

S2: Parashiyot Midrash

The main theme of this Midrash is the way in which God's almighty unlimited power forges an underlying unity between divine holiness and divine love.¹ In order to provide evidence for this point, it is possible to examine Psalm 99:9, Isaiah 63:9a and Jeremiah 32:7.

Psalm 99:9

"Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His holy hill [the Temple Mount]; for the Lord our God is Holy."

This Psalm represents a call to worship God on the Temple Mount at Jerusalem and the reason for such worship is that *'the Lord our God is holy.'* These words form a clear doctrinal statement, either to be believed in or not! God is either holy or not holy. Also apparent in these words is the implication that a high view of God encourages a reverent and exultant worship. God is viewed as the Almighty King, reigning over every aspect of His Creation. However, if seen in isolation from the wider teaching of scripture this verse could create the impression that God is a lofty and remote figure. A gulf is perceived to exist between God and humanity, which no amount of human devotion could ever hope to bridge.

Isaiah 63:9a

"In their affliction He was afflicted and the angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them."

In this text, the prophet obviously has the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt in mind. As verse 10 indicates, his intention is to contrast divine faithfulness with human disloyalty. This verse also contains a clear doctrinal statement which again either has to be believed in or not; God is either a God of love or He is not a God of love. It also implies that this attribute of love is associated with overriding feelings of pity, the fullest depths of which cannot be fully appreciated on this side of eternity. However, their very presence excludes the notion, (common throughout Greek philosophy) that God is an impassable *'Being'* – having no emotional feelings toward His Creation. Such a philosophy represents the teaching of Plato rather than divine revelation.² Returning to the verse in hand, if it is seen in isolation from the wider teaching of scripture it could create the impression that God is not excessively worried by the presence of sin in His people. No gulf is seen to exist between God and the human race, thus allowing people to continue unchallenged in their sin.

Jeremiah 32:27

"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me?"

Here, God was warning Jeremiah that Jerusalem will be given over *"to the hands of the Chaldeans and of their King, Nebuchadnezzar,"* (V28). Of special interest is the rhetorical question *"Is there anything too hard for me?"* The wording of the question implies that it is certainly not too hard for God to hold together His divine holiness and love through the exercise of His almighty power. Without the slightest exertion, He holds together, in perfect unity, both these and all of the other attributes. Only a *'phantom conflict'* exists between them. In God there exists a *'Shalom³ Echad'* (a peaceful and flawlessly complete unity) between all of His infinite (unlimited) number of attributes. Fallible, weak human beings may find it difficult to hold together such qualities as holiness and love but this is certainly not the case with God for whom all things are possible.

During times of affliction we may be comforted by the thought that God can deliver us from our suffering or provide the strength to endure it. For as Saint Paul promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13, God will not allow us to be tested beyond our endurance. In response to His Holy Love, we are not to give up the faith in times of adversity or persecution. We can also trust that God will resolve any conflicting emotions we may feel at such times. So let us go on and persevere in our relationship with Him.

¹ Here it's worth reminding the reader that in a typical Parashiyot structure, a base text (known as a Petkah) is followed by an apparently conflicting text; a final reconciling text then follows. Each text has a brief comment, focussing upon key points. A Parashiyot Midrash is a very traditional Jewish method of handling apparent discrepancies within a sacred text.

² This view was largely brought into the Church by some of the Church Fathers – most notably Augustine of Hippo.

³ The Hebrew word *'Shalom'* does not simply mean *'peace'* alone but also has connotations with personal completeness and wholeness.

From this section, it is possible to conclude that: -

- 1) God's unlimited and almighty power unifies divine holiness and love, with no degree of friction
- 2) In God a flawless unity exists between all of His divine attributes
- 3) People may find it difficult to grasp how a perfect unity exists between all of the divine attributes
- 4) Christians are to draw comfort and strength from God's unlimited power

Questions

- 1) How can a Parashiyot Midrash reconcile seemingly contradictory passages of scripture?
- 2) What are the limitations of Parashiyot Midrash Bible Interpretation?
- 3) Using any of the previous Bible references in this book construct another Parashiyot Midrash to illustrate the unity between divine holiness and divine love.