

June 10, 2022

Dear Members and Friends,

There are a number of sections in the Bible where God, in most cases Jesus Christ, showed His love, compassion and concern for the people He was dealing with at the time. The passages can help us understand how He treated His people during the ages and be examples for us today, since He is the same, yesterday and forever.

In the first section to be considered, we find there was a special relationship between Abraham and God. However, this relationship is not mentioned until 2 Chronicles 20:7 where we find that Abraham was a friend of God. This fact is repeated in James 2:23 where we read, "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God." Of course, when Abraham believed God, this belief resulted in him comprehensively obeying God, which we can read of in Genesis 26:5.

God's blessings for Abraham can be passed down to us, as we read in Galatians 3:7: "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham," and in Galatians 3:9: "So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham." And because of this blessing, we can also be friends of God.

Again, Jesus Christ spelled out what we must do to be a friend of Him and of God the Father. He said to His disciples in John 15:14-15: "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." So, to be a friend of Christ requires obedience.

God shows His gentleness in how He treated the children of Israel. Jeremiah 31:32 states: "...not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD." God in the Person of Christ pictures Himself as a loving husband leading His wife through the wilderness to the Promised Land of Canaan, all the time providing food and protection for her as we read elsewhere. Of course, Israel rebelled continuously, so God had to deal with her accordingly.

This idea of God leading Israel is repeated in Hosea 11:3-4: "I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them." Here God shows Himself as a compassionate loving Provider, as He says, stooping down to feed them. To think that the Creator of the universe would stoop down to feed His people is awe inspiring.

Of course, this was not the only time God fed His people. In the case of Elijah, God caused ravens to feed him daily. And when the brook he was staying beside dried up, God caused a widow's jar of oil and bin of flour to last for the length of the famine to feed Elijah and the family without running out (compare 1 Kings 17:6-7 and 1 Kings 17:14-16).

In fact, in the book of Hosea are some remarkable revelations of the love God has for His people—things that we can hang onto that emphasise God's love for His people. When we read Hosea 2:16, it reveals God's desire of how we should respond to Him. "'And it shall be, in that day,' Says the LORD, 'That you will call Me "My Husband," And no longer call Me "My Master.'" Continuing in Hosea 2:19: "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy..."

In the Authorized Version, the Hebrew terms *Ish'i* and *Ba'ali* are used in Hosea 2:16. When we investigate these terms, which are translated husband and master, we find it is even more inspiring than reading the English translation. *Ba'ali*, although it is the commonly used word for husband or master today, has the original meaning of a husband who lords it over his wife—a potentially abusive husband, one whom his wife had to submit to or be punished. It was also used for the owner of a slave. God does not want us to describe Him that way.

On the other hand, *Ish'i* means a friend, a helper, a companion. It is used in a very positive light. An *Ish'i*-husband is a husband who loves his wife, cares for her and cherishes her. Christ wants us to allow Him to love us and for Him to be our Husband, to be able to show His affection, His love, and His caring to us. Of course, as we read in Hosea 2:19, He wants righteousness and justice as that is His nature, but He also wants to show us lovingkindness and mercy as our husband.

But sometimes God knows that for our good, He has to correct us. We read in Hosea 11:8: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zebolim? [These two cities were destroyed together with Sodom and Gomorrah, compare Deuteronomy 29:23.] My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror." Here God does not want to punish Ephraim and Israel; it distresses Him to have to do so, but He knows that sometimes it is necessary if we are to ultimately be holy like God. As we can read in Hebrews 12:10: "For they (our fathers) indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness." That is God's aim for us, to share His holiness in His Family forever.

What do we read in the New Testament about Jesus Christ's compassion? We can read one example of many in Luke 7:11-15: "Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother."

Here Jesus Christ understood that this widow would have a difficult life without her son to support her. In the books of the Law or the Torah, Jesus Christ had given instructions not to afflict widows and to provide for their needs, and here He was fulfilling what He had commanded.

So, as we read the Scriptures, we can see that Jesus Christ has great love and concern for His people. He treats us as a loving husband treats his wife, and He also considers us as a friend, all with the proviso that He expects us to believe and obey Him. The examples referred to here, plus many others, should give us great encouragement.

With much love and concern,

Your brother in Christ's service.



Paul Niehoff (Australia)