

Running on Empty?

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God, The Father in Mission***The Father Who Adopts a People***

Introduction: The entire concept of the Trinity involved in mission lies at the heart of true Biblical faith. The truth of this issue is only obscured by the difficult reality – where one partner of the Trinity is present, the nature of God means that the other two persons must (by definition) be also. So in acknowledging separate roles where one partner or another does take the lead is not abrogating an exclusive involvement. Perhaps the simplest synopsis of the role of the Trinity in mission is that the Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit, and the Spirit sends the church.

1. Israel's God - Israel's faith can be regarded as a drastic and almost rationally inexplicable break with paganism. It was totally different, as such faith and this God came out of nowhere for He was regarded as:

- A. **The Creator** – devoid of assistance on intermediary He brings all things into existence, 'creatio ex nihilo' (Gen 2:4ff). The very name Yahweh, "He who causes to be what comes into existence."
- B. **The Anionic God** – no picture or image could portray Him, no ancient pagan faith could make this claim. The fierce prophetic denunciation of idols reflect the fact that no single male image displaying Yahweh exists.
- C. **The One and Only** – the Mosaic faith (Ex 20, Deut 5) strictly forbade the worship of any other. All those who claimed to be gods were regarded as nonentities deprived of any trace of real power. Unlike the Canaanites Israel's God has no consort (No word in Hebrew for 'goddess'), no mythology and no dynasty!
- D. **The Living God** - while ancient paganisms were polytheistic with vast pantheons of gods complexly arranged as personifications of nature, cosmic function or human characteristics. They were amoral and could be manipulated by ritual/cultic acts to provide 'appropriate' benefits. By:
 - Being present in fire or storm, but no limited by them (Ex 5:1-17)
 - Controlling sun, moon and stars, just as part of one universe! (Joshua 10:12-13).

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- Turning the tap on the rain (Judges 5:4, 21) – by this means He disciplines His people (Josh 7).

2. By Divine Appointment: He controls nature and history, floods Pharaoh's services, brings Jericho's wells tumbling down, paralyzes the Canaanites with terror, rebukes His own people, maintains the universe in being.

Here He stands, one God – invisible, unique, and yet He chose to enter into a covenant with Israel and make her His people. (Jer 2:2-3). He carries her as a child (Hos 11:1) and gives her His power and grace (Amos 2:9-11). Here emerged the notion of a people of God. Called to live under the rule of God.

In the Exodus event the Hebrews achieved nothing in and of themselves (Deut 4:34). There was no revolution or military intervention, no-one but Yahweh could claim credit, indeed their liberation was primarily to glorify His name, and only secondarily to end their slavery. So signs, plagues and Red Sea victory demonstrated Yahweh's power (Ex 14:17), so Egypt (more even than Israel), would know.

Now every revolution needs a leader, and Moses was the man. Like Joseph he was one of God's first cross-cultural missionaries as he was called by God to go into Egypt in order to bring His people out, to be the servant acting on God's behalf.

3. Fulfilling the Entrance Requirements:

Entrance to the Covenant: The nine steps to covenant.

1. **Give yourself** – normally symbolized by a coat or robe – e.g. Joseph
2. **Surrender your weapons** – indicated by the belt that held them together
3. **Cut the covenant** – divide an animal into two halves, back to covenant partner, and walk a figure of eight. Thus graphically picturing death if we break covenant, and dying to ourselves to walk with our covenant partner till death, e.g. Jacob (Gen 31:44-54)
4. **Blood brothers** – as blood of right arms comes together we vividly portray becoming one life.
5. **Exchange names** – merge partners name e.g. Abra(ha)m!
6. **Make a scar** – as a permanent reminder (e.g. Jacob)! circumcision
7. **Set the terms** – of the agreement
8. **Get a memorial meal** – wine is often the symbol (Gen 49:11)
9. **Make a memory** – plant a blood-stained tree, so our children will also remember.

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The faith of the patriarchs could be seen in another way, they each left to their descendants that which they did not even possess. Like Jacob and Isaac, Joseph was not the oldest son, but God wanted him to be the recipient of the covenant, and so God was with him – and the rest was history. So God worked out His purposes, He wanted Israel to be slaves so He could deliver them. He wanted them to have the land for the Canaanites were not worthy – He wanted them to fulfill His covenant.

4. With Rights of Sovereignty:

Exclusion from the Covenant: God was not Israel; God by her choice, but Israel was God's people, by His! He did not belong to her, but vice versa. He was the cosmic God, and no more territorial deity. It has often been said that if He cannot be Lord of all, then He will not be Lord at all! Abraham found faith, and was declared to be righteous, but faith must result in obedience. Israel was to be a covenant people – but under conditions.

In the covenant ceremony (Jer 2:23), God married Israel. This then was irrevocable. Israel was God's chosen and favored people. His love was seen in the signs and wonders of the Exodus, all marks for His hesed (grace), all unmerited are underserved. It points to God's loving kindness and steadfast love, when any word would be inadequate. But the covenant generated a hope that nothing could erase.

Now comes the word "if" (Exodus 19:5), and obedience was to be the requirement. God wanted to make Abraham to be the father of many nations (Gen 17:5), so He acted: in His election – love ('ahaba), His unconditioned sovereign love. He wanted to do so (Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

- In His covenant – love (hesed). But this is conditional. God existed before Israel, He could exist without her. He chose her, He could reject her. This love always exists in the love a duty of covenant, and it has to be two-way. If it is not – first the rain will stop, and then military sanctions, then exile.

Joseph first demonstrated the possibility of serving both God and Pharaoh, he accepted political responsibility, and recognized that God had sent him to save lives (Gen 4-5:5) and establish a remnant (Gen 45:7) so that eventually God's worldwide redemptive purposes could begin to be fulfilled through them (Galatians 3:8).

Abraham's seed were to bless the nations, but this was to start with Joseph. The model of their lifestyle was:

- Human rules upheld as divine ordinances
- Political leaders viewed as God's servants.
- People of God to live as "aliens and strangers." (1 Pet 2:11), and as co-operative citizens whose 'doing good' (1 Pet 2:15) silenced their critics.

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- Israel's Kings challenged God's rule and authority.

5. He Does Not Give Up:

God's electing grace does not give up on His people, or on His kingdom. Israel believed this, but for the wrong reasons! Her sense of security was misplaced - at no point in her history did Israel believe that she was anything other than the people of God - so she believed that her security was assured.

Old Testament faith retained a confidence which no tragedy, however total, could completely demolish:

- the prophets could not destroy it
- the events could only undermine it

This fatuous popular optimism was based on the premise that history, to the Hebrews mind, was eschatologically oriented - to their benefit. But the Day of the Lord was to prove to be, as Amos promised, a grave disappointment (Amos 3:12).

For Israel knew that she was heading for:

- A land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:8), unimagined place and plenty (Deut 33:13-17).
- A mighty nation (Gen 12:2), living in God - given greatness and security (Nums 23 & 24)
- A divinely promised leader and Messiah who all nations will one day serve (Gen 49:10)
- A destiny to serve God in the world (Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18).

All this was true. But only "if" Israel was obedient to God's call upon her. For the kingdom of Israel is not the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of Israel is under the judgment of God - and that judgment "is history". So Israel's hope became not Israel, but the nation under her messiah (Isa 9:107; Micah 5:2-4). For a Remnant would emerge to be ruled by the Messiah.

Instead Israel, or rather, Judah offered reform under King Hosiah (2 Kings 23:15-20), but social sins continued in the absence of real repentance. In the same way the Old Covenant points to a solution beyond itself - the creation of a new people, Jeremiah saw it, and then, so too did Jesus!

Conclusion: Similarly, we too long for this Kingdom of God. We may be tongue-tied in the language of faith, and might not term it like this. But when we desire the end of war and fear, the establishment of justice, order, brotherhood and morality, a community among nations - of what are we speaking if not a reflection of the kingdom? The Kingdom, where God's will is done on earth, as in Heaven.

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The missionary vision runs throughout the Old Covenant. It was right there with Abraham when he was sent out; it is there with Joseph, Moses. Elijah at Zaraphath, Jonah, Jeremiah, and on and on. But above all it is there in the principles – even more than the practices – of God's activities in human history. He is at work. And it shows. His heart is revealed, and it is a heart of love, and supremely a heart that freely gives.