

## ***'By the mouth of two or three' - key witnesses for Michael Brown.***

Yisroel Chaim Blumenthal<sup>1</sup> is a scrupulous and careful arguer, possessing a mathematician's eye for detail, if not, as we shall note, always for rigorous precision. He argues in his thesis, '[The Elephant and the Suit](#)' that Michael Brown has omitted two important witnesses. It is not my primary interest to defend Michael Brown, nor to rebut Yisroel Blumenthal, however a re-examination of these texts yields important data in favour of the Messianic Testimony.

### **Deuteronomy 4:35**

Blumenthal takes two separate points from the context of this key verse.

**First** we examine his claim that taking the Scripture alone is not a sufficient witness to God's Truth, and needs supplementing by the oral and traditional testimony of Israel. He does not dwell on this question, and alludes to other sources.

He writes for example, in one of them, the '[Foundation of Scripture](#)', 'The standard that God gave Israel is her understanding of God. The people of Israel possess a certain understanding of God, and they measure every claim to prophecy against this understanding.'

The simple problem with this claim of perceptive understanding is that it clashes fundamentally with prophetic witness.

Isaiah writes of his own time of how 'truth fails'(59.15), of how the people construct a 'refuge of lies' and 'a covenant with death' (28.15,17), and how the whole nation falls to such extensive spiritual sickness that 'In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood' (59.13), so that not one man stands, and not one intercessor pleads (59.16), so that HaShem must intervene directly and personally. Is the prophet addressing the surrounding heathen, or rather his own beloved people?

David writes in the 6<sup>th</sup> Maschil, 'God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.' His verdict was sifting but dismal, 'Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, **no, not one.**' (Ps. 53).

So what of the prophets, the ancient ones, the teachers? Do they preserve integrity when all else is corrupt?

According to faithful Hosea, most of them are *the source* of the problem, not its remedy,

'The watchman of Ephraim was with my God: but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah: therefore He will remember their iniquity, He will visit their sins.' (Hos. 9. 8)

Jeremiah adds his lament about the treacherous nature of Israel's teachers, 'Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment.' (Lam. 2.14)

Zephaniah amongst many others, adds: 'Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.' (Zeph. 3.3-4)

Isaiah's formidable commission is to preach, 'Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.' (Isa.6.9b-10)

The Truth as Isaiah was told was held, only by a minority remnant, v.13, 'the holy seed shall be the remnant.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It may well seem disrespectful to some readers not to address Yisroel Blumenthal as 'Rabbi', I am sensitive to this perception, given his patience and courtesy to my contributions on his own site, and the care with which other contributors there have also responded. I don't wish in any way to denigrate his considerable skill or learning or to foster disrespect. Nevertheless I am 'under orders' on this matter ([Matt.23.8](#)), and the simple title Mr. doesn't seem appropriate. I apply the [same \(dis\)courtesy](#) to Michael Brown, also with considerable deference, for he is a dear brother in the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> As to the guarding of a recognisable canon of Scripture, God promises, in spite of great surrounding national and international disobedience to preserve and keep His Word absolutely. 'The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.' (Ps.12.6-8)

Not only does the proposal that Israel as a people had a clear oral understanding of her Law that supplements the written Record clash with manifold, explicit testimony, there are also numerous accounts of incidents where hallowed oral traditions and customs of great longevity were absolutely overruled or outlawed by Scriptural injunctions.

In Nehemiah's day, for the first time ever in Israel's history, the Feast of Tabernacles was observed with Succoth: 'And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.' (Neh. 9.17) The only reason for this is crystal clear from the practice of the elders to check and confirm their practices in the book of the Law as is illustrated in the next verse. The hallowed custom of nearly 1000 years of 'living observance of the testimonial commandments' was corrected and modified by the written Torah.

In Hezekiah's day, Nehushtan, the image of the brass snake was smashed into small pieces. (2Ki. 18.4) We can well hear howls of protest echoing down the ages from traditionalists and archivists who wished to preserve the Lawgiver's own handiwork, the medium of the healing of the nation, and a sacred artefact for instruction and commemoration. Why dilute 'the awe and the power' of the wilderness experience, do we hear them argue? One imperative only dictated Hezekiah's determined action one which would not be countermanded by the weight of 700 years of the 'living experience of ... divinely ordained observances', the Second Command.

How can we know if a custom or practice is sacred or defiling? How can we discern between the clean and the unclean? 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' (Isa. 8.20) There is no other safe criterion.

The Jews in exile in Egypt, justly claimed antiquity and established practice for their custom, 'As we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem'. (Jer. 44.17) However the object of their devotion was the Queen of Heaven, and drew Divine and prophetic fury. Jeremiah staunchly opposed it.

Amos challenges his people with the great longevity of their custom, he addresses the 'Jewish understanding of God,...preserved throughout the ages' and its roots even from the time of the Exodus, but his challenge is not to return to wise and wholesome instruction, but to forsake harmful wickedness. 'Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.' (Am. 5. 25-6) Dear friends, are these sins confined to former generations alone?

Josiah no doubt raised eyebrows when he smashed and defiled sacred high places, not merely ordered by his grandfather and his great great grandfather, but of the fabulous King, no fewer than 15 generations before him, Solomon. (2 Ki. 23.12-13) Why did the appeal to his illustrious forebears, to antiquity, to custom and to venerated oral tradition carry not a mite of weight with this righteous son of David? He acted according to Israel's only constitution, miraculously preserved, according to promise, *not* by the nation as a whole, but by a tiny faithful minority (2 Ki. 22.8,11-20) - its sacred written Law, and paid no attention to gainsayers. We must be the same, or risk falling into the snare the 15 intervening generations also blindly embraced.

**Second**, Blumenthal explains that the experience of Sinai has indelibly burned a deep consciousness of Divine transcendence in the Jewish people, a transcendence to which they are an eternal witness. '***You have been shown in order that you know that the Lord, He is the God there is none beside Him.***' There is much to commend and to approve in this argument. Indeed it is the basis on which Israel is held to such high standards by her God and by the nations around. Israel is first, the Gentiles second, both in grace and in judgement.

Yisroel Blumenthal states it like this, 'The Sinai revelation taught the Jewish people that all of their devotion ought to be directed to the One God who is completely above every conceivable form of existence, and to no one else.' 'Our hearts belong to the One who we encountered at Sinai and to no one else'.

That is precisely the point.

The One Moses encountered at Sinai, the God Whom he was afraid to look upon, the One Who's presence was marked out by sacred ground, the One who declares, 'I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob', the One with whom Moses dialogues and [the One](#) Who claims, 'I AM THAT I AM' the One Who sends Moses, manifests Himself entirely through the medium of His Messenger, His Word.

The One Who Israel encountered at Sinai is the same One Who said to Moses, ‘when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.’ The Messenger of the covenant, the only King, the Governor of Israel, Whose *goings forth* are from of old, from ancient days ( עֲלִמְמִי, מְקַדְמֵם וּמוֹצְאָתִי; בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל ), He is the One Moses and Israel encountered at Sinai. Any other approach and any other devotion is illegitimate, unlawful, and must be rejected. Even the High Priest could not be accepted in his own merit and works ([Zech. 3.1-5](#)), here is the only foundation of the true Temple ([Zech. 3.8-10](#)), the Branch, Who is the LORD our Righteousness, (Jer. 23.5-6)

The second text, and our third neglected witness is **Deuteronomy 30.1-10**.

Again I agree with Yisroel Blumenthal, here is a vital, but often misunderstood foundation stone, upon which we must focus for a while.

*‘And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee.*

*If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee:*

*And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and He will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

*And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.*

*And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all His commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers:*

*If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, ’*

Yisroel Blumenthal summarises the lessons from this passage in 5 points:

1. The return of Israel to her land will be precipitated by her repentance.
2. Repentance means turning back to obedience of God’s law as Moses taught it.
3. Repentance is effective even when we are in exile and we do not have the ability to bring a blood offering.
4. God will accept exiled Israel’s repentance even before He circumcises their heart.
5. The commandments that Moses taught us will be fully observed in the Messianic era.

He lays these in stark contradistinction to Christianity which he claims teaches that:

1. Israel’s return to the teachings of Moses will play no part in the ushering in of the Messianic era.
2. Repentance without a blood offering is not accepted by God.
3. The law of Jesus has superseded the Law of Moses.

This summary does not accurately characterise the position of the New Testament. Yehoshua did not invalidate or replace the Torah, on the contrary the Torah *cannot* be kept or honoured without Him. However I don’t propose here to address these issues primarily, only tangentially, rather to examine an undergirding principle which governs them: the character of the covenants in which Law is presented.

Perhaps in some respects, some of Michael Brown’s statements may have been unintentionally misleading. It is not scriptural to write, ‘The Messiah, not the Torah, is now central’, nor is there a dichotomy between obeying the Messiah and obeying Torah from the heart, the first is quite impossible without the second. There is no discontinuity between the Torah and the Messiah. On the contrary, the Torah cannot be honoured without the Messiah, and the Messiah cannot be understood or followed without embracing the Torah in its totality. This does not mean that the Torah has remained changeless, on the contrary it is the strongest witness that it could not remain unchanged, being founded at Sinai on insufficient mediation. If even David effected a profound transformation in the Torah by commissioning of the building of the Temple, and the replacing of the Tabernacle, how much more radically will

David's Branch transform the Torah? A Sadducee-like Karaite dissident in David's time might have contested his 'supercessionism', his innovation to the Mosaic writings, such as the change in arrangements of the cherubim, or the change of its internal dimensions. However David acted only with direct Divine authority (1 Chr. 28.11,12,18, cf Ex.25.29,40), and the former also enjoyed the gracious benefit of an establishing covenant (2 Sam. 23.5, Jer. 33.21, Ps.89.3,34), distinct in terms, content and scope from that at Sinai, whilst interwoven with it (Ps. 89.30-33). In both these respects he is a microcosm of his [greater Son](#) (Isa. 55.3-5). To glimpse how profound the transformation of Torah has been, and our relationship to Torah, remember in the New Testament the Messiah *is* the true Ark of the Covenant, He is Himself the Tabernacle of the Testimony (Rev. 11.19, 15.5). Yet these terms do not at all justify Blumenthal's suggestion that the Messiah was seeking to invalidate or supersede the Law, on the contrary He depended on His validation from the Law, and, we freely grant, without it He would remain invalid. On the contrary, it is rabbinic Judaism that falls lamentably short of the primary requirements of Torah. We will examine the justification for this claim and a few specific if painful examples of it in practice, all too briefly.

The fulfilment of this basic continuity in Torah was [Yitzhak Kaduri's doctrine](#) concerning the Messiah Yehoshua, '[עומדים ותורתו שדברו ויוכיח העם ימים](#)' (He will raise the people and prove that His word and law are standing).

Just as David might have disarmed contemporary critics, Yehoshua challenged His disputants with this claim, 'Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuses you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?' (Jn. 5.45-7).

Paul writes, after introducing faith in the Messiah, 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.' (Rom. 3.31)

James (Jacob) writes, 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' (Jas.2.10)

The central problem with both some Christian disparagement of the continuing centrality of Torah *and* Yisroel Blumenthal's position with this text is a failure to appreciate the relationship of the Law to the covenant in which it is revealed. This requires explanation, and only a brief sketch of the outlines of a large subject is possible here. The manifold imperfections of this piece may not satisfy doubting opponents, to others perhaps multiply questions, but may, by God's help, enable a stepping stone to the humble and the hungry enquirer after His righteousness.

### **The 'New' Testament older than the Old.**

Moses' reiteration of the covenant at Sinai in Deuteronomy is prefaced by important words of explanation, 'The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made *not* this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day'. (Deut. 5.3) There is an important disjunction, a vital discontinuity between the nature of the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the later covenant made with their progeny at Sinai. The latter is indeed founded upon the former, but as is evident from many witnesses, they are distinct and different arrangements, not a mere repetition or reiteration of the oath that bound HaShem with the patriarchs.

One crucial evidence of this is the lack of efficacy of the Sinaitic covenant. In Deut. 10.16, the inward significance of the outward sign that Abraham received for his righteousness, has still to be accomplished in his children, 'Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked'.

In chapter 29.4, Moses explains that the people have yet to grasp central function of the Torah, 'LORD has not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.'

### **The essence of Sinai**

What is the essence of the requirements of the covenant at Sinai?

'And the LORD heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!'

The Law is summarised in the ten words.

'And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.' (Deut. 4.13)

These written terms are described as the Tables of the Covenant (Deut. 9,9,11,15).

The essence of the covenant is the direct and perfect obedience of the party entering into it.

'Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.' (Deut.5.32-3)

'And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.' (Deut. 6.24-5)

'Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.' (Deut.28.26)

'But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments...Lev. 26.14

'Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God' (Jer. 11.4)

Any and all infractions of its terms are warned against repeatedly and will be punished severely.

'But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:' (Deut. 28.15)

'If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD;

Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.' (Deut. 28.58-9)

This dreadful chapter concludes with the prophesied curse that came to rest on the Jewish people in AD 70, after the devastation of Jerusalem and of the Temple, foreseen over 1400 years before by the Prophet.

'And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.' (Deut. 28.68)

This was a reasonable and proper requirement. However serious doubt about whether perfect obedience is possible by the people is manifested repeatedly before, during and after its revelation.

'And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?' (Exod. 14.4)

'And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.' (Exod.17.4)

'Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.

Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the LORD thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the LORD.

Also in Horeb ye provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry with you to have destroyed you.' (Deut. 9.6-8)

'O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!' (Deut. 5.29)

'For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?

Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.

For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.' (Deut. 31.27-9)

'And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.' (Josh. 24.19)

'And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.' (Josh. 24.22)

Dear friends, please do not think that by listing these terrible passages I desire to condemn the Jewish people, on the contrary, Elihu said to Job, 'I desire to justify thee' (Job. 33.32), though he shared the frustration that Job 'justified himself rather than God'. (Job.32.2)

Limited provision for the forgiveness of the violation of the Law is made by a sin offering for *ignorance* of its requirements, leaving profound doubt about whether wilful disobedience of a more serious kind may ever be remitted.

'And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.' (Lev.5.17)

'And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty' (Lev.5.13)

'When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty' (Lev.5.22)

### **The absolute necessity for effective mediation**

When it was manifest how terrible and unbearable the sight of sin was, the people cried out to Moses:

'Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die.

For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?

Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.' (Deut.5.25-27)

It was a request HaShem approved of, 'They have well said all that they have spoken' (v.28).

However before the Torah was even presented in writing, almost all of its commands were fractured in one day, with Aaron at the head. It was transparent that Moses would have to mediate, and that without such mediation all the people would be utterly destroyed.

'Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.' Exod.32.10

However the declaration plainly leaves the door open to intercession, a door Moses seizes.

'Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.' Exod.32.30

Moses even offers himself for their sin, righteous though he was, as a means of trying to persuade HaShem to pardon his people.

'Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.' (v.32)

He identifies wholly with his people, as a more illustrious Successor, Whom Isaiah foresees. (Isa. 49.3,5)

To Moses' plea, God's reply is however inconclusive:

'And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.' (v.33)

Moses' other arguments are interesting. He pleads the honour of God's name (v.12), and he also pleads the covenant earlier made with the patriarchs.

'Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom Thou swore by Thine own self, and said unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.' (v.13)

These arguments are decisive. 'And the LORD repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people.' (v.14).

### **Even the appointed mediator was rejected**

However even the mediator of the covenant at Sinai, the one who preserved its survival and saved the people from the just deserts of their sins, was himself subsequently rejected.

'Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance: But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land.' (Deut. 4.21-22)

The request he made was not a peripheral matter, but the enjoyment of the very purpose of the covenant, entrance into the Land, the crux of the covenant with Abraham. (Gen. 15.8-9) The heart-rending response was final and unalterable.

'But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.' (Deut. 3.26)

The rejection of this request shows that even Moses himself had not kept the strict terms of the covenant of Sinai - even he was subject to its curse. Who indeed could keep the Law blamelessly and acceptably?

### **The flawed and imperfect nature of that mediation at Sinai and afterwards**

In retrospect, this outcome should have been expected from the outset. Is Moses using false modesty, when he describes his lips as 'uncircumcised' (Exod. 6.30)?

Aaron and the whole of the Levitical priesthood that derives from him, appear almost as second choice, an afterthought, a pragmatic solution to an unforeseen problem. It was a priestly dynasty born out of anger.

'And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.' (Exod. 4.14)

Of course, there was no afterthought, God knows the end from the beginning, however it designedly served to underscore the frailty and weakness of the mediation of the Levitical priesthood, as we shall see.

### **The Ark of the Covenant provided as the picture of the solution**

Although the Ark was designed, and its blueprint of its construction revealed beforehand, the timing of its disclosure to the people demonstrates its purpose.

Not at the first showing of the Ten Commandments, when they might be expected to be kept perfectly.

At the second showing, when any profession of perfect obedience had already been shattered along with the Tablets themselves.

In response to Moses' plea:

'Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin:

Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which He promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness.

Yet they are Thy people and Thine inheritance, which Thou broughtest out by Thy mighty power and by Thy stretched out arm.' (Deut. 9.27-9)

The Lord reveals the Ark as a provision, the Tables are shielded from the people, and the people from them. The Ark was a perfect container of and displayer of the Law. It was a means by which the Law could be approached and appropriated, but without destruction. It was a picture of mediation, and it alone consecrates the Temple.

'At that time the LORD said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood.' (Deut. 10.1)

It was to borne aloft only by the Levitical priests, the symbol of HaShem's presence, a source of blessing and favour. 'At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister unto Him, and to bless in His name, unto this day.' (v.8)

It is noteworthy that the High Priest's death is anachronistically interpolated between the revealing of the Law and the Levites bearing of the Ark. (v.6)<sup>3</sup>

**The Levitical priesthood was flawed from the outset, whilst it has served and will yet serve many important and vital functions, it was never intended to provide adequate mediation to God.**

Aaron was the High Priest, the centrepiece of the jigsaw of atonement. Yet the High Priest, the fountainhead of the Priesthood, even before consecration, was cajoled into ring leading and coordinating the greatest apostacy of all:

'And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time.' (Deut. 9.20)

At best, Aaron was a shadow and mere representation and symbol of his younger brother's effective mediation. He interceded, but usually at his brother's instigation:

'And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD' (Num. 16.46)

His intercessory and mediating work was always subject to being instructed, guided and even corrected by Moses: 'And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt: and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron which were left alive, saying,

Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD?

Behold, the blood of it was not brought in within the holy place: ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded.' (Lev. 10.16-18)

Generations later, we find the High Priest, Aaron's descendant, again utterly unqualified from performing his role as atoning representative of his people before HaShem:

And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. ... Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments'. ([Zech. 3.1,3](#))

By comparison even with its deeply flawed inception, Malachi reproves the priests of his day for profaning this covenant of mediation, a kind of temporary patch repair for Sinai's covenant.

'And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that My covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared Me, and was afraid before My name.

The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with Me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.' (Mal. 2.4-8)

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<sup>3</sup> After the wells of Jaakan, into a place of trial, before the cutting, then afterwards pleasantness.)

Was this not predicted at Jacob's deathbed? (Gen. 49.5-6)

For Malachi, Isaiah and Jeremiah's wonderful predictions about the Levites to be fulfilled, radical help was needed.

### **The mandating of mediation to be perfect.**

In order for such mediation to be effective it needed to be sustained and the mediator himself blameless. This was evidently not the case with Aaron, his descendants, nor even with Moses. This is why a promise of a new mediator is made in future, as Moses completes the terms of the covenant at Sinai.

'The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

According to all that thou desired of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.' (Deut. 18.16-18)

A provision of a new mediator implies both new terms and a new covenant.

### **The necessity for another Priesthood**

Though it was HaShem's aspiration to make the whole nation 'a kingdom of priests' (Exod. 19.6), just as it was Moses' to make them all prophets (Numb. 11.29), the disobedience destroyed such aspirations, at least for now.

The pre- Sinaitic Priests outside of Levi were disqualified (Exod.19.22), most of whom were probably the firstborn sons of the family (Exod.13.2), a custom later reverted to in times of darkness (Jud. 17.5). So the whole tribe of Levi replaced the Firstborn of Israel (Numb. 3.12), with the deficit being redeemed with money (Numb. 3.46).

Reuben had been disqualified from being the firstborn, in favour of Joseph, Ephraim in favour of Manasseh, now in another way, Levi was qualifying as bearing the right of firstborn. Yet the true Surety of Jacob was Judah (Gen.43.9, 44.32), a role his father blesses (Gen. 49.8), from his seed, would come the One, of whom HaShem says, 'I will make Him my [Firstborn](#), higher than the Kings of the Earth.' (Ps. 89.27), His father David included, for He is also David's Lord. He continues, 'My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with Him.' (v.28)

It is precisely this need for a change of priestly mediator that David directly mandates in Ps.110.4.

### **The necessity for another sacrifice**

It is clear too, that some of the most remarkable and blessed acts of atonement in the Tenach, come from outside the strictures of Levitical Law, for example Phinehas' judicial execution of two egregious transgressors is described as '[an atonement for the children of Israel](#)' by which he obtains 'the covenant of an everlasting priesthood', not at all by his ordinary Levitical activities. (Numb. 25.13) A unique act of retributive justice against a singular representative of sin is hallowed and appeases Divine fury against the people, and is explicitly designated as atoning. The censurers of the incense burners with Korah were sanctified and made a covering for the altar not discarded. (Numb. 16.38) David 'made atonement' for the nation by delivering Saul's household to execution. (2 Sam. 21.3)

Psalm 40.6 indicates that ceremonial sacrifice and offering is not the primary desire of God. In Psalm 51.16, David acknowledges that his crimes are too serious to be covered by animal sacrifice, a broken heart and a looking for God's provision of a means of cleansing and pardon is necessary.

### **The necessity for another Covenant, honouring and fulfilling the first, yet distinct from it.**

In Deuteronomy 29.1 or as the Hebrew versifiers prefer the last verse of chapter 28, we are dealing with a separate covenant from Sinai. This separate covenant is distinct in character and terms. This much is manifest from the text:

אֱלֹהֵי דְבָרֵי הַבְּרִית־אֲשֶׁר-צִוְהַיְיָ הַיְיָ אֶת-מֹשֶׁה, לְכַרְתֹּת אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--בְּאֶרֶץ  
מִן־אֲבֹתֵי מִלְּבַד הַבְּרִית, אֲשֶׁר-כָּרַת אֲתֵם בְּחָרָב

*This* covenant has power to grant sight, hearing and circumcision of heart, which Sinai's demands could not.

For despite all its benefits and the accompanying signs, Sinai has resulted in a condition in which, 'Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.' Here is a covenant that provides for return from accursedness, one that embraces repentance, a Word that is 'near', 'very near' to the needy sinner, not afar off. It contains an implicit provision for efficacious pardon, even for serious offences. Sinai unmediated or with

inadequate mediation is but a covenant of Divine justice, the covenant at the plains of Moab offers rich mercy. One describes the famine, the second glimpses the feast. This is the undergirding context to the promises of Deuteronomy 30, which Blumenthal has dangerously neglected. The legal framework is distinct and the covenant foundation is a glimpse of a better and more effectual arrangement, the ratification of which is to be fully disclosed at a later date. This New Covenant is that to which both Ezekiel and Jeremiah especially refer, (Ezek. 37.26, Ezek.11.19, Jer.31.31, Jer.32.39). It has more in common with the gracious, soul-transforming covenant made with the patriarchs than with Sinai – though this particular theme would distract us now.

Of course, all these references have singular and particular reference only to the house of Israel and Judah. They also bear special reference to the return to the Land of promise.

### **Uncircumcised Gentiles have also gained access to this Covenant**

Might the Gentiles dare claim any access to such a covenant?

The answer again is found in Deuteronomy 29, but as I indicated before in responses on the blog, it is a most humbling one. The Gibeonites were Canaanites who deceived Joshua into a covenant, against his better judgement, and were in consequence bound over to humble tasks in servitude. They cheerfully embraced this rather than death. When Saul violated this covenant centuries later, the blood of his sons and a three year famine were the Divinely imposed consequences.

The point is that these servile hewers of wood and drawers of water, the specific term for the tasks assigned the uncircumcised Gibeonites, are also included in the terms of the covenant in the plains of Moab.

‘Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel,  
Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger (גֵר) that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: [Strangers of this kind might be given flesh of animals that had died by itself (Deut. 14.13) or even take a Hebrew into bonded labour (Lev.25.47)]  
That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day:’ (Deut. 29.10-12)

These uncircumcised Gentiles too would be able to enter into the blessings shortly to be outlined in Deuteronomy 30, in particular, the circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30.6).

Access to this second covenant is something to which Ezekiel too alludes, after rehearsing Judah and Israel’s adulteries, and comparing them unfavourably to Samaria and Sodom, he speaks of mercy to Jacob *and* to the Gentiles, but *not by* the covenant that was broken.

‘For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant.  
Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.  
Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, **but not by thy covenant.**  
And I will establish **my covenant** with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.’ (Ezek.16.59-62)

This lowly means of access is why when the Syro-Phoenician woman humbled herself to acknowledge that even the Gentile dogs eat the children’s crumbs from under the table, the Messiah at last acknowledged her (Matt.15.27).

### **Here alone is the promise of life for Jew and for Gentile**

In this second covenant alone is the blessing of life, it is here and here alone that Moses says, ‘See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil’ (Deut. 30.15). Sinai without effective mediation brought death, both to Israel, and even on Earth to Aaron and to Moses. This second covenant brings hope. Only the perfect obedience of a perfect man could bring life, and that can only be found in the Messiah.

### **Here alone is the promise of righteousness**

The Law had no power to cure leprosy, only to diagnose it. So it is with sin. Here in this second covenant, this prototype of the New Covenant is the opening of the eyes of the blindly self-righteous, the unstopping of ears to the music of God’s glory for the deaf, and a cure for the leprosy of pride. Here is HaShem our Righteousness (Jer.23.6), the promise of a perfect Surety and a perfect Mediator, David’s righteous Branch, the King of the Jews.

**Here is the basis for Israel's return to and enjoyment of her land, in a state of imperfect obedience**  
[It is noteworthy that much of Deut. 30 is addressed in the singular second person, as to Israel embodied by one representative.](#) This present reign of the Jewish King, and His righteousness is the ground on which Israel has been returned to her land, in a state of impenitence and unbelief. Well may the Orthodox say that the Messiah rode into Jerusalem on the secular donkey of nationalist Zionism – with all due deference to secularists, he has! Upon what legal merit, if not the Messiah's, has Israel gained the blessing of its right to return, when for centuries she was forbidden? Is the current generation, with its gay pride parades, discos and secular universities, with all their Gentile idolatries, really more righteous than all the preceding ones? Or are the Orthodox so much more pious than their forebears?

### **Here alone is the promise of a Law-keeping heart**

The acid test of the covenants, in all the texts we have examined is the keeping of the Law, even allowing for some radical transformation by the anticipated change of covenant, of sacrifice, of priesthood and of mediation, so let us examine three practical examples of the reality of this doctrine:

#### **Attitudes to the Land**

##### **Tragic predominance of Orthodox victims of the Shoah**

It is deeply disturbing that Yisroel Blumenthal writes that Israel's return 'to her land will be precipitated by her repentance'. Disturbing not because the hermeneutical position itself is peculiar or unjustifiable, it is strongly suggested by our text in Deut. 30, the order of Zerubbabel's and Ezra's return, and many Jewish commentators and some Christian Zionists have shared it. However other texts reverse the order, (Ezek. 11.17-20; 20.42-4; 28.25-6; 36.24-8; 37. 21-3, Zech.12.8 -13.1) and the neglect of the import of these is deeply troubling because in retrospect this position in the face of the murderous Nazi onslaught resulted in the death of a disproportionately higher level of Orthodox Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. This tragic loss of Rabbinic Orthodox Jews to the Holocaust is a [subject of strong criticism](#)<sup>4</sup> by some ex-haredi Jews, dwelling especially on the inconsistent behaviour of some of the Hasidic rabbis. It is also still the same position that some profoundly anti-Zionistic rabbinic movements foolishly hold, to the extent they have [joined hands with enemies](#).

##### **Evangelical Zionists**<sup>5</sup>

Many Evangelical Christians, on the other hand, have often been at the cutting edge of helping Jews return to Israel, and some were prescient in warning of the dangers of staying in Europe. Paul Merkley a historian at Carleton University in Ottawa details some particularly extraordinary instances.<sup>6</sup>

Here is a short extract from the first chapter of his book, 'A few days after the first copies of Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* appeared in the windows of the Viennese bookseller *Breitenstein*, William Hechler, a British clergyman, passed by. Shortly after that, on 10 March 1896, he presented himself in Herzl's study.

Years later, Hechler's own recollection was that was that he began the interview by announcing, 'Here I am!' 'That I can see', was Herzl's reply, 'but who are you?' 'You are puzzled', Hechler observed. 'But you see, as long ago as 1882, I predicted your coming to the Grand Duke of Baden. Now I am going to help you.' This marked the inception of a strategic and enduring, if unlikely, partnership between a secular Jew and a Protestant Anglican clergyman. 'When it came to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Theodor Herzl, it was noted by the editors of the English-language memorial volume that William Hechler would prove "not only the first, but the most constant and the most indefatigable of Herzl's followers".'

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<sup>4</sup> 'Any fair representation of haredi behavior during the Holocaust must include the behavior of hasidic rebbes who ordered their flocks to stay in Europe and then fled, leaving their followers to die horrible deaths. The Satmar Rebbe did this. So did the Belzer Rebbe and his brother. So did the [Lubavitcher Rebbe](#). And then there was Rabbi Elchanon Wasserman, a non-hasidic haredi leader who forbade his followers from fleeing Europe, even telling students not to accept offers to study at Yeshiva University in New York. Wasserman hated YU because it was Zionist and because it was Modern Orthodox. On a visit to New York, Wasserman himself turned down a teaching position there and went back to Lithuania. He and many of his students were killed by the Nazis shortly after.' In the interest of balance and fairness, if a concise and factual response to this serious charge is supplied, I will happily supplement it here. The piece he is so critical of, which confirms a high proportion of murdered Orthodox victims is found [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, Frank Cass, London, 1998, ISBN 0714644080.

<sup>6</sup> Anita Shapira, *Israel a history*, p. 15, 2012, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, proposes that English evangelical Christian restorationists of the 1840s inspired even the early secular Jewish Zionists.

He documents the strong 'Zionist' advocacy of Lord Shaftesbury, William Young, the first British vice-consul at Jerusalem in 1838, and the deep strain of evangelical Puritan influence on the Zionism of Arthur Balfour, the 1917 cabinet and Winston Churchill. In the US he describes the considerable Zionist influence of the Christian author John MacDonald's Isaiah commentary published in 1814, subtitled '*A Remarkable Prophecy, Respecting the Restoration of the Jews...*'. Merkley details the far reaching political weight and Zionist influence of the Blackstone Memorial of 1891, now largely forgotten, but signed by 413 prominent Americans, including the Chief Justice, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, and several other Members of Congress, as well as industrialists like Rockefeller, Morgan, McCormick, and several editors the great newspapers of the day. He describes the strong influence of Christian Zionism on Woodrow Wilson, a 'son of the manse', his relationship with Louis Brandeis, and the extraordinary friendship of Harry Truman and Eddie Jacobson, with its momentous outcome when the UN partition resolution hung in the balance. Jacobson shrewdly appealed to Truman's Baptist admiration for Cyrus to win him over.

Then there is the role of Wingate Orde, who established the roots of the Haganah, a member of the evangelical Brethren, and a staunch pro-Zionist British officer, despite a general climate of apostasy from the Bible among his scornful peers, and with it alienation from Jews and from Zion. Or see the Zionism of evangelical Henri Dunant, founder of the Red Cross, despite ICRC's modern betrayals of Israel. Read the views of the evangelical giants [Spurgeon](#), [M'Cheyne](#), [Bonar](#) and [Ryle](#). One could add to them the expectations and fervent prayers of a huge host of Puritans.

There are also now many evil examples of professing evangelicals who deny both their Biblical and Puritan roots by advocating anti-Zionistic positions, these we strongly repudiate as opposing the Messiah.

With the wisdom of hindsight, we may ask which group Rabbinic Orthodox Jewry or Evangelical Christians has more deeply embraced the principles of the Tenach? Who in this matter has more perceptively served the King?

### **Capitulating to Evolution and the Big bang**

Neo-Darwinian Evolution is a pervasive and [systematic idolatry of Nature](#), it is Babel of creature worship, and a deliberate and engineered denial of the Creator. It is a profound insult to HaShem. The Big Bang is the speculative cosmological undergirding of biological evolution. [Scientific dissent](#) from both of these idols has been excluded from mainstream scientific journals, conferences and has resulted in the wilful destruction of numerous careers and reputations. One visiting Chinese scientist observed, 'In China, one cannot oppose the Government, in the West, one cannot oppose Darwin'. Much more than in the case of opposition to Israel's right to self defence, the Western media have operated as cheerleaders and propagators of this evil and fallacious dogma. Evidence and arguments that expose evolution's weakness are very rarely examined critically or objectively, and often completely sidelined.

So the orchestra plays the music, the strident command goes out, and who has refused to worship the golden statue? The Evangelical organisations opposing evolution are well known, notorious and hated to materialistic fideists, scorned by the press and mainstream academia, and yet they have repeatedly and publically stood for the Torah against considerable odds. What about rabbinic Jews? Why is their public silence deafening?

### **The Embrace of Usury**

Usury is strictly forbidden in the [Tenach](#). For Hebrews it is lawful to take interest from Gentiles, but not from brethren. Usury has been an instrument of oppression and illicitly arrogates in the possession of wealth. For centuries these prohibitions were embraced and honoured universally by Christian churches of all kinds until the time of the Reformation, then there was an increasingly wide capitulation to disobedience. Now that interest-taking dominates and controls the global financial system, sadly only a small remnant of Christians and Messianics now oppose and eschew usury as they ought. However where are the Hebrew voices against this iniquity? Where are the modern day Nehemiahs, rebuking the nobles and the rulers, crying, 'You exact usury, every one of his brother' and 'let us leave off this usury'? Why has the witness of Torah been preserved better, though fossilised, by [idolators of the Ka'aba](#)?

Charles Soper

22/4/14

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