

OpenTheo

July 20th: 1 Samuel 11 & 2 Corinthians 2:12—3:18

July 19, 2020



Alastair Roberts

Saul delivers Jabesh-Gilead. The glory of the new covenant.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

1 Samuel 11 Then Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh-Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you. But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.

2 The elders of Jabesh said to him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers through all the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to save us, we will give ourselves up to you. 3 When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the ears of the people, and all the people wept aloud.

4 Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen. And Saul said, What is wrong with the people that they are weeping? So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh. 5 And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled.

He took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen. 6 Then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. When he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

7 And they said to the messengers who had come, Thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation. 8 When the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad. Therefore the men of Jabesh said, Tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you.

9 And the next day Saul put the people in three companies, and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. 10 Then the people said to Samuel, Who is it that said, Shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men, that we may put them to death.

But Saul said, Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel. 11 Then Samuel said to the people, Come, let us go to Gilgal, and there renew the kingdom. So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal.

There they sacrificed peace-offerings before the Lord. And there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly. Saul has just been marked out as the Crown Prince of Israel.

He is the man who would inherit the throne. However he has not yet been anointed. In chapter 11 he must play the part of a judge first, and his first test is provided by Nahash the Ammonite.

The Ammonites are to the east of Israel. They threaten the Transjordan, and the Philistines threaten the southwest. Saul needs to deal with these twin threats.

Nahash's name is significant. It means serpent. Is Saul going to be the righteous Adam and protect the bride from the serpent? Will he crush the head of Nahash and his men? That's the question that we're asked at this point.

Nahash attacks Jabesh Gilead. Jabesh Gilead is some distance inside the territory of the Transjordan, and so to reach Jabesh Gilead, the Ammonites would already have won several victories and conquered many parts of the land. Jabesh Gilead is a place that we have encountered once before, in the Book of the Judges, where it plays a very important role at the end.

Jabesh Gilead was the city that failed to respond to the summons to fight against Benjamin after the Sin of Gibeah, when Benjamin was almost wiped out in the final

chapters of the book. At that point, Jabesh Gilead itself was destroyed, save for a remnant of its young women, whom the Benjaminites took as their wives. We should probably presume that Jabesh Gilead has subsequently become a sort of Benjaminite enclave within Gilead.

Now a man of Gibeah, Saul, is going to come to the aid of Jabesh Gilead. Painful loose threads in Israel's past history are now going to be woven into a tapestry of redemption again. What was Nahash's plan? The Ammonites' cruel humiliation of the men of Jabesh Gilead would be a sign of dominance.

It would render the men of the city unable to fight. They would not have perspective, as they would lose one of their eyes. It would also send a signal to other cities in the land.

Why do they give the men of Jabesh Gilead this window of opportunity to send men throughout the land, looking for help? Most likely because it gives them the opportunity to avoid the costly burden of siege warfare. The Ammonites are not expecting anyone to come to the rescue of Jabesh Gilead, and if the men of Jabesh Gilead will surrender to them after seven days, it saves them many costly and difficult months of besieging the city. For the slight risk that some people will come to their aid, this is a gamble worth taking.

When the messengers bring the news to Gibeah, the people all weep aloud. This might again recall the end of the Book of Judges, where there are a series of events where the people weep about the fate of Benjamin and the bitter situation of fighting with their brothers. We find accounts of this weeping in Judges 20, 23, 26, and 21, 2. The messengers do not seem to be aware yet that Saul is the crown prince.

Saul will also prove his fitness for the office of king before he is raised to it. When Saul hears the news, the spirit rushes upon him like the spirit rushed upon Samson and came upon the other judges. Saul acts in a judge-like capacity in this chapter.

And he cuts up the yoke of Oxen and sends them throughout Israel. This is a threat to anyone who won't assemble for their brothers in Jabesh Gilead. It is also an expression of the state of a divided nation.

They must come together if they are to survive the twin threats of the Ammonites and the Philistines. And Saul notably calls them to follow him and Samuel. Saul is acting as if Samuel's son.

This is reminiscent of the Levites' gruesome cutting up of his concubine and sending parts of her body throughout Israel in Judges 19, just as that was a means of summoning Israel to avenge her death. So the cutting up of the Oxen is a means to summon Israel to act on behalf of Jabesh Gilead. Recalling the summons of Judges 19 and 20 is important here, because the men of Jabesh Gilead had failed to respond to that summons and were

destroyed as a result.

Now Amman of Gibeah, the city that first provoked that summons in the Book of Judges, is sending out such a summons to Israel on their behalf. There is a sort of reversal of the past history here. Saul gathers 300,000 men from Israel and 30,000 from Judah.

There is much debate about the meaning of such large numbers in scripture. More liberal scholars have often suggested that they are exaggerated for rhetorical or literary purposes. Conservative scholars have generally taken them literally.

However, there are other possibilities, with arguments for and against. One example is the possibility that thousand in such cases refers to a large unit, a unit that may have been considerably smaller than a thousand men in size, much as a Roman sentry could be considerably smaller than a hundred men in some cases, depending on the type of soldiers within them and the period of history. For instance, a sentry of veteran soldiers might only have 30 men in it.

Whatever we make of this question, the number three is clearly important here, and that should remind us of the story of Gideon, who had 300 men, divided like Saul's troop here, into three companies. Like Saul, Gideon went into the middle of the enemy camp in the morning watch and scattered them. After having won the victory in this manner, Saul shows grace and magnanimity in victory.

He does not desire to destroy those who had originally opposed him. He draws attention to the fact that God had granted the victory. At this point, Samuel summons the Israelites to Gilgal, and there Saul is proclaimed king.

There is an epilogue to this story. When Saul was killed when fighting against the Philistines at the end of the book of 1 Samuel, it is the men of Jabesh-Gilead who went to recover his body. 1 Samuel 31, verses 11-13.

But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Besshan. And they came to Jabesh and burned them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the Tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

The story of Saul's kingship begins in Jabesh-Gilead and it ends in Jabesh-Gilead. A question to consider. What significance might there be to the fact that the Lord delivered Israel in this chapter through Saul acting more in the capacity of a judge before he properly became king? 1 Corinthians 2, verses 12-3, verses 18.

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ

always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity as commissioned by God in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit, for the letter kills but the spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death carved in letters on stone came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all because of the glory that surpasses it.

For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened, for to this day when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord who is the spirit. Our passage, which begins at the end of chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians, starts with an image of Christ as a victorious Roman general leading a triumphal procession. Paul and his fellow missionaries are like willing captives following in the train of the victorious Christ.

Like the incense that would accompany such a victory procession. Paul and his fellow

missionaries are like the aroma of the knowledge of Christ, diffused wherever they go, both among those who reject and among those who accept the message. The aroma of the knowledge of Christ also ascends to God, bringing the sweet smell of Christ to him, like the sacrifices of the old covenant.

This aroma has a dual effect upon human beings. For some it produces life as they respond in faith, while for others it yields death as they reject it. Paul expresses how serious and weighty his ministry is here.

He recognises that such a ministry is beyond human sufficiency. It is God alone who is the sufficiency of Paul and his companions for their work. In 2 Corinthians 3-4-6, Paul provides a deftly theological and richly intertextual defence of his apostolic credentials, which seem to have been called into question by his opponents at points.

To anyone who might suggest that he needs letters of recommendation, Paul counters with the fact that the Corinthian church itself is his letter of recommendation. It is a letter written by Christ himself on tablets of flesh rather than on tablets of stone. This alludes to the new covenant theme of God's writing on human hearts and replacing stone with flesh.

In Jeremiah 31-34, And in Ezekiel 36-27, This supports Paul's reference to himself and his missionary companions as ministers of the new covenant, of the life-giving spirit rather than of the death-dealing law. Richard Hayes observes of this. Paul's intertextual trope hints, in brief, that in the new covenant, incarnation eclipses inscription.

The new covenant is enfleshed rather than inscribed, and its ministry centres not on texts but on the spirit-empowered transformation of human community. Paul is not challenging scripture itself here. For Paul, scripture is a dynamically living and life-giving word.

Rather, he is challenging any ministry that is merely one of a disembodied text without the power to effect transformation. To elaborate his case, Paul turns to Exodus 24 as a passage that provides a powerful illustration of the nature of the glory of the old covenant. In Exodus 34-29-35, But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them.

Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out.

And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him. The

old covenant and its ministry were not without glory.

The face of Moses, the great mediator of the old covenant, radiated with such dazzling reflected glory that the Israelites could not bear to gaze at it. However, this reflected old covenant glory pales in comparison with the surpassing glory of the new covenant. The temporary and transitory glory of the old covenant is now being eclipsed by the enduring glory of the new.

Even if a ministry of condemnation displayed such glory, the ministry of new covenant righteousness should be expected to exhibit an overwhelming splendor. Paul writes that Moses covered his countenance with a veil, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end or the telos of what was transitory. The term telos has been taken by many to refer to the cessation of the supposedly fading glory of Moses' face.

When Richard Hayes argues that we should interpret the term as referring rather to the goal or the purpose of the transitory covenant, he re-words Paul's argument in the passage as follows. The old covenant is a reflection of the glory of the Lord, to the person transfigured in the image of God, who is the true aim of the old covenant. For those who are fixated on the text as an end in itself, however, the text remains veiled.

But those who turn to the Lord are enabled to see through the text to its telos, its true aim. For them the veil is removed, so that they, like Moses, are transfigured by the glory of God into the image of Jesus Christ, to whom Moses and the law had always in a veiled fashion pointed. The old covenant then was a covenant of veils, hiding the glory of God, the veil of Moses, the veil of the tabernacle, the veil upon the law.

The ministry of Moses, both the man and the text, was one of concealment, providing only glimpses of the glory that it harboured. The glory was present but was not manifest. The new covenant is a covenant of the removal of veils, the removal of the veil of the temple, the removal of the veil upon the text, and the unveiling of God's glory face in Jesus Christ.

It is also characterised by openness. What was formerly hidden and concealed is now declared freely. Paul's use of Moses in this chapter is a phenomenally dexterous deployment of biblical metaphor.

It is a juxtaposition of similarity and dissimilarity to considerable illuminative effect. While drawing a sharp contrast between old and new covenant and their respective ministries, the brilliance of Paul's argument is seen in the way that he discloses the deep affinity between Moses and the new covenant, presenting Moses as a witness to the glory of Christ, anticipating the unveiling to come. As Paul's argument unfolds, we begin to see that, while Moses may be a symbol of veiling, more fundamentally he is a symbol of unveiling, a point that surfaces in verse 16.

Moses' act of entering God's presence and removing the veil becomes paradigmatic for the experience of Christian believers. We all, who with unveiled face look upon the reflected glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. However, what was intermittently experienced by Moses in the old covenant is fundamentally and enduringly characteristic of the new.

When Moses turned to the Lord, this is an allusion to chapter 34 of Exodus verses 34-35, he removed the veil from his face. While the precise reference of the Lord might seem to be ambivalent here, without clear Christological meaning, in light of Paul's description of Christ in the verses that follow, the glory of Christ who is the image of God, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, etc., I believe it is not inappropriate to give it full Christological weight. That is to say, Paul may be suggesting here that the one whose glory Moses saw was Christ himself.

Paul's use of Exodus chapter 34 then is not just a clever allegorical repurposing of the Old Testament text to illustrate a theological point, but is justified by the deep reality shared by Moses and new covenant believers. The glory that Moses saw was the glory face of the Son, the glory face that has been disclosed in Jesus Christ. As with Moses, those who turn to Christ in repentance and faith are transfigured by the sight of his glory, with the effect of renewing them into his image.

Meredith Klein has written, Glory is again to the fore when the scriptures speak of man's recreation in God's image. The renewal of the divine image in man is an impartation to them of the likeness of the archetypal glory of Christ. The mode of the impartation of Christ's glory, an image renewal, is described according to various figurative models appropriate to Christ's identity, either as spirit lord or as second Adam.

Man's reception of the divine image from Christ, the glory presence, is depicted as a transforming vision of the glory and as an investiture with the glory. Moses is the Old Testament model for the former and Aaron for the latter. Beholding the sinny eye revelation of the glory face transformed the face of Moses so that he reflectively radiated the divine glory.

So we, beholding the glory of the spirit lord, are transformed into the same image. The end, or the telos of the old covenant, was the glorious renewal and transfiguration of humanity in the image and likeness of God. Moses manifested this glory quite visually, but he had to veil it for a people who weren't ready for it.

In Christ we see both the transfigured humanity and the glory face of God himself, which is the telos of all previous revelation. There is a pivotal move in Paul's argument in verse 14, which Hayes describes as follows. In verse 13, Moses is the prophet and lawgiver who veils his own face.

In verse 15, Moses is the sacred text read in the synagogue. The single intervening

transitional sentence tells us that the veil over the minds of the readers is the same veil that Moses put on his face. How can that be so? Because Moses the metaphor is both man and text and the narrative of the man's self-veiling is at the same time a story about the veiling of the text.

A crucial implication of this is that the veiled glory of Moses is not just the glory of Moses the man, but also the glory of the Old Testament scriptures that he stands for. Although Paul's earlier contrast between inscription and incarnation may have led some readers to expect that he was about to associate scripture with the veil concealing the transfigured humanity, he makes the critical move of associating scripture not with the veil, but with the glorious face of Moses that lay beneath it. Having carefully developed the multi-layered metaphor of the veiled Moses, Paul's stage is now set for the dramatic unveiling.

Richard Hayes remarks again, Moses' words are taken out of Exodus 34, 34, unveiled and released into a new semantic world where immediately they shine and speak on several metaphorical levels at once. Thus, rather than merely stating a hermeneutical theory about the role of scripture in the New Covenant, 2 Corinthians 3, 12-18 enacts and exemplifies the transfigured reading that is the result of reading with the aid of the Spirit. In other words, Paul uses the example of Moses' veiled face as a text that can be unveiled to show us the glory of Christ beneath.

Paul's argument, which has been steadily building throughout the chapter, now erupts into a magnificent crescendo. The face of Moses, the face of the law, is no longer veiled when he turns, or when we turn to the Spirit Lord, the Giver of Liberty. For those who turn to Christ in repentance and faith, the scripture is now seen to be the mirror in which we perceive the glory of the Lord Himself.

Through gazing steadfastly at the glory revealed in that mirror, we ourselves are transformed into the likeness of the one revealed there by the Spirit of Christ, from glory to glory. As our reading of scripture is transformed in this New Covenant manner, we ourselves are transformed by our reading, to bear the same image of the glory of Christ that we perceive within its mirror. The telos, or the purpose of the scripture, the transformation of humanity, is thereby achieved in us as the veil is removed from our hearts, enabling us to perceive the glory of the Lord that fills it.

The figural and Christological reading of scripture that Paul exemplifies here involves a sort of transfiguration of the text, as the glory of the Lord is encountered within it. What had formerly been veiled is disclosed and opened up in Christ, revealing His radiance throughout all its pages. The mirror of God's glory precedes a greater revelation yet to come, when we will see Christ face to face.

The transformation that we currently experience is a partial one, it is produced by a mediated encounter, it will be surpassed by the direct vision which it anticipates and promises. Seeing Christ Himself will be the means of our transformation. As 1 John 3.2

says, When He is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

There are times in our experience when we witness something truly and arrestingly beautiful, some natural sight, for instance, that takes our breath away, or a piece of music that is truly remarkable and transcendent. And on those occasions we are transfigured by the beauty that we witness. Our faces open up, cynicism, fear, doubt and distrust wash away, and we light up with joy, awe, wonder, hope and love, and we start to see things around us in a very different light, with a radiant glow to them.

This is but a limited illustration of the way that we will be transfigured when we see the glory of Christ Himself. It gives us the faintest glimpse of the great transfiguration that awaits humanity and all the creation in the age to come. And all of this is produced by the Spirit who communicates a freedom from God to us.

A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which Paul discloses the intense interrelation between the messengers of the gospel, the content of the gospel and the recipients of the gospel in this passage?