

Jesus heals a Boy with an Evil Spirit . . .

. . .but is there a

Deeper Significance?



Gustave Dore's dramatic painting (left and cover) shows Jesus, with arm upraised, commanding the evil spirit to leave the boy. The boy's father appeals to Jesus, gazing into the Saviour's face with an impassioned, imploring gesture. The other groups look on.

that I think Mark's account *really does* add up!)

At first sight, it seems straightforward to explain the "normal" details: these dramatic and graphic details certainly emphasise such things as the plight of the boy and the power of Jesus his deliverer. Perhaps they also indicate that Mark or his direct "source" was an actual eye-witness of the events and was therefore able to give these lively and convincing details. These are good and valid explanations. However, I would like to suggest a possible *additional* reason that these "details" are recorded and that is because of their deeper significance. I wish to explore this possibility in this article.

Mark 9:14-29 gives the account of Jesus' healing of a boy with an evil spirit. Two other passages, Matthew 17:14-18 and Luke 9: 37-43 describe the same miracle, but for now we will concentrate on Mark's version. I hope to illuminate this passage with the practical purposes of helping us to learn more about our Saviour, to have faith and to pray more effectively.

Mark's version of the miracle is the longest of the three and contains many *details* which I think are significant for understanding the passage as a whole. They are of two types:

"Normal" details, particularly about the boy's behaviour as a result of being controlled by the evil spirit - for example, throwing him into fire and water. In the course of the narrative, Mark builds up a remarkably detailed picture of the boy's condition.

"Unusual" details which are curious or which don't "add up" at face value. (It may seem wrong of me to suggest that Scripture should contain such things, so let me say immediately

Unusual details in Mark 9:14-29

- 1) In v.14, the crowd runs up to Jesus and greets Him, but why were they "greatly amazed"? Mark doesn't explain this.
- 2) In v.16, Jesus asks the scribes what they were debating with the disciples. The father replies v.17, but then Jesus answers *them* in v.19.
- 3) Why in v.19 does Jesus say "O faithless generation . . ." After all, a) the crowd had earlier *welcomed* Jesus b) only a relatively few people are involved in this account, not a *whole generation* c) the father had enough faith to bring his son to Jesus, and d) the disciples had enough faith to try to cast out the evil spirit.
- 4) How is it possible for Jesus to see a crowd running together in v.25, when the crowd has already run up to him in v.15 (and has had no reason move in the meantime)?
- 5) Why does the father say the boy has a dumb spirit (v.17) but Jesus calls it a dumb and deaf spirit (v.25)?
- 6) Jesus explains to the disciples that "This kind cannot be driven out except by prayer and fasting" yet, no one has prayed to God or fasted in the entire narrative!

The “unusual” details are also, in my opinion, very important and also point to a deeper significance. The table on the previous page lists some of these.

I think that there are good explanations for both types of detail, and in fact it is these very types of detail that can help us unlock a deeper significance to this healing miracle, as I hope to show.

Let’s remind ourselves of the “story so far”. Jesus with three disciples has come down from the Mount of Transfiguration (a “high mountain”) to be greeted with a scene of chaos and confusion resulting from faithlessness. This immediately reminds us, as many commentators have noted, of Moses’ descent from Mount Sinai in Exodus to be confronted by the idolatrous worship of the golden calf resulting from the faithlessness and apostasy of the Children of Israel.

I think that the subsequent narrative in Mark is very closely linked to the “Golden Calf” events in Exodus and this helps us understand and interpret Jesus’ healing miracle. This is an example of “intertextuality”. (See box below!)

Intertextuality: is the shaping of texts’ meanings by other texts. It is a term used in studying literature generally, but in Biblical studies, intertextuality means using Scripture to interpret Scripture by listening for quotations, echoes, and allusions to other Biblical texts. It includes explicit quotations (e.g. direct quotations of the OT in the NT), as well as more subtle uses of texts (as in this article!)

I want to take some time looking at these links. The “Golden Calf” passage in the Old Testament is Exodus ch. 32, particularly verses 19-29 (although Moses also recounts the episode in Deuteronomy 9:6-21 - with a somewhat different ordering of events).

First of all, let’s look “intertextually” at the similarity between what Moses does to the Golden Calf, and the behaviour of the boy with the evil spirit. (It may seem unlikely that there should be such a connection, but Paul clearly links idolatry and demons in 1 Cor. ch. 10 especially v.20. See also

Deut. 32:17.) The table (below) illustrates similarities between our two passages.

The first 3 points in the table seem straightforward. It would seem the demon is simply malevolent and is trying to do to the boy what Moses did to the Golden Calf. (This would make sense as Satan imitates the work of God, but in a way that causes harm and destruction.)

However, the fourth point is slightly different as here, the boy “imitates” or parallels not just what happened to the calf (now ground into powder), but also what happened to *the Children of Israel*. This suggests that the demon is making the boy “act out” more aspects of the narrative than just the parts that refer to the Golden Calf.

This suggestion is reinforced by the astonishing observation that the boy might also be re-enacting Moses’ destruction of the two tablets of stone! The table overleaf illustrates this. (Perhaps it is not too surprising though, as there is a close parallel in Exodus ch. 32 between Moses’ destruction of the two tablets and his destruction of the Golden Calf.)

I would like to suggest therefore that the demon who possesses the boy doesn’t just correspond to the calf who “possesses” Israel (as in 1 Cor. 10:20). Rather, it seems to me, the demon makes the boy behave in a way that re-enacts in Jesus’ day the destruction of the tablets and of the golden calf and of the Children of Israel drinking the polluted water.

The destruction of the Tablets of the Covenant

Similarities Between the Golden Calf and the Boy with the Evil Spirit Exodus Ch. 32 Mark Ch. 9

Moses burns the Golden Calf (v. 20)

The demon casts the boy into the fire (v. 22)

Moses grinds the Golden Calf to powder (v.22)

The boy grinds his teeth and wastes away (v. 18)

Moses scatters or flings the powder on the water (v. 20)

The demon casts the boy into the water (v. 22)

The demon also violently flings the boy to the earth (v.20)

Moses makes the Children of Israel drink this mixture of powder and water (v. 20)

The demon makes the boy foam at the mouth (vs. 18 and 20)

Similarities Between Moses' Destruction of the Tablets and the Boy with the Evil Spirit

Exodus Ch. 32

Mark Ch.9

Moses takes hold of the two tablets and throws them down* (v.19 with Deut. 9:17)

... wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down ... (v.18)

*Note: the Greek verb in the Septuagint translation (see box below) of this verse is the *same verb* as "dashes him down" in Mark 9:18

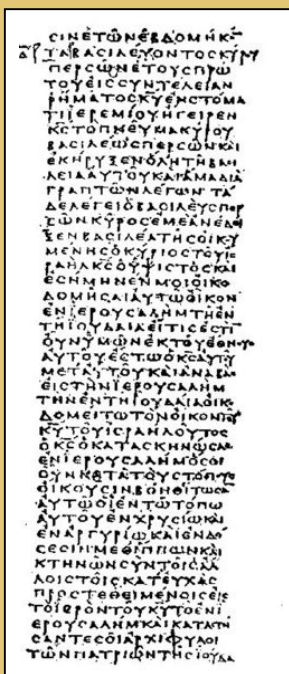
... and shatters (or crushes) them under the mountain (v.19)

The boy grinds his teeth and wastes away (v.18)

Now, at the time of Jesus, the demon is saying, "Things are no different! Israel is still in the grip of sin and Satan. Moses can condemn the sin (destroying the calf) but the Law (and with it the Covenant) has been broken (literally) and is powerless to remedy the real problem – which is the faithless and

The Septuagint

The **Septuagint** (pronounced [/ˈseptu.ədʒɪnt/](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7u3u3u3u3u)), or simply "**LXX**", referred to in critical works by the abbreviation **Σ**, is the [Koine Greek](#) version of the [Hebrew Bible](#), translated in stages between the 3rd and 2nd century BC in [Alexandria](#). It was begun by the 3rd century BC and completed before 132 BC. It is not always a strictly "literal" translation of the Hebrew Bible, yet, perhaps surprisingly, it is the version the New Testament writers frequently use when quoting the Old Testament.



Above: a portion of the 4th Century AD Greek Uncial Codex Vaticanus

idolatrous hearts of the people, and they stand condemned before God's righteous wrath. The demon is also saying that they deserve to die (he tries to destroy the boy by throwing him into fire and water). As such, the demon seems to be describing accurately Israel's continuing plight, in a way that is actually very similar to Paul's treatment of the problem of sin in Romans ch.7.

We have covered quite a lot of ground here! We have shown (I hope) that:

Mark's account is linked to the Golden Calf episode, and that

the boy therefore represents Israel: he is a living picture of Israel's sorry spiritual state throughout her history, but particularly at the time of Jesus.

Armed with these two facts, we are now in a position to "interpret" the *whole narrative* in Mark, and to draw out the deeper significance of Jesus' healing of the boy.

I think Mark's whole narrative, not just the details of the boy's condition, is deeply related "structurally" to the whole "Golden Calf" narrative in Exodus – that is, the "intertextual" connections are very strong indeed.

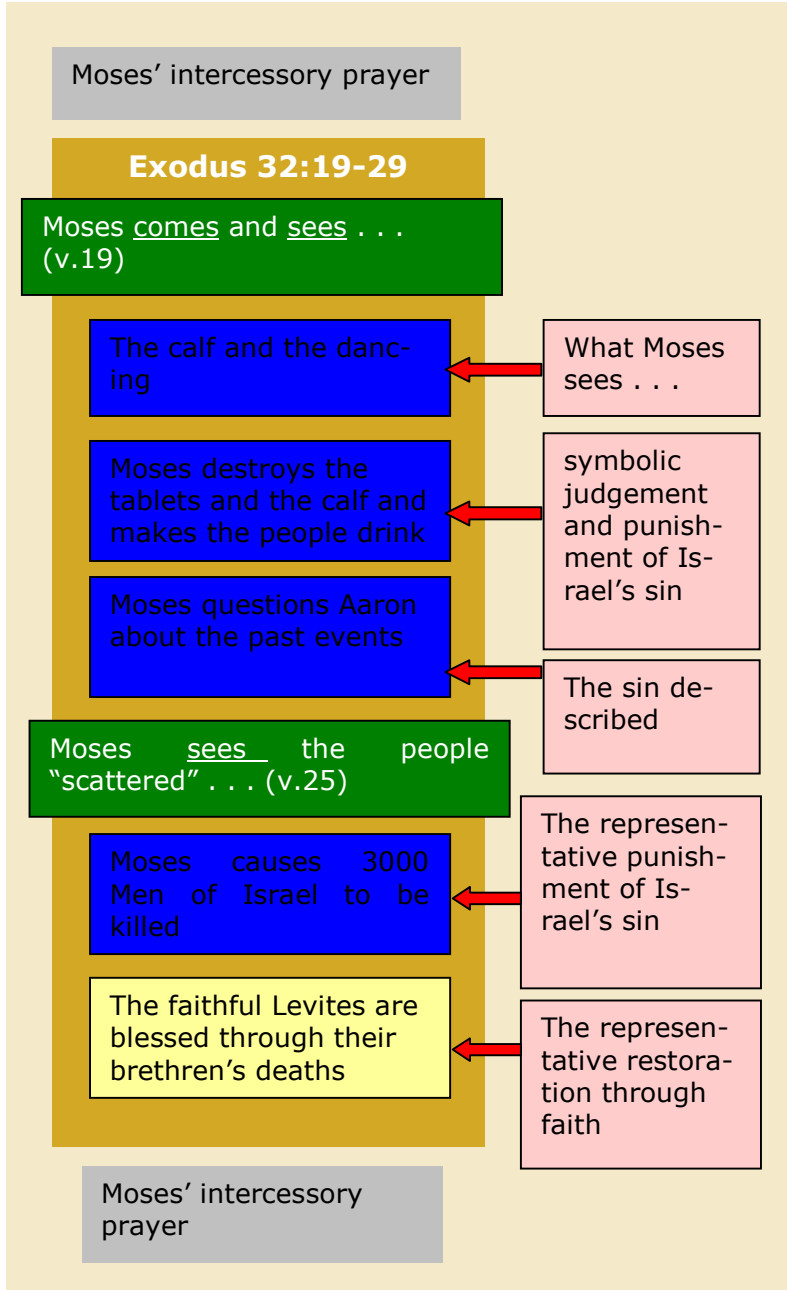
To show this, I have given a possible "outline structure" of the Exodus account on the next page. The green boxes act as structural "markers" separating different sections. Most of the other boxes are blue, but one is yellow - the yellow one shows the one example of Israel's faithful obedience in the whole episode. We note also that both before and after the account, Moses offers intercessory prayers to God. These are shown in grey.

It is because of Moses' successful prayers that

symbolic action – showing that the Law and the Covenant had been broken. The destruction of the calf is a symbol of the punishment that Israel deserved – as shown by the Israelites drinking the polluted water

The son or child then I think represents Israel throughout her history right up to the time of Jesus. His sorry condition is a picture of Israel damaged by its besetting sin of faithless idolatry which it has had "from childhood" -i.e. from the day God brought them out of Egypt. This is the *deeper significance* of the boy and his condition.

Outline structure of the Exodus Narrative



the nation is saved from God's wrath and only a representative number of Israelites – 3000 – are killed. (However, we should note that they were only spared in an "earthly, physical" sense – their hearts were unchanged and they continued to rebel and that whole faithless generation later perished in the wilderness.)

As has been mentioned earlier then, the destruction of the tablets and of the calf are therefore *symbolic* actions representing the breaking of the Law and the punishment that Israel deserves – as indicated by Israel's drinking of the polluted water.

Now we come to Mark's narrative, which follows the structure of the Exodus narrative, but is more complicated because Jesus brings:

healing to the boy and

faith to the father (and possibly others as well)

-so there are really two interwoven stories.

Before we start, I would like to mention one more technical term. Moses is said to be a "type" of Christ because aspects of Moses' life are repeated in an enhanced way and their full meaning brought out in the life and work of Jesus Christ. This is an example of *typology* (see box below). We will see this repeatedly in what follows.

Typology

A type may be defined as:

An Old Testament person, event, or thing having historical reality and designed by God to prefigure (foreshadow) in a preparatory way a real person, event, or thing in the New Testament (the antitype) that corresponds to and fulfils the type.

(The "truth", as usual, is more complicated than this, but this is a useful basic definition!)

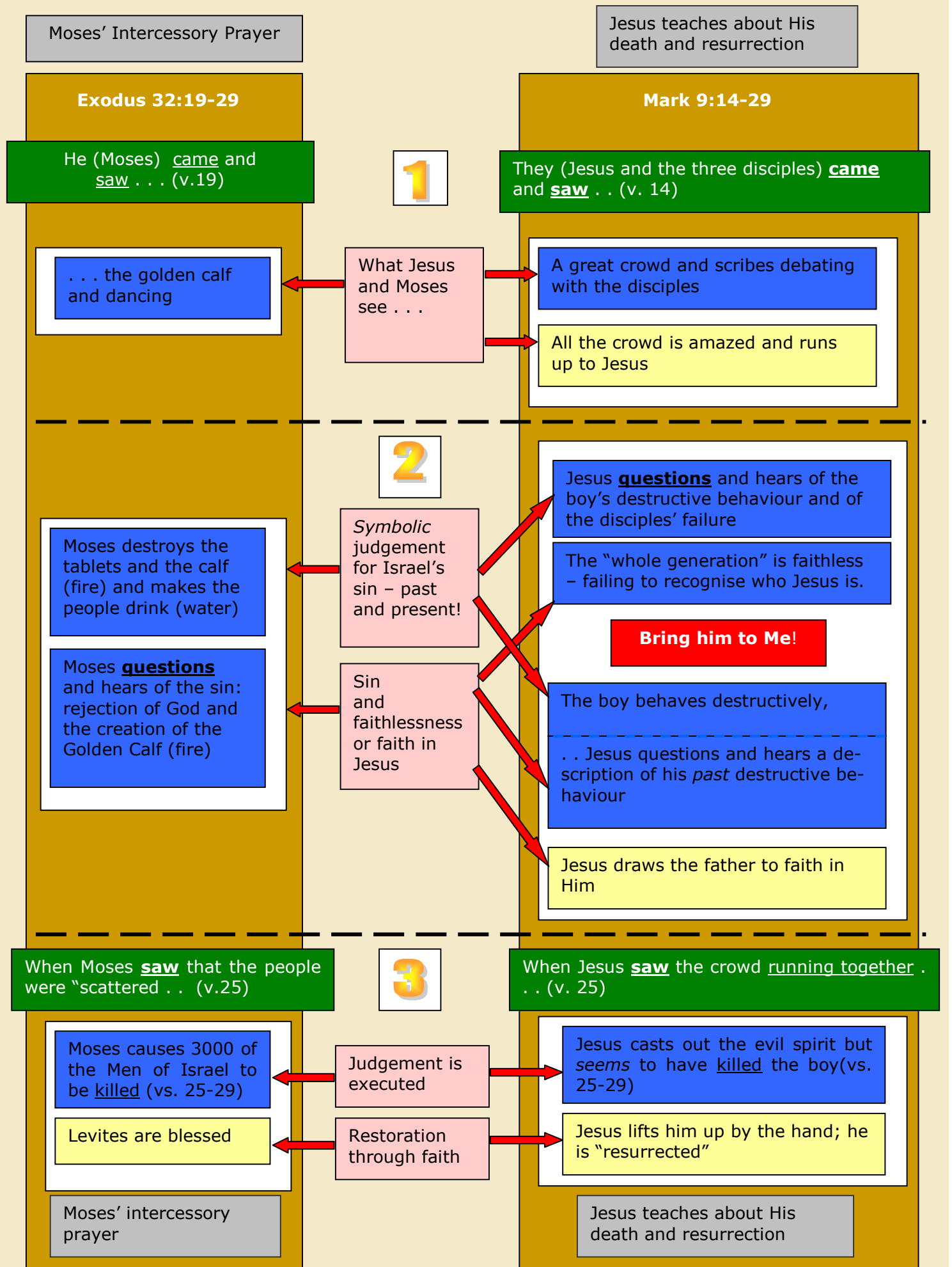
Typological relations between the two Testaments can be summarised as: "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is the New revealed."

In the next diagram (next page) we see that in Mark's account, Jesus "improves on" the work of Moses. Thus, for example, Mark's account is also "framed" before and after, not with prayers, but

with Jesus' teaching about his suffering, death and resurrection. Moses in one of his intercessory prayers offered to have his name blotted out of God's book if the people could be saved – but Jesus *actually* died for sins. Moses' prayer was *anticipatory* of the glorious fulfilment in Christ: in some ways it is similar and in others it falls short.

In some other parts of the diagram, Jesus "improves" on Moses by first "recapitulating" in some way an event in Exodus, but then afterwards repeating it in an "improved", more grace-filled way.

Throughout Mark's Gospel we see people struggling to understand Who Jesus is and to have faith in Him. Mark has written so that we



we too can have faith in Him. Mark tells us right at the beginning that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The rest of the Gospel explains what that means. Our "intertextual" approach to this passage in Mark will really enhance our understanding of Jesus - as I hope to show. We will divide our discussion into:

1. Coming down from the mountain
2. The destruction of the Tablets and the Calf and description of the people's sin
Judgement executed and subsequent blessing

1 Coming Down from the Mountain

Moses has met with God and been given the Tablets representing Laws and the Covenant. During his absence the people have rebelled against God and Moses. Their words (Ex. 32:1) amount to a claim that Moses is dead (but in reality they just didn't want to obey him - Acts 7:40). When he comes down, there is no response from the people: they should have been amazed at receiving him back from the dead but Exodus is silent on this matter. In fact, the Children of Israel are silent (dumb) throughout the narrative.



Jesus has been on the Mount of Transfiguration, and God has said that Jesus is His Beloved Son, and that He should be heard - He Himself is God's message, and God is present in Him. (Incidentally, Moses *has* returned - at the Transfiguration - showing that he witnesses or points to Jesus!) Jesus has already shown himself to be a "New Moses" (for example, in the miraculous feeding of the 5000) and, as the New Moses, comes down from the mountain and sees the chaos of the crowd and the arguing as a result of faithlessness and failure to deliver the boy.

The scribes, like the Children of Israel in Exodus show no response when Jesus returns, but the crowds are amazed. Mark doesn't explain why but their amazement and enthusiastic response to Jesus is what Israel *should* have shown to Moses but didn't, and is a prophetic reversal of that silence. Moses said that a prophet "like me" would arise (Deut

18:15-19 - a remarkable prophecy about Christ) and the people should listen to him. So the amazement of the people is a recognition that "the New Moses" has returned "from the dead" after so many centuries in the Person of Jesus.

The response matches the amazement: to *run* in the culture of Jesus' day was very unusual - it marks a great desire and longing to see Him, and points towards an emerging faith. Jesus questions the scribes, but they are silent! There is real irony when the father replies *on their behalf* that his *son* has a dumb

2 Symbolic Judgement for Faithlessness; Real

Compassion for the Faithful!

Moses has been on the mountain and left Aaron in charge. Aaron has not done a good job, and when Moses finally and unexpectedly returns he immediately carries out a symbolic enactment of God's judgement of Israel. (Although Moses' intercession has caused God to "repent of the evil He thought to the people", Ex. 32:14, Moses doesn't seem to have been told, hence his sense of urgency). The people have broken the law, and deserve to be destroyed like the golden Calf (the powder of which has polluted the *pure stream descending from the mountain*, Deut 9:21 - Let the reader understand!)

Moses then calls Aaron to account, and hears from him a description of the faithlessness - both to Moses and to God - which has led to the sinful behaviour.



Jesus too has been on the mountain and left the disciples in charge and they have failed to cast out the demon whose possession of the boy is a symbol of God's judgement of Israel in the present.

However, Jesus is also the New Moses. The Old Moses has died, and left the care of God's people in the hands of others - in Jesus' day, this is the religious authorities - represented here by the scribes - the experts in the Law. They have failed spectacularly, and Israel's spiritual state has suffered accordingly. They were arguing with the disciples, but really every accusation pointed back to themselves as the spiritual guardians of the people. Jesus

understanding, we can now look again at our passage.

I think in Mark 9:16-19 Jesus is addressing the scribes throughout, even though the father answers on their behalf in v.17. Thus, verse 15 is a little "break" in the narrative, telling us about the crowd, before we come back to the scribes and the debate in verse 16. Some translations do not bring this out, and give the impression that Jesus thought the crowd, not the scribes were doing the debating. Also, the Greek of verse 19 says, "He (Jesus) answered *them*". (The King James' Bible translates this, "He answered *him*").

The silence of the scribes can be understood *spiritually* but it can also be understood *culturally*: public debates (with a crowd of onlookers as "jury") involved the honour of the participants and to "lose" brought great shame. So far, the scribes have been winning, but with the arrival of Jesus, and the enthusiastic response of the crowd to Him, the tide has really turned against them. Better to stay silent than to risk further humiliation!

The father replies on behalf of the scribes and describes his son's plight. Mark's account has the words "father", "son" and "child" only once each – pronouns are used the rest of the time. Here, the father is "one from the crowd". He goes on to say that the disciples have failed to cast out the "dumb spirit" from his son. Jesus replies to them – the scribes – "O faithless generation! How long shall I be with you? How long shall I endure you?" Jesus is the New Moses returning to discover that those entrusted with the care of the people have truly failed the whole nation – they are faithless, blind guides, and they now have the temerity to criticise the disciples for this one small failing! The parable of the beam and the mote comes to mind! It is as though Jesus is saying, "If these, my disciples, lack faith, where do *you* stand – you who are responsible for the wretched spiritual plight of the whole nation!?"

However, Jesus' indictment is expressed in language that goes well beyond anything that Moses might say: Jesus speaks to them as God Himself! In opposing Jesus, they are being disobedient and unfaithful to God, even worse than the Children of Israel of old! This indictment fits in with the ongoing opposition of the scribes to Jesus – described

contexts of healing and demon possession, they have opposed and denied His divinity. The disciples lack faith (i.e. the right *kind* of faith) because they do not yet understand Who Jesus is, not because they are implacably opposed and hostile towards Jesus.

The words of Jesus recall a number of Old Testament passages:

Ps. 95:10 and Deut. 1:35 together describe God as being provoked and angry with:

"... an evil generation that always go astray in their hearts and have not known my ways"

And in Num. 14:11 God says:

"How long will this people despise me?
And how long will they not believe in me?"

Jesus is claiming authority as God in these words. He is also saying that *He*, as God, has endured the faithlessness of Israel from the earliest times right up to the present, since these indicting words were applied to Moses' generation and now Jesus is applying them to His generation.

As I understand this passage, Jesus has now finished his "conversation" with the scribes, and now turns His attention to those who have even a little faith and come to Him. Jesus Himself answers the very question He has just asked, and shows that He has by no means given up on His own people, and is able to "save those that draw near": "Bring him to me!"

Jesus is God's Beloved Son

Jesus now acts as God's Son with the full authority of Godhead: He acts with both grace and truth, compassion and righteousness.

First truth and righteousness . . .

The demon is confronted with Jesus and is immediately even more violent than before, once again symbolically acting out the judgement on Israel, which is even greater than before, because God's own Son has come to them personally. Jesus thus endorses God's righteous judgement of sin.

Jesus now for the first time addresses the *father* directly, "How long ago since this happened to him?"

With the answer "from childhood" and a further description of the destructive behaviour, we are reminded that Jesus, as God, has endured Israel's sin from the very beginning. However . . .

. . . but also compassion and grace.

Jesus' question to the father "How long since this has happened *to him?*" links the present to the past but the tone and wording are gentler, drawing attention to the suffering of the child - and of Israel (whom the child represents) throughout Israel's history. Israel as well as God has suffered from the fracturing of the relationship, from the very beginning to the present.

How many Old Testament themes we have uncovered! "How long?" is the oft-repeated cry in the Old Testament of those who trust in God as they look to Him for deliverance, and Jesus has thus reminded the father of the promises that go with that plea, and it is only here in the entire narrative in Mark, with emphasis on the experience of the *child*, that we are told of the "fire" and the "water". Why should the father proffer this information *now*?

"Son", "child" and "father" draw us to Hosea 11:1

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him
and out of Egypt I drew My son."*

The Exodus experience, described here, is associated with fire and water – the furnace of Egypt (Deut 4:20), the fiery serpents, the pillar of fire, the descent of God in fire on Mt Sinai (Ex.19:18) and the crossing of the Red Sea, the cloud and the water from the flinty rock. Up till now, these symbols have for the father been associated with the destruction of his son. But, through faith, these symbols can have a new and wonderful significance for him: the purpose of God's fire at Sinai was not for making afraid or to destroy, but to purify, to refine as silver (Ex. 20:20 and Ps. 66:10) and the Red Sea was salvation for Israel, not drowning, so that Israel can say (Ps. 66:12):

*"We went through fire and through water
Yet thou hast brought us forth to a spacious
place."*

And again, in Isaiah 43:1-2 God promises:

"Fear not

*When you pass through the waters I will be
with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not over-
whelm you;
when you walk through the fire you shall not
be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you."*

The demon has tried to destroy his son, but God has clearly been with him and protected him thus far, and will bring him to deliverance!

And thus it is that Jesus starts to lead the father in his journey of faith: *real* faith starts to awaken and we are carried back through the long years to Israel's earliest days, and the deep typological significance of his son's condition.

But Hosea also speaks of *love*:

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him
and out of Egypt I drew My son
The more I called them,
The more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
And burning incense to idols."*

Yes, in uttering "from childhood", God's love is recalled from this wonderful verse in Hosea. Despite the idolatry, the love is there! There is hope!

Indeed Hosea goes on . . .

*"Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in My arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with the cords of compassion,
with the bands of love."*

So there is too, the possibility of compassion and healing!

After a passage about judgement, God relents of His anger and passionately declares:

*"How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over O Israel!
How can I make you like Admah!
How can I treat you like Zeboiim!
My heart recoils within me,
my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce 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 to destroy."*

Now the father's faith can start to grow as a grain of mustard seed! *Real* faith that is linked to God and His promises and purposes! (I think Matthew would approve of calling this sort of faith "Kingdom-shaped" faith!) The father's faith is by no means full or complete: "Help my unbelief!", but it is enough! For the father on his journey of and to faith it is *possible* that Jesus is the "Holy One in your midst" (Hos. 11:9), fulfilling God's promise of mercy to Israel after judgement.

Significantly, the father says " . . . if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us!"

The father started off by asking the disciples to help *his son*, then he asks Jesus to help *us* (father and son) and finally he asks Jesus to help *him*. Originally he believed that his son's plight was an unfortunate circumstance, which could be healed by Jesus or the disciples without further involvement from him. Now he is beginning to realise that he too is involved. His son's plight and his own spiritual state are linked. Finally, under Jesus' leading and prompting, he recognises his own specific spiritual problem: "Help Thou my unbelief!"

Jesus now responds to this father's prayer of faith, again moving in prophetic and typological fulfilment of Moses.

3 Judgement and Blessing

Let us compare Moses' and Jesus' subsequent actions. We are looking at Ex. 32: 25-29 and Mark 9:25-29.

Moses sees (v.25) that the people have broken loose, broken free or are running wild. (The KJV translates this as naked – the sense being metaphorical rather than literal – i.e. unprotected and shameful.) The Septuagint translates this as "scattered". By contrast, Jesus sees a crowd "running together". In both cases, I think we are looking at things that have already occurred rather than new events. The breaking loose occurred under Aaron, so it refers to earlier events – the calf and the dancing. Likewise with Jesus, the people had already run to Him. Again "intertextuality" can help us. The words "When Moses saw . . ." I suggest really mean "When Moses *considered* . . ." i.e. Moses considers the earlier action from another point of view – the effect on others (in this case the enemies). As a result,

Moses proceeds to judgement.



Likewise Jesus, I suggest, considers what to do in the light of the positive response of the crowd. Interestingly the Greek expression used by Mark, "to run together", also means "to be in agreement!": they have expressed faith in Him, and He "moves towards" blessing.



The table on the next page shows the connections between both passages. The comparisons and contrasts are quite clear, except for the connection between Levites "ordaining themselves for the service" of the Lord and Jesus taking the boy *by the hand*. The words in Exodus about ordaining are the translation of an idiomatic expression which literally means "to fill their hand" for the Lord.

In casting out the demon, Jesus diagnoses the spirit as being a *deaf* as well as dumb spirit. (Not that the spirit *itself* is either of these things, since it can hear Jesus, and cry out with a loud voice! These are the spirit's effects upon the *boy*.) The calf in Exodus was made from the people's earrings (Ex. 32:2-3) symbolising that they were not listening to God and were deaf to His words. (Eventually, the calf went into their mouths indicating that they could no longer speak of His goodness.)

Just as the Levites were blessed through the deaths of their brethren, so the boy is symbolically raised to life from death. Mark describes this using a particular word, "arose", that is used for Jesus' resurrection. Mark is telling us that whatever Jesus does (and whatever we might subsequently do "in His name") is possible because of, and is patterned after, His suffering, death and resurrection. This is the path He (and we) must tread.



Afterwards, the disciples ask Jesus privately why they were unsuccessful. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says that prayer (and fasting in some manuscripts) is necessary. This seems puzzling given that no one prays to God or fasts in Mark's account. However, the father's words to Jesus – "help my unbelief!" – are really a prayer, so possibly here, Mark is again pointing to Jesus' divinity.

Exodus 32:25-29

When Moses saw that the people were scattered . . (v.25)

"Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me . .

"
and the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.

". . slay every man his brother . . !

Today you have filled your hand
for the Lord that He may bless you

Mark 9:25-29

When Jesus saw the crowd running together . . . (v.25)

Jesus rebukes the evil spirit, "Come out of him . . ."

It came out.

The boy was like a corpse so most said,

Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose (was resurrected)

In the corresponding passage in Matthew Jesus explains that their faith (i.e. "real" mustard seed-type faith) is too small. Somehow then we need to include both prayer and faith as factors involved in the healing of the boy. They are clearly closely connected. I think they are both "cross-shaped": somehow the things prayed for in faith should be things that are "included" in Christ's work on the Cross.

Another possibility is given in Hebrews 5:7 where we learn that Jesus' own anguished prayers during the days of his flesh were closely linked to His deliverance from death (i.e. through the resurrection.) He was heard for His godly fear. So in a way, all deliverance that comes through Christ's death and resurrection is related to His faithful and effectual prayers.

However, another possible explanation is "intertextual". "Structurally", Moses' intercessory prayers which frame the Exodus narrative correspond to Jesus' teaching about His death and resurrection, which frame the healing miracle. So Moses' prayers and Jesus work on the cross are closely connected. Let's look at this briefly:

In the books of Exodus through to Numbers, Moses frequently intercedes with God on behalf of rebellious Israel, and God hears him. This is particularly true in the Golden Calf incident. Moses pleads for Israel on the mountain *claiming God's earlier promises* to Abraham and pleading for God's honour and after he comes down as well in a prayer *offering himself as a substitution* for Israel. Moses' prayers are

effective, and God preserves Israel or effects only a partial or "token" judgement (although all that generation eventually died in the wilderness except two). Jesus both parallels and exceeds Moses since His work of intercession on our behalf is effective ("All that the Father has given me will come to me") and saves us from God's righteous wrath. In this sense, Jesus' whole redemptive work is a supreme prayer. Interestingly, God offers to make a new nation based on Moses, which Moses (representing the Law?) rejects, but Jesus Himself is in some sense the new Israel, (the One who faithfully fulfils God's promises to Abraham), a new Israel which mysteriously incorporates the faithful in the "Old" Israel. So this "type" also reaches its fulfilment in Jesus.

Some Final Thoughts about Faith

It is very interesting to note that the structure of Mark Ch. 9 actually gives us some insight into what was missing in the faith of the disciples. Both before and after the healing of the boy, Jesus talks about His imminent suffering, death and resurrection (vs. 9-13 and 30-32). Mark records that they "did not understand this saying" (v. 32).

In our passage in Mark, we see that, mysteriously, like the growth of a seed, or leaven silently working in bread, the father has been led to identify his own plight and that of his son with the fulfilment of God's purposes and promises for His people through Christ. This is real "mustard seed" faith. Who better than a father - who loves

his son and has “taught his son to walk, and taken him in his arms”, and who has seen that son desperately sick and in need of healing – who better to understand the deep mystery of the kingdom of God – the passionate love and yearning, tender yet fierce, beating deep in God’s compassionate heart for His son, Israel, sick, even dead, through sin and disobedience – love which refuses to let Israel go, but which sent Jesus (the “true” Israel who fulfils all that earthly Israel should have been!) to suffer and die for sin, in order to save us from destruction and bring us to Him? There really *are* two stories in one in Mark, and as the father discovers, they are connected: in the physical healing of his son there lies the mystery of his *own* healing – the spiritual healing and restoration that comes through faith in Christ.

“I will heal their faithlessness;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.

O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress,
From Me comes your fruit.”

Hosea 14:4, 8

Appendix

Both passages also have a *chiastic* structure. See box below. These structures, separately and together I think shed further light. For example, the astonishment of the crowd when Jesus arrives is matched “chiastically” by Jesus seeming to raise the boy from the dead. The chiastic structures are shown on the opposite page.

An attempted chiastic analysis is shown on the next page.

Chiasms/Chiastic Structures

There are nested structures in a text where the first and last sections correspond, then the next innermost sections and so on – rather like Russian dolls! They can be described as ABCC’B’A’ or ABCDC’B’A etc. The correspondences can be of different types, usually related or contrasting words or ideas.

Chiasms are also known as ring structures. A, B C etc can sometimes have structures of their own.



Chiastic Structure of Ex. 32: 11-34

Aaron makes the calf (vs.1-6),
The people make the Calf (vs.7-9),
God's wrath – "Let me consume

Moses' intercessory prayer and God's response and God's writing (vs. 11-16)

Moses and Joshua disagree:
The sound of war or

the sound of singing (beginning a banquet of wine - Septuagint) (vs. 17-18)
followed by

The people ignore Moses' return

Moses sees the calf and the dancing

Tablets of the Law broken (v.19)

The calf destroyed by fire (v.20)

The people and their sin (v.22)

"Let not the anger of my lord burn hot" (v.22) (compare Ex. 32:11)

The people are set on evil (v.22)

"Make us gods!" and
Rejection of Moses (v.23)

The calf created by fire (v.24)

Moses sees the people breaking loose

The Levites obey and come to Moses

Killing (vs. 27-8)
and
Blessing of Levites (v.29) followed by

Moses talking with the people

Moses' intercessory prayer and God's writing and God's response (vs. 30-34a)

Plague (vs. 34b -35)
The people made the Calf (v.35)
Aaron made the Calf (v.35)

A

B

C

D

E

D'

C'

B'

A'

Chiastic Structure of Mark 9: 14-29

Teaching on Jesus' death and resurrection

Jesus comes to His disciples publicly and sees the arguing about their failure

The crowd are amazed at Jesus' return

Convulsion (reported) followed by

Unsuccessful casting out of the demon (reported)

"Faithless Generation!"
"How long . . .", "How long . . .?"

Convulsion (actual)

Jesus asks his father "How long has he had this?" "From childhood"

Convulsion (reported)

Discussion about believing. The father says, "I believe" (Faith)

Convulsion (actual) followed by

Successful casting out of the demon (actual)

The crowd think the boy is dead, but Jesus "resurrects him"

Jesus comes to His disciples privately and talks with them about their failure

Teaching on Jesus' death and resurrection