

# Introduction to the Bible

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## Creation and Preparation of the World

Christians are to be found and live and grow only where the Bible is. We say with reference to Christians that they live by faith. Then we learn that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

The Bible is the book of the Christians. And yet, although the Bible is spoken of as a book, it is really a collection of books. It is a number of writings in one volume and called the Bible, the Holy Bible or the Word of God. These books were not written by any one person and they were not written at any one time or any one place. There is no announced plan or structure. There is no advance description in any one part of the Bible as to what else will be written. In other words, there is no master outline to be found. And yet, this book is bound together by the power that we associate with the Word of God.

The book was written by men, but men who were rather unique, distinctive. In II Peter 1: 21 we read that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." As to who these men were we have some idea from tradition and from the titles of the books, but in some cases it is obscure. The 66 books that constitute the Bible are spoken of as the canon. This idea of the canon means that group of writings, those 66 books were put together as the Bible. The 66 books were not identified as the canon in the writings themselves. They were defined by people. 39 of them are found in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

The books of the Bible were named by men, no claim is made that the titles in themselves belong in the inspired Scriptures. For that matter even the order of the books is nowhere designated as, shall I say, an inspired order. They have been put together by scholars and accepted in the church. With reference to the books themselves, you see them divided into chapter and verse. When the Scriptures were originally written they were not divided into chapters and verses. Those chapters and verses have been put there by scholars, by students, to enable them to readily locate any particular passage.

All the English copies that we have are translations. When these translations become somewhat known and standardized we call them versions, and there are many versions in English. The Scriptures originally were written largely in two languages, Hebrew and Greek. The matter of translation from those two languages into our modern language is always a problem. Take for instance the matter of translating the Hebrew into English. It cannot be a precise translation because the Hebrew language in itself is largely composed of something less than 1000 roots and yet the verbs in Hebrew have seven voices. We have two. At the same time, there are no tenses and no moods in the very construction in the Hebrew. So with the Greek, they have three voices where we have two. But they have many moods in which the verb forms can be found.

Of the English translations with which we are acquainted in many ways the most famous of them all is called the King James Version. For a long time it was called the Authorized Version. You will see it with the initials KJV. Then we have the Revised Version, RV, the English Revised Version, ERV, the American Standard Version, ASV, the Revised Standard Version, RSV, the New English Bible, NEB. And besides that we have Moffett's translation, Goodspeed's translation, Phillips' translation, Barclay's translation, and on and on and on.

Because of all these various translations, it is very important that the person who is going to study the

Bible should study the narratives, the Bible stories, historical events that actually happened, the ritual, the parables, and the visions as they are reported. These things are very important to convey the ideas and meanings to you. Without the Bible stories, a person could read something in the Bible and actually be quite ignorant of its meaning.

The Old Testament as we have it right now, the 39 books of the Old Testament, was very likely the same Scripture that was used by our Lord. Scholars will tell us that this is so. The New Testament writings were quoted by the early church fathers. And while no one has been able to find any place where anything was said as to just which ones should be chosen as Scripture, the early church fathers quoted certain of these writings over and over.

The 66 books that we have specified were accepted as a norm in the days of the Reformation, something like 500 years ago. The church accepted these to be the canon of Scripture. So far as we are concerned, there are no alternatives. There are not two or three or four Bibles. This is the only Bible. There may be many different versions, but the differences are so very slight that no major doctrine has ever been confused because of the different manuscripts.

This Bible, as you have it, has been effectual in the life of the church. It has a certain self-authenticating effect. Missionaries use the same Bible you have. Evangelists use the Bible that you have. Expositors teaching the meaning of the Bible take the Bible you have in your hand and use it. Preachers use it to preach from. Pastors use it to comfort their people. An individual Christians read it for their own personal spiritual life and growth.

Jesus of Nazareth used the Old Testament Scriptures that you have without ever correcting them or ever altering them. The Lord Jesus said, with reference to the very Scripture you have in your hand in the Old Testament, that not one jot nor tittle should fail till all would be fulfilled. The New Testament writers like Paul, James, Peter and John quoted Old Testament Scripture without any discount. They never questioned its authority or its meaning. The Bible as it is, has the power that has always been claimed for it.

Basically the Bible that you hold in your hand, the canon of Scripture, is arranged chronologically. You'll find that the creation of the world comes at the first of the book and the end of the world comes at the end of the book. You'll find that what happened before Christ is in the first part of the Bible and what happened after Christ is in the latter part of the Bible. It has this general kind of arrangement. Some parts of the Old Testament are grouped as to style. For instance, the 31 chapters of Proverbs do not seem to have been written all at one time, nor by one author. And they were grouped together because they were Proverbs. So with the Psalms, the 150 Psalms we commonly call the hymn book of the Old Testament. Those Psalms were not all written at one time, nor was the first one written first and the last one written last. They have been grouped together simply because they are all Psalms. The same is true with the prophetic books. Starting with Isaiah and ending with Malachi, those books in the Old Testament are not arranged according to the time when they were written. It isn't that Isaiah was written first and Malachi was written last. There is a general pattern that way, but it's not absolute.

The historical narrative beginning with the creation of the world and ending with the destruction of the world in the New Testament is the general pattern that prevails throughout the Bible as a whole. We will find this in the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. If I were to give any particular name to this part of the Bible, I would say that here we have "The Creation and Preparation of the World."

In Chapters One and Two you have the biblical account of creation. Many people have problems with this, but they do not really need to because the story as it is told is very plain. It makes one thing clear to you, that God created the heavens and the earth. Chapter One gives in general the creation of the

whole universe, the seven days of creation, six days in which the world was created and the seventh day when God rested. All the known creation is to be found in those six days or divisions of time. The second chapter, which some people feel is another account of creation, is just a more detailed account of the creation of man. You will find how man was created and put in the Garden of Eden, and also how the woman, Eve, was created to be the fellow helper, equal to man.

Quickly you come in Chapter Three to the fall of man. In some respects this is one of the most decisive chapters in the Bible. Here you have the occurrence of sin, disobedience to God. A sin that the first man exercised or committed resulted in all his progeny being sinful. There is a certain sense in which the life of all human beings was in the first man and woman, in Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve sinned, something happened almost like an infection. They infected the whole stream of life and it is to be understood that in Adam all sinned.

Not only does Chapter Three tell us of the sin of Adam but also of the judgment of God. Before the chapter is through you learn something of the grace of God. All that is one chapter, the fall of man into sin, the judgment of God upon sin and the grace of God in promising deliverance to the condemned man.

In Chapter Four you have the well known story of Cain and Abel. Here again you could do well to take time to dwell upon this and meditate because here you will find two brothers and you will see the evidence immediately of individual differences. Not all men are alike. Not only that, but they are just as different as godly and ungodly. Where Cain was an ungodly man, Abel was a godly man. As you look at it you will see that the ungodly man, Cain, kills the godly man, Able. This occurred right at the very outset of the whole human race.

Sometimes people talk about human beings getting together as brothers. Well, the first human beings on earth started out as brothers, but one brother killed the other, and that hasn't stopped yet. That's characteristic of mankind.

The generations of men are set forth in Chapter Five. You'll find a description there of one family after another, the whole world being filled, as it were. You don't necessarily mean that every space of ground on the whole globe was covered with mankind. That's not the point. But men spread out over the world from the original parents.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight record a very important event. We commonly call it the flood. You will see that at the time of the flood man's sinfulness had become worse and worse, until with God it was intolerable. This is very important. Many people represent God as if He would just put up with anything. That's not true. The God of the Bible won't put up with anything forever. He can be pushed to the point where He won't tolerate evil any more. This is what happened at the time of the flood. And God looking out upon mankind judged them all as being unfit. Now while God is judging all mankind as sinful there comes a wonderful truth. There will be some men who will believe God. There was Noah, and because Noah believed God, God saved him. We have set before us in a dramatic way the beginning of the salvation of God. God will deliver those who put their trust in Him.

Now in Chapter Nine you have almost another beginning of the world. You have the new world after the flood and this is marked by human government. The principles of human government are marked out and to this day we recognize them. Society is responsible to control the ungodly members for the protection of the innocent. This is found right in Chapter Nine. Also, the incident involving Noah's son, Ham, you begin to see the result of sin down to the children and the grandchildren of those who do wrong.

In Chapter Ten you find the record of the generations of the sons of Ham, and again you have mankind spreading out over the whole world.

The primary thing in chapter eleven is the story of the tower of Babel. This is very very important, because here you have presented before you the weakness and the futility of all human scheming, men trying to control affairs for their permanent advantage. Under God it cannot be done, and God affected man in such a way that man will never be able, by getting together with other men, to achieve a perfect fellowship and cooperation. There will always be opposition. And so mankind was scattered upon the whole face of the earth, and the situation that then prevailed is pretty much the way that it still exists today.

## **The Search for Blessing**

Freedom of action faces us with the great human problem. Because we can turn to the right, or to the left or just not move at all, we are faced with the fact that our action brings various kinds of results, diverse consequences. Very early we learn that you cannot eat your cake and have it, too. It's just not possible, so far as the things of this world are concerned, to have all this and heaven too. This power of choice does make a difference. The results may be either good or bad. We do not want to miss what is possible for us in the way of blessing.

Every living thing seeks to live well. Flowers turn to the light, birds want to fly in the air, fish want water in which to swim. Man wants a friend. Parents want their children to do well and to live well. In fact each person wants things to turn out well. If he knew it and could say the words, what he really wants is the blessing of God as he lives. Much of our experience day in and day out is actually determined in the providence of God. It's true that God makes the grain grow, but it's the farmer who sows the wheat or the barley or nothing; because of the farmer, the field has in it wheat or barley or nothing.

In our study of the first eleven chapters of Genesis the closing scene was at the well-known tower of Babel, a classic demonstration of human enterprise. There we find man living in this mixed-up world, faced with all the various possibilities, seeking to arrange their own security and satisfaction, the normal goals of all mankind. That's a short simple story and the testimony of its result is as clear as daylight. Man can never make it by his own efforts. The tower of Babel wound up incomplete, in frustration, with men alienated from each other. To this day the tower of Babel is a classic illustration of the common fate of all human endeavor. The wise Gamaliel could say thousands of years later, "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought."

Now we turn in this second study to a portion of Scripture that will present God's plan for the salvation of man out of his frustration, his defeat and misery. In the remainder of Genesis Chapters Twelve to Fifty, we have the record of what is called the time of the Patriarchs. In that connection we usually name at least three men . . . Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and sometimes we include Joseph. In these men we have one common trait, one common characteristic: the desire for blessing. They searched for blessing.

Let me draw your attention to something right at this point. We should beware lest we miss the significance that when we are turning from all mankind at the tower of Babel to note the careers of individuals, we're not turning to something less. We are actually meeting the issue. This is most important. The unit where the issue is actually faced is you — not the group, but in you, the one soul. There is nothing more important with God than the issue in the single soul. In one chapter you can read of all men together at the tower of Babel. In the next chapter you read of one man, Abraham, dealing with God. You didn't step down. You stepped ahead.

It is a very common human error to be impressed by the mass, by everybody. We might well remember that when God became incarnate, when He actually appeared in the flesh, He came as one man, the man Jesus of Nazareth. And when the Lord Jesus dealt with people, He won individuals. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you."

The Lord Jesus talking with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well is the typical illustration of God working with mankind. You remember the Lord Jesus walking along in a great company, lifting up his eyes and seeing Zacchaeus up in a tree. "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down," said Jesus. There were hundreds of people around, but there was just one Zacchaeus and that's the one He is dealing with. You'll remember the story of the good shepherd. He had a hundred sheep. He left the ninety-nine in the fold and he went out to look for the one lost sheep. This is so wonderful. This is not only very touching for you and for me; it is very profound. For the whole truth, the whole problem of all mankind is never solved at the tower of Babel. It is solved with one man, with Abraham. To be sure, all nations are in view, and you find out that the seed of Abraham is going to be the source of blessing for all nations. But it's one man we're going to deal with. And so we study each Patriarch in this section of the Scripture. And in doing this we are getting the whole answer that God has to give to man.

Now Abraham's problem was a problem just the same as yours and mine. Abraham needed to act; he needed to choose. Abraham wanted to do what was right. We ask ourselves what is right in God's sight?

The Bible sometimes uses the word just, meaning this is just like God wants it. Or you can use the word godly, or you can even use in the Biblical sense the word good. Righteous living brings blessedness, which means to say that God will prosper a right-living person. We ought to remember here that the Lord Jesus was asked, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" And He answered saying, "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." That is not just a mental idea. Believing on Him is to yield to Him and follow Him whom He hath sent.

We study Abraham in Chapters Twelve through Twenty-Five, and we would do well to keep in mind what the New Testament has to say about Abraham in Hebrews 11:10: "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." That statement will strike your mind if you will contrast it with Babel. Those people said, "Go to, let us build us a city." But Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. Do you see the lesson?

The story of Abraham begins with his call. God called him: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." This is the classic pattern of the call of God — out of that which you had naturally into that which God will prepare for you spiritually. When Abraham got out of the past, left home and turned away from his natural situation, it wasn't just because he had a venturesome spirit. It wasn't just because he wanted to go out and explore. This man went out under orders. He left home in order to enter into something that God had prepared for him.

This principle of obedience to the will of God, which is actually living in faith, was manifested in the life of Abraham in a series of situations. Abraham's faith involved separation in four successive experiences. First he was told to leave his homeland and go into a land that God would show him. In the second place, he was called upon to separate himself from his family, and this referred to his nephew, Lot.

The story of Abraham and Lot is very rich in what it teaches us about fellow believers. Both Abraham and Lot believed in God, and yet they did not live their lives in the same way. Lot apparently did not live as closely in obedience to God. So the two of them are found in a situation where eventually they separate from each other. However, Abraham did not neglect his nephew. And on one occasion he risked

his life and his servants to rescue Lot who had been taken a prisoner of war. On another occasion he engaged in a long prayer of intercession, praying for the deliverance of the city of Sodom, in order that Lot would be spared. Abraham would not live with Lot because he didn't want to go along with his way of living, but he did not ignore him or neglect him.

The third phase of Abraham's experience was when he was separated from his own flesh. In talking things over with Sarah, his wife, Abraham had been led to think that what he ought to do was to take Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, as his second wife. And from her a child was born by the name of Ishmael. Later on, according to the promise of God, a child was born to Sarah by the name of Isaac. And then came a very painful experience for Abraham when he had to send Ishmael away. As you read the story you will wonder about it but when you read the New Testament in the book of Galatians, you will see that Paul makes something of it. It was necessary that this should be done. The child of the flesh, Ishmael, could not have the same inheritance as the child of promise, Isaac.

Then finally, in the supreme test of his career, Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his own son, Isaac. Now all the promise of God was tied up in Isaac; a multitude of seed was to come through Isaac. And yet Abraham felt that he ought to offer Isaac up. He went ahead to do it, as we read in the New Testament, believing that if necessary God could raise Isaac from the dead. As it turned out he didn't have to sacrifice Isaac. Yet he was willing to do so. Abraham did not falter in this course of his life in his obedience to the guidance of God.

You will notice that the revealed will of God was never in the natural processes that surrounded Abraham. As a matter of fact you can read in Romans 4:19-21 that the faith of Abraham was distinguished by the fact that he did not consider the natural processes, the natural situation, but believed that what God had promised He was able also to perform. It is only right to say that the life of Abraham shows that the will of God for Abraham was supernatural. Following this in Chapters Twenty-Five and Twenty-Six we have the life of Isaac. It's not a long story but it's a good one. We have in Isaac a wise son of a great and good father. He set a very faithful and meaningful example in that he followed where a good father had gone before him. There is a verse that will give you the whole picture: "Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father . . . and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them." This was the pattern of Isaac's life. And you will read that when he sowed in the fields inherited from his father, he was blessed a hundred fold.

Following that we come to Jacob in Chapters Twenty-Seven through Fifty. In Jacob we see a more obvious personal involvement in believing. Jacob wanted the blessing of God. I imagine that everybody who reads about Jacob will have the feeling that Jacob was not a very nice person. But that's neither here nor there. He was a man who wanted the blessing of God. At the very outset in Chapter Twenty-Seven we see that he gave up the meal that he had prepared for himself in order to get the birthright to which Esau was entitled. Jacob gave up his meal to get the birthright, but Esau gave up the birthright to get the meal. This is exactly why you will find later on in the New Testament that God said, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Following this we see several major developments. First in Chapter Twenty-Eight, in the place called Bethel, Jacob had a great experience in the vision in which he saw a stairway leading from earth to heaven. In this spiritual insight he saw that earth and heaven belonged together under God, and God meant to bless him. Following this in Chapters Thirty-Two and Thirty-Three Jacob met Esau whom he had previously wronged. This is a case where a man had to face the past. Here the remarkable thing is to hear him say to the angel of the Lord, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." He showed the remarkable truth that by putting his trust in God he persevered to get the blessing from God.

As you study the book of Genesis you also have the story of Joseph, one of the few men in the Bible of whom no evil is recorded. Here, above everything else, the providence of God is set forth. There are two verses that will occur to you. One in Chapter Forty-Five, verse eight, Where Joseph said to his brothers, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God." This man trusted God in his affairs. Again in 50:20, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."

Thus, in facing the uncertainty of life, the weakness of man, the frustration of experience, the defeat in the course of affairs, the Patriarchs in turn each demonstrated God's answer for man. The will of God will guide a man into blessing. Abraham is the outstanding illustration of obedience. Isaac shows patience. Jacob shows perseverance. Joseph shows trust. In these four ways you will see faith is demonstrated for everyone's life. This is the way of God. This is God's answer to the problem of living. "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

## **The Plan of Salvation**

Salvation is the work of God, not in any one blinding flash, like lightning is an act of God, nor in some sudden calamity, like an earthquake or a tidal wave, but perhaps one could say such as in the making of a man. While it may begin suddenly, it is not all accomplished in one sudden moment. It is the man as he lives, being inwardly activated and helped by the power and the will of God, who in this sense is being saved. For instance, as you read in I Corinthians 3:6, "I [Paul] have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Or again, later in the ninth verse, he says, "We are laborers together with God: Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." As the raising of a crop, the way in which the tree grows, God's part may be His own initiative in that He gets life and growth started. But the realization of God's plan, the way it finally works out, is "according to your faith be it unto you."

This is the blessing expected when Joseph had his people promise that they would not bury him in Egypt but would keep his bones because they would one day return to the land of Canaan to inherit the promises of God. The plan of salvation is set forth in the history of the Exodus of Israel. It is seen in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. This plan of salvation, as set forth, involves a real change. In the way it occurred in the history of Israel this was an outward change. From being in the land of Egypt as slaves, they were brought over into the land of Canaan to be citizens. The work of salvation in the Christian is an inner work. Salvation as a work of God in time has a beginning the way a babe is a beginning, and an end the way a man is an end. From infancy through childhood and adolescence, into youth, into maturity, even into old age, all of this is the work of God. Salvation is something like this.

The beginning of the plan of salvation for Israel is to be seen when they were in Egypt as slaves in bondage. The end of the whole work is seen when Israel is found in Canaan as free citizens. As we see this we see immediately the problem of believing so far as Israel is concerned and the problem of consent so far as Pharaoh is concerned. Something must be done in Israel to make them willing to come out. Something must be done to Egypt to allow them to come out. This is part of God's work in salvation. We will see when we study in the book of Exodus that miracles performed by Moses grounded the faith of Israel to believe in God's promise. And the plagues which took place under Moses' guidance and direction made Pharaoh willing to let them go.

Deliverance from the judgment of God in the passover, the last of the plagues, is part of the salvation event. Deliverance from the power of Pharaoh is to be seen at the Red Sea. Israel's deliverance has those two aspects: the passover experience in which they were delivered from the judgment of God which went out upon the whole country, and the Red Sea experience in which they were delivered from the

power of Pharaoh and his army. So in one sense when they came out of the land of Egypt and had crossed the Red Sea you could say that Israel was saved. You will remember that they had a great celebration under those circumstances, and Miriam led them in the song of Moses, the song of deliverance. Israel was saved.

Yet we will see that while they were saved in the sense that they were saved from the power of Egypt, they had only begun. This is the commencement so far as the actual experience of salvation was concerned. The demonstration of this whole matter of the power of the plan of salvation is to be seen in what happened immediately after the deliverance. We see the delivered, redeemed Israel now beginning the journey over to the land of Canaan. The way we see that in a human being is that the delivered, redeemed soul who can be reconciled to God at the cross of Calvary and saved by the blood of Christ on Calvary's cross, should now begin to walk in the will of God and to move in the plan of God. We could say that the newborn babe should now grow and then go in the will of God.

There is one condition which is never changed from the beginning to the end. Note that Israel moved under the guidance of God. They were guided by the cloud by day and at night they were always guided by the pillar of fire. This evidence of the presence of God is a very essential element and aspect in the whole experience of salvation.

As they moved out from Egypt, being guided by the living God, they experienced five problems in succession which served as object lessons. They were like little children learning things. The first experience they had was that of coming upon wells in which the water was bitter. This was an unexpected experience for them and caused considerable dismay. But Moses was shown a certain tree which when put in the water made it sweet. This is the beginning of spiritual understanding that a delivered soul starting to walk in the will of God may come across bitter tasting experiences, but you do not change your course. You find a way of adding to those bitter tasting experiences that which makes them sweet to the taste.

The next problem they had was that of hunger. Here is the very well-known instance of how God gave them manna from heaven. Then they faced thirst. You will remember how the rock was broken open and they were provided water out of the rock.

The fourth problem they came across was that of conflict. Amalek attacked them in the desert. We will learn there a profound spiritual truth. The children of Israel, moving as God led them, were confronted by hostile forces of the flesh, forces of this world. In a straight, knockdown, drag-out fight, the forces of this world are stronger than the believers. Amalek can defeat Joshua and the army of Israel. But that is not the whole story. On a hilltop nearby, Moses prayed, and as long as Moses prayed, Joshua prevailed in the fight. And that would seem to be the end of it except for this. Moses got tired, and he let his hands down. When Moses' hands came down and his praying slacked off then Joshua was being defeated and Amalek was winning. Then two men, Aaron and Hur, came to help Moses and held up his hands. Israel won a notable victory, setting out this very wonderful truth, that united intercessory prayer is the key to victory in the life of faith.

We move on from there to one more problem. That was the problem of human limitation. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came to visit him and never had an opportunity of speaking to Moses because he was so busy. Moses was busy from before daylight till after dark, all day long, with his problems of administration of the law. Jethro told him what he was doing was not good. He would surely wear away doing that kind of thing. He showed him how by delegating responsibility and sharing the leadership with other like-minded men that it would be easier on him and more possible to do the work well. And this was done. This was the problem of human limitation and it was solved by organization. Now when



we have all of this in mind we see how the children of Israel on their journey are learning certain basic spiritual truths.

Then they came to Mount Sinai and a very important aspect of their experience. Here we have instruction. We learn something which I could illustrate in terms of a garden. Growing plants sometimes need frames to hold them steady. And fruit trees need to be pruned. Israel had come out from the land of Egypt and had been some time on the road; at Mount Sinai they were instructed concerning their attitudes before God. Moses was given for them the Ten Words that we commonly call the Ten Commandments. These show what would be acceptable to God.

Also, they were taught the principles and practice of worship. The tabernacle was set up. This structure with the arrangement of its furniture symbolized aspects of the truth that a man needs to have in mind when he is coming to worship God. As a sinner he would find in the furniture of the tabernacle the conditions under which he could come into the presence of God. God provided them with leadership in the form of priests. Their function is to guide and to act for the worshipper in the worship of God.

Another thing they learned at Mount Sinai was organization. The procedures of God's people should be orderly. In the camp the tabernacle was to be in the center. The twelve tribes were to be situated around the tabernacle — three to the north, three to the east, three to the south, three to the west. When they set out on the road in a march they were to be organized in the same fashion.

When this kind of instruction is given, human nature is not always going to obey. So we will also learn that discipline has its place. The story of the golden calf is an instance where Israel went wrong and Moses led in disciplining them.

Following this, we come to the place where all the plan of God was to be brought into action. We could call it activation. There comes a time when the redeemed, delivered, instructed person should act according to what he believes. This happened for Israel when they came to the place called Kadesh-Barnea. They were told to go up and possess the land. Until now they had been led the way a man leads a child. But then Moses stepped back and said, "Here it is in front of you. Go in and do it."

They sent twelve spies to search out three things about the land: was the land worthwhile; were there any difficulties in Canaan that would hinder them; and if there were difficulties, were they such that would prevent them? Could they do it? Was it possible? All twelve agreed the land was very much worthwhile. All were unanimous that there really were difficulties. They found high walled cities, and the soldiers were like giants in the land. When it came to the question can we do it, there was a split report. Ten said, "No, we can't do it. It's impossible." Two said, "Yes, it can be done." Now these two, Joshua and Caleb, agreed that Israel didn't have the strength personally. But they emphasized the fact that God would be with them. Their attitude could be described by those wonderful words, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

There at Kadesh-Barnea occurred the great provocation by Israel. This is a very profound truth for us to understand. It is possible to come up to a certain point in following the will of God and then to have everything stalled due to unbelief. The people would not go forward because of their unbelief and they were condemned to thirty-eight years of further wandering in the wilderness. This was the result of failing to go forward. Until that whole generation of adults died in the desert they never got into the land of Canaan to which they had set out. Only Joshua and Caleb of that generation, who were willing to go forward, entered.

For our instruction concerning the plan of salvation we see this strange case of unbelieving believers. These children of Israel had been saved out of bondage and had been kept coming across the desert through learning. They had been growing in their understanding of the things of God. And yet when they

came to Kadesh-Barnea they failed to continue through to victory. It makes one think of the fact that apple blossoms can show up and begin to form into fruit, but fall off before they are ripe. There is such a thing as people being converted who never do become consecrated. They are incomplete in the overall plan of salvation.

The plan of salvation is based on these books and can be noted in three phases, by these three prepositional terms: "Out of," "Across," and "Into." It's "Out of Egypt," "Across the desert," "Into Canaan." You can think of this in terms of conversion, communion and consecration. Or, you can see in these three basic words used by our Lord Jesus Christ. The first stage is come: "Come unto me." The second stage is abide: "Abide in me." The third stage is go: "Go into all the world."

This is the plan of salvation as set out in the Old Testament in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers.

## **The Life of Faith**

The will of God in His work of salvation leads a person into a life of faith. In this life of faith a man must believe that God "is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." To be saved by the power of God a man must believe in God and what God has said in His Word. Salvation is the work of God in whosoever will obey the call of God. The call of God to man may appear in one specific crisis but it leads into a permanent, total commitment for the whole of life.

Egypt and Canaan in the history of Israel represent alternate ways of living. Egypt is the place where the natural prevailed. The natural is that which is according to the processes in the created world, in nature. You become conscious of the natural through the senses and you can manipulate and share in nature according to laws. Canaan represents that which is spiritual. In the spiritual realm you have your consciousness affected by the implication of the reality of God. And you are led according to His promises. The children of Israel were called out of Egypt, out of that which was natural, into Canaan, into that which was spiritual. In this way they became an historic demonstration of the life of faith.

Living in the promised land can be seen as typical of living in faith. When the people of God are conscious of the will and the Word of God and are minded to do His will, we have a situation which is like Israel in the land of Canaan. Today we would call all that "living in Christ." This life of faith is set forth in the Bible in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges. For instance, there should be a preparation for this life of faith, and this is implied in the book of Deuteronomy. There should be an activation stage, an experience in which you put your confidence in the promises of God into actual performance. Israel is shown doing this in the book of Joshua. Then there will be a continuation.

The book of Deuteronomy shows that preparation for the life of faith involves an interpretation of the ways of God and an exhortation to the individual to do the will of God. This interpretation shows the significance of the situation confronting the believer. In the case of the book of Deuteronomy there was a matter of reviewing history and pointing out the lessons of the past experience of Israel. Recall the original purpose of God's plan. The will of God for Israel was, that they should dwell in the land of Canaan under His control, guided by His Word. When God promised Abraham that his seed would be blessed, this is the way in which it would be blessed. There's nothing in the Bible to indicate that there is any valid blessing of God apart from His presence. When He promises to bless, it's a way of saying He promises to be with you. Men do not live the life of faith just out of the blue. We do not start living the life of faith just because we make up our minds. There must be a seed time for this. There is to be a preparation for this. Seed time and summer time come before we have the harvest of faith.

Before they came to the land of Canaan, Israel was redeemed out of Egypt. They were delivered from Pharaoh at the Red Sea. That had happened long before. They were taught at Mount Sinai by Moses. And they were disciplined from time to time in the desert over the period of the last thirty-eight years. These children of Israel as they stood on the verge of entering into the land at the time of the book of Deuteronomy were heirs of a former generation. They had a legacy of promises left to them. They had traditions of the past to encourage them. And they had the failures of the past that were to warn them. The message of the book of Deuteronomy is a way of saying to God's people that the history of our fathers, the traditions that are to be seen in our cultures and that are clearly put in the Word of God are ours now. We can enter in more fully than the former generation did if we will avoid their mistakes. We need to commit ourselves permanently and entirely to obey the Word of God. That is what the Israelites failed to do, but if we do it we can enter into blessing.

Now in the book of Joshua we have a continuation of this revelation and we are shown how the whole plan of salvation is actually put into performance. Joshua had a definite challenge presented to him, and he led the people to definitely commit themselves.

There is a whole campaign of conquests in the course of living in the land. The crisis which was caused by the death of Moses presented to Joshua a call to action. This will happen in the course of spiritual experience. Sometimes the most astonishing and the most shattering things can happen to us. The message came to Joshua, "Moses my servant is dead." This must have been a shattering thing for Joshua. But then the word came to him, "Go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them."

The very death of Moses presented the call to action. The promise was offered to them all. The challenge was to move in to possess their possessions. A definite, specific action was to be taken. This would not occur in a gentle, general, gradual, growing fashion. This was something they were to take hold of and make a decision. It would take courage on their part in obedience to God.

The Jordan River right there before them, filled to the brim and overflowing in flood time, presented a challenge. They were to face it. There was in the very presence of that overflowing river a challenge to take a specific action on their part. If they were to enter in now they would know they had done something. They would not just slip in at night. It would not be just a gradual infiltration. It was an actual, open definite challenge whether they would or would not enter into the land. We are reminded of the Red Sea in the course of their deliverance. When they came out of Egypt they actually had to cross the Red Sea. In so doing the power of Pharaoh was broken.

Now here they were, facing the River Jordan. There was no bridge over the River Jordan. They could not come back again. When once they were over, the water would fill in behind them. They were committed to the consequences of their action if they dared to go forward.

Some see in this experience of Israel what has been called a second blessing. Yet there is a difference in this, compared to the first blessing in coming out of Egypt. I want to draw your attention to this difference. All had to come across the Red Sea. But they did not all have to cross the Jordan to enter into their possession. As a matter of fact two and a half tribes actually entered their possessions before crossing the Jordan. Nine and a half tribes, representing ten of the twelve tribes, crossed the River Jordan. This would say there is something true about entering into consecration that is not quite the same as conversion. Consecration may be undertaken at a critical time of decision, but there may be such a thing as entering into consecration in the course of events. That is what happened to two of the tribes who found that they were able to enter into their possessions before they crossed the River Jordan. And yet ten out of twelve had to definitely make the decision to cross the Jordan to get into the land where

they would live the life of faith.

Joshua took steps to make this crossing a matter of great importance. He had the priests bring the ark down to the water. Then they walked into the river and the flow of the river stopped. The priests stayed there till all the people had passed by and had gone across. In the life of faith, responsible leaders must take charge. They must do their part first and then the people are to follow.

Next Joshua set up memorials. He took some stones out of the river bottom and carried them up to the hilltop and took stones from the hilltop and carried them down to the river bottom. And there on the bottom of the river Jordan, he built an altar that could be seen, and on top of the hill he built an altar that could be seen. Any passerby could see the evidence that they had actually crossed into the land. This is the significance of the memorial. Memorials have always had a significance in salvation. We need to remember the pit from which we were dug. We need to remember Jesus Christ who died for us.

Following this, after they had come into the land by crossing the River Jordan, Joshua had them sanctify themselves for the campaign that was to follow. There was preparatory sanctification. The way this was done on the part of Israel was by observing the ceremony of circumcision. This had been neglected during the time that they had been traveling in the desert and now, as they were to begin their campaign of conquest, this which had been neglected was taken care of and made right.

There was victory by faith at Jericho. And there was defeat because of sin at Ai. We see the significance of sin in the camp when we find that God will not bless a disobedient people. But there was victory after judgment upon sin, also at Ai. That will show that even though we sin we can confess our sins, God will forgive us, and we can then go on and receive blessing.

Then there was the experience of being beguiled by cunning deceit when the men of Gibeon fooled Joshua. It says in the Bible, Israel "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." Following this was a long campaign when by diligent effort the children of Israel extended their control over the land of Canaan. Finally, as a dying leader, Joshua warned them that if they did not stay faithful to God, God would destroy them, He issued his great challenge, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

When we come to the book of Judges, we find it covers a period of four hundred years. Yet it has a very simple message. It is a sad and yet a promising message. This is a message that will show you that God's people, in living the life of faith, are prone to neglect obedience to God, and this results in their defeat. And then in their defeat and distress when they cry unto God, God in mercy and grace sends them a leader and they have revival. And in revival they have victory and then they have peace. This pattern was followed over and over again during the book of Judges. The significant lessons are obvious. The life of faith demands careful and continuing obedience to the will of God.

We read in the opening chapters of Judges that when they were possessing the land, conquering the land, Israel compromised with the natural elements. They did not completely root out the Canaanites as they had been told to do. That is like saying that a man had an operation for cancer and the surgeon did not take all of it out. And you know how serious that would be. So it was with Israel. They had been told to root out the Canaanites. But when they would gain victory over them, they would not completely obey. They would not thoroughly carry out the instruction of God. They allowed the Canaanites to stay in the land, and that became a source of sore trouble to them. By tolerating the presence of these people Israel was exposed to infection to sin. And we read this sad statement, "They forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."

That word Baal refers to the natural forces of power, and there is such a thing as being taken in by natural forces of power, and there is such a thing as being taken in by natural powers. Ashtaroth, the goddess of pleasure, brings to mind natural pleasures. And so the children of Israel were taken in by

natural powers and natural pleasures, so much so that they did not yield themselves to the Will of God. Then God withdrew His favor; and when He did, the Canaanites subjected the Israelites. They defeated them in battle and brought them into bondage.

This is the picture. It's a symbol of the old struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh and the Spirit can get along all right only if the flesh is subdued and denied and the Spirit is in control. The book of Judges ends with a commentary on this whole matter of the life of faith: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." And this was a life of confusion.

## **The Kingdom of God**

The blessing of God which rewards the life of faith affects the living experience to bring strength and joy. God will give grace to strengthen, just as He will direct His providence to benefit those who put their trust in Him if His people will obey in following the direction that is in His call.

The call of God presents the promise to a person, and this promise calls the individual soul toward God. These promises are revealed in God's Word, but His Word must be interpreted. Then after it is interpreted and understood it must be activated. The activation must be brought into performance through leadership. So the call of God needs certain leadership among the people that will interpret the call to the people. Such interpretation is the work of the prophet. This brings to mind the three classes of leadership to be found among God's people, prophet, priest and king. The priest leads the people in their relationship with God. The king directs His people in their relationship with other men.

This leadership had been provided in the early history of Israel by a judge. The last outstanding example of the Judges was to be found in the man Samuel who embodied all these functions, interpreting the will of God to the people, leading the people in their worship toward God as a priest, and then guiding the people in their relationships with other men, doing actually the work of a king.

The benefits of such centralized authority, which became obvious in emergency situations, led the people to make a request for a king. The great Samuel did not consider this request to be healthy. I think he suspected their motivation was not good. Samuel was very sensitive to the fact that they already had God as their leader and that, through the Word of God mediated by the prophet and through the service of the priest, God actually was leading the people. Samuel seemed to feel that this was adequate. He saw that the people wanted to put their trust in a man, and Samuel was afraid for them.

But God directed Samuel to yield to their request and find them a king. Here is to be seen the wisdom of God. He would take the request of the people, even if their motivation was not good, for the idea was valid. Also the power of God could overrule.

The idea was valid and could be used, and God knew this. So God told Samuel to find them a king. And Samuel anointed Saul to be the first king of Israel. Saul was a great warrior with much natural ability. Physically, he stood head and shoulders above his fellows; and actually from the standpoint of his ability as a military leader, it is obvious from the record that he was a good one. On the other hand, his conduct in humility and in consideration for others was very good until he became king. Then this man Saul showed the weakness of his human nature in his impatience. After an incident of impatience in taking on himself to offer sacrifice in place of the priest, Samuel warned him that he was displeasing to God. Then in another case, Samuel gave Saul a commission to destroy Amalek, and we find that Saul spared the king and spared part of the spoil. This was disobedience and because of this disobedience he was rejected.

We are shown in this life that a man of flesh, which is what Saul would represent, cannot achieve the

will of God. Despite his great ability, when God withdrew His help because of disobedience, Saul began to deteriorate and to fail. At this point in the record is to be seen this very important piece of advice from God. We should never forget it: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Nothing that Saul could offer would ever be acceptable to God when he did not obey God. Obedience is important. When God withdrew His favor, without the grace of God to hold him up, Saul became vain and arrogant. He was not blessed in his activity and finally was benighted in his own soul.

Under the guidance of God, Samuel then went out and anointed David to be king. You have the whole story of how Samuel went to the house of Jesse to find someone whom he could anoint as king and was led to anoint the youngest son, David. Note that Saul was still on the throne when David had already been anointed. David found himself in what you could consider as a training period.

David was still too young to serve in the army, and he was only a lad when he volunteered to face Goliath. This dramatic incident is an evidence of David's courage. But if we looked at that and tried to understand and interpret David's courage from the standpoint of his human strength, we would miss the point. David's courage was grounded in his faith in God. David was confident that God was with him and that God would bless him. In that confidence he did not hesitate to meet the giant Goliath.

Following this experience, David became prominent and widely known and entered into the service of the king as one of his military leaders. Saul, who was now doomed, persecuted David who was anointed to be the real king. And this is a very classic matter. It is the common situation of the man of flesh afflicting the man of the Spirit. It takes us back to the very beginning when Cain killed his brother Abel. Or it takes us right up to the great climax of all God's revelation when Pontius Pilate as governor condemned Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, to death.

David, called of God to be the real king and obedient to God in everything that he did, was driven to flee as a fugitive. He finally had to flee the country and go over to be in exile among the Philistines. But in all of this period of time we find him always humble and wise, respectful, considerate and obedient. When he was crowned as king, even then he had to fight the house of Saul for seven more years. All of this was a prolonged period of preparation.

Then we find that when he had become established in his place as king, David wanted to build a house for God's worship, a temple. This he was not permitted to do, but he was permitted to gather the materials. His son, Solomon, afterwards built the temple. But at that time God gave the promise that became the covenant with David. This was that one of his flesh should be the king and should sit on the throne forever. The fulfillment of this promise leads us right up to the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is King of kings and Lord of all.

David's career was marked by faith in God. When Saul pursued him to try and kill him, and David was in a position where he could have killed Saul, we find that David would not harm Saul. He wanted God to handle the situation. This reminds us of Abraham who would not receive a single thing from the king of Sodom because he would not let anybody say that the king of Sodom made him rich. He expected to become rich, but God would do it. Here we have David who expected to be king, but he would not raise a hand to advance his own cause. David then became the greatest king that Israel ever had.

Yet the record will show that this great king sinned and came to much grief. His sin with Bathsheba, which the Bible speaks of as a sin against Uriah the Hittite, was his notorious flaw. Nathan the prophet told David that it would be remembered forever. David was forgiven, but even though he was forgiven this sin, he suffered the consequences in that the child that was born to Bathsheba died in spite of David's prayer. And David's own family caused such grievous sorrow for him. There was Amnon his son who violated his sister Tamar. As a consequence, Absalom, another son, killed Amnon. And then

later Absalom plotted to take the throne away from his father and threatened his father with death, so that David fled from him.

In the ensuing battle Absalom was killed. Later, when David was an old man, a son by the name of Adonijah actually made his plan to take over the government. And so David's career was marked by these sad and grievous experiences out of his own family which Nathan the prophet told him would follow because of his sin.

But in the last days of his life David appointed Solomon to be king. Solomon comes to our mind in a certain sense almost as an extension of David. Everything Solomon possessed he had from his father. He inherited so much. And he was a man with unusual wisdom because, when he was given his opportunity to make a request of God, to pray for what he wanted at the beginning of his whole reign, Solomon humbly asked for wisdom. He acknowledged that he did not have the understanding that would enable him to be a good king. He needed wisdom from God. This pleased the Lord so much that word was sent to Solomon that because he hadn't asked for riches or for power, God would not only give him wisdom but He would also give him riches and power. This man Solomon, whom we might look on as the king of peace, entered into other men's labors. With the material that had been left in his hand. Solomon went on to build the temple, the most splendid structure that Israel ever had.

And yet this wise and glorious king sinned. We read the story that Solomon indulged himself in his domestic affairs with many wives. And Solomon permitted these wives to turn his heart away from a true fellowship with God. It caused him to compromise, allowing evil things to be done. And we read the very stern and serious line in Scripture, "The Lord was angry with Solomon," and "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon." And so this man's life which began in peace actually ended in dissension and conflict.

Our present study has covered the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and the first eleven chapters of 1 Kings. This has been a presentation of the kingdom in Israel. We can call it "the kingdom of God" in which a representative of the will of God, the king, is set up to direct the people. One of the things that Samuel had feared was that the human nature of the king would come to the forefront and the king would try to take over and manage instead of just doing the will of God. Saul was a great young man and very gifted in many ways. Yet when he became king, through impatience and disobedience he had to be rejected. David became a great king, and yet this great king sinned. His whole career was marred by that.

Solomon was the most glorious king that Israel ever had, but this man foolishly did things that were wrong in the sight of God. One thing seems to be coming increasingly clear. There is nothing wrong with the idea of having someone to lead the people to do the will of God, but man in the flesh, in himself, is not able to obey God.

What we see in the kingdom we can actually see in individual personal experience. Any one of us will find that although we may know the things of God, when it actually comes to wanting to do the will of God, we are not wise enough nor good enough to be able to do this successfully. In our next chapter we are going to see that this is the whole story of all that happened in the Old Testament days. The weakness of man in the flesh resulted constantly in failure in the Old Testament.

## **Failure In The Old Testament**

Salvation is by faith. And this leads us to recognize that an essential aspect of faith is obedience.

The life of faith set forth and offered to us through the Scriptures is essentially a matter of obeying the call of God, obeying His word. Now, the problem of obedience is generally that of denying the flesh, of

denying self. It is a matter of denying the ego of the individual human being in order that that person might do the will of God. This was illustrated in the Old Testament in the life and history of the nation of Israel.

We have been studying in the Old Testament and are now looking at the time of the kings. As we are going to look at the kings we need to have in mind that Israel redeemed as they were from Egypt, delivered as they were from the power of Pharaoh, guided as they had been across the desert, instructed as they were at Mount Sinai, disciplined as they were in the course of their experience, repeatedly restored to the favor of God upon repentance came to confusion because of the personal tendencies of individuals following the interests of their own hearts. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

The pattern of the kingdom had been designed for blessing by having the whole nation under God whose Word is the light. This central government in the land is a good type and symbol of an individual person with a controlled, disciplined heart. Just as in Israel there were elements that were undisciplined and rebellious, so it will be in any individual person. Just as with Israel a strong central government would insure a measure of righteousness and this would bring peace, so the same thing would be true in individual spiritual experience. We will find that our own experiences are very similar to the life of Israel.

An example of strong government that brought about righteousness among the people and peace in their experience was seen in Samuel. The failure of this kind of leadership was seen in Saul. The fulfillment in the kingdom occurred under David and Solomon. And yet even with them there was a blemish.

Because faith occurs in conscious understanding, the Word of God is revealed in intellectual expression. The Word is God's own and is eternal and infinite in God. Yet, this Word of God was revealed through the words of men, in what we now call the Scriptures. So, we find in this portion of the Bible that quite a large section is given over to that which deals with the understanding. I am referring to that section we call the Wisdom Literature; it includes the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. This has to do with understanding of the ways of God. The fact that it occurs at this place in the Bible does not mean it was written at this particular juncture in the course of the history of Israel. But a lot of it was written during the time of the kings.

Then there is a section of the Bible we commonly call the Poetic Literature. You would recognize it better if we just called it the Psalms. These one hundred and fifty Psalms represent the hymn book of Israel and are grouped because of their lyric nature. They constitute a section of Scripture in which the consciousness of man is guided into appropriate expression of attitude toward God, toward life and toward the soul. If anyone wants to have the right kind of language with which to worship God, it would be a good thing to study the Psalms. The Psalms give us the expressions which the heart can use in responding to the truth of God.

The latter part of the Old Testament we call the prophetic books. They are spoken of as the major prophets and the minor prophets. So far as I can see the only reason to call one major and the other minor is the length of the book. But their significance is equal. These prophets are actually the preachers in the Old Testament. And most of these lived during the time of the kings. These men gave themselves over to interpretation of the will of God and the events of Israel. The prophets interpreted what was happening in Israel as coming from God, and they interpreted to Israel the mind of God as shown forth in the law. So the prophets would take the law and preach the law to the people, warning them against evil and encouraging and exhorting them to do right. If you were to think in terms of interpretation and exhortation you would have the general emphasis of the prophets.



The history of God's people after the time of David and Solomon is one of darkening doom because of the incorrigible sinfulness of the human heart. One of the prophets, Jeremiah, expressed it in Chapter 17, verse 9, that the heart of man is desperately wicked, sinful beyond belief. And it is obvious as we study the historical portion of the Old Testament, from 1 Kings Chapter Twelve and on, that man, even instructed man, even redeemed man, even delivered man, even guided and blessed man, will not do the Will of God and cannot do the Will of God. The emphasis is on the fact that man in his human nature cannot — "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The history of Israel after the time of Solomon can be seen in the lives of the kings. The son of Solomon was Rehoboam, and Rehoboam was a young man whose claim to fame or his right to notoriety, whatever you want to say about it, is seen in the fact that through impatience and arrogance he caused a large section of the country to break away from his leadership. He precipitated the division of the kingdom into the northern kingdom of, roughly speaking, ten tribes, and the southern kingdom of two tribes. Actually two and a half tribes remained together in the south, Judah, Benjamin and half the tribe of Manasseh, while nine and a half tribes separated in the north.

The matter of names becomes confusing because, while the whole nation was the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom took the name Israel, and the southern kingdom took the name Judah. Oftentimes in the writing of the prophets you will find that the northern nation is called Ephraim and the southern nation is called Manasseh, using the two names of the sons of Joseph by way of designation. The capital city of the north was Samaria, and the capital city of the south was Jerusalem; so sometimes we find the kingdoms referred to as Samaria and Jerusalem. Rehoboam was the king at the time of the division and remained as king of Judah for a length of time.

Jeroboam was the one who started the northern kingdom. In his case he is known as the man who caused Israel to sin because he built a substitute altar and set up a substitute ritual so as to cause the people to worship God in a substitute way. The center of all worship was at Jerusalem. For political reasons Jeroboam did not want his people to worship God, Jerusalem to worship God, because he felt that their identity as a kingdom separate from the southern kingdom might be broken down. And so he built altars in the north and set up a priesthood to lead the people in their worship there. And this was a sin in the life of Israel.

From there on we find that while the south, generally speaking, had good men as kings, the north usually never had anything but an evil king. The fact of the matter is that no one even of the good kings was ever without his blemish. Asa in Judah was a good king, but he was not effectual because he was not clear in his testimony. At the same time that Asa was king of Judah, Ahab became king in Israel. This man apparently was competent in government, but showed no sense at all of discrimination with reference to religion. He married Jezebel, the daughter of a pagan king and priest, a worshipper of Baal. Jezebel apparently was a very capable and brilliant woman who brought Baal worship into the country of Israel.

Asa was followed by Jehoshaphat, his son. Now this is a man that your heart will go out to in many ways. He was a good man, a wise man, diligent in serving God and intelligent in his procedure. Incidentally, he is the man that started what we will today call Christian education. He started educational processes to encourage the people to become believers. But he had his weakness, and strangely enough that was a blind spot with reference to evil in anybody else. He was what you would call a joiner. He joined up with anybody and everybody, and he could not see evil in other men even when it was there to be seen. And so he associated with Ahab the king of Israel, and the result was disastrous for Judah.

There was a period of time when the families of the kings of Judah and the families of the kings of Israel were so close together that they began to exchange names. They named their sons after each other and they intermarried with one another. As a matter of fact, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, married Athaliah who was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Athaliah brought Baal worship down into Judah itself. And so during this time, in spite of the fact that Jehoshaphat was a good man, his association with Ahab was such that Baal worship entered into both countries. Let me say in passing that this tendency on the part of a good man to associate himself tolerantly with an evil man is not a sign of strength. Mark that down. This is not strength. This is a form of dullness and weakness in taste and it is something that has dire consequences. Now one can go on from there to other things, but the story does not change any. Athaliah arranged to try to kill off the whole royal family and took over the leadership of Judah and became queen, and Jezebel her mother continued to dominate the situation so far as Israel was concerned.

Two strong men came up in the life of these two nations at this time, but because they were so harsh we seldom refer to them with anything like approval. One of them was Jehoiada in the south, the priest. He withstood Athaliah and eventually managed to have her violently set aside. He formed the government under Jehoash, the son of Athaliah and Jehoram. In the north there was a military man by the name of Jehu. This man in a most drastic fashion destroyed Baal worship in the north by the very severe method of simply killing it off. He liquidated the people.

The northern kingdom shortly was destroyed by Assyria after the time of Jehu. The southern kingdom continued for a while with a number of kings, some of them not so bad and some of them really good. There was Hezekiah who was a good king and was strong and knew the Lord. Yet his life was blemished by the fact that when the time came for him to die he very foolishly prevailed upon God in prayer that God should let him live. He lived fifteen extra years and in that time more trouble was brought upon Judah than they had ever had. Manasseh was born during that time and eventually became king. Because of the wrongs of Manasseh, Judah was eventually destroyed by Babylon.

When both the northern and southern kingdoms had been destroyed, the period was called the "Babylonian captivity." For seventy years all the people of Judah were captive under the power of Babylon. Eventually, after Babylon had fallen to Persia, some of the Jews returned to rebuild. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and of the temple. We learn some wonderful things, especially in the prophet Haggai, when we come across the remarkable idea that this second temple was actually more glorious than the first which was built in the time of Solomon. Actually, that second temple was a much smaller building, not nearly so glorious in appearance. But "the Desire of all nations," which was a reference to Jesus Christ, would stand in it. And truly Jesus of Nazareth stood in this second temple.

Throughout this whole section which we have been studying one thing becomes clear in a sort of a dreary fashion — the failure of man, any man, even a good man, to do the will of God. And the Old Testament ends with this note of complete frustration in failure. But some little glimmer of light came when a new covenant was promised by the prophets. We shall discover how this came about as we look at Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, who actually demonstrated here on earth the life of faith under God's power and grace.

## **The Son of God**

"When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son." The coming of the Son of God into this world as Jesus of Nazareth was not an emergency measure. This was not something new, something

introduced to take care of an unexpected development. The Lamb of God was slain "before the foundation of the world." In these words the Bible would give us to understand that it had always been in God's mind from the very beginning, before the creation of the world, that through His Son, Jesus Christ, He would complete His purpose in all of creation. The message of the Bible should be seen as one message, and this message, this Word of God, was known to God before the creation of the world. "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven."

We may very well ask ourselves what was the purpose of God when He created the world, and what idea should we possibly have concerning His plan? In the book of Hebrews we read that the Lord Jesus Christ came that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. This is what the Bible offers to us as a reason for the creation, that there should be a whole multitude of persons, of individuals like the Lord Jesus Christ, with whom He could have fellowship forever and ever. The whole course of history is actually the achievement of the plan of God.

The whole creation of the world and everything that followed afterwards was for the purpose of producing sons of God. The creation of Adam was a case of making man in the flesh with a material body. This human being developed what we would call a psychological ego. This human being in the physical body sinned, becoming sinful, and because he was sinful, fell into need of the grace of God. The judgment of God upon Adam, upon the whole world at the time of the flood, and all the way through the Old Testament, revealed to man the sinfulness of sin. The promises of God all the way through the Bible and through the history of God's people in the time of the Scriptures revealed to man the saving grace of God to overcome sin. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

The course of Israel in the Old Testament reveals the inability of the natural man to do the will of God. But all through the Old Testament the prophets predicted that there would be a new covenant. That is to say there would be a new procedure. We read that God would send the seed of the woman to bruise the head of Satan, the serpent. He would send the seed of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed. He would send a prophet like unto Moses who would teach His people and to whom they should give heed. He would send a priest like Samuel who would be righteous and faithful in doing the Will of God among his people. He would send a King like David and He would sit on the throne forever. Where all mankind failed, God would send One, His righteous Servant, who would do His will. He would send Messiah, the Prince, the Anointed One, who would set up the kingdom of God. In these various expressions and others like them, the Old Testament sets forth the idea that God would send someone who would deliver His people and would accomplish and do the Will of God.

The Old Testament prophecies became true in Jesus of Nazareth. He came to save His people. This is the real meaning of the Incarnation. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world, the birth of Jesus of Nazareth at Bethlehem, was one birth that did not come about in the usual way. This One came into this world on purpose to seek and to save the lost.

The four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, present four accounts of how He, the Son of God, did His work and performed His task. Two of the Gospels tell about the Virgin Birth. Even though the miracle may be astonishing to you, it will be well to remember that this is the only possible procedure if the Son of God actually lived before in eternity. When you and I were born into this world nobody claims we lived before. But when Jesus of Nazareth was born, remember that He had been with the Father. In John, Chapter Seventeen, we see that the Lord Jesus said, "Glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" And Paul says in the book of Philippians that the Son of God did not think it was a thing to be grasped after to remain equal with God, but "made himself of no reputation [emptied himself] . . . and [was] found in fashion as a man.

The four Gospels that we have in the New Testament are not a biography of Jesus Christ. There's a big section in the life of Christ of which there is no mention. Actually, apart from a very few verses, the whole story concerns His public ministry of about three years. But even then we do not have a complete record of everything that happened. The four Gospels are not even a history. They are the record of the work of salvation as it was done in and by Jesus of Nazareth. Christ Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And this He accomplished first by openly manifesting here upon earth the life of faith in God and then, as we shall go on to see, by giving Himself as a ransom for sin.

The very thing that Abraham was called to, the very kind and form of life that the children of Israel were called to when they were delivered out of Egypt and brought into the land of Canaan but which they never accomplished, the very kind of life that the kings were called to guide the people into, but which they never managed, this the Lord Jesus Christ showed plainly in Himself. When He was baptized the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." By that time He was about thirty years of age. This would mean that over the space of about thirty years, in ways of which we have no record, this Being lived in this world.

I think we can understand this voice from heaven to say that when God the Father looked upon Jesus of Nazareth in those thirty years of living in this world He saw exactly what would please Him. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." While He was here upon earth, living in the form and fashion of a man, limited to man's size, He perfectly fulfilled the law of God. And His outstanding characteristic throughout all this was that He was seeking only to do His Father's will.

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ are reported in various ways to point out that He could do nothing of Himself. He would speak of Himself saying "The Son can do nothing of himself." "My father worketh hitherto, and I work." In the book of Hebrews we are reminded of the Old Testament passage which predicted what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself would have in mind in these words: "A body hast thou prepared me . . . Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God." Jesus Christ perfectly demonstrated God's way of living.

To ground the faith of the people that, He was who He claimed to be and that He could do what He promised to do, while He was here He worked certain miracles. These miracles drew attention and helped people to get the idea that He really was Almighty God. He Himself would say that these miracles were being done by the power of God working through Him.

It is worthwhile to look realistically at the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and see the record of the earthly career of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that what the Holy Spirit has caused to be written is a series of incidents, events and works, the like of which nobody can do, there is not a single thing recorded as to what Jesus Christ did that any human being could do in himself. Everything that was done showed the power of God. It was God working in Him, "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" that accomplished these things. At no point in all the life of the Lord Jesus Christ did He ever show to natural man how human nature could enter into the kingdom of God or obey God. As a matter of fact, He put it very plainly, saying, "Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again."

Further, we find that the Lord Jesus personally showed and personalized in Himself the promises of God. Anybody that could see Him could see God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And He gave the call, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

As it is recorded in the Gospels we see that as soon as He was identified, in those three years, as soon as people got the picture clearly in mind that He claimed to be the Son of God, He went to Calvary. This was not to end things. This was to do things. He went to Calvary, not because somebody interrupted Him and some unfortunate event occurred. The cross was His personal route to victory. When He was

arrested and when Peter would have defended him against the Roman soldiers, He told Peter to put up his sword. He then went on to say, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" No, you and I are to have in mind that when Jesus Christ went to the cross that was no surprise. This is what He came for. The next time you celebrate Christmas and think about the Babe of Bethlehem remember this was a Person who was born to die.

The death of the Lord Jesus Christ had in it the further plan that He might be raised from the dead and brought into the presence of God. The resurrection from the dead was the supreme strategy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although He was without sin and His body was pure, yet the body in the physical self, such as was similar to our nature, was inadequate, unable to enter into the eternal kingdom of God. That human nature needed to be taken to the cross and buried, that God might raise it from the dead by His power with a new body that would last forever.

On Calvary's cross Christ Jesus suffered for our sins. When He died there, He bore the full weight of the course of sin upon Himself. But when He was resurrected into a new body that can never die, He opened the way for believers to be delivered from their own sentence of death.

As we believe in Him, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes effectual for us. We are to understand this and to believe it. For that reason, after He was raised from the dead, for the space of forty days, "He showed Himself alive . . . by many infallible proofs." His disciples were convinced for sure that He really was raised from the dead.

Then after those forty days, He took them out to an open space and ascended into heaven in full view of them all. The next time you think about that ascension remember He could have gone to heaven some other way. He did not have to do it in broad daylight. He did not have to do it in their presence. In that forty days time it is quite conceivable He had been in the presence of God many times. But this was done with dramatic effect because He wanted one thing understood, after the resurrection His disciples would be brought into the presence of God, forever. At Pentecost the new covenant was manifested. God came to dwell in the hearts of the people. The coming of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the children of God is God's great plan.

## **The New Creation**

Salvation is just as real as creation. Almighty God is Saviour, just as well as He is Creator. And salvation is better. In the first creation, man is a creature. In the second creation, the new creation, man is a son.

Born in the flesh in the old creation, man is unable to do the Will of God. Born again in the Spirit as the new creation in Christ, man can do the will of God. This does not mean he can do this Will of God apart from Christ. There is no such thing as being apart from Christ in the new creation. Human beings, even though they are instructed and informed men, even if they are inspired men, cannot in themselves do the things of God. Living as one should in the presence of God is not by law and not by works. It is not by manipulating natural processes and living in a natural way, but as a member of His body, belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ, having "Christ in you, the hope of glory." We are to have in mind it is the saved man who walks by faith. It is the born again Christian person who can walk in the newness of life.

The gospel which we believe in for salvation is based on four actual events. Paul lists these — "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the

third day according to the Scriptures and that he was seen." This is the great event that brings heaven and earth together.

But Christ Jesus has not completed His work even with the resurrection. He is not done even after the ascension into heaven. We read in the Acts of the Apostles in the first verse, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach," and you can not help but feel in the very language and tone that He went on doing and teaching. This is what He did after He ascended into heaven. And this is what He is doing today. Christ Jesus is working in the world today, for He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

Right at this point we want to be careful that we do not let anybody tell us what Christ Jesus is doing in the world. We are not going to accept even well-minded, good-intentioned men telling us what Christ Jesus came to do. We are going to look into the Scriptures and find out what Christ Jesus came to do. Looking then in the New Testament we learn about the Church, the Body of Christ. We find that the Church has a mission and that mission is to complete the work of Jesus Christ. He never gave His Church an assignment to work out, and which He would afterwards approve. There is not any such thing possible.

We know that "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." And we know that for Christians the word is "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." So without any hesitation we would point out that so far as Christians are concerned, we have nothing else to do on earth but what He came to do. The Christian, you see, is not his own; he has been bought with a price. And the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In his service he actually serves as a member of the Body of Christ.

This brings our attention now to the Church. We read about the Church in the latter part of the New Testament. There all the messages are written to Christian people. We learn that the Church is new. So far as this world is concerned, it is different. There is nothing on earth like the Church. The various figures that are used about the Church will bring this out. For instance, the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples saying, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." This is a very fine figure showing the vital relationship between the branch and the vine. The branch could never bear fruit if it were not for the life of the vine. But this very figure of speech does not allow for human traits. We are not just exactly like a branch. After all we can move and we can be on our own. So again when we look at the figure that Paul used when he wrote of the Gentiles being as a wild olive branch grafted into the cultivated olive tree. That illustrated the Gentiles being brought in with the Jews in Christian experience. The wild olive branch is the Gentile grafted into the cultivated olive tree, which is the Jew. And yet it illustrates just one aspect of the truth.

There are other illustrations even more definite. For instance, the Church is spoken of as the Bride of Christ. This points to a sweet relationship of love and affection. But when you think about the bride and the bridegroom, your mind goes back to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were equal. Eve was to be a helper equal to Adam. Nobody should claim the Church is equal to Christ. So while we have the figure of the bride, we can see that we just take it for one aspect.

With reference to speaking of the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit it's wonderful to think that the Christian people are builded together for an habitation of God. But the word is used that they grow, a building that grows into an habitation of God. Now buildings do not grow. So, while we can use the word building as meaning that all Christians are definitely related to each other according to a master architect's plan, yet actually it is much more than a building because they are living, growing things. So also, with reference to speaking of Christians as stones in a wall. You can think of the stone in the wall

as given its place and how the whole wall depends on its staying where it is. The wall will not collapse if each stone will be what it is supposed to be. Yet when Peter uses that figure about Christians he calls them "lively stones," which is to say living stones. Certainly a stone is dead. And yet the Christian is alive.

Christians are said to be members of His body, one an arm, another a leg, one an ear, one an eye, and so on. That has a real meaning in the symmetrical and functional relationship of all these parts to each other, members of one another as they are members of Christ. Yet, how are you going to add an arm? How would you add a leg? Yet you add Christians all the time.

My reason for pointing out the limitation of these figures is to emphasize again the fact that there is nothing on earth that is full illustration of what is involved in the Church. As a matter of fact, Paul pointed his finger at it when he wrote that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Now, I would like to point out some things about this new creation. For instance, in the old creation (in Adam) the natural man develops an ego, and the ego is the center, the "I". In the new creation, where the individual is in Christ Jesus and is produced as a spiritual man, the center of him is Christ. In the new creation the center of the person's consciousness is Christ. Remember how John the Baptist put it when he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The marriage relationship is perhaps the best illustration of all. That is, when we consider that in marriage the Bible says a man shall forsake his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. So in Christ Jesus, the individual person must deny himself. He must deny father and mother, and son and daughter and all of his friends. He must deny himself and commit himself only to the Lord, "Christ liveth in me."

The new life by faith needs to know the things of the Lord. In order that we might receive the promises of God, we need to hear them. In order that we might obey the Will of God, the Word of God, we need to know it. To help the believing person obey, even in the New Testament, God has given the Holy Spirit into the heart. That is the significance of the new covenant. When the Holy Spirit is given into the heart, there is more than just an impulse. The Holy Spirit is more than just an inclination in you. At the same time we are told, "I will put a new spirit within you." We read also, "I will put my laws into their hearts." This brings us to the significance of the Scriptures which are spoken of as "the sword of the Spirit."

The epistles are written to instruct and to guide Christians. The life of faith is formed by the Scriptures and instructed by the Scriptures. And throughout all the epistles of the New Testament we have various aspects of living in Christ brought forth. All the epistles from Romans to Revelation were written to believing people to help them understand better their relationship, that they might believe it more and be blessed in it.

In the book of Romans, we see put out before us the idea that righteousness in the sight of God is by faith. It is as we believe that we become righteous. In 1 Corinthians, problems of conduct on the part of Christians are the evidence of immaturity. If we were mature, completely yielded to and fully understanding Christ, we would not have any problem of conduct. He would work in us that which was well pleasing in His sight. In 2 Corinthians there is a more positive note: the believer is saved to serve God in Christ Jesus. In the book of Galatians another truth is emphasized that is an extension of what we had in the book of Romans. Special emphasis is made that the believer is not only forgiven by the grace of God but also is delivered from his evil ways through Christ Jesus.

In Ephesians the idea is set forth that believers altogether are His one body. Philippians emphasizes that in Christ, believing in Him, triumph over life in this world is sure. Colossians points out that Christ

Jesus is the Head of all. In all things He should have preeminence.

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to tell the Christian people that the expected return of Christ is the hope of the Christian. Perhaps because the excitement over the possible coming of the Lord Jesus Christ at any time seemed almost to overbalance the human awareness and consciousness, 2 Thessalonians speaks a very sober word of warning that there is need for humble waiting on the Lord.

We have certain epistles written by Paul to individuals. 1 Timothy, written to a young preacher, makes it clear that believers should help each other. In 2 Timothy we see that believers should witness clearly. And in the book of Titus it seems obvious that believers benefit by supervision. The book of Philemon gives emphasis to the fact that a faithful witness blesses others.

In the book of Hebrews we have a very profound truth set out — the new covenant opens the way to greater blessing than you ever could have had in the old covenant. The book of James in a very practical fashion points out that spiritual living is helped by practical guidance. In 1 Peter we see set out that the grace of God sustains the believer even in the day of suffering, and in 2 Peter we are given understanding that Christians should look forward to the culmination of God's plan in the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in the short epistles of 1, 2 and 3 John and in Jude, one idea seems to thread all the way through them all, the genuine obedience to God in the Holy Spirit through the Lord Jesus Christ is glorious. It means the coming of glory.

Finally, in the book of the Revelation at the end of the New Testament, while there are many things in there not easily understood, one idea seems to be clear — Christ Jesus will triumph.

All these messages of the epistles, setting out various aspects of the truth in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, are intended for the encouragement, the edification and the exhortation of believers that they might walk yielded to God in the Holy Spirit. As such they will be doing the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is in them as their head, guiding them in their service and in their testimony, in their witness and in their conduct.

And thus the Bible leads us to the fulfillment of God's plan. He is finally going to make a man acceptable to Him for eternity in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.