



Born Again

NUMEROUS BIBLICAL REFERENCES contain proleptic (anticipatory) metaphors for the end of the old age, marked by God's Parousaic (Second Coming) appearance in the final judgment, the subsequent preparation and purification of those who are risen, and the ultimate transformation of all who are granted eternal life.

Metaphor: First Temple

"Solomon's Temple [the First Temple in Israel] represented a reclining human form. The Holy of Holies symbolized the head. The staircase represented the neck. The Holy Place symbolized aspects of the chest/abdomen. The bronze pillars portrayed the legs. The priestly side chambers represented the two arms. Five lavers on each of the north and south sides of the Temple symbolized the fingers of the hands, while the Temple entrance represented the genital opening.

"However, unlike the Edenic story of a sleeping Adam, Solomon's Temple was not a metaphor for a reclining Adamic male. Rather, it was the metaphor for an androgynous parent (father/mother) who is awaiting the birth of the Adamic child as *the human manifestation of God*. This triune metaphor — father, mother, child — symbolized God's promised inaugural 'fillment' of the covenant and God's self-creation as human. This triune metaphor further implied that *the totality of the Godhead participated in the human manifestation of God*.

"The Temple, as a metaphor for an androgynous individual in pregnancy, has profound implications in Hebrew thought. '... [Thus, i]n Hebrew (as well as Aramaic), the word [*racham* or *rechem*] usually translated as

"Solomon's Temple . . . was the metaphor for an androgynous parent . . . who is awaiting the birth of the Adamic child as the human manifestation of God."

“compassion” is the plural of a noun that in its singular form means “womb.” . . . To say that God is compassionate is to say that God is “like a womb” . . . In its sense of “like a womb,” *compassionate* has nuances of giving life, nourishing, caring, perhaps embracing and encompassing . . . [T]his is what God is like.”¹

Metaphor: Second Temple

The metaphor of God’s giving birth was extended in Second Isaiah to the period of the Second Temple, built during the time of Cyrus, the Persian king who authorized the exiles to return home to Israel. Thus:

Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God. Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. — Isaiah 66:9-13.

The metaphor of God’s giving birth was extended in Second Isaiah to the period of the Second Temple.

Strikingly enough, this metaphor is further extended to eschatological times:

. . . [I]t shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. . . . For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. — Isaiah 66:18, 22.

Metaphor: “Forty”

The Temple metaphor of God’s giving birth to Creation, to his people, and to the Messiah is even further applied through the Hebrew invention or adoption of another symbol characteristic of Zoroastrianism (the religion of Persia before, during and after the time of Cyrus). In this symbol the act of a mother’s giving birth to an infant was regarded as an event of joy, while both mother and child remained isolated in ritual purification for 40 days after birth.²

The Hebrews then employed the numeric symbol of 40 and applied it to days, months, years, and even to structures in the ancient Tabernacle. In Hebraic thinking the number 40 signified transformation.³

In Hebraic thinking the number 40 signified transformation.

In this context the number 40 was applied to numerous purifying and transforming events in Hebrew history. For example:

1. In the time of Noah, "the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth" (Genesis 7:17).

2. When his father, Jacob, died in Egypt, "Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed . . ." (Genesis 50:1-3).

3. When the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai after their exodus from slavery in Egypt, "Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights" (Exodus 24:18; cf. 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10).

4. Later, Moses sent 12 spies "to spy out the land of Canaan . . . And they returned from searching the land after forty days" (Numbers 13:17, 25; cf. 14:34).

5. Then Moses said to Israel, ". . . [T]hou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

6. On his journey to Mount Horeb, the prophet Elijah was given food and drink by an angel. "And . . . [Elijah] went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God" (1 Kings 19:8).

7. After being expelled from the belly of the whale, "Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh . . . and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:3, 4). Because of Jonah's warning, Nineveh repented, and God spared the city.

Additional references could be made to the number 40 in the Old Testament, such as the 40 sockets of silver that helped form the foundation of the wilderness Tabernacle (Exodus 36:24), the 40 years that David reigned over Israel (1 Kings 2:11), and the 40 days that Ezekiel lay on his right side to symbolize his bearing "the iniquity of the house of Judah" (Ezekiel 4:6). These references to 40 were numeric symbols for diverse Hebraic missions that all involved transformation.

It is in this context that the Gospels apply the number 40 to Jesus during and after his ministry. Thus:

The Gospels apply the number 40 to Jesus during and after his ministry.

1. After his baptism by John in the river Jordan, "Jesus [was] led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred" (Matthew 4:1, 2; cf. Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2; John 2:20).

2. Shortly after his death on the cross at Calvary, Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus expired "about the ninth hour" (3 p.m.) on Friday, and he rose from the tomb on Sunday, just before "the rising of the sun" (7 a.m.) (Matthew 27:46; Mark 16:2). Calculation of this period shows that it was almost exactly 40 hours!

3. After his resurrection Jesus appeared on a number of occasions to his disciples, "to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

Conclusion

To summarize, in Hebrew tradition the number 40 was frequently used to symbolize various transformations in Israel's history. These transformations represented extended metaphors for the rebirth of Creation, of a people, and even of God himself.

It is in this context that the final resurrection of the dead and the judgment before God's Parousaic (Second Coming) presence can be visualized. Accordingly, this involves the ultimate preparation — divine revelation, human understanding and acceptance, and purification. It involves the ultimate repentance, confession and forgiveness, and transformation. And that transformation into new and eternal relationality embraces Creation, humanity, and divinity itself.

We do not know how long the judgment will convene, but birth and the number 40 could well symbolize the final transformation. If this be so, then and only then will we be fully "born again."

Endnotes

1. "The First Temple: United Monarchical Period," *Outlook* (November 2001).
2. See "Zoroastrian Code Book," at www.geocities.com/spenta_mainyu_2/zoroast3.htm.
3. See Baron Baptiste, "Forty Days to Personal Revolution," at www.dailyom.com/library/000/000/000000267.html.