of the Community of God called from false and demeaning servitude in an alien land to journey to the Promised Land' and then notes its powerful hold on the imagination of later biblical authors and of Jewish and Christian thinkers.⁵

¹ 1974: 2-3.

² 1987: xix-xxxiv.

³ 1908: vii.

⁴ 1993: 44.

⁵ We might note also its fundamental significance in the Liberation Theology Movement of recent years, which sees embodied there its hope of deliverance of the poor from oppression.

2.3 The nature of the text.

As in the rest of the Pentateuch, most scholars see in the book an inter-mingling of J and E and D sources together with P, but how and when these elements were compiled and combined has been and remains the subject of wide and continuous debate and extensive writing. A useful coverage of the various views may be found in 'God and his people' by E. W. Nicholson.⁶ It is not within the purpose of this study to consider the debate except to note a shift in recent years towards the idea that covenant is a late concept.⁷ J. van Seters has been a notable exponent of the idea, positing the whole of J as a post-Dt. work emerging in 6th century and showing evidence of influences from the broader cosmopolitan horizon of Babylon to which it had responded.⁸ On that basis he finds there is no longer any basis for supporting the notion of a pre-exilic Sinai theology of Law and Covenant; rather that it belongs with a primarily diaspora form of corporate identity that became significant for Israel only after the demise of the state.⁹

This is in sharp contrast to Brevard Childs who insists on the importance of the large consensus of scholarship that still sees the Sinai pericope as reflecting an ongoing religious institution of covenant-renewal going far back into Israelite early pre-monarchical history, when material treasured in cultic form was periodically re-enacted.¹⁰ He sees the challenge to be that of interpreting the canonical text in its own integrity - a process which, he suggests, may in an indirect way aid in unravelling some of the mysteries of the earlier stages of the Exodus traditions.¹¹

In a different vein, but one which has certain resonances with Childs, Cassuto sees the whole as an ancient heroic poem dating back to earlier times.¹² He is self-avowedly not primarily looking at sources in his commentary but at the received text which alone, he rightly observes, has factual existence and is not the imaginary work

⁶ 1988 and now also 1998.

⁷ Described and summarised by Nicholson (1988: 83,109ff.).

⁸ 1994: 994.

⁹ 1994: 289, 468. A majority of scholars do not hold Van Seters' views.

¹⁰ 1965: 344ff. Whilst agreeing with Childs and others that some sort of ritual or Covenantal Festival may be indicated here, it is important to recognise that Scripture does not specifically describe or endorse such a function, as Childs himself elsewhere (1992:417). is careful to point out (See below).

¹¹ 1965: 338,344. For a useful discussion on method in interpretation, though with particular reference to Ex.32-34 see Moberly (1983).

Chapter 2: Exodus 19.6

that rests on mere conjecture. Martin Buber approaches his story of Moses in a similar way, seeing it as saga¹³. He quotes Ernest Herzfeld, an Iranologist who sees saga and the writing of history as starting out from an identical point - the event; and insists that it is saga which in particular preserves historical memories 'not of what the consequences show to be historical event but of that which roused the emotions of the men undergoing the experience.'

Without placing ourselves precisely in Buber's position, we may nevertheless take up the final phrase and recognise that whatever the nature or origins of the traditions or the situations which arose that prompted men to reflect on them, emotions, imaginations and creativity were roused in such a way as to facilitate the formulation of a theology of election and covenant relationship leading to a concept of nationhood that was both holy and that had a priestly function in the world. The narrative and the Exodus event described in it hold transformative power.

This is a point especially made by Walter Brueggeman.¹⁴ He sees the Exodus narrative as one which jars, asserts, and disorientates, and suggests that Israel's faith development consisted in seeing the destructive power of Pharaoh's world which was alien to them and having the freedom to stand apart from it and against it.

This suggests to me a faith response to a perceived divine stimulus on the part of the people and their religious leaders or the scribes who later wrote and thought theologically. At what time this interaction may have taken shape as a positive creative theology - whether in Israel's earliest days or the monarchical period, or in the Exile, we cannot know. But all scholars are agreed that if earlier, then considerable development took place both before and during 7th and 6th Centuries. Childs, whilst seeing Covenant theology as resting on earlier traditions, recognises a dominant Dt. influence which helped shape Israel's theological development.¹⁵ A large consensus of scholars agrees.

¹² 1965: 2f.

¹³ 1946: 14.

¹⁴ 1987: 8.

¹⁵ 1992: 418.

2.4 Israel's identity

Whatever went before, it is clear that at the time of the Exile the need was great for Israel to realise her identity. Both Exodus and Deuteronomy seek to establish her in her nationhood with emphases on certainties related to that:-

- a) her deliverance from Egypt through the mighty acts of JHWH.
- b) her election as God's chosen people.
- c) JHWH'S entering into covenant relationship with her and her acceptance of that.
- d) the consequent call to holiness.
- e) the continuity in all this with the promises made to the Patriarchs.

These were often brought to her in the form of injunctions to remember (especially in Dt.) - a strong term in Israelite thought close to the idea of actualising or re-living.¹⁶ The act of remembrance in Dt. was also linked with strong injunctions to instruct the children in the traditions to ensure continuity of the nation's history. We saw in ch.1 and will see further, Peter recognising the same need to emphasise identity, as he continually reminded his readers of their new position in Christ in order that they might realise their election and live accordingly.

2.5 Israel as God's people

What is so significant in Exodus is that the message of deliverance came through the medium of a man - Moses. Throughout Exodus, Israel's fortunes are embodied in him. The book might be seen as his biography. His birth, under the watchful providence of God; his privileged early life; his exile and recall for a specialised task; his initial reluctance but eventual total commitment to that task, all intricately form the web leading to Israel's great deliverance - itself a prelude to the climax of the drama - her

¹⁶ There may well be a link here with earlier Covenantal Festivals (if these did in fact take place), when the Deliverance from Egypt at least, was celebrated.

formation as God's own people by the giving of the Covenant on Sinai through Moses, and her response in acceptance and promise.

The detail of this saga puts immense emphasis on the fact of JHWH the transcendent, almighty God who yet acted to make Israel His people and communicated with her through Moses. It is especially important to keep this in mind in approaching ch.19, the focus of this study - a chapter with which all scholars have wrestled because of what are seen as its textual confusions. Whatever may lie behind its final text it was, for its author or editor, making a fundamental statement about the nature of JHWH and His relations with Moses and through him the people.

2.6 The Sinai Traditions – Ex.19

It is in ch.19, the beginning of the Sinai traditions, that the confusion in Exodus regarding sources is most evident.¹⁷ In contrast to a majority of scholars, Childs holds that the traditional source division does not suffice to cope with the literary tensions of the chapter and sees the different traditions as already combined in the oral stage of transmission. His alternative understanding is that the Sinai tradition breaks in a different way, i.e. according to a Mosaic office, for which he traces two different traditions.¹⁸ What is not in doubt is:-

a) The importance and significance of the Mosaic office.

b) That in the likely conflation of the two forms a richer picture of Moses has emerged. He is not only a mediator at the people's request, underlining his servant role, but also by direct legitimation from JHWH whom he meets face to face as a man speaks with his friend (33.11), this in itself setting forth another aspect of the character of JHWH as the God, not only of terrifying holiness demonstrated by thunder, lightning, trumpet, but of communication - speaking face to face.

¹⁷ In the wide debate Childs offers a useful and detailed study (1965: 340ff.).

¹⁸ 1965: 344f.

2.7 The role of Moses

It is appropriate at this point to pursue a little further the nature of Moses' role and its indication to us of the nature of JHWH.

Exodus is a book very much engaged in demonstrating the power of JHWH and his awesome holiness. So in ch.19 we find the writer ransacking his store of imagery to describe the terror of this power and holiness - peals of thunder, flashes of lightening, loud trumpet blasts all from a mountain enveloped in dense cloud and fenced off from ordinary human approach. But this is the cue for demonstrating also JHWH's presence and the intensity of his love and mercy. It is mediated through Moses whom we have seen as the central figure, a point not always sufficiently appreciated among scholars. For instance von Rad writes:-

*'Not a single one of all the stories in which Moses is the central figure was really written about Moses---It is God who is the central figure. God's words and God's deeds---these are the things that the writers intend to set forth.'*¹⁹

More startlingly P. F. Ellis writes:-

*'There is no human hero in the Yahwist saga - not Abraham, or Jacob or Joseph or Moses---because the protagonist of the saga is the Lord God.'*²⁰

Again G. A. F. Knight writes:-

*'(Moses)---is great only insofar as he is the servant of God---in reality the chief character in the book is God.'*²¹

There is a sense of course in which these writers are correct as we have already observed. But it seems to me that they are missing the fact that in Moses as mediator a fundamental statement is being made about the nature of JHWH and how he is to be discovered by people. It is in the context of Moses sensitivity, his turning aside to the bush, his understanding of the law and the commandment (24.12), his anguish at the peoples' apostasy, his identification with them and his soul poured out pleading for their

¹⁹ 1960: 8.

²⁰ 1981: 158.

²¹ 1976: ix-x.

forgiveness that the nature of JHWH is seen and his love as well as his power is actualised on behalf of Israel.

And Moses is the prototype for Israel herself. The deepest possible statement is being made that there is nothing magical or automatic in God or in his election of Israel. There is paradox here. Whilst JHWH is indeed before all things in his sovereign will (and the link with Genesis and the forefathers is evident throughout), yet his activity needs man's response in order to be activated and appropriated. At the same time Moses typifies God to Israel in what at times seems awesome severity, at other times identity with their failure in sacrificial love and brokenness. Both these attributes are really two sides of the one attribute of love.

So the Moses here presented is no bland, neutral, intermediary spokesman, but one who goes up to God, who is able to receive God's laws and bring them to Israel, who as mediator is the reason for God coming down, and who ultimately prevails with JHWH to forgive his people's apostasy by arguing on the basis of JHWH's own character (Ex.34.8,9).

Thus in considering Exodus 32-34 Moberly writes:-

'It is God's faithfulness which is the basis for forgiveness: and yet this faithfulness is only revealed and made actual when Moses' bold intercession calls it forth'²²

Such divine-human balance plays a central role not only in the narrative following chs.32-34 as Moberly says, but in the whole of Exodus, the whole of Scripture, and religion as both Jews and Christians know it. It is indicative of something more which lies at the heart of Exodus, seen particularly in ch.19. The majesty and might of God in the theophany is expressed in tablets of earthly stone, given to Moses for the people with injunctions regarding their moral and religious life, so that they might be linked to God's transcendence whilst finding at the same time the truest meaning and satisfaction in their daily living and worshipping. This was what it meant to be holy and the sublime intention of the law was to make ordinary life holy, beautiful

²² 1983: 54.

and shot through with the glory of God. It was to demonstrate this that Israel was the elect of God. It is a concept developed to the full in Deuteronomy.

2.8 Ex.19.1-6

The particular concern of this chapter is to consider 19.1-6. 19.3-8 are widely seen by scholars as summarising the material of the foregoing chapters. Thus in summary, the message of the verses is what became the classic one for Israel:-

a) a reminder of all God has done in delivering her from Egypt.

b) a call to listen and to keep God's Covenant. This will facilitate her formation as a holy nation, JHWH's own special possession, a kingdom of priests.

The remainder of the book shows Israel hearing the laws and the beginning of her pilgrimage to keep them followed by her failure, reinstatement and the renewal of the Covenant.

We have looked briefly in the preceding pages at some of the factors which may lie behind the text. Yet whatever the facts, it is the text as it is given by the writer, in this final form of Exodus, that has meaning for us. The literary quality of the book, referred to by Cassuto, was noted earlier. It means that there is a heightened sense of poetic drama evident in each phrase throughout, bringing added depth to its spiritual meaning.

2.8.1 Exegesis

19.1 *They came to the Wilderness of Sinai---*

The phrase strikes powerfully on the imagination. The reference point is ch.3.1 where Moses had met with JHWH at Mt. Horeb in the Wilderness and was called to lead his people the Israelites out of Egypt, the land of her misery, to a new land 'flowing with milk and honey' (3.7-10), which they were to occupy in accordance with the promise given by the same God to the forefathers (3.6). The proof that this was indeed JHWH who was calling and sending was to be the fact that when the mission of deliverance was accomplished they were to worship God at the same mountain.

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Now sixteen chapters of cataclysmic and transforming events later Israel has come to that same mountain (here Sinai).²³ In one sentence, JHWH's accomplishments of the previous sixteen chapters are summarised and underlined, but much more, Israel is shown to be in continuity with all that had been said to the forefathers. Thus there is a powerful reinforcement of her position in preparation for what is to be said in the succeeding verses.

Hodes = month or new moon_ (i.e. 'on that very day'²⁴).

Some commentators (e.g. McNeile,²⁵) suggest that the dating is probably the result of a late tradition connecting the Day of Pentecost with the giving of the law i.e. 50 days after the 15th day of the month the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev.23.5), so that they would arrive at the mountain on the 5th day of the third month, but that the statement of the day has fallen out leaving 'on that very day' unexplained. Cassuto sees this explanation as inferred but, in line with his general alternative approach, adds to it a more symbolic understanding:- this was the beginning of a new experience, but also of the seventh week from their leaving Egypt. So, as the 7th day brought rest so the 7th week was to bring a sense of exaltation and of drawing nearer to the world of the Divine.²⁶ Undoubtedly the sentence is a weighty one. Perhaps what is most important is that it is filled with the awesomeness of fulfilled promises and the mighty acts of the previous chapters, centred around Moses as leader and mediator.

wilderness -to be repeated in 19.2 (x2).

It was in the wilderness that JHWH had spoken with Moses, as the God of their forefathers and had commanded Moses to lead them out (3.1,7,8). Whilst we should see the writer's emphasis as likely to be primarily on the timing of the giving of the law (above), it is interesting to reflect also on the symbolic significance of *midbar*. The treble mention of wilderness in 19.1,2 highlights Israel's position, perhaps inviting a

²³ See n.29 below.

²⁴ Sarna (1991: 103). He notes Midrash Tanhuma's comment that Hebrew uses 'this' rather than 'that' to teach that the revelation at Sinai should be freshly experienced each day.

²⁵ McNeile (1908: 109). See also discussion on chronology in Mark Smith (1999: 189).

forward look to the Promised Land. Wilderness - *midbar* - is a place which is desolate or deserted, the place beyond, a place of danger and disorderliness, where Israel finds herself bewildered and disorientated (cf.Dt.8.15).²⁷ In time to come she would recall her wanderings there as a time of terror. Yet it was there that JHWH had spoken to Moses a message of hope and it is there now that this same God is to meet Israel in what was to be the most significant event in her history. So wilderness has symbolic significance for Israel's religion. Her experience of God was forged out of the crucible of suffering - not only at the Exodus but later in the Exile. This fact is a mark of the nature of the God whom they are to worship. JHWH is the God who delivers, rescues and restores, a fact vividly evident in the Psalms as they voice, frequently, the laments as well as the praises of this people, but always (except Ps.88) with hope.

May we hypothetically conceive of the writer as having such a view, inviting his readers to consider the mission accomplished thus far and to witness JHWH's mighty acts as the solid basis for what lies ahead? For the first readers of this final form of Exodus, struggling to come to terms with the Exile, its message would give new meaning and hope, but it was also to shape their religion. Bereft of what had formerly been associated with their worship they are reminded of their true position - a people of the wilderness yet beloved of JHWH. In such a place JHWH had first revealed himself to Moses showing his concern and will for Israel. Now He is again to reveal himself, this time with the larger agenda of his elective purposes for Israel.

19.2 Israel set out---and encamped before the mountain.--

'From Rephidim' The verse takes up the narrative interrupted by ch.18 and in part repeats 19.1, recalling the setting. Is there a further reason for referring back to Rephidim here? It was Israel's frustration over the lack of water there that had led to her question (17.7) 'Is the Lord among us or not?', and in instructing Moses to strike the rock JHWH had said 'You will find me waiting there' (17.6). Is this then being

²⁶ 1974: 102.

²⁷ HDB (1971: 1133).

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deliberately stressed by way of introduction to a section in which JHWH's presence is to be revealed supremely²⁸ and the nature of his covenant described through Moses?

Chapter 18 is an interesting digression and I venture to wonder if its emphasis is suggestive of what is to come. Jethro is not of Israel yet he blesses the Lord who has delivered Israel from Egypt (18.10) and because of what has been done testifies to YHWH's greatness, offering burnt offerings and sacrifices, whilst Aaron and the elders eat bread with him 'before God' (18.11-12). Some commentators suggest that in 19.5-6 we find a strong suggestion of Israel as a witness among the nations because of what God is to do for her. If this is so then is the emphasis in ch.18 a suggestive precursor of what is to follow?

19.1,2 together underline not only the importance of the wilderness but also of Israel's encamping in front of the mountain (x2). The question of which mountain and where continues to exercise commentators a great deal. Only one thing really matters and is sure - that Mt. Sinai here is meant to be the same as that in ch.3 - the Mt. of God from which Moses had received his call.²⁹ The mountain played a significant role throughout Exodus in the development of Moses as leader and mediator and in the concept of JHWH's Presence for Israel, especially here in ch.19 and in chs.24 and 32-34. This latter is a study in itself and beyond the scope of this present thesis.³⁰

Israel had been commanded to worship at the mountain. But what did that mean? In Egypt Israel had not known God as JHWH. They now knew Him as the God of deliverance, though there was much even in that which challenged their feelings (cf.16.23). The substance contained in the command to worship was as yet unknown to them. They were to learn that to worship JHWH they needed to know his prescribed terms and to obey them. Yet that in itself inadequately described what was required. They were set to discover their own uniqueness as they perceived JHWH seeking to enter into Covenant relationship with them to make them His own people. In acceptance of that relationship and the prescribed laws which were part of it they were to find not

²⁸ Cf., Durham (1987: 259,265-6 and see below).

²⁹ Different traditions are evident in the reference in 3.1 to Mt. Horeb - the name we find used in Dt. - and here - (Wilderness of) Sinai in 19.2 and Mt. Sinai at 19.11. Clearly the same Mt. is intended.

³⁰ For useful and interesting material see Moberly (1983).

only a way to worship, but a way to live and that the two concepts were one in JHWH's eyes.

So Israel is poised for what Mc Neile describes as the greatest of all turning points in her history.³¹ Sarna sees the beginning of 'the process of forging Israel's national identity and spiritual destiny.'³² The shared expressions of bondage and liberation are to be supplemented and given ultimate meaning by a great communal encounter with God. Henceforth Israel is to be a people inextricably bound to God by covenantal relationship. This is the central focus to be expressed in ch.19ff.

19.3a Moses went up to God and the Lord called to him out of the mountain.

19.1,2 have formed a backdrop to 19.3a. They present a panorama of Israel encamped in the wilderness - goal thus far achieved, whilst in the foreground, holding centre stage, Moses goes up to God. God called to him (*wayyiqra* = speak in a loud voice, not summons) out of the mountain. Immediately ch.3.4 is recalled. As there, God called to him out of the bush, now he calls out of the mountain. Childs, as observed earlier, notes the concern of the entire chapter to single out Moses as of fundamental importance³³. The role is evident as Moses is distinctively called up to God over against the people who are left at the bottom. In ch.3 we saw him turning aside to see the bush with the resultant call from God, followed by his (Moses') ready response, and God's consequent introduction of Himself describing who He is. That is not needed here. Moses has proved his reliability and faithfulness; he is qualified to go up to God. Embarrassed by the anthropological language, LXX translates 'Moses went up to the *mountain* of God and the Lord called to him out of *heaven*', but this is to miss the whole point of MT with its linking to 3.4, stressing the Presence of God, within the holiness that surrounded the bush and the sacredness of the mountain.³⁴ From the holiness of the bush God called to Moses. From the holiness of the mountain he calls again. In the foregoing verses the awesome terror of the Lord is to be seen as present in the mountain.

³¹ 1908: 109.

³² 1991: 102.

³³ 1965: 351.

³⁴ Maybe it is an attempt to reflect on ch.24.15,16.

Yet from this place is to come God's communication in the form of the Decalogue and Covenant.

19.3b-8

In common with other scholars as we have noted, Childs sees the passage as a topical introduction to the rest of the chapter, anticipating by way of summary the action that lies ahead and presupposing the ratification of the Covenant which comes in 24.3ff³⁵. He notes that verses 3b-6 have 'a compositional integrity of their own'. The poetic rhythm of the composition in the Hebrew is a feature noted by most scholars. The writer would seem not only to be linking back to ch.3 but also gathering up the traditions concerning presence found throughout Exodus, especially at chs.24,32-34. There is great beauty in the expression of God's relationship with His people, the product, McNeile suggests, of a religious thinker of the Dt. school.³⁶ He quotes Dillmann, 'It is a classic passage of the OT on the nature and aim of theocratic government' and sees the tenderness of a God who hears and knows (cf.Ex.3.7 I have seen--heard--know--am come down to deliver).

Durham finds the 'careful economy and memorable phrasing of its language' suggests it was a set piece used in covenant renewal ceremonies³⁷. This is to follow the consensus referred to earlier that the pattern of standard treaty formula lies behind it. Sarna³⁸ advocates this in strong terms and follows the conventional understanding that it was structured according to accepted patterns of legal documents which would make it intelligible to contemporary Israelites of the time. But he insists on the uniqueness of the Hebrew version in the fact:-

a) that it was a covenantal relationship between God and an entire people - a fact hitherto unparalleled,

b) that it is in a narrative context giving it meaning and significance,

³⁵ 1965: 360.

³⁶ 1908: 110. Whether the text is Dt. or pre-Dt. is however a contended issue.

³⁷ 1987: 261.

³⁸ 1991: 102.

c) that it regulated individual behaviour and human relationships - an area beyond the scope of other ancient treaties.

D. E. Gowan suggests there may be ancient liturgical fragments used in worship and looks at other kinds of evidence alongside that of covenant to describe the nature of God's relationship with Israel. He sees an analogy of the concepts described, in the imagery of adoption i.e. parent-child relationships noted below.³⁹

19.3b Thus you shall say---

The words underline the fundamental importance of what is to follow. Durham⁴⁰ has stressed the advent of JHWH's presence - the vital formative event of OT faith⁴¹, so we may envisage the writer as himself immensely aware of that reality and the uniqueness of such a situation, with a consequent yearning for Israel's response (cf.33.14-17). If what inspired the writer were lost hopes and floundering faith threatening to engulf the nation, he demonstrates here his understanding that nothing was more fundamental for Israel's ongoing relationship with God than to recall that they had been called into that relationship, and to lay hold of the fact through a positive awareness of God's presence leading to yet more certainty of call and security in relationship. This would seem to lay in part at least behind the writing here.⁴²

the house of Jacob---sons of Israel

This is a parallel phrase found repeatedly throughout the later writings of the OT but in the Hexateuch only in poetic passages (Num.23.7,10,21,23; 24.5,17,19; Dt.33.4,10,28) as here. The phrase underlines Israel's nationhood. It was at Peniel that Jacob wrestled with God, prevailed and so was called Israel (Gen.32.28). Is there also a

³⁹ 1994: 174-5.

⁴⁰ 1987: 262.

⁴¹ cf. Rephidim.

⁴² Russel Gregory in a book whose ref. I am no longer able to trace, seeing Exodus as both a reflection and transformation of historical events, suggests that Israel never quite internalised either the significance of the Exodus or the sense of the Covenant. Presumably he means by that, that they were not able to so trust in the certainty of the Covenant terms and the reality of God's provision and presence, that they could unequivocally keep their part of it. For the nation as a whole, in her earlier period - if the covenant existed then - that seems to

hint of Presence again? Jacob asked for the stranger's name but was given his blessing and went on to marvel that he had seen God face to face yet his life had been spared (Gen32.29-30). Face traditions were clearly important at this time but they vary greatly and probably come from different sources (cf. Ex.33.18-23).

19.4 What I did to the Egyptians

This phrase was to resound through the OT as Israel remembered the event annually at Passover, re-living the events and finding new hope in the recollection. There is a suggestion of YHWH as the war-God fighting on behalf of his people. In the strong resonance with Deuteronomy and in the OT refrain, there is also a deeper element of the God who acted for them simply because he loved them (Dt.7.7-8) and had chosen them to be his people. So this reminder of what He has done serves as the appropriate introduction to the Covenant. It was always to be on the basis of what God had done for them. This element continues in the next two phrases. Jacob points to two aspects of God's character combined here: his power and his love - the awesome with the merciful.⁴³ Similarly in the next phrase, the imagery combines pictures of the eagle with that of childhood.⁴⁴

I brought you on eagle's wings (cf. Dt.32.11).

This moving concept introduces what is the dominant point of the whole chapter - that the God of the awesome and terrifying theophany is also the God who has led and cared for his people and who has loving and exalted purposes for them. The image is fuller at Dt.32.11 where we find what Fretheim describes as a wonderfully gracious image of God as a mother, caring for her young during the time they are especially vulnerable, but also testing them as the mother eagle seeks to help her young to learn to fly for themselves, pushing them out of the nest, but swooping under them to catch them

have been true. Yet the prophets and Psalms bear testimony to individuals who had an intense awareness of this provision and presence and it was they indeed who, in the Spirit of God, inspired the on-going life of the nation.

⁴³ Jacob (1992: 526) observes that it was a basic teaching of Torah that God demanded nothing until he had given something. Thus the patriarchs received no commands, only promises.

⁴⁴ 1992: 527.

if they flounder.⁴⁵ There is similar imagery in the Psalms - 17.8; 36.7; 57.1; 61.4; 63.7; 91.4. So a priority of God's actions to the elect people of God is being described. The refs. in Ex. and Dt. are to the wilderness experience cf. Dt.1.31,33; 4.32f; 8.3-5. It was to be seen as a testing experience used by God in love to prepare them for their high calling as His people. There is much here and in the Dt. refs. (also Dt.4.37) that speaks of Presence which was to make them a marvel in the sight of the nations (Dt.4.6). But we see also the seed of the suffering /glory concept which was to develop at Qumran and was to find its fullest expression in NT Christianity.

And brought you to myself

The simplicity of the phrase in itself has immense power to allay the stresses and fears of a people. There is strong suggestion of the J/E concept of JHWH with an emphasis on a relationship of love brought about by God's faithfulness to his people and there is strong resonance with Dt.32.10 - 'He found him in a waste howling void (NEB), He protected and trained him--kept him as the apple of his eye.' Durham sees the 'myself' as referring to the mountain of God's special presence in accord with his (Durham's) emphasis on presence throughout.⁴⁶ This seems inadequate. It was the whole experience of the Exodus and wilderness journeys that was part of the bringing to Himself, the image extending onwards through Israel's history of struggle, presupposing what is to be said at 19.5-6. It is because God has chosen them to be his own people that they have been led in their many experiences, which have proved difficult but in which God has borne with them, teaching them and launching them into this status. The image and the word are being used here, not only as a record of what has passed, but as a challenge to Israel to appreciate and appropriate what God has done for her and thereby to enter more fully into her inheritance. Each phrase of 19.4 has this emphasis. The mountain may nevertheless symbolise the whole.

⁴⁵ 1991: 210.

⁴⁶ Cf. n.40.

19.5. *Now, therefore if--*

There is no specific Hebrew word such as *laken* in the text, but *w'atta*, infers the idea of a very definitive statement, looking back to all that has been accomplished and on the basis of that, heralding the momentous proposal that is about to be revealed, foundational for Israel as a nation under God.

19.5-6 constitute this proposal. They are a concise declaration of God's purposes for Israel and an invitation to the solemn commitment of the Covenant. However, in the probable exilic context in which the proposals were read they also recall her all-too-rapid renouncement of her side of the Covenant in the Apostasy (Ex.32). By dint of the book's biographical quality in relation to Moses, they also recall, by default, his fervent and successful intercession on Israel's behalf and her consequent forgiveness with renewal of the Covenant. All this we may see as embodied in 19.5.

We can press further and suggest what is almost a turning round of what appears to be being said, that at its heart it is God asking for trust. We might paraphrase it thus:- 'If you will stake all on my love for you to the point of not having any other rival allegiances and so fully obey my law then you will find that in doing that you are living the sort of holy life that makes you special and draws forth my blessing in the relationship which results.'

In this understanding there is nothing at all arbitrary in God's choosing of Israel, though He lies behind the whole relationship, but nor is there the more restrictive sense of ANE covenant formulae (see below). Rather it is true relationship based on acceptance, trust and natural reciprocal response to the love that has already been shown. It is of paramount importance to understand that in its inception the Covenant was a gift to Israel giving her the means to live a moral and religious life altogether different from what was current around her and to enjoy the knowledge of the presence of JHWH. It was in this sense that she was to be JHWH's treasured possession.

Commentators vary however in their interpretation of the phrase and the differentials are fine. Durham points out the drawback of too close an equation of this

passage with ANE covenant formulae⁴⁷ and reiterates Sarna's point⁴⁸ that they were functioning on an entirely different basis. There, there was the requirement without option to serve the king. Here it is not so. It is not even the offer, as Muilenberg advocates,⁴⁹ of choice between obedience or disobedience. Rather, YHWH is offering Israel the means of appropriate response to what he has done for them, if they choose to take it.⁵⁰ Durham sees an affirmative response as meaning the birth of Israel as YHWH's people. Without it they will only be sons of Israel/descendants of Jacob.⁵¹

The writer is underlining the essential element of integrity in a relationship which, when it is with the Divine, calls forth man's highest values, demonstrating what human beings are capable of when reckoning on the presence of JHWH - His knowledge of them, His care for their well-being. This carries strong resonances with wisdom thought as we will see later in Dt. Sarna⁵² notes the fact that the provisions of the Decalogue are paralleled in the wisdom and ethical literature of the Ancient World but that what is revolutionary is seeing them as expressions of the Divine Will, binding on society as well as individuals. This is partly the sense in which Israel is to be God's own possession from among all people.

You shall be my own possession

Segullah - treasured possession. The term came to be employed in a figurative sense during the 2nd Mill. in theological and political contexts in the ancient Near East.⁵³ The Hebrew has ugaritic and accadian cognates *sglth* and *sikiltu* respectively, the latter related to the accadian verb *sakalu* - to set aside. Thus a royal seal of Abbasan of Alalakh designates its owner as the *sikiltum* of the god, valued property to which the god had exclusive right of possession.⁵⁴ The expression then continues the earlier thought of God's special covenantal relationship with Israel and His love for His people. A

⁴⁷ 1987: 262.

⁴⁸ 1991: 102.

⁴⁹ 1959: 353 cited Durham (1982: 262).

⁵⁰ So also Jacob (1992: 527-9) and Fretheim (1991: 210,212).

⁵¹ 1987: 262.

⁵² 1991: 102.

⁵³ Sherriffs (1990: 67f. & n.10).

⁵⁴ Greenberg cited Durham (1987: 262).

stronger term could hardly have been used. This is exactly as found in Dt.7.6; 14.2; 26.18,19 which Sarna cites as the same description, but the word there is linked to *bahar* - choose, to give more precise expression to 'election'. For Jacob⁵⁵ this is much less strong than the Exodus expression, especially when, as in Torah, *segullah*'s meaning is raised yet further by the prefix, *li* - to me, indicating the most intense pride of possession, consideration, love and delicate joy - a unique treasure. One senses the intensity of desire on the part of the writer to emphasise the wonder and uniqueness of Israel's position, standing as we have assumed in a disorientated situation. Can the people understand that they have the means at hand, within their grasp, to keep the terms of God's Covenant and so find deliverance? They have been given a moral and religious law which can make them the most special of all people. They are truly jewels in the king's eyes, his precious possession.

All the earth is mine

McNeile follows the school of thought of his time in noting that the absolute monotheism expressed here was not the belief in Israel until taught by 8th century prophets, so endorsing the deuteronomic tone.⁵⁶ Cassuto paraphrases the phrase, 'I am the God of all people (cf.Gen.11.1) but if you will agree to my proposal I shall choose you specifically for the fulfilment of an exalted spiritual task.'⁵⁷ This perhaps helps to catch the balance between God's activity and the people's response. Yet in the word 'agree' there seems still a sense of staying within the ANE formula idea (cf.above). I would prefer, 'If you accept my proposal you will find yourself chosen--', putting greater emphasis on the immensity of the possibilities on offer for Israel if she responds, because JHWH as Lord of all the earth has the means of blessing her, giving her the status and security she needs. This I find in tune with the rest of the passage. An additional nuance may be found:- As the whole earth is JHWH's, then He alone is qualified to declare what constitutes a right way of living in it. In choosing Israel for Covenant relationship he is giving her, out of all nations, the opportunity to live in that

⁵⁵ 1992:527.

⁵⁶ 1908:110.

way. Thus her positive response to the offer will be to bring her into the realm of being JHWH's own special possession.

19.6 memlekhet kohanim

This phrase is unique in the OT and so has intrigued many scholars and brought a variety of interpretations. 'Priests' is frequently seen as an attribute of 'kingdom' as 'holy' is an attribute of 'nation' in the parallel phrase, but Moran insists that *mamlekhet kohanim* is not a synonym for *goy qados* rather 'a separate entity which forms a totality with the people'.⁵⁸ Endorsement for this is found in R.Alter⁵⁹ who disputes the misconception that Hebrew parallelism represents a total repetition of an idea. Rather he shows the dominant pattern to be a focusing, heightening or specifying of ideas, images, themes etc. from one verset to the next and quotes the elizabethan, Hoskins - 'In speech there is no repetition without importance'. So one must constantly look for something new happening from one line to the next. This can be seen to be the case in 19.6.

The two elements of the first phrase are most probably in the construct case, indicating the defining of a single idea which could be either the kingdom as Israel ruled by God, her priestliness being in the realm of worship, or the kingdom as indicating Israel's sovereignty over the nations, with her priestliness in a mediatorial role.⁶⁰ But *memlekhet* could also be in the absolute, both it and *kohanim* standing as independent nouns in apposition - a kingdom, priests--.

Whatever the intended meaning, what is significant is that the terms kingly, priestly, holy are new when used in the context of God's own people, and so are only given content in the light of the subsequent understanding of the terms.⁶¹ It will be helpful therefore to consider the role of the priest in Israel.

⁵⁷ 1961: 227. See also Driver (1973: 294) on Dt.26.17-18.

⁵⁸ Moran cited Childs (1965: 342). So also Durham (1987: 263).

⁵⁹ 1992: 178.

⁶⁰ See Gelston (1959:152f.) for a useful consideration of the phrases.

⁶¹ Jo Bailey Wells (1997: 89).

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Excursus - Priesthood in Israel

In the immediate context, 19.22 describes priests as 'having access to JHWH', an important clue, given more explicit content at Ex.chs.28-9 in the instructions for their installation, with the intricate details of their garments (28.2ff.) and the nature of their responsibilities in worship. We see them as very specifically set aside to be 'holy to JHWH' (28.36, as were the sacrifices - 29.33,34,37), but also to bear up the people before Him (28.15,21,29,30; note also 19.38) and through their offerings to be the means of JHWH being fully present among His people and recognised as such by them (29.43-46 - a key passage). The instructions are actualised at Lev.8-9 with a continuing intense emphasis on set-apartness and purity (further underlined at 10.1-7).

Very much the same emphases are found at e.g. 1Sam.2.28 and Dt.10.8, 9, though the latter also speaks of the priests blessing the people (cf. Num.24-26 and see below).

These texts make it plain that the priests' primary role was godward and that it was through their godward activity that they also imparted to the people the sense of the presence of JHWH and of His holiness.

It now becomes clear what was being offered to Israel in designating her a kingdom of priests or a royal priesthood. In assenting to the gift of the Covenant she was actualising her selection, and accepting the terms - exclusive commitment to JHWH in holiness, set apart to Him in all aspects of her living and being, different from other nations. In being thus, she would also be the bearer of JHWH's presence in the midst of the nations and in that sense 'bring' Him to them.

There was another side to priesthood which we should also note. Priests were teachers; in some cases they administered the law; they were qualified to obtain guidance through the Urim and Thummim and as the Aaronic blessing indicates (Num.6.24-6), they were qualified to pronounce blessings on the people. All these show an outward thrust different from the above which was also part of an ideal priesthood. Further, the letter to Hebrews in NT (5.1-5) reminds us of the priests' empathy with those for whom they offered sacrifice and of their responsibility to show care in the community and minister to its needs.

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Are we then to see an analogy with the role of Israel in these activities also, with her called to reach out in service to other nations - a majority view among commentators e.g. McNeile⁶² who sees her as committed 'to bring other nations to the worship of God and to teach them His Will'⁶³? Or have commentators too readily, in this area, assumed an intended style of priesthood for Israel that relates more to modern western understanding of the role than an OT biblical one?

It would seem we have an important guide-line in Is.61, the only other place in OT where Israel is referred to as priest. In 61.6a the people are designated 'priests of the Lord and ministers of our God'. The immediate context indicates how this is understood.

61.5 – aliens will feed their flocks, foreigners will be their ploughmen---vinedressers.

61.6b – they will enjoy the wealth of other nations and be furnished with their riches.

61.3 – they have an inherent righteousness, 'trees planted by the Lord that He may be glorified'

61.9 – they are renowned among the nations, acknowledged as a race blessed by JHWH.

Throughout the rest of the chapter and late Isaiah (chs.56-66), this emphasis on Israel's sovereignty, together with her blessedness by JHWH, continues, e.g. 62. 3ff.- 'You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord' you shall be called 'My delight is in her'.

The sense is of Israel richly endowed, enjoying blessings, whilst offering back praise and worship in obedience to the Giver - an idealistic picture showing that it is in the sense of Israel's blessedness, privilege and separateness to God that her people are seen as priests and ministers of JHWH and thereby witnessing to the world of JHWH's

⁶² 1908: 111.

⁶³ See also Durham (1987: 263), Cassuto (1974: 227).

greatness and glory, and His faithfulness on behalf of His people. There is no sense here of specific mediation. As with the levitical priests the stress is on a godward relationship which in itself ministers to those who witness it and in that respect brings JHWH 'towards' them.

It seems to me that the primary understanding of *mamlekheth kohanim* at Ex.19.6 is the same. As the treasure of JHWH Israel is to recognise her unique privilege and blessedness as a nation chosen supremely for separation and commitment to Him in worship and obedience.

goy qados

Following Alter, we would expect to see this phrase extending or enhancing the above understanding. It does so. The phrase is not found elsewhere in OT but 'holy people' has a number of occurrences viz. Dt.7.6; 14.2,21; 26.18,19; Is.62.12. Of these, Dt.26.18 is particularly interesting – 'The Lord has recognised you this day as His special possession. He will raise you high above all the nations to bring Him praise and fame and glory and to be a people holy to the Lord your God.

The first two elements of the phrase match the picture of priesthood seen at Is.61.6 which we have applied to Ex.19.6a, but they also relate to the last element - the peoples' holiness to God, which describes how the first two elements are to happen.

Whilst 'holy' at that time did not carry the moral connotation that it usually does today, but rather separation, nevertheless JHWH's covenant with Israel concerned her keeping His laws many of which, as we see in e.g. Ex.chs.20-23, were concerned with mundane details of everyday life. This was to be part of Israel's holiness as a nation, but always to be held within the larger context of her chosenness and her 'priestly' commitment to JHWH. There was no sense of the laws as ends in themselves. It was thus that she was to be a holy nation and it was this concept which was seen to raise her morally and religiously above the surrounding nations and thereby bring 'praise, fame and glory' to JHWH, ideally influencing other nations for good in demonstrating the nature of the One she claimed - at least by the time of the Exile - was the one God of the whole earth.

Israel as a holy nation is set apart not simply from other peoples/nations, but for a specific purpose - to embody and demonstrate God's purposes for the world. The language of nation rather than congregation draws in all aspects of the life of Israel as relevant to the fulfilment of this purpose, not just the religious. All of Israel's life is seen as a unity, belonging to God.⁶⁴

2.9 Conclusion

Thus we have in Ex.19.6 a remarkably comprehensive statement of the nature of election. It means privilege and status such as was associated with kings. Such privilege carried with it the requirement for total commitment godward to JHWH in the entirety associated with priests. Israel was to be a worshipping theocracy. This in turn brought its own requirements in living relationships. What was being envisaged was, in its ideal, a totality of good life (though with plenteous provision for dealing with failure). Such would stand as a witness to the world of the glory of JHWH and the possibilities of life when lived to Him, so drawing the nations to Him and in measure 'taking' Him to the nations.⁶⁵

It was this concept that 1Peter was using powerfully in his letter. In the following chapter we examine how it was presented in a different form by the Deuteronomist.

⁶⁴ Fretheim (1991: 213).

⁶⁵ Cf. Sarna (1991: 104).

Chapter three

Deuteronomy - Its monotheism seen in covenant and election

3.1 Introduction

The book of Deuteronomy sets out a restatement of the Law, purporting to be delivered by Moses shortly before his death and before Israel's entry into the Promised Land (Dt.1.1,5; 4.1; 5.1ff.).¹ The latter is generally regarded as a stylistic literary device to give authority to its content.²

It is thus different from Exodus whose contents form its raw material. In Exodus God speaks (except at 7.4; 11.13-15; 17.3; 28.20; 29.4ff.) often through his interpreter Moses, but always the words are His. Thus, 'God spoke these words' (Ex.20.1); The Lord said to Moses, 'Say this to the Israelites' (20.2); 'These are the laws you are to set before them' (21.1), throughout the book. Not so in Dt. where it is largely Moses who speaks and mainly in homiletic, interpretative style.³

In purporting to be the words of Moses the book is a hortatory treatise in which the writer takes up earlier traditions and seeks to reinterpret them in the light of the present. He is facing the major problem of where Israel now stands. Behind her, since the settlement in the land, stands a chequered and religiously woeful history, forming her into a different people from that which, as tradition records, stood at the foot of Mt. Horeb. How is all that now to be understood in the light of considerable national disintegration? Do the old traditions have any relevance any more? If so how are they to be incorporated into the present situation?⁴

In seeking to face and answer these questions Dt. is attempting to restructure and reestablish the life of Israel. In particular it is attempting to recomprehend the old Israel on the basis of divine election. We cannot know to what extent this concept had

¹ For location see Driver (1973: 1-9).

² Weinfeld (1972: 1).

³ von Rad (1953: 11ff.) sees Neh.8.7b-8 as a possible example of the style (though he recognises difficulties in the passage) in the direct proclamation of the will of JHWH before the community and then the instruction.

⁴ von Rad (1953: 70ff).

been formulated at an earlier stage in Israel's history. More important is the fact that it now became a potent factor in describing that history in terms of Israel's experience with God and in seeking to create in her a sense of identity as the chosen of JHWH. The relevance of it to the time of writing is underlined by the recurring use of the phrase 'this day' (e.g. 4.20,38,39; 5.1,3,24; 6.6; 7.11; 8.1.)

In respect of these factors the work marked the emergence of a new unique literary style which prevailed over the next 150 years circ. 650-500 BC - found also in the Deuteronomic History and Prophetic literature - a style distinguished by intrinsic simplicity, but beyond that, by a specific terminology reflecting the religious upheavals of the time and marking a significant development in Hebrew literary composition.⁵ Klaus Koch writes that the traditional legal tenets and historical traditions of Israel were integrated so radically and altered in such a way that 'In the whole of the ancient world there is hardly a single writing - not even Plato's Republic - which can equal Deuteronomy in its solemn revolutionary passion.'⁶ In this radical interpretation the constitution of the people of JHWH was embodied. In due course it was to change Israelite religion fundamentally, though how that took place and what was the process of its reception as authoritative are questions about which we know little.

3.2 Authorship, Date and Provenance

The book has provoked debate and speculation as to its authorship, date and provenance probably more than any other book in the Scriptures.⁷ It is widely accepted that the Book of the Law found in the Temple in Josiah's reign (2Ki.22-23) was the original Deuteronomy,⁸ though a persistent minority view has queried the close linkage,⁹ and as with Exodus, some modern scholars see it as an exilic or post-exilic document.¹⁰ Almost all are agreed that considerable working on the text took place in the exilic era and that if it was indeed the Book of the Law this does not represent Deuteronomy as we now have it.

⁵ Weinfeld (1972: 1).

⁶ Koch (1983: 4).

⁷ Nicholson (1967: 37).

⁸ A view proposed by de Wette (thesis:1805), following some of the Early Fathers - Athanasius, Jerome, Chrysostom, et al but contrary to them, in suggesting it as *first written* then.

⁹ E.g. O.Bacchli sees Deut. as growing *out of* Josiah's reforms cited Nicholson (1967: 88); the Gramby School (19th C.) saw it as exilic. For a useful, general discussion see Christensen (1991: xlix-li).

¹⁰ E.g. Van Seters (1994: 12ff.).

E.W.Nicholson proposes a northern provenance centred on the Prophetic Schools¹¹ with a fanciful theory as to how it reached the Jerusalem Temple.¹² The biting criticisms found in Amos and Hosea against the cultic centres (Amos 4.4-5; Hos.4.15; 9.15; 10.5,15; 12.12) and against the emptiness of what purported to be worship of JHWH (Amos 5.21-22; Hos.6.6), highlighting what they saw as the decadent state of Israelite religion in the Northern Province fit well enough with Nicholson's connection between Dt. and a prophetic party intent on renewal, but the latter may rather be a reflection of Nicholson's own thought, and we cannot discount the degree to which exilic editing of these prophets took place, reflecting a later view of an earlier situation.

Other scholars favour a southern provenance; e.g. von Rad¹³ proposes it as coming from amongst a Judaeen circle of Levite preachers (partly based presumably on the strong support given to the Levites in various places e.g. 10.8-9; 12.12, 18,19) at the centre of a 7th Cent. B.C. Revival Movement,¹⁴ bearers of the old sacral and cultic traditions underlying the book and yearning for national revival; Weinfeld on the other hand, underlines its significantly *non-sacramental* aspect seeing it as emerging from a scribal circle connected with the court, simultaneously with a *pre-exilic* 'P' from priests in the central sanctuary. This fits with its distinctly 'protestant' atmosphere in contrast to the sacramental P, as it aims to express spirituality through the everyday, grounded in a secular reality.¹⁵ This is underlined by the use of themes which strongly reflect the Wisdom Literature (reward, long-life, blessed offspring, material affluence, dependence on God). Indeed wisdom thought is the pervasive atmosphere throughout (to which we will constantly make reference) and shows the author as strongly influenced by it.

3.3 The nature of Israel

Uncertainty surrounding its origins is in no way reflected in Deuteronomy's significance, as evidenced in its content. The traditions associated with Israel's history are used as the basis for setting forth her calling to be a nation separate, holy to JHWH,

¹¹ 1967: 58-9, citing also A.C.Welch, A.Alt, A.Weiser, J.Bright.

¹² 1967: 83ff.

¹³ 1953: 60ff.

¹⁴ Evidenced again by such texts as Neh.8.7; 2Chron.35.3 reflecting earlier pre-exilic practice.

¹⁵ Von Rad (1953: 71) also, 'All the departments of life are laid claim to in the light of this great new proclamation'.

living according to prescribed commandments and ordinances, a witness to surrounding nations of the character of her God and the blessings He bestows. The writer used and developed these traditions theologically but it is probable that he was at the same time also using them metaphorically so that motifs such as land, *herem*, etc. became symbols to describe what the nation's spiritual life was to be.¹⁶ This is discussed at greater length below.

The theocratic principles by which Israel was to be governed are first set out in chs.5-11 in what Tigay calls 'A preamble by Moses to the laws given in Moab.'¹⁷ Chs.12ff. are an exposition of these laws with their purposes and the motives for their observance.¹⁸ They largely constitute a development of those found in Exodus.

As already observed these premises are stated in Deuteronomy in a homiletic, sermon-like style grounded in the needs of the people, especially the cult. Klosterman¹⁹ observes that it is not a law-book as generally understood, rather it is 'a collection of material for the public recital of law' i.e. it is law preached²⁰, with the purpose of acting as a force in the formulation of a moral and religious people of JHWH. The message is set forth through comparatively few themes, repeated again and again with such passion and force of rhetoric that they carry immense persuasive power.

Much of the language of these chapters shows the writing to be patterned in its style on the loyalty oaths asked of vassals by their suzerains. The keeping of Divine laws is a duty owed to JHWH as king in the same way that keeping social/political laws etc. is owed to a human suzerain. The discovery of the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon in 1956 has confirmed this.²¹ Linked with the influence of wisdom thought, this makes the book intensely practical in its application of theological principles to the needs of the people, albeit in the context of a strong ideology. Israel is set forth as having a distinct and personal relationship with JHWH through the Covenant He has made with her, bringing serious responsibilities on her part. This relationship is particularly expressed at 7.6. Israel is to be a people holy to the Lord because God has chosen her

¹⁶ Cf. Christensen (1991: 44).

¹⁷ Tigay (1996: 74ff.).

¹⁸ Driver (1973: 82).

¹⁹ 'Der Pentateuch' NF (1907) cited Weinfeld (1972: 3).

²⁰ von Rad (1953: 16).

²¹ Weinfeld (1972: 6,7). But cf. also ch.2 this doc.

to be a people for His own possession, out of all peoples on the face of the earth. The lifestyle being described for her is contingent upon this.

3.4 Israel's Identity

The context of Dt's purpose, as seen from the suggested possibilities of its provenance and also from an exilic redaction standpoint, was a people in dis-array. In such case it was necessary first to remind them in persuasive manner of their identity and the uniqueness of their position as God's chosen.²² This is a primary element in the writer's passionate discourse, which he sets against the background of their former predicament as slaves and aliens in Egypt and the mighty deliverance wrought for them by JHWH, seen as unaccountable apart from his electing love. (4.20,34; 6.12,21; 7.18; 8.2; 9.7,12,26; 10.22; 11.3,4,10; 13.10; 16.1,3,12; 20.1; 23.4; 24.18,22; 25.5f.).

Again and again through repeated rhetorical phrases this point is made with almost dogmatic insistence - yet 'with warm and persuasive eloquence'²³ - that Israel is a people delivered and chosen by covenant with JHWH (4.20; 7.6; 10.15; 14.2; 26.18) for special blessing and for obedience (4.5,8,14,40,45; 5.1,31; 6.1,2,17,20; 7.11; 8.11; 9.23; 10.13; 11.1,8,28,32; 12.1,14; 13.4,5,15; 26.16,17). Remembrance of this fact is to be the source of her life, demonstrated in every part of it, even in what would seem to be the most mundane, setting her apart as a nation holy to JHWH. Indeed the call to remembrance and its synonym 'not forgetting' punctuates these chapters with persistent regularity.

3.5 Themes of the Book

These are understood by Weinfeld as expressed through a number of 'theological principles' categorised by him as follows :-²⁴

Struggle against idolatry

Centrality of cult

Exodus, Covenant and Election

Monotheistic Creed

²² van Seters (1983: 359ff).

²³ Driver (1973: 82).

Observance of Law and loyalty to the Covenant

Inheritance of the land

Retribution and material motivation

Some of these I will explore below.

The overriding rationale of chs.1-11 is, from one perspective, the threat of idolatry, coupled with its counterpart and antidote, the observation of the law and loyalty to the covenant. This is the issue at stake. To reinforce that and to show whence it arose is the purpose of the declaration of the *Shema* at 6.4 - referred to above as the monotheistic creed. It became foundational for Israel's sense of identity.

3.6 Monotheism

Writing of later 1st. Century Judaism N.T.Wright calls the *Shema* 'the battle cry of the nation that believed its God to be the only God, Lord of Heaven and Earth.'²⁵ Whilst this describes what pertained in the 1st Century, in Dt. it is a more problematical term.

Eichrodt relates it to 'the first, clear comprehension by the prophets of the uniqueness and universality of God',²⁶ which had been reached through struggle against nature worship and the idolatry associated with it. Again, though that struggle is everywhere evident in Dt., certainty regarding monotheism is not so clear. It is true that for the writer of Dt. 'what emerged was an experience of God as a close, living reality, seen through Exodus and the Covenant, with its assurance of Election,'²⁷ but whether there also existed 'a vital and moral monotheism' as Eichrodt understands it is less certain.

Referring like Wright to later Judaism, Weinfeld sees the term at that time, not only as defining monotheism in terms of one God in contrast to a plurality of gods, but also in the character of JHWH as 'transcendent - beyond the sphere of nature and therefore not subject to physical and biological principles as were the gods of

²⁴ Weinfeld (1972: 1).

²⁵ Wright (1996: 248ff.).

²⁶ Eichrodt (1961: 226f.).

²⁷ Eichrodt (1961: 226f.).

polytheistic systems.’²⁸ This is a philosophical view, which undoubtedly describes concepts that were being felt after by spiritual thinkers in Israel at that later time and possibly earlier e.g. Isaiah chs.44ff., but it is not a view expressed with unambiguous clarity in the biblical text of Dt. where verses such as 4.7; 5.7 vie with others such as 4.35, 39 and the general tenor of 4.32-40 - all seen as later writing.

How then is the *Shema* to be understood? The above observations suggest that a different approach would be appropriate. This we will consider further below. But first we consider questions concerning Covenant and Election. Together with Exodus, which sounds as an oft-repeated refrain throughout the book, Covenant forms the canopy beneath which the remaining principles (above) are set forth. This will be considered further below.

Excursus – Covenant and Election

On the much-debated issue focusing on the roots of Covenant and Election, ranged largely between the Schools of Alt (ancient Covenant traditions rooted in Covenant Festivals) and Wellhausen/Perlitt (Monarchical with no early mention of Covenant and Election), B.S.Childs has a useful contribution.²⁹ Drawing on James Barr - ‘Some Semantic Notes’ - he notes that the lack of occurrence of the vocabulary of Covenant does not exclude the possibility of a related concept whose vocabulary has its own functional integrity within another linguistic context. The same rule might be applied to Election, People of God and Land.³⁰

He also draws attention to the hermeneutical issue, suggesting that on the one hand a historical trajectory can to a certain extent be traced from Israel’s pre-exilic to her post-exilic religion with Isaiah’s theology distinct from that of Dt.; on the other that ‘late post-exilic material was often projected back into Israel’s earliest Patriarchal and Mosaic periods and the writings of the early Prophets edited with a language and concepts of a different age.’³¹

In evaluating the process, far from viewing the canonical form of the text as a self-serving ideology which from a modern perspective regards any non-historical

²⁸ Weinfeld (1989: 37f.).

²⁹ Childs (1992: 413-428). Also on this theme Mayes (1979: 64).

³⁰ Childs (1992: 414f.)

³¹ Childs (1992: 415).

material as fictional, he insists that the canonical shape must be interpreted as reflecting the perspective, *from within the community of faith* [italics mine], of how Israel understood her relationship with God.³² Whilst this is a correct insistence it does not as it stands deal with the objection. However we cannot pursue the matter further here.

As in the case of Exodus, Childs notes also that in the degree of multi-layering and reworking which can be seen in the text there is recognisable evidence of theological continuity. As an example he contrasts the covenantal language of Gen.15.18 reflecting Dt. redaction, with that of Gen.50.25; Ex.13.5,11; 32.13; Num.11.12; 14.23, all largely uncontested early levels of the Pentateuch.³³

In summary he sees the Dt. Theology of Covenant as resting consistently on an earlier tradition but also insists that any theology of OT Covenant must be seen from the perspective of the final editors in their shaping of the whole literature, so that 'it became the normative expression of God's relation to Israel, and served as a major theological category for unifying the entire collection comprising the Hebrew Scripture.'³⁴

3.7 Inheritance of the Land

The primary setting of Israel's Elect status and JHWH's Providence is the land, introduced at the outset of the treatise in the prologue (1.8) and appearing 50 times through the discourse - more than any other theme (4.1,5,21,22,26,40; 6.10,18,23; 7.1,13; 8.1,7-10; 9.4-6,23; 10.11; 11.8-10,17,21,25,29,31; 12.10,29; 16.20; 17.14; 18.9; 19.1,8,10,14; 21.1; 23.14,20; 24.4; 25.19; 26.8,15,19). No longer to be aliens, the people of Israel are reminded of God's original covenant with the Fathers and invited to take possession, 'to enter and occupy' (1.8,21; 4.22; 6.18; 10.11; 11.29,31; et al).

3.7.1 *The significance of the Land*

As noted, the covenant with the Fathers is an all-pervasive, persistent and significant theme tracing back Israel's beginnings to the patriarchs and underlining a faithfulness of God to promises made there (1.8,11,21,35; 6.3,10,18,28; 7.8,12,13; 8.1,18; 9.5; 10.11,15; 11.9,21; 13.17; 19.8; 26.3,15; 27.3; 28.11; 31.7,26), but the

³² Childs (1992: 415-6).

³³ Childs (1992: 417).

demonstration to the nations around of the might and providence of her God is to be seen in the tangible fact of His delivering her people from slavery in Egypt into a settled land of plenty (4.32-40; 6.10-12,20-25; 7.13-15; 8.7-18; 11.10-12,13-15 et al) and in being a God responsive to His people's calls, at the same time as giving them just laws by which to serve Him (4.6-8). Thus land and laws became inextricably linked, the former the necessary ground on which the latter are to be worked out. The degree to which and the manner in which this is expressed indicates the deep significance of the idea to the writer of Dt., as it was to be increasingly in the spiritual life of the nation.³⁵ This was the great mark of Israel's identity as God's people. Part of Dt.'s strategy is to create a deep awareness of her elective position, through the persistent reminder of the debt she owes to JHWH for her deliverance from Egypt into a new land, and out of that awareness, to draw her on to spiritual devotion in the keeping of the laws.

So theologically as well as practically the land is set forth as the mark of Israel's election and of her inheritance. It was to be the sphere in which God's blessings were to be experienced and in which her people would work out their holy living, resisting idolatry and rising to the land's challenges in the strength of JHWH, so demonstrating to the nations around, her uniqueness and the uniqueness and glory of her God in delivering her out from---into (4.34; 6.12,23) and in giving her just laws (4.6b-9a).

There is both reality and theological symbolism here. Israel is being powerfully reminded of the traditions of her history. From being aliens in Egypt she had been given a literal dwelling-place, a land in which to settle, marking the end of her years both of servitude and of wandering. As a settled people she was to be seen as able to develop as a nation and find an identity. The details of her settling are significant. They are illustrative of wisdom teaching, but mark also a switch from nomadic to settled existence e.g. cities, well-set-up houses, strong durable cisterns, cultivation, food, mineral wealth, plenty (6.10,11; 7.13-15; 8.7-10) and the scope such provision and settlement offers for development and creativity.

Yet from the perspective of the writer the land was shown to hold even greater significance in its theological or symbolic aspect. God had chosen Israel, thereby

³⁴ Childs (1992: 418).

³⁵ Cf. e.g. Pss.105-107,114,135,136.f.

giving her an identity as a people set apart, whilst underlining that it was not because of her worth (cf. 7.7,8; 9.4-5) and pinpointing what were key factors in the spiritual life Dt. was seeking to create - the need for remembrance of JHWH's activity in bringing her there (6.12; 8.2,11,14,17,18 et al) and even more, continuing humility in such remembrance (9.4-6) with the sense of dependence upon God which that brings and responsibility for continually establishing herself in occupation and driving out the enemy. In these factors, fundamental to Israel's sense of identity, the land was a very powerful element indeed.

In the somewhat ideological portrayal of the riches the land was to hold, we may discern a first movement towards metaphor, indicative of the spiritual perceptions that lay behind Dt.'s writing.³⁶ As the setting for Israel's life with God, the land symbolises life itself with the challenges to character that lie therein and as such, functions powerfully in that respect in the hands of the writer. Even so, the concrete fact of the land as God's gift and as a basis for Israel's well-being and development would seem to remain.

3.7.2 Issues relating to the Land

There are issues at stake here which present problems, particularly to the present day reader of Scripture. In the portrayal of her history as it is presented, what right had Israel to dispossess other nations of their land? How can this be defended as God's doing on Israel's behalf? Was the Dt. writer not promoting triumphalism and nationalism to an unacceptable degree? And what of the claims of present day Israel, based on the promises to the Fathers, yet set against strong Palestinian claims?

These are hard questions and there is no clear-cut, or ready-made answer, nor is there likely to be. However I offer my suggestions.

There are two main factors to consider. In the first place we must note that even in the modern era up to last century, it was accepted that nations established their supremacy when, in certain situations at least, they overpowered other nations. War was taken for granted as necessary and inevitable, albeit an evil; colonisation was not viewed, in general principle, as particularly immoral, rather the reverse in that it was seen to be improving the lot of the indigenous peoples and furthering the course of

³⁶ See further Moberly (1999[i]: 43).

civilisation. This was not necessarily a right premise (though the amount of good that was done is generally ignored today), but it is how things were and went largely unquestioned. Such a situation was certainly true in the ancient world. It is just *because* the concepts of war and victory or defeat were so much a part of every society that they became a basic metaphor for many aspects of life and remain so e.g. we speak of 'winning through', or of 'being defeated' in personal inner situations. This suggests that we cannot judge the ancient foundations of these matters on the basis of the refined criteria applied in 20th century. The question may then be asked 'But how does *God* view these situations?' Was he not misinterpreted by the writers?

Whilst it is true that God is unchangeable, He is *understood* in man's terms and through man's eyes and his contemporary experiences and so has been *interpreted* differently in every era according to how men were in their times. Man's *concept* of the Divine in ancient times was incomparably different in multitudinous respects (though undoubtedly not all) from what it is today. In the complex intricacy of Israel's recognition of divine transcendence at work in her deliverance from Egypt and the grasping of both in terms of the contemporary situation understood by her (i.e. the taking of the land) Dt. perceived Israel's election and largely interpreted both its blessings and its demands according to the spiritual understanding of the times (cf. Ex., Num., Psalms, Wisdom teaching), to enable her to find an identity and to encourage her to realise herself as a people holy to JHWH and so rise to actualise new and wonderful possibilities as a nation.

In doing this the writer was laying upon Israel the consequential necessity of living according to JHWH's laws. The land then was seen as a solemn trust, a framework for demonstrating to the nations JHWH's way of life and how He honours those who love and serve him in this way (6.10ff; 7.12ff; 8.7ff; 11.11ff). As such the land and Israel herself were to be means of blessing to the nations. (cf. ch.2 Ex.19.6 - Israel a royal priesthood).

There is mystery and paradox here as in all questions relating to God and his activity on man's behalf and man's relationship with him. But I suggest that we cannot argue against the validity of what was written *for that time*. However we must bear in

mind the movement towards metaphor already mentioned and to which we will refer more fully below.³⁷

First we consider a second factor.

3.7.3 *Israel's present position in the Land*

Whilst her people maintained a strong sense of identity throughout the centuries *in diaspora* and through unspeakable suffering and humiliation, the ideology of the land continued, not only as a fundamental, albeit well-nigh *metaphorical* element in her religion, but for most individuals and for her as a nation, as a continuing *actual* hope for the future - 'Next year in Jerusalem!' There seems therefore a certain fundamental fittingness about her return there in 1948, not because of a literal interpretation of promises seen to have been made to Abraham but because the whole fabric of Israelite religion is so caught up in the land and because a people needs a land in this world now, no less than in early days, in which to live, settle and prosper. It is not difficult to understand that for many Jews the events of 1948 signalled the fulfilment of their deepest hopes and longings, especially in the wake of the Holocaust. But what of the Palestinians, deprived of what was their homeland too?

It is noteworthy that it is some of the Hassidic Jews - those who live supremely by Torah and who were against the return of Israel to the land in 1948, believing it to be a political measure, not wrought by God or in God's time - who, now they are in the land, are the most extreme in their attitude to the Palestinians, holding to a wholly literal understanding of Scripture and adopting an exclusive and often fiercely antagonistic attitude towards that people. A less fierce but still literal understanding of scripture is also to be found among most Messianic believers in Jesus. At the same time, many who claim to be secular Jews more readily recall the Dt. injunction to treat the alien well, in remembrance of their alien status in Egypt (10.18-20 et al) and to call for and demonstrate for Palestinian Independence.

It was in the emergence of Christianity that the deepest understanding of land was realised - hardly even dimly foreshadowed in Dt. - as Gentile followers of Christ, living in many lands like those in 1Peter, understood themselves as *also* the elect of

³⁷ I suggest individual as well as corporate experience may be included here indicating a dual understanding in the mind of the writer.

God, chosen for salvation and glory and inheritors of the *spiritual* riches of ‘the land’- the life of faith with God extending to believers everywhere, bringing what had begun as Israel’s blessings, to the nations. As a Christian I must believe that this is the true end of the matter. But can this demonstrate, even within Judaism, that the deepest understanding of Israel’s relationship with God goes far beyond earthly land, enabling her to ‘put to the ban’ the *inner* enemies of hatred and destruction and extend an attitude of love and sharing to the other claimants to the land, so continuing to show to the world in a new context, what she was called to do in Dt. and in the OT as a whole - the continuing wonder and greatness of a God whose ways were declared to be higher than the natural ways of men and women? This surely is the way in which election must now function for Israel.

The issue is fraught with problems and a way forward is difficult to see. But whatever the solution, one thing at least is clear - it is not possible for Israel to insist on her right to dwell in the land on the basis of her history without at the same time fulfilling her ‘right’ to treat with love the aliens within her borders (cf. Dt.10.18,19).

3.7.4 Further reflections relating to the land

Two other important aspects relating to the land must be noted, both described concretely yet giving the sense of a strong underlying metaphorical understanding at work. Both link closely with other themes and so inevitably overlap and will be referred to again below.

One lies in the reminder of Israel’s reluctance to enter (1.22-46). A note is being struck on one of the major concerns of this author and one of the underlying themes and purposes of his discourse and of an understanding of the nature of election - the necessity to appropriate and make actual what has been given (7.17ff. et al). In view of what God had done in her deliverance, it was incumbent upon Israel to capitalise upon it and drive out the nations already in occupation. Stress is laid on the dual responsibility and inter-reaction between JHWH and Israel. Israel need not fear: JHWH will drive out the enemy (7.18-19; 9.1-3) in continuance with His power shown in Egypt but Israel must actualise it (7.16,23,24). This is given added emphasis in the recurring references to the riches which are to be a part of Israel’s inheritance in the land, and a further mark of her identity as an established people (6.10,11; 7.12-16; 8.7-

10)³⁸. Here we have the wisdom themes again (cf. Job 1.1-3; 42.12-17), incorporated into the understanding of the land as JHWH's gift for settlement and enjoyment, with the salutary reminder that they are not the results of her righteousness (6.12; 8.11-18; 9.4-6).

The latter becomes an important theme in itself underscoring even more strongly the spiritual understanding that lies at the heart of all that the writer is saying. Israel has been given identity, status and immense privilege. But she can only enjoy that as she abandons any form of self-righteousness and recognises her dependence on her Creator. In the zeal for purity which this expresses we see the writer reaching to the heart of all true spirituality and applying his own individual understanding hermeneutically to his vision for Israel as he interprets for her, her history in the light of the living and all powerful God. Israel must realise herself as part of the handiwork of the Creator, giving all praise and credit to Him. In doing so she will experience the freedom and joy of realising her chosenness. The natural consequence of that will be a glad keeping of the commandments which constitutes the totality of love set forth in 6.5 (below) and an entering into a rich relationship with JHWH leading to an experience of true life.

Closely linked to this theme and yet another strand in the land motif is the reminder of its obverse - Israel's sin and stubbornness as a people, linked to the wickedness of other nations (evidenced as one reason for God's favour to Israel), together with His promises to the Fathers (9.4-6).

This becomes another avenue along which the writer seeks to establish Israel's identity, setting her free from the ways of other nations and exalting at the same time both the mercy of God and the role of Moses in his leadership. Israel has no cause to congratulate herself. At some length and in dramatic style in ch.9 Dt. recalls, as the peak of Israel's persistent rebellions, the apostasy at Horeb (cf. Ex.32). She had defied and angered the Lord to the point where he was ready to destroy her (9.7-9). Even while Moses received the two tablets of stone, she was casting an image of a metal calf (9.8-12). God must cast her off. The account follows Ex.32, in parts verbatim, with its considerable play on pronouns - '*Your* people whom *you* brought out of Egypt', says JHWH to Moses, 'have turned aside-' (9.12), i.e. these were no longer his people but

³⁸ One feature of Wisdom Literature.

were fit only for destruction (9.13).³⁹ Moses alone was fit for God's favour (9.14). The tablets are shattered (9.17,18,21) but the stature of Moses as true servant/leader is recalled as he refuses to accept JHWH's verdict and is shown, much more strongly than in Exodus, pleading on behalf of his people. Reversing the pronouns, he argues on the basis of God's own integrity, 'Lord do not destroy *thy* people, *thine own* possession, whom *thou* didst redeem by *thy* great power--'. Ten times in the space of three verses (26,27,29) Moses insists that Israel is God's people and then (9.28), as against 4.34, poses the question of JHWH's reputation before other nations. In God's hearkening to his cry, the strength and integrity of Moses as leader, earlier set forth at 5.27-31 is endorsed.

In contrast to Exodus it is the giving of the *second* set of tablets which becomes the occasion for the appearance of the Ark to contain them (10.1-5), a plainer object than in Exodus (Ex.25.10-16). This would seem to underline especially the continuing centrality of the commandments, despite the apostasy,⁴⁰ and in fact throughout chs.10-11, which largely constitute a repetition of material from chs.6-7 (see further below), we find additions or intensifications presumably related to God's reinstatement of the covenant after the apostasy.

In recounting the apostasy Dt. is seeking with enormous zeal to stress all that Israel owes to the greatness and forgivingness of her God and to his servant Moses, in order to make more real her elect status and identity, giving her a new sense of purpose in loving and serving JHWH.

The dominant emphasis throughout chs.1-11 on the sin of idolatry, in itself illustrates the passionate concern of the writer that Israel should be established as the people of JHWH, free and separate from the ways of other nations. In the landscape of biblical narrative it acts as the prelude to even stronger expression in Deutero-Isaiah as the writer there sought to impart understanding of the *reality* of the holiness and power of JHWH which constituted His glory in contrast to the dead images of surrounding nations. (e.g. Is.44.9-28; 45.5-13; 48.22.).

³⁹ We will consider the starkness of this term and this judgement - an intrinsic part of Dt.'s style - further below.

3.7.5 *Additional exegetical notes on the land*

In concluding this section we note four areas in chs.1-11 where promises relating to Israel's prospective settlement in the land are given. Each stresses different points, partly related to their context, but a fundamental factor in each is an encirclement about with the same exhortations and warnings against idolatry and the penalties for non-conformity.

At 6.10-15 the emphasis is on the fact of the land's givenness, apart from deservedness on Israel's part, underlining the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers and the reliability of JHWH's provision. Thankfulness for such bounty is the ideal foundation for practising and developing the love commanded at 6.4ff.

At 7.13-15 the particular emphasis is on fruitfulness of body, produce and flocks along with freedom from sickness and disease. The context here is Israel's chosenness (7.6) despite being a small nation (7.7), in contrast to other nations who are to be destroyed, and the fact that she was rescued out of Egypt in fulfilment of promises to the fathers.

At 8.7-18 is presented the most idealistic picture of the land (8.7-9) - a truly blessed and rich place indicating a settled and developing society. The emphasis here on plenty and the fact of no poverty is in the context of the contrasting wilderness years. According to OT theology the trials of that experience, including the hunger, are seen as sent by God to test Israel's obedience. A particular feature is the mysterious manna (8.3,16), seeming to represent spiritual food which proved sufficient for their nourishment though in itself it was unsubstantial, so demonstrating man's need for more than simply bread. The years had been hard yet they had been sustained (8.4,15). This must keep them mindful of the giver and free from any pride of achievement in their own strength (8.14,17,18). Of the four 'land' descriptions this one most obviously yields to a metaphorical interpretation calling to mind the picture which every spiritual pilgrim understands, of difficult learning experiences leading on, if God's ways are held to, to riches, joy and blessing. The whole of chapter 8 embraces concepts found particularly in wisdom teaching and finding particular expression in 1Peter in the suffering/glory context.

⁴⁰ In contrast to a number of commentators who see it as *only* a box.

The final picture in chap.11 is a broader one - Israel has been reminded of the various phases of her deliverance from Egypt (11.1-7), so now the new land is contrasted with Egypt and its need for irrigation (11.10). Here there will be rain, providing pasture for cattle and grass and the tender care of the Lord year in, year out - his eye ever upon it (11.11,12). It presents an idyllic picture of security and peace.

These four pictures are intended to fill Israel with wonder and gratitude at God's many-faceted provision and love and to undergird her sense of election and choosing. But the warnings with which they are hedged about against turning aside to other gods and the resultant disasters if they do (6.13-16; 7.25,26; 8.19,20; 11.16,17) are severe. Seen in terms of a final editing of Dt. at least some of these warnings would seem to bear relation to Israel's persistent syncretism as recorded in the Dt. writings and to what in fact happened to her at the exile.

3.8 The giving of the Laws

The focus of the struggles of the Exodus and Wilderness (1.6; 4.10-14) had been the encounter at Horeb, setting Israel apart as a Covenant People and laying before them the laws by which they were to live.

Ch. 4 constitutes an introduction to the restatement of these in the Decalogue (ch.5) focused around Horeb. It is generally seen as a secondary Deuteronomistic addition, with the continuation of chs.1-3 being found in the book of Joshua (cf. Dt.2.24 with Josh.6.2 for stylistic affinity).⁴¹ 4.25-31 in particular suggest later, retrospective writing (4.29 has a certain resonance with Jer.31.31-34 in its encouragement to the exiles). The chapter as a whole summarises the thrust of the following chapters (6-11) drawing on elements which belong both to the Wisdom Literature and the form of extra-biblical treaties - history, law, blessing, curse (e.g. teaching children - 4.9,10; the fear of the Lord - 4.10; the basis of wisdom and understanding - 4.6-8; not adding to or subtracting from laws - 4.2) but as we saw in the previous chapter, not itself paralleling such documents. Both Ex. and Dt. show themselves to be writings different from, and the writer independent from, extra-

⁴¹ Mayes (1979: 117).

biblical treaties, though using the concepts found in them with which they and their readers would be familiar.⁴²

The chapter's overall concern is:-

a) to recall the circumstance of the laws giving at Horeb (4.10-14,36). This embodied a demonstration of the nature of JHWH - there was a voice but no form (also at 5.22-27) - and so forms a basis for the solemn prohibition of images (4.15-26), that was to persist throughout the discourse echoing the recurring cry of the Deuteronomistic literature which sets forth Israel's participation in their worship as the reason for her demise at the hands of idolatrous enemies (4.25-32);

b) to show that the laws are to give life (4.4-8) and that the keeping of them is a fundamental part of their entering into their inheritance in the land (4.40). The Law was essentially a *freeing* device showing the way into truer life than the nations around knew.⁴³

We have seen that the elements in a) find strong resonances in Isaiah chs.40-46 (espec.4.35, cf.Is.43.10ff.; 44.6; 45.6f.,22). Though representing some development in thought, those passages reiterate the thinking as recorded in Dt. The voice at Sinai proclaimed the awesome fact that God was a living God (4.7,39) who had revealed himself in His mighty activity on behalf of Israel at the Exodus (4.34,35,37,38). Isaiah's mockery of man-made images stresses, in contrast, their powerlessness as well as their source - they are man-made; man is simply worshipping the work of his own hands. The theophany at Sinai had demonstrated not only a living God in communication with man (4.12,15,33,36) but, at the same time, a Divine Being wrapped in the awesome mystery of cloud, thunder, lightning, trumpet, in a mountain that was to be fenced off from man (4.11,24). JHWH was *other* than man, separate, holy, worthy of worship, *yet* in communication with him and in his midst, as Exodus had shown in the construction of the Tabernacle, with its emphasis on Presence.

Chapter 4 then is something of a patchwork representing a picture of contemporary understanding with its need to create or re-create or establish in Israel the sense of her own identity, as the Elect of JHWH (4.20,37) even beyond apostasy and exile (4.29-31) and the uniqueness both of her God and her own position and privilege,

⁴² Mayes (1979: 149).

⁴³ Cf. Mayes (1979: 77,78).

though this in itself is to act as a solemn warning against the snare of idolatry (4.15-24) and underlines Israel's responsibility to keep the commandments as she had undertaken to do at 5.27. It constitutes an effective lead-up to the reiteration of the laws at ch.5 and the definitive declaration of the *Shema* at 6, though this is seen by most scholars as earlier material.

3.9 The *Shema* (6.4)

There are a variety of possible translations of the phrase which in RSV margin reads 'JHWH our God, JHWH is One'. Weinfeld opts for 'JHWH our God is one JHWH' emphasising JHWH's aloneness which would match concepts in Sumerian and Ugaritic literature of a hymnic-liturgical nature⁴⁴ as is Dt.6.4. Driver and Mayes give comprehensive coverage each reducing the possibilities to a basic two both of which find support in Dt.⁴⁵ 'The Lord our God is One Lord'(RSV) or 'The Lord is our God the Lord alone'. The former emphasises the oneness of JHWH as against the multiplicity of manifestations of Baal around the country, which is seen by some to fit Dt.'s concern for a central sanctuary (ch.12ff.); the other, the exclusiveness of Israel's worship of JHWH. Tigay prefers the latter⁴⁶ in its description of Israel's *relationship* with JHWH - He alone is Israel's God. However he points to difficulties with this interpretation in his Excursus (10)⁴⁷.

These translations show the *Shema* to be not *necessarily* a declaration of monotheism, a fact noted by commentators. Whatever its meaning, it would seem that its purpose is close to Tigay's interpretation, to show that for *Israel* JHWH is *her* God.

The Deuteronomic history set forth syncretism as the main threat to Israel's prosperity and blessing as a nation and we have already noted the persistence of the theme in Dt.1-11 (cf.6.14; 7.2-5,24-26; 11.28; 12.2-4,30-31 and the recall of the apostasy at Horeb followed by JHWH's gracious response to Moses' pleading at 9.7-10.11). *Shema* then may be expected to relate to this.

⁴⁴ Weinfeld (1972: 338).

⁴⁵ Driver (1973: 89-91); Mayes (1979: 176) citing McBride on a study of the history of its use and interpretation in Judaism.

⁴⁶ Tigay (1996:76).

⁴⁷ Tigay (1996:76,438,440).

Various texts are offered by scholars as indicating the sense of *ehad* e.g. Is.51.2; Ez.33.24; 37.22; Zech.14.9; 1Chron.29.1. Yet these offer nothing towards an understanding of what is *meant* at Dt.6.4, which is not clear.

I have found helpful a paper by R.W.L.Moberly in which he tackles the issue.⁴⁸ Moberly's translation of the phrase is 'JHWH our God, JHWH is One' as in RSV margin. He notes the significance of the position of the phrase - at the beginning of Moses' exposition of the Covenant, indicating that 6.4 should be linked with 6.5 - describing how Israel was to love JHWH. The Oneness then is not related primarily to reform and the establishment of a central sanctuary (ch.12), but to the implications of JHWH's nature as seen in his self-disclosure at Horeb and to the contemporary nature of the covenant.⁴⁹

This is reflected in the fundamental questions which Moberly sees Dt. as addressing - those of God and Israel; faithfulness and unfaithfulness; not only as literary conventions reflecting social, political, economic and religious practices and conflicts but as representing a discernment of the will of God and of human relationship to God that is of enduring truth.⁵⁰

Such questions are not to be resolved by resort to religio-historical enquiry, he insists, because they involve the application of the interpreter's own sense of priorities with regard to religious truth. They demand that the phrases in question be treated as Scripture, Jewish and Christian.⁵¹

On that basis, in the linking of 6.4 and 6.5 we find that the meaning of 'JHWH is One' in 6.4 is something which makes appropriate the totality of response in love requested at 6.5.⁵²

By way of illustration Moberly uses Song of Songs 6.8-9. The woman described there is such that she draws forth the admiration both of her lover and her mother. For both of them the woman is unique, the one and only and so commands their love and devotion. Yet the description comes from them and is linked to their personal discernment of her quality. Similarly JHWH is unique for Israel, the one and

⁴⁸ 1999[i].

⁴⁹ Moberly (1999[i]: 4).

⁵⁰ 1999[i]: 4.

⁵¹ 1999[i]: 5.

⁵² 1999[i]: 5.

only and as such commands the totality of Israel's love⁵³ - this description coming from the writer as represented by Moses (though it is important to insist that the quality of the woman - and of JHWH - is there in the first place. It is *discerned* not *created* by the beholders, yet their discernment is fundamental for the expression of its reality - it actualises it.)

This also fits with our earlier thought. To Israel as Elect has been given the discernment of the supremacy of JHWH. Such discernment is itself linked to the relationship between Creator and created humanity (as seen in Gen.1.27), so by its nature must command totality of devotion and commitment in love if the relationship is to be complete. The requirement is part of the inbuilt nature of how human beings are in relation to their Creator.

The *Shema* and its accompanying phrase commanding Israel's response, form a succinct summary of the message of the previous five chapters of the book, especially in relation to chapter 4, but also act as an effective launching-pad for all that is to follow.

3.10 Love

Israel is to love. The term *ahav* is the same as that used between a man and a woman (Gen 29.18,20; Judg.16.4; Deut 21.15) but also in non-sensual spiritual relationships such as parent/child; man and fellow-man (Lev.19.18,34). In ancient treaties it described what a vassal's attitude to his overlord should be. In the prophets, especially Hosea, it was used in describing God's love to Israel, as also here in Dt. (10.15) especially in relation to the forefathers. Later it was further developed in rabbinic literature as the supreme religious value.⁵⁴

In these chapters it is linked in particular to the preamble's overall purpose - that of exhorting Israel to keep the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. Thus 6.6 follows immediately on 6.5, strengthened by the additional injunctions at 6.7-9, words repeated with a different sequence at 11.18-21 after the renewal of the covenant.⁵⁵ There could hardly be a more comprehensive description than the latter of

⁵³ 1999[i]: 6.

⁵⁴ Dan Cohn Sherbok (1992: 328).

⁵⁵ Close parallels are to be found in biblical and extra-biblical wisdom texts cf. Prov.3.3; 4.4,21 Amen-opet iii 10-11, xxvii.13 (ANET.421,424) cited Mayes (1979: 177). Parallels are also found to 6.7-9

how the commandments may be remembered and kept in mind, in order to do them. *This* is how Israel is to love JHWH.

The practice of teaching children in this specific way (6.7) was common throughout the ancient world⁵⁶ (and still today in the Middle East to a far greater extent than here, particularly among Jews and Muslims), but there it was rather less related to moral or religious teachings and more to duties to rulers etc. Claus Westermann⁵⁷ speaks of the basic element of historical continuity that depends on something being passed from one generation to the next. 'It is the only way', he writes 'that progress, cultural growth and the preservation of values is possible' (cf. Ps. 78.5-8). Here it indicates the immense desire - necessity rather - that the writers felt to establish and preserve the pure worship of JHWH.

The command to love and keep the commandments is also repeated at 10.12-13 following the summary of the events of chs. 9-10 at 10.10-11, but is even more explanatory there:- 'love and serve--this you will do by keeping the commandments which I give you this day for your good'. At 11.22 this is reversed - it is by loving the Lord that Israel will keep the commandments - a firm illustration of how closely intertwined the two terms are.

Continuing in the light of ch. 9, ch. 10.14, 15 juxtapose JHWH's lordship of heaven and earth with His care and love for their forefathers issuing, in recall of ch. 7, in the choosing of their descendants and they themselves, still 'at this day', above all peoples of the earth. So great has been God's mercy despite Israel's sin and stubbornness, that in choosing her, an additional ingredient of the love they owe is proposed - 'to circumcise the foreskins of their hearts', to cut away, destroy whatever may be a hindrance to their love (10.16). The intensity of this injunction links love in a particularly interesting and *metaphorical* way to the concept of *herem*, also linked to choosing at ch. 7, which we discuss below.

where it is used figuratively in teacher /pupil relationship but Mayes sees 6.9 as suggesting that in Dt., as in late Judaism, the injunctions were intended literally. Note the antonymic pairs in 6.7 signifying totality in the context of a semitic idiom.

'Sign' - the short text was to represent the whole law. In a metaphorical interpretation, Israel's constant fulfilment of the law signified her obedience to God. 'Diligently' - the same word is used at 32.41 in the sense of 'sharper' but a more likely derivation is from a 2nd root *smn*, found in Ugaritic and Accadian with the sense 'tell' or 'recite'; so Driver cited Mayes (1979:177).

⁵⁶ Tigay (1996: 78 [7]).

⁵⁷ Westermann (1984: 489).

These verses express a pervading atmosphere of the discourse - the totality of commitment which a quest for purity (holiness in Dt.) always involves. They lead on to a new injunction at 10.18,19 which might be seen as the precursor to the second great commandment (Matt 22.39 & pars.) - Israel must in gratitude, love the alien, remembering her own alien-ness in Egypt (10.19). This is again underlined by a reflection on JHWH's mighty acts but also on His nature in seeking justice for the alien, the widow and the orphan (10.18). It is significant that holiness, as understood by Dt., whilst making extreme demands in love to JHWH, expresses these in a humanitarian approach to the alien.⁵⁸

The charge to love is repeated again as a sort of refrain at 11.1 with the additional 'for all time'. It acts as a headline for a rehearsal of God's providential leading (11.2-7), precursor to another, different description of the land that Israel is to enter and occupy already noted (11.9ff. cf.6.10-12; 7.13-15; 8.7-20) containing almost identical instructions to those in ch.6 but with a further addition - Israel is to keep the commandments not only in order to live long as at 5.33; 6.2 but 'for as long as the heavens are above the earth' (11.21). A different slant is seen at 11.22 where love is linked to the Lord driving out the nations. (See further below).

Chs.10-11 then together form a whole restatement of chs.6-7. This is presumably, within the context of Dt., to reinforce continuing blessings and requirements, following the renewal of the covenant, and with particular emphasis on not turning aside (11.16). The features of wisdom teaching are especially evident and there is possibly a more marked movement towards metaphor, suggesting later editing.

It is clear from the above categories surrounding love that whilst emotion may be involved it is not necessarily so. Rather the word signifies undivided allegiance, pure and intense affection,⁵⁹ action rather than emotion⁶⁰ In Dt. it is set forth as the fundamental motive of human action (10.12; 11.1,13,22; 13.4; 19.9; 30.6,16,20.), cf. also Josh.22.5,23.11. So Driver quotes Dillmann :-⁶¹

⁵⁸ Frequently in ancient days aliens or sojourners were treated very much as outcasts; this attitude represents a dramatically different approach from the norm. It is particularly interesting to compare Dt. in this respect with the addressees of 1Peter. Christensen (1991: 21,206-8).

⁵⁹ Driver (1973: 91).

⁶⁰ But cf. Tigay (1996: 76 [5]).

⁶¹ Numeri,Deuteronomi und Josua, 1886, cited Driver (1973: 91).

Chapter 3: Covenant and election in Deuteronomy

'It is a duty which follows naturally as the grateful response to JHWH for the many undeserved mercies received at his hands. (5.12; 10.12ff.) - it involves the fear and the service of God (5.13; 10.12; 11.13) - it impels those filled with it to the conscientious observance of all God's commands (11.1,22; 19.9; 30.16) - thus it is the most inward and comprehensive of all religious duties and is the chief commandment of all'.

In deuteronomic expression, it implies devotion of the whole being to God (10.12; 11.13; 13.4; 26.16; 30.2,6,10) cf. also 4.29, and we have noted the close parallels in biblical and extra-biblical wisdom.⁶² Heart and soul means with the totality of thoughts, feelings, intentions and desires.⁶³ 'Might' suggests the strongest possible emphasis of this. There cannot be the slightest degree of deviation from the love of one for whom they have been set apart.

This concept of devotion was not new. But it was new as a prescription of a people's attitude to her God, the One and Only.⁶⁴ The nature of Israel as a theocratic society was thus being clearly defined. All aspects of Israel's life were to be submitted to God's scrutiny and standards. She was to be set apart for God, to keep his laws and to be obedient to Him in devotion, to the exclusion of all other rival allegiances. In summary, she was to be holy - an element fundamental to the thought of 1Peter.

3.11 Fear of God

Fear of God is a significant phrase in these chapters of Deut, reflecting again the wisdom thought of the writers (cf. e.g. Prov.1.7) that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom). It is found at 6.2,24, where it links directly with keeping the commandments, and at 6.13 where it relates to serving JHWH only and not other gods.

The term gathers up into itself, and expresses an attitude of response to, the major themes of Dt.:- the nature of JHWH - His awesome holiness and his near presence; His mighty acts on behalf of Israel - leading out, disciplining, bringing in; His 'jealousy' in demanding exclusive worship and in particular the requirement to hold fast to his commandments and ordinances e.g. 5.22, where hearing JHWH's words (the Decalogue), with the understood implication of doing them, was the means for Israel to learn to fear Him all their lives. Each occurrence of 'fear' at chs.1-11 is similarly linked to an injunction to keep the commandments, underlining their centrality. The

⁶² Mayes (1979: 177).

⁶³ Tigay (1996: 77).

above themes are all contingent on Israel's election and it is part of the writer's purpose to confront her with them in such a way as to convince her of JHWH's continuing providence and love towards her, but firmly hinged to the nature of His holiness and His commandments which require obedience. In short with the need to fear Him. The sense given is 'How else *could* she rightly respond before such might and holiness?'

Dillmann saw love as involving fear. On the other hand the Talmud, in defining love as the highest form of service to God, *contrasts* it with fear as a lower form.⁶⁵ It seems there are two different concepts of fear here. Fear of God is distinct from fear of Divine punishment because it arises from a different source. Dillman's definition is certainly descriptive of biblical fear as in Dt. where fear and love are so very closely linked.

The concept stems in part from an awareness of the mystery and 'otherness' of God displayed at Sinai in the theophany and in the hearing of God's voice unembodied by form (Dt.4.10-12), *together with* an awareness of His reality, His Presence, His activity on Israel's behalf, and His faithfulness to the Fathers in continuity of the Covenant, all of which the writer has sought to awaken in practical terms (e.g 4.32-38). Their godly fear is also to be rooted in the incomprehensibility of JHWH's love for them, itself unearned and undeserved and so beyond what is seen as rational explanation i.e as in some way reciprocal (7.7ff.). Rather it is descriptive of JHWH's nature. He loves, in faithfulness to his oath to the forefathers and because it is in his nature to do so. But as with the *Shema*, this is a concept understood and realised only by those who by faith permit themselves to experience it and not outside that definition. The experience of its mystery leads to an awesome fear, which provokes obedience in keeping the commandments and ordinances, which we have seen is linked to love (e.g. Dt.5.10).

In the above we have seen a trio of requirements by JHWH which are foundational for Israel's life - loving, fearing, keeping the commandments. These are to be the positive elements in their lives. They embrace inclusively the instructions about entering and occupying the land; about remembering their deliverance from

⁶⁴ von Rad, (1966: 63,64).

⁶⁵ *Ned.31a* cited EJR (1967: 242).

Egypt and the testings in the wilderness; about teaching children; about treating Levites well etc. At the same time they outlaw idolatry. Like oil and water, fear and love of JHWH and worship of idols cannot mix.

3.12 Wisdom Literature

Attention has been drawn frequently to the elements of Wisdom thought present in Deuteronomy. Wisdom was an ancient concept, based on the rational insight and practical experience of the sages.⁶⁶ In Jewish thought it had been taken up into the fear of the Lord - the beginning of Wisdom (Prov.1.7) and was related to various closely aligned themes in Proverbs e.g. length of days, (10.27); the fountain of life, (14.27); training in wisdom, (15.32); turning from evil, (16.6); humility with riches and long life, (22.4); those who are worthy of emulation, (23.17); et al. Dt. embraces these in its comprehension of the Divine through the three elements of Creation, Providence and Covenant and in expressing the whole as uncompromising love shows that this is in man's best interest, the true way of life.

One particularly dominant wisdom theme in Dt. to which attention has already been drawn is the need for dependence on God and the threat which ironically, God's own gifts can pose to that, in creating pride in self-achievement or simply forgetfulness of the Source. Hence the persistent exhortations to remember God's mighty work on Israel's behalf. The move to metaphor is most evident as the writer confronts elements of all true spirituality - the need for worship of God in acknowledgement of His transcendence, with delight in His blessings and consequent freedom from pride leading to thankfulness, humility and service with an offering of the self back to God which in itself is freedom and the only true way of approaching perfection.

Contemplation upon and practice of such wisdom constitutes the fear of the Lord called for by Dt. and is to lead to an acknowledgement of JHWH'S uniqueness and oneness which by its very nature demands the totality of response defined as love. Such love by its nature precludes idolatry and designates Israel as chosen. This understanding was fundamental to the holiness which Dt. was to describe at 7.6.

⁶⁶ ER XV.396f. Also Weinfeld (1972: 260f.)

3.13 Holiness and Chosenness

Holiness is introduced in the context of the commands of 7.1-5. themselves closely linked with the fact that Israel had been chosen out of all nations to be JHWH's special possession. See also 14.2,21; 26.18,19; 28.9,10. The idea is the same as that at Ex.19.6, linked closely to chosenness at Ex.19.5 (cf. also Ex.22.30). There however chosenness is presented as more contingent on Israel's listening to JHWH and keeping His covenant whereas here the choosing is seen as a primary act of JHWH carrying with it the criterion of holiness to which Israel must respond in a particular way (7.1-5).

We noted in ch.2 that the word holy - *kadosh* - in its original sense did not have an ethical connotation as we usually understand it today but was seen as a divine attribute signifying separateness from what was *not* divine.⁶⁷ This is especially clear at Dt.7.6 where the commands of 7.1-5 are pronounced *because* Israel is a people holy to the Lord.

The primary meaning of the word is clean in a physical sense, untarnished. So in a ritual context it was used of that which was consecrated, set apart cf. Ex.29.37 where the altar was to be consecrated as 'most holy'; whatever touched it was to be forfeit as sacred. The same sense is conveyed at Ex.29.43 where by His presence JHWH was to hallow the tent of meeting by his glory. Similarly at Gen.2.3 the sabbath was to be set apart as hallowed. The laws of the Holiness Code at Lev.17-26. demonstrate the usage over a wide spectrum of detail in every day life whilst Jer.51.27-8 uses the same word to describe the setting apart or 'hallowing' of nations for war.

Thus in accepting the Covenant Israel had accepted a state of holiness which was to inform all her activities, with even physical implications - holy land, holy places (Temple, Holy Place, Holy of Holies), holy day, holy eating, holy people. The sense is of the cognate *mekudeshet* - 'betrothed'. Israel is betrothed to JHWH and therefore is to forsake all other or is 'forbidden to others like something consecrated'.⁶⁸ Such betrothal forbids compromise and precludes the toleration of what would corrupt or tarnish and which would therefore be a dilution of Israel's commitment to JHWH. This clarifies the meaning of the idea as expressed at 7.6 According to its context, it describes how Israel is to love JHWH (cf. 6.4-9), also, how she is to dwell in the land

⁶⁷ EJR 188. On the relation of separateness to the Covenant in the Psalms see Weiser (1962: 48ff.)

(6.10-19), to understand the laws and teach them to her children (6.20-25) and finally what her attitude to other tribes is to be (7.1-5).

Dt.'s preoccupation with the threat of idolatry and the writer's passionate insistence that it must have no part in Israel's life with God, linked to His deep perception and spiritual vision of a holy people, had emerged in the midst of a syncretistic society and functioned to some extent as a protest to that society. Israel was to be different because JHWH was different. So it is not surprising to find 7.6 placed in the context of such fierce injunctions against the neighbouring tribes as are at 7.1-5. Here are intrinsically the same marks of holiness as were noted in chapter one, albeit exercised according to a 7th Century BC culture. Intermarriage posed the threat of pollution of worship, so must be avoided (7.4). Similarly the sacred altars, pillars, poles and idols of other tribes, which must therefore be destroyed (7.5). As the Deuteronomist saw it, the nature of JHWH and the establishment of his holiness, *of necessity* precluded any compromise (so also 6.19; 9.1-45; 11.23f; 12.2f; 13.5f; 18.10f; 20.3,10f.).

Such an injunction to Holy War offends our modern ears and notwithstanding its logic, poses problems for modern man not dissimilar to those already discussed, associated with the land. How are we to understand and assimilate it to our thinking?

In the first place we must recognise:-

a) that war was considered a necessity in ancient times - even modern times up to this century.

b) that as JHWH was seen as a superior God inviting a superior kind of worship devoid of idols and their accompaniments and inviting totality of commitment on the part of the worshipper it was valid to destroy enemies who acted otherwise (cf. Josh.1-11; 1Sam.15). According to ancient logic this was the way to establish the rightness and righteousness of JHWH, proving loyalty and exalting His greatness and power by the elimination of whatever was understood to be contrary to his purposes.

This is acceptable as the understanding of ancient peoples, in this case Israel, but what of the time of Dt. and beyond?⁶⁹ I refer again to Moberly.

⁶⁸ Tigay (1996: 86).

⁶⁹ 1999[i]: 6ff.

In line with what has been suggested above, he sees the placing of the injunctions to *herem* at 7.1-5, following so closely on the *Shema* and its accompanying command to love, as indicating that the injunctions are intended to give content to that command., that 7.1-5 are in fact *the principle exposition of the implications of the Shema*. This would seem to be further reinforced by their leading up to 7.6 with its introductory *ki* 'for'⁷⁰

In the specific instructions given in Dt. with regard to *herem* (7.3-5) there is no mention of loss of life, rather it is concerned with the destruction of religious apparatus. This is read as indicating that whilst the traditional language of *herem* has been retained by Dt. its meaning had shifted into the realm of metaphor, relating to the two specified issues which became representative of religious fidelity and dedication to God as a whole - marriage and shrine worship. The same would then apply to the use of *herem* elsewhere in Dt. (e.g. 7.25; 12.2,3; 20.16-18).⁷¹

Moberly's view endorses my earlier suggestions regarding land, though developing them further⁷² as he points out that if this is correct, Dt. is demonstrating a characteristic feature of biblical tradition seen in both Jewish and Christian faith - that a religious practice which initially functioned as literal practice may, as time and culture change, be reinterpreted metaphorically (e.g. cf. Paul in NT enjoining believers to put to death all that was earthly within them - and the understanding of holiness that pervades 1Peter). This reinterpretation recognises that holiness is demanding and not easily attained but that if striven for and achieved offers a richness of spiritual life and communion with God that alone satisfies the human spirit and is God's purpose for humankind. This would seem to be a part of Dt.'s longing for his readers as individuals though linked to his passionately strong vision of Israel as a holy nation. Both seem to be envisaged at Dt.7.6.

Of the use of the type of reinterpretation we have described, Moberly writes :-

'It is at heart a confidence in the intrinsic wealth of resource within the existing tradition which enables renewed vitality through fresh refiguration and reappropriation of elements already present.'⁷³

⁷⁰ As Moberly himself suggests (1999[i]: 7).

⁷¹ 1999[i]: 7.

⁷² 1999[i]: 6.

⁷³ 1999[i]: 8.

So theologically and metaphorically the *herem* statement is valid and provided for the reservoir or encirclement of holiness in which the blessings of JHWH could be experienced and out of which adherence to the commands could be both joyfully given and prove to be life-giving as the real enemies of the human spirit were destroyed. The writer clearly saw this as the way for both the individual and the nation to be established in the vision of moral purity which had inspired the prophets and spiritual leaders of the time and which he discerned to be the way of JHWH, giving a new and different quality to life from that of surrounding peoples (4.6-8).

It was unique in bringing into the sphere of JHWH'S ordained laws an application drawn from the common understandings of life. There is no suggestion of withdrawal from the world. Judaism always opposed asceticism - rather it insisted on holiness through separation from things *whilst living in their presence*. Creation was good. Every gift of God was seen as given for man's use. Man was free to use it - indeed was expected to do so - but must recognise its source and use it as honouring the Giver. Dt. reflects this as it teaches of man's obligation to fulfil commandments and ordinances in the common details of life. Thus we see the movement towards holiness taking on an ethical connotation also. All aspects of human life were holy and so what was seen as the proper conduct of everyday affairs reflected God's holiness. The idea is described perfectly in George Herbert's hymn, 'Teach me my God and king, In all things thee to see'. The same understanding pervades 1Peter.

The distinctiveness of the biblical concept of holiness, especially in Dt., is seen at 7.7f. as a complement to the fierce exhortations of 7.1f. If the question is to be asked, '*Why* has JHWH chosen Israel in the way he has?', the writer holds, on the one hand, to JHWH's faithfulness to His promises to the fathers: on the other, he seems to be admitting to what he did not understand, but which he himself had experienced - that if she would, Israel could enter into a relationship with the Divine and experience both material and spiritual blessings in its life which could only be described in terms of the love of God. A proper response to this activated and actualised the Divine activity further on Israel's behalf, bringing resultant material blessings and joy (cf.12.12,18).

3.14 The Central Sanctuary

The new law of the Central Sanctuary, if that is what it is, has puzzled many scholars who see it, in its practical outworking, as probably the most far-reaching and dramatic in its effects of all the ordinances prescribed. Tigay for instance, draws attention to the vacuum which must have been left in local life.⁷⁴ With only three sacrificial festivals per year to attend at a central place (Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles), he asks what happened in between times. Various possible reasons for the change are considered, but none wholeheartedly embraced by him.

Not all scholars however see ch.12 as necessarily implying the establishment of one central sanctuary. For example C.J.H.Wright⁷⁵ argues that the defining phrase at 12.5 could equally well apply to a number of sanctuaries as to one and that the weight of the ruling lies elsewhere - viz. that each sanctuary must be *chosen by JHWH* and be *for the worship of JHWH alone* i.e. that the principal issue at stake is the threat of polytheistic pollution and corruption. G. von Rad likewise argues against those who consider the establishing of one central sanctuary to be 'the most important and strikingly distinctive feature in all the new Dt. arrangements for ordering Israel's life before God', that this is not Dt.'s theological centre.⁷⁶ He observes that many of the ordinances neither mention nor appear even to be aware of the demand for centralisation.

A brief survey of the chapter endorses this. The directive appears in triple form:- 12.2-7; 8-12; 13-19; followed by an extra section at 12.20-32. 12.2-7 most clearly demonstrate what lies at the heart of the injunction. 12.2,3 virtually repeat the *herem* ordinances of 7.1-5 and, as at the end of ch.7 (7.25,26), there are complementary injunctions at 12.29-32.

This suggests that, according to our understanding of 7.1-5, 12.2,3 are closely linked to the *Shema* and its accompanying commandment *describing how Israel is to love JHWH*. Israel is not to follow the practices of other tribes but is to worship where JHWH's name dwells. Scholarly theories suggest that the use of the name is a deuteronomic move away from a more primitive anthropomorphic understanding of

⁷⁴ Tigay (1996: 118).

⁷⁵ 1996: 158.

⁷⁶ 1966: 94.

JHWH himself dwelling in the Sanctuary - rather He is in Heaven whilst His name guarantees His presence. This may be, but the important factor is that 'name' signifies possession. Is there a balancing mechanism at work here, that as Israel are JHWH's chosen, His own possession (7.6), so her worship must be at the *place* which is His own possession and *in the manner* appropriate to JHWH's chosen i.e. in families delighting with joy in the blessing of the Lord and giving their whole worship and devotion to Him? The picture that is drawn illustrates well the understanding of holiness already considered, exhibiting further aspects of wisdom teaching - resistance to all that is contrary to totality of devotion to JHWH, but delight in the life, based on family units, that within the Covenant, JHWH as Creator and Provider gives.

12.8-12 further strengthen this, relating the injunction particularly to Israel's settlement in the land. 12.10 may be seen to resonate strongly with 8.7-10.

At 12.13-19 we find no negative or contrasting commands, rather a complementing of the rules of sacrifice with regard to non-sacral meat-eating extending into 12.20-28.⁷⁷ There is considerable indication of wisdom understanding here in a less sacramental approach to celebration, with meat from the herds released for general feasting, ritual purity no longer a criterion for participants in a celebratory feast and blood from non-sacramental meat, though not to be consumed, no longer sacred (it may be 'poured onto the ground like water'). Joy is again underlined as a mark of JHWH's people in celebration and such celebration may take place wherever the people happen to be in their settlements. Clearly there is considerable bending to expediency here. With JHWH's chosen place a journey away for most people, alternative arrangements for general feasting were necessary if the people were to be happy.

At the same time, the rules regarding sacrificial worship, only at the place JHWH will choose, are strongly and carefully spelled out. What is evidently most pressing is to do everything possible to inhibit the use of polytheistic shrines for the worship of JHWH, a practice which the Dt. History saw as prevalent. So the issue was probably less the actual existence of multiple shrines as how they were used. In view of the polytheistic society in the midst of which Israel lived, where each group had its

⁷⁷ on Rad (1966: 92) sees 12.13-17 as the simplest of the three and therefore probably the oldest but bearing marks of considerable amplification. The fact that this section is nevertheless placed last adds force to our earlier suggestions of a developing metaphorical understanding of earlier tradition: it is the two later sections, in particular 12.2-7, which, being placed first, sound the most dominant note.

shrine for the worship of its particular god, the temptation to dabble in multiple worship would be great. In the ancient world it seemed a matter of course that a place of worship should be set up at the indication of a numinous power. As divine powers were perceived as present everywhere, there were a countless number of cultic hills and shrines.⁷⁸ This left the way open for numerous unacceptable practices and rituals associated with the various gods and cults, as evidenced by the instructions at Dt.7.5 and texts such as Amos 2.8 (cf. also Dt.12.29-31). *More particularly* it contradicted everything Dt. was saying regarding the nature of JHWH and his oneness.

In the context then of such impassioned declarations against all forms of idolatry and Dt.'s desire to establish Israel's identity under the banner of the *Shema* there stands ample reason for the pronouncement of a Central Sanctuary.

But another factor is of equal importance. It is evident from some of the Psalms (see further below) that the bringing together of the tribes to a central place in praise, worship and sacrifice became a powerful mechanism in establishing Israel's religious and national identity as a community of people under One JHWH.⁷⁹ With the increased possibility of controlling what went on, it seems highly probable that at least at the times of the gatherings together, the people's emotional and spiritual temperature would be raised and at the same time, as a consequence, belief in themselves as God's People be stimulated with an accompanying potential to have done with idolatry. The emphasis on *joy* in the context of family celebration (12.7,12,18) accords with many of the Psalms, especially those called 'Zion Psalms' (see further below) Ps.46.4ff.; 48.1ff.; 76.1ff.; 84 also 87.1ff.; 102.16; 132.13ff. and 147.2⁸⁰

Systematic teaching could also take place from priests able to teach and develop understanding. Emphasis on more inward worship is evidenced by the prescribed prayers for ritual ceremonies (21.8; 26.3b-10a,15).⁸¹ The Wisdom teaching undergirding Dt.'s understanding is likely in time to have provoked a more devotional attitude towards the sacrificial cult, possibly prompting a natural move away from local

⁷⁸ Koch (1983:5).

⁷⁹ Some, mainly those close to the Alt School e.g. Nicholson, see a possible reflection of an earlier Central Sanctuary of the tribal league, probably at Shechem, but Koch (1983: 6) sees the idea as now largely abandoned.

⁸⁰ Weiser (1962: 45).

⁸¹ cf. Weinfeld (1972: 32).

polytheistic practices, though this is pure speculation. In any case such moves probably needed considerable time to be appropriated.

The freeing of meat-eating from the sacrificial ritual with the permission to pour blood on the ground rather than on the altar, whilst being probably a matter of expediency, signifies a shift in religious thinking. Similarly, the greater freedom of individual choice in dealing with offerings emphasises distribution to and care for the needy, even the sojourner, (24.6,13,14,17f.) remembering that 'they had been slaves in Egypt'. These marks of a holy society, separatist yet caring within the Community and towards certain outsiders, follow the line of holiness described earlier and are precursors of the holiness described in 1Peter.

No mention is made of where the place of God's choice is to be. Jerusalem and the Temple is probably understood (so 1Kgs.14.21).⁸² Clearly by the time of the final editing this was so. Tradition saw Abraham taking Isaac to Mt. Moriah the site of Jerusalem, for sacrifice (Gen.22), and David purchasing the threshing floor of Araunah (2Sam.24).⁸³ JHWH's name attached to His Temple at Jerusalem was a reinforcement of His Oneness and righteous character. (cf. Ex.3.14,15; 6.2-4 - the name defines the nature and character)⁸⁴

The general trend towards simplicity is further echoed in the refs. to the ark (10,1-5)⁸⁵ Mayes notes that its historical time and place of origin are uncertain but that it 'seems to have been understood as the throne or pedestal of the invisible JHWH (Num.10.35; ISam.4.3,6f.)'. His proposal that such a view, probably elaborated in the Jerusalem Temple, is being countered here in 'the sober Dt. evaluation of the ark as a simple container for law tablets'⁸⁶ misses the *significance* of this. Two factors of immense importance for the Deuteronomist and for Israel are being underlined:-

a) The longsuffering of JHWH in his willingness to accede to Moses' request for a second set of Law tablets. This is in accord with Ex.34.1 though in contrast to Exodus 34.28 where God writes on the tablets.⁸⁷ The strongest possible assurance is

⁸² Though note Shechem at Dt.27 - a factor in arguments for a northern provenance of Dt.

⁸³ Tigay (1996: 119).

⁸⁴ For further discussion on the Name see von Rad (1966: 89f.).

⁸⁵ At 3.7.4.

⁸⁶ Mayes (1979: 204).

⁸⁷ For discussion see Moberly (1983: 101ff.).

being given of JHWH's forgiveness, His mercy and His love. The sin of ch.9 is forgiven, and the Covenant, having been renewed, remains intact.⁸⁸

b) The over-riding importance of the law. The careful account of the making of the box by Moses - 'from acacia wood'- as a repository for the tablets endorses what has been the persistent note of the book thus far. Through no merit of her own Israel has become the focus of JHWH's mercy, has been called into fellowship with the One Living God by Covenant, to be a witness to the nations and has been given the immeasurable privilege of having laws to live by which themselves will be life-giving, establishing her as a holy people acceptable and pleasing to Him. The ark with its contents stood as a constant reminder to Israel of this.

3.15 Conclusion

The previous paragraph echoes the resounding note of the Book and signals its achievement. Israel was thus set firmly on its course. Koch suggests that by proclaiming carefully formulated edicts which were ascribed to JHWH, as the highest norms by which action was to be judged, the Deuteronomists changed the morality which had hitherto been valid, with its concept of *sedaqa* (clan and people)⁸⁹ to one of conviction that the divine commandments are the guide to all that is meant by a saving faithfulness to the community. Categorically this is true, and certainly became true later. Yet I believe the spirit that inspired Dt. and is present in it was filled first with an overwhelming sense of the love of JHWH and the realisation that life only had meaning as it was lived to Him and through Him its Creator and Preserver. We have seen that the proclamation of edicts was never in Dt. an isolated element in itself but always linked to the central pivot on which it rested - JHWH's deliverance, election, love and holiness of character. It was out of his own passionate declaration of these facts that the writer sought to engage Israel and draw her on to a holiness and reciprocal love that gave the commandments the quality, not of edicts, but of life.

I believe that consideration of 1Peter in chapter 6 will demonstrate the same passion reinterpreted towards Gentile believers. Though Dt. itself is not quoted in the letter, its elements are everywhere to be felt, most profoundly in its insistence on

⁸⁸ Driver (1973: 117), whom see further for detailed discussion on differences between Ex. and Dt. accounts.

holiness, interpreted as separateness from all that lies outside of commitment to Christ; at the same time as seeing the whole of life as God's gift.

In this warm acclaim of the book we must acknowledge also its particular openness to abuse. Without deep devotion to JHWH the legislation could quickly become sterile, as did in fact happen. Yet I believe the persuasion of the writer was a correct one and rooted in a true perception of life as God's gift.

The following chapter presents a different picture, in some ways far less attractive, yet illustrating a feature persistently referred to in this paper – the need for Israel, like the early Christians, to be assured of God's unchanging commitment to them if they were to stand firm as His people. This is the message of 'The Balaam Section' of Numbers which we now consider.

⁸⁹ Koch (1983: 9).

Chapter four

The Balaam Oracles¹

4.1 Introduction: The book of Numbers

As a part of the Pentateuch or Hexateuch, following Exodus - dealing with Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and Leviticus - setting out the codes of sacrifice and worship, Numbers covers the movement of Israel from Sinai, where the community is constituted (1.1-9.14) through the Wilderness with its setbacks and successes (9.15-25.18) on to the final preparations for the Settlement (26.1-35.34), to be followed by Deuteronomy with its more detailed requirements and different emphases for life in the land, and Joshua - dealing with the Settlement.² Its Hebrew title 'In the Wilderness' (1.1) more readily describes the scope and purpose of the book.³

As in the case of the other books in the group, Numbers is seen by most scholars as a complex compilation of traditions, representing the work of J/E and P, the latter being seen as responsible for some three-quarters of the whole and J/E for only the remaining quarter, of which the Balaam oracles form the longest continuous section.⁴ There is no real consensus as to how J and E are intermingled.

There is a fairly general scholarly consensus that Numbers as it stands is a post-exilic document, begun probably in the Babylon during the Exile, and emerging in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but whether as the work of an author or as a final redaction is less clear. Either way, it makes use of many topics and literary forms - stories, laws, travel itineraries, census lists, lists of personal names, lists of instructions for worship, reports of legal disputes⁵, to make a powerful statement for those returning to Israel on a *second* wilderness journey - regarding the life they are to live in the land before JHWH.

¹ In rabbinic tradition Num.22.2-24.25 is called 'The section of Balaam' evidencing the rabbis' belief that the chapters were an independent composition inserted later than the Pentateuchal corpus. Milgrom (1990: 185,467).

² Budd (1984: xviiiff.).

³ See further Milgrom (1990: xi).

⁴ Gray (1976: xxixff.); Budd (1984: xxii). For wider discussion see S. R. Driver (1913) and others, cited Budd (1984: xviii).

⁵ Milgrom (1990: xiii); Olson (1996: 2).

Budd sees this final document as belonging with the influential movement in Judaism that originated in Babylon in exilic times, and which effected a resettlement in Palestine from the late 6th century onwards.⁶ The whole work then would represent an apologia for the group's position, and the seemingly disconnected stories may be seen as a unified theological statement of the requirements of the resettlement if there was to be restoration, though one modern writer gives a radical twist to this understanding.⁷ Most scholars agree that supplementary material was subsequently added to existing traditions.⁸

We may see the book as above all an etiology of Israel's possession of the land at the time of the Settlement, seen not as an accident of history but part of the Divine promise.⁹

Within that purpose the Balaam narratives have a particular function in declaring the inviolable purpose and reliability of JHWH - 'God is not a man that he should lie nor the son of man that he should repent. Has he not said and will he not do it?' (Num.23.19). The narratives, in their origins, are almost certainly the product of an earlier time (8-10C.). Gray finds that the spirit of national confidence evident particularly in the poems, indicates this - he thinks most probably the time of the Monarchy when national pride was at a high level and he is critical of those scholars who advocate a later date.¹⁰

One overriding problem for all commentators has been 'the seemingly disconnected stories' referred to above.¹¹ Modern scholars have tended to be more positive than earlier ones in seeing a unity at least in the overall strategy, e.g. Brevard Childs.¹² Among them J. Milgrom¹³ and D. T. Olson¹⁴ go further taking the two censuses (chps.1,26) as significant markers between the old generation of rebellion and the new generation of hope and thereby find an overall structure. Mary Douglas has a

⁶ Budd (1984: xix) who sees the priestly traditions as providing for Israel's early traditions what the Chronicler was later to do for Deutr. and the period of the Monarchy. For a useful summary see xxff.

⁷ Douglas (1993). See further n.17 this doc.

⁸ Olson (1996: 3).

⁹ Budd (1984: xxiv).

¹⁰ Gray (1976: 313).

¹¹ E.g. Gray (1976: xlvii); Noth (1968: 1,4), who is unequivocally scathing and Eissfeldt who questions Numbers integrity as a unit at all, cited Budd (1984: xix).

¹² 1979: 190-201.

¹³ Milgrom (1990: xiii-iv). See also his notes on commentators xliiff.

¹⁴ 1996: 3ff.

more radical understanding¹⁵, finding modern scholars in error in supposing that the genre is narrative, when a larger antique structure might be holding the book firmly together in a way incomprehensible to modern editors. This idea she then intriguingly unfolds.¹⁶

4.2 The content of the Book

As noted, Numbers is concerned with the nature of the life of the community as it moved towards the Promised land, fundamental both to the achievement of the goal and what would follow and is described through the experiences of the first wilderness journey. In this the central place of the Tent of Meeting (2.1-34) is symbolic¹⁷, indicating that the community is to draw its strength from God who is present in its midst. He is to be at the centre of their lives, their worship and their giving (7.1-88; 31.1-54); to direct their journeying (10.11-12,35-36) and their future in planning. In this way they are to prepare for their future inheritance - the land, the possession of which requires and depends upon such a life-style. Gray is conscious of a particular emphasis on holiness, of a pulling away into greater separateness (as e.g. in Balaam's 1st. oracle 'a people that dwell alone').¹⁸

As in Deuteronomy immense emphasis is being placed on the land. Its gift is seen as the natural sequel to Israel's deliverance from Egypt and essential for the expression of her elect life with God, offering a settled environment with its resources.¹⁹ Canaan, the land offered, is God's gift and therefore attainable and to be refused at their peril (13.1-14.1-38). A very strong note is sounded on the necessity of embracing 'the scope of the divine intention' and the cost of failure in response (16.1-17; 26; 20.1-13; 21.4-9; 25.1-18). Throughout there are strong links with Genesis as the text harks back to the promises made there, fulfilled in Israel's entry to the land. These are found particularly in the discourses and will be referred to in more detail there. Douglas in fact describes Numbers as a commentary on the book of Genesis, the two functioning in reverse i.e. the beginning of Numbers tends to deal with the end of Genesis and so on.²⁰

¹⁵ 1993: 83-87.

¹⁶ 1993: 107-126, also 88-98 as an intro. to her thought.

¹⁷ Budd (1984: xx,xxv ff.).

¹⁸ 1976: 347.

¹⁹ Budd (1984: xxxi-ii).

²⁰ 1993: 98-101.

On any view, whatever the date and heterogenous nature of the original component elements of Numbers, we see, as in the previous chapters, a bringing together of these early sources of the wilderness experiences to make one strong, unmistakable statement on Israel's election by YHWH. She was the object of his love, and as such, was to continue, in the return from Exile, to occupy the land given to her in a way that would demonstrate before the nations His supremacy and power. In so doing she would also establish her own identity and life as distinct from that of other nations in its monotheism and the nature of its worship. Budd comments that this 'remained an ideal, but the author offers ideas which may be a fundamental precondition for its realisation, while explaining the pattern of human behaviour which may in the short term frustrate it.'²¹

Part of a 'precondition of realisation' for any community is confidence and certainty. The insertion of the Balaam narratives at ch.22-24, following Israel's series of victorious campaigns in ch.21, may be seen to have the purpose of providing that, with their proclamation of Israel as a people covering the face of the earth (22.5), mighty and immune to the threats of other inhabitants who would have them cursed (22.6,11), and blessed because JHWH their God is with them.

As a part of the whole, Numbers also explores the nature of authority in the community and the consequences of its rejection.²² However, this is not a part of our immediate concern here.

4.3 The narratives

The narratives themselves (chs.22-24) are placed strategically when Israel is encamped on the Plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho (22.1) i.e. 'north of the Dead Sea and east of Jordan,'²³ about to enter the Promised Land, following their defeat of a number of tribes and their leaders whom they had encountered as they moved through the wilderness - Arad of the Canaanites (21.1-3); Sihon of the Amorites (21.21-31) and Og, King of the Bashan (21.33-35).

It would seem that the tale embodies ancient traditional strands. Two of the combinations of fragments of an inscription inside an Iron Age 11 (900-600 BC)

²¹ 1984; xxvi.

²² Cf.Gray (1976: xlix).

Temple found in Deir 'Alla in 1967 were found to refer to a seer named Balaam who was commissioned by a divine council to communicate a message to his people,²⁴ suggesting the existence of earlier traditions upon which the Numbers narrative may also be based.²⁵ P. Kyle McCarter²⁶ notes the close parallels in narrative style and content between DAT and the biblical traditions and suggests cautiously that the author of the narratives in Num.22 may have been familiar with some form of Transjordanian traditions prior to the written form of DAT. Budd finds that the inscriptions support the impression that Balaam is a figure of the 1st Millenium BC rather than the 2nd.²⁷

A considerable amount of research has gone into the work amongst both Christian and Jewish scholars with a consensus supporting the idea that a number of units of tradition have gone into the composition. J. T. Greene calls the MT a nightmare, seeing the whole as a literary mosaic 'which is, nevertheless, readable'.²⁸ There is general consensus that it is a combination of J/E sources (apart from 22.1 which is P) but so intertwined as to resist efforts to identify each separately.²⁹

However, 22.22-34 is generally seen as J and does seem rather evidently to have been originally a separate unit, now effectively incorporated to bring a particular slant to the story. These verses resonate in a number of respects with Gen.3 - also widely seen as J. Each has an animal that speaks - the only two places in the OT; 22.31 - the Lord opens Balaam's eyes (cf. Gen.3.7); 22.23 - the angel has a drawn sword (cf. Gen.3.24); and the theological tone of the passages is similar.³⁰ The apparent contradictions to the main narrative in this interspersion have been a problem to some scholars. Yet its placing here serves to strengthen the theological thrust of the whole narrative and is clearly no accident, as I hope to show. It is fundamental to the story. Gray, in fact, has a nice comment: 'Drawing from both sources, the editor, indifferent to the incongruities produced by his method which strike the modern reader, is careful to combine the material to give the fullest effect to the leading motive.'³¹

²³ Gray (1976: 307).

²⁴ Translation of reconstructed text by J Hackett HSM 31 cited Ashley (1993: 438).

²⁵ Israel's position 'on the borders of Moab' is the only connecting link with the rest. Milgrom (1990: 185). Cf. also n.1 this chap.

²⁶ 'The Ballam texts from Deir 'Alla' BASOR 239 (1980): 49-60 cited M.S.Moore (1990: 9).

²⁷ 1984: 265. For useful overall comment see also 271-3.

²⁸ 1992: 19.

²⁹ And with many differing opinions see e.g.'s Greene (1992: 20-21); Gray (1976: 309ff.).

³⁰ Gray (1976: 312ff.).

³¹ 1976: 316. See also Budd (1984: 263f.).

The poems are generally seen as independent additions fitted to the narratives³² and in this way they became the vehicle for the message of Israel's supremacy. Their date and provenance remain obscure, but it is most likely they are old, with those in ch.24 probably older than those in ch.23. Their close linkage with Gen.49 and Deut.33 shows them to belong to the same genre. In their heightened language they become a powerful medium for expressing the theological ideas of the writer.

4.3.1 *The character of Balaam*

Balaam has had a bad press from both Jewish and Christian circles³³, encouraged by the account of the apostasy of ch.25 as being due to his council (31.16). Only Mic. in the OT (6.5) puts him in a favourable light, in stark contrast to Deut.23.3-6, Josh.24.9,10 and in the NT Jude 11 and Rev.2.14. With respect to his *character* it is possible to read the story in a number of different ways in isolation from the rest of the story, and this has acted, in some cases, as a red herring³⁴, causing it to take precedence over what is clearly the main purpose of the narrative as we now have it - to demonstrate Israel's singular blessedness in the purposes of God and that his intentions towards her cannot be thwarted by the machinations of man (cf. Num.23.19). This is a pity for, on one understanding, when the story is taken as a unit there is no problem in seeing the presentation of Balaam's character as a part of that whole purpose. His developing perception of the nature of God is the scaffolding around which is presented the concept of Israel's election by JHWH, a warp upon which is woven a presentation of God's nature as seen in the O T, in his relationship with Israel, and the resultant nature, identity and future of Israel herself.

However, scholars' understandings of the story are legion in this direction, especially in the nuances they give,³⁵ and Jewish tradition in particular has viewed Balaam in a more negative light.³⁶ Mary Douglas follows this negative view but with a

³² Gray (1976: 313).

³³ Josephus speaks of Balaam's 'evil intent' and his 'extremely grave offence' - his greed and vanity, cited Vermes (1973: 173). Pseudo-Philo (in Charlesworth [1985: 324]) is slightly milder in portraying him as recognising his failings. See further below, also Milgrom (1990: 469ff.).

³⁴ Gray (1976: 315-318).

³⁵ See Budd's (1984: 259-265) introduction to the narratives.

³⁶ Gray (1976: 320) sees the spirit of a later age at work that could not tolerate the appearance of a true prophet of God among the heathen and therefore took care to represent him in an unfavourable light. Budd similarly sees the favourable element in the narratives as belonging to a resurgent and aggressive period of JHWHism

particular slant.³⁷ She sees the story as satire, as a play within a play, the larger play being the life of the day, in a post-exilic enclave culture, rife with factions, addressed by the narratives against the over-zealous reforms of Nehemiah the provincial governor.

Douglas's interpretation is not one that I intend to follow, but it has some value in underlining the relationship of Num. to the situation referred to in the next chapter which, according to the books of Nehemiah and Ezra, existed in post-exilic Israel between the returnees and those who had remained in the land, as the former struggled to establish a pure, spiritually-orientated community in accord with their high calling as the elect of JHWH, struggles bearing some slight affinity with those which were to be experienced in the early church community of 1Peter.

Douglas's view arises from her antipathy to the enclave culture which she discerns developing in the book of Nehemiah. H.G.M. Williamson, whom she frequently quotes, is more positive and sympathetic. Whilst acknowledging the unattractiveness of the Provincial Government's exclusive claims to the land he nevertheless concludes:-

It is not hard to sympathise with the fears of an embattled and financially weak community *as they sought to maintain against overwhelming odds the distinctiveness and purity of what they believed God had vouchsafed to them*³⁸(italics mine)

It is in such a context that the fierce proclamation of Israel's superiority - religiously and nationally - was made, together with strong insistence on her unity - one Israel of the twelve tribes. The central pivot of the story remains the unchangeableness of JHWH in His love towards Israel and in His purposes for her, but this needs constantly to be seen against the background of the situation into which it was written.

4.3.2 Exegesis: 22.1-23.6

The story is presented in dramatic form building up to a climax as Balaam's perception and embracing of truth grows.

(the united monarchy) which later faded as antagonism to all things anti-Israelite arose, (cf. Deut. 23.3-6 where Moabites are excluded from the Jahvistic community). Balaam then became increasingly denigrated.

³⁷ 1993: 216. ff.

³⁸ 1987: 90.

22.1-6

These verses constitute an introduction to the narrative and set out one of the underlying themes - the interplay of two kinds of power, that of the pagan Balak, King of Moab and that of Israel, the people of God whose power, demonstrated in their summary dealing with the Amorites and in the vastness of their numbers, he sees as constituting a formidable threat to his own. He therefore seeks to limit it by means of a curse to be imposed by the pagan seer Balaam - seen by Balak as the master of blessings and cursings (22.6).

The emphasis on the power Israel has achieved since coming out of Egypt - itself an act of JHWH - such that she is feared among all peoples, together with the threat of a curse upon her, is in direct reference back to God's promise of blessing to Abraham in Gen. 12.2-3 with its theme of blessings and cursings, a fundamental text for the nation of Israel and the underlying basis of the story.³⁹ Israel can only be blessed, for those who (seek to) curse her will themselves be cursed, presumably negating the power of any attempted curse upon her. Gen.12.3b also suggests that Israel's blessing stretches beyond herself. Great uncertainty surrounds the meaning of this verse, but after a lengthy discussion Claus Westermann⁴⁰ concludes that in any case 'God's action proclaimed in the promise to Abraham is not limited to him and his posterity, but reaches its goal only when it includes all the families of the earth'. This intensifies the significance of the whole episode. A curse on Israel would be not only to deny the reality of JHWH's promise for Israel but also through her for the entire world. So to seek to curse Israel was a dangerous pastime. As noted earlier the fact of Israel's great numbers links back to Gen.13.16; 28.14 and at Num.22.5 the stress on Israel's nationhood since her deliverance by JHWH from Egypt is an endorsement of earlier blessings. So there is a build up of Israel's position, with Moab, in sharp contrast, 'sick with fear' (NEB).

³⁹ 'Blessing becomes the catchword of the whole of Israel's history'. H.W.Wolff cited Westermann (1986: 149).

⁴⁰ 1986: 150.

22.7ff.

In consequence the leaders of Moab are sent to Balaam at Pethor on the Euphrates⁴¹ with a message from Balak begging him to come to curse Israel. The writer seems to have no problem in portraying Balaam, a pagan sorcerer,⁴² as inviting them to stay the night whilst he consults YHWH (22.8) - the name characteristic of a true spokesman for God.⁴³

The delegation are said to bring with them 'fees'. A more likely translation is 'tools of divination'⁴⁴, underlining the fundamental difference between Balak's earthy concept of how the divine may be approached and what is to be set forth in the story (cf.23.23). Similar contrasts are frequent in Jewish Scriptures e.g. Ps.115.3-4 ff., Is.40ff.

Balaam receives and passes on YHWH's reply - he cannot go with them to curse Israel because they are blessed (22.13). This is a correct reply and ought to constitute an end of the matter. The fact that it does not is itself sufficient to undermine Balaam's character in the eyes of later Jewish commentators. His reply embodies what is to be the theme and proclamation of the whole episode.

The Princes of Moab return to Balak telling him simply that Balaam refused to come with no mention of why. Balak appears to interpret Balaam's answer as meaning that he requires more recompense⁴⁵, which could well be correct in Middle Eastern terms⁴⁶, and fits with Jewish interpretation of Balaam.⁴⁷

⁴¹ There is considerable confusion as to Balaam's origin as other sources refer to it as Aram which suggests Syria though see Gray (1976: 325); Budd (1984: 267).

⁴² Milgrom (1990: 471) points out the difference between sorcery and divination. The former is an attempt to alter the future (e.g. by a curse); the latter predicts it. Sorcery was punishable by death in Israel (Deut.18.10) but divination tolerated as it was not incompatible with monotheism. However sorcery was widely practised. e.g. 1Ki.9.22; Jer.27.9 etc.

⁴³ Moberly (1999[ii]: 2).

⁴⁴ Moberly (1999[ii]:2,3).

⁴⁵ Moberly.(1999[ii]: 4).

⁴⁶ I recall a young missionary nurse in Eritrea being offered 1 doz. eggs in gratitude for a life saved, in the desert hospital where she worked. In embarrassment and knowing that the family were poor she declined the gift, assuring them that she was only too delighted to have been of help, whereupon her would-be donors took away the eggs, only to return later, to her far greater embarrassment, with a chicken!

⁴⁷ A sub-theme running throughout the narratives is money cf.22.17,18; 22.37,38; 24.11). Balaam is being used as an instrument to demonstrate one aspect of Israel's set-apartness in YHWH - obedience to him is more important than tangible reward; also to underline an emphasis found throughout scripture - OT and NT - that money represents a certain threat to integrity.

22.15-21

Balak's second attempt to obtain the curse, despite a more powerful delegation than the first and made with offers of great honour and compliance with Balaam's directions is likewise refused, along with a strong and typical flow of Middle-eastern rhetoric (22.18), *yet* accompanied by an invitation again from Balaam to stay the night and a further offer to try again with YHWH. (cf. Gen. 23.8-16 for a similar bandying of words in seeming contradiction of the outcome), resulting in God's permission to go but only to speak as He said. It reads like a classic case of trying to see how far one can go with God.⁴⁸

The story in fact is set in a regular ancient near-eastern cultural context of the pagan world. Repeated omen-taking was attested among the ancient Greeks as acceptable practice of diviners, the same ritual procedures being repeated until a favourable omen was received.⁴⁹ Similar procedures seem to have existed among the Hittites and in pre-Islamic Arabia. Milgrom suggests that the sacrificial rituals which Balak was later asked by Balaam to repeat from different places had the same root. It also applied to dreams. Against this background the *difference* which pertains to YHWH and his people is about to be portrayed. Repeated asking, repeated sacrifices, reward for God's spokesman, all with the object of cursing this powerful people, are of no avail because it is YHWH the *all-powerful* that is being dealt with and His promises and purposes for Israel are irrevocable and glorious. They will be the powerful and blessed ones casting down every other nation through the power of their God who brought them out of Egypt and is still with them delivering them.

22.22-34

At this point we have the interpolation of 22.22-34. Balaam saddles his ass and goes with the princes of Moab, but God is angry. The narrative does not say why, but it is clear from the foregoing verses. One traditional interpretation, in accord with what we have already observed, is that God could read Balaam's heart and knew that he was determined to get the fees for cursing Israel. This accords with the association of

⁴⁸ An alternative way of understanding the situation is to see it as a test from God which Balaam was failing. (Moberly (1999[ii]: 4).

⁴⁹ Milgrom (1990[ii]: 189). See also an overall history of the Balaam tradition proposed by J. de Vaux - cited Budd (1965: 260).

Balaam with greed among Jewish scholars and fits his rather over-flowery words at 22.18. However a sufficient explanation would simply be that he was going beyond his first word and in fact testing God. This would bring a Jahwistic understanding to the story and has strong resonances with Gen.3 - 'Has God said?'⁵⁰

God's anger is expressed through the ridiculing of Balaam in the pantomime that follows. There is a play on the themes of 'blindness' and 'seeing', to be continued throughout the narratives (cf. Gen.3.7; 16.13; 22.14 marg.) and on 'threes' also to be found throughout (see further below). God's angel, barring the way to progress, remains unseen by Balaam, his servants and the princes of Moab, yet is visible to the dumb ass who thereby lampoons his master. We are presented with the ridiculous picture of Balaam beating his ass three times as it tries to avoid the angel with the drawn sword and finally sits down under him until a further strike draws forth words of protest. In the face of Balaam's fury and death threats the ass patiently reminds her master of her life-long faithfulness - only some exceptional circumstance could have led to her reactions - whereupon Balaam's eyes are opened. He sees the angel and realising what is behind the ass's seeming stupidity, falls on his face in apparent penitence. The dumb ass is praised by the angel whilst Balaam's way is stated to be perverse, to the point where, had he persisted, *he* and not the ass would have died. Disobedience to God is thus shown to be a matter of life and death.⁵¹ JHWH is not a God whose will can be played with or ignored.

In the three encounters between Balaam and Balak which follow, it begins to be clear that in the earlier part of the above narrative an analogy is being drawn; Balaam is in fact Balak unseeing and stubborn in pushing against God to gain the impossible, whilst the ass is Balaam, growing in his perception of JHWH through the three successive encounters.⁵²

⁵⁰ In answering the question, 'Why did God change his mind and allow Balaam to go?' Milgrom (1990: 189) offers the Rabbi's insight - 'From this you learn that a man is led in the way he desires to go. If one comes to defile himself he is given an opening.' In other words this tale presents the doctrine of human responsibility and free will. In such a case God's anger (22.22) is not surprising but predictable.

⁵¹ Moberly (1999[ii]: 8-10,12,13).

⁵² Cf. Milgrom (1990:469).

22.35

Balaam's offer to go back is refused by God and in what is seen as a return to the basic narrative, Balaam goes on but with strict injunctions that he may only say what YHWH allows.

In inserting the above unit of tradition we see the compilers presenting a theological unfolding of the nature of YHWH and his purposes for Israel which, far from being in disunity with the rest, underlines it in a powerful way. As Balaam pushed and sought three times in vain, to persuade the ass to move, blind to its vision of the angel, so Balak is to push Balaam, seeking to extract from him the desired curses. He is blind to what - in due time - Balaam himself is to understand, issuing in his fourth, unsolicited oracle, that Israel is a nation whom JHWH has chosen for blessing through Abraham and such blessings cannot be gainsaid by cursings.

We find also, in the fact that in the composite story Balaam was allowed to go on, a portrayal of the divine mystery that man's sins can be taken up into the will of God and used to further both His purposes in the world and man's spiritual growth. We may see at the same time a mirror image of God's working with Israel who through her history had grieved YHWH, provoking His wrath, yet continued to be a people through whom the nations were blessed, as she struggled to grasp His requirements and discern more of his nature.

In an alternative reading of the story, relating to much Jewish traditional understanding, Balaam's going on with Balak constitutes continuing insincerity and avarice, his 'repentance' superficial, him still straining at the power strings, determined to get what he wants, and remaining unaware of whose power he is really pushing against. Even in such a case he was used as a channel through which God's blessing came to Israel and by the third oracle did seem genuinely to have understood.

22.36-23.6

By the time Balaam meets Balak the ground is well prepared for what will transpire. Balak makes reference to his power and authority (22.37) whilst Balaam continues to insist on his powerlessness to say anything apart from what God gives him to say.

The drama heightens in a display of sacrificial ritual⁵³ (pagan 'power') on the part of Balak (22.40), before he takes Balaam up to the Heights of Baal to view 'the full extent of the Israelite host' (22.41NEB). Translations vary here; RSV has 'nearest of the people'. The idea appears to be that as Balaam could only see some of the host; he was to deduce how vast a hord they were.⁵⁴

The viewing is the first in the series of three which continues the motif already introduced in the account of Balaam's encounter with the angel. At each, Balak hopes to obtain a curse but each time his attempt is thwarted so making the point of the story - the impossibility of going beyond JHWH's purposes. Unlike foreign gods who may be manipulated by manipulative humans if they try hard enough, JHWH cannot be.

Having viewed the people the first time, Balaam and Balak together proceed with elaborate sacrifices before the expected cursing. Balaam himself ascends a bare height to meet God and receive the word he is to deliver. 'Peradventure the Lord will come to meet me' sounds a somewhat uncertain note which could indicate an awareness on Balaam's part that he was where he should not be and participating in what he should have said 'No' to at the beginning. Alternatively it may simply show him only at the beginning of what is to be a growing understanding of JHWH.

God does indeed meet him, putting a word in his mouth. The phrase emphasises his powerlessness. He is to be simply a vehicle for the declaration of God's unchangeable purposes of blessing for Israel. He returns and before all the Moabite leaders gives forth the word of JHWH - not, as had been expected, a curse but a blessing upon Israel.

4.4 The discourses

No satisfactory term has been found to translate the Hebrew *mashal* which is applied to all Balaam's poems. Gray lists a variety of alternatives all of which he finds inadequate⁵⁵, but Gray finds early *mashals* cited in 1Sam.10.12; 24.14 which do not fit the description. Haupt⁵⁶ argues simply for a verse of poetry or a verse in two halves.

⁵³ H.D.B. (1950: 659) comments at length on the sacred character of 7 which is supported by the frequent occurrence of this in the ritual. It points out however that the Bible does not especially endorse the idea. See also Milgrom(1990: 194); Budd (1984: 266).

⁵⁴ But cf.Milgrom (1990: 193) and n.62 below.

⁵⁵ 1976: 344.

⁵⁶ 1900: 32f. cited Gray (1976: 344).

His best suggestion is that it is an extension of its use in Proverbs (*meshalim* Prov 1.1; 10.1; 25.1; 26.7-9; Job13.12; Eccles12.9) - a didactic and artistically constructed sentence. The term is never used of the utterances of the Hebrew prophets or of ordinary Hebrew poetry so this suggestion fits well with the present context.

The poems are generally seen to fall into two groups the first two belonging to the E tradition, possibly 8th C. and the second to that of the earlier J (reflecting the prosperity of the United Monarchy). What is more important is that in their present context they constitute one whole element, expressing the progression of discernment in Balaam which underlies the story and which constitutes a fundamental part of the whole. The linkings in both to the blessings of Jacob and Moses in Gen.49 and Deut.33 are obvious.⁵⁷

4.4.1 1st. oracle - 23.7-12.

The first oracle is a poem of 14 lines (7 distichs)⁵⁸ in which Balaam explains the charge committed to him, but then as the instrument of God, declares why he cannot do this. Israel is a nation blessed by God whom it is impossible to curse or denounce because God has blessed and has not denounced.

23.8

The verse is a key to the discourse in which there is none of the militant emphasis of the remaining four oracles but which is itself foundational for them. It declares the solid and solemn ground upon which the returning exiles were to build their lives in the coming years. The reference is directly to Gen.12.3a. This nation has been blessed by JHWH and nothing can undercut that fact.

23.9

9a. Viewing Israel from the tops of the hills, Balaam is given words which encompass her history.

9b. He sees a people that dwells alone, not reckoning itself among the nations (cf. Deut.33.28 re. the tribe of Joseph, also understood as a prince among his brothers). The

⁵⁷ For further useful detail see Budd (1984: 260).

⁵⁸ Gray (1976: 344).

primary emphasis here is the fact of Israel's election (cf. Deut.7.6b) distinguishing her among the nations because of her unique relationship to JHWH. In this she is singularly blessed, a reference again to Gen.12.2-3. This statement, however, encompasses her miraculous deliverance from the bondage of Egypt - the defining act of her chosenness as a people with its possibility of nationhood - and her ongoing progress through the wilderness to the Promised Land, protected at all times by JHWH's presence (cf. Deut.4.6-8), as well as her solemn commitment - however ill-kept - to the covenant, part of which, in a Deut. context, concerns the first three commandments - no other gods; no images; not taking JHWH's name in vain. The words embrace also the call to holiness and 'royal priesthood' at Ex.19.6 though these almost certainly stem from a later date. All these factors set Israel apart as a people 'dwelling alone', different from other nations.⁵⁹

23.10

10a. The numbers of Israelites stretched out below, authenticate the reality of the promises of Gen.12.2; 13.16; 17.6; 22.17; 26.3,4 and 28.14.

10b. So impressive has been Israel's impact upon Balaam that far from cursing, he aligns himself with her, expressing the desire to die as she will. Here is the fulfilment of Abraham's words in Gen.12.3b, completing the declaration begun at 23.8. Not only is Israel established as most blessed among the nations, but in standing alone as a witness to JHWH's righteousness and greatness, she is able to be a means of blessing to others also (cf. Ex.19). The idea behind Gen.12.3b is not that others will necessarily become part of the Jewish faith, but that they will recognise the reality and glory of JHWH through her and be blessed thereby, evidenced by Balaam.

An immensely powerful challenge is being made to the returning exiles to look back to the earliest beginnings of their faith, to recall the promises and by faith to live in the light of them. The whole wealth of later Jewish teaching as we see it in e.g. Deuteronomy is here being expressed.

⁵⁹ Cf. Gray (1976: 347).

23.13-18

Balak's blindness and lack of understanding is emphasised as he suggests another try from a more exalted position - Pisgah - and performs the same sacrificial rituals. 'It was a matter of constant experiment to find out the place in and the circumstances under which a god would favourably regard special requests - some places were more adapted for one kind of manifestation, some for another.'⁶⁰ This is probably the basis of the moves to various places in the hope that Balaam's words could be changed. Such inconsistency was not seen in JHWH by Hebrew writers. Thus the relevance of 23.19 with its fundamental difference. God is *not* a man like Balaam whose mind might be changed in this kind of way.

From his viewpoint Balaam is only to see the nearest Israelites, probably Balak's response to 23.10a⁶¹. Does he think it might bring a better result? According to Milgrom the object must be in sight for a curse to be effective, but Balak fears that the sight of too many Israelites may nullify or even erase the curse⁶². Like Balaam at 22.22ff. he strives against the impossible. But whilst Balaam can only see a portion, they are all there, emphasising even more the fact of their numbers - too great to be seen from this point (Cf. Gen.28.14 et al).

The earlier procedure (23.3) is repeated, but with more confident words from Balaam - 'I will meet the Lord' not 'Perhaps He will meet me,' as before. The inference depends on one's view of Balaam. A negative view would see him imagining that this time the message might be different; a positive one, in line with the view I am taking, that he was warming to the task of being God's prophet for Israel. As Balaam returns with what is to be a triumphant message from JHWH we are presented with the pathetic picture of Balak and his princes standing dutifully beside their painstakingly prepared burnt offerings - the best that their worldly power has to offer - hopefully awaiting the curse from Balaam's lips, such hopes to be even more thoroughly dashed than before.

⁶⁰ Gray (1976: 349). In Israel cf. also Mt. Gerizim (for blessing) and Mt. Ebal (for cursing).

⁶¹ See Gray (1976: 349) for the difficulties of the verse.

4.4.2 *Second oracle - 23.19-20.*

A rousing shout calls Balak to attention. How can he have had such expectations? God is not a man that he should lie. Balaam has blessed, according to God's word and he cannot revoke it.

Excursus : the repentance of God

In the immediate context of the discourse, 23.19 refers specifically to 23.20 and the underlying theme of the narrative. However taken in general terms the statement at 23.19 has been seen by some to stand in contradiction to such views as Gen.6.6 which assert that God does repent. The confusion belongs to the wider debate on the nature of religious language and the differences in meaning which may lie within a single word. This particular facet has been explored by Walter Moberly in an essay under the same title as the first line of the verse.⁶³ With 23.19 Moberly pairs 1Sam.15.29 which says the same thing. In each case 'does not repent' is accompanied by another verb in parallel. In Num.23.19a it is *kzb* (Pi) - lie, deceive (see NEB trans. and also Ps.116.11 where *kzb* is used of all people in general - *kol ha'adam kizeb* - all people are liars i.e. do not keep their word), and in 1Sam.15.29 it is *lo'yesaqqr* - speak falsely - used to contrast God who never speaks falsely with people who in general terms, may do. The parallels serve to indicate the intended meaning. This is further clarified by the fact that Hebrew has two different words for repent: *sub* - usually used for people and *niham* - usually used for God. When both are used together the respective attachments are always observed, thus defining the difference in meaning between the two. So in the parallel in 23.19 God is being contrasted with humanity. Unlike people, who cannot be relied upon, God can. In Ps.110.4 the word is used similarly with reference to the irrevocability of God's commitment to David.

On the other hand, within the broad terms of that statement there is room for what seems to be a contrasting idea, yet is no contradiction. God does respond to mankind. Jeremiah was called upon to address nations in such a way as to elicit a response of repentance. When that was forthcoming it drew God's own response of 'repentance'. God and man interact. Where man remained unresponsive then there was

⁶² Milgrom (1990: 193).

⁶³ 1998.

no mechanism that could enable God's repentance to be set in motion, and in sorrow, God must remain unrepentant of his plans to pluck up, break down. Where men did respond e.g. at Nineveh in the Jonah narrative (Jonah 3), then God repented.

Paradoxically what may best draw forth man's right response may well be the certainty of God's unchanging overall purposes of good for him - a dominant feature that we have observed lies at the heart of both Exodus and Deuteronomy and indeed prevails throughout the OT. Whatever man does God does not repent of his *purposes of good* for him. His desire continues, he woos him as he wooed Balaam in the saga of the ass - even as man himself blindly batters his head against a wall until, like Balaam, he 'sees' and repents. It is only God's repeated pleading that brings the seeing, and it is this that the writers of the OT insist, so unrelentingly, is God's way with Israel - his unchanging love for them on which they can utterly rely, i.e. their election - whilst paradoxically, at the same time, warning against spurning such an immense commitment to them on God's part by failing to respond in obedience.

23.20

In the putting together of the tale Balaam was shown to have experienced this for himself and so could be allowed to express it in the eloquent terms of the 2nd oracle. He had received commandment to bless. God had blessed and he could not reverse it try though he might. Inherent in the concept again here are contrasting ideas of power. Over against Balak's confident assertion of earthly power and independence Balaam insists that he has no power to do other than God commands, but this fact is again a reflection back to Gen.12.2-3.

23.21

21a. RSV margin reads 'None can discern iniquity in Jacob ---perverseness in Israel' and Gray 'One does not see etc.'⁶⁴ i.e. JHWH is not specified as the subject of the verb. The words conflict totally with what has already been recorded of Israel in the wilderness. In view of the confident theme in the oracles of God's irrevocable blessing, the statement may be read as an idealised one - Israel is the chosen of JHWH, she will be blessed - a challenge to the returning exiles to be what they are, putting away

⁶⁴ 1976: 352.

impurity and perverseness. On the other hand, the same words are in Hab.1.3, explained by destruction and violence and in Ps.90.10 (RV) by labour and sorrow,⁶⁵ so Gray sees the verse as meaning absence or lack in the material sense rather than in the moral i.e. there is an absence of trouble, violence, sorrow in Israel. In the context, I see the first suggestion as carrying more weight. What are being seen are the marks of a highly privileged, 'royal' people (cf. Ex.19.5-6) bearing the distinction of God's elect, richly endowed and blessed, secure from harm. Some would also see a reference to an absence of idolatry as at Is.66.3. If so this would support the idea of the verse as an ideal, and not what always pertained, at least at the time of the origins of the oracles, and presented as a challenge to the returnees to once and for all put away the idolatry that had dogged their history up to the Exile. In the context of the narrative, ideally at least, Balaam sees a people at peace, secure in the love of God, because God is with them cf.Is.8.10.

*21b.*The discourse moves towards a new phase. With 'The joyous, welcoming shout given to a king is among them', a hint of nationalism sounds. The promised blessings were not only to set Israel apart as a nation holy to her God, but also to make of her a great nation giving her prowess, through the strength of her God, against her enemies. How, in the face of that could any curse possibly be given or be effective?

23.22

God's defining act for Israel as a nation is recalled. He brought them out of Egypt (23.2) and is still bringing them out, right on to Canaan,⁶⁶ evidence of the certainty of His purposes for them. Their path is an ongoing one of triumph, despite their own flaws and whatever machinations enemies may design against them. Like a wild ox they are untameable (Job39.9f.) and dangerous (Ps.22.22).⁶⁷ The imagery is drawn from Deut.33.17, part of Moses' blessing on Joseph where Ephraim and Manasseh are portrayed as a war-like people, putting down all peoples before them (cf. also Gen.49.24 and see 23.24 below).

⁶⁵ 1976: 353.

⁶⁶ Driver translates 'is bringing out' cited Gray (1976: 354).

23.23

The verse presents difficulties. RSV margin has ‘against’ rather than ‘in’, but Gray disputes this.⁶⁸ Milgrom also has ‘in’. The problem lies in the meaning of the preposition. The techniques of enchantment were illegal in Israel and divination, though probably practised, was discouraged, so ‘in’ is possible and would show the superiority of Israel over other nations.⁶⁹ Israel is not like the heathen in needing to resort to omens, cursings etc. (Ezek.21.26f.; Deut.18.10f.), as Balak is doing, because they have a God who announces what he is to do.⁷⁰ He has also chosen them, delivered them from Egypt, continues with them in faithfulness to his promises (23b). Alternatively, ‘against’ would show that as the people of JHWH, secure in His protection, Israel is invulnerable to the enchantments and divinations of other nations directed against her. In the context this would fit well. Balak’s plots to curse Israel cannot succeed because of God’s promises and protection. However ‘in’ is strongly argued for. In fact one may be seen to include the other. It is because Israel are God’s people that sorcery etc. is not in them and embodied in that is the fact that it cannot prevail against them either. Israel is presented as an ideal people, so enfolded in the blessing and purposes of God that her position provokes marvel and wonder. (cf. again Deut.4.6-8). Whilst this exalts Israel’s position in relation to all peoples, in the context it is clearly directed especially towards Moab.

23.24

The oracle moves further into a nationalistic tone as it waxes yet more powerfully with imagery drawn possibly from Jacob’s blessings on Judah at Gen.49.9,10, and Benjamin at Gen.49.27. In consequence of JHWH’s presence and his mighty activity on her behalf, Israel is like a lioness proudly taking its prey. It is possibly noteworthy that the Genesis imagery at 23.22,24 places together Joseph and Judah i.e. the northern and southern kingdoms. This may well have been deliberate at the time of the original writing of the oracles and may still be pressing a point in their

⁶⁷ 1976: 354.

⁶⁸ 1976: 355; Milgrom (1970: 200) where it suggests to him the stated fact as the central point of the story.

⁶⁹ See n.43. Despite early discountenancing in Israel (Ex.22.17 cp.1Sam.28.1-7), in practice, divination still went on in some quarters as various laws show (e.g. Lev19.31; Dt.18.10; Is.2.6, 3.2, 8.10 (espec.),44.25; Hos 4.12; Zech.10.2. *Ideally* however it was not present.

⁷⁰ Kuenen’s interp.cited by Gray (1976: 356) as the best.

appearance in the Balaam narratives. A united Israel is portrayed as undefeatable, devouring his prey, drinking the blood of the slain. Undoubtedly Moab is the prey in mind. Balak the advocator of curses upon Israel will experience the reality of Gen.12.3a as he himself feels the backlash of JHWH's wrath through Israel His people. At the same time, this strong nationalistic emphasis, acclaiming the greatness of JHWH is undoubtedly calculated to stir the blood of the returning, or about-to-return exiles, raising their belief in themselves and in their identity.

So the discourse ends. In reverse of Balak's expectations, it is difficult to imagine a more triumphant and climactic acclamation of a people than this one.

23.25

Balak seems to take a step backwards at this point. If there is to be no cursing there need at least be no blessing either. But this also is disallowed. Balaam is the vehicle of God and as such must utter the blessings, which are irrevocable.

As noted previously, many commentators see here a division in the sources of the narrative. Noth suggests⁷¹ that the 'E' material ends at 23.26 with secondary material added by the writer at 23.27,29,30 linking it to a resumption of 'J' (23.28-24.19). Gray has a similar idea.⁷² This is possible in the light of other unexplained discrepancies, but if it is so, then, as in the ass episode, sources have been combined in the final editing to create one whole and progressive statement whatever the nature of that may be. To disregard this is to miss the central pivot of the story, which is a progression in Balaam's discernment. We recall also Albright who (with others) denies that the use of the divine names is consistent enough to be a distinguishing factor.⁷³

24.1-2.

One mark of a possible different source is evident in that there has been no previous mention of Balaam 'resorting to divination', now it is assumed that he had. Perhaps this is an editorial link with 23.23. Turning from pagan ways Balaam looks out towards the desert, the place of Israel's experiences with JHWH thus far; the place

⁷¹ 1968: 187.

⁷² 1976: 358.

⁷³ Budd (1984: 256-261) gives a useful summary of views.

of the covenant and of deliverance towards the Promised Land.⁷⁴ There, freed from the restraints attached to cursing, he sees the *whole* of Israel encamped 'tribe by tribe'⁷⁵ (cf. comment on 23.13-18 n.60). The sight brings upon him the Spirit of God enabling him freely to utter his own oracle in the manner of a true prophet⁷⁶ rather than functioning as something of a passive channel for JHWH's words (23.5,16).

4.4.3 *The third oracle – 24.3-9.*

24.3,4.

The elements are very evidently drawn from Balaam's encounter with the angel at ch.22. The text is corrupt and could indicate that Balaam's eyes and ears were closed (in a trance?) or opened (in mind, to understand and receive the vision?), or else that they had previously been metaphorically closed and now were no longer. In any case, in recalling in this *third* oracle his *3-fold* encounter with the angel and the revelation that came to him at the *third*, Balaam attests to the power and unchangeable will of JHWH which Balak had tried so hard to negate. With his eyes and ears now open, by the spirit of God, Balaam sees with his own understanding a nation blessed of the Lord and hears for himself God's words concerning her blessing.(24.5) The imagery is similar to that found frequently throughout scripture e.g.Is.35.2,5.

24.5-9

The discourse constitutes a prophecy from Balaam relating to Israel. The elements of 24.6,7a are slightly curious, but the overall sense is clear, demonstrating again the fulfilment of Gen.12.2-3. Israel is richly blessed and endowed with peace within her own borders. In the strength of her God she is also a powerful nation in relation to her enemies, so is an entity to be feared and respected - especially by those who attempt to curse her! 24.5-7a describe Balaam's vision in rich terms, bearing some slight affinity with the blessings bestowed on Joseph by both Jacob (Gen.49.22,25,26) and Moses (Deut.33.13-16), although the imagery is different. This linkage may be seen as somewhat tenuous but is supported by other verses in the discourse e.g. as in

⁷⁴ Budd (1984: 268).

⁷⁵ Presumably in the order in which they are listed in Numbers. ?Douglas (1993: 223 see also 172).

23.19-24. 24.8 repeats the theme of the horns of the wild ox used to describe Joseph (and therefore Ephraim and Manasseh) at Deut.33.17,18, whilst 24.9a repeats very closely Jacob's blessings on Judah at Gen.49.9,10. The two themes are drawn together at 9b in the final climactic couplet from Gen.12.3 - God's blessing to Abraham.

24.6

The imagery is puzzling as aloes are native to India and Malay, not Israel. They are found in Prov.7.17; Ps.45.8; Cant.4.14; alongside cassia, myrrh, cinnamon and frankincense, all of which are fragrant, so are possibly paralleled with cedar on the basis that both are fragrant.⁷⁷ Cedars do not grow by water, rather in high mountains, but the term may be used in a generic sense of all evergreen plants.⁷⁸ Perhaps 'beside the water' (cedar trees) indicates richness in parallel to 'that the Lord has planted'(aloes). Budd suggests⁷⁹ there is here a deliberate attempt, through exotic imagery, to heighten the poetic tone and intensify the thought of the whole.

24.7a

This imagery is also strange and a puzzle to scholars. The buckets may be irrigation buckets, hung one from each shoulder⁸⁰ (or cf. Egyptian shaduf). Overall the analogy is stressing fruitfulness as a result of abundant water. Water in Israel is always indicative of blessing.⁸¹ Such fruitfulness must be interpreted as indicating prosperity, happiness, joy, contentment, influence and power. In the context of the opening of his understanding, Balaam has been given the ability to savour the richness of Israel's blessing and to articulate it (cf. again Gen.12.2).

⁷⁶ Milgrom (1990: 202).

⁷⁷ Milgrom (1990: 202) suggests a word play between the Hebrew '*ahalim* (aloes) and '*oholim* (tents Num.24.5).

⁷⁸ Milgrom (1990: 202).

⁷⁹ Budd (1984: 269).

⁸⁰ Gray (1976: 364; Milgrom (1990: 204).

⁸¹ Early rains produce dancing in the streets because from April to November the land goes hard and dry.

Then with the first rains it turns green - often literally overnight. In the Spring of 1992 after a winter which included three major snowstorms (unheard of for 50 years in Israel) even the barren land around the Dead Sea sprang to life, its shores bedecked with flowers of wide-ranging colours and types. The seeds from which they grew must have lain dormant for many years.

24.7b

Beyond the pastoral blessedness, Israel is portrayed as an exalted kingdom with a leader greater than Agag, king, in Saul's time of Amalek (1 Sam.15.8), Israel's most dreaded enemy in the time of Moses (e.g.Ex.17.8-16; Deut.25.17-18)⁸² - a further threat to Moab and Balak.

24.8-9

Imagery from Balaam's previous discourse is repeated but carried forward into a prophecy of Israel's future prowess over her enemies and the final dire warning to Balak and any others who may dare to seek to curse the nation that the promise of Gen.12.2,3 (and 22.18, to Abraham; 27.29, to Jacob and Ex.23.22, to the Israelites) stands and will not be revoked. It is at the same time seeing fulfilment in Balaam.⁸³

There follows what seems a conclusive end to the story with a predictable outburst of anger from Balak, accompanied by the striking of hands (probably in a typical Middle Eastern gesture of contempt, even cursing, where one hand is swept over the palm of the other towards the antagonist) and an allusion to the three blessings. There is strong irony as Balak, earmarked for cursing, claims his power to withdraw the promised honours - mere silver and gold - from Balaam, already the rich inheritor of JHWH's blessings (so the narrative takes up again the power/money motif). Balaam, strong in JHWH's power, recalling his earlier banter of silver and gold, now fully meaningful declares his intention to return, but not without a parting rapier thrust, a further oracle beyond the solicited three, denouncing all the surrounding 'enemies' of Israel, but in particular Moab (24.17b) sending the curse redounding upon Balak's own head.

4.4.4 *Fourth oracle*

24. 15 - 17

These are a further re-cycling of Balaam's own experiences constituting a stress on the fundamental importance of the events. The words repeat exactly the previous

⁸² Milgrom (1990: 204, cf.n.44 this doc).

⁸³ Milgrom (1990: 205).

oracle with the significant addition of 16b 'who has knowledge of the Most High'. Balaam now knows what is hidden from others.⁸⁴ Having left behind the magical arts, he is seen as having an intimacy of relationship with God and so stands to some extent in line with Israel's national prophets. In that capacity he is able to prophecy concerning Israel's future.

24.17-19

Olson⁸⁵ notes Balak's dismissal of Balaam as an attempt to prevent the turning of the metaphors of the preceding oracles into historical specifics and that in a near-eastern understanding of blessing and curse the specific denigration about to be uttered by Balaam would set in motion the events they defined.

Star and sceptre are both general refs. to a king, the latter a likely ref. to Gen.49.10, the sceptre of Judah, so most scholars see the original ref. as being to David and his conquest of Moab. However for the writer in the whole context of the discourses the verses constitute the culminating proclamation of the triumph of the united Israel in a wider sphere in fulfilment of the promises. Even so, in the context of the narrative of chs.22-24, 24.17b stands dominant in pronouncing the destruction of Moab.

Here most probably the original poem ends. 24.18f. are different in style and subject⁸⁶ and would seem to be the addition of a later editor, no doubt wanting to intensify the sense of Israel's supremacy. All the nations around: Edom, Seir, Amalek, the Kenites, Asshur, Eber, all will be dispossessed or destroyed, whilst Israel will do valiantly and exercise dominion. From a later date Israel is being challenged to recall what God has wrought in her and to see herself in the light of world-wide dominion.⁸⁷ She is to take courage, press on without fear and as she does so the blessings that already attend her will multiply and redound to her own glory and to God's cp.Mic.5.8; Is.60 (espec.v.12); Zech.12.6.

⁸⁴ Gray (1976: 368).

⁸⁵ 1996: 149.

⁸⁶ Gray (1976: 372).

⁸⁷ Gray (1976: 372).

4.5 Conclusion

The nationalistic tone of this 'Section of Balaam' strikes discordantly on modern ears and to some extent within this dissertation also, in its lack of reference to holiness as found in Ex. and Dt.

What are we to make of this? I suggest the following points are relevant:-

a) The purpose of the section, already noted frequently, was one of challenge and encouragement to the returnees struggling to reestablish themselves as God's people (cf. Williamson above).

b) The contrasted situation in the rest of Numbers shows Israel as disobedient, dissatisfied and complaining, hardly yet a people, *yet* she did settle and progress on to a measure of greatness in the Monarchy, the probable source of the oracles. Let the returnees take heart.

c) The language of triumphalism is capable of diverse interpretation:-

i) It concerns the future. If they are to survive the returnees must believe in what God purposes to do through them in the world, to the glory of His own name as well as theirs. In due course the Hasmonean Dynasty emerged partly fulfilling this.

ii) It may be read metaphorically as in Dt. In the uphill struggle of reestablishing their daily lives and themselves as a social entity both inner strength and challenge were needed. Militant language was eminently adapted to this.

iii) Deep at its heart there is also even here a call to the commitment of holiness. Abraham was seen as the father of the nation because he *obeyed God's voice* (Gen.22.16-18). Inherent in the triumphant oracles was the call to do likewise, to be a prophetic people dwelling alone in obedience to and in the strength of their God. Without that the Balaam section could be sounding a dangerous note.

It is not difficult to deduce from this section the religious influences that may have lain behind the writer of 1Peter as he sought to address situations facing the addressees of his letter, possibly not dissimilar from those facing the returning exiles of Nehemiah's day, but to be applied in a new and hitherto undreamed of situation – the Early Christian Church.

Chapter 4: The Balaam Oracles

This we examine in chapter 6. But first we consider the years following the Return, predictable in their conflict, yet bearing witness to a continued yearning after holiness, expressed in a surprising development.



Chapter 5

Qumran and the inter-testamental period

5.1 The legacy of the Exile

In chapter 3 we noted the intensity of zeal on the part of the Deuteronomist to underline the nature of the Covenant - its blessings and benefits and linked with that its demands. Many scholars suggest that it was out of the crucible of the Exile that Israel as a clearly defined nation began to emerge and that this Covenant concept took on more positive dimensions at that time, e.g. in the writing or editing of the Deuteronomic writings, possibly Genesis and Exodus also,¹ as religious leaders and writers sought to come to terms with the situation facing them, perceiving new dimensions in their understanding of Covenant and, as the prospect of the Return appeared, being able to pass on to the Exiles new hope and belief in a future in the mercy and continuing purposes of God (e.g. Is.40-55; Jer.30.31; Ezek.36.8f., 37.1-14).

Of the years following the Return, the internal history of the Jewish community remains obscure, in contrast to the evidence for the wider political history of the period, from the rise of Cyrus to Alexander's conquests.² But enmeshed in details of the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple and the rehabilitation of national life under Ezra and Nehemiah (Ez.1-6; Neh.; Hag.; Zech.1-8) is evidence of political instability with internal dissensions and struggle as suggested in chapter 4.³ Though both were reformers, Nehemiah would seem to have been more strongly slanted in a political and nationalistic direction whereas Ezra's zeal is marked by his desire for religious reform. Ackroyd sees these two leaders as epitomising the two major concerns of the Persian period:-

a) The very nature of the community's existence involving its relationship with the outside world.

¹ So e.g. van Seters (1994), see ch.1.

² Ackroyd (1979: 328).

³ Ackroyd (1979: 329-336).

b) The question of the community's identity (which in Israel's case amounts to its religious identity).⁴

Ackroyd also notes the differences that were bound to exist between those Israelites who went to Babylon and whose experience of their faith and life was thereby conditioned and those who remained in Palestine; further, between the descendents of both groups in what each had come to regard as a normative life style.⁵ It does not need too great a stretch of the imagination to envisage the immense upheavals that the Returnees experienced - first in the emotional trauma of Return to a land which had meant so much to them, then in the hardships of simply living, in sharp contrast to the prophetic expectations given to them beforehand and to what had probably been a not unreasonable life-style in Babylon (the development of literature, synagogue worship etc. is taken to suggest this. There is also the fact that it seems to have been the 'Middle' and 'Upper' classes in the community who went into Exile and who prospered there e.g. Daniel).

Though their origins are obscure it seems possible that it was out of the tensions of these times that the three groups which later emerged as sharply defined parties in Second Temple Judaism, viz. Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes, may have had their beginnings.⁶ The eventual development of such parties underlines the uniqueness of Israel as a religio-political entity, a fact which emerged more clearly in the Maccabean crisis, when Israel's identity as the Covenant people was seen to be at stake (1Macc.1.57; 2.27,28; 11Macc.1.2-4; 2.21-22; 5.15; 13.14) and the response to that crisis was resistance expressed in terms of 'zeal for the law' (1Macc.2.26-27,50,58; 11Macc.4.2; 7.2,9,11,37; 8.21; 13.14). It was thus that Second Temple Judaism began to take shape.

5.2 Emerging Judaism

Recent scholarship, initially in particular that of Jacob Neusner⁷, has shown that this emerging Judaism took many different forms - 'Judaisms'.⁸ Nevertheless, as Dunn observes, there remained one unifying core which he sees as a fourfold

⁴ 1979: 336-341.

⁵ 1979: 341f.

⁶ Ackroyd (1979: 340).

⁷ E.g. 1995: xiiff.

foundation on which all were built - that of Monotheism, Election, Covenant and Temple.⁹ Crucial to that foundation was the centrality of Torah in Israel's self-consciousness of being God's chosen people,¹⁰ the latter a theme we have already seen expressed in Deuteronomy, referred to by Dunn as the classic expression of Israel's Covenant and which, following J.E.Sanders, he calls 'Covenantal Nomism' - God's election of Israel as His people through the Covenant and His gift of the law to provide that people with the means of living within it.¹¹

It was the interpretation of this theme, however, that produced the wide diversity to which Neusner referred. The Maccabean uprising had seen the emergence of the Hasidim or Faithful Element expressing a separatist tendency, reiterating the longings of ancient prophecy which had continued through the years of foreign rule¹² and which would seem to have stimulated the development both of the Essenes and the Pharisees as religious groups committed to the upholding of the law,¹³ and the maintaining thereby of Israel's monotheistic and covenantal individuality.

At the same time it would seem that the unifying core referred to above issued in an increasingly fierce nationalistic assertion of Israel's election and divine right to religious (if not national) freedom in the land given by God and a national pride in their elect position, as recorded by the secular writers of the period¹⁴ and in some of the Apocryphal literature which appeared at that time.¹⁵

What began as a stimulating insistence on JHWH's love for Israel (cf.ch.4) in an effort to recreate the sense of national identity and call forth a response of faith, hope and right living during and immediately after the time of the Exile, appears to have taken on, predictably, in some areas e.g. the Sadducees¹⁶, an over-conservative emphasis on the priestly status quo and in others, e.g. the Pharisees and in more extreme form, the Essenes, an increasingly detailed demand for obedience to the law.

⁸ Dunn (1991: 13,18).

⁹ 1991: 18.

¹⁰ Dunn (1991: 23).

¹¹ 1991: 25.

¹² Ackroyd (1959: 240).

¹³ Schubert (1969:87).

¹⁴ E.g. Philo - *Mos.* I .278; II.17-25; Josephus - *Ap.* 2.277-86

¹⁵ E.g. Jub.15.31-32; Ps.Sol.9.8-9.

¹⁶ See e.g. Anderson (1975: 551), also Ackroyd (1968: 7n.20).

In such a melee¹⁷ it is hardly surprising (and accords with acknowledged social realities) that whilst the Pharisees emerged as the popular party, representing the religious aspirations of the majority of the religious people¹⁸, there should have existed alongside a more ascetic group. Such were the Essenes.

5.3 The Essenes

Opinions on the Essenes vary very widely. According to Josephus they were a sectarian group found in considerable numbers (about 4,000) throughout Israelite society. He praises their way of life highly.¹⁹ Their origin and nature is a subject of scholarly debate.²⁰ There is however, at the present time, a fairly general consensus that it was from them that, in the early 2nd Century a sub-group arose in protest at what they saw as defilement of the Temple and a turning aside from the law by the priests, leaders and people and which, under the leadership of the Teacher of Righteousness, fled to the desert, settling in Qumran.²¹

The Essenes would seem to have inherited from the Hasidim the apocalyptic tradition,²² which may have arisen partly from Persian ideas but was itself a successor to Prophetic Eschatology, 'a complex doctrine of ideas re the last things more or less coherent and developed' (Mowinckel).²³

Such Eschatology developed out of the bleakness of the post-exilic world when times were hard, immediate expectations remained unfulfilled and prophetic vision was consequently carried beyond the present to the future. It kindled and kept aflame the reality of Israel's faith, using apocalyptic imagery as its tools, with images of divine transcendence, angelology, fantastic symbolism, re-interpretation of

¹⁷ Frend (1984: 15-30) gives a vivid picture of the times.

¹⁸ Frend (1984:23) citing Josephus *Ant.* X111.298; X111.401.

¹⁹ *War* II V111.4; *Ant.* XV111.1,5.

²⁰ See Martínez (1995: 77).

²¹ Martínez (1995: 32); Cross (1995: 54); Cook (1996: 1116) but note the very different view of Golb described there. For other different views see Schiffman (1993: 35) and VanderKam (1993: 50).

²² 'The Essenes prove to be the bearers and in no small part the producers of the apocalyptic tradition in Judaism' Cross (1995: 144).

²³ Nicholson (1979: 192f.) - a useful survey of views on the origins and development of Apocalyptic and Eschatology in the post-exilic world and their relationship to each other. See especially his citation of Hanson, 203f.

prophecy, the coming of the golden age, the Messianic deliverer, the resurrection of the dead et al.²⁴

Such teaching became a dominant element in the Community of Qumran. The desert to which they had fled held significance for them as the place of Exodus and giving of the law as they saw themselves as the true interpreters of the law and the Covenant. They found it necessary to reject the mainstream interpretation of the fourfold foundation already mentioned and seek for one which more exactly represented God's intention as they understood it, seeing *themselves* as the Temple, while they waited for the coming of a new Jerusalem, a new Temple and an Eternal Covenant. Their aim, in that waiting, was purity and observance of every aspect of the law.²⁵

It is now widely accepted that the scrolls discovered in caves north-west of the Dead Sea, close to the site identified as that of the Qumran Community, were what constituted the Community Library. It is from them that the wealth of information we now have relating to this community has come to us. I do not propose to examine in detail its life or its literature. Some aspects however, warrant attention in the relationship which they bear to NT traditions and in particular to 1Peter.

The life-style and aspirations of the Community as evidenced by its literature, present a climate of thought to which the teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus and the New Testament are clearly related, and from which the latter would appear, at least in part, to have grown. Julio T. Barrera gives a timely warning against studying the texts in terms of a literary corpus of a later period and with a geographical horizon and ideas which are much wider than, and differ from those of the Qumran texts.²⁶ Nevertheless he adds, 'This does not mean to say that these Mss do not throw light, in many cases dazzling light, on the origins of Christianity.'

I propose to look briefly at five aspects relating to the life of the Community which I believe shed some light on our study of 1Peter.

²⁴ Nicholson (1979: 192) citing D.S.Russell.

²⁵ Martínez (1995: 35f.).

5.3.1 *The 'Coming' of God*

In an article in Revue de Qumran²⁷ Otto Betz emphasises the fact that the people of Qumran were people under the law of God. OT scriptures were understood and interpreted in an existential way, producing a community life-style essentially eschatological. Ex.19 was a fundamental scripture to them but so also was Dt.33.2-5. In the latter the people found a scriptural definition of their own understanding.²⁸ God came from Mt. Sinai accompanied by myriads of angels. To them the waiting heads of the people were gathered. The people of Qumran similarly awaited the coming of God, to be accompanied by his holy ones - themselves, the true Israel, who already had an invisible communion with the angels. This communion would be perfected for those made clean by the Holy Spirit,²⁹ effected through a holy life-style. The priests of the community were envisaged as serving in the Temple of God's Kingdom in the coming age, like the angels of His Presence.³⁰

We must note that Betz observes that this interpretation was not confined to the Essenes. It was found also in later Rabbinic interpretation of the same subject using Ex.19.³¹ He believes that the later Dt. account helped in interpreting the giving of Torah as a universal act. I find this strange however, as in common with most sectarian groups one of the features of Qumran was its fundamentally non-universalistic outlook in which it was in sharp contrast to NT teaching.

5.3.2 *Purity*

In the idea of waiting for God permanent ritual purity was essential. At Ex.19.5,6 Israel had been separated from the nations, offered elect status and called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. So now the Community saw *itself* in the light of Ex.19.6, as the promised kingdom of priests and holy nation.³² Having cast aside the Temple built with hands and its priests in Jerusalem they had reinstated both, in their own selves and their community, as the true interpreters and

²⁶ 1995: 49.

²⁷ 1967: 89-107.

²⁸ 1967: 90.

²⁹ 1Q *Serek* IV.22 cited Betz (1967: 91).

³⁰ 1Q *Blessings* IV,25-6 cited Betz (1967: 91).

³¹ Betz (1967: 92).

³² Betz (1967: 93).

bearers of the tradition, until the coming of the more perfect one.³³ As God had separated Israel from the nations through His Covenant, so they now were the separated, holy ones, the men taught in His commandments. Many features of the community life derived from the scriptural regulations for the priests who had to serve in the Temple e.g. celibacy, daily ablutions, white linen cloths, sacred meals.³⁴ In Qumran the rule applied to all because all wanted to be ready for God, consecrated like the people at the foot of Sinai. Because the time of God's coming was unknown, the status of this exegetical community was to become a permanent one, a style of living.³⁵

This attitude in Qumran was not dictated solely by an intensified search for sanctification and absolute purity. They were aiming by these means to re-establish the true Israel - on the road to victory, raised from humiliation - by perfect submission to the law.³⁶ As we saw earlier, this ideal of sanctification and purity drew its inspiration largely from the Temple in Jerusalem and the priests who served there. The Temple was the centre of Israel, YHWH dwelt there and from there poured out His holiness. This Temple ideology was not dismissed, rather it was increased. Jerusalem must be abandoned *because* it was defiled. In order to maintain its holy function a new spiritual centre must be created to replace it, in which dwelt a new spiritual Temple - the sign that God would dwell among his people eternally until His coming revelation. The Community saw itself as at once both spiritual centre and Temple.³⁷

5.3.3 Struggle

Boundaries were set around Sinai (Ex.19.10-12). Interpreted spiritually, this boundary became the law which hedged them in on all sides through the rules of

³³ Martínez (1995: 33ff.) 'There is not to be found in our actions deceit or betrayal or evil, for concerning these things -- we have written -- that you must understand the book of Moses and the words of the prophets--4QMMT 92-96; DSST,79.

³⁴ Gärtner (1965: 1-15ff.); Betz (1967: 93-94).

³⁵ Martínez (1995: 32f); Betz (1967: 94).

³⁶ Gärtner (1965: 13).

³⁷ Gärtner (1965: 17,18) cf. Ezek.37.26ff.; 40.1ff.; Hagg.2.9; 1En.90.28f.; Jub.1.28f. Gärtner stresses the immense importance, at this stage, of the Temple which remained the focus of ideas, though transferred to the Qumran Community (C.D. iv. 8ff.; IQpHab ix. 4f., xi.12f; IQpHab xii. 9, cf Ps. Sol. viii.10ff.). By AD 70 however the

purity contained in it. Moses had fenced the Jews with impregnable ramparts and walls of iron in order that they might be pure in body and soul, having no communion with other nations. He had hedged them on all sides with rules of purity.³⁸ Deriving from the Sinai tradition, levitical purity became a characteristic mark of the Jewish nation in the Gentile world - its rules a protecting fence.

But whilst the boundary at Sinai had been around the holiness of the sacred sphere of God's dwelling place, it was now against the unclean world, and for the Qumran Community that world was the rest of Israel, no longer living in accord with God's commandments.³⁹ The Community was the Elect - not the chosen in an ethnic sense but as a union of chosen individuals. Like Israel at Mount Sinai, its members were living in a camp (Ex.19.2,16,17) and awaiting the manifestation of God's glory. So the law for them was as it was interpreted by the Teacher of Righteousness and obedience to God embodied obedience to him as leader.⁴⁰

5.3.4 Biblical Interpretation

i) In seeing itself as the Chosen of God, an eschatological community living for the last days, Qumran's understanding was based on its method of interpreting scripture. Following ancient Jewish method, the Community, as we have seen, saw itself as fulfilling the Scriptures. It was the chosen, the elect. Its members were the priesthood, the holy ones, the people called. So they became the bearers of the special calling of God, the recipients of God's love. As a community in the law they followed the demands of Deuteronomy; as a community fleeing to the desert they saw themselves in an Exodus situation.⁴¹ Such interpretation weighs in favour of the community being Essenes, though it is argued by some that the same principles could apply if they were Pharisees.

In a similar way at a later stage the Christian Community saw themselves, as followers of Jesus, as the true Israel, considering the promises and institutions of the OT to have reached fulfilment in them. This hinged on the fact that some of the

Law had superseded it in Israel so that the destruction of the Temple was not so devastating as might have been expected.

³⁸ Letter of Aristeas #139,142,151 cited Betz (1967: 95-96).

³⁹ Betz (1967:96).

⁴⁰ Betz (1967:97).

same principles of scriptural interpretation were in use as pertained at Qumran. Whilst NT develops all methods of interpretation known to the Judaism of the period, two literary forms in particular, practised in Qumran, appear also to be used in NT texts - those of *pesher* and *testimonia*.⁴² They are found in the Gospels, the letters of Paul and in other NT writings such as 1Peter (1.10-12; 1.24f. *pesher* genre) and so act as particular points of contact with the Qumran *pesharim*. Among many examples is the theme of living stones combining images from the OT, developed in 1Pet.2.4-8 (and elsewhere in NT, see ch.6), found also in the writings of the Community (1QS viii 7f; 1QH vi 26) and linked to the prophecy about the corner stone in Is.28.16, used by Qumran with reference to its own Community (1QH v 125-127, v 118-9).

ii) From 5th - early 2nd Cent. BC collections of books which later formed the canon were established.⁴³ This began a process of transmission and translation of its text, following traditional principles and methods, so creating a rich hermeneutic and leading to an accumulation of huge further traditions of oral and written interpretation. Out of this may arise the question of the origins of the Christian canon of the OT and may account for the fact that Christians did not feel obliged to keep to the strict Hebrew canon.

This also may have antecedents in the Qumran community in its prime focus on the study of Scripture. Qumran hermeneutics had a two-fold aim - to explain and make more intelligent and clear the biblical text (pure exegesis) and to apply the biblical text to a new situation - its own (applied exegesis).⁴⁴ Believing itself to have a continuous link with Moses and the prophets, and to be their true successors, it considered itself authorised to draft new laws on a par with those of the Mosaic Law. The most important documents amongst the DSS reflect this. Thus the Damascus Document interprets scripture by referring directly to the biblical text; the Temple Scroll introduces interpretative elements so that the actual Torah is converted into a new and real Torah.

⁴¹ Barrera (1995: 99f.). He writes 'The transmission of the text is of extraordinary exactitude without parallel in Greek or Latin classical literature'(p.102).

⁴² Barrera (1995: 113f.).

⁴³ Barrera (1995: 110).

⁴⁴ Barrera (1995: 112).

Contrary to earlier critical approaches e.g. History of Religions, which saw Christianity as a syncretistic outflow from pagan elements and led it to study the NT in the framework of Graeco-Roman literature, most modern scholarship sees NT as following the lines of Judaistic exegetical tradition of the period, especially the writings from Qumran,⁴⁵ very much as described above, and using some of the same principles and methods except that it incorporates a christological meaning to the readings.

iii) We noted in ch.1 that the many quotations in 1Pet. from LXX provided interesting variations from MT, and had raised questions regarding possible error on the part of the Greek translators. It was the discovery of the Scrolls at Qumran that transformed the problem. Barrera⁴⁶ proposes the existence of two text forms in Mss found at Qumran - the rabbinic form and that known by the Christians.⁴⁷ This would indicate that some biblical books underwent a kind of 2nd edition - corrected and enlarged, which probably accounts for variations in NT texts which clearly stem from a common source. Barrera asserts that the Greek textual variants in fact reflect with great exactness lost Hebrew originals, very similar to those found at Qumran⁴⁸ and LXX has been shown to be faithful to *its own* Hebrew original.

Texts related to the Samaritan Pentateuch also offer a further proof of textual pluralism in the Bible.

The fact of textual pluralism is highly significant in the variations to our own OT text found in 1Peter and other NT writings, as we will see.

5.3.5 John the Baptist and Jesus

We may ask finally what relationship did John the Baptist and Jesus have, if any, to the Qumran Community?

The Essenes and the Qumran Community flourished at the same time as John was preaching. It seems clear that the ideology which inspired and motivated him

⁴⁵ Barrera (1995: 115f.).

⁴⁶ Barrera (1995: 101f.).

⁴⁷ The factor of double editions leads of course to other significant questions such as which is the original and authentic?, which of the two is canonical?, which should be used for translation into modern versions?

⁴⁸ Barrera (1995: 107f.).

arose from the same root as that which inspired the Essenes and the Qumran Community.⁴⁹ Both combined prophetic and priestly ideals of a holy life, ritual purity, repentance, expectation of final judgement. Both have resemblances to each other in outlook and ascetic life-style. In particular the text which the Gospel writers attach to John from Isaiah 40.3 (Matt 3.3; Mark 1.2, 3; Luke 3.4-6; John 1.23) is found in the Qumran Community Rule (1QS viii 12-16) to account for the presence of the Community in the desert (cf. also John's reference to Jesus baptising with fire (1QS iv 20-21; DSST,7).⁵⁰

Weighing against this, however, is the fact that John is not mentioned in the DSS, and that he is never called an Essene in either the NT or Josephus.⁵¹

The fanciful view of Otto Betz is that John was raised in the Community by the Dead Sea (Luke 1.80; 3.2) and was strongly influenced by them, but that he ultimately left them to reach out into a wider community of Jews.⁵² Such conjecture is without evidence, based only on the hints noted above. His own vision was greater but the Gospel writers show him recognising that still greater things lay beyond (Matt 3.11-12; Mark 1.7, 8; Luke 3.16,17,21-22; John 1.26, 27.32-34).

If all this is so then John is the significant representative of a movement beyond Qumran, possibly disillusioned or dissatisfied with Qumran's limitedness yet recognising that its message contained within it the seeds of salvation as promised by the Covenant.

'The Essenes of Qumran no doubt prepared the way for the prophetic voice in the wilderness. They succeeded in combining Israel's priestly and prophetic heritage in a kind of eschatological existence. The Essenes radicalised and democratised the concept of priestly purity; they wanted a true theocracy and they sought to turn the people into a Kingdom of Priests (Ex.19.5,6).⁵³

John, then was at the threshold of that movement which led to a new and hitherto undreamed of understanding of who that Kingdom of Priests might be. Yet his teaching lay in firm continuity with that of the prophets who had gone before.

⁴⁹ Betz (1993: 206ff. espec. 209f.).

⁵⁰ Barrera (1995: 205-6).

⁵¹ Betz (1993: 212).

⁵² Betz (1993: 213).

⁵³ Betz (1993: 214).

5.4 The Ministry of Jesus

As in the case of John, many of the themes of Jesus ministry, as it is presented by the Gospel writers, are to be found in the Qumran Community and the pesher-like interpretations of Scripture remain, especially in Matthew's Gospel. Loren Stuckenbruck lists these themes⁵⁴ and writes, 'This list is a blend of traditions which may have some basis in the historical Jesus or more overtly, have to do with the interpretations of who he was in the eyes of the early Christians.'

He expands on three of the themes, demonstrating the radical nature of Jesus' teaching, yet its linkedness with earlier traditions:-

- a) Jesus as exorcist in the Kingdom of God (4).
- b) The Jesus logion 'Love your enemies' Matt 5.43-44 (6).
- c) Jesus injunction against divorce Mark 10.2-9 (8).

None of these are seen as suggesting any direct connection, positive or negative, between Jesus and Qumran but that together they allow certain general conclusions to be drawn:-

i) As a first century Jew in Judaea/Galilee, Jesus cannot be understood without recourse to currents of thought in contemporary Judaism.

ii) In a comparison with other Jewish sources from antiquity, the teaching and activity of Jesus may not only find a secure anchoring in Judaism but also may emerge more distinctly in its own right.

iii) In a consideration of similarities and contrasts between Jesus tradition and early Jewish sources, the Dead Sea materials have added and are continuing to contribute a wealth of data.

5.5 Conclusion

NT roots are thus seen to be firmly rooted in Judaism and there is a strengthening of the idea that the early followers of Jesus had close links with groups such as Qumran, if not Qumran itself, drawing in their own writings on texts from the OT which we find in the DDS and using the same methods of interpretation to re-interpret them in the light of Jesus, whom they saw to be the Chosen One of God and

⁵⁴ .Stuckenbruck (1997: 10).

in whom all previous understanding found its fulfilment. This is evident particularly in 1Peter, to which we now turn.

Chapter six

1 Peter 2.9 in the context of 1Peter 2.4-10

6.1 The context of the pericope – 1Pet.1.1-1Pet.2.3

We have already, in the Introduction, discussed at some length the destination and purpose of 1 Peter. The purpose of this chapter is to consider in the context of 2.4-10, Peter's affirmation at 2.9, of the elect status of the addressees and the consequent nature of their calling.

By way of introduction and as appropriate background, I consider briefly 1.1-2.3.

1.1a Petros apostolos Jesou Christou

We may recall the suggestion in ch.1 that Peter was the pseudonym for a group of Jewish Christians - possibly second generation successors - or one such - of a group deeply immersed in the teachings of Judaism and their methods of interpretation, who at some point in their history had embraced Jesus Christ as Messiah and had become familiar with the teachings and traditions of early Christianity, or had taken an active part in the developing of those traditions, re-interpreting their own OT understandings in their light.

We noted that whilst there are many similarities to the teachings of Paul, modern consensus would see Peter as a letter standing in its own right drawing on the traditions of early Christianity, as Paul himself did, but with an interpretation independent of his.

The claim that the letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, gives both authority and weight to its contents regardless of whether it was so, and underlines the nature of its message - the Gospel of the Risen Christ whom Peter knew intimately and in a very particular way through his denial and re-instatement (cf.2.25), and which they have heard and embraced (1.3,8,13,19-21). Some of the emphases are distinctly Petrine.

1.1b eklektois parepidemois diasporas

Again we recall our consideration in Chapter 1 regarding to whom 'exiles of the dispersion' refers. Not, as might at first seem the case, Jewish believers, but in view of 1.14,18; 4.3-5 almost certainly Gentiles of the Gentile dispersion.

Following the majority of commentators we saw the designation 'exiles' as probably used in a metaphorical sense, relating to the situation into which these believers' faith had placed them, a situation described throughout the latter part of the letter (2.15,18-25; 3.9,13-17; 4.1-5,12-19; 5.7-10) where suffering is seen as a fundamental part of their faith and which was essentially the occasion for its writing.

As one clearly taught in the Jewish Scriptures, the author was well-placed to understand their position. As we saw in the earlier chapters, the Jewish Scriptures portrayed the history of the Israelite nation as earthed in the concept of alien-ness and exile. Abraham was 'a wandering Aramean' drawn into a covenant of circumcision, his forbears aliens in Egypt, until, in the Exodus and by the Covenant at Sinai, they became the Elect of JHWH, a position which by its very nature was shown to isolate them through the succeeding years, at least ideally, and in the eyes of the prophets and the writers, as a people apart from their pagan, polytheistic neighbours. During the years of the Exile and beyond, that position was strengthened into a coherent Judaism with its more formalised and wide-ranging laws, setting them even further apart. This was especially true of the Diaspora, where such difference frequently brought antagonism, either from neighbours or ruling authorities.

It was against the background and tensions of such alien status that Election had found its fullest development and understanding. As we saw in Ex., Dt. and Num. this was the significant factor for Israel. They were the chosen of JHWH and therefore able to be partakers of his blessings and riches. Prophets, Psalmists and Historians had poured forth a stream of writing calculated to enable Israelites to enter into this as their inheritance; to *realise* their position - to some extent *creating* it in their activating of it - and allow such realisation to issue in praise, honour and obedience of holiness to JHWH. This was especially true during and following the Exile together with the emergence of a new element - Eschatology. We saw in the previous chapter that it was as high hopes and promises were proving to be elusive in the immediate time, that fulfilment was seen to lie in the future, embracing the promised coming of a Messiah

who would rule in the line of David. This period saw the beginnings of groups such as the Pharisees, concerned to preserve Torah, and the more pietistic Essenes - notably the group at Qumran - seeking to re-establish and maintain the purity of life and worship ideally associated with the Temple but with the Temple as reconstituted in *themselves* in readiness for such a coming.

Finally we saw Jesus, seen by his followers as the fulfilment of all that had pointed towards Messiah in the OT, and those followers using contemporary principles and methods of interpretation of Scripture in their understanding of his life and death, itself lifted into a new and different realm and given credence by his Resurrection - forerunner of his Ascension and promised Return - sealed and authenticated by the reality of the Holy Spirit. Thus the NT writings are in strong continuity with what had gone before in the OT.

J.R.Michaels¹ draws attention to the freedom of the Gentile churches of Asia Minor, secure in their own identity, who can be addressed, as here in Peter, as partners in a new Judaism (cf.2 Apoc. of Baruch 78-87) though still needing much encouragement and assurance, in contrast to e.g. the Council of Jerusalem's letter in Acts 15.23-29 to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, still under Jewish Christian authority. Michaels suggests that the Asian churches convey the solidarity of a people who, though scattered, shared the same experience of suffering and of awaiting vindication. This latter becomes a fundamental element of NT tradition, especially in 1Peter.

The particularly Jewish background of the author/s is suggested by the use of the word 'diaspora' in this verse, hinting at kinship with a long tradition of Jewish letters written from Jerusalem to the Jewish Diaspora in Babylon, Assyria and Egypt.² This tradition is seen more strongly expressed in the James Epistle (cf.James1.1).

Interpretation such as that of which we are thinking, was fitted to the needs of groups of believers drawn, not only from among Jews, but from Gentiles also, as in the case of 1Peter, who probably were familiar with some Jewish teaching through the presence of the diaspora. They were now elect, the focus of God's blessings and mercies, the recipients of His grace that was able to lead them away from their former darkness into what was seen as holiness of life, a showing forth of the Glory of the One

¹ 1988: xlixff.,4.

² Michaels (1988: xlviif.;4ff.).

who had called them 'into His marvellous light' (2.9). Whatever alienation and suffering had come to them through their embracing of the truth of Christianity, did not alter the facts or the glory of their chosenness in Christ.

It was to strengthen them in the certainty of these truths, to build up their faith and trust in God's love for them, and to set out clearly the privileged, yet demanding life-style that was to be the consequence, with a particular emphasis on the value of suffering, that 1 Peter was written.

1.2 kata prognosin theos patros---eis hupakone kai pantismon---

The initiative in their election had been God's. Following NT tradition (cf.Eph.1.4) that is where it is firmly placed. But what does that mean? In our OT investigations, I suggested that though we may recognise the divine initiative to be at work, response on the part of those designated elect is necessary to produce the awareness of that initiative. Just how the two interact belongs to the realm of mystery. Michaels³ notes that the divine initiative begins in the past but finds expression in the social experience of individuals and a community and is synonymous with being 'called' (1,15; 2.9,21; 3.9; 5.10). In the last resort God's call must hinge on both individual - or community - perception and response. Why some respond and not others is beyond human understanding and one can only acknowledge that it is so.

Ideas such as these lie behind 1.2, which constitutes a summary of all that is to come. The verse embodies a number of 'calls' to 1Peter's addressees:-

- a) To realise their elect status, ordained by God.
- b) To realise Christ's shed blood as effective for them for purification, cleansing and forgiveness.
- c) To realise their sanctification.
- d) To respond in obedience - the completion of all the rest and ultimately the only evidence of its reality and validity.

These do not stand in sequence, rather they interact with each other to produce the whole. Realisation of God's work for them is a fundamental constituent of the addressees' election and it can be seen at all points as being in harmony with, but in succession to an equivalent understanding in the OT.

³ 1988: 10.

1.3-12

These verses exalt this elect status and the privilege that it contains. It is declared (1.3), defined (1.4,5) and is set as the context against which the addressees are to understand their trials (1.6,7), an emphasis which is to continue throughout the letter and which certainly constitutes the main reason for its writing. The trials are necessary to test and refine their faith cf. Abraham, Joseph, Moses etc. As they endure (cf. Heb.11.27; 12.2) in love, they will find joy beyond words (1.8) and salvation (1.9). It would seem that by salvation Peter probably has in mind the end-time, the not-yet, but it could equally well (and probably more acceptably in our modern understanding), mean the 'now' - their own souls will know renewal in the present. In fact the tenor of the letter is towards the realisation of this.

Again in accord with OT interpretation, the prophets⁴ are shown to have understood that their messianic prophecies were pointing forwards to this very time - to these believers - a mystery which draws even the angels in enquiry.

1.13-2.3

Undoubtedly the all-predominating passion of the author is that his addressees should remain firm in faith and endure their trials in holiness and the purity of life in daily living that issues from it. Opinions differ as to how Peter sees this being worked out, typically in the debate between J.H.Elliott and David Balch⁵ on the matter of the Household Code where the former sees the emphasis to be serving what he sees as the letter's overall strategy of *preserving* the unity and identity of the brotherhood of faith and the household of God, in what one may see as a close-knit and sharply-identifiable community, maintaining its separation from the world, while the latter sees it as advocating a programme of Christian assimilation to secular society. I believe Elliott is correct and Balch wrong (though he makes useful points); the exhortations to right living towards those that are without are based entirely on the strength and certainty of the addressees' elect status in Christ and the centrality of the theme of holiness. It seems to me this precludes any idea of their assimilating to secular society. Indeed it is here that we may discern the author's particular identification with the Qumran school

⁴ It is not clear what prophets the writer had in mind. Is.52,53 springs to mind, but Selwyn (1949:134) argues that the whole prophetic tradition including NT Christian prophets may be included.

⁵ 1986: 61-78 (Elliott) and 79-101 (Balch).

in his strong emphasis on the brotherhood and on purity and distinctiveness from the old ways (1.18), and by default, from those still following them.

There is no polemic against Jews here, as most would see in Paul⁶, rather a natural movement from the old select Israel of Judaism, embraced by the Qumran Covenanters and the Pharisees, yearning after holiness and purity, to the new inclusive community composed of all who follow Jesus Christ but with boundaries against those who reject Him and in so doing reject God, as we see further expanded in OT terms in 1Pet.2 which essentially continues the holiness theme.⁷

The call to purity is introduced at 1.13-17, carried on in the background of 1.18-21, climaxing purposefully at 1.22, with a particularly Jewish emphasis on the place of the Word in their regeneration at 1.23-25, then continues with more explicit definition in 2.1,2. where Ps.34 is used significantly, acting as a marker to the nature of the author's thought in 2.4-10. Parts of Psalm 34 may be seen to resonate very closely with the OT quotations in 2.6-8.

The exhortations are to continue from 2.11 throughout the remainder of the letter, but at 2.4-10 the author develops them in a particular way and with reference to the theme which has been summarised in the introduction of his letter - that of election, expressed specifically at 2.9. They have already tasted the kindness of the Lord (Ps.34). In response they must now move on and grow.

Before turning to that section we need to consider briefly the *nature* of the material of the whole section with which we are dealing.

6.2 Interpretation in the body opening of the letter

In his exhaustive study referred to in chapter 1 Schutter suggests, in line with the foregoing understanding, that the body opening of the letter, 1.13-2.10, is homiletic midrash.⁸ It is developed from the holiness theme of 1.16, quoting Lev.19.2, 'with embellishments through paraphrase (1.19; 1.22,23; 2.2), catchwords (1.22; 2.5,9), and extensive use of the OT' both in direct texts and ideas leading to the climax of 2.5-9 where, he suggests, the holy Temple-community is addressed as the indicative

⁶ Though note here J.D.G.Dunn 'Was Paul a covenant theologian?' Lecture to Durham NT Seminar Feb.'98.

⁷ Cf. Michaels (1988: xlixf.).

⁸ 1989: 85-100 espec. 93ff.

presupposed by the imperative of 1.15-16. In such a way Scripture is being applied to contemporary situations, actualising them at this later date in just the ways we have considered in other parts of this paper. The author's belief in the divine origins and authority of Scripture is being underlined, with Scripture interpreting Scripture as the controlling principle.

Schutter has selected this genre of homiletic midrash from four - and those from a wide range of other possibilities - as being flexible enough to accommodate the kinds of situations and materials that existed, but having an essential feature that they did not have - the central place given to the OT. He does however urge caution in acknowledging that influence from other directions may also be present in the body opening's design, such as missionary proclamation, communal discipline, diatribe and epistolary framework. It seems to me that this need not preclude the former.

It is particularly interesting that he suggests 1.10-12 as a hermeneutical key, (especially in its suffering-glory motif). He describes it thus:-

'The whole course of salvation history and the progress of revelation seem to be summed up in a skilful manoeuvre that draws the addressees simultaneously into its perspective. So it stands to reason that the author's formulation is likely to be fairly representative of his hermeneutical stance and is the fitting object of close examination for whatever insight into the author's interpretative approach it may offer.'⁹

This close examination is carried out on the whole range of 1Peter's concepts, the result leading Schutter to conclude¹⁰ that the author's hermeneutical orientation has been 'repeatedly illuminated by appeal to a peculiarly Jewish hermeneutical tradition which became a major force in the Early Church'. This acts for him as independent corroboration of his designation of the body opening as homiletic midrash, which itself also similarly exhibits Jewish hermeneutical traditions to be found in the Early Church. Schutter further concludes, relating to the history of this passage (1.10-12),

'No more relevant or abundant material is available for comparison than that from Qumran. A picture of Qumran hermeneutic has emerged which resembles that of the early Church more nearly than any other whether in content or form. But there remained the fundamental difference - Qumran's

⁹ 1989: 101.

¹⁰ 1989: 109.

largest hope had still not been fulfilled (1QpHab V111.1f.). For Peter Messiah had come.’¹¹

Schutter’s study is a valuable and highly detailed resource which space forbids examining in the detail and at the length it deserves. It is not clear to what extent he sees the writer as developing *his own* midrashic interpretation. A majority of modern scholars acknowledge strong evidence of 1Peter’s close links with Rabbinic and Qumranic materials and traditions but most see the links as secondary. Achtemeier, for instance, acknowledges¹² that 1Peter bears strong resemblance to the kind of midrashic exegesis evident at Qumran, including at times pesher-like interpretation, and that e.g. the stone passages reflect the self-understanding of the Qumran Community more closely than other NT writings do¹³, but thinks direct linkage to Qumran as a source unlikely. This may also be the case with Schutter but I could find it nowhere stated and on the whole he seems to be assuming more direct links. Michaels,¹⁴ whilst quoting from the Qumran Manual of Discipline (Community Rule) depicting the kind of passionate aspirations after holiness which we find in 1 Peter, nevertheless, with Achtermeier, Best,¹⁵ Elliott,¹⁶ Snodgrass,¹⁷ and others, sees 1 Peter as drawing on a tradition rooted in Judaism, common to Paul and the Gospel tradition and important to the earliest Christians, rather than primarily from Qumran.

So in the inclusion of his twin themes of holiness and glory out of suffering, Peter is probably not original. Yet in the way such themes are applied to the situation of the addressees and in his particularly abundant use of the OT he is unique. The letter also has significant value in enabling us to discern more readily, with the help of studies such as Schutter, how at least one NT witness used the materials and methods available in a pesher style of interpretation to teach and encourage life in the Early Church.¹⁸

¹¹ 1989: 110-123. Schutter also quotes from the beginning of the Dam. Doc. Col. vi. to show that a pesher exegesis could accommodate other OT texts to aid the exposition while continuing to focus on one primary text, as we find in 2.4-10.

¹² 1996: 151.

¹³ He cites refs. to a New Temple (I.QS 8.4-6 using Is.28.16); to non-material sacrifice (e.g. IQS 8.4-6; 9.3-5; 4QFlor 1.6-7) and the use of OT citations.

¹⁴ 1988: 96.

¹⁵ 1969: 278-9; 282.

¹⁶ 1966: 26-8,33,45 et al.

¹⁷ 1978: 104.

¹⁸ Cf. the many scholars who see 1Peter as a baptismal homily or manual of instruction for believers.

6.3 The central pericope – 2.4-10

The driving motive of 2.4-5 mirrors that of the whole section 2.4-10, indeed of the whole letter. It is two-fold:- assurance and exhortation based on encouragement. The overall central focus is the addressees themselves, as seen in relation to Jesus Christ, though in the first section *lithos* - the stone metaphor - is dominant, whilst in 2.9 it is *laos* - people.

2.4

There is some debate among scholars regarding the translation of the participle in *pros on proserchomenoi* which in the RSV is the imperative 'Come', paralleled by 'Be built' at 2.5, whereas most scholars prefer 'As you come', paralleled by 'You are being built'. Either way the overall sense remains that of exhortation based on assurance,¹⁹ with the emphasis on obedience and trust. The author's longing is for the addressees to avail themselves of Christ's power and understand more fully the nature of their calling and the assurances it contains. The pattern follows that seen in our OT studies in the Pentateuch. Only in realisation of the reality of their calling, and of the certainty of the initiative of God, can they find the power to live holy lives. Therefore 'come' constitutes the climax to the biddings to 'put away' (2.1), 'to long for' (2.2), to 'grow up' (2.2), to savour their taste buds (2.3). It is also the necessary precondition for these. We may be seeing here a strand of Early Church tradition (cf. Rev.22.17. Still closer to Peter's thought is the Didache x.6, 'If any man be holy let him come.').

The One to whom they are to come, with the assurance embodied there, is defined in terms of the Stone metaphor. Christ is depicted as the Living Stone, reflecting in one short phrase both his resurrection and his relatedness to OT messianic tradition. The fundamental factor is that He is on the one hand rejected or disallowed of men, but on the other, chosen by God and precious to Him, as the addressees themselves are and as the Jewish nation had often been. This offers immediate encouragement. They may identify fully with the One whom they are following. This is guaranteed by Scripture (2.6-8), understood and re-applied to their NT situation,

¹⁹ Michaels (1988: 97).

assuring them of the reality of Christ's Election, of their own elective security in consequence, and at the same time, of their antagonists' ultimate demise.

Peter then moves forward into the climactic exhortations of 2.5, in which he links the believers as *lithoi*, to Christ as the *lithos* of 2.4. and describes what the consequent outworking of their status should be. His use of OT Scripture at 2.6-8, however, interspersed with small midrashic insertions, links naturally with 2.4²⁰, strengthening the assurance upon which the calls of 2.5 are based. I propose therefore to consider 2.6-8 before 2.5.

2.6-8 The OT texts

Three OT texts are presented, each concerned with the stone metaphor:- Is.28.16 (v.6), Ps.118.22 (v.7), Is.8.14 (v.8). Peter is unique in juxtaposing the three, although they are found separately or paired elsewhere in the NT.²¹ In doing this he specifically applies the OT thought-concepts they contain to the present situation of the believers, and embraces a main thrust of the letter - that Jesus Christ is the rejected stone of OT Scripture and NT interpretation, the Elect of God. In identifying with Him the addressees should not fear rejection and persecution by those who are against them, rather it evidences their own status as elect and in fact their persecutors' antagonism will in the end constitute the rock of their own (the persecutors') destruction.

2.6 - *Is.28.16 Idou tithemien en Sion lithon akrogoniaion, eklektou entimon kai o'pisteuon ep autou me kataischunthen.*

The cornerstone 'tests' the strength of a whole building, supporting its weight.²² LXX presents as here, a more positive connotation than MT which in its Isaiah context expresses JHWH's judgement on the scoffers of 28.14, therein by default constituting hope for the believers. In this form the stone could be a metaphor for genuine faith and trust in JHWH rather than man, from which it is easy to see how it could be reinterpreted as messianic in later Jewish tradition, with some LXX Mss (not all)

²⁰ A majority of modern scholars see the verses as linked in this way.

²¹ Matt.21.42f.; Mark 12.10; Luke 20.17-18 (linked with Is.8.14); Acts 4.11; Romans 9.33; also Eph.2.20 - an image close to that of 1Peter 2.5.

²² Calvin (1851: 231). Cf also Clements (1982: 231):-'tried stone suggests a testing stone, one which is reliable and by which the measurement and shape of other stones may be judged'.

including the direct object *en auto* after *pisteuon*.²³ Whilst Peter's citation includes *en auto* he does not precisely follow LXX, suggesting as in chapter 5 the existence of multiple texts.

The text is found within the Qumran community literature where in a number of documents (1QS V5, V11,17f; V111,5f.; 1QH VI,25-27, V11,8b-9, 17f.; 4QpIs.d.) it was adapted to serve as a description of the community's own end-time existence; *they* were the elect stone²⁴, demonstrating a further change in the function of the metaphor, this time from a concept, to a description of a community - the Eschatological community of the last days. Johannes Maier²⁵ notes that Qumran's interpretation is closely bound up with the process of entry. The laying of the foundation is *effected* through the formation of the Community. This may offer an important nuance to Peter's thought in 2.5a and further supports the evidence that the whole reflects a reinterpretation of Jewish tradition with which Peter was familiar, seen in the light of Christ. He may well have been following what had become a part of Christian tradition by the end of the first Century, though the way he uses the texts in an election context is significantly Petrine.²⁶

The understanding within the Qumran community of themselves as the elect stone was probably characteristic of a widespread spiritualised movement, rooted in the OT, against normative Judaism, of which Qumran may only have been an extreme part,²⁷ as indicated in the previous chapter. In Targumim and early Synagogue and Rabbinic literature a similar tendency appears, with the messianic hope being given firm basis (The Is. targum replaces 'stone' with 'king'. So also Ps.118.22f.). In NT tradition this came to mean the Lord himself. *He* becomes the measuring standard - either as the precious foundation or the stone of stumbling. Peter's incorporation of the other 'stone' texts with his midrashic comment at 2.7a amplify this, stressing the dangerous position of the unbelievers. Unbelievers cannot affect the exaltation of God's elect cornerstone, which constitutes a test of attitudes. In respect of the unbelievers it will become a stone of stumbling.

²³ For further detail see Michaels (1988: 102-104).

²⁴ Snodgrass (1978: 100); Elliott (1966: 27f.).

²⁵ Die Texte vom Toten Meer Munchen /Basel 1960 cited Elliott (1966: 26).

²⁶ Snodgrass (1978: 105).

²⁷ Snodgrass (1978: 104).

Peter's independent use of LXX reinterpetation probably drawn from NT tradition summarises the tenor of this whole passage - honour not shame for believers, despite rejection (i.e. 'shame') as outsiders, in the eyes of the rejectors, who in fact themselves become the 'shamed' outsiders in the Lord's eyes.

In his use of the three OT texts Peter establishes the credentials of Christ as the Determiner. It is attitudes to Him, the Living Stone, that ultimately count. Only in reliance on Him will it be possible for the believers to function as living stones and attain to the life-style set out in 2.5, which we now consider.

2.5

As noted the exhortations of the verse arise from the identity of Christ as the Living Stone at 2.4,6-8, and constitute a climax of the body-opening portion. The purpose of the addressees' new-found faith is that they may become a spiritual community, able through the Spirit of their Lord, to offer spiritual sacrifices which, because of their position in Christ, are pleasing to God. With such a function they constitute a holy priesthood (2.5). Peter is to underpin this at 2.9 which I will suggest underlies 2.5, but at this point we consider the verse as it stands in relation to 2.4,6-8.

In focusing on the relationships between *lithos* (2.4) and *lithoi* (2.5), 2.5 carries the thought of 2.4 forward and expresses the author's passion to see his addressees, as living stones, fully demonstrating their Christian faith in their lives, both as individuals and as a community.

The verse presents difficulties however and has been considered by most commentators as a *crux interpretum*.²⁸ In addition to its syntactical problems it is open to a variety of interpretations.

Syntax of 2.5

The subject 'you' of the passive *oikodomeisthe* has three phrases standing in relation to it - *autoi*, *lithoi zontes* and *oikos pneumaticos*. All three stand in apposition to the subject or the final one may be understood as a nominative predicate.²⁹ The verb must stand as absolute; it cannot function with *eis* to make *oikos pneumaticos* a

²⁸ Elliott: (1966: 148).

²⁹ Achtemeier (1996: 154).

complement. So the RSV is misleading. An alternative translation could be ‘You are a spiritual house who as living stones are being built up’³⁰ or ‘You yourselves as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built --’³¹ or ‘You too are being built up - a Spiritual House’.³²

The weight of scholarly opinion understands the verb *oikodomeisthe* as indicative passive rather than imperative.³³ However, Michaels’ insistence that it must be so because stones cannot build themselves up seems overdrawn - *living* stones could.³⁴ The fact of their livingness in relation to the Living One of 2.4 is a vital feature of the verse; it also fits well with the exhortations of 2.1,2.³⁵ Even in a building of lifeless stones there is a sense in which, if it is well built, the component stones interact together to create the unity of the whole; much more when each stone is potentially alive with Christ’s life through the Holy Spirit. So the passive indicative should not be taken to suggest any automatic upbuilding for the addressees; rather it is *as they come* to Christ the Living Stone, that the Holy Spirit will be at work, energising each one spiritually in such a way that they can function together as a *structure* i.e. a spiritual house.³⁶ Here the balance of human/divine interaction seen throughout our OT investigations in chs.2-4, is repeated, and embodied in that, the OT understanding of election, related especially here to 1.10-12 - the addressees are to find particular assurance in their sufferings, in the fact that Christ the Living Stone from whom their life is to be drawn, was rejected by men, yet precious to God. The theme is to recur with detail from 2.11ff. (at 2.12,19-25; 3.9,14-18; 4.1-4,12-19; 5.1,7-11), applied to individuals but always in the context of community.

spiritual house

oikos has presented scope for various interpretations. The word can mean house or household, but its proximity to the verb *oikodomeisthe* is seen by Selwyn to indicate that house is intended here though with the context not domestic but religious and

³⁰ Michaels (1988: 100).

³¹ Achtemeier (1996: 149 & n.3).

³² Elliott (1966: 148).

³³ Selwyn (1949: 159); Beare (1970: 93) - especially useful.

³⁴ 1988:100. See also Achtemeier (1996: 155 & n.80); Selwyn (1949: 159f.).

³⁵ See also Martin (1992: 181) & n.68 below.

³⁶ Selwyn (1949: 159) notes that *os* before living stones indicates their derivative position in contrast to the Living Stone who is such in His own right.

sacerdotal.³⁷ Commentators connect this appropriately with the stone imagery in the passage and with priesthood in the following phrase, so suggesting the metaphorical meaning of 'Temple'.

Selwyn notes the same word's use for a shrine or temple in both classical Greek and LXX.³⁸ The idea of Christians as a spiritualised Temple was part of NT tradition (cf. Eph.2.21 where it is linked to the imagery of Christ as the corner stone [2.20] and 2 Cor.6.16 where the body of Christians is seen as a temple indwelt by God, and they as His people, though the word in both cases is not *oikos* but *vaos* cf. also Acts 7.48, 17.24; 1Cor.3.16/17, 6.19). In the gospels the concept is presented by Christ Himself. In John (2.13-17 cf. Mk.11.17; Matt.21.13; Luke.19.46), He condemns the profanation of the Temple, in support of Is.57.6 and Jer.7.11 and then claims Himself to supersede its visible presence with His own body as the Temple (Jn.2.18-22 cf. Mk.14.58; Matt.26.61), offered to the world as a sacrifice for its purification and the feeding of his followers who would then constitute his body in another sense. From this, says Selwyn,³⁹ came the transfer of the term house of God from a building to a community of people, a task assigned to Jesus himself, which he argues only gradually dawned on the mind of the church.

However such a concept may well have had its beginnings at Qumran where, as well as identifying with the Elect Stone, the community saw *itself*, as noted in chapter 5, as the new purified Temple, superseding the structure at Jerusalem, now considered defiled, and replacing also its priests and sacrifices.⁴⁰ Atonement for sins which remained an issue was seen to be obtained through the rigorous pursuit of holiness of life. It seems there also remained in Qumran the prospect of a renewed eschatological material Temple in the last days. Such an idea is found elsewhere e.g. IIMacc.2.17,18 where it is seen as accompanying the messianic era.⁴¹

³⁷ 1949: 160.

³⁸ E.g. Pss.116.19; 118.26; 69.9 cf. Jn.2.17; Is.56.7 et al.

³⁹ 1949: 287.

⁴⁰ Cf Gärtner (1976: 21) 'The transference of the complex of ideas from the Temple to Community may have been facilitated by the fact that even in OT, Israel was sometimes spoken of as the house of God'. Parallel is found in Qumran where House of God = true Temple. Martin (1992:182) cites Manual of Discipline 9.3-6 as an 'excellent illustration of the transference of ideas' - "At that time (future) men of the community will constitute a real, true and distinctive Temple - a veritable holy of holies - wherein the priesthood may fitly foregather and a true and distinctive synagogue made up of men who walk in integrity".(D.S.Scripture ET, T.H.Gast. et.)

⁴¹ Gärtner (1976: 80).

The radical change in NT was the understanding of Christ, not only as himself Temple, and High Priest, dispensing with the need for any material Temple, but also as atoning sacrifice, His followers still called to holiness of life but now as *evidence* of the new life imparted to them by the Holy Spirit through Christ's atoning sacrifice and resurrection,⁴² not any more as a means of atonement.

It is thus not surprising that Peter's use of the term 'spiritual house' with its references and context is widely seen by scholars to indicate that a spiritual temple was in his mind. There is considerable support for this in NT tradition:- the midrashic evidence already discerned in this section especially relating to Qumran; the presence of the Temple/Community motif elsewhere in the N. T. (e.g. Heb.3.6; 1Tim.3.15; Mark 9.17) alongside Hebrews' capacity to see Christ as both priest and sacrifice; the implications of the verse itself and the strong weight of scholarship seeing the Temple as being implied. However the phrase also indicates a significant shift in meaning from individual stones towards community, suggesting a collective understanding of *oikos* as e.g. in Parliament or a debating society - 'this house proposes--' or as in a dynasty e.g. House of David. Both are possible with *oikos*, giving the sense of household which Peter is to develop from 2.11 onwards. Beare⁴³ in fact sees the use of *oikos* as a deliberate choice in order to develop this secondary thought (cf. Heb.3.1-6) *alongside* the notion of temple.⁴⁴ This fits with Philipp Vielhauer's view⁴⁵ that Christian tradition was not so rigid as to dictate one constant meaning on every occasion, but it also suggests affinity with Qumran in its view of itself as *both* community and Temple.

Another element is present too however, unmentioned by a majority of commentators, but taken up by Elliott. Whilst agreeing with Vielhauer and Beare⁴⁶, Elliott holds that the context of *oikos* in 2.5 is to be found *not* in Temple but in the Exodus tradition at 2.9 - which stands irrespective of the idea of Temple - and in *basileion* as a noun (royal household or kingdom of priests) seen as paralleling *oikos*, the emphasis being on the growth of the community.⁴⁷ This is particularly interesting in

⁴² Gärtner (1976: 87).

⁴³ 1947: 96.

⁴⁴ Cf. Selwyn n.48.

⁴⁵ Cited Elliott (1966: 158).

⁴⁶ Elliott (1966: 159).

⁴⁷ Cf. also Martin (1992: 187-8), but note Achtemeier (1996:159) who writes 'While Elliott is correct that the author of 1Peter is much more interested in the concept of Christians as a household than as a Temple, one can only with great difficulty fail to find references to the Temple in these phrases.'

light of our earlier reference to Betz⁴⁸ and his view that at Qumran there was a desire *to reestablish the Sinai tradition through its own temple community*.

Does this not lead precisely to the possibility that Peter having in mind the assuring election themes drawn from Israel's Exodus and Exile, which he was to skilfully link together at 2.9, was *at the same time* linking those to the notion of the believers as a renewed spiritual Temple in the tradition of Qumran, i.e. a holy, spiritual community *in the direct Sinai tradition*, but purified by Christ and functioning in its life through the power of the Holy Spirit, the detail of how that is to be expressed in household terms, occupying the letter from 2.11 onwards but described in 2.5 as a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices? I suggest that here we see the particular significance of 1Peter - that he takes NT tradition, already dependent on Qumranic and Rabbinic midrashic interpretation, and uses it in his own distinctive way, and according to his own predisposed OT and Qumranic orientation, in the joyful understanding that these believers are, through Jesus Christ, the true eschatological inheritance (priests and kings, 2.9) called through the Holy Spirit to holiness and spiritual sacrifice.

*A holy priesthood*⁴⁹

Eis in the phrase *eis hierateuma hagion* is important, indicating that priesthood is the purpose for which the believers had been constituted a spiritual house. It also throws emphasis on the word 'holy' suggesting contrast with the defiled priesthood against whom the Qumran community protested rather than the more polemical approach of Hebrews where the contrast is with the material sacrifices now superseded through Christ's own sacrifice. Nevertheless this latter element is present. As priests of the old dispensation had been set apart by elaborate initiation ceremonies culminating in the sprinkling of blood, so the idea of the community as a holy priesthood matches the description of them at 1.2 - a community of believers, each one metaphorically sprinkled with Christ's blood, guaranteeing their imputed cleansing, purity and sanctification, with the high privilege that had formerly accompanied

⁴⁸ Chapter 5.p.6.

⁴⁹ See especially Selwyn (1949: 291-294). Also, with ref. to the previous paragraph, Selwyn's comment on Heb.10.21,22 - 'The high- priest's office was one of constant relationship both to the Temple and the people on whose behalf he must stand and *in the light of that relationship the two meanings of the oikos as 'Temple' and 'household' become scarcely distinguishable.*'(italics mine).

priesthood now offered to them as Christ's ministers of the new covenant⁵⁰ - they may enter into God's very presence and offer to Him praise and worship. It is in this respect that they enter into the inheritance of Israel (and become the reinterpreted royal priesthood of 2.9).

To offer spiritual sacrifices

Spiritual sacrifice was not a new idea solely related to the disappearance of material sacrifice.⁵¹ The idea was common in Judaism, traceable back to the Psalter and the prophets⁵² as well as to different traditions extant at the time of Qumran. Gärtner suggests that it expressed an awareness of true men of God that the sacrificial cultus meant nothing unless also accompanied by ethical living, in this case obedience to the Law. It was the necessary foundation of the sacramental cultus, but not a replacement for it, which would have been unthinkable. However with the disappearance of material sacrifices at Qumran, obedience to the Law became the true sacrifice - a spiritual one, the rightful occupation of the spiritual community of believers who had become both the spiritual Temple and its priests. Most of the Qumran texts quoted above give exactly this understanding of spiritual sacrifice.

Whilst Christ's own sacrifice had brought new life to Peter's addressees, within the new life the principle remained the same - the believers were *sanctified to obedience* (1.2), a prelude to the call to spiritual sacrifice at 2.5.

Undoubtedly by NT times this was how spiritual sacrifice was understood cf. Rom.12.1; Eph.5.1,2; Heb.13.15,16). *kai autoi* at the beginning of 1Pet.2.5 introduces the whole verse as a comparison with Christ in 2.4. In that case the thought is close to that of Eph.5.1,2 - the believers are to offer up *themselves*, as Christ did, a fragrant offering well-pleasing to God, but also to Romans 12.1 - the whole self as a living sacrifice, and to Heb.13.15 - through Christ the sacrifice is made, a sacrifice of praise, acknowledging his Name. Every injunction which follows (2.11ff.) to holy living, to

⁵⁰ Selwyn (1949: 291ff.,280-6) carefully examines different aspects of the role of the priest in OT in order to find analogies in 1 Peter. He sees the epistle as having a more primitive understanding than Hebrews and so marking an important stage in the development of the NT idea of priesthood which was to reach its full flowering in Hebrews.

⁵¹ Gärtner (1976: 84ff.).

⁵² E.g. Pss.50.13,14,23; 51.16-19; 69.30,31; 141.2; Is.1.11-17; Hos.6.6; Amos.4.4,5; 5.21-24; Mic.6.6-8. Achtemeier (1996: 157).

right attitudes within the fellowship, to respectful attitudes to outsiders assumes these as expressions of the believers' primary attitude of sacrificial devotion to their God.

These were also the prime activities of priests in their context of the Temple (cf.chap.2). It is not difficult therefore to see here nuances relating to Christ in His self-offering; to the spiritual priesthood of Qumran *but also* to the priestly character of Israel defined at Exodus 19.6, and to be reinterpreted by Peter in terms of the believers at 2.9, for the purpose of showing forth God's praises, in parallel to the spiritual sacrifices of 2.5⁵³

2. 9-10

I have proposed in the above section that as 2.4 is a development of the OT material embodied in 2.6-8, in terms of Christ, so 2.5 is a development of OT material embodied in 2.9, in terms of the believers (though the manner of presentation of the two is not parallel).

I believe that Peter's aspirations for his addressees – the new Israel - expressed in 2.5, reflect his understanding of the old Israel's position and function, into which the addressees have entered by inheritance and which we have recognised and investigated in Ex.19.6 and in Dt. and Num.

We must not however disregard the unity of the whole in which other linkings are to be discerned. Whilst 2.6-8 are primarily foundation texts of 2.4 they also carry forward to 2.9, where *umeis de* underlines the privileged status of the believers in continuation with 2.7a (but see below). As the Living Stone in 2.4 is the life source of the living stones of 2.5 so the same Living Stone – the cornerstone of 2.6-8 - is the life source of the new Israel at 2.9. Thus 2.9 gathers into a climax the weight, thought and purpose of the whole pericope. We examine now the content of this verse and its supporting verse, 2.10.

The focus is the addressees as God's elect people, introduced by the phrase *umeis de*. Whilst a majority of scholars e.g. Best⁵⁴ see these as Peter's words

⁵³ Denney summarizes the sacrifices as praise, self-consecration and charity (HDB IV.100a). According to I. QSI. 21 cited Best (1960: 279), priests declare the righteous acts of God. The former comprehensively takes care of all the elements we have already considered - upward praise to God, inward holiness of life and the believers' attitudes to each other and to those outside. In doing these things they are fulfilling the second exactly as described in 2.9.

⁵⁴ 1969: 277.

contrasting the believers with the unbelievers of 2.8, Elliott⁵⁵ claims that they introduce the LXX translation of Ex.19.6 and are used by Peter to accentuate the parallelism between Jesus as the *lithos eklektos* at 6b and the *genos eklekton* at 2.9. In view of Peter's intense emphasis in the pericope on election this is possible.

Following *umeis de* three epithets from Is.43.20,21 are introduced, but separated – so forming something of an *inclusio* – by two epithets from Ex.19.6.

Peter's incorporation of Is.42.20,21 is fascinating. There is no tradition of it being used in the early Church. Thus it seems it was his own choice, enhancing the possibility of his independent use of the Scriptures integrated with his independent application of the traditions.⁵⁶ To set forth his election theme, Peter could well have used Ex.19.5. By interpolating Is. 43.20,21 a far more powerful statement is being made.

Isaiah had a new Exodus in mind so that although the word 'covenant' is not mentioned, as in Ex. 19, the idea is implicit and continues the train of thought traced in our earlier chapters in the Pentateuch. The words are drawn from a chapter full of the assurance of God's mercy, love and activity in deliverance on behalf of his people in the midst of their trials in the Exile:- fear not (43.1); You are precious, honoured, I love you (43.4); I work, who can hinder? (43.13); I make a way in the sea, through the wilderness (43.16,19). To further strengthen this elective assurance two descriptive phrases from Hosea follow at 2.10. They collate Hos.1.6, 1.9 & 2.3, recalling the symbolic naming of Hosea's children, which offered new hope to Israel - 'Not pitied' becomes 'The pitied one'; 'Not my people' becomes 'My people', 'Sons of the Living God'. This is an association of texts already found in NT tradition and in Rabbinic Literature⁵⁷.

Underlying the election theme in these epithets we may also discern the strand of honour. Part of the tragedy of the Exile for the Jews was that their honour as the people of JHWH, and by default JHWH's own honour, was at stake. The former at

⁵⁵ So Elliott (1966: 142-44), cf. Achtemeier (1996: 163).

⁵⁶ Contrary to Best (1969: 279) who finds no independent thought in 1Peter. It is also noteworthy that Best sees the new People of God portrayed far more in contrast to the Old than as in natural succession to them - the view of a number of modern scholars e.g. Michaels; Achtemeier which I have followed. It seems to me that Best quite fails to appreciate what most recent scholars find in 1Peter - the degree to which his Jewish background has influenced both his choice of material and the emphases he has given it in seeing Christians as *successors* to Israel rather than as in opposition, and the marked difference this makes from the approach of Paul. Best seems to see 1Peter very much in the light of Paul.

least was also an issue for these believers, alienated because of their faith. Both in Isaiah and Hosea honour is a particular concern (e.g. cf. Is.43.14,17-19).

There is one further reason however for Peter's use of Is.43.20,21. In a more universal atmosphere than we find in the Pentateuch, Is.43 declares Israel to be JHWH's witnesses (vv.10-12) in the midst of the nations (vv.5-9), a theme closely related to the function of the priesthood and to Israel as a Kingdom of Priests. A particular way in which she is to do this is by declaring God's praise (v.21). By careful design this is Peter's final phrase at 2.9 (and also by implication at 2.5), following closely on the designation of his addressees as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The effect of their privileged calling to holiness of life is to be that their lives bear witness to God's glory' showing forth His praise.

Thus we see, through the skilful integration of different but related passages of Scripture, Peter proclaiming very powerfully for his addressees both the rich inheritance and the elective security which are theirs.

Into the heart of these texts of hope and certainty, are placed the two phrases from Ex.19.6, the climax of the Covenant Formula of Ex.19.3b-6, described as 'one of the most dominant central expressions of Israel's theology of faith in the entire OT'⁵⁸. And as at Ex.19.6, so here the privilege is expressed in terms of the responsibility.

Basileion hierateuma---goy hagion.

The content of the statement according to MT, has been already examined in ch.2. It was a call to the whole community for totality of separation from other nations in priestly devotion and worship offered to JHWH.

In LXX as in MT *basileion* presents syntactical problems. It could be a noun – 'kingdom', or an adjective – 'royal'. In the context the meanings become close, both expressing the honour of the service and the demands which spring from it.

More important for our purpose is a discerned movement in the meaning of *hierateuma* to a more active, composite sense than in MT - 'a body with a priestly charge'.⁵⁹ It seems that the LXX translators may have been influenced by the situation of diaspora Jews both in Alexandria and beyond, where Judaism was increasingly

⁵⁷ Elliott (1966: 44).

⁵⁸ Elliott (1966:39).

⁵⁹ Selwyn (1949: 109) but see n.2. Also Elliott (1966: 63-68).

defined by precepts of Torah rather than Covenant, with emphasis on exclusivism and the status of priests,⁶⁰ yet with recognition that Israel's status as a chosen *nation* in the midst of a pagan society, remained a basis for her priestly responsibility to the nations, giving her people sovereignty and kingly honour. In that case the translators were adapting the Exodus formula to point to the Jews as 'priests', still in Ex. terms, but emphasising their active, God-given religious mission in the world.

Applying this to 1Peter, it would seem that in the LXX translation Peter had a ready tool by which to hinge his understanding of the depth of God's mercy for his Elect as in Is.43.20,21a, to his Qumranic understanding of the Elect as a community called to the holiness of life of priesthood - of worship, nearness, access to God, in the tradition of Ex.19.6 *and* by dint of that to stand as a witness to those 'outside', 'the nations' of the OT as at Is.43.21b. I recall again our reference in ch.5 to Betz,⁶¹ where he referred to Sinai as 'the fundamental act of God's self-exposure', and saw this tradition as revived at Qumran with the hope that it would be a powerful reality for the nation. The holiness of the Community was developed and maintained in the face of a world seen as unclean, in readiness for the coming of God, even as Peter was advocating for his addressees.

If, as seems likely, Peter's ideas came via NT tradition, then we may have in this Epistle particular evidence of the way in which that tradition developed. Peter draws on the Exodus traditions for just the same reasons as those in Qumran did - to underline to his addressees the powerful reality of God's choice of them as the ongoing people of God, inheritors by election of the promises of the covenant given to Israel. Joined to that is the deep sense of holiness associated with a priestly calling, to be expressed, as LXX *hierateuma* hints at, and as Peter describes through the rest of the Epistle, in the most positive ways within the household and in attitudes towards the structures of society.

In this understanding the heart and life of the writer himself and of the earliest Christians is evidenced. The two together reflect the understanding which lay at the heart of the covenant and in the prophets, of the depth, immensity and reliability of God to those who, through their response to him are his elect. Now embracing all peoples

⁶⁰ Elliott (1966: 69f.,73f.).

⁶¹ 1967: 89.

through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is made for these people, Peter's addressees, especially meaningful *through their sufferings*,⁶² the new and different factor that Peter was to develop more distinctively in the succeeding chapters.

Peter's juxtaposition in 2.9 is a singularly engaging one. It demonstrates with eloquence and beauty the continuity of the gospel of Christ with OT tradition, seen first in Ex. in JHWH's covenantal assurance at 19.6; in Dt. in the call of the *Shema*, an appropriate response to JHWH's choice of Israel as His special possession (7.6); in Num., the Psalms and elsewhere, in the certainty and unchanging commitment of JHWH to His people in blessing; in Qumran and amongst other renewal groups in their commitment to a renewed search for holiness. Peter's inheritance lay in such traditions even as John the Baptist's and Christ's did and the Epistle gives a strong sense that Peter was mindful of all of these as continuing receptacles of the mind and wisdom of God in a particular way. It is precisely in the varying use of these traditions that the importance of the human element in all Revelation is made clear.⁶³

6.4 In conclusion

Acts chapter 10 describes the apostle Peter's initial resistance to the fact that Gentiles could receive the Holy Spirit and be partakers of the blessings of salvation. It is not difficult to relate this to the mind-set that lies behind this letter. It is that of a writer deeply immersed in prophetic understanding of the love and mercy of God and His requirement for holiness in those who would worship Him. He has embraced with joy the fact that the messiah described by the prophets has indeed come, suffered and risen again and thereby qualified outcasts such as gentile aliens to be sharers and partakers in His inheritance. Yet he cautiously holds closely to the tenets of OT spirituality, reflecting these in his teaching for the building up of these new believers, whose election he saw as marking them out for holiness and distinctiveness in society, even suffering, in identification with Christ Himself.

There is then, undoubtedly, in 1 Peter, something of a sect-like concept of these communities of believers, even as there was in OT Israel from whom the writer drew

⁶² Cf. again Best (1969: 284f.) who sees Peter as drawing wholly on early Christian tradition.

⁶³ Dunn (1990: 265) has pointed to this. He describes it by means of a line showing the spectrum of Jewish Christianity from John through works of increasing 'jewishness' up to Ebionism, no longer acceptable within the Christian corpus. He does not include 1Peter; it would probably lie between John and Hebrews.

his pattern. Yet if such groups, set as they were in the midst of a pagan world, were to maintain their identity how could it be otherwise? In the end it was their difference, their attempts to love within community, their willingness to suffer, that proved the attraction to others and ensured the spread of the Gospel. It may evidence humanity's making in the image of God that those of honest heart are still drawn to what is worth dying for, and that those who enter into fellowship with Jesus Christ still know that in doing so they have passed from darkness into the marvellous unending light of God Himself and offer Him their worship and their praise.

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