

A New Way Salt May Metaphorically Serve as an Example of Natural Revelation in the Bible

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Natural revelation is one way we can know God. It especially resonates with the scientific mind. In the Bible, salt is used in eight ways to metaphorically convey spiritual truths. The metaphorical significance of some of these uses is debated among the experts. By considering all the interpretations and overlaying them with an understanding of salt not available to the original authors but available to us as a product of modern science, it is proposed that insights into these problematic uses can be achieved.

The title suggests at least three themes for this paper: 1) In order to establish that we have a new way, we must examine all the ways salt is already recognized as an example of natural revelation in the Bible, 2) what exactly is natural revelation, and what role does the metaphor play in it? And 3) what is this new way? We will explore the second of these three questions first, then the first, and, finally, the third. Bible verses are from the New International Version¹.

Natural Revelation and the Metaphor

Among other ways², God reveals himself in his Word and his Works. The former is the Bible and the latter is his Creation. The Bible contains many lessons about who God is, his Holiness and his Love, and how we imperfect humans are to relate to a Holy, Loving God. This is Biblical Revelation. The intricate simplicity of the universe also points toward a Creator. Whether the evidence for this is as broad as the puzzling beauty of the elegant, short equations that describe its operation,³ as sweeping and durable as the awesome implications of the night sky, as transient as a stunning sunset, or as tiny as the workings of a caddisfly larva building its case, the brilliance of a Creator behind it all can hardly be missed. This is Natural Revelation. The connection between the two is made several times and in several ways in the Bible. Perhaps the two best known are Psalm 145:3-7,

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.
One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.
They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
They tell of the power of your awesome works—
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

And Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

If, then, God is the author of both the Word and the world (cosmos), then it seems reasonable to expect that the two would contain elements in common, confirming their common authorship—elements that can be captured in metaphors. It further seems reasonable, since the world is simply the stage upon which the play of God’s love for humanity is carried out, that the play is

the more important of the two. Thus the metaphors drawn from the stage should reflect God's Holiness, Love and divine plan for humankind, rather than the other way around.

This takes us to a major reason for this paper. Many fundamentalist Christians in America find a conflict between science and the Bible. This mostly stems from the implications of natural selection and evolution. This paper does not intend to address that tension. Rather, it does propose that a more productive discourse can be achieved when we search the deeper knowledge of the universe revealed by modern science to see if examples of metaphors that point toward natural revelation lie here as well. If they do, then not only do we find alternate, perhaps deeper, ways to comprehend and reinforce difficult spiritual truths, but we find ways that could not have been known to the authors of the Bible, thus indicating anew the common authorship of the world and the Word.

The Ways Salt is Viewed as an Example of Natural Revelation in the Bible

The word for "salt" used in the Old Testament is "מֶלַח," read in the Hebrew order as, "mem, lamed, chet," or "*melach*." It is used 29 times. Related or derived words are used another six times^{4,5}. The word for "salt" in the New Testament is "ἄλῆ," "alpha, lambda, alpha, sigma," or "*halas*." It is used eight times. Related or derived words are used five times^{6,7}.

The Bible uses these words to reflect properties of salt familiar to Palestinians during Old Testament and New Testament times, and to metaphorically, symbolically, emblematically or allegorically convey spiritual concepts. Although there are real differences among these four, they all can be subsumed under the heading of metaphor, which is the preferred word choice in what follows.

At least seven of salt's properties are used: 1) a taste enhancer, 2) a powerfully effective compound of which just a little will influence flavor, 3) a white compound, 4) a persistent compound that does not decay, 5) a preservative, and thus, for all these reasons, 6) a valuable commodity, a necessity of life. Yet, despite all these positive uses, it is also 7) a toxic compound when present in high concentrations.

These properties established the metaphorically important roles for salt as a symbol for flavoring relationships by adding 1) peace 2) wisdom and knowledge to them, 3) for purifying and cleansing, 4) for loyalty and fidelity, and 5) for permanence and durability and how all these serve as a symbol for its use in covenants and ceremonial offerings and sacrifices. It is also used as 6) a unit of exchange, in payment or salary transactions, and 7) as a symbol of destruction. These properties and their important symbolic uses will be explored below.

1) Salt as a taste enhancer, seasoning or spice, and the metaphorical uses of this property

This property of salt is addressed in the following manner, "salt renders food pleasant and palatable⁸," capable of adding flavor to an otherwise "tasteless food" as suggested in Job 6:6 with the question Job poses as he tries to justify his complaint against God.

Its metaphorical use in this vein is found in Mark 9:50, "...Have **salt** [in this and all Bible verses that follow, "salt" will be in bold print to make its use more obvious] among yourselves, and be at peace with each other." The metaphor "refers to the goodwill that 'seasons' positive relationships between people."⁹ Notice that having this salt brings peace to the relationship. How can this be? The explanation for that must wait for the discussion of the covenant of salt, in 6a), below. Salt as a flavor enhancer is found in Colossians 4:6, where it refers to seasoning speech with intelligence and versatility: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned

with **salt**, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Reflecting on this, Matthew Henry says, “Grace is the salt which seasons our discourse, makes it savory and keeps it from corrupting.”¹⁰

A different metaphorical use, closer to that indicated above in Job 6:6, is that “salt gives flavour to that which is insipid. God's gifts may easily pall and become worthless if his presence is not associated with them.”¹¹ There will be more to say about this under the new way that salt may serve as an example of natural revelation, below.

Another interesting point about this property of salt is made by Nancy Ortberg¹². She reminds us that if our food is properly salted, we normally pay no attention to it. However, if our food is unsalted (or too heavily salted), we take notice. Thus salt is likened to the Christian who adds flavor to relationships that often go unnoticed until they are absent, or contrasted with a response that is diametrically opposite of what that Christian does.

2) Salt as a powerful compound that requires only a small amount to noticeably affect the flavor, and the metaphorical uses of this property

Continuing with the property of salt made by Ortberg, perhaps we can see why salt was used in this next role: to symbolize wisdom and wise behavior. It doesn't take much salt to know that it is there and to produce a pleasing result. In a way, this is somewhat like wisdom and wise behavior. If wisdom and wise behavior are lacking, as pointed out above for salt, we notice immediately. If it is present in the right amount, it produces pleasing or sometimes even expected results that go unappreciated precisely because they are expected. But an emphasis on wisdom and wise behavior (just the facts) in a story can sometimes overwhelm it and render it un-enjoyable, just like too much salt can render food unsavory.

Linking Colossians 4:6, quoted earlier, with its prior verse, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity,” provides a passage using this metaphorical role in which the apostle Paul is suggesting we should use salt as intellectual wisdom to guide our conversations with others so as not to offend, but, to attract them¹³. Referring to this same passage, Walvoord and Zuck appeal to its strength in flavoring by pointing out its ability to penetrate thoroughly.¹⁴

3) The color of salt, and the metaphorical uses of this property

Pure salt is white in color. If you've ever been on the salt flats in Utah on a clear summer's day, the flats are almost blindingly white. Barclay confirms this: “The very glistening whiteness of salt was a picture of purity,” and “The ancients declared that there was nothing in the world purer than salt because it came from the two purest things, the sun and the sea.”¹⁵ White is often associated with the condition of being clean in the Bible. We see this property applied in Leviticus 13 in three instances: v. 13, “the priest is to examine them, and if the disease has covered their whole body, he shall pronounce them clean. Since it has all turned white, they are clean”; v. 17, “The priest is to examine them, and if the sores have turned white, the priest shall pronounce the affected person clean; then they will be clean”; and v. 39, “the priest is to examine them, and if the spots are dull white, it is a harmless rash that has broken out on the skin; they are clean.” A slightly different reference to the association between white and clean is found in Psalm 51:7, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.” And lastly, in Revelation 19:14, “The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.”

Perhaps, then, the white color is why salt was used to purify, especially in the sense of healing¹⁶. The property of salt to purify and heal is almost certainly more symbolic than

chemical. Elisha (most likely as a miraculous act) used this property in a spring at Jericho, as described in 2 Kings, 2:19-22,

The people of the city [Jericho, vs 17] said to Elisha, 'Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.' 'Bring me a new bowl,' he said, 'and put **salt** in it.' So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring and threw the **salt** into it, saying, 'This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'" And the water has remained pure to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken.

Besides purifying, then, salt also signifies a new beginning.

Alexander MacLaren said about this miracle,

[T]he main lesson of the miracle, beyond its revelation of the spirit of gentle compassion in Elisha, is the symbolical one. The new cruse [bowl] and the salt are emblems of the divine gift which cleanses the human heart. Salt is an emblem of purification, and its emblematic meaning prevails here over its natural properties; for the last thing to cure a brackish spring was to put salt into it. The very inadequacy, as well as inappropriateness, of the remedy, points the miraculous and symbolical character of the whole. A jar full of salt could do little to a gushing fountain.¹⁷

But it is perfectly symbolic of how a little of God's love [2), above] applied in the right way can purify/cleanse us, "at the fountain-head in the heart, not half a mile down the stream, in the deeds. Put the salt in the spring, and the outflow will be sweet."¹⁸

Perhaps it is also this property that the Lord had in mind when he instructed Moses to write in Exodus 30:35, "and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be **salted** and pure and sacred."

Another passage sometimes attributed to the linking of salt to purity is the metaphor in Ezekiel 16:4, "On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with **salt** or wrapped in cloths." Since it couldn't have been used in large quantities (which would be toxic to the infant), perhaps the role of salt in this metaphor was to "purify" the infant, to cleanse it from the blood of childbirth.¹⁹

4) Salt's persistence and its lack of decay and the metaphorical uses of this property

The ancients knew from practical experience that as long as pure salt is kept dry, it will persist forever without changing its properties. Decay is produced by microorganisms, and microorganisms require water to live. In actuality, the presence of a little moisture is insufficient to alter this property of salt; the extreme halophile (most salt-tolerant microorganism) requires more than 70% water by weight in the mix.²⁰ Salt that remained dry just didn't lose its properties. Thus it naturally lends itself as a symbol for the enduring property of a covenant.

Throughout Palestine, the eating of salt is a sign of friendship²¹; thus salt carried with it the sign of permanence²², loyalty²³, perpetuity and incorruption²⁴. In *The Land and the Book*, by William Thomson, we read of an incident between a marauding tribe of Bedouins from whom Thomson was protected by a letter of introduction from one of the local feudal sheikhs. After the local sheikh read the letter, Thomson was asked to join in a ceremony of "bread and dibs." Following

this, the sheikh told him, “We are now brethren. There is bread and salt between us; we are brothers and allies. You are at liberty to travel amongst us wherever you please; and, so far as my power extends, I am to aid, befriend, and succor you, even to the loss of my life.”²⁵

An even more direct confirmation of this metaphor is seen in the following, two quotes: “The Arab word for salt and for a ‘compact’ or ‘treaty’ is the same. Doughty in his travels in Arabia appealed more than once to the superstitious belief of the Arabs in the ‘salt covenant,’ to save his life. Once an Arab has received in his tent even his worst enemy and has eaten salt (food) with him, he is bound to protect his guest as long as he remains.”²⁶

“[A]mong the Asiatics, eating together was deemed a bond of perpetual friendship; and as salt was a common article in all their repasts, it may be in reference to this circumstance that a perpetual covenant is termed a covenant of salt; because the parties ate together of the sacrifice offered on the occasion, and the whole transaction was considered as a league of endless friendship.”²⁷

Mark 9:50, mentioned earlier, is also a play on the covenant of salt, indicating the fidelity and constancy²⁸ that produces peace.

5) Salt as a preservative, disinfectant or antiseptic, and the metaphorical uses of this property

Most food-spoiling microorganisms and microorganisms capable of producing toxins cannot live in a salt solution (brine).²⁹ Thus salt is used as a preservative to preserve from putrefaction³⁰ and corruption³¹ (in the sense of decay). Direct reference to this use in the Bible is lacking. Although this role is not mentioned directly, Nehemiah 13:16 contains an indirect reference to it, otherwise how would the merchants selling fish on the Sabbath transport those fish from Tyre to Jerusalem, except by salting or drying them? Furthermore, since this property of salt was well known at the time to the Egyptian embalmers of mummies³² and since Jacob was embalmed under Joseph’s direction (Genesis 50:2-3) it was clearly available as a metaphor for preservation by the Bible’s authors.

Much as a little salt goes a long way in flavoring food [properties 1) and 2), above], a Christian should have a powerful influence on his contemporaries. For this reason, and for its role as a preservative, it bears on another passage that is held by some to contain this metaphorical use: Matthew 5:13, from the Beatitudes, “You are the **salt** of the earth....” From the context it is not clear what property of salt Jesus is referring to. Many assume it is its preservative property -- that the earth would be destroyed but for the people Jesus is addressing, or at least it is saved from universal vice and crime.³³ Others are less certain.³⁴ Some insight into this argument is obtained by considering Mark 9:50 once more, where he recounts the same event: “.... Have **salt** among yourselves, and be at peace with each other;” and by considering Wesley’s thoughts on Matthew 5:13, “Ye -- Not the apostles, not ministers only; but all ye who are thus holy, are the **salt** of the earth -- Are to season others.”³⁵ Thus it may make more sense to understand that this passage most likely refers to the seasoning effect of salt, discussed in 1), above, or as W. Binnie wrote, “Christ’s people are the salt of the earth; and salt, to do its work, must be mingled with that which it is to preserve.”³⁶

In this regard, my wife has pointed out that a tiny crystal of salt, when dropped into a supersaturated salt solution, immediately causes the salt in that solution to precipitate out. This is not unlike the incidences we hear where missionaries enter a new territory to find the people prepared to receive the Gospel by their myths and understanding, resulting in a sudden explosion of believers.³⁷

Referring to the verses mentioned under the covenant of salt in 4), above, Y [the text provides no clue to whom “Y” is] makes the following claim, “Salt will not bring back life, but it will hinder putrefaction. Under the old covenant God did not give life, though he was preparing to give it; but at the same time he did much to preserve the world, dead in trespasses and sins, from corpse decay, while he made ready in the fullness of time to bring back the dead to life.”³⁸

Another passage sometimes attributed to the disinfectant or antiseptic property of salt is the metaphor in Ezekiel 16:4, mentioned in 3) above which refers to the practice of rubbing newborns with salt. In order for us to understand this use, the passage should be explored further. This occurs at the beginning of a long passage in which Ezekiel makes an allegory of an unwanted baby thrown away at birth (Israel), God’s care for that baby, and its eventual growth into a beautiful, desirable woman still under God’s care. The passage ends with an indictment of Jerusalem for straying from God, just as the woman did in the allegory. Some claim the practice of rubbing a newborn with salt was done for “sanitary reasons,”³⁹ thus emphasizing its property as a disinfectant or antiseptic, while others claim it was to “strengthen them”⁴⁰ perhaps a reference to its caustic effect in wounds and on sensitive skin (something we’ve all experienced as sweat enters a fresh wound) that would somehow “toughen” the newborn.

Mark 9:49 is a controversial verse: “Everyone will be salted with fire.” No one is certain what Jesus meant by this statement. The editors Walvoord and Zuck ascribe about 15 possible explanations to it as follows:⁴¹

This difficult expression is taken by some as a promise and by others as a punishment. In the former sense, fire is taken in the signification of purifying and preserving, and this twofold property it shares with salt. Salt preserves from putrefaction, fire purifies from corruption.... So, when we present ourselves living sacrifices to God, we may be purified by fiery trials; we may be called to pass through the fire of affliction, perhaps of persecution, certainly of self-denial. But thus purified by fire, like the sacrifice on the altar, salted with salt, we shall be saved.⁴²

To resolve this conundrum, we must look at the context of the verse: “Everyone” is not all living and dead persons, but only those thrown into hell (v. 47). Thus it is the preserving role of salt (and fire) that is called upon in this verse. Fire is used as a symbol of preserving punishment in vs 43 and 48: “[F]ire is taken to mean punishing and preserving. Six times does the evangelist represent unceasing torments by unquenchable fire; and as the salt applied to the sacrifice was the symbol of preservation, so fire here is symbolical of preservation, not, alas! from punishment, but for punishment, so that the undying worm and the unquenchable fire, instead of annihilating, preserve while they punish. Here is a fearful figure, and a terrible warning!”⁴³

6a) Salt as a component of sacred covenants and sacrifices

The properties of salt that made it an ideal symbol for a covenant discussed in 1) (its ability to add savor), 2) (its effectiveness in small amounts), 3) (its ability to purify), 4) (its persistence) and 5) (its ability to preserve) made it only logical that it would be a component of the sacrifice which contained all these elements, and represented the reminder of the covenant between Israel and God, the “covenant of Salt” or the “salt covenant” introduced in 1).

The Bible contains several references to the use of salt in a covenant between God and man. Leviticus 2:13 reads, “...Do not leave the **salt of the covenant** of your God out of your grain offerings;” Numbers 18:19 informs the priests, “Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings

the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your perpetual share. It is an everlasting **covenant of salt** before the LORD for both you and your offspring.” In 2 Chronicles 13:5, King Abijah referred to the covenant of salt in a warning to Jeroboam who had twice as many men drawn up for battle, “Don’t you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a **covenant of salt?**” Incidentally, Jeroboam ignored the warning and was soundly defeated, losing five out of every eight of his men in the ensuing battle (v 17).

Salt was required of every sacrifice and ceremonial offering burned on the altar. We see this requirement in Leviticus 2:13, when we include the part left out above, “Season all your grain offerings with **salt**...add **salt** to all your offerings.” Although grain offerings were highlighted here, “all your offerings” was added, almost as an afterthought, to be sure it was clear. In Ezekiel, the meat offerings were specifically covered, as revealed in his vision of the restored temple, introduced in Ezekiel 40:1-4. His heavenly guide states, “When you have finished purifying it (the newly-built altar, v. 18), you are to offer a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. You are to offer them before the LORD, and the priests are to sprinkle **salt** on them and sacrifice them as a burnt offering to the LORD” (43: 23-24.)

About 20 years after the first group of exiles returned under Zerubbabel, King Darius (I) determined that the priests among the returned exiles should be provided with “[w]hatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, **salt**, wine and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons” (Ezr 6:9). Later in chapter 7, verse 22, King Artaxerxes (I) establishes a similar decree as he sends Ezra back to Jerusalem to determine its state.

“Now I, King Artaxerxes, decree that all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, the teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you— up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and **salt** without limit. Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should his wrath fall on the realm of the king and of his sons?”

So salt shall be provided “daily without fail” and “without limit,” and in both the case of King Darius and King Artaxerxes, this emphasis on salt was clearly critical to sacrifices and done out of concern for the welfare of the decreeing King and his sons.

This decreed source of salt supports the understanding that the “salt for the sacrifice was not brought by the offerers, but was provided at the public charge, as the wood was [Ezr 7:20-22]. And there was a chamber in the court of the temple called *the chamber of salt*, in which they laid it up.”⁴⁴ We will consider the significance of this practice in the “Proposed New Way,” below.

As introduced in 5) (salt as a preservative), Jesus uses salt in a very enigmatic statement, “Everyone will be **salted** with fire” (Mark 9:49). One of the more prominent explanations proffered relates this verse to the use of salt in the sacrifice.

Another ceremonial use of salt is in the salted incense described in Exodus 30:35, mentioned in 3) above. This incense was to be burned daily on the altar of incense: “Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense

again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come” (Ex 30:7-8).

6b) Salt’s metaphorical use in sacred covenants and sacrifices

Salt was used in the sacred (Temple) sacrifice in such a quantity and way that it couldn’t have changed the intensity of the flame of the sacrifice or its aroma. Its use must have been symbolic. But of what was it symbolic? Did it include any of the five ways mentioned at the start of 6a), or were there other explanations?

To answer these questions, let’s return to these five properties and explore them more thoroughly to determine if they have meaning in the Temple sacrifice. Because of its central importance to God, the ancient Hebrews, and present-day Christians, we should not be surprised to find a great deal of thought dedicated to these questions.

6b1) (its ability to add savor)

Part of the sacred sacrifice was to be shared with God (burned) and part consumed by the priest and his family, and part was to be consumed by the offerer and his family (Deuteronomy 18:3). Thus we find,

The altar was the table of the Lord; and therefore, salt being always set on our tables, God would have it always used at his. It is called *the salt of the covenant*, because, as men confirmed their covenants with each other by eating and drinking together, at all which collations salt was used, so God, by accepting his people’s gifts and feasting them upon his sacrifices, supping with them and they with him (Re 3:20), did confirm his covenant with them.⁴⁵

Thus there are mutual pledges of fidelity. God is the guest of the priest, and the priest in turn the guest of God. In this way God lifted a social custom to a holy use. We cannot but notice in the second chapter of Leviticus that while some things are mentioned as constituents of the meat offering, viz., oil and frankincense, and others as excluded, viz., leaven and honey, a special emphasis is laid on the *presence* of salt. A special significance was to be indicated by that presence.⁴⁶

Thus not only was salt there to give flavor to the offering, it was there symbolically to give flavor to the relationship between the offerer and God, and to signify the depth of the covenant. Yet, it also symbolized more as it anticipated the future covenant:

God’s gifts may easily pall and become worthless if his presence is not associated with them; with the sense of that presence they [the offerer-recipients] cannot but be grateful.... And the same may be said of the new covenant through the great reality in Christ Jesus. There is an element of salt in this covenant also Indeed, what we call the old and the new covenant are really but shapes of that great covenant between God and man made in the very constitution of things. God, creating man in his own image, and planting within him certain powers and aspirations, is thereby recording the Divine articles in the covenant; and man also, by the manifestations of his nature, by his recognition of conscience, even by his idolatries and superstitions, and gropings after God, testifies to his part in the covenant. And in this covenant all true disciples are as the salt, the solemn, continuous pledge from God to the world that he does not look on it as beyond recovery. Be it the part of all disciples then to keep the

savour of the salt that is in them.... It rests with us to honour God's covenant of salt and make it more and more efficacious.⁴⁷

6b2) (its effectiveness in small amounts)

For other than the real reason of adding flavor to the portion of sacrifice consumed by men as indicated immediately above, salt served no physical purpose. Thus,

It must have served as a *symbol* of something in context with the sacrifice, just as those sacrifices themselves symbolised something. Symbol of what? Some might speculate that the salt in those sacrifices symbolised "wisdom", so that the sacrifice was to be performed "with a purpose", as if "understanding" what it pointed to.⁴⁸

As discussed above under 2), salt can symbolize wisdom, especially in the sense that a little goes a long way. Thus, "Christ's people are the salt of the earth; and salt, to do its work, must be mingled with that which it is to preserve."⁴⁹

6b3) (its ability to purify)

As pointed out in 6a), the grain offering was to be seasoned with salt. This salt served to "purify" the offering and as the symbol of purity.

When the Hebrew worshipper had presented his burnt offering, had sought forgiveness of sin, and had dedicated himself to God in sacred symbolism, he then brought of the produce of the land, of that which constituted his food; and by presenting flour, oil, and wine, with frankincense, he owned his indebtedness to Jehovah. In engaging in this last act of worship, he was to do that which spoke emphatically of purity in approaching the Holy One of Israel.⁵⁰

In Leviticus 2:11 we are told the grain offering sacrifice cannot contain yeast or honey. "Everything associated with corruption must be avoided; that which was antiseptic in its nature [salt] should be introduced; 'nothing which defileth' before him; the 'clean hands and the pure heart' in 'the holy place.'"⁵¹

Salt was regarded as the "corrective of impurity.... When we come up to the house of the Lord to 'offer the sacrifice of praise' or to engage in any act of devotion, we must remember that—"⁵² only the pure in heart can see God (Matt. 5:8). "Salt ... signified the purity and persevering fidelity that were necessary in the worship of God. Every thing was seasoned with it, to signify the purity and perfection that should be extended through every part of the Divine service, and through the hearts and lives of God's worshippers."⁵³

All of these are, of course, part of the covenant of salt: "The Hebrew term for covenant (ברית, *berith*) literally signifies *purification*; and the covenant of God is the gospel which is instituted of God for our purification from sin."⁵⁴

6b4) (its persistence)

As shown above, salt was required in the various Temple offerings, "bloody and unbloody.... It signifies the imperishableness of Jehovah's love for His people."⁵⁵

Mackintosh, addressing the use of salt in the sacrifice as a covenant of salt, opines that salt "sets forth the enduring character of that covenant. God Himself has so ordained it, in all things,

that nought can ever alter it — no influence can ever corrupt it. In a spiritual and practical point of view, it is impossible to over-estimate the value of such an ingredient.”⁵⁶

This covenant had to be enduring because it has to last through the ages, “because as salt is incorruptible, so was the covenant made with Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and the patriarchs, relative to the redemption of the world by the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷

Much as a circle is unending, in a like circular manner, salt was used to symbolize the permanency of the supply of salt and of the priesthood [Nu 18:19],

God has defined the provisions for the priesthood, and indicated in what certainty and sufficiency they would come. He also indicates the *permanency* of the supply. The things given would be given to Aaron and to his sons and daughters with him by a statute for ever. Everything was done to make and keep the priesthood separate, and prevent those who had it from being tempted into the ordinary business of life, by fear lest they should lack sufficient support.... Thus we may understand God saying to Aaron, and through him to the long succession of priests, ‘There is bread and salt between us.’⁵⁸

Its symbolism carries through to our priesthood today [Rev 1:6, 5:10, and 20:6]: “For it is to be feared we often forget to season our sacrifices with salt. We work for God in a consecrated spirit, but we do not universally commit our work to his preserving grace, and expect its permanency and purity. Work for God *should* endure. It is our own fault if it do [sic] not.”⁵⁹

6b5) (its ability to preserve)

As stated in 6b4), leaven and honey are strictly forbidden from the sacred sacrifices. This is because

Leaven is “a substance in a state of putrefaction;” honey “soon turns sour, and even forms vinegar.” These were, therefore, expressly interdicted; they might not be laid on the altar of God [except as first fruit offerings – Lev 2:11]. But so important was this feature that positive as well as negative rules were laid down Salt is the great preservative from putrefaction, fitting type of all that makes pure in symbolic worship.⁶⁰

As an aside, pure, unadulterated honey does not turn sour. Its osmotic properties (like that of salt) are such that it prevents the growth of microorganisms. It is as “incorruptible” as salt. However, unlike salt, if a little water is added to honey, its osmotic properties are altered and the fructose and glucose in honey now becomes a ready food source for spoilage microorganisms, and it will turn sour and form vinegar. Pure salt does not do this when a little water is added, because it does not have a carbon source to provide energy to the microorganism and the building blocks for its growth.

Salt in the sacrifice also serves as a reminder of our obligation to God and his to us: “The status of the believer is an indissoluble alliance with the Almighty on the ground of promise and oath. This is his privilege and motive power. Every sacrifice must be salted with the salt of holy obedience, producing peace and purity, and preserving it from corruption.”⁶¹

The problematic practice of rubbing a newborn with salt introduced in 4) above, may be a reminder both of God’s covenant of salt and its preservative power. Hebrew parents likely wanted their infant to enter into the covenant and to live a long life.

In conclusion, we have seen that all five properties of salt have their metaphorical roles in the sacred sacrifices. I believe the survey has been thorough enough that there no roles are left.

7) Salt as a valuable commodity, a unit of exchange, used as payment (salary), and reference to this in the Bible

For many of the properties discussed above, and especially because the hot, arid weather of the area means lots of sweating for evaporative cooling, which leads to the ready loss of body electrolytes,⁶² of which salt is the most prevalent, salt is a valuable commodity, a necessity of plant and animal life.⁶³ It doesn't need to be ingested in large quantities to meet this role. The minimum daily requirement for humans is 6 g per day,⁶⁴ or about a teaspoon. Ingesting less than this for a long period of time can be fatal. Exactly how it is important will be considered during the discussion of the new way that salt can serve as an example of natural revelation, below.

But to show that it was universally important, let's turn to a translation of Pliny in the seventh of the thirty-first book of his *Natural History*, rendered by Clarke,

So essentially necessary is salt that without it human life cannot be preserved: and even the pleasures and endowments of the mind are expressed by it; the delights of life, repose, and the highest mental serenity, are expressed by no other term than *sales* among the Latins. ... But its importance may be farther understood by its use in sacred things, as no sacrifice was offered to the gods without the salt cake.⁶⁵

The importance of salt to man and beast is perhaps recognized in Isaiah 30:24: "The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel." The Hebrew word for "mash" used in this verse is "*chamiyts*."⁶⁶ Although the exact meaning of this word is not certain, Strong⁶⁷ translates it as "seasoned" (with salt).

Another possible place salt is used in this role can be found in Ezra 4:14, "Now since we are under obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonored, we are sending this message to inform the king," The phrase, "under obligation to the palace," includes the Aramaic word, *melach*. "Under obligation" could mean a payment. Or *melach* as used here could indeed carry the implication of the translation: "It probably reflects the common Near Eastern idiom 'to be under obligation to.' If a host gives a guest salt, the guest is under the protection of his hospitality which is considered a binding obligation."⁶⁸

In short, the exact role of salt in this verse is uncertain.

But more to the point, the word "salt" is derived from the Latin *salarium* meaning salary or stipend, referring originally to the soldier's allowance for the purchase of salt. *Salarium* is in turn derived from the neuter of the adjective *salaris*, pertaining to salt.⁶⁹

8) Salt as a substance found in barren lands, and the metaphorical uses of this property

The main area where salt was gathered in ancient Palestine was (and still is) the bottom of the Rift Valley in and near the south end of the Dead Sea, "especially the massive six mile long salt cliffs of Jebel Usdum. The face of the ridge is constantly changing as weather interacts with the rock salt."⁷⁰

This area is even referred to as the “Valley of Salt” five times in the Old Testament: 2 Samuel 8:13, 2 Kings 14:7, 1 Chronicles, 18:12, 2 Chronicles 25:11 and Psalm 60:1. Furthermore, in nine of the 16 instances where “Dead Sea” occurs in the NIV, the original Hebrew is “Salt Sea” (Gen 14:3; Num 34:3,12; Deut 3:17; Josh 3:16,12:3,15:2,5, and 18:19).

In a vision of the consequences of a river with its headwaters gushing from beneath the restored temple, and its destination the (consequently no longer) Dead Sea, in verse 11 of chapter 47, Ezekiel relates the condition of the salt end of the Dead Sea, “But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for **salt**.”

An enigmatic reference is made in Joshua 15:62, “Nibshan, the City of **Salt** and En Gedi—six towns and their villages.” Although the location of En Gedi in the Valley of Salt is well established, the location of the City of Salt is not certain. It is attributed to a plain just above the north end of the Dead Sea,⁷¹ in an area with an annual rainfall of a mere 4 to 8 inches,⁷² making it quite sparse in vegetation.

That this land is barren is captured in six passages, beginning with Deuteronomy 23:23 in which Moses describes the consequences of not honoring the covenant with the Lord, “The whole land will be a burning waste of **salt** and sulfur—nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it...” The Lord makes the connection in Job 39:5-6, “Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied its ropes? I gave it the wasteland as its home, the **salt** flats as its habitat.” In Psalm 107:33-34, the Psalmist associates salt with wasteland, “He (the LORD, v 31) turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a **salt** waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there.” “Jeremiah 17:6 reinforces this with, “That person [one who turns from the LORD, v 5] will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a **salt** land where no one lives.” Zephaniah is the last of the Old Testament writers to employ this connection in chapter 2, verse 9, “Therefore, as surely as I live,” declares the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, “surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah—a place of weeds and **salt** pits, a wasteland forever...” In the New Testament, James implies this barrenness in chapter 3, verses 11-12, “Can both fresh water and **salt** water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a **salt** spring produce fresh water.”

The role of the barrenness of salt lands as a metaphor for destruction is first encountered in Genesis 19:26, “But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt,” and Jesus’ reminder of the perils of hesitating on the day the Son of Man is revealed by referring to this with the simple warning, “Remember Lot’s wife!” (Luke 17:32).

Deuteronomy 29:23, given above, is a use of this metaphor. Judges 9:45 is a clear use of this metaphor, “All that day Abimelek pressed his attack against the city until he had captured it and killed its people. Then he destroyed the city (Shechem, v 44) and scattered **salt** over it. The land of defeated cities was salted to mark their perpetual desolation.”⁷³ The salt was a symbol of destruction. There wouldn’t have been enough salt to cover Shechem to the extent it would have actually become barren, which is why archeological investigations have revealed phases of occupation up to the Hellenistic period, 332-152 BCE.⁷⁴

A similar condition is established for Moab. In chapter 48, verse 9, Jeremiah proclaims, “Put **salt** on Moab, for she will be laid waste; her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them.” Lastly, in Mark 9:49, we read the dreadful state of those condemned to hell: “Everyone will be **salted** with fire.”

A New Way to View Salt as an Example of Natural Revelation in the Bible

The astute reader will notice that I have assiduously avoided reference to a use of “salt” in Matthew 5:13, “You are the **salt** of the earth. But if the **salt** loses its **saltiness**, how can it be made **salty** again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” or its corresponding verses in Luke 14:34-35, “...**Salt** is good, but if it loses its **saltiness**, how can it be made **salty** again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out,” or in the first part of Mark 9:50, “**Salt** is good, but if it loses its **saltiness**, how can you make it **salty** again?” This oversight is intentional, because these parallel verses are key to understanding the new way in which salt may be viewed as an example of natural revelation.

But before we go there, we still have three more questions to probe.

How can salt lose its savor?

There is some question about how salt can lose its savor.⁷⁵ If, for example, it is possible for it to become tasteless or lose its preserving properties, it would “lose its savor.” At least three ways have been proposed for salt to do this: the salt was mingled with 1) vegetable and earthy substances (dirt)⁷⁶ 2) water and air,⁷⁷ or 3) other minerals.⁷⁸

Two early accounts of travelers help us understand these possibilities. In the earliest, we find (modified somewhat from the original Jacobean English),

Along, on one side of the valley, viz. that towards Gibul, there is a small precipice about two men's lengths, occasioned by the continual taking away the salt; and, in this, you may see how the veins of it lie. I broke a piece of it, of which that part that was exposed to the rain, sun, and air, though it had the sparks and particles of salt, yet it had perfectly lost its savor.... The inner part, which was connected to the rock, retained its savor, as I found by proof.⁷⁹

In the second, we find additional and more pertinent detail,

It should be stated in this connection that the salt used in this country is not manufactured by boiling clean salt water, nor quarried from mines, but is obtained from marshes along the sea-shore, as in Cyprus, or from salt lakes in the interior, which dry up in summer, as the one in the desert north of Palmyra, and the great lake of Jebbul, southeast of Aleppo....Maundrell, [the prior author] who visited the lake at Jebbul, tells us that he found salt there which had entirely “lost its savor,” and the same abounds among the debris at Usdum, and in other localities of rock-salt at the south end of the Dead Sea [e.g., the outcrop at Gibul, mentioned above]. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that the salt of this country, if left long in contact with the ground, does become insipid and useless. From the manner in which it is gathered, much earth and other impurities are necessarily collected with it.⁸⁰

If salt can lose its saltiness, what would it be good for?

This is the second question. Assuming it could happen, salt of this sort is not good for much of anything. It does have some suggested uses. 1) because of its ability to kill plants as mentioned above, it is thrown on the road to keep it free of weeds; 2) because of its hygroscopic ability (its ability to attract atmospheric water), it can be thrown on roads to adhere dirt particles

together and thus keep the dust down; 3) because of its granular nature, perhaps combined with 2) it can be used on slippery floors to give purchase.

The first two of these are captured in the following quote,

Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all, and such salt soon effloresces and turns to dust - not to fruitful soil, however. It is not only 'good for nothing' itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown; and this is the reason why it is cast into the street. There is a sort of verbal verisimilitude in the manner in which our Lord alludes to the act: 'it is cast out' and 'trodden under foot;' so troublesome is this corrupted salt, that it is carefully swept up, carried forth, and thrown into the street. There is no place about the house, yard, or garden where it can be tolerated. No man will allow it to be thrown on to his field, and the only place for it is the street, and there it is cast to be trodden underfoot of men."⁸¹

There seems to be some controversy over the third suggestion. On the one hand, we find, "There was a species of salt in Judea, which was generated at the lake Asphaltites [the Dead Sea], and hence called bituminous salt, easily rendered vapid, and of no other use but to be spread in a part of the temple, to prevent slipping in wet weather."⁸² Others, perhaps wanting to keep such salt out of the temple, lest it "contaminate" or negatively influence the significance of the salt used in sacrifices discussed above, challenge this assertion, "Some have claimed that such contaminated salt supposedly was thrown on the temple floor. But no, there was no need to use salt indoors on floors, only on dusty roads outside. And that is what Jesus said also, 'to be cast *out*.'"⁸³ [Emphasis added by the original author.] This controversy cannot be resolved in this paper, nor does it need to be, since it is not relevant to the main point, which we will get to shortly.

What is the metaphorical meaning of salt's losing its saltiness? Could it suggest a deficient witness?

This is the third question and one possibility. We should see how others have regarded it. Emphasizing the metaphor of seasoning and preservation, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown suggests,

Whether salt ever does lose its saline property-about which there is a difference of opinion-is a question of no moment here. The point of the case lies in the supposition--that *if it should lose it*, [italics in original] the consequence would be as here described. So with Christians. ... But, W[sic]hat is to be the issue of that Christianity which is found wanting in those elements which can alone stay the corruption and season the tastelessness of an all-pervading carnality? ... The question is.... Since living Christianity is the only "salt of the earth," if men lose that, *what else* [italics in original] can supply its place? What follows is the appalling answer to this question. **It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out** [bold in original]-a figurative expression of indignant exclusion from the kingdom of God (compare Mt 8:12; 22:13; Joh 6:37; 9:34) **and to be trodden under foot of men** [bold in original]-expressive of contempt and scorn. It is not the mere want of a certain character, but the want of it in those whose *profession* [italics in original] and *appearance* [italics in original] were fitted to beget expectation of finding it.⁸⁴

A similar argument is made by McKenzie, “the saying in Mk and Lk [sic] refers to the possibility of defection from the gospel.”⁸⁵

Notice that in both these passages, the possibility that one can lose his usefulness in the kingdom is conceded and linked to the metaphor of salt if it were to lose its saltiness, and hence its roles as a preservative and a substance that adds savor, without shedding any light on how salt might or even whether it could lose its saltiness.

What is the metaphorical meaning of salt’s losing its saltiness? Could it suggest that the cost of discipleship is huge? And, was Jesus talking to us? – Yes and No

As shown above, some exegete or eisogete (depending upon your bias) Matt 5:13 to include not only the disciples whom Christ was addressing at the time, “who might be compared to ‘salt’, because of the savoury doctrines they preached⁸⁶,” but also “ye who are thus holy, are the salt of the earth -- Are to season others⁸⁷.” Or, “We have here the practical application of the foregoing principles to those disciples who sat listening to them, and to their successors in all time.”⁸⁸

On the other hand, others caution, “Please keep in mind that Jesus said those things to and regarding *those disciples*, who were around him on that occasion, and not to or regarding people of our day.”⁸⁹

I must enter this fray and find myself siding with the former sentiment, not the latter. But, in defense of those siding with the latter, the reason for their denial is an honest one, since

... some preachers have used Matthew 5:13 for tickling people's egos. They have caused their followers to think that Jesus was talking to and regarding *them*, and not to and regarding the disciples whom he in actual fact was addressing on that occasion. Some preachers have even told their followers that the Earth would be destroyed, were it not for them, as “the salt of the Earth”, in the meaning ‘preserving agent’. Most readers should be able to see that that is nonsense, merely a way to manipulate people.⁹⁰

This passage does apply to the disciples around Jesus and to us, but not to serve to “tickle” our egos, but to do something much more serious--to let us know how much it will cost us to be Jesus’ disciples, as identified by the noted Biblical scholar, Paul S. Minear, “Despite much misunderstanding among modern readers and preachers, Jesus’ saying in Matthew 5:13 (“You are the salt of the earth”) concerns sacrificing one’s life to follow Christ. Moreover, this high cost of discipleship has cosmic significance.”⁹¹

Minear conflates the two possibilities in the following: “It was clearly for the sake of these crowds [and hence, us, the modern day equivalents of these crowds] ... that Jesus concentrated his attention not on them but on the disciples, whom he was training as future leaders of the crowds. ‘When he saw the crowds ... his disciples came to him ... and he taught them (the disciples)...’”⁹² Minear goes on to point out that the form of the first eight beatitudes is different from the form of the ninth and thus it is specifically addressed to his disciples.

At this point, Minear makes his understanding of these verses crystal clear,

“In the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Those words are a microscopic summary of the macroscopic vision on a history-long drama of bloodshed. By beginning the training of his disciples with these words,

the Master-prophet not only prefigured their future but also furnished the necessary clue to the meaning of the announcement that followed: 'You are the salt of the earth.' That clue is the link between the ninth beatitude and this declaration. ... Translators, editors, and printers have formed a conspiracy to conceal this linkage. Although early Greek manuscripts used no paragraph division, printed Greek texts and English translations habitually begin a new paragraph with this announcement. Misunderstanding is further ensured when editors insert a new non-biblical heading between the two paragraphs, such as 'Salt and Light.' The separate caption encourages preachers and teachers to begin their exposition with this new idea and thereby ignore the controls that are exerted on the meaning of the metaphors by their linkage to these disciples who as prophets face persecution and death. Salt then loses its connection to such requirements as carrying the cross.⁹³

In other words, the emphasis for salt in this passage is its central importance in many of the metaphorical roles indicated above, especially the importance of salt in sacrifice, in signifying covenants, and in flavoring relationships. If a disciple is not willing to pay the price (referring to another one of salt's metaphorical roles) of service to Jesus, including the ultimate price of willingness to die for that service, that disciple's usefulness to Jesus is the same as salt's, if it "loses its saltiness," is to its metaphorical roles. Inasmuch as we are called to be disciples and "fishers of men," this message applies to us as well.

We can't leave the latter phrase without noting another, cryptic use of the word salt in the Bible which is relevant to this discussion. The Greek for fisherman is *halieus*⁹⁴. This word also serves for the word for sailor.⁹⁵ Thus the argument can be made that the etymology of its use for fishers may have derived from the location where most fishermen fished, the salty Mediterranean Sea. But equally likely, it was derived from the habit of salting the fish to preserve them. If so, when Jesus said to his first disciples, the brothers, Peter and Andrew, "I will make you fishers [*halieus*⁹⁶] of men." (Matt 4:20), he was, if he had the Greek in mind, in essence, making a pun perhaps appreciated only by him at the time, which he later made clear when he used the metaphor discussed in the above passages.

How this fits with a new interpretation

As most people know, salt as used here and elsewhere in the Bible is sodium chloride. Halite is the mineral form of sodium chloride, the white crystal referred to above under the color of salt. Sodium is one of the most versatile electrolytes in our body. It is the most abundant cation (positively charged electrolyte) in our body fluids. For this and other reasons, it is important in regulating body fluids and acid-base levels. It is central to the nerve and muscle impulse and it is important in what happens at the synapse (gap) between a nerve cell and a muscle cell or one nerve cell and another. Lastly, it is important to many chemical reactions in the cell. Its regulation is so important in our body that its concentration is controlled by three hormones: when its concentration in the blood is low, aldosterone is released, which controls its reabsorption from filtrate in the kidney into the blood, resulting in its increase in blood; when its concentration in the blood is high, atrial natriuretic peptide is released, which controls its secretion from the blood into the kidney filtrate, resulting in its decrease in blood, and antidiuretic hormone (ADH) also known as vasopressin is released, which brings about its decrease in blood by dilution with water reabsorbed from the filtrate to the blood in a location similar to that where atrial natriuretic peptide acts.

A search of the literature reveals that salt was not identified by the classical Biblical scholars by its chemical formula. The earliest reference to sodium chloride in the body of Biblical literature

appears to be (“chloride of sodium”) in 1863.⁹⁷ In 1870, the Treasury of Scripture knowledge used “muriat of soda,⁹⁸ suggesting the transition to a more technically correct term was not yet universal.

This failure should not be surprising, since sodium was first isolated in 1807⁹⁹ and chlorine in 1810,¹⁰⁰ both by the brilliant chemist, Sir Humphrey Davy. Sir Davy gave sodium its name after the source from which he isolated it, soda, in this case, caustic soda, sodium hydroxide.¹⁰¹

Finally, the new metaphor

All the groundwork has finally been laid for the introduction of the new metaphor. Sodium chloride consists of *two* elements. As noted above, the ancient writers of the Bible could not have known this. This corresponds to its use as a metaphor for a covenant, which is an agreement to work together forged between *two* parties. But it doesn't end there. Sodium chloride is formed when one of the elements, neutral sodium, surrenders its single outer electron to the other element, neutral chlorine. When it does so, its new outer electron shell, which was previously the next to the outer shell, now has eight electrons, which is the electrochemically desirable number for a shell this close to the nucleus. At the same time, neutral chlorine, which has seven electrons in its outer shell, picks up the electron offered by sodium, to make its outer shell also reach the desirable number, eight. Both elements are now not only equipped with an “ideal” or “completed” configuration to their outer electron shell, but sodium, because it has one less electron than its neutral number, becomes the sodium ion, with a single positive charge, while chlorine, with one more electron than its neutral number, becomes the chloride ion, with a negative charge. In this state, these two electrolytes are attracted to one another because of their opposite charges, and they form the quite strong, ionic bond.

Presumably you have noticed the analogy this description has to Jesus's giving up His Spirit on the cross to assume a “spiritually” desirable condition for God, while we, having received His Spirit, now have the “spiritually” desirable condition for man. Furthermore, this new condition causes us to be powerfully attracted to one another.

Perhaps to take this metaphor further, it is not too much of a stretch to even suggest that the number seven has such significance in Biblical contexts in part because it is important as a number that reflects the neutral state of man (chlorine). Thus for Jesus, as fully man, this number is an appropriate metaphorical equivalent, because it represents the state of man in need, while for Jesus as fully God, this number represents the ideal number because of its potential to complete man. This contention is further supported by the observation, made in 6a), that the salt for the sacrifice was provided by the priests from the Temple store. The solution for our sin nature, which created the need for the sacrifice in the first place, is provided by God through Jesus, who is now seen not only as the sacrificial lamb, but also as the salt of the sacrifice symbolic of so much more.

Now we are ready to examine how salt can lose its saltiness in light of this metaphor. If man should chose to sever this relationship (give up his extra electron), he ceases to be attracted to God (and *vice versa*). Can sodium lose its attraction to chloride? Absolutely! When polarized water in sufficient abundance is added to a halite crystal, the combined effect of many polarized water molecules, though substantially weaker individually than the ionic bond between sodium and chloride, is able to overcome that attraction and pull the two atoms apart. This is exactly what happens when the attractions and worries of this world overpower the loving bond formed

between our Savior and Lord and us (the seed that fell among the thorns: Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19, and Luke 8:14).

Another way is reflected by my wife's insight which emerged when she read the first travel account under "How can salt lose its savor?" above. She was immediately struck by the passage, "The inner part, which was connected to the rock, retained its savor" while that which had fallen away from the rock had not. To her, this is an even more powerful metaphor of our need to be bound to the Rock (our Lord) to retain our savor (a focus shifted to pleasing our Lord over ourselves that is attractive to others) than the more arcane metaphor of chlorine and sodium I am attempting to establish.

In either case, with this interpretation, it should be clear I come down on the side of those who prefer to think that Jesus was referring to a witness who has fallen away. However, I can accept this without thinking any less of the alternate explanation: that the cost of discipleship is dear.

In conclusion, we may ask ourselves: is this new metaphor something God intended His children to understand as their comprehension of the universe matured? Thus when He planted the metaphors discussed earlier in the minds of the biblical authors and people, did He intend them to do double duty with an interpretation that was both meaningful at the time and also possessing a deeper interpretation that would not emerge until today, yet which, when it did, would serve to reinforce the meaning gleaned earlier? Or is it just a product of man's desire to see connections and patterns in everything¹⁰²? Some would suggest that the former goes too far, an extreme case of eisegesis, and that the latter is a better explanation. I would suggest to them that their God is too small.¹⁰³

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¹⁷ Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1944), Vol II, 345.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1949), 620.

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⁴⁶ Ibid. 11, at 238-239.

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⁴⁸ Ibid. 34.

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⁵⁴ Ibid. 11, at 35.

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⁵⁶ Charles Henry Mackintosh, *Genesis to Deuteronomy: Notes on the Pentateuch*, (originally published in six volumes, 1880-1881), (Neptune, NJ, Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), 299.

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⁵⁹ Ibid. 11, at 28.

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⁷¹ Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 2010), 114.

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⁷⁵ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Jamieson Fausset Brown Complete Commentary*, 3 Volumes, (Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), Vol III, 29.

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⁷⁹ Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem, at Easter, A.D. 1696*, (Edinburgh, John Orphoot, 1812), 249.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 25, at 362.

⁸¹ Ibid 25, at 362-363.

⁸² Adam Clarke, [19--?], *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, ... with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, reprinted from the original, New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, Vol I, p 68. Incidentally, Clarke continues, "This is probably what our Lord alludes to in this place. The existence of such a salt, and its application to such a use, Schoettgenius has largely proved in his *Horae Hebraicae*, Vol I p. 18, etc." Lightfoot wrote *Horae Hebraicae*, not Schlottgenius. The latter was a much earlier writer and his book is in Latin throughout. Lightfoot's is not.

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⁸⁴ Ibid. 75.

⁸⁵ John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1995), 760.

⁸⁶ John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament; in Which the Sense of the Sacred Text is Taken*, reprinted from edition printed by William Hill, 1852-1854, London, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1980), Vol V, 32.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 35.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 75, at 28-29.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 34.

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⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 6, at 10.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

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