

## Bob Dylan's 'Long and wasted years' – an analysis by Kees de Graaf

Undoubtedly this is another masterpiece – like so many – from the album 'Tempest'. It is rather unique in Dylan's oeuvre. Like 'Brownsville girl' the song is more recited than sung which very much adds to the drama of the song. Apart from this, there is no bridge, no chorus or refrain in the song which gives every word equal significance, felicity of expression and penetrance. The melodic repetition together with the descending guitar riff yields both momentum, dispense and tension. The phrasing is absolutely magnificent, Dylan twists and bends the words to give them maximum impact. From beginning to its sudden end there is no let up, you are overwhelmed by the continuous pounding of waves of words and when the drama suddenly comes to an end, it leaves you somewhat bewildered and with the feeling that the poet has something very important to say, yet you cannot immediately pinpoint what exactly this is all about.

What is this song about? The least one could say is that something has gone terribly wrong in this love relationship. Two lovers still stuck together in a bond full of pain, tears and remorse, seemingly mutually incapable to heal the wounds they have inflicted on each other. A thought which we feel can hardly be dismissed is that of burning Eden, paradise lost. If this supposition is correct, and I found many allusions in the song which point in that direction, '**Long and wasted years**' may be a metaphor to describe the whole epoch of fallen mankind. An epoch which started when man fell into sin and had to leave the Gates of Eden behind, an epoch which still lasts as we speak and will last till the Latter Day. The poet now confronts us with the bitter consequences of this downfall. Is there an auto-biographical undercurrent in this song? Maybe. However, we have to bear in mind what the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) wrote. Gadamer wrote that the finest and greatest art in this world always has something which is inexplicable and remains a mystery, full revelation of this mystery will blur great art and make it superficial. This also the case here. This analysis is an attempt to get a little closer to what may be nothing more than a possible interpretation of this great song.

Having said this let's make a start with the daunting task of analyzing the lyrics of this song.

**'It's been such a long, long time, since we loved each other and our hearts were true'**. In the poet's mind this introductory dialogue may be taken from a scene in which Adam is addressing Eve, shortly after they had been expelled from the Garden of Eden. When somebody is in agony and pain for one's perception, time moves slowly and happiness seems such a long time ago, that's why he says: **'It's been such a long, long time'**. The memory of the perfect happy days in the Garden of Eden still linger but in Adam's perception this happy period seems such a long time ago. The happy days flew by in the twinkling of an eye, just like Dylan wrote in 'Standing in the Doorway': *'Yesterday – in the Garden of Eden - everything was going too fast, today, it's moving too slow'*. In the Garden of Eden they loved each other in the most truthful and perfect way: **'our hearts were true'**. There was a perfect understanding between the two, no anxiety or fear to blur their love relationship, mutually serving and supporting each other in all circumstances and walks of life. In some sort of a way the poet here reiterates what he wrote in the final verse of his song 'Gates of Eden': *'At dawn my lover comes to me and tells me of her dreams, with no attempts to shovel the glimpse into the ditch of what each one means. At times I think there are no words but these to tell what's true, and there are no truths outside the Gates of Eden'*. But for Eve and Adam that is now something from a distant past. Adam goes on to say to Eve: **'One time, for one brief day, I was the man for you'**. That **'One time'** may have been in paradise, in the Garden of Eden. It now looks as if this perfect matrimony only lasted for a brief day. However, they say that time flies when you're having fun, when you are happy and having a great time. Though this **'brief day'** might in reality have lasted much longer than a day, it now feels it was over before it had even started. It is just like a short dream as Dylan wrote

in 'Sugar Baby': *"Happiness can come suddenly and leave just as quick"*.

The fictitious conversation goes on when Adam says to Eve: **'Last night I heard you talking in your sleep, saying things you shouldn't say'**. **'Talking in your sleep'** may mean that whatever Eve said in her sleep she did not say those things consciously. **'Talking in your sleep, saying things you shouldn't say'** may show that when Eve and Adam fell into sin in paradise, not only their conscious state of mind but also their subconscious state of mind had been corrupted. For the first time after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam overheard Eve say wicked things, wicked things Adam obviously never heard before. For them this was a new phenomenon. Whatever Eve and Adam's mind produced in an unfallen state in paradise, also in their sub-consciousness, was always true and without any sin or flaw. But things had changed. In the Garden of Eden Man had deliberately risen against God by eating from the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1-7). This is what happened immediately after Eve and Adam fell into sin: *'At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. Then the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you? He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked'*. Here we see shame and fear enter into this world. Things deteriorated between the two of them. Adam blamed Eve and Eve claimed that the serpent had beguiled her (Genesis 3:12,13). Ever since that day it has become an integral part of the human condition to decline any personal responsibility for whatever evil there is in this world and always blame *others*, others like your husband or wife, your neighbors, the government, the system, or other races, nations and religions.

After Adam overheard Eve talking in her sleep **'saying things she shouldn't say'** Adam now says to Eve: **'Oh baby, you just might have to go to jail someday'**. The words **'go to jail'** may be a metaphorical expression for 'to be sent to hell' meaning that one day Eve will be held accountable for all the wicked things she has said and done and has to face judgment. We find this metaphor more often in the Bible e.g. Revelation 20:7: *'When the thousand years come to an end, Satan will be let out of his prison'* and ultimately Satan will be judged.

**'Is there a place we can go? Is there anybody we can see?'** once again expresses fear and bewilderment. These words may be uttered when somebody has committed a crime and urgently needs help or medical assistance. When somebody has committed a crime one cannot go to the authorities or to a doctor, for if one does he or she will immediately be arrested and imprisoned. Man has no courage to go back to God because he now fears God and cannot go back to the serpent because that will bring him into further trouble, so in bewilderment he desperately asks: **'Is there a place we can go? Is there anybody we can see?'** Of course Adam could have gone back to God but after the downfall of man this is also part of the human condition that man has no inclination at all to turn to the only place where he can have his problems cured and that is with God. When the poet goes on to say: **'Maybe, it's the same for you, as it is for me'**, this sounds like an understatement. Once again, after the fall of man into sin, part of the human condition is his ability to exactly pinpoint evil and sin in *other* people, but to turn a blind eye to one's own mistakes, flaws and sins. Adam clearly sees Eve's sins but underestimates his own situation which is equally dreadful. It is as if Adam says to Eve: 'You have sinned and you will be held accountable for what you have done but my flaws and sins are not so bad as yours, therefore I say: **'Maybe, it's the same for you, as it is for me'**, we have to wait and see if I'm equally accountable for what I've done but I don't think I am'.

When the poet goes on to say: **'I ain't seen my family in twenty years, that ain't easy to understand, they may be dead by now, I lost track of them after they lost their land'** the focus of the camera now seems to shift from this post paradisiac scene to a more universal level, albeit there is still some sort of a connection with the Garden of Eden because in a way also Eve and Adam lost their land when they were expelled from the Gates of Eden. When it says: **'that ain't easy to understand'** it is

as if the poet wishes to emphasize that the words ***'I ain't seen my family in twenty years,*** should not be understood in a literal, autobiographical, sense, as if Dylan had not seen his family, his siblings, in twenty years or so. ***'That ain't easy to understand'*** challenges the reader not to focus on what seems obvious here – Dylan's own family or siblings – but to meditate on and search for a deeper, more spiritual meaning. At the same time ***'That ain't easy to understand'*** also says that although it is not easy to understand what the poet means, it is not impossible to find out what the poet means and he actually challenges you to find out what he wants to say. The fact remains that Dylan wants to be understood here.

First we have to find out what ***'to lose one land'*** means. The line ***'I lost track of them after they lost their land'*** seems to echo the 'Battle of Angels' which is an early version of Orpheus Descending. After Myra had asked: 'Don't you have folks anywhere?', Valentine Xavier answers: 'I lost ***track of 'em after they lost their land'***. In Biblical times, in Israel, the land was the life and blood of God's chosen people. God took the tribes of Israel to the promised land. This land was an inheritance of grace. This land was a free gift from God and had to be cultivated and was not for sale, it had to be passed on from one generation to the next. It is the reason why Naboth refused to sell his land to King Ahab (1 Kings 21:2,3). However, Naboth had to give up his land, not because he sold it, but because he was subsequently falsely accused in a mock trial and stoned to death for 'the wrongs that he had done'. In those days, selling your family land was seen as a treacherous act towards your family and simply 'not done' because land was the only God given means by which families and communities could survive. In those days, to lose one's land is the same as to lose one's identity both as a nation and as a tribe or family.

However, the word ***'land'*** used here has an ever deeper meaning than just the physical land of Israel or Canaan. The promised land, the land of Canaan, was just a foretaste of the real land and this real land is heaven. Dylan dwells on that in his song 'Sweetheart like you' where it says: *'There's only one step down from here, baby, It's called the land of permanent bliss'*. This land of permanent bliss is heaven.

This land, the full realization of one's identity, this New Jerusalem, the city of gold, is close by and will be coming down from heaven (Rev. 21:2) and will be a tangible reality once again, in the same way as the land of Canaan was a tangible reality. Each follower of God will have his own land – one's own mansion – one's own identity - in the New Jerusalem, just like Dylan also said in 'Sweetheart like you': *'They say in your father's house, there's many mansions (John 14:2) ,each one of them got a fireproof floor'..*

When it says: ***'I ain't seen my family in twenty years, they may be dead by now,*** this might be a vague reference to the arch patriarch Jacob who had been working in Haran with his uncle Laban for twenty years when he was instructed to go home and return to Canaan (Gen. 31: 3 and 41). The distance from Haran to Israel was more than 400 miles. Jacob had not seen his family for twenty years and without today's modern means of communication (mail, telephone internet) he had no knowledge of their whereabouts and might quite rightly have concluded: ***'they may be dead by now'***.

What may be the deeper, spiritual meaning of this verse? We first have to see that falling into sin – like Eve and Adam did in the Garden of Eden, or Jacob when he deceived his brother Esau and ultimately the people of Israel when they refused to recognize and accept Jesus – will lead to permanent estrangement from your land, it will lead to losing your identity, this notion is expressed by the metaphor ***'losing your land'***.

On the other hand, the longing for a land where one's identity is fully acknowledged and recognized, this home-coming, is very much present on the album 'Tempest'. Listen to what Dylan says in 'Duchesne Whistle': *'The lights on my **native land** are glowing, I wonder if they'll know me next time 'round'*. It is as if Dylan has Jesus speak through his mouth here. Jesus 'native land' is the land of

Israel and as the Duquesne train passes by, it is as if Jesus sees the lights of this beautiful land flicker and Jesus wonders: *'will they know me next time round'* . When Jesus says *'I wonder if they'll know me next time round'* this should be seen from a human perspective as if Jesus wonders if they – the people of Jerusalem – will accept and acknowledge Him when He will come back to His land and that will happen on the Latter Day.

Therefore, through the mouth of Jesus we paraphrase this verse as if Jesus says the following: ***'I ain't seen my family in twenty years, which means it has been twenty centuries since I've seen my family, my Jewish compatriots, at the time when I was in there in the land of Israel my Jewish compatriots refused to acknowledge and accept me. Being disobedient and not acknowledging and accepting me is the same as being dead and now it looks as if they are dead – they may be dead by now. Being disobedient and not acknowledging and accepting me when I was there, led to my compatriots losing their land. They lost not only their earthly temporal land but what is worse, those who persist in being disobedient and not acknowledging and accepting me will lose their future eternal home and identity. After they lost their land I lost contact with them – I lost track of them – so I went to the gentiles to show them my mercy, and the gentiles acknowledged and accepted me but I will come back and be merciful for the remainder of my Jewish compatriots, I will also reconcile and reunite with some of them'*** . ( see also Romans 11:25-32)

With the words ***'Shake it up baby, twist and shout'*** the poet seems to take us in an entirely different direction in the song. ***'Shake it up baby, twist and shout'*** reminds us of a song 'Twist and shout' written in 1961 by Phil Medley and Bert Burns. The original title of the song was 'Shake it up, Baby'. It was covered by the Isley Brothers and later on by the Beatles. ***'Shake it up baby, twist and shout'*** takes us back to social dancing in the 1960s. The 'twist' which involved the shaking of the hips and pelvis introduced a new style of dancing and replaced coupled dancing in youth clubs and gatherings. At the time this dance was even banned from television because by many it was seen as a provocative way of dancing. The dance caused an almost worldwide craze, mainly because of its simplicity and lack of restrictions.

After the words ***'Shake it up baby, twist and shout'*** it says: ***'you know what it's all about'***. Does this ***'you know what it's all about'*** refer to this dance, the 'twist' as if Dylan meant: 'Baby you know all about this way of dancing' or does it refer to the preceding or next verse(s)? To answer this question we first have to examine what follows next: ***'What you doing out there in the sun anyway? Don't you know the sun can burn your brains right out?'*** It is obvious that these lines echo an African-American folktale called *'Uglier Than A Grinning Buzzard'* in the version by Louise Anderson which can be found in the book *'Talk That Talk': An Anthology of African-American Storytelling*. It is a tale about a trickster –an old buzzard - which had fooled a rabbit and a squirrel into taking a refreshing ride on his back which in the end led to the rabbit and the squirrel being eaten by the buzzard. In return we see that the buzzard is tricked by a clever monkey which is out there in the sun, about to give the buzzard his comeuppance. From the tale: ***"They said, What's the monkey doing out there in the sun? Oh, that monkey done lost his cool. The sun done burned that monkey's brains out'***. So we see in this story that the trickster gets tricked. It is all about getting what one deserves.

If we now go back to the story of Eve and Adam just after they had fallen in sin we may see some of the same phenomena as described above come back. Because Adam had sinned God said to him: ***'By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.'***(Genesis 3:19). ***'Being out there in the sun,'*** sweating and planting and harvesting what the earth brings forth, is *not* Eve's territory but Adam's. Therefore in that situation it is as if Adam says to Eve: ***'What are you doing out there in the sun anyway? Don't you know the sun can burn your brains right out,*** this hard labor in the fields in the burning sun will be much too much for you Eve, you have your own agony to bear Eve which is quite different from mine because God has said to you: ***'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe,***

*with painful labour you will give birth to children, your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” (Genesis 4:16).*

The next verse dwells on the same subject. Not only Adam and Eve- representing mankind - had to bear the dreadful consequences of their downfall but also the serpent who had deceived Eve and Adam gets his comeuppance. We see this paraphrased in the next verse: ***‘My enemy crashed into the dust. Stopped dead in his tracks and he lost his lust. He was run down hard when he broke apart. He died in shame, he had an iron heart’***. Some commentators have argued that this verse deals with the struggle a reborn Christian is going through. When you surrender your heart to the Lord, you increasingly become aware of the fact that there is an enemy within you who continuously tries to crush your new way of living and continuously tries to drag you back into your old way of living. Some call this enemy within a Christian the ‘old man’ or the ‘old nature’ within you, as contrasted with the indwelling ‘new man’ or ‘new nature’ worked by the Holy Spirit (cf Ephesians 4: 22-24, Romans 6:6, Colossians 3:9,10). It reminds us of what Dylan once wrote in the song ‘Where are you tonight? (Journey through dark Heat)’: *‘I fought with my twin, that enemy within, till both of us fell by the way’*. This verse ***‘My enemy crashed into the dust. Stopped dead in his tracks and he lost his lust. He was run down hard when he broke apart. He died in shame, he had an iron heart’*** would describe the final outcome of this struggle within a reborn Christian. In the end when a Christian dies physically, that enemy within him will also die suddenly but then in a spiritual way. It is now as if a Christian looks back on his life after he has died and is in heaven and now says: ‘The battle is over, ***‘my enemy crashed into the dust, stopped dead in his tracks and he lost his lust***, once my body had to return to dust when I died on earth but this enemy will remain in dust forever and this enemy is no longer capable to stir up lust within me, his downfall came suddenly and abrupt, ***he was run down hard when he broke apart***, and had to let me go, I was raised to glory but ***he died in shame***, I received new eyes and a new heart, not a heart of stone but a new heart of flesh but ***he had an iron heart***, a heart harder than stone that can never be converted, ***he died in shame***, for my enemy it has come true what it says it says in Psalm 83: 17 *‘Let them be humiliated and terrified permanently until they die in shame’* (ISV).

However, this verse may also be interpreted as relating to the state of fallen mankind. Not only Eve and Adam were held accountable but also the trickster, the devil, the serpent is cursed. So in this interpretation, this verse echoes Genesis 3:14,15: *‘So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat **dust** all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will **crush** your head, and you will strike his heel’*. It is clear that this serpent, the devil will not only eat dust, ***he will also crash in the dust***. When he will be crashed into the dust, his head will be crushed as well. In other words: he will be ***‘stopped dead in his tracks’***. It will all happen suddenly in the twinkling of an eye, like a flash of lightning as it says in Luke 10: 18: *‘I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning!’*. Falling from heaven is the same as being ***‘run down hard’*** and ***‘to be broken apart’***, like it says in Romans 16:20 *‘then the God of peace will soon crush the Satan under your feet’*. In the end the serpent, Satan, will lose his power to deceive nations and individuals which means that ***he will lose his lust*** and he will be consumed by fire and thrown in the lake of fire and sulphur (Revelations 20:10) and this way he will ***die in shame***. This may be called the second death (Revelations 20:14). The serpent, the devil has ***‘an iron heart’*** a heart which is harder than stone and never can be converted.

The words ***‘I wear dark glasses to cover my eyes, there’re secrets in them that I can’t disguise’*** again echo the ‘Battle of Angels’ from Orpheus Descending. In the ‘Battle of Angels’ Sandra says to Valentine Xavier: *‘I wear dark glasses over my eyes because I’ve got secrets in them’*. This line ***‘I wear dark glasses to cover my eyes, there’re secrets in them that I can’t disguise’*** expresses shame, fear and embarrassment. For the first time, paradise lost caused shame to be introduced into the fallen

world as we read in Genesis 3:7: *'Then the eyes of both (Eve and Adam) were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons'*. It was the moment that man fell into sin that the big masquerade started. Eve and Adam – and through them mankind - lost their innocence and capacity to communicate with an open-mindedness in which there are no hidden secrets. For the first time now they had entered into a situation in which **'saying things you shouldn't say'** is a mistake which should be avoided. Eve and Adam started to wear aprons to disguise their physical nakedness and vulnerability and the words **'I wear dark glasses to cover my eyes, there're secrets in them that I can't disguise'** is just another modern metaphor to express this feeling. The poet makes it clear that if he would not wear those dark glasses, compromising secrets which are very harmful to him or to other people, would be disguised and made public. Ever since the downfall into sin the human mind is so defiled, depraved and corrupted that man needs to deploy all kind of means – in this case **'dark gasses to cover his eyes'** - to disguise all the wicked things that are going on in his mind. If man would not wear clothes or dark glasses to disguise his real intentions, all wicked thoughts and plans would come out into the open and man would become so vulnerable that it would be impossible to have a livable society. However, no matter how defiled and depraved the human mind may have become, even today there are still some remnants left in the human condition of the original good an uncorrupted state of mind which man once had when he was in paradise. It is the reason why these words **'I wear dark glasses to cover my eyes, there're secrets in them that I can't disguise'** are followed by the words: **'Come back baby, if I hurt your feelings, I apologize'**. These words express a certain sense of responsibility, regret and remorse for the things that have gone wrong in a love relationship and prove that accepting responsibility, and showing regret and remorse is still part of the human condition. At the same time this oasis of good will worked by the Spirit holds a promise for the future that one day all evil will be wiped out and that the paradisiac open mindedness, innocence and honesty will be restored. The feeling which the words **'Come back baby, if I hurt your feelings, I apologize'** expresses, very much resembles what Dylan wrote in his song 'Never gonna be the same again': *'Sorry if I hurt you, baby, sorry if I did, sorry if I touched the place where your secrets are hid'*. We may conclude that in a fallen world it is sometimes better that secrets remain secrets. The next verse: **'Two trains running side by side, forty miles wide, down the eastern line. Oh you don't have to go, I just came to you because you're a friend of mine'** shows that the oasis of good will expressed by the words **Come back baby, if I hurt your feelings, I apologize'** cannot take away or conceal the rift which the downfall of man has caused in history. A rift between the first two people on earth, Eve and Adam. This rift, this brokenness, would from then on define and burden all future human relationships. The words **'Two trains running side by side'** make it clear that there is a love covenant here between two people, a love relationship in which they share their lives. The lovers, the **two trains**, have a certain degree of unity because they run **'side by side'** This fragile unity is also shown by the fact that these two trains are heading in one and the same direction and that is **'down the eastern line'**. The feeling still lingers that actually it should be only one train and not two trains. In Dylan's rewritten version of *'Gonna change my way of thinking'* (2002) he meditates on the fact that one day harmony in love relationships will be restored and from that day on it will be only *one* train, not two trains, heading in the right direction. This idea is expressed when he wrote in that song: *'The sun is shining, ain't but one train on this track'*. And in the song *'Duquesne Whistle'* he, full of rejoice, adds that his time his woman will be on board of that train: *'Listen to that Duquesne whistle blowing, blowing like my woman's on board'*. Perfect harmony will be restored between all the chosen players on the world scene, between Eve and Adam, between man and woman and between Christ and His bride. Lost paradise will be regained. Although there is a certain degree of unity and harmony between the two lovers when the poet writes: **'Two trains running side by side'**, at the same time, there is also a deep rift, a large gap

between the two lovers, between the two trains. This is expressed when it says that the two trains running side by side are running **'forty miles wide'**. There is a distance, a gap of forty miles between those two trains. The number **'forty'** stands in the Bible for a fixed, predetermined and yet limited period time of tribulation, judgment and temptation. Some examples: During the sin flood it rained for forty days and nights, the people of Israel had to wander in the desert for forty years before they were finally allowed to enter the promised land of Canaan, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert for forty days. When we take this into account within the context of the song, the number **'forty'** may mean that although they are having a hard time in their love relationship, this predetermined period of tribulation and alienation, underlined by the number 'forty' will come to an end and a final decision about the final direction and destination of this love train still has to be made.

The words 'down the eastern line' may simply mean that this train is running down the East coast (the East coast of the US for example) but the poet may also have thought of the direction in which this train is running. From the words **'down the eastern line'** one may conclude that right now the poet feels that these two trains are not running in the right direction. These two trains should go to the West but they are in fact running to the East, they are running **'down the eastern line'** and that may be the source of alienation and separation between the two lovers. As lovers they are not on the same track. Although they say that wisdom comes from the East, it does not mean that the root of spiritualism that comes from the East is acceptable to the poet. Why not? Because in eastern spiritualism – like in Buddhism – there is lack of an authoritative figure. In Eastern spirituality there is no metaphysical deity to whom you should submit. Although in Eastern spirituality you are able, through inner contemplation, to fulfill your desire for purpose and broader understanding, the whole mental, spiritual experience and fulfillment is within your own grasp, just like Dylan once wrote in 'License to kill': *'Now he worships at an altar of a stagnant pool, and when he sees his reflection, he's fulfilled'*. I read somewhere that there may be an autobiographical undercurrent in these words.

They say that there was a time when Dylan's former wife Sara Lowndes was involved in some sort of Zen Buddhism. Initially Dylan is said to have found some comfort in some of the ideas of his wife's Zen Buddhism but later turned away from them as we may learn from a line in the song 'Precious Angel': *'You were telling him about Buddha, you were telling him about Mohammed in the same breath, you never mentioned one time the Man who came and died a criminal's death'*.

The ostensibly kind words that now follow: **'Oh you don't have to go, I just came to you because you're a friend of mine'** seem to reduce and soften the poignancy of the fact that there is no unity between the two lovers and that they are on two separate trains which are obviously running in the wrong direction. At first glance these kind words – like the words **'Come back baby, if I hurt your feelings, I apologize'** – seem remnants of a paradise lost and an attempt for reconciliation between the two lovers.

However, when you take a look at the origin of those words, these words **'Oh you don't have to go, I just came to you because you're a friend of mine'** are not as friendly and as cool and forgiving as they sound. Just like an earlier line in the song, these words echo an African-American folktale called *'Uglier Than A Grinning Buzzard'*. An old shrewd buzzard lures an unsuspecting squirrel for a ride on his back. The squirrel accepted the buzzard's invitation but the squirrel paid by his life for this mistake and was eaten by the squirrel. We quote from the story: *'Hold it right there now,'* the buzzard said, *'I am not begging you to go. You don't have to go if you don't want to. I have folks lined up who want to go for a ride. I just came to you because you're a friend of mine and I thought you might like to cool off, but if you don't want to go, you just tell me'*. What may be the message underneath those words? . It may be a warning not to be deceived. It may be a hint that eastern spiritualism – spiritualism from **'down the eastern line'** - may sound inviting and attractive at first glance (causing instant inner peace) but this sort of spiritualism is deceptive and it will kill you in the

end because enlightenment, fulfillment and salvation has to come from somewhere else and enlightenment and salvation is not a capacity which man possesses and may exploit as he pleases but this capacity has to be gracefully given to man through the way of trusting your fate in the hands of God.

The words ***'I think that when my back was turned, the whole world behind me burned'*** seem to support the idea- of which we wrote in our introductory remarks - that the ***'Long and wasted years'*** refer to the entire epoch from the downfall of man in paradise till the Latter Day, albeit seen from an anthropological stance and not from a metaphysical one. Seen from where we as humans stand as sinners, this whole epoch seems like ***'Long and wasted years'*** but not from where God stands. God uses what we regard as ***'Long and wasted years'*** to create something entirely new and in His plan these years are not long and wasted at all. So here we see a phenomenon, which we see more often in Dylan's work, and that is that it looks like Dylan has Jesus speak through his mouth. So it is as if Jesus says: ***'I think that when my back was turned, the whole world behind me burned'***. We find something similar in Dylan's song 'Summer Days'. In 'Summer Days' Dylan has Jesus say: *'I'm leaving in the morning just as soon as the dark clouds lift, gonna break the roof in—set fire to the place as a parting gift'*. In this line Dylan refers to Jesus' ascension into heaven on a cloud (Acts 1:9). After His Ascension Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit as His Counselor (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit is the parting gift from Jesus, a parting gift which indeed *'set fire to the place'* as we may read in Acts 2:3: *'and there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them'*. It is possible to interpret the words ***'I think that when my back was turned, the whole world behind me burned'*** as pointing in the same direction. After His Ascension into heaven, when Jesus turned his back to this world so to say, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit and by the fire of the Holy Spirit the gospel spread through the world like wild-fire, that's why it says: ***'the whole world behind me burned'***. However, it is also possible, and more likely, not to think of fire from the Holy Spirit but of Judgment's fire here. When Jesus paid in His own blood on the Cross, it meant the downfall of Great Babylon. As soon as Jesus turned His back to this world and ascended into heaven the fate of Great Babylon was sealed and the Great Babylon, the powers which are hostile to God's kingdom, will enter into a process of burning. Revelation 18:8 speaks of this burning Babylon: *'Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her'*. This will culminate in the purifying fire of the Latter Day as we may read in 2 Peter 3:10: *'But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare'*. (NIV)Therefore, this Latter Day will be the day when the words ***'I think that when my back was turned, the whole world behind me burned'*** will come to its full impact and culmination.

Some see in what now follows: ***'It's been a while since we walked down that long, long aisle'*** an autobiographical note from the poet in covert terms. ***'Long aisle'*** would refer to ***'Long Island'***, New York. This place Mineola, Long Island, is supposed to be the location where Dylan, in a secret ceremony during a break in his tour, married Sara Lowndes under an oak tree on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1965. True or not, we feel that within the context of the song, the poet digs deeper than that. We feel that the words ***'It's been a while since we walked down that long, long aisle'*** embroider on the previous line ***'I think that when my back was turned, the whole world behind me burned'***. Again- as so often –when the poet says: ***'It's been a while since we walked down that long, long aisle'*** the poet has Jesus or God speak through his mouth. In the Bible the love relationship between God and his people and between Christ and the church is often metaphorically compared with a marriage between God and His people or Christ and the church, whereby God or Christ is the groom and his people (the church) His bride. For example Isaiah 54:5: *'For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth'*. (See also Ephesians 5:23,24). So when God or Jesus now overlooks this whole epoch- which from a



human point of view can be denoted as a period of **'Long and wasted years'** - it is as if God or Jesus now says: **'It's been a while since we walked down that long, long aisle'** which means that I made a covenant with you, Adam and Eve, long time ago in paradise and we started walking down that long aisle of time and history with you and your posterity. You, Eve and Adam, your posterity, my people, my children, throughout history, all these long years, you were unfaithful to me and committed adultery over and over again but I never gave up on you, I kept on walking with you on that long, long aisle and we have nearly reached our eternal wedding party which will be held very soon at the end of times, just as it says in Revelation 19: 7-9: *'Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.'* (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb'. Unlike the so-called 'never ending tour' this eternal wedding supper will never end and when that day has finally come all tears will be wiped away and that will be the moment when the epoch of **'long and wasted years'** will come to an end. But before that day comes we first have to go through a valley of tears, this is put into words when it says: **'We cried on a cold and frosty morn', we cried because our souls were torn'**. Eve and Adam, who represent the whole future mankind, driven away from the gates of Eden into a cold and frosty world, these two ardent lovers still together, 'heart burning, still yearning', are now fully confronted with the bitter consequences of their downfall. It is like Dylan wrote elsewhere in the song 'Mississippi': *'So many things that we never will undo, I know you're sorry, I'm sorry too'*. All that is left now is bitter remorse and tears in a cold world, full of cold hearts. It may be the reason why it says: **'We cried on a cold and frosty morn'**.

It is as if on behalf of mankind that Eve and Adam cried bitterly because innocence had died and their souls – though not destroyed – were battered and torn because of sin. Implicitly there is at the same time also a glimmer of hope in the words **'We cried on a cold and frosty morn', we cried because our souls were torn'** because it reflects what Ecclesiastes 7: 3,4 explicitly says: *'Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better . The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth'* (KJV) and also what it says in 2 Corinthians 7:10 *'For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death'* (NLT).

The final words **'so much for tears, so much for these long and wasted years'** may be understood as some sort of final conclusion. There is a song called **'Wasted years'**, written by Wally Fowler and sung by Rev. Jimmy Swaggart. Its chorus runs like: *'Wasted years, wasted years, oh how foolish, as you walk on in darkness and fear, turn around, turn around, God is calling, He's calling you from a life of wasted years'*. The expression **'so much for'** has various shades of meaning. For instance, **'so much for'** may express disappointment at the fact that something has not been helpful at all. Did all those tears and all those long and wasted years during which **'we cried on a cold and frosty morn' because our souls were torn'** help us to get out of this dreadful situation of pain, bondage and brokenness?. No, these tears and years did not help us at all, and in spite of many tears and in spite of the long years we spent to overcome this ordeal, we did not succeed in overcoming our problems. What a waste all those tears and all those wasted years!: **'so much for tears, so much for these long and wasted years'**.

Another meaning of **'so much for'** is used to indicate that 'it is the last of someone or something, you have finished talking about a subject, there is no need to consider someone or something anymore'. Within the context of the song, it may implicitly express the hope that one day all tears will be wiped away and have to be considered no more. The present suffering is not unending (Romans 8:18) and one day it will be 'enough is enough.' The number of tears and of wasted years is limited and one day the memory of all those tears and wasted years will be wiped out, just like it says in

Revelation 21:4 *'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'*.(NIV) Psalm 56: 8 may give a lot of solace: *'You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book'*, in the same way as Dylan once wrote in the song 'If You ever go to Houston': *'Put my tears in a bottle, screw the top on tight'*.

At the beginning of this analysis (Part 1) we wrote that ***'these long and wasted years'*** may be a metaphor to describe the whole epoch of fallen mankind. An epoch which started when man fell into sin and had to leave the Gates of Eden behind, an epoch which still lasts as we speak and will last till the Latter Day .***'Long and wasted years'*** bears heavily on the Book of Ecclesiastes. It is as if we hear Ecclesiastes speak: *'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, what does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun'* (Ecclesiastes 1:2,3). Ecclesiastes realizes that when only seen from an anthropological, human, perspective, all these long years feel as if they are wasted, as if all these years are in vain and serve no purpose at all. However, Ecclesiastes also came to understand that when seen from a divine perspective these years are not long and wasted at all and that for everything *'there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven'* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-9) For God, Who created time and Who is above time, Psalm 90:4 is a reality: *'For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours'*. What to us, mortal human beings feels like an endless period of ***'long and wasted years'*** of tears and suffering, a sort of a detour without any ending, for God these years represent an indispensable part of a perfect finished plan, ***'so much for tears, so much for these long and wasted years'.....***