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THE VINE OF GOD
A STUDY IN DISCIPLESHIP
ACCORDING TO JOHN 15:1-16

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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A SHORT TITLE

THE VINE OF GOD

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

A Statement of the Problem

This paper is intended to be a study into the Biblical idea of the Vine of God as a word picture describing God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. Specifically, the problem this investigation hopes to shed light upon is this: in the light of God's dealings with His Old Testament Vine, what distinctive accents and emphases does the Vine-branches analogy give to personal discipleship with God through Christ, the True Vine?

The Importance of the Problem

The problem has importance for the writer chiefly because he feels quite acutely the desperate need of modern Christianity to recapture the personal, vital relationship with the risen Christ. For too many Christians, their relationship is to the Church. "Churchiness" replaces abiding in the Christ. Close, intimate relationship with Christ and through Him to the Father seems to be the basic idea behind the picture of the believer's incorporation into the Jesus, the True Vine. The mutual abiding and indwelling depicted by the metaphor of Vine-branches expresses this intimate relation: "Abide in Me, and I in you" (Jn. 15:4).

This mutual indwelling and abiding of Vine and branches becomes especially urgent when such a relationship with Christ is the only possible way to bear the fruit of love and other disciples. "I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears

much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Only through the mutual indwelling expressed in the Vine-branches metaphor will the need for the discipline of a life of loyalty, trust and obedience to Jesus' word be brought about in the Christian. The awareness of being an integral part in Christ's on-going life and work is heightened by the Vine-branches picture. This expresses some of the urgency and importance the writer attaches to this problem.

The Organisation of the Study

Otto Procksch's analysis of the Suffering Servant in his Theologie des Alten Testaments furnished the basic motif and theme for the study. Procksch sees the Servant of the Lord taking the geometric form of an inverted pyramid in its development. The pyramid at its broadest base is the nation Israel as Yahweh's Servant. As the pyramid becomes progressively narrower, the figure of the Servant of Yahweh also narrows correspondingly to the Remnant and then finally to the Suffering Servant, a lone and solitary figure, who fulfills in himself the destiny and mission of Israel. Ultimately, this solitary Suffering Servant is Jesus Christ.¹

The writer has used Procksch's analysis of the Servant of Yahweh, and has applied it to the figure of the Vine of God in the Old and New Testaments. However, whereas Procksch's progressive narrowing of the Servant stopped at the apex of the pyramid in the person of Jesus Christ,

¹Otto Procksch, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1950), pp. 288-291.

the writer has followed Oscar Cullman² and John A. T. Robinson³ who both hold that the Vine of God who is Jesus Himself, no longer is further reduced and narrowed, but becomes constantly wider and more inclusive as branches are grafted into the Vine.

Following these analyses by Frocksch, Cullman and Robinson, the plan of the paper revolves around the progressive eschatological reduction and narrowing of the Vine of God from the entire nation Israel, that was appointed to be God's Vine by virtue of His Election-love (Chapter II). The Vine was reduced to a saved Remnant because Israel as a nation rejected and ignored the demands placed upon her by Yehweh's Covenant-love (Chapter III). Because the saved Remnant rejected Yehweh's call to be a saving Remnant by failing to carry out the mission of the Suffering Servant (Chapter IV), Jesus Christ, who gathered up and recapitulated the whole life and mission of Israel, is Himself the True Vine of God (Chapter V). Jesus, the True Vine, incorporates branches into Himself by issuing to men the call to discipleship. The disciples' unswerving loyalty, trust and obedience to Jesus and His word mark them as true abiding branches in the True Vine, and place them in direct contrast to the disloyal, unbelieving and recalcitrant Israel who forfeited any right to the names or privileges of the Vine of God (Chapter VI). The branches abiding in Christ show their fruitfulness by their love and their bearing the fruit of more disciples. Here too, the branches in the True Vine assume the

²Oscar Cullman, Christ and Time, translated from the German by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), pp. 116-117.

³John A. T. Robinson, The Body (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), pp. 60-61.

functions and prerogatives of the old, unfruitful, non-producing Israel (Chapter VII).

The Method of Investigation

A topic of such scope necessitates a wide Biblical approach and method. The Old Testament has been used widely as a backdrop for understanding the eschatological narrowing and progressive reduction of the Vine of God from Israel the nation to the True Vine and Real Israel, Jesus Christ. The chief concern and effort of the writer has been to see the conception of the Vine of God take its place in the wide panorama of God's saving dealings with men as recorded in both the Old and New Testaments. However, these great themes of God's salvation history in turn are seen and interpreted in the light of the Vine-branches metaphor of John's Gospel, chapter 15, verses 1-16.

A Summary of Conclusions

Through all redemptive history the Vine belongs to God by virtue of His sovereign Election-love that called the Vine into existence.

The communion with God initiated by God's sovereign Election-love is sustained only by God's constant gift of loving grace.

God's Election-love and His Covenant-chesed place demands upon His Vine. These are briefly chesed toward God, chesed toward fellow sharers of God's Covenant-love and a universal mission to bless all nations. These are the fruits Yahweh demands of His Vine.

The only way the Old Vine could fulfill these covenant demands led them through death as a nation. Israel's death as the Vine of God alone enabled Jesus to become the True Vine, the source of life to all who

believe. For Israel, as well as for Jesus, resurrection could only follow crucifixion.

Jesus, the True Vine of God, is the center of all God's redemptive dealings in history. He is the real meaning and goal of Israel's ordeal, for Jesus' cross is the key that closes the door on Israel as God's Vine and is the key that opens the Vine of God to all believers.

To be a branch abiding in Jesus, the Real Vine, means being connected to Jesus' grace which alone can serve as the basis of an abiding Vine-branch relationship.

The disciples of Jesus, as branches in the True Vine, assume Israel's responsibilities, names, functions and missionary task. Thus God's redeeming and redemptive purposes for the Old Vine are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the True Vine, and in the branches remaining in Him, His faithful, loyal, trusting disciples.

CHAPTER XI

THE NATION ISRAEL AS YAHWEH'S VINE

In the Old Testament, as Ethelbert Stauffer has pointed out, one of the oldest ways of speaking about the people of God is the figure of the planting of Yehweh. "From the remotest times the 'people of God' had been called a 'planting of God' in the old biblical tradition."¹

This strand of teaching is widespread. The chief passages in the Old Testament that deal with the conception of God's people as His chosen Vine are the Song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7, 27:2-11; Ps. 80; Jer. 2:21, 6:9; Ezek. 15:1-3, 19:10-11 and Hosea 10:1.

The Vine Is Yehweh's by Virtue of His Election-love

The underlying idea beneath the Vine of God conception is the fact that the Vine is God's. The Vine belongs to Him; He is the Owner and Keeper of the Vine. Yehweh is the one who planted Israel as "a choice vine, wholly of pure seed" (Jer. 2:21). The Old Testament uses many pictures to show how delighted Yehwh is with his choice planting. Hosea 9:10 speaks of Yehweh finding Israel like ripe, luscious grapes in the wilderness, and He is overjoyed because He did not expect to find any fruit in such an unlikely place.

Yehweh went out of his way with His Election-love to secure this vine for His very own possession. Israel's greatness as the Vine of God lay only in the fact that God had chosen Israel out of His unexplainable,

¹Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated from the German by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 154.

sovereign 'ahabah, His spontaneous, undeserved love.

Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt;
 thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.
 Thou didst clear the ground for it;
 it took deep root and filled the land.
 The mountains were covered with its shade,
 the mighty cedars with its branches;
 it sent out its branches to the sea,
 and its shoots to the River (Ps. 80:8-11).

So, the Psalmist credited Israel's growth and prosperity as a growing empire under kings David and Solomon to Yahweh's mysterious selection of Israel out of love. His constant care and concern alone prompted her growth.

God's unmerited 'shabah was the only compulsion He had in lavishing His care and protection on His "pleasant vineyard." Isaiah shows to what extent Yahweh went out of His way for His Chosen Vine, Israel:

A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!
 I, the Lord, am its keeper;
 every moment I water it,
 lest anyone harm it,
 I guard it night and day;
 I have no wrath.
 Would that I had thorns and briars to battle!
 I would set against them,
 I would burn them up together (Is. 27:2-4).

The result of all this generous, undeserved care and cultivation of the Vine Israel is that Yahweh claims the Vine for His very own. Because the Vine has been completely possessed by Yahweh's 'ahabah, His Election-love, she is Yahweh's own possession. Israel is God's people, belonging solely to Him. It is God's Election-love that selected Israel in the first place, and it is that same Election-love that is the very basis of all of Yahweh's dealings with Israel, His Chosen Vine. The Vine which Yahweh had transplanted was digged about with Yahweh's own loving hands (Is. 5:2). All of his solicitous and constant concern.

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for Israel's growth flow directly out of His Election-love for her. So because of Yahweh's sovereign, undeserved Election-love, His 'ahabah,

. . . the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting (Is. 5:7).

Yahweh's Election-love Is Sovereign and Unconditioned

by Any Effort of Israel's

This 'ahabah of Yahweh was His sovereign gift to Israel. Israel could not give nor find any reason for it. Here was a prime case where God's thoughts were not their thoughts, nor His ways their ways. God's Election of Israel as His Chosen Vine was based solely on His free and sovereign Election-love. There was no other compulsion, no other must to God's choice, than the compulsion of His love (Deut. 7:6-8). In fact, Yahweh chose Israel just because she was small and insignificant. Certainly nothing especially attractive and pleasant about Israel prompted Yahweh to fasten His love on her. Quite to the contrary, Israel's origin was not pleasant, but repulsive. She was like an unwashed, uncared-for and unwanted child that Yahweh saved only out of sheer compassion and love, as Ezekiel pictures Yahweh saying to Israel:

And as for your birth, on the day you were born your navel string was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor swathed with bands. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you; but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day you were born. And when I passed by you, and saw you weltering in your blood, I said to you in your blood, "Live" (Ezek. 16:4-6).

Even Israel's outstanding military successes in the conquest of the promised land were not their doing, but Yahweh's. Deuteronomy discounts any human effort in the conquest (Deut. 9:4-5).

This election-love of Yahweh is completely unconditioned by anything of human effort. Israel is "found" by Yahweh, found "like grapes in the wilderness" (Hosea 9:10). The sole basis of God's ties and dealings with Israel is God's sovereign love, the only condition that any relation could exist between Creator and creature. That love is more lasting and enduring than even the most tenacious of human loving, that of a mother for her child (Is. 49:15).

Yahweh's Election-love--

the Sole Basis of Israel's Entire Life

Yahweh's miraculous, undeserved and unwarranted 'ahabah, His Election-love, that had settled on Israel in spite of what she was, formed the cantus firmus of Israel's religious life. The major festivals of Passover in the spring (Ex. 12, 13) and the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of the year both had right at their center the remembrance and commemoration of God's great saving acts. G. Ernest Wright, following Gerhard von Rad, has demonstrated that the liturgical confessions of faith used in Israel's worship were composed almost entirely of recitals of what God had done for Israel in His saving acts of history. He cites Deut. 26:5-9, 6:20-24 and Josh. 24:2-13 as examples that can be isolated. He holds that there were three confessional elements that were especially emphasized: God's election of Abraham and the rest of the fathers, Yahweh's deliverance out of the slavery of Egypt at the Exodus and His gift of the Promised Land.² So basic was the conception of God's

²G. Ernest Wright, God Who Acts (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1952), pp. 70-72.

salvation history to the thinking of Israel that the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua have this keryematic view of history as their basis and foundation.

Inherent in the idea of Yahweh's Election-love is the fact that Yahweh existed before Israel. This is the constant theme of the Deutero-Isaiah.³ "I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am He" that was "calling the generations from the beginning" (Is. 41:4). Yahweh existed before all things, creating even light and darkness, and fashioning the weal and woe of all nations (Is. 45:6-7). Yahweh's famous words addressed to Moses on Mount Horeb also carry this emphasis on His mysterious prior existence. The self-designation, "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14), would carry always the mark of mystery and would be at best only a partial drawing of the veil that shrouds Israel's Deus Absconditus. It is this great unknown about Yahweh that deepens the terror and fear of the people in front of Mount Sinai and is signalled by thunderings and lightnings and a smoking mountain (Ex. 20:18-20).

Not only had Yahweh done without Israel before He chose her as His Vine, but he could just as well do without her again. Israel, the Chosen Vine, was not needed by Yahweh, but she was completely dependent on Him. The constant reminder of the prophets is that Yahweh is the God that brought a disorganized, contentious group of slaves, a "No-people," into existence as a people, and made them God's Chosen People at that. The very words that Yahweh uses to preface the giving of the Decalog in Exodus 20 carry

³Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), p. 108. By employing the terms Deutero-Isaiah and Second Isaiah, the writer is merely using terms commonly employed by text researchers and scholars.

a very pointed reminder that Israel was a slave people He could just as well have done without. "I am the Lord Your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of bondage" (Ex. 20:2).

Further, if Yahweh had chosen Israel to be His chosen people, He could just as well reject them. The Vine chosen and carefully tended by God could very easily be cut down and its roots ripped out. For Israel had no independent life of its own. The nation was God's Vine, to be dealt with as He saw fit.

And finally, Yahweh's Election-love placed its mark on the objects of that love, making them instruments of Yahweh's will. As the God of Election-love Yahweh was different from other gods. Just because He loved them so utterly He could make demands on his people as their part of the covenant agreement.

These four factors, God's prior existence, His ability to do without Israel, the fact that He could reject them, and the fact that He made demands on them precisely because they were the objects of His Election-love are the ones that controlled God's relations with His Chosen Vine, Israel. "These relations were centered in, and summed up in the Covenant. The covenant involved these four special and peculiar conditions."⁴

Yahweh's Election-love the Basis of His Covenant Relations with Israel, the Vine

Though Yahweh established the relation with Israel solely on the basis of His undeserved love, His 'ahabah, this relation is continued and perpetuated by His strong, tenacious, determined chesed that wants Israel

⁴Ibid, p. 108.

as His Vine to be fruitful and will not let her go until she does bear fruit as a return on His Election-love. Snaith clearly demonstrates this difference between Yahweh's Election-love and His Covenant-love:

Chesed, in all its varied shades of meaning, is conditional upon there being a covenant. Without the prior existence of a covenant, there could never be any chesed at all. The word represents that attitude to a covenant without which that covenant could not continue to exist. . . . On the other hand 'ahabah is unconditioned love. It is not limited by the conditions of any covenant, but only by the will or the nature of the lover. Actually God's 'ahabah for Israel is the very basis and the only cause of the existence of the Covenant between God and Israel. 'Ahabah is the cause of the covenant; chesed is the means of its continuance. Thus 'ahabah is God's Election-Love, whilst chesed is His Covenant-Love.⁵

But of the two, 'ahabah, God's Election-love, is the more primary. The two go together, but God's Covenant-love is derivative and secondary to God's Election-love.⁶

God's Covenant-love is deeply embedded in God's Election-love. The Old Testament holds that Israel is His elected people, the Vine of His choosing, because He preferred Her before all other nations. Snaith has demonstrated that the Old Testament usage of 'ahabah as a choosing love is remarkably the same, whether used in religious or non-religious contexts. He concludes:

We see therefore, that the root -h-b is used in the sense of "choose" even in non-religious contexts. This is the sense in which the origin of the Covenant is due to Jehovah's 'ahabah (Election-love). He loved Israel--that is, He preferred her before all other peoples. She is His elected people.⁷

What God offers His Chosen Vine as His part of the Covenant is first of all His protecting care. Yahweh, the Keeper of His Vine (Is. 27:3),

⁵Ibid., pp. 94-95.

⁶Wright, God Who Acts, p. 36, footnote.

⁷Snaith, op. cit., p. 134.

brought His Vine out of Egypt (Ps. 80:8-9), transplanted it into the most ideal conditions (Is. 5:1-2) and gave it a favored position (Ezek. 19:10), waters it constantly and guards it day and night lest anyone harm it (Is. 27:3-4). Yahweh is the protecting and caring Keeper of the Vine who burned thorns that threatened the Vine (Is. 27:4), and set a protecting hedge about the Vine (Is. 5:5).

Second, Yahweh guides the growth of His Chosen Vine. All of the issues of Israel's history were seen as resting securely in Yahweh's hands, for He is the God of history.

And finally, Yahweh out of His Election-love provided for His Vine a way of life marked by trust in Yahweh. The Vine of Yahweh was more than adequately cared for, and had every need taken care of.⁸

Yahweh's Covenant Demands upon His Vine

But Yahweh's Election-love that established such ideal conditions for His Vine, placed covenant demands upon Israel. The well-known passage of Amos provides the pattern for God's ~~method~~ of covenant dealings. First came God's choice of Israel--"You only have I known of all the families of the earth"; and then came the demands that followed from that Election-love--"therefore . . ." (Amos 3:2).

The covenant conditions placed upon the Vine by Yahweh revolve around Israel's doing only what would be expected of her as a Vine, namely, bearing fruit. After all of Yahweh's preparations, says the song of the Vineyard, Yahweh "looked for it to yield grapes" (Is. 5:2).

⁸T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 191-193.

Yahweh had given His Choice Vine such extraordinary treatment because He expected it to be "fruitful and full of branches" (Ezek. 19:10).

The Demand of Loyal Chesed toward Yahweh

The fruit that Yahweh would have the Vine bear for Him is a dutiful and loyal love that is conditioned only by Yahweh's unconditioned, sovereign love for His Chosen Vine. Yahweh's love for the Vine would show itself in faithful and proper fulfilling of Yahweh's requirements laid down in His covenant. Since Yahweh's Covenant-love (chesed) was utterly sovereign, "Israel's love for God is that of an inferior to a superior. It is concerned all the time with doing His will."⁹ To love Yahweh totally and completely is to obey the words Yahweh commanded at Sinai with such clarity that they were engraved upon Israel's heart that day of the Covenant (Deut. 6:4-6). This obedience to Yahweh's commands was the way the Vine evidenced love to him. Fleming James has put it this way:

Then too Israel was to obey Yahweh's laws; that was the practical evidence of affection for Him. The Deuteronomists wanted something more from men than that they should refrain from idolatry and keep the commandments. They aspired to call forth in the human heart nothing less than a passion for God personally. That was to be the central motive for life. "Thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might."¹⁰

The Hebrew word for "soul" in this passage is nepesh. Hahn in his recent survey of Old Testament scholarship, Old Testament in Modern Research, has pointed out that Pederson in his Israel I-II (pp. 99-104) discovered that the Hebrew nepesh does not mean "soul" as distinguished from "body," but

⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁰Fleming, James, Personalities in the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 285.

rather means "man in his total essence."¹¹ Thus the command to love God with "all your nephesh" meant for the Israelite to love God with his total personality that expressed itself in a willing that consciously acted according to the demands placed on the individual by Yahweh's sovereign Covenant-love.

The Demand of Loving Dealings toward Fellowman

Further, the fruit of Covenant-love that Yahweh would have His Vine bear was the fruit of upright dealings with the brother. In the Song of the Vineyard Yahweh says of His Vine that He "looked for it to yield grapes . . . for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice (nishpat)" and "for righteousness (zedekah)" (Is. 5:2,7). Israel's true chesed or Covenant-love involved knowing Yahweh intimately, and then, issuing from that, proper behavior toward fellowmen. How closely related these twin ideas of the knowledge of Yahweh and chesed toward fellowmen are, is demonstrated in the parallelism of Hosea 6:6. Here Yahweh is depicted as saying, "I desire steadfast love (chesed) and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." Again, the humble obedience and receptiveness to His Covenant demands that is involved in "walking humbly with Yahweh" is closely linked with doing justice (nishpat) and loving kindness (chesed) in Micah 6:8.

The down-trodden and the oppressed are to be the special objects of Israel's loving concern while bearing the fruit of love as God's Vine.

¹¹Herbert F. Hahn, Old Testament in Modern Research (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1954), pp. 68-70.

The fatherless, the orphan and the widow are mentioned repeatedly in the prophets, perhaps because their need is greatest and the most obvious (Is. 1:16, Jer. 7:5-6, etc.). The book of Deuteronomy is especially concerned with Israel's chesed toward the underprivileged. The debtor is to be charged no interest (Deut. 23:19); many provisions are made to lessen the hardships laid upon the poor debtor in the matter of pledges (Deut. 24:6, 12, 17); and slaves are to be treated humanly, as are sojourners (Deut. 15:12 ff., 5:14 ff., 10:9).

Interestingly, the reasons for this chesed toward the downtrodden, unfortunate and oppressed is clearly drawn out in some instances. In all such cases the reason is theological and centered in Israel's remembering God's great redemptive acts of chesed in the Exodus. Thus, Israel, the Vine of Yahweh's chesed, is to "love the sojourner; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). Israelites are to free their slaves after they have served their masters for seven years, remembering that they were once slaves in Egypt whom the Lord miraculously delivered (Deut. 15:12-15).

The Covenant Obligation to Bless All Nations

Israel, the Vine of Yahweh, had been chosen and elected by God not on any basis of merit, but solely upon a mysterious, unexplainable grace. The reality of this grace was sealed and confirmed by the great saving acts of Yahweh, particularly as they were expressed in the redemptive rescue from Egypt and in the establishing of the Sinai covenant. Because of this mysterious election-grace, ". . . the problem of life" for Israel, as G. Ernest Wright had pointed out, was "understood over against the will

and the purpose of the God who had chosen one people as the instrument of his universal, redemptive purpose."¹²

It was the "universal, redemptive purpose" of Yahweh that prompted Yahweh to confront Abram of Ur with His call of grace. At the moment when Abraham, the man of faith, "went out, not knowing where he was to go," then "God's holy Israel came into being. Here is the process of selectivity beginning in crisis, the process which involves 'covenant' . . ." and centers in "the 'striking down' of God,"¹³ for it was in Abraham the nation descended from him that Yahweh purposed to grant His blessing to all the nations of the earth. Five different times the book of Genesis answers the question, "Why did Yahweh choose Abraham?" Yahweh gives the answer: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and will make your name great so that you will be a blessing . . . and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (Gen. 12:2-3, 28:11, 18:18). In Genesis 22:18 and 26:14 the formula reads: "and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves." The hitpa'el form of the Hebrew in both of these latter passages would seem to indicate that the verb "to bless" should be understood in a reflexive sense.

The thought is that God has chosen Israel in order that all people of the earth may use her name in the formula by which they seek blessing for themselves. Through the ancient conception of blessing the writers are saying that God's purpose is to use Israel for a universal blessing.¹⁴

¹²Wright, God Who Acts, p. 27.

¹³William Robinson, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church, (Revised edition; St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1956), p. 21.

¹⁴G. Ernest Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1950), p. 51.

Both blessing and cursing were believed to be peculiarly effective and objective in the Old Testament. H. Wheeler Robinson has demonstrated this very tellingly:

A classical and well-known example is that of the father with his son meeting an enemy. The father thereupon threw his boy on the ground, so that the enemy's curses might pass over his head without harming him; he treated the curses, in fact, just like the blast of a bomb.¹⁵

Conversely, Israel's mission to be a blessing to all nations was to be just as effective.

But Yahweh's redemptive purpose of having all nations bless themselves through Abraham and the Vine of Yahweh that was descended from him was in turn tied to Yahweh's Election-love and Covenant-chesed. The all-pervading sense of election and covenant grace that throbbled through Israel was the only basis for her becoming a blessing to all other nations. Only because the Vine of God had been blessed above measure could she bear the fruit of blessing for others to enjoy.

Yahweh's Election-love had chosen only Israel; yet she was to be the instrument through which God would bless all nations. Yahweh's election-grace had selected one particular people and one particular strand of history in which He enacted that historical selectivity and exclusiveness toward His chosen nation. That meant He had chosen only Israel to be His Vine. However, covenant relations with Yahweh, the God of the universe, meant that Israel's mission was to be equally universal. So Israel's mission as the Vine of God was at one and the same time particular and universal. T. F. Torrance has stated it very well when he says:

¹⁵H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 170.

a covenant relation of union and communion with God . . . was universalistic from the beginning. It was essentially dual in its nature: particular and universal. . . . The movement was paradoxical in character . . . the more particular it became, the more universal it also became; . . . the more intimately Israel was tied to the one and only God, the God of all, the more the activity of grace broke through the limitations of national Israel and reached out to all the world.¹⁶

So Israel's mission was a universal mission. The restricted and particular election of Israel by Yahweh meant that Israel was Yahweh's answer to the universal plight of man. Even in the early eighth century B. C. Elisha had brought the "divine helpfulness" of Yahweh into the common life of Israel and had made the daily intercourse of Israel with the surrounding nations the opportunity for the Vine of Yahweh to bless the world with the fruit of God's election-'ahabah and covenant-'chesed.¹⁷

In the light of Israel's day-by-day mission to the world all of the happenings in her history were to be explained. The missionary, redemptive obligation in the covenant interpreted all of her life. The sense of obligation and relatedness to Yahweh furnished her basic interpretation of the events of life. Yahweh was the Keeper of His Vine, pruning it and training it. If the Vine bore fruit as a blessing to the nations, Yahweh caused it to bear more fruit in the form of success, joy, happiness, security, and peace. But if Vine of Yahweh stubbornly refused to bear the fruit of Yahweh's blessing, then He pruned it severely by failure, unhappiness, insecurity and war. Breach of the covenant obligation to

¹⁶T. F. Torrance, "The Israel of God--Israel and the Incarnation," Interpretation, X (July, 1956), 311-312.

¹⁷James, op. cit., p. 210.

bless brought Yahweh's cursing, rejection of His grace and love brought judgment and wrath.¹⁸

The sole basis of God's relationship with His People Israel lay in His strong, sovereign chesed, the only condition on which any real relation can exist between the sovereign Creator and the created. This chesed was God's determined faithfulness, a deliberate and "almost stubborn steadfastness," to cling to His covenant with His people. At every turn Israel was dependent upon Yahweh's persistent chesed.¹⁹

When the word came to be used predominantly of the Covenant between Jehovah and Israel, it was realized by the prophets that such a covenant could be maintained only by that persistent, determined, steadfast love of God, which transcends every other love by its nature and depth.²⁰

How sorely Israel, the Chosen Vine of Yahweh, needed the strong sure and stubborn chesed of Yahweh is shown by the fact that the Old Testament invariably speaks of Israel as a sinful and unfruitful Vine.

¹⁸Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment, p. 70.

¹⁹Snaitch, op. cit., pp. 99-106.

²⁰Ibid., p. 99.

CHAPTER III

ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO BE THE PRODUCTIVE VINE OF YAHWEH, AND PROPHETIC NARROWINGS OF THE VINE TO THE REMNANT

Israel's Failure to be the Vine not Yahweh's Fault

The Old Testament invariably speaks of Israel as a sinful and unfruitful planting.¹ In the Song of the Vineyard (Is. 5:1-7) God did everything possible to make His Vine productive; "and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes." And then comes Yahweh's great baffled cry: "What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done for it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?" Israel is a "luxuriant vine that yields its fruit," but its fruit is more and more idolatrous altars and pillars or phallic symbols (Hosea 10:1). At its very best, Israel's fruitfulness was only fitful. But more often the fruit it bore was the fruit of sin, revolt and disloyalty to Yahweh.

Further Israel's unfruitfulness is directly tied to their breaking the covenant with God that bound them to upright dealings with the brother man. Hosea pictures Yahweh ringing His hands, as it were, grieving, because Israel's love is no more lasting than the wisp of a morning cloud or the early dew (Hosea 6:4). And though "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting," yet upright dealings turn to bloodshed (Isaiah 5:7). This unfruitfulness of the planting of God is not God's fault. The Vine was planted "a choice

¹Vincent Taylor, The Names of Jesus (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1953), pp. 104-105.

vine, wholly from pure seed" (Jer. 2:21); but Israel became degenerate and grew wild.

Amos

Amos lashed out against those that put profit and gain ahead of right relations with brothers under the covenant of Yahweh.

O you who turn justice to wormwood,
and cast down righteousness to the earth! . . .
They hate him who reproved in the gate,
and they abhor him who speaks the truth.
. . . you trample upon the poor
and take from him exactions of wheat . . . (Amos 5:7, 10-11).

Israel's sin was comfort and luxury-loving leisure that put more value in its comforts than in right dealings with people. And how Amos excoriates the ladies of Israel! He calls them fat "cows of Bashan" more concerned with their drinks than the oppressed poor (Amos 4:1). Israel sells "the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes" (Amos 2:6). Even the religious holy days mean little before the prospect of more profit (Amos 8:4-5).

Amos was sent to bring low a nation that delighted to think that God was on their side because of His choosing them to be His people. But corresponding covenant responsibility for the brother mattered little. But to have experienced God's love, is to be doubly responsible for the brother, insisted Amos.

You only have I known
of all the nations of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities (Amos 3:2).

But Israel persisted in counting on the shallow unfounded hopes of a Golden Age when Yahweh's Day would break with a dawn of unparalleled material comforts and pleasures. And it was Amos' task to jolt Israel

into seeing the Day of Yahweh for what it was: "It is darkness, and not light" (Amos 5:18). Nor could a nation heal itself by more religion, especially when the people had openly flaunted God's demands for upright dealings. In fact, such religion, that busied itself with ceremonial and the superficial, but ignored the brother, was a positive offense to God (Amos 5:21-24).

The real trouble with Israel was her mistaken and warped view of God's covenant with her. She needed no reminding of her election; she cherished the idea that God had chosen only her out of all the families of the earth. But what Israel forgot was that the covenant was set up and based on God's sovereign covenant-grace. No mechanical bond based on blood ties and relationships tied together Yahweh and His People in the covenant relationship. Amos asserts again and again that Israel has no claim on God's love, because God is sovereign. Israel's whole past was a history of God's Covenant-love extended, and that grace rejected (Amos 2:9-12). There is no "chosen people" with Yahweh: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?" . . . Not only was Israel brought out of Egypt, but other nations had been moved in their migrations by Yahweh's hand (Amos 9:7). Israel, as well as the circle of her traditional enemies and adversaries, must stand equally guilty of repeated transgressions before God (Amos 1, 2).

Mistreatment of the brother severs the covenant relationship because the people of Yahweh is a community knit together by the ties of Covenant-love for mutual concern. The covenant is not mechanical nor does it follow blood lines or the boundaries of nation. John Bright affirms, "It had been forgotten that the covenant was a bilateral obligation, requiring of its

people the worship of Yahweh alone and the strictest obedience to his righteous law in all human relationships."² Further, Bright goes on to say:

The covenant is not mechanical and in the nature of things; it is a bilateral, moral agreement and can be voided. Mistreatment of the brother voids it, for he who crowds his brother spits on the law of God and, in that fact, does not keep covenant with him. In short, Israel is the people of God, but only as she keeps his law and exhibits his righteousness. Because Israel has not done so, but has egregiously violated the covenant brotherhood, Israel is no true people of God!³

In the face of this rupture of the covenant relationship, Amos issued his call to repentance: "For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: 'Seek me and live'" (Amos 5:4). To seek Yahweh is to seek good for the brother; only under those conditions would the Lord, the God of hosts, be with them (Amos 5:14). But those who repent by seeking the Lord will be the few: "the God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15). Plainly, Amos did not expect widespread repentance. For Israel is a tottering wall completely out of line with God's plumb line (Amos 7:7-9). Only a few will constitute the remnant, a small minority, as tattered and torn as the two legs or the piece of a sheep's ear pulled out of the mouth of the lion (Amos 3:12). The remnant will be like a city that went out with a thousand soldiers, but returned with only one hundred (Amos 5:3). So sure is the doom of Israel because of her lack of repentance that Amos chants a dirge over her bier:

Fallen, no more to rise,
is the virgin Israel:

²John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 64.

³Ibid., p. 65.

forsaken on her land,
with none to raise her up (Amos 3:2).

Hosea

The target that Hosea aimed at was different than that of Amos. Amos spoke to a nation riding high on the crest of national prosperity. Hosea addressed his message to a nation tottering and reeling under the blows of Assyrian retaliation for trying to gain independence and stirring up revolt. Hosea pictures vividly the frenzied political intrigues, the mad plotting and the sickening picture of drunken puppet kings sitting on the throne of Judah (Hosea 7:1-7). Dynasty after dynasty is rapidly set up and just as rapidly put down; there are kingmakers galore (Hosea 8:4). The result is that the people have lost all faith in the king, for he is helpless to relieve them in their plight (Hosea 10:3). On top of this political decay, the heart of organized religion has gone rotten. The priests have abandoned instruction in the true religion; in fact, they have forgotten the Torah (Hosea 4:4-6). The priests foster idolatry, corrupting the people and abetting the decay of religion (Hosea 4:7-10). Deliberately the priests have banded together (Hosea 6:9-10) to set traps and snares for the common folk (Hosea 5:1-2). Moreover, the only solution the leaders had was to change their foreign policy, attempting to capture every changing political breeze by feverishly seeking after foreign alliances. No help or cure could come from Assyria (Hosea 5:13). They appeal to Egypt, calling "like a dove, silly and without sense" (Hosea 7:11). Such alliances meant repudiating Yahweh as the only real help. Since He only is ruler of history, such policies would be fatal and could lead only to ruin. Nor do they realize that Israel is like an old, worn

down man that does not know that he is way past his prime (Hosea 7:9).

In short, Israel's collapse is thorough. Israel is finished.

The seat of the national disease that ate out the heart of Israel is, in Hosea's thinking, worship of idols. Albright has demonstrated by the high incidence of Baal names "that Baalism was still the basic religion of a large proportion of the people of the land."⁴ Israel is an apostate given over to idols; that has separated her from Yahweh so drastically that she can not be His people. Israel is "Lo-Ammi," "Not My People" (Hosea 1:9).

Hosea expressed the covenant bond between Yahweh and His people in terms of marriage. Yahweh had wooed Israel in the wilderness wanderings after she came up out of Egypt (2:14-15). He married Israel to Himself, making her his wife. To worship other gods, the Baalim or whatever, is adultery, breaking and dissolving the marriage union. Repeated adultery will only end in Yahweh's divorcing her and putting her away completely. What God demanded was chesed, complete faithfulness and loyalty as the response to God's chesed, His faithfulness and favor sealed in His covenant agreement. This chesed is God's sole requirement:

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

But Israel's repentance was like the whining wheedling of Gomor, Hosea's repeatedly unfaithful wife. Her chesed was nearly as lasting as "a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away" (Hosea 6:4). Israel,

⁴William Foxwell Albright, The Biblical Period, reprinted by permission from The Jews; Their History, Culture and Religion, edited by Louis Finkelstein (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949, for Private Distribution Only; Pittsburgh, Pa., 1955), p. 38.

like Gomer, was an incurable adulteress (Hosea 1-2:13).

Therefore, the nation as a whole is not God's People. Israel thanked the Baalim for her material prosperity (Hosea 2:7-13) and participated wholeheartedly in the prostitution, sex orgies and drinking bouts connected with Baal worship (Hosea 4:11-14). Yahweh had wanted to bring Israel back to Himself, but they have utterly rebelled and strayed (Hosea 7:13). And so God's verdict is one of judgment: "Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people and I am not your God!" (Hosea 1:9).

But God's chesed is so great, so large that He could not abandon his erring people. Because God is God and not a man, His chesed never fails (Hosea 11:9). Yahweh will not give up on Israel (Hosea 11:3-9). Yahweh will love Israel freely, heal her faithlessness and cause her to return to Him (Hosea 14:1-4). The state of Israel is doomed to destruction; she will be stripped of all she has, and sent back into the wilderness, as in the days of her desert wanderings (Hosea 2:9-13). But the interlude in the wilderness will be a time when a Remnant will respond with Israel's earlier loyalty, love and singleheartedness to Yahweh's chesed. Here is a new start and beginning of God's love affair with His people (Hosea 2:14-20). Then the Remnant of Israel will be the true People of God (Hosea 2:1).

Isaiah

Isaiah, more than any other eighth century prophet, extends a glorious message of hope for the future, but this hope is balanced by a scathing fury over the people's sins that is as severe as either Amos' or Hosea's. Like Amos, he inveighed against the greed of man that made real

estate and profit more important than people (Is. 10:1-2). Honest and upright dealings are not even to be found in the vineyard that Yahweh had tenderly and patiently planted, prepared and cultivated. The grapes it bore were wild grapes, bitter and small (Is. 5:1-4).

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
 is the house of Israel,
 and the men of Judah
 are his pleasant planting;
 and he looked for justice,
 but behold, bloodshed;
 for righteousness,
 but behold, a cry! (Is. 5:7).

But it was the false unfounded pride of the people that Isaiah hated most of all. It was this pride that sought to organize life as though God did not exist, that took the high holiness of God and tried to bring it low. It was such pride that was the very heart of sin (Is. 2:9-22).

Isaiah's attack on the sins of his people is complete and uncompromising. For such a society and for such a government there can only be God's judgment. The state is doomed, for the judgment comes in history whose processes are securely in God's controlling hand. The day of Yahweh's wrath "against all that is proud and lofty" is imminent (Is. 2:12, 17). The hand of His anger is poised and stretched out; the plundering, murderous armies of Assyria are the rod of His anger (Is. 10:4-6). Not even the military might of Egypt can be of any help here, for when the Lord stretches out His arm, both parties of the alliance will fall and perish together (Is. 31:1-3). So sorry is the plight of the state, that no one is willing to rule over the heap of ruins that was Judah (Is. 3:1-8). The political instability will be so great that mere boys and babes will rule, and they will force the man who has so much as a mantle on his back to take over the responsibility of the mess.

But Yahweh had created His people for His purpose and that purpose would be carried out. God's purpose will be worked out in history, and He will work it with recalcitrant, stubborn Israel. Though Israel as a nation is tottering under the severe and crippling blows of Assyria, God will save some for His purpose. Not even all the mechanized might of Assyria can amount to anything when confronted by the God of history.⁵ This is the same God whose glory in Isaiah's inaugural vision had completely filled the temple, shook it to its very foundations and burst out of the temple. Such a God could not be contained within the confines of any structure or stricture erected by men. For this is the thrice-holy God; no mortal eyes could see the regal Lord of hosts and love through that experience without being more completely shaken than the temple had been (Is. 6:1-5). Hence the mighty powers of the earth, including Assyria, are just God's instruments. He whistles for them to come and they obey (Is. 7:18-19). After Assyria has been used in God's purpose, He will cast her off (Is. 10:5-19). Judah's northern sister may have fallen, but Judah's future lay in God's purpose. He would save some for His purpose.

This confidence in God's working out His purpose for Judah in the complex processes of history is the basis for Isaiah's hope and confidence for a portion of Judah. Isaiah could never speak of a total destruction of Judah. True, God's purging would be complete and radical; Judah would be like "an oak, whose stump remains standing when it is felled." But that stump is "the holy seed" (Is. 6:13). In that cut-down stump there

⁵Bright, op. cit., pp. 84-86.

was still sap, and it would some day put out a "shoot" whose branches would be fruitful (Is. 11:1). In God's judging discipline Isaiah saw a purge that was radical and thorough. Out of the furnace of affliction would come a purified metal--God's true people (Is. 1:21-26). So basic is the idea of the saved Remnant to Isaiah's thinking that he named his two sons Shear-jashub ("A Remnant Shall Return To Repent") and Maher-shalal-hash-baz ("The Spoil Speeds, The Prey Hastes") (Is. 7:3, 8:1). The branch from the cut down stump (Is. 11:1) "shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel." (Is. 4:2). The Remnant will be called holy for Yahweh will have washed the Remnant clean from her former filth and bloodstains (Is. 4:3-4). The loving "zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this" (Is. 37:32). The Remnant will be characterized by their return to the Lord, for they "will lean upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (Is. 10:20-22).

The whole idea of the Saved Remnant is implicit in and dependent upon God's having selected the Remnant in the first place out of His free, sovereign and unhampered will to love. Both the Remnant and those who are touched by God's Election-love have been chosen out and selected. The Remnant's past history as a nation was full of examples of God's sovereign selectivity active in her midst. Abraham was a prime example of this selective Election-love in action as G. A. Danell has pointed out:

Through a series of decrees and acts of Election, Yahweh creates the people which He promised to Abraham. The idea of a remnant is implied in that of Election. The people of God is established out of a remnant. . . . The ancestor, Abraham, was one man, who went into exile at Yahweh's call and from him the people was descended.⁶

⁶G. A. Danell, "The Idea of God's People in the Bible," The Root of The Vine, edited by Anton Fridrichsen (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 25.

Deutero-Isaiah seconds this idea when it requests the Jews to look back at the history of Abraham and see for themselves the quarry from which they were hewn. For when Abraham "was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many" (Is. 51:1-3). Danell suggests that the way God dealt with His people in choosing them out was the principle, "the way to renewal passes through death to life."⁷ Such was the case with Abraham. Abraham went out, not knowing where he was to go. To leave a secure home and a comfortable future to become a nomad was death to himself, but that new beginning constituted his passage from death into a life filled with God and His blessings. Joseph, the son sent into bondage, passes through the death of slavery and imprisonment to become the new beginning whereby the whole family is saved. So also Moses, the man who had to "die" in forced exile, returns and gives God's people a new beginning. So the conception of Isaiah's saved Remnant was dependent upon and found its roots in Yahweh's great acts of Election-selectivity that chose out the patriarchs by a process of passing from death into life.

According to Isaiah, Israel had to die to herself. Only so could she become Yahweh's Remnant through repentance and trusting faithfulness in Yahweh. It was for this purpose that Yahweh was standing up to contend and judge His people (Isaiah 3:13). As long as Israel, the Vine of Yahweh, remained unrepentant, stroke after stroke would fall, for Yahweh's anger would not be averted; the whip of the Assyrian was still in His outstretched hand (Is. 9:12, 17:21, 10:4, 5:25).

But Isaiah offered the reeling nation a clear way to renewal with Yahweh.

⁷Ibid., p. 265.

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel:
 "In returning and rest you shall be saved;
 in quietness and in trust shall be your strength"
 (Is. 30:15).

There were two steps to this way of renewal and new life for Israel, as Fleming James has pointed out.

The first step was to return to God. That meant to "put away the evil of their doings from before His eyes" (1:16). It involved not only the cessation of wrong and oppression but the abandonment of every dependence save that on God. The second step was to wait quietly upon Him in the certainty that He would bring relief and deliverance.⁸

However, only a Remnant would repent and be saved. How dreadfully clear this was to Isaiah is seen in Yahweh's instructions to the prophet in his inaugural vision (Is. 6:9-10). This seems to have been the view that Isaiah held all of his long and lengthy career as prophet for Yahweh. Again, at the outset of his public ministry he named his child "A Remnant Shall Return" and thereby indicated that only a fraction of the nation Israel would return to Yahweh and be renewed.

Further, the message of return to Yahweh that Isaiah proclaimed to the nation Israel had just the effect of stopping up their ears, blinding their eyes and building up impenetrable layers of fat around her heart.

Almost if not quite from the first, then, Isaiah was convinced that his ministry would only aggravate the rebellious disposition of the nation. And as he went on experience proved the truth of this foreboding. Yahweh, whom he offered as a sanctuary, became a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel (Is. 8:14).⁹

Isaiah was faced with the prospect that many would perish, and that only a very small Remnant would return. Even this diminished Remnant would not be completely pure, for their profligate debauchery after the lifting

⁸Fleming James, Personalities of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 264.

⁹Ibid., p. 265.

of the Assyrian siege in 701 B.C. and their subsequent neglect of the God who rescued them evoked Yahweh's wrathful indictment: "Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you all die" (Is. 22:14). T. W. Manson in his The Teaching of Jesus has commented that Isaiah's gathering together a band of disciples to whom he committed his teaching (Is. 8:16-18) "may fairly be regarded as an attempt to 'consolidate the Remnant.'"¹⁰

Since even the Remnant was in greater part rebellious against Yahweh, the whole mystery and secret of Yahweh's continued mercy and leniency with Israel was that they were the people of His Election-love. Only God's persistently stubborn Covenant-love could continue any real relations with His Remnant. And it was this Covenant-love with which Yahweh bound His Remnant to Himself, for only His chesed could be strong, certain and sure enough to have Yahweh eagerly and ardently desire the Remnant of Israel, His Chosen Vine, to be His chosen and representative people. The Vine of Yahweh had been chosen to show ethical uprightness that stemmed from a way of life characterized by trust and obedience and loyalty to Yahweh. This moral uprightness demanded by Yahweh involved helping and defending the poor, helpless and oppressed. But now the once proud and luxuriant Vine had been trampled, ravaged and burned (Ps. 80:8-16). Now that Yahweh's Vine was helpless and oppressed, His strong, saving chesed swung into action to preserve the Remnant of His Vine. This strong chesed of Yahweh for His oppressed but sin-ridden Vine is an example of Yahweh's giving precedence to mercy rather than deserved judgment.¹¹

¹⁰T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 176.

¹¹Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), pp. 120-121.

Isaiah's distinctive teaching is that the nation Israel can no longer be the true Vine of Yahweh because her constant rebellion against His covenant demands and the lack of right dealings with fellow members of Israel irreparably snapped the covenant. Because the Vine of Yahweh had forsaken His guidance and cultivation, had borne only the bitter, wild fruit of sin, the Keeper of the Vine had to prune it severely, cutting it back until only a part of the Vine was left. This pruning process shows Yahweh's further selectivity in choosing the True Vine, for only by drastic cutting, further narrowing down and setting apart could even the smallest fraction of the nation Israel approximate Yahweh's hopes for a productive Vine. In short, "Isaiah's doctrine of the remnant . . . tended to break up the solidarity of national religion by distinguishing between two groups within the nation and promising salvation to the righteous alone."¹² This was Isaiah's restrictive emphasis, plus the dominant note that only through Yahweh's unswerving, mysteriously-persistent chesed could the Vine of Yahweh be restored and given new life and hope for better days. For without Yahweh's chesed that stood the shock of rebuff added to insult from even His chosen Remnant not even the Remnant could have any existence.

King Josiah's Failure to Renew the Covenant

Yahweh's persistent chesed that would not let His people go was the only basis on which Yahweh could establish the Remnant. T. F. Torrance sees in this persistent chesed Yahweh's desire to make something of His people, to fashion out of them something for His service, in spite of their rebuffs and their refusals.

¹²James, op. cit., p. 263.

He (Yahweh) held on to his purpose of love, binding the covenant-people to himself, refusing to divorce it in spite of persistent rebuffs. The covenant grounded in mercy (chesed) and truth ('emeth) was maintained by God in utter faithfulness, that is, in the utter consistency of truth, and in the utter steadfastness of love. In that covenant relation of truth and love Israel had to suffer, for it shattered itself on the unswerving persistence of the divine purpose of love. Israel suffered inevitably from God, for God would not let His people go.¹³

To what depths of suffering God's stubborn chesed plunged the Remnant.

Israel can be seen in Israel's rapid decline after the reforms of Hezekiah. So low would the Vine fall that not even Josiah's "New Covenant" could revive it.

The reforms good king Hezekiah had instituted under the influence of Isaiah were swept away by "a popular reaction under Manasseh" who "brought back the Canaanitish ways of the past. Manasseh himself took the lead in reintroducing the cult practised on the high places, with its altars to the baalim," its groves and all the other compliments of nature religion.¹⁴

G. Ernest Wright in his monograph, The Old Testament Against Its Environment, has thoroughly demonstrated that the sun, moon and stars were very widely regarded as members of the heavenly assembly, and thus were given worship--a practice intolerable to anyone who belonged to the Remnant of Yahweh.¹⁵ Because Manasseh was a vassal of Assyrian masters, he also brought in the worship of the heavenly bodies popular in Assyria, especially that of Ishtar, the "queen of heaven." Bright has shown that this

¹³T. F. Torrance, "The Israel of God--Israel and the Incarnation," Interpretation, X (July, 1956), 308.

¹⁴James, op. cit., p. 303.

¹⁵G. Ernest Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1950), pp. 30-41.

largely a political necessity, for it was a world completely dominated by Assyria, and "in the ancient world political subservience always entailed at least nominal acknowledgement of the overlord's gods."¹⁶ II Kings 21 gives a capsuled account of the incredible apostasy into which Manasseh plunged the Remnant of Yahweh. Not only were the Canaanitish gods and the Assyrian gods worshipped in Jerusalem (vss. 3b-5), but altars were erected to the heavenly bodies in the temple itself (vs. 5). Magic, augury and divination were popular, for these were also popular with the Assyrians at the time. Even the barbarous worship of Moloch who demanded live sacrifices gained a foothold, and Manasseh himself "burned his son as an offering" (vs. 6a). The historian who transmitted the history of Kings rates Manasseh the very worst ruler ever to sit on the throne of Judah (vs. 9,11) and declares that his apostasy was so terrible that it never could be forgiven, and that his sin alone was enough to explain God's wrath and the impending national ruin (vss. 11-15).

Manasseh's recipe for national security which meant subjugation to Assyria was successful in that there was a measure of peace that allowed the ordinary pursuits of life to go on. But at what a price! Dedication to foreign deities took the place of Yahweh the God of the covenant.

It was the collapse of the jerry-built empire of Assyria that gave rise to the reforms of Josiah, at least in an indirect way. Albright in his From the Stone Age to Christianity has noted the uplift of spirit the defeat of Assyria gave to Israel. "After 625 B.C. the rebellion of the Chaldean Nabopolassar against his Assyrian suzerain gave new confidence to

¹⁶Albright, op. cit., p. 100.

the land, and Josiah appears to have briefly reoccupied most of the former territory of Israel."¹⁷

It was out of this rise of Israel's fortunes that King Josiah's reform stemmed, at least in part. Bright holds that "the reform was, in part, a facet of high hopes born of independence and resurgent nationalism."¹⁸ The prophets and priests and their adherents who gradually "found themselves strong enough to effect a sweeping reform formed another root of the reform."¹⁹

The actual reform was shaped by a law book found in the rubbish of the temple while repairs were being made there. The young Josiah had it brought to his attention. It shocked him, for if this code were really the law of God, then God help Judah; for it had been flagrantly disregarded (II Kings 22:3-20). The king summoned all the people to the temple, personally read the law to them, and then bound the people to a solemn covenant before Yahweh to put its demands into action (II Kings 23:1-3). From this the reform took shape. Worship was cleansed of all foreign elements and additions and no worship was allowed outside of the Jerusalem temple; all other local shrines were forbidden. The ethical and social requirements of the law were held up to be the ideal for the nation.²⁰ The reform under Josiah was an attempt to return to the purity of Mosaic religion.²¹

¹⁷William Foxwell Albright, From The Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), p. 240.

¹⁸Bright, op. cit., p. 104.

¹⁹James, op. cit., p. 304.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 304-305; Bright, op. cit., pp. 102-105.

²¹Albright, From The Stone Age to Christianity, p. 244.

Much of this reform was superficial, but here at least the Vine of Yahweh was attempting to bear the fruit of proper worship and right relations. Here in any event was a right-thinking minority who realized that being the Vine of Yahweh and worshipping Moloch, the nature gods with all the attending paganism were incompatible. Rather, such behavior left Israel, the Vine of God, ready to be chopped down, ripe for judgment.

Bright has suggested that

perhaps God had destroyed the Assyrian colossus and allowed this moment of freedom that there might be one last chance to repent. If Israel is to find her destiny as the people of God, nay, if she is to survive, she must put away foreign gods and serve Yahweh alone.²²

If Israel is to be the true Vine of Yahweh--she must reform!

But Josiah's humbling defeat and death at the hands of Pharaoh Necho of Egypt at Megiddo in 609 B.C. dealt the death blow to the reform movement. The reform was just superficial, backed up by the proclamation of the king. Josiah's son, Jehoiakin, allowed many abuses to come back into the nation's religion, including the worship of the "queen of heaven" and Moloch with its child-sacrifices (Jer. 7:18-31). The historian of II Kings summarizes his career with the words: "And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done" (II Kings 23:37).

The last attempt at reform had failed. As a nation, Judah had rejected the covenant with Yahweh and thereby had cut herself off. No longer was she the Vine of Yahweh. Even the remnant that was left of Israel would be gleaned thoroughly as a vine (Jer. 6:9). Since she had borne only bitter and wild grapes, the sign of a degenerate vine (Jer. 2:21), she was worthless. The vine has no useful purpose other than

²²Bright, op. cit., p. 105.

fruit bearing. An unfruitful, degenerate vine could only serve as fuel for the fire of God's judgment.

Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them; though they escape from the fire, the fire shall consume them. . . . And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, says the Lord God (Ezek. 15:6-8).

The Remnant was finished as the Vine of Yahweh, for not even a new covenant could resurrect it and give it new life.

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CHAPTER IV

THE FAILURE OF THE REMNANT TO RESPOND TO THE VINE'S MISSION AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

The Exiled Israel, a Despairing and Broken Vine

Isaiah 40-66, commonly referred to as Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah, presents the next step in God's further reducing the Remnant of Israel as His Vine. The beginning words of the message, "Comfort, comfort, my people" (Is. 40:1), give us the tenor of Second Isaiah's voice and the setting to which it spoke. The Remnant of the Vine, Israel, was in sore need of comfort. They were a disorganized and broken people.

This thoroughgoing emphasis on comfort was something new for the prophets. Many prophets had preached comfort and consolation, but only as a foil for the predominant message of doom and God's impending punishment. James has noted this change very well.

The fatal year 586 B.C. marked a change in the temper of the Hebrew people. Before that it was only the prophets who talked of ruin; the majority continued stout-hearted, hoping in spite of repeated disasters that the tide would yet turn in their favour. After 586 B.C. it was the prophets who hoped, while those about them were plunged in despondency.¹

The condition of the land of Palestine was desperate. First, most of it lay in ruins. Second Isaiah speaks longingly of the Golden Age when there will be inhabitants to "people the desolate cities" (Is. 54:3), and promises that "the waste and desolate places and the devastated land" will be filled up (Is. 49:19). Zion is like a widowed woman after her

¹Fleming James, Personalities of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 364.

bereavement who has lost all her children (Is. 49:19-21), and is compared to an unfortunate with a barren womb (Is. 54:1).

Also the population of Judah had been scattered and dispersed during over a century of intermittent warfare. In 701 B.C. Sennacherib had stormed and taken forty-six fortified towns in rapid succession.² From this campaign the Assyrian claimed to have taken no less than 200,150 prisoners. Certainly, some of these must have been carried away as hostages and captives.³ Albright has demonstrated that the period 598-587 B.C. was one of unmixd gloom for Judah. King Jehoiachin was taken into exile along with Judah's best leadership and finest craftsmen. Excavations at Debir and Lachish show increased poverty of the countryside between the two destructions of these towns in 598 and 587. Albright also holds that "the population of Judah, which had probably passed 250,000 by the end of the eighth century, can scarcely have been over half that number" in 587 B.C., when Jerusalem was stormed and taken again and most of the remaining leading figures and artisans were sent to Babylonia.⁴

Probably the most difficult things the exiles had to bear was the constant contempt of their captors. They were a conquered people, their nation dragged down and broken. They were nobodies; Jacob was nothing more than a "worm" (Is. 41:14). Taunts reach out at them from every

²William Foxwell Albright, The Biblical Period, reprinted by permission from The Jews; Their History, Culture and Religion, edited by Louis Finkelstein (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949, for Private Distribution Only: Pittsburgh, Pa., 1955), p. 43.

³James, op. cit., p. 365.

⁴Albright, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

corner; Second Isaiah advises the exiles to "fear not the reproach of men, and be not dismayed at their revilings" (Is. 51:7). Their tormentors said to them:

"Bow down, that we may pass over";
and you have made your back like the ground
and like the street for them to pass over (Is. 51:23).

The result of this oppression that the captives endured was that any faith they formerly had in Yahweh was seriously blasted. They turned against God, for He had cast them off. "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me" (Is. 49:14). Some held that Yahweh was worn out. He had grown weak and weary (Is. 40:28). Yahweh's arm that formerly was so vigorous and mighty to save had grown shorter. He was not able to meet the new demands that foreign exile placed on His adherents (Is. 50:2). Some grew stubborn, refusing to believe that Yahweh could still deliver (Is. 46:12-13, 48:4).

In their desperation and misfortune, the poor exiles turned to the splendor and prestige of Babylon's world-conquering gods, Bel and Nebo. The exiles seem to have made figurines of these gods and actually worshipped them, praying, "Deliver me, for thou art my god" (Is. 44:17). Second Isaiah had to remind the Remnant that Yahweh and not the idols had brought about former deliverances, for they were prone to lay the credit at the feet of their images (Is. 48:3-5).

The Greatness of Yahweh's Power and Purpose

In contrast to the captives' despair, Second Isaiah is a source of constant abounding optimism. This was not just based on a political hope that was fanned by "the coming of Cyrus and the impending collapse of

Babylon."⁵ The prophet's faith in the future lay squarely on the mighty power and purpose of Yahweh. Nothing is comparable to Him; even the greatest nations are powerless before Him.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?

.....
Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;
behold, he takes up the isles like fine dust.

.....
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
who brings princes to nought,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing (Is. 40:12, 15, 22-23).

Second Isaiah calls on his compatriots to rely fully on such a magnificent and powerful God as Yahweh. Not only has the prophet drawn his picture of Yahweh in bold, giant strokes, but demonstrates to the exiles that to rely on Him and His power is to receive boundless strength, courage and buoyant hope.

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Greater of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary,
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who had no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint (Is. 40:26-31).

⁵John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 138.

Not only is Yahweh magnificently powerful, but that power is channeled into the control of the universe. Even the great celestial bodies owe their origin to Him and are held in place by Him (Is. 40:26).

Yahweh directed the course of history in the past, and He is directing present history now. Second Isaiah saw this work out especially in Cyrus's victories (Is. 41:2-4). How ridiculous and absurd to think that Yahweh is played out; Yahweh's hand was not shortened so that it could no longer redeem. His arm is still powerful to save! (Is. 50:2).

What folly to turn from a God like Yahweh to the protection of helpless idols! Yahweh is the only God, the only Redeemer.

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
"I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god" (Is. 44:6).

"I am He.

Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.
I, I am the Lord,
and besides me there is no savior.
I declared and saved and proclaimed,
when there was no strange god among you" (Is. 43:10).

Yahweh is a jealous God and has no intention of sharing His honor with other gods. He does not intend to be just another member of a pantheon (Is. 42:8).

Yahweh loved His chosen Vine, the Remnant of Israel. True, Yahweh had been angry with Israel and had punished them with the military machine of Babylon. The reason was the sin and rebellion of Israel.

Behold, for your iniquities you were sold,
and for your transgressions your mother was put away
(Is. 50:1).

But anger and punishment were in the past, for Yahweh had freely forgiven His Chosen Vine. Israel had received enough at the hand of the Lord

(Is. 40:2). Now would Yahweh's favor and forgiveness come to an end any more.

For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love will not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on you (Is. 54:10).

Together with the good news of Yahweh's forgiving favor again restored came a wonderful invitation:

I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud,
and your sins like mist;
return to me, for I have redeemed you (Is. 44:22).

Ho, every one who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why should you spend your money for that which
is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;

.....
Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Is. 55:1ff).

The Vine's Universal Mission

The reason for this invitation and this forgiving restoration is that Israel, the Chosen Vine, is still to bear fruit for her Creator. The Vine of Yahweh will participate in God's purpose, but not by any merit of her own. She had been blind and deaf to Yahweh's calling in the past (Is. 42:19). She was completely stubborn, obstinate and rebellious when it came to doing Yahweh's will (Is. 48:1-3). Only a new and completely

reconstituted Israel could be a fruitful Vine. Jeremiah's promise of a New Covenant had failed to stir the people from their rebellion and non-productivity. Only a new beginning would yield a new and productive Vine bearing fruit for Yahweh. John Bright in his study, The Kingdom of God, has pointed out that Second Isaiah's unique use of the phrases, "the former things" and "the new things", and the allusions to the Creation in connection with these phrases point toward a new Exodus in which God would create for Himself a new Israel, a real Vine.

Israel is to experience a new exodus! But the Exodus was looked upon by every Israelite as the national beginning. To speak of a new Exodus could therefore mean only a new beginning. There is for Israel, then, a new national beginning, a future more glorious than the past.⁶

But the national limitations and ancestral lines of the former Vine of Yahweh will be transcended. For if there is but one God, Yahweh, and if this God rules all men of all nations, then there can be but one God for all people. The restrictive limitations are widened, for the domain and area of rule of Yahweh are to be world-wide. So all heathen nations are to turn from their idols to Yahweh, the only God who can save (Is. 45: 20-23). Yahweh's house shall be called a "house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7). So the victory of Israel and her vindication over her captors and oppressors will be complete. Thus Israel, the Vine of Yahweh, will fulfill the destiny Yahweh had called her to when He said that Abraham's descendants should bear the fruit of blessing to all the nations of the earth.

⁶Ibid., p. 140.

The Vine's Universal Mission
Achieved by the Suffering Servant

But what sort of victory would be claimed? What would Israel's destiny be? Certainly Israel's victory would not be counted victory as the world would consider such things. On the contrary, Israel as the Vine of God would be called to humiliation, defeat and suffering, and yet just such was Israel's victory. The instrument of Yahweh's victory among the nations would be the Suffering Servant of God. Here is the strangest figure, so stooped with humiliation, so rejected and ignored, so laden with offense that hardly anyone would be favorably impressed with him. The Servant is so unimpressive, so hideous and despised by all, that he is completely unique. But it is in terms of the Suffering Servant that Deutero-Isaiah sets forth the destiny and the victory of the Vine of Yahweh.⁷

The Suffering Servant's mission is universal and world-wide. In this respect the Servant is completely different from the Remnant of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. T. W. Manson has stated this fundamental difference between the Remnant and the Servant very strikingly:

The difference may be stated simply in this way, that whereas the Remnant was to be a saved few, the Servant of Jehovah is to be a saving few. The brand plucked from the burning is to become a light to lighten the Gentiles.⁸

⁷Sigmund Nowinckel, He That Cometh, translated from the Norwegian edition of 1951 by G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), pp. 199-202.

⁸T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 179.

It is this universal, saving work of the Servant which Yahweh describes in Is. 42:1ff.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
 my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
 I have put my spirit upon him,
 he will bring justice to the nations.
 He will not cry or lift up his voice,
 or make it heard in the street;
 a bruised reed he will not break,
 and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
 he will faithfully bring forth justice.
 He will not fail or be discouraged
 till he has established justice in the earth;
 and the coastlands wait for his law (Is. 42:1-4).

The Servant of Yahweh will be a light to the Gentile nations "to open the eyes that are blind, to bring . . . from the prison those who sit in darkness" (Is. 42:6-7). The work of the Servant is to go beyond Israel. It is not enough that the Servant fulfill Yahweh's purpose within Israel, His own chosen Vine. For Yahweh has told His Servant:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
 to raise up the tribes of Jacob
 and to restore the preserved of Israel;
 I will give you as a light to the nations,
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth
 (Is. 49:6).

His mission to all the people of the earth is to express the tenderness of Yahweh. The thirsty and hungry will be the objects of the Servant's pity. He will lead them by springs of water, shielding them from the scorching heat of desert wind and sun (Is. 49:10). Wherever men languish in prison houses, the Servant of Yahweh comes as liberator and deliverer (Is. 42:7). He will faithfully bring forth justice, not snapping those who are broken; for his is a healing mission (Is. 42:3). He has the special faculty of sustaining "with a word him that is weary" (Is. 50:4).

Apart from the Servant Songs, Israel is elsewhere often spoken of as the Servant of Yahweh in Deutero-Isaiah. All of these ten or twelve

instances refer to God's electing Israel to be His Servant with a mission to the heathen.⁹ This universal character of Israel's vocation to be the Servant of Yahweh G. A. Danell feels is "undoubtedly closely connected with his strong emphasis on Yahweh as the God of the whole earth and as the only living God."¹⁰

The Vine of Yahweh is to be the Servant of Yahweh in the sense that those who constitute the real, productive vine of Israel will be totally devoted to their Keeper and that they will bear the fruit of Yahweh's blessing throughout the world. The task of the Vine of Yahweh as the Suffering Servant is quite distinct from Israel's task as the Servant, though that task is carried on within the framework of Israel. Mowinckel has suggested this basic difference in his recent volume, He That Cometh.

He (the Servant of Yahweh) has received from Yahweh a quite special task. That is why he is the Servant, not in the more passive sense which the word has in Deutero-Isaiah when it is applied to Israel: the worshipper of Yahweh, secure under His favor and protection, able to trust in Yahweh, and because of her historical experiences as witness to the election, the favor, and the faithfulness of Yahweh, and to His will and power to save Israel and to bring to fulfillment His plan for the world; but in an active sense: he who had been chosen and equipped for a special work in Yahweh's service. He is Yahweh's "deputy", an effective instrument for the realization of Yahweh's purpose, and thus for glorifying Him in the world.¹¹

However, the Servant would not force this special mission upon men. Very meekly and self-effacingly would the Servant go about his task. The Servant's strategy to win the nations would not be that of force or

⁹Arthur S. Peake, The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament (originally published in 1904; London: The Epworth Press, 1947), p. 34.

¹⁰G. A. Danell, "The Idea of God's People in the Bible," The Root of the Vine, edited by Anton Fridrichsen (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), pp. 30-31.

¹¹Mowinckel, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

compulsion, but a gentle and inward persuasion. The Servant of Yahweh's task is to conquer the world, but, as F. W. Manson has indicated, this victory would be attained through gentle means. The Servant is to

conquer the world, not by force of arms, but by spiritual power; not to establish an earthly empire after the manner of Assyria and Babylonia; not to compel the unwilling submission of vassal states to themselves, but to attract individual men and women to voluntary acceptance of Israel's King as their King.¹²

Endowed with the Spirit of Yahweh, and supported by Yahweh himself (Is. 42:1), the Servant will not concede to discouragement and setback or give up until the victory is won (Is. 42:4). He is certain to meet up with hostility, but he will not resist. He will not draw back, for he is not rebellious (Is. 50:5). Rather, he will give his back to those who abuse him. Beaten, tormented, he would not even avert his face from those that pluck out the beard and spit in disgust in his face (Is. 50:6). Through it all, patiently enduring and confident, the Servant of Yahweh sets his face like a flint, sure that Yahweh will see him through and vindicate him (Is. 50:7-9). Though at times the Servant would complain that his labor was in vain, his courage would be restored by the vision of his destiny and confidence in vindication from Yahweh (Is. 49:4).

This obvious characteristic of humility in the Servant's approaching his task and in carrying it out in spite of humiliating hostility and opposition was a common characteristic of piety in the Near East at the time of the exile, as Albright has suggested in From the Stone Age to Christianity. "Humility, silence, and meekness became increasingly characteristic of ancient oriental piety . . ." Inscriptions of Neo-Babylonian kings of the sixth century B.C. often began with words, "the

¹²Manson, op. cit., p. 180.

meek and humble one," and humility was desired of devotees of Assyrian and Babylonian gods in their prayers.¹³

However, these characteristics of humility, meekness and silence common in Near East piety cluster and concentrate uniquely in the Servant's task as explained in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. There the ultimate is said of the Servant. Here the Servant achieves victory and destiny precisely through his suffering. Such a conception of Israel's destiny fulfilled through the Servant's example of suffering was unheard of. It was bold, unique, completely sui generis--so much so that onlookers cry out: "Who has believed what we have heard?" (Is. 53:1). Nowinckel has shown that this Song is composed within the framework of a funeral dirge. But even as a funeral dirge, it is completely unique, for the Song lays stress on just the unimpressive and positively repulsive features of the Servant.

But this poem appears to be exactly the reverse of the usual funeral dirge: the dead man's beauty, courage, and manly virtues, which made men love him and miss him, are not celebrated here as in other poems which thus become bitter laments over loss. This Song tells how unimpressive, hideous, and despised the Servant was: not a tree is blossom, but a parched shoot; not a lion or an eagle (the figures used for instance in the lament over Saul and Jonathan), but a gentle lamb. He was neither high-born nor manly, and had no fascinating influence upon man; on the contrary, he was unimpressive and gentle.¹⁴

Now unlikely that Yahweh's redeeming arm should be bared (Is. 53:1) in the uncomely form of "a root out of dry ground" (Is. 53:2). This unlovely and wretched figure of the Suffering Servant is scorned of men and seemingly afflicted by Yahweh (Is. 53:2-4). This is so, to follow Nowinckel's suggestion, because the Servant was "stricken by a foul disease which

¹³William Foxwell Albright, From The Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), pp. 254-255.

¹⁴Nowinckel, op. cit., p. 200.

brought disgrace, possibly leprosy." In any event, the Servant's death would be seen by pious Jews as a direct judgment of Yahweh disqualifying the Servant as the Messianic instrument of deliverance.¹⁵

Moreover, the Suffering Servant endures harsh and brutal persecution (Is. 53:4-6), so brutal, in fact, that belatedly it dawns upon those who persecuted the Servant that no sin he had ever committed could possibly account for his mistreatment. In fact, it was just for his persecutors that the Servant suffered. He suffered vicariously for them, bearing their sins. Finally the sufferings and ignominy of his life will be crowned with the shameful death of a criminal. The Servant is led off like a lamb to the butcher, without a complaint, and is foully done to death (Is. 53:7-9). But the Servant suffered innocently, for it is clear that he gave his life as "an offering for sin" and the misdeeds of others (Is. 53:10).

However, this vicarious suffering of the Servant of Yahweh actually becomes his vindication and glorification. The onlookers and those who have done the Servant to death are horrified in retrospect. Nowickel is quick to point this out:

The lament in the funeral dirge becomes an accusation, the self-accusation of the poet and his hearers. Thus the Song becomes a vindication of the Servant's honour; for everyone must now understand that the ignominy, the wretchedness, the humility, the apparent lack of self-assertion ("righteousness") were really the titles of his honour.¹⁶

It is this insight on the part of those who did the Servant to death that makes the suffering sacrifice of the Servant effective. This is the

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 200-201, footnote.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 203.

Servant's victory and his vindication. His act of suffering would be in vain if the onlookers did not respond by confessing their guilt and sin.¹⁷ Thus the sacrifice of the Servant is complete in that his example of self-giving to the redeeming universal purposes of Yahweh is total and complete without any reservation. Here in the person of the Suffering Servant the New Covenant of Jeremiah becomes incarnate. H. Wheeler Robinson in his study of Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament has noted that the prophet Jeremiah saw himself as "the revelation of the true Israelite, the man in whom human nature, in its Israelite form, finds fullest and truest expression".¹⁸ Robinson goes on to say that "through the prophet, as through none other, the will of Yahweh is done. . . . Jeremiah's 'new covenant' is virtually the extension to every Israelite of the prophet's own obedient relation to God."¹⁹ Here in the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, Yahweh's promise of a new heart and a new spirit in Israel itself comes true. The Vine of Yahweh becomes a true and productive Vine in the figure of Israel as the Suffering Servant. For, as Father Hebert has indicated, "the picture of the Servant of Yahweh is precisely Israel thus renewed. He is the pattern of what God means Israel to be: 'my Servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'"²⁰

¹⁷Vincent Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1951), p. 42.

¹⁸H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 162.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 185-186.

²⁰A. G. Hebert, The Throne of David (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), p. 68.

The Servant a Representative and Fluid Figure

Who is the Servant of Yahweh? Albright²¹, Rowley²² and Procksch²³ have shown conclusively that there has been a reaction against the many efforts on the part of Old Testament scholars to interpret the Servant solely as the people of Israel itself, or as some historical character such as Jeremiah, Cyrus, Jehoiachin, Zerrubbabel or even Moses. The figure of the Servant changes so frequently and radically that it is difficult to fix it upon one person. Christopher North in his monograph The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah has shown that there is progress in the Servant figure. It is fluid, but with no retreat. Rather the figure moves from the nation Israel to an individual who in turn points forward to Christ.²⁴ H. H. Rowley, however, finds "development from the thought of Israel as the Servant to the thought of an individual Servant par excellence, without abandoning the thought of Israel as still the Servant."²⁵ Though the Fourth Song is dominantly individual, the mission the Servant fulfills is Israel's, Israel is still called upon to enter its mission, and so the Servant is truly Israel's representative."²⁶ Albright likewise feels that the Servant is the nation Israel, the "pious individual who atones for the

²¹Albright, From The Stone Age to Christianity, p. 255.

²²H. H. Rowley, The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), pp. 3-46.

²³Otto Procksch, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Gütersloh, Germany: G. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1950), pp. 287-288.

²⁴Christopher North, The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 215ff.

²⁵Rowley, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁶Ibid., p. 55.

sins of the many," and finally the coming Savior of Israel.²⁷ William Robinson sums this up very nicely when he says:

In what have been called "the servant songs" it is clear that in some cases . . . "the servant" is the whole of Israel, "the remnant"; and finally, he is the single son of Israel in whom the whole of Israel is embodied, a corporate personality.²⁸

Israel's Rejection of the Suffering Servant's Mission

It is obvious that parts of the Servant Songs can not possibly refer to the Israel of Yahweh as a nation.²⁹ It would involve a straining far beyond the limits of the text to refer to the nation Israel as the Servant in the words of the Fourth Song:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. . . . But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed . . . and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . And they made his grave with the wicked . . . although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth (Is. 53: 4-6,9).

H. H. Rowley has commented that it is foolish to suppose that the Deutero-Isaiah would believe Israel's exile suffering to be innocent. This would fly in the face of the pre-exilic prophets "who declared in no uncertain way that the sufferings of the exile were the instrument of God's discipline of His own people for their folly and neglect of His will."³⁰

Further, Israel as a nation failed to live up to her mission as the Vine of Yahweh who would reach all nations and become a blessing to them

²⁷Albright, From The Stone Age to Christianity, p. 255.

²⁸William Robinson, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1955), p. 31.

²⁹Procksch, op. cit., p. 289.

³⁰Rowley, op. cit., p. 51.

through its sufferings as the Servant of Yahweh. The Jews rejected the Deutero-Isaiah's conception of a universal mission to the heathen and "accepted rather the ideals of Ezekiel, . . . shrank from the task to which the great prophet of the exile had called them," and instead, "became hard, narrow and exclusive."³¹ T. W. Manson feels that in Israel's refusal to become the Servant with a world-wide mission the people ceased to be the Vine of Yahweh, bearing the fruit of blessing to all peoples. By over-emphasizing Ezekiel's restrictiveness, the Jewish nation begins its career of "strict Judaism," and thus rejects Deutero-Isaiah's "prototype of Evangelical Christianity."³² From this point on, the Jewish nation as a saved Remnant is generally concerned only with its own salvation. It becomes Pharisaic by refusing to follow the example of the Suffering Servant conception of the Remnant of the Vine--that of being a saved Remnant for the purpose of saving the nations.

To refuse the mission of the Suffering Servant as a nation made Israel a rebel. No longer was it the Vine of Yahweh, for it had refused to bear fruit. The more Yahweh revealed Himself in His call to Israel to become the Servant of Yahweh, the more Israel's sin was intensified and the more the contradiction between Yahweh's call to be the Servant and Israel's failure was intensified.³³ Torrance has further shown that Israel's destiny to be the Servant of Yahweh would be carried out even

³¹Peake, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

³²Manson, op. cit., p. 181.

³³T. F. Torrance, "The Israel of God--Israel and the Incarnation," Interpretation, X (July, 1956), pp. 309-310.

though Israel refused to obey Yahweh's call to service and mission. Exposed to the full judgment of God, Israel was to act as God's Servant by representing all nations in its rejection of Jesus Christ.³⁴

Israel could no longer be rightly called the Vine of Yahweh. By priding itself on the fact that it had received Yahweh's call to be his Chosen Vine, it had severed itself from its Keeper. It had grown degenerate and wild, and its fruit was the fruit of self-will, self-glorification and sinful self-seeking. Israel felt that it was the Vine of Yahweh mechanically and automatically. She did realize that she had no automatic status or privileged position, nor did she realize that to be the Vine of Yahweh meant she had no right to the name unless she was productive.³⁵ Israel had failed to be the Vine as a nation, had proved to be degenerate and sin-ridden even as the smallest Remnant, and had given up all right to the title of Vine of Yahweh by refusing to bear the fruit of suffering and ignominy as the Suffering Servant and thereby refusing to be a blessing to all nations.

John's Baptism, Israel's Last Chance

Yet Yahweh gave His Vine still one more chance. In the radical call to repentance issued in the proclamation and baptism of John the Baptizer, Yahweh was giving his Vine another and a last chance to be reconstituted a true and productive Vine. This radical change was meant to come about

³⁴Ibid., p. 312.

³⁵Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated from the German by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), pp. 188-190.

in John's preaching of the radical call to total repentance and turning to Yahweh, and in a baptism of repentance that would place both Jews and the cursed Gentiles on the same moral level. Both Jew and Gentile were equally in need of repentance, as Flemington has indicated in his monograph, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism.³⁶ John's task was to reduce and destroy the confidence that Israel was the true Vine of Yahweh by virtue of its ancestry, election and past participation in salvation history and that it could continue to rely on her past as a gilt-edged security from which every reasonably good Jew could continue to draw a life-long dividend. Manson sees in the Baptizer's procedure of calling to repentance the sharp stinging point that the children of Abraham must submit to a rite designed for pagan Gentiles.

He says in effect: you call yourselves Jews, you claim to be descendants of Abraham, you demand the privileges that belong to Israel. You have no right to the name, no right to the status; you have forfeited all by your wickedness. You have only one chance. You must begin where the unclean Gentile begins--at the bottom. You must rediscover and re-learn your Judaism from the beginning. Only so can you hope to have any part in the good time that is coming.³⁷

That the radical calls to repentance by the Baptizer failed is evident from the Jews' later treatment and ignoring of Jesus. The primitive Church felt that the Jews by their persistent and stubborn disobedience were just repeating the same disobedience of Israel as a nation that had caused her to fail to be the true productive Vine of Yahweh. That stubbornness of Israel resisted Yahweh's efforts to purge the Vine by regrouping it around a cleansed Remnant, and persisted in rejecting Yahweh's universal task and mission that He had given to the Vine when He called her to be the Suffering

³⁶W. F. Flemington, The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: SPCK, 1953), pp. 13-24.

³⁷T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 44-45.

Servant. Oscar Cullman has noted that in Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin he deals with the disobedience of his contemporaries and "fits their disobedience into the entire redemptive history as the people of Israel have experienced it."³⁸ But perhaps nowhere is the total failure of the nation Israel or any part of it to be the Vine of Yahweh more apparent than in Paul's letter to the Romans, as Ethelbert Stauffer has indicated:

The first eight chapters of Romans culminate in the triumph hymn of the elect (8:37ff.). Then follows a great silence . . . Paul listens about him like some shipwrecked mariner who has escaped with his life on some small boat, while round about him the night is filled with the cries of the drowning. After a long silence and listening attentively the apostle continues, with the agonized confession: . . . "I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart . . ." (Rom. 9:2).³⁹

The failure of Israel is complete. Israel as the Vine of Yahweh is finished, done for, doomed.

³⁸Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, translated from the German by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 110.

³⁹Stauffer, op. cit., p. 190.

CHAPTER V

JESUS AS THE TRUE VINE OF YAHWEH

Jesus, the True Israel of God

God's dealings with Israel, His Chosen Vine, had resulted in His drawing together the cords of the covenant with a corresponding narrowing and limiting of those included in the true Vine of Yahweh. Yahweh's redemptive history unfolded in a progressive reduction of the Vine of Yahweh from the people of Israel to the Remnant of Israel to the Suffering Servant.¹ Many had been called but few had responded. The result of this rejection of Yahweh's call to be the Vine was the severe and radical pruning of God's judgment--so radical that the Vine was reduced to a stump. But out of that stump grew Jesus Christ, the righteous Branch (Is. 11:1). Torrance has shown how Jesus was the true Vine of Yahweh, the real Israel of God:

just when the vine of God's choosing and planting was cut away down to the ground, there sprang up out of the earth a new shoot, a new vine, for he who had willed to be Israel and was crucified, rose again as a root out of the dry ground to be the true Vine.²

Jesus Christ in His person and work became the real and true Israel of God.

the prologue can be interpreted as a kind of philosophy of history, which is conditioned by the idea of a "people of God", in whom the Word seeks to be incarnated. Here . . . the "Israel of God" is

¹Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, translated from the German by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 116.

²T. F. Torrance, "The Israel of God--Israel and the Incarnation", Interpretation, X (July, 1956), p. 311.

introduced as fulfilling, or failing to fulfill, its function in history . . . until it stands revealed in one Man, who is not only the beloved Son, the pre-existent Word, but is himself the "Messianic community", "the Israel of God" reduced to one man.³

Jesus, the True Remnant

Not only does Christ bring together the perfect "messianic Israel of God" in His very person, but He is Himself the Remnant. G. A. Danell in his essay, "The Idea of God's People in the Bible," has brought this identification out very clearly. He holds that the Remnant and the figure of the Messiah were closely linked in the Old Testament, so closely that the Remnant "has a Messianic significance." But the tie is more explicit than that, for "Christ is Himself the Remnant, He is the Holy Seed, in Himself representing the whole of Israel."⁴

Jesus, the True Suffering Servant

But most important for Jesus' own interpretation of His work and ministry is the idea of the Vine of Yahweh as the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah. This interpretation is important because "the Servant is identical with the Remnant, the new beginning of the re-established Israel," and so the idea of the Vine as the picture of God's people in the Old Testament culminates in the person of the Servant of Yahweh.⁵

³William Robinson, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1955), p. 81

⁴G. A. Danell, "The Idea of God's People in the Bible," The Root of the Vine, edited by Anton Fridrichsen (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1953), pp. 32-33, 36.

⁵Ibid., p. 33.

The conception of the Suffering Servant played a big role in acting as a general pattern for Jesus' ministry. There is a remarkably close congruence of the career of the Suffering Servant and the ministry of Jesus. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus preached that the Redemptive Rule of God had broken out "with a gentleness like that of the Servant in the first song." Jesus' mission to Israel is then intensified and made more urgent by the sending of the disciples to ready Israel for the Redeeming Rule of God. Then come the realization that suffering was not just the price of Jesus' mission but the very instrument of victory, as in the third and fourth poems. Though not every detail was fulfilled in Jesus, yet the area of fulfillment was "remarkable."⁶

Jesus, the Suffering Servant, Assumes Israel's Mission
as Revealer of Yahweh

Further, Jesus' interpretation of his ministry along the line of the Suffering Servant meant that God's long line of revelation to Israel was reduced until it centered in one Israelite. The more the Word of Yahweh became one with Israel, the more it became one Israelite. Torrance's insight holds true:

the Suffering Servant . . . was primarily to be understood as the Word identifying himself with Israel, and becoming one particular Israelite, an individual personal Messiah.⁷

Jesus, as the Servant of Yahweh, filled Israel's functions as the revealer

⁶H. H. Rowley, The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), pp. 54-55.

⁷Torrance, op. cit., p. 312.

of Yahweh to the nations.⁶ The long revelation of God in and through Israel reached its climax and goal in Jesus. For it lay in the nature of the case that no group could perfectly reveal God. Only God's complete self-revelation in Jesus Christ could open up God to the nations. Coming through Israel and perfectly summing up Israel in Himself, Jesus completes the great redemptive purposes Yahweh had in electing Israel to be his Servant.

It was at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer at the Jordan that Jesus first identified Himself with the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah. Gullman in his monograph Baptism in the New Testament, has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that in Jesus' Baptism it falls to Him to undertake the role of the Servant of Yahweh, suffering vicariously for His people.⁹ In both Mk. 1:11 and Matt. 3:17 the voice from heaven repeats the word which in Is. 42:1 is directed to the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Gullmann in his Early Christian Worship feels that the connection with Is. 42:1 is even clearer in John's Gospel where "at least according to the reading of the Sinaitic, old Latin and old Syriac translation, the word is quoted more precisely: 'This is the ἐκλεκτός (chosen) of God.'¹⁰ Jesus knew that He was the Chosen One of God and that He was chosen for a far greater task than John's baptism.¹¹ The Greater One's greater task lay in

⁶Arthur S. Peake, The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament (originally published in 1904; London: The Epworth Press, 1947), p. 58.

⁹Oscar Gullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, translated from the German by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1952), pp. 15-22.

¹⁰Oscar Gullmann, Early Christian Worship (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1953), p. 64.

¹¹T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 65.

His coming to baptism to completely identify Himself with sinful and unworthy men. It is in this sense that Jesus' insistent words to the Baptist should be understood: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).¹²

This self-identification with the Suffering Servant begun at Jesus' baptism is continued in other vital parts of His public ministry. Immediately after His baptism and temptation experience, Jesus delivers His inaugural sermon in the synagogue service at Nazareth. He reads from the prophet Isaiah, deliberately turning to Isaiah 61, a poem often thought to be one of the Servant Songs. Preaching of the Good News, proclamation of release and liberty in the acceptable year of the Lord, together with recovery of sight to the blind are "quoted as the programme of the ministry of Jesus" (Luke 4:18-21).¹³ Jesus' answer to John's inquiry as to whether He were the Messiah is again answered in terms of Isaiah 61 (Luke 7:22). In the great ransom saying of Matt. 20:28 Jesus interprets His death as a self-giving ransom for "the many," a recurring emphasis of the Servant Songs.¹⁴ In Luke 22:37 Jesus quotes directly from Is. 53:12: "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors.'"

¹²Vincent Taylor, The Life and Ministry of Jesus (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 59.

¹³C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 94.

¹⁴Martin H. Franzmann, "A Ransom For Many: Satisfactio Vicaria," Concordia Theological Monthly, XIV (July, 1954), pp. 499-500, 509; Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, translated from the German by I. Erhardt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), pp. 148-150.

The evangelists witness to Jesus' being the Servant of Yahweh. Even when performing miracles and doing mighty acts the evangelist Matthew thinks of Jesus as the Suffering Servant in a direct quotation from Is. 53:4 (Matt. 8:17). Jesus' healing of the sick is compared to the tenderness of the Servant in the First Song (Is. 42:1-4) who "will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick" (Matt. 12:17-19). The failure of Jesus' "signs" to effect any general repentance among the Jews is attributed by John as a fulfillment of the opening words of the Fourth Song (John 12:37-38).

In the Book of Acts Luke reliably records the gist of the apostolic proclamation. Even in an abbreviated condensation the idea of the Suffering Servant being identified with Jesus is prominent (Acts 3:13; Is. 52:13).¹⁵

Jesus, the Suffering Servant, Assumes Israel's Mission as the Vicarious Sufferer

Jesus' interpretation of His mission as the Servant of Yahweh meant that He was the True Vine of Yahweh concentrated in one person whose task was the revelation of Yahweh to the nations. But also Jesus was the Suffering Servant. That meant that He was not only the true Israel but that He was also Israel's Savior by virtue of His vicarious suffering, revealing Yahweh precisely through His suffering.

This interpretation of Jesus' ministry furnished Him by the figure of the Suffering Servant flew full in the face of current Messianic views. The Jews of Jesus' time thought of the expected Messiah in terms of the

¹⁵G. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), pp. 22, 25-26.

Davidic King whom God would raise up for the rule and deliverance of Israel. This hope was based on the permanence of David's dynasty, whose house had existed down to their day. The future King of David's descent was chiefly a "national, political, historical character."¹⁶ The expectation was that this Davidic King would usher in another Golden Age similar to David's. The Davidic Prince would strike down all enemies of Israel, bring all nations under Israel's power and yoke, and rule from his throne over the powers of the earth.¹⁷ Taylor points out that the real foundation of the Davidic Prince idea of the Messiah was religious and "rested in the unwavering conviction regarding the faithfulness of God in "founding a Kingdom of righteousness of which Israel would be the expression and symbol."¹⁸ The chief political and national aspect ruled out the thought of a suffering Messiah.

Jesus' own consciousness of His Messianic task did not include any notion of a Davidic political Prince. He was the Bringer of Peace to the Jews, not their conquering hero. Jesus was a Hero in His own estimation, but the Hero of Zechariah 9:9 who "was a Messiah of peace because He rode the ass and not the war-horse."¹⁹ Nor would the ideal Messianic Age be ushered in by the intrigues of political contrivances. T. W. Manson has said it very well when he states that for Jesus it became increasingly clearer

¹⁶Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated from the German by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 105.

¹⁷Vincent Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1951), pp. 45-46.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁹Norman H. Smith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), p. 88.

that the kingdom of God does not come, cannot come, by defeating the kingdoms of the world at their own game; that the Messiah is not, and cannot be, the latest, loudest, and most successful of a long line of international gangsters; that Israel is not to be, and rightly understood cannot be, just another and a greater Rome.²⁰

Jesus' Fusion of the Davidic King, and the
Son of Man into the Suffering Servant

Rather, Jesus interpreted His Mission as Suffering Servant to both reveal Yahweh and to be the Savior of Israel by His redemptive suffering. This basic view of His ministry resulted in a fusion of the Messianic Davidic King, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh and the Son of Man of Daniel. Both the Davidic King and the Son of Man figures are in turn fused and brought together and interpreted under the conception of the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah. The lowly and self-effacing character of the Isaianic Servant of Yahweh determines the decisive control of Jesus' ministry.²¹

The bringing together and fusion of certain elements of the Davidic King and the Suffering Servant figures was something unique. It is not surprising that these two motifs were never brought together before the time of Christ, for they are two fundamentally different conceptions.²² For the Servant was not thought of as primarily a ruler, but a sufferer, whose very means and organ of service was his vicarious suffering. Several Old Testament scholars have noted kingly traits in the figure of the Servant,

²⁰T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah, p. 76.

²¹William Manson, Jesus The Messiah (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1952), p. 95.

²²T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah, p. 13.

and thus, though "not identical conceptions, they would therefore seem to be related conceptions . . . drawn from common roots."²³ However, these traits common to both the Davidic King and the Suffering Servant would not seem to belong to the regent side of the King's office, but to the regal manner in which the Suffering Servant endures his suffering.

Jesus draws together the conceptions of the Servant and the Davidic King by the refusal of all self-assertion and by a rigid hewing to the only tests of greatness that He would grant, those of self-sacrifice and service. Hence, as Manson has observed:

The King in this Messianic Kingdom is not above the law, but is himself the First exponent of it. The principle that he who would be greatest must be servant of all . . . who comes not to be served but to serve; and he who saves his life in first of all he who gives his life a ransom for many. He is highly exalted and is given a name above every name because he became obedient even to the death of the Cross.²⁴

Thus the Davidic King's regal glory and kingship is revealed in the lowliness of the Suffering Servant. The glory of Jesus' self-sacrificing love was the law of the realm and only unselfish service merited any mark of distinction.²⁵

The Son of Man figure of Daniel Jesus also interpreted and fused with the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah. Far from being a figure marked by lowliness and self-effacement, the Son of Man was a glorious and exalted figure. Daniel's description of the Son of Man has this exalted figure come "with the clouds of heaven" into the presence of the Ancient of Days

²³Rowley, op. cit., p. 86.

²⁴T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 209.

²⁵W. H. Rigg, The Fourth Gospel and Its Message For To-day (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), p. 67.

and stand as an equal before Him (Dan. 7:13). The Son of Man is given by the Ancient of Days a dominion that is eternal and a kingdom which cannot be destroyed, and he receives international acclaim and service (Dan. 7:14). The Son of Man stands in severe opposition and sharp contrast to the four demonic beasts, the powers of the world (Dan. 7:2-8,17). Nowhere is there "the slightest suggestion of any suffering of the Son of Man comparable with the suffering which is the most notable feature of the servant. . . ."26 Rather, Jesus' assuming the title "'Son of Man' is just about the most pretentious piece of self description that any man in the ancient East could possibly have used!"27

Again, as in Jesus' fusing of the Davidic King and Servant motifs, there is no evidence of any bringing together of the Suffering Servant and the glorious Son of Man before Jesus' time.²⁸ For Jesus the Son of Man is glorified only by the sufferings of the Servant predicted in the Fourth Servant Song.²⁹ It was in Jesus' fusion of the Suffering Servant and the glorious Son of Man that

. . . Jesus perceived the last consequences of the Messianic synthesis of lowly Servant and glorious Son of Man, thus accepting what Judaism in its retrospect upon its own prophetic history had refused to see or failed to grasp. In this view it is 'the man of sorrow,' the man who identifies himself with his sinful nation to the extent of making its guilt and tragedy his own (Isa. liii), who is raised to glory as the Redeemer-Man (Dan. vii.13-14). The Son of Man is thus revealed in his solidarity with, men, as their friend, helper, benefactor, vicarious substitute, and intercessor: so he becomes their Savior.³⁰

²⁶Rowley, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

²⁷Stauffer, op. cit., p. 103.

²⁸Rowley, op. cit., p. 85.

²⁹William Manson, op. cit., p. 112.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 117-118.

In Jesus' view of His ministry He was called to be the Messiah and establish the Messianic Kingdom of the Davidic Prince. But the way to this is marked out for Him by the endurance of the sufferings of the Servant of Yahweh, for it is only through the humiliation and self-sacrifice of the Servant that the eternal glory of the Son of Man can be attained. William Manson in his Jesus the Messiah has demonstrated with abundant evidence that all three figures share in the attributes of wisdom, judgment, righteousness and all possess the Spirit of God in the Old Testament.³¹ However, these parallels are too hidden to explain Jesus' unique interpretation of His ministry and His tying together the Messianic King of David and the Son of Man around the central, controlling motif of the Suffering Servant.

There is a compulsion to suffer in Jesus' view of Himself as the Messiah. He had come "to seek and to save the lost" (Lk. 19:20). The Davidic King in popular thinking would come to save politically, and it was an inner necessity resulting from the natures and callings of the Son of Man and the Servant as they converged in Jesus that redemptive suffering was necessary for Jesus to fulfill His calling as Savior.³² His suffering was necessary as a Messianic act. It was not just another piece of information, but an unheard of, revolutionary Messianic doctrine. "The Son of Man must suffer" is a constant refrain running through Jesus' ministry after the apparent failure of His public teaching (Mk. 8:31, 9:12,31, 10:33-34,45). Vincent Taylor traces the emergence of this

³¹Ibid., pp. 117-118.

³²Rudolph Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, translated from the revised German edition by Floyd V. Filson and Bertram Lee-Weolf (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 251.

distinctive Messianic teaching to Jesus' withdrawal from public teaching to the borders of Tyre,³³ for immediately after this the first notice of the Son of Man interpreted in the light of the Servant of Yahweh comes to light in the words: "He began to teach--ἤρξε διδάσκειν --then that the Son of Man must suffer" (Mk. 8:31). Jesus' prophecies of the Suffering Son of Man "were not meant as occasional sighs or marginal notes, but as a definite teaching, as a 'doctrina.'³⁴

The Gospels tell us that the disciples were always nonplussed when Jesus spoke to them of His mission in terms of suffering. They seem to have regarded a mission of suffering completely alien to the role of the Davidic King (Matt. 16:21-23).³⁵ For Jesus had made a completely new and radical synthesis in fusing the Davidic King and Son of Man into the humble, lowly figure of the Suffering Servant. Such a composite interpretation of the Messiah ran counter to all Jewish thought about the Messiah. The Synoptics, in claiming that Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, are very selective about the figures they use for Jesus as the Messiah.³⁶ They make "no use of the conception of mighty king, warrior, and judge so characteristic of Jewish Messianism both in its nation-historical and in its apocalyptic-transcendental form."³⁷ This new synthesis of Jesus would not only be unprecedented but would have appeared blasphemous to the pious Jew of Jesus' time.

³³Taylor, The Life and Ministry of Jesus, pp. 118-119, 110-111.

³⁴Otto, op. cit., p. 247.

³⁵Rowley, op. cit., p. 11.

³⁶Dodd, According to the Scriptures, pp. 28-103.

³⁷William Manson, op. cit., p. 95.

Such a reinterpretation of Messiahship was mysterious and strange both to the common people and to the disciples, but as Strachan has observed, it helped preserve Jesus' conception of His messianic task from being contaminated by current political and nationalistic ideas.³⁸ But even the peculiar slant given to the Son of Man figure by Jesus in His interpretation of the "Son of Man who must suffer" could be and was confused. People took the term in the familiar collective sense of "the saints of the Most High" who would fight at the side of the Messiah to cast the heathen empire of Rome and would be involved in a hard struggle bringing hardship, persecution, wounds and even death to those who fought with the Messiah.³⁹

The Merger of Son of Man and Suffering Servant in John's Gospel

St. John's Gospel also records this startling and unique interpretation of the glorious Son of Man of Daniel 7 in the light of the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah. Also in John the Son of Man's glorification comes precisely through the vicarious sufferings of the Lowly Servant of Yahweh.

The figure of the Son of Man as portrayed in John's Gospel is an exalted and glorified figure. In both Jn. 3:13 and Jn. 6:62 the Son of Man is the one who descended from heaven and ascends to heaven again. His origin is in the celestial courts of the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7.

³⁸R. H. Strachan, The Fourth Gospel (London: SCM Press, 1941), pp. 8-9.

³⁹T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah, pp. 80-81; Otto, op. cit., p. 255; C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 244-249.

Also the Son of Man in John shows a solidarity with "the saints of the Most High." The Son of Man descends from heaven and dies to draw all men to Himself (Jn. 12:32), and He ascends to heaven again, so that where He is the saints of the Most High may dwell also (Jn. 14:3).

In John's conception the Son of Man is merged with the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah. In Is. 49:5 the Suffering Servant's mission is performed to bring Israel back and to gather the nation together. Parallel is the Evangelist's comment, "that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:50-52). The Suffering Servant is to be a "light to the nations" in Is. 49:6, while Jesus the Son of Man is portrayed as the Light of the world who will never lead those who follow him into darkness (Jn. 8:12, 12:46).

Further, the exaltation of the Son of Man in John comes through the suffering of the Servant of Yahweh. In the Fourth Servant Song the Servant "shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (Is. 52:13), but this exaltation is understood in the light of the degrading and undeserved suffering of Is. 53:7-8. Likewise, the Johannine Son of Man "must be lifted up" (Jn. 12:24, 34). Like the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah, John's Son of Man is lifted up and glorified by His death and suffering.

The Divinity in the "I Am" Sayings of Jesus

The exalted and glorified position of John's Son of Man is shown conclusively in John 8:28: "So Jesus said 'when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.'" The phrase, "I am he," is loaded with ideas expressing Deity in the Old Testament. The Old Testament

"I am" sayings, so Rigg concludes, show "clearly the style of Deity."⁴⁰

C. H. Dodd holds that in John 8:28

The solemn affirmation, *ἐγὼ εἰμι*, here as elsewhere, is an echo of the *ἐγὼ εἰμι*, *אֲנִי יְהוָה*, by which in the Second Isaiah Jehovah declares Himself as the Self-Existent, and is to be taken as declaring that in Christ the Self-Existent is fully revealed.⁴¹

The famous words addressed by Yahweh to Moses at Mount Horeb show some of the stark majesty and power behind the designation "I am." In the prophetic writings "I am" is the accent of Divinity and carries with it an aura of tremendous power and mystery directed toward God's saving deliverance of His people. The magnificent work of creation is attributed to "I am" in Second Isaiah (Is. 44:24, 45:6-7). Yahweh, the God who alone holds the course of history in His hands, is the only God who can say, "I am the Lord, the first and with the last, I am He" (Is. 41:4, 27; cf. Is. 43:10-11, 15). "I am" is the God who blots out transgressions, not remembering sins (Is. 43:25), the God who alone can offer man comfort and protection from political enemies and conquerors (Is. 51:12-14). "I am" controls the wild seas (Is. 51:15), can allay men's fears and give them adequate grounds to trust in Him (Is. 51:15, 52:6). These "I am" sayings are in many instances followed by the assertion of God's uniqueness in such phrases as, "And there is no god beside me," as is the case in Deut. 32:39, Is. 43:10, and Is. 45:6. This uniqueness of Yahweh consists in the fact that He alone is the Savior and Deliverer of His people (Is. 43:11, 46:4).

In John's Gospel Jesus applies "I am" sayings to Himself twelve times. In Jn. 6:35 and 48 Jesus says: "I am the Bread of life." He refers to

⁴⁰Rigg, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴¹Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, p. 248.

Himself as "the living bread" in Jn. 6:51. He is "the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12), "the door of the sheep" (Jn. 10:7,9), "the good shepherd" who lays down His life for the sheep, which is the basis for deep intimate relations between flock and shepherd (Jn. 10:11,14). According to John 11:25 Jesus is Himself the resurrection and the life in that "Jesus comes to our world . . . from God Himself."⁴² This is succinctly summarized in I John 5:11: "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." In John 14:6 Jesus applies to Himself an "I am" saying of the broadest sweep: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." To say that Jesus is the Way in that or in so far as He is the Truth and the Life, is a profound and exclusive claim.⁴³ And finally, in John 15:1,5 Jesus applies to Himself the title: "I am the true Vine."

The imagery behind all of these "I am" sayings in John's Gospel bears the same force as the "I am" sayings of the Old Testament. Here the same style of speech found on the lips of Jesus was spoken by Yahweh in the Old Testament. The "I am" sayings of John, as in the Old Testament, stress Jesus' uniqueness and the fact that this uniqueness is expressed in His being the only Savior and Deliverer. Jesus' saying: "I am the Bread of Life," is parallel with Yahweh's giving of manna in the great series of saving Exodus events (Ex. 16:1-36). The Psalmists also reminisce over the fact that Yahweh gave bread from heaven to preserve their father's lives (Pss. 78:24, 105:40). Vincent Taylor suggests that behind the saying, "I am the door," stands the idea that there is a door leading to

⁴²Vincent Taylor, The Names of Jesus (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1953), pp. 141-142.

⁴³Wilhelm Michaelis, "ὁδός" in Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Friedrich (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1954), V, p. 84.

heaven and cites Gen. 28:17, the account of Jacob's dream: "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate to heaven."⁴⁴ The teaching that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep is implicit in such Old Testament passages as Is. 53:11ff.; Micah 5:2-4; Ezek. 34:23ff., 37:24. The undertone of these Old Testament passages describes Yahweh as one who would lead his flock Israel in mercy and love, and would never desert them, even saving them at the cost of His life.⁴⁵ The great name, the Light of the World, has many Old Testament applications to Yahweh's salvation as a light. The saying's roots are embedded deeply in such declarations as the Psalmist's, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1) and in the Servant Song of Second Isaiah in which the Suffering Servant is given by Yahweh as "a light to the nations" (Is. 49:6; cf. Is. 52:6). Also in the great religious revival foreseen in Is. 60:1, the nations are to arise and shine because the light of Yahweh has come upon them.

These parallels between Jesus' use of "I am" sayings in John and the "I am" sayings attributed to Yahweh in the Old Testament point to the fact that "Jesus speaks the language of Divinity."⁴⁶

The divine glory inherent in the "I am" sayings of Jesus is further demonstrated in Revelation. Here St. John sees "one like the Son of Man" with all the marks and trappings of the Ancient of Days described in Daniel 7. This startingly glorious figure speaks: "I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive forever, and

⁴⁴Taylor, The Names of Jesus, pp. 137-138.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 89-90.

⁴⁶Strachan, op. cit., p. 21.

I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1:17-18). All of this is "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1).

Most striking also are the similarities of the "I am" saying of both the Synoptics and John's Gospel with the cultic ascription of Hellenistic religion. Deissmann has cited "certain ancient examples of the same style as we find it in wide-spread use for purposes of non-Christian and pre-Christian religion."⁴⁷ He goes on to cite a pre-Christian text from Nysa in honor of Isis on the authority of Diodorus of Sicily who died in 27 B.C.

I am Isis, the queen of every land, taught by Hermes, and whatsoever things I have ordained, no one is able to loose them. I am the eldest daughter of Cronos, the youngest god. I am wife and sister of King Osiris. I am the first that devised fruit for man. I am the mother of Horus the King. I am she that riseth in the dog-star. For me was the city of Eubastis built. Rejoice, rejoice (or hail, hail), Egypt, that nourished me.⁴⁸

Further, the divinity of Jesus is proved by a series of witnesses in John's Gospel. Right from the beginning of the Gospel John the Baptizer points to Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29,36). At the end the beloved disciple bears witness (Jn. 19:35). Both the disciples who are in close and intimate contact with Jesus (Jn. 3:11) and a Samaritan woman with a shady past who has never seen Jesus before (Jn. 4:39) bear witness to Jesus as Son of Man and Savior of the world (Jn. 3:13-14, 4:42). Jesus' very works bear a constant witness to Himself (Jn. 8:12ff.), and so does the witness of the Father, for the Father and Jesus are one (Jn. 14:11ff.). Also, it is the work of the Spirit to bear witness (Jn. 5:37, 15:26ff., 16:13-14). In the light of these unanimous and undivided witnesses Hoskyns

⁴⁷ Adolph Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, translated from the German by L. R. M. Strachan (London and New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), p. 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

and Davey conclude that "the work of Jesus, his whole life and death, is not the fortuitous operation of a man, however high his calling, but the working of God."⁴⁹

The Synoptics also portray Jesus' astonishing claims to divinity in "I" sayings. Familiar is the imperious "I" that looms so large in the first part of the Sermon of the Mount: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old . . . , but I say to you. . . ." (Matt. 5:21:22; cf. Matt. 5:27-28, 5:31-32, 5:33-34). But the same pronoun is prominent in other passages in the synoptics. "I send you out" (Matt. 10-16) prefaces Jesus' commissioning of His disciples to preach the Good News of God's Redeeming Rule. It is "by the finger of God" that "I cast out demons" (Lk. 11:20; Matt. 12:28). "I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

These "I" sayings loom large because they "one and all attest a mission to the world which moves any thoughtful reader to ask, 'Who then is this who knows himself so sent, so authorized by God!'"⁵⁰ These "I am" sayings were spoken by one who was uniquely authorized--"the representative of the very Deity."⁵¹

Jesus assumes divine prerogatives in the Synoptic Gospels. He forgives sins (Mk. 2:5-10). As the Lord of the Sabbath He revises the laws of uncleanness in a manner that puts Him in a class apart.⁵² He is greater than Solomon in Divine Wisdom (Lk. 11:31), greater than Jonah, the

⁴⁹Sir Edwin Hoskyns and Noel Davey, The Riddle of the New Testament (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1952), p. 164.

⁵⁰A. M. Hunter, The Works and Words of Jesus (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1950), p. 89.

⁵¹Otto, op. cit., p. 163.

⁵²A. G. Hebert, The Throne of David (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), pp. 152-156, 183.

representative of the Old Testament prophets, (Lk. 11:32) and greater than even the Temple (Matt. 12:6). Rudolph Otto has summarized this testimony very well when he says that "the nimbus of the numinous surrounded Jesus when he came forward, spoke or labored; thus it corresponded with his consciousness of mission."⁵³

Jesus the True Vine of God

By using "I am" sayings in both the Gospel of John and the Synoptics which in the Old Testament were used only by Yahweh, and by assuming prerogatives that only Yahweh had any right to in Jewish thinking, Jesus was very boldly saying: I am the true Vine. I, the lowly, humble Son of Man whose glorification comes only through the lonely suffering of the Suffering Servant, am the real Israel of Yahweh, for I alone fulfill the covenant requirements of God's people. I am the true Remnant, the Real Israel, the chosen Vine of Yahweh, precisely because I am the Suffering Son of Man.⁵⁴ For it is the very nature of a Vine, especially the true Vine of Yahweh to suffer. F. B. Meyer has suggested that it is the very nature of a vine to be tied to a stake, to have its branches stretched out cross-wise and tied and bound.⁵⁵ The redemptive purpose of God entrusted to Israel is fulfilled in Jesus. The implication behind Jesus' self-designation as the Vine of God has startling implications, as Archbishop

⁵³Otto, op. cit., p. 164.

⁵⁴Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, pp. 410-411.

⁵⁵F. B. Meyer, Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1950 ed.), p. 261.

Temple observed. For the vine gives its life-blood. Small of flower, its fruit is abundant. Its brief moment of glory comes when the fruit is mature, but the grapes are quickly torn down and the vine cut back to the stem.⁵⁶ For Jesus to identify Himself with a Vine meant that He too would find His moment of glory in giving Himself to the uttermost--even to death upon a cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

As the true Vine of God, Jesus concentrated within Himself all of the redemptive and revelatory purposes God had had to successively abandon, as the nation Israel failed to live up to His covenant demands. Since Israel found herself incapable of making that perfect response of chased to God and man, the divine purpose could only find fulfillment in a Remnant. But, as even this narrowing of God's Vine into a Remnant failed, the Second Isaiah was granted the insight that Yahweh's redemptive and redeeming purposes for Israel would be concentrated in one individual who would fulfill all the significance of the Vine of God (Is. 53). And it happened. The Vine that God brought out of Egypt (Ps. 80:8) is Jesus, the True Vine (Matt. 2:15).

Jesus Incorporates Branches into Himself

Jesus, the Real Vine of God, is a vine that brings life to men. That life, dispensed from the cross of the suffering Son of Man, was planted as the tree of life on Golgatha and is a fruitful, self-perpetuating life.⁵⁷ Jesus Himself was the noble stately Vine of God that was fruitbearing and altogether true (LXX rendering of Jer. 2:21), that was fruitful and full

⁵⁶William Temple, Readings in St. John's Gospel (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1952), pp. 252-253.

⁵⁷Stauffer, op. cit., pp. 128, 133.

of branches (Ezek. 19:10-14), and that sent branches and shoots all over the world (Ezek. 15:1-6; Is. 27:2-6). The faithless nation Israel was a dead vine whose branches were worth nothing more than to be burned with fire (Ps. 80:16). Not even its wood merited saving the vine; the unproductive vine's fate was to be given to the fire for fuel (Ezek. 15:6).

As the Vine of God, Jesus came to give that divine life to others by incorporating them into the Vine of God. Thus the true Israel of God would be set up again by one who was not merely one of the sons of Abraham, but was before Abraham (Jn. 8:58) and one with the Father (Jn. 10:30). The sufferings and death and resurrection of the suffering Son of Man are the birthpangs of those branches who would be incorporated into the True Vine. The cross and the open grave prove to be the key that opens the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.⁵⁸

The Real Vine's Continuity with Israel

The Vine of God never went out of existence. It was the people of God with a continuous life, that was, however, constantly narrowed and limited by God's eschatological judgment.⁵⁹ Centering in and reconstituted by Jesus who was Himself the True fruitful Vine, the Vine had new branches grafted into its stock. The grafting was done by Christ who willed to be Israel, and who gathered up and recapitulated the whole life of Israel in Himself, and was, as such, the True Vine.⁶⁰

⁵⁸T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, p. 235.

⁵⁹A. M. Hunter, The Message of the New Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 80.

⁶⁰Torrance, op. cit., pp. 316-317.

With the grafting of new branches into Jesus, the true Vine, the Vine of God is no longer eschatologically narrowed and reduced, but becomes constantly wider and more inclusive. Though the new branches are still chosen by Election-love, there is no longer the corresponding progressive reduction there was before Jesus Himself became the True Vine.⁶¹

The Old Vine of God was in the paradoxical position of being at one and the same time the Vine of God and yet not being the Vine of God. The Old Testament captures this incompleteness and forward thrust toward completeness, as C. H. Dodd points out in The Bible Today:

The history of Israel consists of alternating phases of crisis and development through which Israel is shaped, under divine providence, into a people of God. All through, but notably in the latest phase, there is a sense of inclusiveness and a forward reference. Always Israel is the people of God, and at the same time is not yet the people of God in the fullest sense. The ideal attributes which the prophets applied to Israel are fully understood to await realization in an age to come. . . .⁶²

That the Church of Jesus Christ considered herself to be incorporated into the True Vine of God can be seen from the fact that she takes over the names of the Old Testament People of God. The Church is called "The Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), "God's own people" (I Peter 2:9), and they are designated a kingdom of priests dedicated to God (Rev. 1:6). Though others may be lineal descendants of Abraham, they are the seed of the devil, for the true Israel consists of those attached to Jesus and truly freed by Him (Jn. 8:31-59). They are children of Abraham because they follow the example of his faith (Rom. 4:12). They are the Remnant of

⁶¹John A. T. Robinson, The Body (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), pp. 60-61; Gullmann, Christ and Time, pp. 116-117.

⁶²C. H. Dodd, The Bible Today (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 70.

Is. 1:9 that will be saved (Rom. 9:27) and the people of the New Covenant of Jer. 31:31 (II Cor. 3:5). In Rom. 9:25-26 Paul quotes directly from Hosea 1:10 and 2:23, applying the titles "sons of the Living God" and "My People" to those engrafted into the True Vine.

Thus the Vine of God that truly became productive in Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection bore fruit by incorporating and ingrafting other branches that took over the positions and prerogatives of the old unproductive Vine the nation Israel.

Jesus' revelation of the Father is explicit and reliable. He states with authority that He has heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15). He bears witness with authority to what He has seen and so speaks with authority (Jn. 1:11, 32), and that authority comes solely from a will that is completely congruent with the will of God (Jn. 5:30). Having declared what He heard (Jn. 5:30), He declares to the world (Jn. 8:12). The Father's revelation of the Father is reliable because Jesus is the only God who is in the image of the Father—the "Image of the Father" (Jn. 1:14).

Jesus' revelation of the Father was not self-centered, but centered wholly on God and His glory.

Jesus was not to reveal and magnify the glory of the Father in the world of a world man, interested with His own self-justification, but to reveal and magnify the glory of the Father, revealing the Father about God's glory. He is not only faithful and obedient if His own glory means nothing to Him, but He is also true.

CHAPTER VI

THE LIFE OF DISCIPLESHIP RESULTING FROM INCORPORATION INTO JESUS, THE TRUE VINE

Jesus, the Perfect Revelation of God Calls People into Discipleship

Jesus, the True Vine of God, calls men to Himself because, as the Vine of God, He perfectly reveals the Father. To reveal Yahweh was an integral part of Israel's mission as the Servant of Yahweh. As the Vine of God, Jesus fulfills this mission perfectly.

Jesus' revelation of the Father is authentic and reliable. He makes known only what He has heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15). He bears witness only to what He has seen and so speaks with authority (Jn. 3:11,32), and that authority stems solely from a will that is completely congruent with the will of God (Jn. 5:30). Having declared what He heard (Jn. 8:26), His message is the truth (Jn. 8:10). And Jesus' revelation of the Father is reliable because Jesus is the only God who is in the bosom of the Father--the "Exogoto" of the Father (Jn. 1:18).

Jesus' revelation of the Father was not self-centered, but centered wholly in God and His glory.

Jesus was sent to reveal and accomplish the gloria dei in the midst of a world that, intoxicated with its own self-glorification, hears, and wants to hear, nothing further about God's glory. But he can only fulfill his mission if his own glory means nothing to him, and God's glory all.¹

¹Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated from the German by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 28.

Jesus' glory is not gained by slavishly seeking the honor of men. Man's honor and esteem was the Jewish leaders' chief concern, and herein lay the fundamental opposition between them and the Christ of God (Jn. 5:41-43, 7:18, 8:49-50).

But Jesus glorified the Father especially in His going the downward way of the Suffering Servant to the cross. No longer is there any thought of visible light or radiance accompanying Jesus in this unique way of glorifying the Father. Rather the equivalent of the divine presence is found in the actions of Christ, for in His redemptive actions "the power and presence of God are brought within human experience."² Hence in Jesus' total self-giving in going the way of the Cross the divine glory finds expression (Jn. 3:13, 34-35, 4:14, 5:26-27, 6:27, 32-33, 37, 39, 51, etc.).

In Holy Week, as the great acts of suffering and dying near, the hour strikes, for the time of glorification has come (Jn. 12:28). When Judas Iscariot leaves the upper room to betray Jesus to the authorities, Jesus is glorified, for the Passion is well under way (Jn. 13:13-32). Jesus' glorification of the Father through His death means that He has come into His kingly power. Pilate's question, "Are you a King?" (Jn. 18:37), is answered in the affirmative. But Jesus' kingship is unique, for His throne is the cross, His crown a plaited chaplet of thorns, and His scepter a flimsy reed. Yet tough soldiers reel backwards before His kingly splendor and majesty (Jn. 18:6). The greatest work of His reign is perfected in the victory cry "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30; cf. Jn. 17:4).

²C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp. 205-206.

The Election-Call of the Disciples

Jesus' call to discipleship is a sovereign, regal call. The initiative lies with Jesus. He is the one who extends the call that is issued only out of Election-love. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn. 15:16). Jesus' sovereign call issued to those He elected to become disciples is strikingly parallel to Yahweh's call to the Old Testament prophets. The similarity lies in the fact that "in every account of a prophet's call which we possess, the initiative is with God", as H. Wheeler Robinson has observed. Amos was "taken" from his ordinary occupation to become God's spokesman. Though Hosea's experience was radically different in form, still God's commanding call was primary. Before Hosea can speak in God's behalf he is commanded, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry" (Hosea 1:2). Isaiah's voluntary offer of service comes only after the overwhelming vision of God in the temple.³ In the Old Testament God's calling the prophets lies solely in His initiative.

In Jesus' choosing His disciples the initiative also is completely with Him. Jesus issues the absolute command, "Follow Me," to Peter, Andrew, James and John as they pursue their customary occupation as fishermen. But Jesus "takes" them from their daily work, gives them the absolute, sovereign call of love and "immediately they left their nets and followed Him" (Matt. 4:18-22).

What makes this absolute call to discipleship by Jesus unique is the fact that there is no direct parallel to it in Old Testament times. Renstorf

³H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 164-166.

points out that the Old Testament does not know the Master-disciple relationship. Joshua seems to have been merely the servant of Moses, and his authority to lead the people is given directly by God, not passed on by Moses. Though the prophets may have had companions who accompanied them and served them, they were not disciples but servants.⁴ The reason for this absence of any Master-disciple relationship is simple. Since Israel's religion is a religion of revelation, and since the prophets themselves are the spokesmen and servants of Yahweh who perform their services in exclusive dependence upon God, God Himself is their Master and Teacher.⁵

At Jesus' time the teacher or master never chose his disciples, but the disciple selected his teacher. Rengstorf cites an example of a pre-Christian teacher, Joshua, son of Perachja, who gives the advice: "Take to yourself a teacher. . . ."⁶ Jesus' choosing disciples instead of letting them choose Him as their rabbi went right against Jewish custom.

But in so doing, Jesus was aligning Himself with Yahweh's laying hold of His prophets and placing His absolute, sovereign call on them. "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (Jn. 15:16), Jesus says to His disciples. The disciples are chosen and elected because Jesus Himself is the Elect of God (Is. 42:1-7).

⁴Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "μωδγρjς" in Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1954), IV, 429-431

⁵Ibid., pp. 432-434.

⁶Ibid., p. 437

Election in Christ strictly implies that Christ is truly Elect, as the beloved Son in whom God is well pleased. The faithful become participants in His election.⁷

Jesus' choosing disciples out of Election-love is purely supernatural. Man does not strive to be chosen or to bring about or influence Jesus' choice. Jesus' call to discipleship is His gift to sheer sovereign grace.⁸

Hence, the disciples Jesus has called are His disciples. J. Y. Campbell has pointed out that the disciples are "nearly always called 'his disciples,' but not 'the disciples.'"⁹ At every stage of their association with Jesus, from the very beginnings as well as in more mature stages, Jesus poses the question, elicits the answers and forms their convictions. When the disciples give their matured conviction that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16), it is Jesus that poses the question, directs their thinking; the disciples only respond.

It is significant also that Jesus calls men to Himself. The content of His call is Himself. The entire center of gravity is with Jesus Himself.¹⁰ The bare command comes: "Follow Me," and men are expected to obey. This is further demonstrated in Jesus calling men to Himself in Matt. 11: 28ff. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you

⁷Kjester Stendahl, "The Called and The Chosen," The Root of The Vine, edited by Anton Fridrichsen, (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 68.

⁸Vincent Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1951) p. 10.

⁹J. Y. Campbell, "Disciple," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 69.

¹⁰Rongstorf, op. cit., p. 147.

rest." T. W. Manson sees this call of Jesus paralleled by many passages from Jewish wisdom literature.¹¹ Otto feels that Jesus here speaks as the personification of Divine Wisdom.¹²

The significant thing for us in his words, however, is that he does not summon men to Wisdom as a mere expert or teacher or even a pupil of Wisdom, but that he, like Wisdom, calls men to himself. He speaks in the name of Wisdom, indeed, as Wisdom itself.¹³

Further, Jesus' call to discipleship extends even to those men who do not seem to satisfy the conditions for fellowship with Him. For it was an ancient rule from the beginnings of the rabbinate that expressly restricted the role of disciple to the pious man.¹⁴ Men like the tax gatherer Levi receive Jesus' call to discipleship (Mk. 2:13ff.); tax gatherers were accounted "sinners" and hence were to be avoided by the pious (Luke 15:1). Moreover, Peter was conscious of this, for when he was called to be a disciple he shrank from that call: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

Discipleship as Abiding in God through Jesus

Jesus calls men to Himself. His person bears the weight of the relationship with the disciples. Not the power of His word, but the powerful impression of Jesus Himself upon Peter and His companions compels them to follow Him. (Lk. 5:1-11). Parallel with this is the account of

¹¹T. W. Manson, The Sayings of Jesus (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1954), pp. 185-186.

¹²Rudolph Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, translated from the revised German edition by Floyd V. Filson and Bertram Lee- Woolf (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 170.

¹³Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁴Rengstorf, op. cit., p. 447.

the calling of Nathanael (Jn. 1:45-49). The brief exposure to Jesus' person swings Nathanael from an aloof, sophisticated skepticism to an exuberant confession of Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel. Rengstorf sees the personal tie that bound the disciples to Jesus confirmed by their deep depression in the days between the crucifixion and the resurrection. The disciples found no comfort or source of power in Jesus' word after His death, for they were tied to His person. His fate had struck them low.¹⁵ Jesus was the Vine; the disciples were only branches attached to the Vine, and without Him they were helpless (Jn. 15:5).

The purpose behind Jesus' sovereign call that makes disciples is that they may "become the sons of God" (Jn. 1:12). The prologue of John's Gospel places the coming of Jesus Christ and the subsequent fellowship of disciples called by Him into a "cosmological setting" by showing that Jesus came in order to make all who received Him "sons of God."¹⁶ The goal toward which Jesus' call to discipleship leads is union and fellowship with God. To know the Father through the Father's Exegete is the aim of discipleship (Jn. 1:18). The object of the life of discipleship on the part of those "born of God" is that they may be "in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (I John 5:20). Discipleship aims at the Old Testament ideal of knowing God intimately: "Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:3). Being a disciple of Jesus is not just being personally related with Jesus, nor is it a sentimental following of Jesus, but it has its ultimate meaning and

¹⁵Ibid., p. 449

¹⁶Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and Noel Davey, The Riddle of the New Testament (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1952), p. 163.

connection in God. "In John the mysticism" of discipleship "advances from Christ to its final center in the Father."¹⁷ Discipleship is "with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3).

Such union with the Father is mediated in the highest sense. It comes about because the disciple abides in Jesus, the Vine, and the life of the Vine abides and remains in the disciple (Jn. 15:4-5).

The union of the faithful disciple who remains united in the Vine is of the same nature as the unity of the Son with the Father.¹⁸ The disciple who is united with Jesus, the Vine, is by that very union the object of an indwelling that becomes mutual. So Jesus says to His disciples, "I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn. 14:20). If the disciple loves Jesus and evidences this love by keeping His word, the "Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn. 14:23). In Jesus' High Priestly Prayer Jesus prays the Father that the glory given Him by the Father may in turn be given to His disciples so "that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one." This oneness of the disciples in turn demonstrates that the Father has sent Jesus and has loved the disciples just as He has loved Jesus (Jn. 17:22-23). The entire relationship is a "balanced subordination" between the Father and the Son, and the Son and the disciple.¹⁹

¹⁷Burton Scott Easton, Early Christianity, edited by Fredrick G. Grant (Greenwich: The Seabury Press, 1954), p. 132.

¹⁸Ingve Brilioth, Eucharistic Faith and Practice, translated from the Swedish by A. G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1939), p. 58.

¹⁹W. H. Rigg, The Fourth Gospel and First Message for To-day (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952).

This "subordination" of Father and Son, and Son and disciple is completely on the basis of dependence. The disciple "sees the Son and believes in him" and thereby has eternal life (Jn. 6:40). To see Jesus and to believe in Him is to see and to believe in the Father who sent Him (Jn. 12:44-45). There is no trace here "of the characteristically mystical idea of absorption in God or in Christ"²⁰ that was peculiarly common to the Mystery cults. Brilioth, following Reitzenstein, has well outlined the marked tendencies of the Mysteries toward the absorption of the devotee into the very being of his god. Typical is the following passage:

Attis, Orisis, Adonis were men, who died and rose again as gods. . . . If we become united with them, receive them into ourselves, or clothe ourselves with them, we have the most certain assurance of our own immortality, even our deification.²¹

Far from being identification with and absorption into Christ, the disciple's experience of "abiding in Christ" or being "in Christ" describes the most intimate fellowship imaginable of the Christian with the living Christ. The Christian lives in a Christ atmosphere.²² To be "in Christ" and to "abide in a Christ" means that the disciple's personal life is anchored in the events of Christ's career, past, present and future.²³ In short, Christ is life for the disciple (Phil. 1:21). For the disciple to be in Christ and abide in Him means to "have been raised with Christ," to have died and so

²⁰H. A. A. Kennedy, The Theology of the Epistles (London: The Duckworth Press Ltd., 1948), p. 122.

²¹Brilioth, op. cit., p. 51.

²²A. W. Hunter, Interpreting Paul's Gospel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1954), pp. 37-38.

²³Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, translated from the German by Floyd V. Wilson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), p. 218.

have life "hid with Christ in God" waiting to fully appear "when Christ who is our life appears" (Col. 3:1-4). "Christ lives in me." Because He was crucified, the disciple dies also, living a life whose dominant note is "faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Life in Christ, the Vine, is a completely new life (II Cor. 5:17) free from condemnation (Rom. 8:1). The life of God expressed by the terms "in Christ" and "abiding in Christ" is a present fact and reality. The disciple who sees the Father behind the word of Jesus "has eternal life" (Jn. 5:24); to keep the word of Jesus and believe in Him means that the disciple will never die (Jn. 8:51, 11:26). Thus "to depart" and "to be with Christ" in Phil. 1:23 are identical in meaning and content.²⁴ Those abiding in the Vine "have passed from death into the hidden life of Christ in God's own world (Col. 3:3). John's and Paul's teaching of "being in Christ" and "abiding in Christ, the Vine," is the fulfillment of Jesus' teaching about discipleship made possible by the resurrection, expressed in terms of the resurrection, in which the "whole invisible being of Christ is communicated to the believer."²⁵

How necessary and urgent "abiding in Christ, the Vine," really is for the disciple is evident that John uses the phrase eleven times in eleven verses in John 15. This emphasis is all the more impressive because failing to abide in Christ means not having life. The Lord says of the man who does not abide in Him that he is cut away from the Vine, cast out as a branch and withers (Jn. 15:2,6). The Greek words "cast forth," *ἐξαιρέω*.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 212.

²⁵ Anton Friedrichsen, "Jesus, St. Paul and St. John," The Root of the Vine, edited by Anton Friedrichsen (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), pp. 41-42.

and "withered", זָבַח וְזָבַח, are aorists pointing to the future judgment of mankind, but treating that judgment as already past, so certain and inevitable is it.²⁶ But the disciple is not cut off, but has already passed out of the sphere of judgment (Jn. 5:24) and need not face judgment for he that does the will of God abides forever (I John 2:17). The words "to abide forever" are always applied to disciples and believers in John, while those who reject Jesus the Vine and do not remain in Him as branches "abide in darkness" (Jn. 12:46) or "in death" (I John 3:14); theirs is the lot of the murderer who has not eternal life abiding in him (I John 3:15).

The Demands of Jesus' Sovereign Call to Discipleship

Renunciation

Jesus bound His disciple to Himself alone. He is the Vine; as branches, they must remain in Him, for without Him they are helpless (Jn. 15:5) and have no independent life of their own (Jn. 15:4,6). Jesus brings only Himself; He is the only content of His call to discipleship. His disciples are not asked to represent or champion a great cause. Rather they are asked to give up all for His sake and renounce everything that had seemed indispensable to them.²⁷

Since the disciples, those branches abiding and remaining in the Vine, Jesus, are the society called into being by the Messiah, they must take up the yoke of the Messiah. For the Jews, the recitation of the Shema was the

²⁶ Rigg, op. cit., p. 90.

²⁷ Rongstorff, op. cit., pp. 450-451.

equivalent of taking the yoke of God's Kingdom, and a man being delivered from the yoke of worldly cares and divided loyalties.²⁸ Likewise the disciple proclaims his loyalty to God, renouncing all for Jesus' call. This call to discipleship and the resulting relationship of abiding in Christ is his greatest treasure. His heart is set on God in Christ, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21).

This renunciation that Jesus asks of his disciples is a radical denial of self. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. . . ." (Mk. 8:34). Not deny things to himself, but to deny himself. This is "the same sense of 'deny' as when a father disowns his son."²⁹ Nothing personal should stand in the way of an undivided and whole-souled loyalty to Christ, the Vine and source of his life. The disciple enters Christ's life at all costs, even named by the loss of just those things most necessary for pursuing daily tasks. All symptoms of divided heart and loyalty are to be curbed at all costs.³⁰ Even family ties can not vie for first place in the disciple's heart. Christ is sole master (Matt. 10:37-39; Lk. 14:26); any attempts to preserve and guard his life will only result in failure, for he truly finds his life who gives it to Christ (Matt. 10:39). Hence, to be a disciple is to bring a divisive and shattering force into life; Christ brings a sword of dissension into the lives of those disciples who accept His sovereign call (Matt. 10:34). But because the disciple has renounced all in favor of Christ He can objectively place

²⁸T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 192, 211.

²⁹A. G. Hebert, The Throne of David (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), p. 176.

³⁰T. W. Manson, The Sayings of Jesus, pp. 156-157.

proper value on human interests. So he steadfastly seeks first God's Saving Rule and His Righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

Renunciation means counting closely and carefully the cost and consequences of discipleship. This is the import of the parables of Treasure Hidden in the Field and The Pearl of Great Price (Matt. 13:44-46). The same point is brought out by Jesus in the Lucan accounts of the builder who erects a tower only after first carefully calculating the cost and in the account of the king who reconsiders going to war against an opponent with vastly superior forces. Jesus concludes: "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:28-33).

Positively stated, the disciple renounces all and thereby makes a choice between God and some other ruler of his life. For "no one can serve two masters" (Lk. 16:3; Matt. 5:24). He can swear his undivided allegiance to only one. For the disciple the supremely important choice is whether to accept the Rule of God as it meets him in Jesus or be miserably destroyed in waging a useless and futile battle against God's sovereignty.³¹ To do so would align him with the Old Vine Israel that destroyed itself by hopelessly hurling itself against God's purpose. But for the disciple who abides in the Vine, no sacrifice is too great.

Thus the royal sovereignty of God is supreme in the life of the disciple attached firmly to the Vine of God, Jesus. For the disciple accepts God's regal sovereignty, bows to it in obedience. As Rudolph Otto has observed

³¹T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, p. 165.

It takes place now; not by defeat of enemies nor by the exercise of coercive royal power, but where men confess the royal authority by obedience to it, and in so far as they carry out the King's will.³²

Trust in the Father and Jesus

The basis of the disciple's renunciation of everything, including his very life, was the loving call of God to be a disciple of Jesus. The disciple did not renounce much in the hope that he would receive something much greater, nor did he renounce all and follow Jesus because of the material gains or rising prestige that would result.³³ The sole basis of the disciple's renouncing all and following Jesus centers in Jesus' drawing the disciple and his entire life into communion with Jesus' life.³⁴ That personal relationship is one marked by trust and faith in God's call to become a disciple of Jesus, the True Vine.

It is this whole-hearted trust and faith in the Father that is a dominant note in the disciple's relationship with Jesus. Committing his entire existence to Jesus by confessing Him to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16), the disciple has removed all outer concerns, cares and worries that would sever the relationship to God mediated through Jesus, the Vine. Just such anxieties about worldly concerns choke and stifle the Word in men's hearts (Mk. 4:18-19; Matt. 13:22; Lk. 8:14). To be a disciple is to trust unswervingly in God's sovereign Fatherly love. Concern for security in this world, worry about where the next meal or the next suit is coming from are symptoms of distrust in the Father's love

³²Otto, op. cit., p. 37.

³³Rengstorf, op. cit., p. 451.

³⁴Ibid., p. 453.

revealed by Jesus. Only the heathen Gentiles are worthy of such distrust. Those under God's Redeeming Rule can be certain that the Ruler can and will provide for all the disciples' needs (Matt. 6:25-33; Lk. 12:22-31). The disciples are to fear no one at all, not even those capable of killing the body. Disciples are to fear only God, and this fear is a reverent awe stemming from trust in Him who has counted even the hairs on their heads and values them as worth far more than many sparrows (Matt. 10:26-28; Lk. 12:2-5). Even in special crises the disciple comes under God's loving care. This is behind Jesus' reproach of His disciples in the storm upon the lake. He rebukes them not for cowardice or lack of courage, but for their lack of trust: "He said to them, Why are you afraid? Have you not faith?" (Mk. 4:40). Thus the disciple's courage and his unswerving trust are based on the Father's saving sovereignty that meets them in Jesus. Because Jesus has told His little flock not to fear but rather to trust in the Father's "good pleasure" ($\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\kappa\lambda\epsilon\upsilon$), the disciples are free from fear and the anxiety of divided trust (Lk. 12:32).

Obedience to the will of the Father

The third requirement and demand made by Jesus upon those He calls to discipleship is obedience to the will of the Father. He places these largest possible demands of total renunciation, trust and obedience upon His disciples only because He Himself is totally loyal, trusting and obedient to the Father. This is seen in Jesus' interpretation of His mission as Savior and Revealer of God in the light of the humble, lowly, confidently trusting and totally obedient Suffering Servant. Because Jesus is totally loyal, trusting and obedient to the Father, so the disciples are called by Jesus' perfect revelation of the Father in the

Suffering Servant to be totally loyal, trusting and obedient to Jesus, and through Jesus to God.³⁵

Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father's will because by His obedience to the Father's will, He revealed the glory-shine of God.

In the Old Testament God's glory was almost invariably associated with a brilliant, dazzling display of light. An excellent example of this conception of God's glory as brilliant light is Exodus 33:18-23. Here, before Yahweh reveals His glory-shine, He places Moses in a cleft of the rock, covers him with His hand, and then only reveals His back, not His face. Yet despite these elaborate preparations and safeguards, Yahweh's glory-shine is so intensely brilliant that the people can not endure to look at Moses without his wearing a veil. Dazzling light is also the chief characteristic of Yahweh's revealing His glory in Is. 60:1; Ezek. 1:27, 10:4, and 43:2.

In John's Gospel, however, God's glory-shine centers in Jesus, the revelation of God and His glory, Jesus is "the fountain of life" in whose light all men see light (Ps. 36:9). He is the Light of the entire world (Jn. 8:12) because He made Himself completely one with all men (Jn. 1:10, 3:19). Jesus is the Light of the world, but He reveals the glory-shine of the Father through perfect and total obedience to the will of the Father. Here again, the Glorious Son of Man and the Suffering Servant merge in Jesus' revelation of the Father. His entire life is one of total consecration to the Father (Jn. 7:18), and His whole aim is to honor the Father, for to honor Himself would amount to "nothing" (Jn. 8:49), for it is the Father who glorifies Him (Jn. 8:54). Jesus persistently seeks the

³⁵T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, pp. 210-211.

glory of the Father, avoiding self-glorification. He faults His Jewish opponents because they prefer the honor and glory of men rather than the glory of God (Jn. 5:44).

This glorification of the Father by total obedience to the Father's will made it possible for Jesus to reveal God's will as it really is. To reveal God's will for its own sake, and as it really is, was the motive behind Jesus' glorifying the Father. His obedient glorification of God caused men to see God's will not deflected or shadowed, but caused them to see the will of God "in all its radiance and white-winged purity."³⁶ Such a revelation of the Father's will implied both insight into God's very nature and will and the determination to represent God's purpose and mind.³⁷ This is confirmed by Paul when he says that God "has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time. . . ." (Eph. 1:9-10).

In the account of Jesus' temptation by the devil in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:13), it is Jesus' high sense of glorifying God and God alone that is most prominent. As the instrument whereby the glory of God would be revealed by His loyalty, trust and obedience to God alone, Jesus becomes the special target of Satan. The temptations are designed to undermine and impair Jesus' loyalty and dedication to the Father and His will. Satan tries to split the oneness of purpose between Jesus and the Father by tempting Jesus to give up the difficult downward way of the

³⁶William Manson, Jesus the Messiah (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1952), pp. 91-92.

³⁷O. S. Rankin, "Name", A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 157.

cross and become a bread King. The offer of all the kingdoms of the world aims at Jesus' loyalty to the Father, and invites Jesus to self-glorification, while Jesus' unswerving trust in the Father is the target in the invitation to leap from the Temple.³⁸ But Jesus refuses the temptations to self-glorification and self-will by each time putting the Father in the center of the stage.

each time the implication is made perfectly clear that even the Messiah is only God's servant--indeed, just because he is Messiah he must be pre-eminently God's servant. The Messiah is the chief man in Israel: then he must be the servant of all. But above all he must be completely and unreservedly the servant of the Lord (the Ebed Yahweh).³⁹

John's Gospel expresses this complete dependence of Jesus upon the Father in the portrait of the Son sent by the Father to accomplish His work and will in the world.⁴⁰ Jesus' mission comes from God, for He has no origin in Himself, but comes from God and was sent by God (Jn. 5:37, 7:28-29, 8:29, 42, 12:49). Because He was sent from God, Jesus does nothing on His own. He is completely dependent upon the Father, for He does nothing of Himself (Jn. 5:30, 8:28, 12:49-59). Jesus undertakes nothing apart from the Father (Jn. 5:19); even the very words He utters are the words of God (Jn. 3:34). The life He lives, He lives "by the Father" (Jn. 6:57). Jesus' mighty miracles of healing are no cause for self-glorification, for they are done in accord with the authority of the Father (Jn. 5:19,30), and are the Father's answers to Jesus' prayer that others may see the glory of the Father through Him (Jn. 11:40-42).

³⁸A. M. Hunter, The Work and Words of Jesus (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1950), pp. 38-40.

³⁹T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 57-58.

⁴⁰Anton Fridrichsen, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

Jesus' obedience is the obedience of the Suffering Servant (Is. 49:14, 53:14-6).⁴¹ Jesus' desire to "do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (Jn. 4:34) is quickened by the knowledge that His time is short, and that He must do the will of the Father while it is still day (Jn. 9:14). For the will of the Father finds its perfect fulfillment in the cross. God's will for Jesus reaches its final goal and realization in Jesus' going the way of the Cross. This is part of the definite plan and foreknowledge of the Father (Acts 2:23). Jesus' obedience even unto death (Phil. 2:6) makes Jesus the complete "Yes" to God and His will and the total "No" to all self-glorification (I Cor. 1:19-20). The glorification of the Father through Jesus reaches its peak and climax in the events of Passion Week. Then "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" through falling into the earth and dying (Jn. 12:23-24). This reflecting about His death causes a soul-searching agony quite similar to the Synoptic account of the agony in Gethsemane: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?' . . ." But this possibility of avoiding the Father's hour "is crushed, almost before it is uttered, into an act of complete surrender: 'Father glorify thy name.'⁴²

It is this perfect obedience to the Father's will that at the same time reveals the will of the Father that Jesus enjoins upon His disciples.

Such whole-souled obedience to God's will was the mark of the Old Israel's total loyalty to their God. The standard of obedience that Jesus set up was designed for the New Israel, the New Vine of God. As the old covenant demands were given to Israel as God's chosen Vine to be the

⁴¹Hebert, op. cit., p. 120.

⁴²Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, edited by Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), p. 245.

charter of her existence as God's loyal people, so Jesus places these demands upon His disciples.⁴³

But the demands placed upon those who have received Jesus' loving call to be His disciples are far more rigorous and more inclusive, for the Old Testament Vine of God interpreted God's covenant demands as limited in province and sphere. "A stipulated measure of obedience was demanded, which, if it were rendered, left men in a position to consider the rest . . . their own."⁴⁴ But Jesus' claims brought men face to face with God's sovereignty over all of life that demanded man's total life for God. Thus Jesus goes far beyond what was demanded of the Jews in Torah or tradition. The disciples are called to outstrip the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), and when they have done all they are still only unworthy servants who have done only their duty (Lk. 17:10). There is to be the willing offering and oblation of self that is more acceptable than burnt offerings of year old calves together with thousands of rams (Leviticus 6:6-8). For the disciple delights to do God's will (Ps. 119:6-8) and walks obediently in every way God commands (Jer. 7:23).

The disciple who abides in Jesus, the Vine, must become like a little child (Matt. 18:3). He is child-like in his unquestioning obedience to Jesus and the Father. Gone is the legal shiftiness and subtlety of the Pharisee with its theoretical, academic hairsplitting and the adroit handling of the Law of God that kept the Torah between God and the heart. This child-like simplicity that trusts and obeys the Father comes to the disciple not as the result of techniques.⁴⁵ The disciple is to receive

⁴³ P. W. Hanson, The Teaching of Jesus, p. 210-215.

⁴⁴ William Hanson, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴⁵ Otto, op. cit., pp. 119-120.

as a little child, not cause or produce (Mk. 9:37; Lk. 9:47). Rather, such child-like obedience to the Father comes as the God's gift of a new heart (Jer. 31:33-34, 32:38-40) and comes from the Father who gives all good gifts (Matt. 7:9-11).

This wholehearted, radically new obedience to God's will revealed in Jesus does not come by way of incidental decision, but by a radical conversion and turning in repentance. As God's gift to men, this new obedience is a radical change of mind which is beyond all human willing or achievement. But it is the self-surrender of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, that has the effect of bringing disciples to conversion from a wrong way.

All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all (Is. 53:6).

And at the same time that obedient self-surrender leads disciples from a willful choosing of their own path to a fellowship in the only way of obedience to the Father--the way of the Master.⁴⁶ Thus "the God of the New Testament wills our wills."⁴⁷

The obedient life of the disciple means accepting God's will as it really is, revealed in and by Jesus. The obedience to which Jesus calls the disciple who abides in Him is not just a pointing to some happy state in the future when God's will will be perfectly realized, but it is chiefly concerned with living a life of complete loyalty and unquestioning obedience to God here and now.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁷Stauffer, op. cit., p. 134.

⁴⁸T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, pp. 161-162.

The obedience of the disciple shows itself in his allegiance and service properly devoted to God, and not given over to the demonic forces. Jesus' power over the demonic, causing Satan to fall like lightning from heaven (Lk. 10:18-20), protects the disciple. The saving sovereignty of God checks the forces of evil in his life, for God's Saving Rule is set up where the finger of God, Jesus, casts out demons (Lk. 11:20; Matt. 12:28). The strong man Satan has been bound by a Stronger One; the Suffering Son of Man shatters the demonic power by His suffering (Lk. 11:21; Mk. 3:27). Thus the call to obedience for the disciple has standing behind it the call of Jesus' sovereign saving love that stands ready to halt and check the inroads of the demonic into the disciple's obedience. Without Him they can do nothing (Jn. 15:5).

We have seen how Jesus makes the largest possible demands upon His disciples by calling them to renounce all other loyalties in favor of complete loyalty to God and to unswervingly trust in the Father with a radically new and rigorous obedience. But He does this without lording it over them. He is master of all because He is most completely the Servant of God. And He is servant of $\alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha$ because He is their Master.⁴⁹

Jesus' Word and the Disciple

To abide in the Vine by virtue of living the life characterized by loyalty, trust and obedience to the Father implies that the disciple abides in Jesus' word. The words "I" and "word" are interchangeable in Jn. 15:4,7. "Abide in me, and I in you" is balanced by "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you." Only when men continue in Jesus' word, are they truly His disciples (Jn. 8:31). Hearing Jesus' word is connected with obedience to

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 210-211.

that word. Hence Jesus admonished the disciples in the Sermon on the Plain: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Lk. 6:46). Abiding in Jesus' word is more than merely listening to what Jesus has to say. It means as much as "Listen and obey." For Jesus is the "prophet" of whom Moses spoke: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet . . . from your brethren--him you shall heed" (Deut. 18:15). The obedience of the disciple is based on abiding in Jesus' word, active and speaking to the disciple. And if God has spoken and declared His will in Jesus' word, then the disciple's chief concern is how to be obedient to what God has to say.

In John's Gospel Jesus the Word is linked with and equated with the Lord of the Old Testament. Rigg sees in John's use of the verb *σκηνοῦν* in Jn. 1:14 a reference to God's Shekinah tabernacling and dwelling with Israel. The Word's tabernacling with men is parallel with God's Shekinah "which is derived from shakan, to dwell, and its origin is to be found in Exodus 40:34ff.; and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."⁵⁰ Jesus the Word, tabernacling among men as Savior, utters the words of God (Jn. 3:34) and is Himself the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-3,14) and speaks the life-sustaining words by which men abide in the Vine.

This word by which men abide in Jesus is an active Word. It is never purely verbal, but is given in acts and deeds, rather than in syllables and phrases. His word is never static or quiet, but always working.

In the Old Testament especially, God's word has an objective power. The prophets describe God's word as a destroying fire (Jer. 5:14;

⁵⁰Rigg, op. cit., p. 26.

Hosea 6:5), or as a hammer that smashes to bits even the toughest rock (Jer. 23:29). The word has a permanence that is contrasted with the withered grass (Is. 40:8).

The word is God's effectively creative act signalling that God Himself is at work. So God's word goes forth and does not return empty, but accomplishes the creative purpose of God (Is. 55:10-11). God's word is an effective creating word because His word is concerned with effecting His will. God acts through His word because He means to effect His will.⁵¹ God wills His will, and that will of God was perfectly expressed in Jesus, God's Word incarnate. The creative Word of God is Jesus Himself. The word of God can not be separated from Jesus' own person as the Savior perfected and glorified through death.⁵² Jesus, the creating Word of God, effectively creates obedience within the hearts of His disciples. Abiding in His love, the disciples keep His commandments (Jn. 15:10). Where the disciple abides in Jesus' word (Jn. 8:31), he will keep Jesus' commandments (Jn. 13:34, 12:15,21). The obedience of the disciple is due to Jesus' creative word of divine love. It is because Jesus has loved the disciples freely (Jn. 13:1) that they can obey His word and commandment (Jn. 13:34, 14:21). The disciple's obedience to Jesus' word, in short, is due to Jesus' creative word, not the disciples' deed.⁵³ God's seed, not man's deed creates obedience in the disciple.

The word of Jesus is dependent on Jesus' deeds. John records that Jesus' disciples did not understand or penetrate through to the meaning of

⁵¹Stauffer, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵²Fridrichsen, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵³Otto, op. cit., p. 118.



Jesus' words until His death (Jn. 2:32), His resurrection (Jn. 12:16), or the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost (Jn. 7:38). Because Jesus' word is "His historical revelation" of Himself, the disciples can continue in His word.⁵⁴ Both Jesus' words and works are essentially the same, for they both witness to the Christ who performs both in His Father's name (Jn. 10:25).

Jesus' word is also a word of judgment on unfruitful branches that do not abide in Him. Not to abide in Jesus, the Vine, is to be pruned away by the Father (Jn. 15:1-2), and to be cast out and wither (Jn. 15:6). However, if the disciple really abides in Jesus and His words abide in the disciple (Jn. 15:7), then the disciple will not be judged and cast out. All depends on abiding in Jesus' word.

Judgment comes on those who fail to "hear" Jesus' word and to have that hearing become fruitful and active in doing the word (Jn. 12:27; Matt. 25:31-46). The decisive thing to hearing Jesus' word is subsequent action on that word. To know the word is not enough; only those are blessed who do the word (Jn. 13:17). Not intellectual appropriation of Jesus' word, but taking it up into the will and actualizing it is what matters.⁵⁵ To be separated from Jesus' word means that the branch is severed from the vine, thrown aside, "excommunicated."⁵⁶ The word *ἐξαιρέω* is the same used in the excommunication from the Jewish synagogue of the man born blind (Jn. 9:34). To be severed from the Vine by the Vinedresser's

⁵⁴Fridrichsen, op. cit., p.452.

⁵⁵Rengstorf, op. cit., p. 452.

⁵⁶G. H. C. Macgregor, The Gospel of John, in The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 288.

pruning is disastrous for it means being cast into the furnace of fire (Matt. 13:41-42).

However, judgment is not the only function of Jesus' word. It is also a saving, cleansing word. For Jesus comes as both Savior and Judge. Both salvation and judgment are continuously operative among the disciples.⁵⁷ The word of Jesus, ignored and disobeyed, becomes the source of judgment, but that same word exerts its force to purify and cleanse through seeking, pardoning love.⁵⁸

The disciples are already made clean by the word Jesus has spoken to them (Jn. 15:3). This cleansing power of Jesus' word is illustrated in the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' miracles of healing. The Capernaum centurion's slave is healed by Jesus' word (Matt. 8:5-13), and the ten lepers are made clean by acting on Jesus' command, "Go, show yourselves to the priests!" (Lk. 17:11-19). He casts out demons and makes people clean by His word--*λογῶ*--(Matt. 8:11-17). And Jesus' word not only heals the paralytic but forgives him his sins, making him whole and completely cleansed from sin by Jesus' effective word, but he is cleansed in a more active sense, for the pruning and cleansing word, hard to bear and painful though it may be, releases the disciple for bearing more fruit (Jn. 15:2-3).

Where the believer obediently abides in Jesus' word (Jn. 8:31), and keeps His commandment (Jn. 13:34; 14:15ff.) there is Jesus' true disciple, raised from the status of a slave to a friend by Jesus.⁵⁹ The disciples

⁵⁷Hebert, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

⁵⁸Karl Holl, The Distinctive Elements in Christianity, translated from the German by Norman V. Hope (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), p. 16.

⁵⁹Rengstorf, op. cit., p. 453.

are given this status of "friends" by Jesus' sovereign word of love. He called them to be His disciples (Jn. 15:16), and as His disciples they were His slaves, doing menial tasks no thalmid would ever do for his rabbi. Although the thalmid was required to serve his master,⁶⁰ never was he required to perform such low and humble tasks as Jesus asked of His disciples when He sent them to get an ass for His Palm Sunday procession into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1-7; Mk. 11:1-7; Lk. 19:29-35), or to make the preparations for Passover (Matt. 26:17-19; Mk. 14:12-16; Lk. 22:7-13). Formerly slaves, Jesus' word of grace raises the disciples to friends. Jesus gives communion on equal terms to His disciples. But that communion of the disciples with Him expressed in "friends" is Jesus' own gift.⁶¹

Disciples are raised from the position of slaves to friends solely because of Jesus' love that causes Him to lay down His life for His friends (Jn. 15:12-13). "The use of the word 'friend' instead of the Synoptic 'neighbor' (Mk. 12:31) does not necessarily narrow the love-circle for whom Christ is thought to die: rather does it emphasise the intimacy of the love."⁶²

Somewhat akin to John's idea of the disciples' being Jesus' friends is the conception of believers being children of God. Christians are no longer slaves, but sons through God (Gal. 4:7), whose entire redemptive purpose centers in people becoming His children through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). Such intimate communion with God expressed in sonship and adoption of sons comes through the love that the Father sheds abroad

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 437.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 437.

⁶²Macgregor, op. cit., p. 289.

(I John 3:1). As sons of God, disciples need not fear, for they have God's Spirit and are able to cry, "abba, Father" (Rom. 8:14-17).

Though the disciple's obedience is not servile (Jn. 8:35, 12:36), the condition placed upon the disciple because he has received Jesus' love elevating him from slave to friend status is one of joyful obedience to Jesus and His word. Only if the disciple does what Jesus commands can he properly be called a friend of Jesus.

The fact that the disciple is obedient to Jesus' word suggests that the disciple by his obedience takes over the position and prerogatives of the Old Testament disobedient Vine. Israel was the qahal Yahweh. The fact that qahal stems from the same root as qol, the word for "voice," would seem to suggest that the Old Testament qahal was the community summoned by Yahweh's Voice, by His Election word of love, and that the qahal Israel was summoned to be obedient to that Voice and word of God.⁶³ But though called by God's voice, Israel rejected, ignored and spurned the word of God. But the disciple, abiding in the True Vine, Jesus, bears the fruit of obedience to Jesus and His word, and becomes a productive branch in the real productive Vine replacing Israel.

⁶³T. F. Torrance, "The Israel of God--Israel and the Incarnation," Interpretation, X, (July, 1956), 305.

CHAPTER VII

THE DISCIPLE'S FRUITS--LOVE AND MISSION

Love Peripheral in the Old Testament

Jesus' total command to love as He had loved (Jn. 15:12) was not without roots in the Old Testament. Love as the basis of ethical behavior lay implicit in the strong ethical bent Moses had given Israel's religion.¹ Such prophetic ethical summaries as Micah 6:8 and Hosea 6:6 had stressed that God desired and demanded mercy and upright dealings from the recipients of His Covenant-love. Deuteronomy had also emphasized chesed toward the down-trodden, under-privileged and sojourners, and often drew out the theological reasons behind such chesed: Israel was to love because God had loved her in a unique fashion in the Exodus.²

However, as it worked out, chesed was not the fundamental measure in relations between God and man and man and man. Rather, the Law was more prominent and determinative for ethical behavior. There was more than ample reason for this prominence. For the Law was what had made Israel a nation, and in the Law Yahweh bound His people to Himself with covenant bonds. This prominence of the Law stemmed from Israel's experience of God's salvation in history.

In Israel, therefore, the social order was not grounded in nature, nor was the law a natural law. Law and society were brought into

¹Fleming James, Personalities of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 222.

²Supra, pp. 11-13.

being through a special revelation of God in the setting of the covenant. A formless enslaved people who had no law were made into a nation and given a law. Consequently, Israel could rejoice in the law, for behind it lay the Giver, the redemptive God, who had set His love on a defenceless people for whom justice had been denied.³

Gradually, though, the emphasis shifted from the Giver who had bestowed Israel with the Law to the gift itself. The God who dealt redemptively with Israel and who also gave the Law became the God of the Law who also happened to deal redemptively. The emphasis had shifted completely. Such tendencies hardened even more under leaders like Ezekiel in the exile and Ezra after the exile. The Law and the high holiness of God loomed so large that even the idea that God could stand near to a heinous sinner was impossible.⁴ Love, if given any place, was set at the periphery, while the Law stood at the center. How peripheral love actually was is seen from the fact that Rabbinical Judaism distinguished between duties exactly regulated by Law and precept and other duties not regulated but left to conscience. Among the latter belonged the duties of charity and kindness to others.⁵ Even this qualified duty of love is further limited and hedged about by its "fundamentally centripetal character." The Jews of the Dispersion fashioned a system of loving the entire creation. But the Jew stood right in the center. Any surplus love was

³G. Ernest Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Background (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1950), p. 59.

⁴Walther Eichrodt, Man in the Old Testament, translated from the German by K. and R. Gregor Smith (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1951), pp. 17-23; Karl Holl, The Distinctive Elements in Christianity, translated from the German by Norman V. Hope (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), p. 18.

⁵William Manson, Jesus The Messiah (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1952) p. 83.

dispensed to proselytes, resident aliens, enemies, slaves, beasts and plants in that descending order.⁶ Love under Judaism was limited chiefly to one's fellow Jews and remained isolated from life, the demands of righteousness in the Law providing the foundation for Jewish ethics.⁷

The Love of God in Jesus

Jesus did more than issue a new command to love. If He had done nothing more than proclaim another demand upon men, He would just have been repeating the Old Testament sentences to love God and love the neighbor (Mk. 12:28ff.; Matt. 22:40). For even Jesus' formula for love of the neighbor was merely Hillel's famous rule couched in positive terms.⁸ Jesus' teaching of love, then, would not be unique, but would merely be a heightening of the demand to love and a deeper insight into its working out.

However, such is not the case. Jesus proclaims not merely a heightened demand to love but a new situation created by God's love. Because He is the Suffering Servant, His is a self-sacrificing love that is greater than any man's (Jn. 15:13). The assertion, "God is love" (I John 4:8) would never be emptier if love were interpreted in terms of a God's private sympathies that never prompted Him to purposeful acts of love.⁹ Jesus' constant contacts with the outcasts and apparent failures of life must be

⁶Gottfried Quell and Ethelbert Stauffer, "Love," Bible Key Words, translated from the German and edited by J. R. Coates from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), pp. 36-77.

⁷Ibid., pp. 40-43.

⁸Ibid., pp. 45-46.

⁹R. H. Strachan, The Fourth Gospel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1941), p. 36.

interpreted as the merciful, redeeming love of God in action. Also Jesus' numerous encounters with demons and unclean spirits is a corollary to this active, seeking love of God, and illustrates that God's warfare against the forces of evil frees those down-and-outs from the powers that would keep them down and out.¹⁰

Nygren in his monumental work, Agape and Eros, has described this active love of God incarnate in Jesus as being completely spontaneous and unmotivated by any effort of man and completely indifferent to any thought of human value, since all objects of God's love are sinners; far from recognizing human value as a reason for loving men, God's unmerited love creates value in men precisely because He loves them. Finally, God's love alone is the way man can come to communion with God, for from man's side there is no other way that leads to God.¹¹ It is in this conception of the holy God, not only as the God of suffering love, but specifically the Father who seeks out and creates the objects of His love, that is absolutely unique to Jesus' teaching of love. Here, Floyd Filson suggests, "there was something in the Christian idea of God which Judaism did not parallel."¹²

Jesus is the actualization and incarnation of God's love to men because love is the sole relation between the Father and the Son. Jesus' revealing God's love to men depends upon the Father loving Jesus. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (Jn. 15:9). Christ is loved

¹⁰F. W. Hanson, The Servant Messiah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 68.

¹¹Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, translated from the Swedish by Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 75-81.

¹²Floyd V. Filson, The New Testament Against Its Environment (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1952), pp. 21-22.

by the Father; He is the Son of the Father's love-- ἡγάπημένω -- (Eph. 1:16). Christians have been delivered by the Father "from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son-- τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ -- (Col. 1:13). That the Father loves the Son is proved by the Father's giving all things into Jesus' hand (Jn. 3:35; Matt. 11:25-27). Because Jesus is the object of the Father's love and the relation between them is one of love, there is no room for self-assertion or independent action on the part of Jesus (Jn. 5:19-20). Rather, the Father's love of Jesus channels Jesus' life and action toward the total revelation of God's love on the cross. Because Jesus willingly lays down His life, the Father loves Him (Jn. 10:17). This supreme self-giving of Jesus, in the words of Jesus, accomplishes the divine purpose: ". . . that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me." (Jn. 17: 23).

The Love of the Disciple

This new, unparalleled event of the divine mercy and love grounded totally in God's redeeming purpose and incarnate in Jesus is the basis of a new situation for the love of the disciple. "Jesus brings the forgiveness of sins, and when a man experiences that, a complete new power of overwhelming love is released within him."¹³

Jesus' commandment to love is a new commandment (Jn. 13:34). The newness "consists in the depth of meaning that love has received from what Christ is, from the manifestation of His Love toward the disciples. . ."¹⁴

¹³ Quell and Stauffer, op. cit., p. 49.

¹⁴ W. H. Rigg, The Fourth Gospel and Its Message for To-day (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), p. 85.

John describes Jesus as loving them to the end (Jn. 13:1), and laying down His life on their behalf (Jn. 10:11-15, 15:13). Thus the commandment to love does not stand unrelated to His revelation of God as love, but is closely related to it. For, as Karl Holl observes, "whosoever has been forgiven most will love God most; and he to whom God has remitted a great debt, will also learn mildness towards his neighbor."¹⁵ In God's love lies the newness of Jesus' commandment.

Thus, the commandment to love the neighbor is really anything but a "commandment" in the sense of a moralistic law. To view the commandment to love as something demanded, Nygren feels, would bar the way to understanding the nature of love.¹⁶ Far from being merely one of a number of rules as in the Old Testament, Jesus' command gives love control and gives it command over all of human dealings. The commandment to love replaces the Old Testament Law. The perfect had come and superseded the imperfect (I Cor. 13:10).

The result is . . . that it is no longer possible for the life of religion truly conceived . . . as a fully restored relationship between the soul and God, to come down again to the old moralistic level at which love has to divide the field with an infinite number of other imperatives. The Law is transcended by the fact that it is now grasped in its perfect norm.¹⁷

Really, the commandment to love as patterned on God's love in Jesus is without parallel. It defies codification to such a degree that it seems to say, "Just attempt to make another law out of this."

¹⁵Holl, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁶Nygren, op. cit., pp. 61-64.

¹⁷William Manson, op. cit., p. 84.

This commandment to love cut right across two popular and influential movements of Jesus' time, that of the Pharisees and that of the patriotic nationalists.

To continue to make the Law the standard of ethics, as the Pharisees did, involved failing to see that the Law was given by God to meet an emergency, and so had a temporary task to perform that pointed to its historical incompleteness.

The function of the Torah was to bring man's satisfaction with this world to an end, and to quicken in him a thirst for righteousness (Matt. 5.6). But the Pharisees can go about with all the appearances of satisfaction, for they have turned the historical function of the law into its exact opposite.¹⁸

Jesus' commandment to love flew full in the face of another popular movement, that of rising nationalism's patriotic violence as a protest against the Romans. Jesus' command to love must be set against the background of Roman domination and oppression under which the Jews chafed. The Jew's nationalistic fervor often led to explosive and abortive rebellions. Firmly refusing to recognize Rome's political supremacy, they tried to put forward the Jewish cause with armed resistance and guerrilla action. Jesus' commandment to love must be seen to be the exact opposite and alternate to the armed violence of misguided patriots.¹⁹

Jesus' command to love is first of all a command to love God above all things (Mk. 12:28-30; Matt. 22:36-38). This is the first and the

¹⁸ Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated from the German by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 91-92.

¹⁹ F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity, edited by F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (Reprint of 1920 edition; London: The Macmillan Company Ltd., 1942), I, 289-290.

greatest commandment. To love God totally is first of all a call to repentance, for it places the disciple next to God's sovereign holiness out of which He has condescended to love.²⁰ Such love is a complete devotion to God that comes by recognizing and accepting God's saving sovereignty. By accepting God's saving Rule operative in Jesus, the disciple shows His connection to the Real Vine, Jesus; for the degenerate Vine, Israel, had in general disregarded God's holy, sovereign love that stooped to save and thus was disobedient and disloyal to the claims that love placed in it. But the disciple by loving God belongs absolutely to God; his loving God as a result is pure and unfeigned, and he devotes all to carrying out God's will.²¹

This love of the disciple toward God is motivated in the highest degree by God's spontaneous, unmotivated love.²² But any other consideration but the divine source of the disciple's love to God places that love in jeopardy. To glow with eagerness and a passion for God means that the disciple must declare war on the pride that comes from riches (Matt. 6:24, 30ff.) and the pride that comes from position (Lk. 11:43; Matt. 22:6), for pride in any form threatens love to God.²³ Such love toward the Father is a signal that the disciple is abiding in Jesus, the Vine; he is abiding in Jesus' love (Jn. 15:9).

²⁰Rudolph Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, translated from the revised German edition by Floyd V. Filson and Bertram Lee-Woolf (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 52.

²¹Nygren, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

²²Ibid., p. 93.

²³Quell and Stauffer, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

The love of the disciple toward his fellowman and neighbor also is the result of abiding in Jesus, the Real Vine. Jesus' commandment to love one another as He has loved (Jn. 15:12) is obeyed and fulfilled by abiding in His love (Jn. 15:9-10). The disciple's love toward men stems from God's unmotivated love toward him. "We love, because he first loved us" (I John 4:19). So the disciple's love of others is measured by the absolute standard of God's unmotivated, unmerited love toward him. His love is not a subtle form of self-love that is deepened and projected. Recognition or credit from others play no part in the disciple's love (Lk. 6:32-34). Only the concrete need of people determines the love of the disciple. Since the disciple was loved and forgiven while a miserable sinner, he in turn loves people in their misery and misfortune; even the lowest socially and morally are objects of his loving concern (Matt. 25:31-46). Because God's love to him in Jesus is unlimited and unconditioned, unlimited and unconditioned love marks and shapes the disciple's dealings with others. Any question such as Peter's as to the limits of forgiving the brother indicate a gross misunderstanding of loving the brother. Such a disciple is spiritually immature who is more concerned with legalistic arithmetics than displaying an overflowing, unhampered working of love (Matt. 18:21-22). The question is not "How should I behave to those I naturally dislike", but rather, "When the love of God is shed abroad in men's hearts, what limits can it have?" This is central to Jesus' teaching about forgiveness and turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:43-48; Lk. 6:27-36).²⁴ For motivated by a Father's love in the concrete forms of sun and rain upon all mankind alike

²⁴A. G. Hebert, The Throne of David (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), p. 174.

(Matt. 5:44-45), the sons of God are commanded to likewise love all men without distinction or preference.²⁵

But Jesus' disciples are called to love one another especially. This is His commandment, "that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). The "greater love" that lays down its life for those it ties intimately to itself furnishes the pattern of the disciples' love one for the other (Jn. 15:13). Just as Jesus had called the disciples into a collective group, so the effect of abiding in the True Vine with other branches would tie each branch closely to the others.²⁶ For within the True Vine there is no room for unloving individualism or self-assertion; rather all are interconnected through the love of the True Vine, Jesus.²⁷ The disciples are not lone wolves, but are a corporate group, sheep under the same Shepherd (Jn. 10:14). The Father's love given the disciples in Jesus is shed abroad "that they may be one" even as the Father and Jesus are one in love and purpose (Jn. 17:11, 22-24).

Israel's Failure to Reveal Yahweh Universally

Abraham and his seed had been selected as the Vine of Yahweh for the purpose of bearing the fruit of blessing to all nations. Theirs was a universal missionary vocation to reveal Yahweh, the universal God.²⁸ They were to be the priestly people of God, rendering to Yahweh, the one true

²⁵Nygren, op. cit., p. 66.

²⁶Vincent Taylor, Forgiveness and Reconciliation (London: Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1952), pp. 127-129.

²⁷G. H. C. Macgregor, Eucharistic Origins (London: James Clark and Company Ltd., 1928), p. 57.

²⁸William Robinson, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1955), p. 22.

God, the worship and obedience which He could rightfully claim from all the nations of the earth. As a priestly people, Israel was forced to be exclusive.²⁹ Paradoxically, it was this exclusiveness that proved the source of Israel's missionary calling and the essence of her missionary strategy.

Out of this exclusiveness of Israel her missionary vocation springs. Pagans on their part notice this religion of Israel, that it appears to have a reality which other religions have not, and they perceive, more dimly or more clearly, that here is a God who is not made in man's image, but has made man in His.³⁰

Examples of the effectiveness of this exclusiveness are the conversion of Naaman the Syrian (II Kings 5:17), and the proselytes mentioned in the New Testament, the pious centurion of Capernaum (Lk. 7:5) and Cornelius the centurion of Caesarea (Acts 10:2). Such examples were just single instances of Zechariah's prophecy being fulfilled:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23).

However, Israel never seemed to have active missionaries who went out beyond Israel's borders to proclaim the unique greatness of their God, Yahweh. The one seemingly obvious exception is the book of Jonah, but as Father Hebert has pointed out

The Book of Jonah gives no programme of missionary activity; all that side of the picture is sketched in very lightly. He goes to Nineveh, but not to call the Ninevites to worship God, to pray to Him, to bring gifts and presents, to offer sacrifice; he has only one thing to say, and that is to warn them of impending judgment.³¹

²⁹G. A. Danell, "The Idea of God's People in the Bible", The Root of the Vine, edited by Anton Fridrichsen (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 28.

³⁰Hebert, op. cit., p. 76.

³¹Ibid., p. 93.

Even the Servant of Yahweh does not perform an active missionary career. Instead, He is given as a light to the nations, but he does not bring them light (Is. 49:6), and the coastlands and islands will wait for his Torah (Is. 42:4).

Israel's mission sprang out of an exclusiveness that found its origin in the greatness and universality of God. This exclusiveness, though a necessary part of Israel's religion, springs up in a very ugly and separatistic form after the exile.³² The saved Remnant concentrates more on its own salvation than on saving others, expends more effort on keeping itself pure than purifying others.

The Jews at Jesus' time, however, showed great missionary vitality. But their energy was misdirected. For Jesus comments that the Pharisees bound their converts to the Law and not to the God who gave the Law. Thus, though they "traverse land and sea to make a single proselyte," when they succeed, their converts become "twice as much a child of hell" as the Pharisees themselves (Matt. 23:15).

Israel was actually impotent to carry out her universal mission to the Gentiles. Though she realized God's high and holy purpose, she was never able to realize her potentiality as the universal Vine of the universal God. This high calling lay beyond her powers of fulfillment.³³ She was unable to realize the fullness of her universal potentiality until God's fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4).

³²T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 240-242.

³³Hebert, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

Jesus' Universal Mission

Jesus' universal mission was inherent in His interpretation of His ministry as the Suffering Son of Man. As the Suffering Servant, Jesus was to bring forth God's righteousness and justice for the Gentiles (Is. 42:1), to be a light for the Gentiles (Is. 49:6), and by His grisly suffering He would startle many nations and their kings (Is. 52:15). As the glorious Son of Man of Daniel 7, Jesus completely identified Himself with all the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:13,18).³⁴

Jesus Himself understood His mission as extending to all men. Salvation is from the Jews (Jn. 4:22), but there comes the time when other sheep that the Good Shepherd possesses beyond the sheepfold of Israel will be brought in, hear His voice and become part of the one flock under the one Shepherd (Jn. 10:16). In John's Gospel the Gentiles are specifically mentioned twice. In John 7:35 the Jews contemptuously ask if Jesus will consort with Gentiles while trying to make proselytes of them. This would seem to indicate some future time when the Gospel would come to the heathen. At the close of Jesus' ministry, some Greeks come to Jesus. Jesus, informed of their intention to see Him, exclaims, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The great purpose of His coming that He be lifted up has arrived with the coming of the Gentiles. By being placed into the earth like a seed, Jesus will die and bear much fruit (Jn. 12:20-24). Jesus' bearing the fruit of the Gentiles is dependent upon His death, resurrection and ascension. After these redemptive events He will draw all men to Himself (Jn. 12:30-32), and so bear much fruit (Jn. 12:24).

³⁴R. Newton Flew, Jesus and His Church (London: The Epworth Press, 1951), pp. 53-55.

The Disciples' Fruit-Bearing Mission

Jesus chose the disciples, incorporating them into Himself, the Real Vine, for the purpose of bearing abiding fruit. "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn. 15:16). That this fruit bearing was important and central to Jesus is evident from the accentuated emphasis He gives the idea. There is a definite progression--fruit, much fruit, more fruit.³⁵ But nowhere does Jesus even contemplate the possibility of just a little fruit. If a branch abides in the True Vine, it will bear fruit (Jn. 15:4-5). Apart from the Vine it is impossible for any branch to maintain life, much less bear fruit (Jn. 15:6).

Basically, the fruit that the disciple is to bear is other and more disciples. However, the disciple's love, faith and obedience also play a vital role in the disciples' mission. In the High Priestly Prayer Jesus shows the role love plays. The disciples' oneness has as its goal "that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:21). Their unity is compared with the perfect harmony and congruence of purpose between the Father and Jesus and is to be perfected through abiding in Christ (Jn. 17:23). The purpose of this loving unity of the disciples is "that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me" (Jn. 17:21). Strathmann feels that "Glaube und Gehorsam waren die

³⁵ F. B. Meyer, Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1950), pp. 262-263.

Frucht, die von Israel erwartet wurde. . . ."36 This faith, obedience and love of the disciples are signs that the disciples assume Old Israel's place as God's fruitful Vine.

However, the major force Jesus puts behind bearing fruit centers in the universal mission of the disciples. "Go, bear fruit" (Jn. 15:16) is strangely reminiscent of Jesus' last command, "Go, teach all nations, making disciples. . . ." (Matt. 28:19). The lasting fruit borne by the disciples are those who are brought into the Church by the disciples' effective witness to Jesus the Vine.³⁷ Branches in the Vine, the disciple's effectiveness rests in Jesus working through them. Though Jesus' work was confined during His life, the disciples' is world-wide. "The Lord divested Himself of life that He might invest them with the apostolate to the world. He set aside His life and set them to their work."³⁸ In this sense the disciples' work is greater than the Lord's (Jn. 14:12).

Theirs was a work of mission from the very start. "Their work was not study but practice. Fishermen were to become fishers of men;"³⁹ peasants were to be laborers in the vineyard. They were appointed reapers who "gather fruit for eternal life" (Jn. 4:36). By choosing from the wider circles of His disciples twelve to be His intimate companions, Jesus indicated that He intended the chosen disciples to play a real part in His

³⁶ Hermann Strathmann, Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Teilband IV of Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1951), p. 217.

³⁷ Adolph Schlatter, Der Evangelist Johannes (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1930), p. 305.

³⁸ Sir Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, edited by Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), p. 478.

³⁹ T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, p. 239.

mission to the whole people of God (Mk. 3:12ff.).⁴⁰ The composition of the Twelve was so varied that it provided a composite picture of the Jewish people as they were at Jesus' time. In all their divergence, though, the disciples are called by Jesus to serve all people as they are.⁴¹ Jesus may have deliberately chosen the name Apostle for His disciples as the exact contrary of Pharisees. For to Jesus the disciples "should be a saving Remnant of Deutero-Isaiah rather than the saved Remnant of Ezekiel. They are to be the preservative (the salt of the earth) rather than the preserved."⁴²

The disciples were sent by Jesus into the world, as He had been sent by the Father (Jn. 17:16), to bear the fruit of more disciples (Jn. 15:16). Their mission was essentially one of witnessing to Jesus, the True Vine, of which they were branches. Because the disciples had been with Jesus from the beginning, their mission was to witness what they had seen and heard (Jn. 15:27). The disciples were witnesses to what God had done in Jesus; they were not the bearers and preservers of a tradition.⁴³ Because Jesus had sanctified Himself by dedicating and consecrating Himself in death to God (Jn. 17:17), the disciples also were consecrated and set aside for witnessing to Jesus (Jn. 17:19). So in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer Jesus does not pray for the world, not because the world is past praying for, but because the world is the disciples' trust (Jn. 17:9). Rather

⁴⁰Rengstorff, *op. cit.*, p. 454; Flew, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-42. Vincent Taylor, *The Life and Ministry of Jesus* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 97.

⁴¹Rengstorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 455-456.

⁴²R. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 242.

⁴³Rengstorff, *op. cit.*, p. 457-459.

Jesus prays for those who will come to believe in Him through the disciples' witnessing word (Jn. 17:20). The overwhelming sense of urgency with which the disciples proclaimed their witness is not accidental or misplaced fervor. But as witnesses to what God had done decisively in Jesus, the disciples were gripped by a revolutionary view of history and their own importance in history.⁴⁴ God in Jesus had dramatically broken into history, had purged and cast out the dead, unfruitful Vine of Israel and in Jesus, His True Vine, had reconstituted and reorganized the Vine of God. Because they had been incorporated into the Vine by Jesus' call of grace, because they were obedient to that call by loyalty, trust and obedience to God and Jesus' word, and because they had witnessed God's great redemptive acts for all men in Jesus, they know that they were called as branches into Jesus, the Vine. Thus the Vine would grow and spread to all mankind as more and more branches bore the fruit of more and more disciples.

The disciples Jesus had chosen were to exercise their mission freely. Because they abided in Jesus' love, that love would be the mark of their service and witness. They were not chosen to act as censors over the rest of mankind, limiting the number of those incorporated in Jesus, the Vine. They had been chosen for a career of serving love whose distinguishing marks would be a deep and sincere humility and a boundless generosity. Because Jesus was lavish with loving grace to them, they were called to lavish that generosity upon all the nations of the earth.⁴⁵

Finally, the disciples were assured of Jesus' constant presence. The disciples as branches could never bear the fruit of more disciples without

⁴⁴Stauffer, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁵T. W. Manson, The Servant Messiah, p. 59.

Jesus' abiding presence remaining with them. If it had been left to the disciples to take up their task alone, their choice would have fallen elsewhere. Peter, Andrew, James and John might well have spent the rest of their days trying to rebuild the prosperous fishing business they had rashly abandoned to follow the prophet of Nazareth. But because of the resurrected Jesus' abiding presence with them such was not the case.

it is Christ who picks up the threads, Christ who takes the lead, Christ whose presence and power are constant inspiration and strength. The Resurrection means above all just this, that Christians do not inherit their task from Christ, they share it with Him.⁴⁶

It is Jesus' abiding presence with the disciples that gives them the readiness and confidence to perform His universal mission. For the risen Christ, the Real Vine, comes in full power to continue His work of bearing the fruit of more believers through the branches, His disciples. He Himself takes the lead, linking the work of the disciples with the work He Himself had started. But above all, comes the assurance of His abiding presence with them. "Abide in me. Abide in my love. Abide in my words" (Jn. 15:4-5,7,9).

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 98.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The entire redemptive movement in God's salvation history is essentially one. This one redemptive movement throughout the Old and New Testaments is the movement of God's redeeming love whereby He re-establishes the bond between Himself and people and restores them to communion with Himself. The sordid story of the degenerate Vine Israel is a story of that grace rejected, spurned and ignored, with God's corresponding judgments upon His unproductive Vine. The Old Vine was progressively pruned back and cut down until it centered in one Israelite, the real Israel and the True Vine, Jesus Christ. Those engrafted into Jesus, the True Vine, as branches are His disciples who complete and fill out the Old disloyal, unproductive Vine with their loyal fruitbearing.

The Vine is always God's Vine throughout redemptive history. The Old Vine belonged to God by virtue of His sovereign Election-love that selected Israel to be God's Vine solely out of sovereign selectivity. This Election-love was unconditioned, unmerited and undeserved, and as a result served as the sole basis of Israel's life as a nation. Even Jesus Christ, the True Vine, comes under the gentle care of the Father-Vinedresser's love. The branches engrafted into Jesus have their position in the True Vine only because of God's Election-call of love issued them by Jesus, the Elect One of God. Thus in both the Old and New Testaments the Vine belongs to God alone because He called the Vine into being by His sovereign Election-love God alone in the Keeper, Tiller and Husbandman of the Vine.

The communion with God expressed in the Vine-Keeper and Vine-branches metaphors and initiated by God's sovereign Election-love is sustained only

by God's loving gift of persistent grace. The Old Testament Vine continued to exist only under Yahweh's persistently stubborn chesed that guarded and cared for His Vine, Israel. Likewise, the branches continue to abide in Jesus, the Vine, only because He laid down His life in love and continues to generously pour His love into them.

The sovereign Election-love of God and the persistent chesed that sustained the relation between Keeper and Vine placed corresponding Covenant demands upon Israel. Because Yahweh existed before Israel, could do without her and could even reject her, He could also demand covenant responsibilities. Yahweh's persistently loyal chesed toward His Vine called forth the total response of faithful chesed from the Vine that signalled the Vine's totally dependent trust in her Keeper and involved absolute loyalty and obedience to Yahweh. Further, Yahweh's chesed was to serve to incite Israel to corresponding chesed toward all sharers of Yahweh's covenant grace, and would burst out beyond all national limits and barriers in Israel's universal mission to bless all nations. The particularistic selectivity that called Israel into active partnership with God in the covenant of grace for a universal mission became the rock of stumbling and offense to Israel. For the more intimately God disclosed His sovereign love for Israel, His chosen one, in preference to the many other nations, the more universal Israel's mission became. The more intimately the Vine was tied to God, the God of all, the more God's grace had to break through the limits of Israel, the nation, and reach out to all the world precisely through His Vine, Israel. Only then would Israel bear the fruit Yahweh demanded of His Vine in the covenant.

Paradoxically, the way that would fulfill these covenant responsibilities led her through death to life. Israel had originally been called

from death to life as God's Vine when Yahweh chose the Patriarchs. But as a nation and corporate people of God, Israel's only way to life as God's Vine involved her death as a nation. The nation Israel had to be severely pruned and cut down because of her continued rebellion against God's covenant purposes for her. Strangely, the making of Israel as the True Vine could come only through Yahweh's breaking her as a nation. The path to life as God's Vine led straight to Israel's death as a nation because the more God gave Himself in relentless chased, the more the unproductive Vine was forced to rebel and bear only the bitter fruit of sinful self-will. A symptom of this death became apparent in the growing contradiction between Yahweh's hopes for Israel as a saved Remnant and a saving Servant and Israel as she really was. As God's self-giving pressed relentlessly toward His ultimate gift in the Incarnation, Israel as God's Servant became blinder and blinder. Finally, Israel was cut down to the ground, and for all purposes she was dead, but out of her stump arose the True Vine. Israel shattered herself on the cross, for rejection of God's ultimate self-giving in Christ meant death to Israel. But these rebellious refusals of God's stubborn Covenant-love that nailed Jesus to the cross meant not only death for Israel as God's Vine, but also meant life for those who would recognize Jesus as the Suffering Servant, the only Way to the Father. The humble Root out of dry ground signalled the death of Israel as the Vine, but the way to life in Jesus, the True Vine, could come only after unfruitful, degenerate Israel had died. Paradoxically, Israel would become a light for the Gentiles only through its blindness to Jesus, the Light, and the True Vine incorporated in Jesus could come into existence only through the death of the Old Vine. For the real believing Israel, as well as for Jesus, resurrection could only come after crucifixion.

Jesus, the True Vine of God, is the center of gravity in all of God's redemptive dealings. All of God's redemptive action and movements in history expressed in the figure of God's care for His Vine converge and center in Jesus, the True Vine. Jesus is the Vine quintessentially. He willed to be the true nation Israel, the real saved Remnant and the saving Suffering Servant. In that He fulfilled the functions, tasks and missions of Israel as Nation, Remnant and Servant, Jesus recapitulated in Himself the whole life and career of Israel under God's redemptive dealings. When the Old Vine was cut down to the ground, there sprang up a new shoot, a new vine, for He who willed to be Israel was crucified by Israel only to rise again as the root out of dry ground. Thus Jesus is Himself the True Vine of God. By perfectly revealing God in His suffering as God's Servant Messiah, and by extending the call of Election-love to the entire world, Jesus, the Vine, grafts more and more branches into Himself. Thus it is in Christ, who is the real meaning and goal of Israel's life, that we understand Israel's ordeal in history and her role in God's purpose. For in Jesus Christ, the True Vine of God, the election of One for all becomes salvation for all through the rejection of the One by all. So the cross of Jesus, the True Vine, at the same time marks the cutting down of the Old Vine and the putting forth of branches through which all believers are incorporated into the Vine of God.

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