

PLAIN TALK
ON
Great Events In
The Bible

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Chapter 1

Creation

The Scriptures were written to tell the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that men might know the ways of God, might understand the plan of God, and might believe the promises of God in Christ Jesus that they may be saved. The Scriptures are a revelation from God to man.

God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, invisible. Man is a creature made of the dust, limited to space and time. Communication is possible only if God will reveal Himself to man within the scope of man's mind. The consciousness of man is an awareness of data from the senses, of ideas from imagination and of thoughts from self. God uses all three avenues in communicating His revelation.

God is Almighty so that He can do anything He wills to do, and God is Sovereign so that He does what He wills to do. He made the world as He willed to make it, and He controls events as they occur. Man recognizes events and learns as he observes their course. The Scriptures record certain events which reveal the ways of God to man.

The Bible begins with the account of the creation of the world, and ends with the prediction of its destruction. The creation of the world included the creation of time and space, neither of which are seen as having fixed form or limit. The record is found in Genesis I and II.

In Genesis I the creation of the natural world is sketched. In Genesis II is detailed the creation of man. No description of any process is set forth. The major truth is "God created the heaven and the earth," even as "God made all things."

In six days God created and made the natural world, and on the seventh day He rested from all His labors. This does not say that God was tired or exhausted, but merely that He ceased from His creative works.

The record lists in general terms what was created and made in each of the six days respectively. The date of the writing of these records is not known exactly, but it is commonly understood that they originated at a time when Egyptian culture prevailed. It is of more than passing significance that the world view of Egyptian culture is not reflected in the account as we have it in the Bible. It is a matter of record that Moses was learned in "all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Why would there be no trace of Egyptian mythology in this account? This problem disappears when it is remembered that Moses did not derive his ideas from the contemporary culture, but he received a revelation from God.

The mode of operation by which God accomplished the creation is not described, but there can be no question as to the origin of anything that was created or made. One aspect is obvious: "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." This is reflected in Hebrews 11:3a "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." Yet the words following say even more ". . . so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3b). John writes plainly "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Paul states with no hesitation "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16). One of the names given to the Son of God is "The Word of God" (Revelation 19:13). We can only conclude the Bible teaches that Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is the Creator of all things.

The Genesis account of the creation is seen to be even more meaningful when it is noted how Paul used it to interpret his own spiritual experience. Paul writes:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 4:6).

Here Paul refers to the Word of God commanding the light to shine, as being a type of what happened

to him on the Damascus road.

This is of special meaning to every believer in Christ. The pattern of the new birth may very well be that first the Word of God in the Gospel enters into the soul with creative, regenerative operation, so that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Corinthians 5:17).

The two words "create" and "made" are closely related but quite different in meaning: "to create" means to bring into existence that which was not before; "to make" means to produce by manipulation something else and different out of something that already existed. The design of a hat may be a "creation," which is a way of saying that the like of that never was seen before. The flowers that trim the hat have been "made" out of materials, cloth, wire, wax, already in hand. When God "created" He brought into existence what did not exist before; when God "made" He produced a new thing out of materials already existing. The word "create" is used very little in the Old Testament, more than half of the total number of times it is used are in the first chapter of Genesis. Yet it is used three times in one verse, Genesis 1:27, to refer to the creation of man.

The account shows that man was "created in the image of God." There is no possible way to understand this can mean that he was "developed out of" something less or else "into" the likeness of God. The Genesis account of the origin of man shows that he was designed by God and created as he is.

The third chapter of Genesis traces the fall of man by way of his own choice. It is the well known story of the Garden of Eden and is the only account that tells about the beginning of sin in the world.

In the eleventh chapter of Genesis the story of the Tower of Babel tells about the failure of man's attempt to achieve his desired goals in life by human cooperative enterprise. At this time the judgment of God resulted in a change in man's physical constitution so that he would never be able to achieve unanimous agreement with his fellowmen.

There may be many questions about the origin and the nature of the world and of man that are not answered in the Bible records but some important facts are plainly expressed. Now let me review these that you would find in the first few chapters, the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Here you will find these ideas plainly set forth.

- God created and made all that is.
- God controls all events wherever they may happen.
- God made man with freedom of choice.
- Man is responsible to God for his actions, his choices.
- Man has sinned and because of sin, he is alienated from God.
- Man will never be able to achieve what he needs by his own efforts.
- God is merciful and will help man in trouble.

These are the things that come to our minds when we are considering the creation of the world as seen in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. It is always so impressive to me that throughout the whole Bible as you go on reading it, this will not be changed or altered. No one ever adds to this. When Jesus of Nazareth was here on earth and was teaching, He referred to the opening chapters of Genesis and took them as they were. The things that are said there about the creation of the world and about God's doing it are plain. The things that are said there about God's being in control of everything are clear, and the record that is given about the nature of man and the responsibility of man is found all through the Bible. It does not change any throughout the Scripture.

That God condemns sin and is of purer eyes than to behold evil: that never changes all through the Bible. And that God will judge man and destroy what does not suit His purpose, which is what you find in the opening chapters of Genesis, is to be found all through the Bible. This would indicate to us that when we have in the Bible account the creation of the world, we have an insight into the real nature of everything. God made it. God controls it. God judges it. God brings His will to pass. God overrules in the affairs of men.

Chapter 2

The Flood

In chapter one we looked at the first big event as recorded in the Bible, the creation. In this chapter we are going to look at the next great event in the record as we have it, the flood. The actual account is in Genesis, chapters six to nine, and so far as the Bible is concerned, that is the whole account of the flood. It is referred to (as we shall see) in other places, especially in the New Testament. There is much importance attached to it, but the record is in these chapters in Genesis. It is truly an important event.

There is widespread skepticism about the idea of God's ever destroying anything He ever made. People naturally seem to feel that if they had made anything they would not destroy it. So they unconsciously read that over into the mind of God. This is a personal assumption: whatever I would do is what God would do. That is saying too much. I would have to call that a bogus assumption. The true record in the Scripture of the flood is needed as a corrective to such wishful thinking. It would be so nice for us when we are doing wrong if we could just have the feeling that God would not actually, really condemn anybody to the point of destruction. Some people will claim that over the whole world, in all countries, our foreign missionaries will tell us that when they are dealing with people of other cultures and they bring the idea that God will destroy that which is not in His will, the pagans cannot accept that. They feel in their hearts that would not be true. They feel that a God of love would be too good for that. They feel that if God is good He would not do that. But this is not true.

I can remember one occasion when I was sharing in a discussion among some ministers about how much use, one should make of the Old Testament and someone remarked that one certainly would not need to bring in these things about the flood, with the idea that God would destroy all mankind except eight persons. I remember a missionary arose and said, "Brethren, this is absolutely needed when we go out to talk to the wide, wide world. When we go out to talk to these people of other cultures, this is absolutely necessary. We have to have something like this to say, or they will not believe that God would destroy that which is out of His will." The true record of the flood as it is in the Bible is needed as a corrective to wishful thinking. Now let us consider this account so far as the flood is concerned.

It is a good thing to remember that the Bible is not a history of mankind. There is no attempt to tell all the details of all that happened in the world. Certain events that happened in the world are chosen for description and record, because these events are useful to show the ways of God with man.

After the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, when sin entered the world in mankind, generation after generation demonstrated "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." As you read Genesis, chapters four and five, you will see this coming up. There is no attempt to name all men nor to describe the life history of any of them. It is noted that some men were intelligent, and some men were diligent in their dominion over the earth so that cities were built, industry was promoted, and art was developed. All these things are found in the early chapters of Genesis. The point that was particularly noted in that record is that sin became more and more rampant.

When the conduct of man became so sinful that his thoughts and his imaginations were only evil continually, the Bible reveals that God moved to destroy all mankind in judgment by sending a flood to "cover the earth."

But God is righteous in His actions, so that in judgment He remembered mercy. God knows how to deliver the godly in the time of judgment. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He was warned about the coming flood, and was instructed to build an ark for the salvation of himself and his household.

In the New Testament Noah is referred to as a "preacher of righteousness," who was ridiculed and despised by his fellowmen while he was building the ark. Apparently, no one believed his warning about their doom, but all continued in their sinful practices until the flood came.

The record of this awful catastrophe is set forth in Genesis, chapters six to nine. Rains fell and "the

fountains of the deep" were opened until the whole earth was covered with water, and every living thing perished. Noah and his wife, with his three sons and their wives entered into the ark. They took with them of all the animals in the land. God shut the door of the ark as the flood began.

After 150 days the waters of the flood began to recede. The ark came to rest on a mountain top as the dry land began to appear. In due time Noah and his family, eight souls in all, came out of the ark to begin life anew on the face of the earth.

The first act of the righteous man was to build an altar that he might worship God. Taking some of the clean animals he had saved in the ark, Noah prepared sacrifices and gave thanks to God.

At this time God made a covenant with Noah in which He promised He would never send another flood. The sign of this covenant was to be the rainbow in the clouds.

At the same time, God placed a special responsibility upon Noah by way of a commandment, that man should henceforth govern man in such a way that the innocent and the weak should be protected from the aggression of the wicked. This exercise of social control was to be an action of grace and mercy by which the violence of the wicked should be restrained by the violence of the righteous, in the interest of protecting the innocent.

The covenant with Noah has been seen by some to justify war in defense against aggression, and also to warrant capital punishment for capital crimes in society. It should be noted that the command to take the life of the murderer was not designed to affect the future conduct of that criminal, but to deter, to hinder, other potentially violent aggressors from carrying out their murderous intentions. In other words, the idea of taking the life of the murderer is not for the sake of the murderer, it is for the sake of society. The life of the murderer was to be taken by society for the sake of society, and not for the sake of retaliation or the just punishment of the wrongdoer.

Judgment belongs to God, and in His own time He will deal with each human being on the basis of his actions in this world. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." The covenant with Noah was not a pattern for vengeance, but was a guidance for salutary action by society as a whole in the interest of protecting the innocent from aggression.

The covenant with Noah reveals the responsibility of man to control man. Man's proclivity to sin in harming his fellowman, even as Cain killed Abel, calls for intelligent deliberate control of human conduct. Parents must control children. Society must control individuals. The wise man will control himself. Jesus of Nazareth taught that this could entail the "plucking out of an eye" or the "cutting off of a hand." But such control, even though it appears arbitrary, is essential to human welfare.

The covenant with Noah was designed for the welfare and happiness of mankind. It remains to be recorded in Scripture and to be demonstrated in human affairs that the sin of man corrupts human conduct even in the operation of government. Even though it was God's plan that man should govern man, and that in itself is right in God's eyes, men won't always do it in the right way. Government will many times abuse other men but this does not change the pattern. What was designed to function as a principle of control to protect the innocent can be abused to become a practice of oppression to exploit the weak.

The covenant with Noah also called for corporate action on the part of society on behalf of the individual. The sinful disposition of man led him to attempt to use corporate action to achieve blessedness in living by his own efforts in the building of the Tower of Babel, as recorded in Genesis, chapter eleven. The judgment of God brought about such a basic change in the nature of man that all future attempts to achieve blessedness by corporate action were doomed to failure.

The wider significance of the flood is revealed in the New Testament. It is worth looking at what we have here. In Matthew we read:

But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be

(Matthew 24:37-39).

Our Lord teaches on the basis of what happened at the time of the flood, the nature of the end of the world by referring to it in this way. He points out that that action will be sudden. In Luke 17:26, 27 a very similar passage indicates the end will come quickly and will be unexpected. In Hebrews we have a word that brings to our mind something about this.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Hebrews 11:7).

God will judge, but the righteous will be delivered. In II Peter we see another use made of this record of the flood:

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (II Peter 3:5-7).

God brought the flood in upon the ungodly, just as He will bring judgment by fire at the end of the world. When we are thinking about this whole record about the flood, we can re- member several things:

God will judge.

In judgment, God will destroy.

In destruction, God will save the righteous, for which we thank Him and praise Him.

Chapter 3

The Patriarchs

In continuing our study of the events as recorded in the Bible, we now consider the Patriarchs remembering that everything that we are studying and reading about was written for our learning.

Following the judgment of God at the Tower of Babel, mankind was living under worldwide conditions which continue to this day. The remainder of the book of Genesis, chapters twelve to fifty, is devoted to the record of incidents in the history of the family of Abraham. This account is featured by events that occurred in the lives of four leaders in four generations, respectively. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph follow each other as father and son.

Abraham was first called Abram. He is counted as the "father of many nations." Even today he is recognized as the father in each of the three monotheistic religions in the world: Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan.

The Bible presents Abraham as the pioneer of living by faith. At a time when all men sought blessedness by joint action in community enterprise, Abraham was called to come out from his native land, away from his kindred, into a land that should be his own. "By faith Abraham obeyed . . . and he went out, not knowing whither he went." He and his family lived as sojourners, never taking up permanent residence, for "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." All who believe in Christ today are counted as the children of Abraham, walking "in his steps."

Abraham is spoken of as the "father of the faithful" not only because he was the first to order his life in conscious obedience to God's call, but because his life was a pattern to others who followed him, walking in the footsteps of faithful Abraham.

The life of Abraham should be studied carefully because it is the classic example of living by faith. "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness." It should be noted and it is to be seen in the life of Abraham that the very essence of "believing God" is "obeying God."

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Hebrews 11:8).

The call was into something new and unknown. Obedience is not on the basis of understanding nor of good judgment. When we study the life of Abraham we see this in him; he did not obey God because it was the smart thing to do, nor because he understood his circumstances so well that he did these things because he was wise. Obedience was directly in response to the will of God that had been revealed to him.

The second thing I would point out is that the practice of separation marked Abraham's life. He was separated from his country and his kin. He was called away from everything in his past into something new. He was separated from his own nephew, Lot, very early in his experience. He was separated from his own flesh when he cast out Ishmael from his own household. He was separated from his son of promise, Isaac, when he offered him up, as he thought God wanted him to do. This practice of separation marked the life of Abraham. It is a very important and basic element in living by faith. If I am going to walk in the ways of God according to His will, I will be separating myself from myself and everything pertaining to me and all that is around me and everything in this world, to choose God alone.

The third thing that we notice about Abraham is prolonged delay in answer to faith prompted fleshly substitution. That is a rather heavy way of putting it; but you will see what I mean when you have this in mind. Abraham had been promised a son, but Sarah did not have any children. So Sarah recommended to Abraham that he take her handmaiden, Hagar, as his second wife. Abraham did this and Ishmael was born. Later Abraham received a promise that Sarah would have a child, even though she was past age. In due time Isaac was born.

The fourth thing that we notice in the life of Abraham about which we want to take special notice is

that it was necessary for him to cast out of his family situation, Ishmael, his own son after the flesh. Ishmael was cast out. This is very significant to us, when we consider that in walking in obedience to God we may have to cast out and repudiate that which is natural, human, and of the flesh.

In the fifth place, Abraham was tested in offering up Isaac. Isaac was the son of promise. All the promise of God which He had given to Abraham was invested, as it were, in this son Isaac. Abraham obeyed and proceeded to do this very thing, which resulted not only in that God spared Isaac, but that He gave Abraham the final great blessing in his career. In Abraham's life, it is to be noted that while Abraham became wealthy, he desired above all else the glory of God. When he had led his own servants to the rescue of Lot and the king of Sodom from the enemy, he refused to accept any of the loot in that military success because he said he did not want anyone to say that the king of Sodom had made Abraham rich. He wanted God to have that glory.

Isaac is distinguished by his wisdom. There are not many details recorded about Isaac. They are easy to read. Not much is said, but this is the main point:

And 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 (Genesis 26:18).

Afterwards we read of the "wisdom of Isaac," but this was his wisdom. In an arid country digging for water, he dug where Abraham his father, his great father, his illustrious father, had dug. That is where the water was, and the wisdom of Isaac was in this fact he was not above following in the footsteps of a wise person. "And he called their names after the names by which his father had called them." This is very, very important. In the history of our spiritual experience, our Christian life, we have had in the course of our history words such as "justified, sanctified, heaven, hell, saved." What we need to recognize just now is that those are good words. A person would be really wise to call those truths by the names that our fathers called them.

Jacob was the younger twin son of Isaac and Rebekah. Though born after Esau (the firstborn), Jacob was destined to become the leader of the family. While still a young man, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage. When Jacob collaborated with his mother to deceive Isaac his father, Jacob was forced to flee away to escape Esau's wrath.

In his vision of the ladder or more accurately said, "stairway" between earth and heaven, Jacob received profound revelation: the living God would bless him and make him great. After working for his uncle for twenty years Jacob started home with his wives and children. He was met by a hostile Esau and in peril of his life. At Peniel he wrestled with an angel to receive the blessing of God. Because of his perseverance Jacob won and his name was changed to Israel. His descendants are called the Israelites.

Joseph was the son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. He was sold by his brethren as a slave into the land of Egypt. He was falsely slandered and cast into prison. In due time, he was released from prison to become the Chief Administrator under Pharaoh in the land of Egypt.

From this position he was able to befriend his father, Jacob, and his brothers who had sold him down there, sustaining them with food, while famine was over the whole land.

These four patriarchs are the principal persons in this section of Genesis. Their stories are entwined even as they are told in the narrative. The record reveals much pertinent truth about family life under the hand of God. Here we can study the family phase of religious education.

Each of these four patriarchs accent some important truth or characteristic in godly living. In the case of Abraham, he believed God and obeyed. In the case of Isaac, he was wise in following a proven pattern. In the case of Jacob, he was willing to give up the lesser to secure the greater benefit. In the case of Joseph, he was dependable because he trusted God.

Chapter 4

Israel In Egypt

The descendants of Jacob lived in the land of Egypt about 400 years. The story of this period is told in the book of Exodus in the first twelve chapters.

Jacob and his large family came to Egypt in a time of famine in search of food. Because of Joseph's prestige as national benefactor, the Hebrews were treated as welcome guests and were settled in the land of Goshen. In the generations following they prospered and multiplied greatly.

In the course of national affairs in Egypt there was a change in leadership when a Pharaoh came to power who was not impressed by the reputation of Joseph, and so was not inclined to be generous to the Hebrews. He developed a jealousy about their wealth and a suspicion about their loyalty. He tried to control their numbers by instituting cruel birth control methods, but to no avail. The Hebrews continued to prosper and to multiply.

Pharaoh then established a program of public works in which the Hebrews were forced to do slave labor in erecting public buildings. This work was done under Egyptian taskmasters who abused the Hebrews cruelly.

During this time Moses was born, and in a dramatic way was taken into Pharaoh's household as a ward of Pharaoh's daughter. Apparently he received the best training available for it was written of him that he was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." In Hebrews 11:24-26 it is implied that Moses had the opportunity of being adopted into the family of Pharaoh where he might have succeeded to the throne, or at least have enjoyed a place of prominence. But Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God."

In the providence of God, Moses' nurse was his own mother, so it would seem that Moses learned the history of the Hebrews including the covenant with Abraham, and the promise of the home in Canaan. In any case we read, "when Moses was grown, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens"; and thus recognized their plight. When he saw "an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew" Moses interfered and as a result the Egyptian was killed.

The next day Moses saw two Hebrews quarreling, and again he undertook to help by stopping their strife. When he learned that they knew he had killed the Egyptian, Moses fled into the land of Midian.

After forty years God called Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. He was directed to confront Pharaoh with request for permission for the Hebrews to leave Egypt for a "three day journey into the wilderness."

Pharaoh refused to give permission. Moses was authorized to bring plagues upon the Egyptians. Magicians who were working with Pharaoh were able to produce wonders that were similar to the miracles that Moses had performed, and thus they encouraged Pharaoh not to yield to Moses. But when Moses continued to bring plagues that were beyond their power to duplicate they advised Pharaoh to agree to Moses' request, but it was too late. Pharaoh had hardened his heart and was stubbornly refusing to yield.

When the plagues became more grievous, Pharaoh tried to compromise. First, he proposed that the Hebrews worship their God "in the land." Moses refused this because he pointed out that the religious practices of the Hebrews involved sacrificing animals, shedding their blood; and animals were sacred to the Egyptians. In his second attempt, Pharaoh proposed that the Hebrews go "only a little way" out of the land into the wilderness; obviously having in mind it would be easy to bring them back. Moses rejected this, insisting they must go three days journey into the wilderness. Pharaoh tried again, for the third time, by proposing that only the adults go. He pointed out that the journey would be so hard for the little children; so he proposed that the Hebrews leave the children behind. But Moses refused this, saying that the children were involved. They belonged to their parents and they needed to go along to worship God with their parents. Pharaoh then made a fourth offer of compromise, proposing that the Hebrews leave

their flocks and herds. I am sure Pharaoh had in mind in each one of these cases it would be easy to bring the Hebrews back. If they had left the little children, of course the parents would want to come back to the children. Now if they were to leave their flocks and their herds, of course these people would want to come back to their property. But Moses refused, saying that they needed those flocks and herds to worship God because they offered those animals as sacrifices. Finally, Pharaoh was provoked to anger and dismissed Moses from his presence saying he would never see him again. Then we have the only instance when Moses became stern with Pharaoh. Moses told Pharaoh, "You told the truth. You said it. You never will see my face again." That night the last plague struck the land of Egypt.

The last plague was the death of the firstborn throughout the land. God showed Moses how the Hebrews could escape this plague by offering a lamb, and then sprinkling the blood of the slain lamb on the doorposts of their house. The promise was that when the Angel of Death came through the land and saw the blood he would "pass over" that house. That was the origin of the word "Passover." This event has been commemorated ever since in the culture of the Jews by the "Feast of the Passover."

When this plague struck the Egyptians, Pharaoh relented temporarily and consented that the Hebrews leave. Moses had instructed the Hebrews to be ready to go. They were all dressed and had everything packed. When Pharaoh said that they could go, they left immediately. There was some evidence of more goodwill among the Egyptians for the Hebrews than was commonly expected. When the Hebrews did leave, many of the Egyptians gave them jewels and treasures to take with them. That night was the Passover night in Israel's history. It has been commemorated in Jewish culture by the Feast of the Passover.

This is the story of Israel in Egypt. All the time the Hebrews were in Egypt, they were strangers. They did not belong there. Egypt was not their home. The land of Canaan had been promised to Abraham. The Hebrews were strangers in a far country when they were in Egypt.

God had prepared Moses for His servant. Moses was the leader that brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. This was a situation in which Moses became a great leader but it is possible that his greatness was largely due to the situation. It was not so much that he was a man of courage, and that he was a man of wisdom: a big thing needed to be done, and this was just the situation in which Moses could do it. Moses had been prepared in providence and by the grace of God became the leader.

Moses was forty years of age when he saw the situation and understood it. He recognized that there was injustice to the Hebrews from the Egyptians, and that there was quarreling going on among the Hebrews themselves. Those conditions both external and internal were not good, and Moses wanted them to be free from such hindrances. The first thing that Moses did turned out to be wrong. He tried to fix things himself. He tried to solve the problem of injustice by controlling the aggressor, the one who was doing wrong. If you have any dealing with human beings, you will soon know that when it comes to dealing with the man that has done wrong, you cannot do anything by telling him to do right. He has already done wrong. In Moses' case, when he interfered, you will remember, an Egyptian was killed. Then you will remember when he tried to get the Hebrews themselves to stop quarreling they turned on him too. So Moses, although he was the right man and saw the truth of the situation, and was trying to do what was the right thing, failed actually because he was going about it in the wrong way.

It is obvious that the problem of Israel could never be solved in Egypt. The Hebrews were living in Egypt and they were having trouble in Egypt, but the solution of their trouble was not going to come out of Egypt. It was going to come by a simple and very elemental action, because of the simple fact that they needed to come out of there. They needed to leave Egypt behind them. Right there is a picture of the way in which the human soul can be delivered from his sin and his addiction, his faults and his failings. He comes out of them. He leaves them behind. Those of us who know the Gospel know that we understand that all our sins were put on Jesus Christ, who took them to the cross of Calvary and then went into the grave. He was raised from the grave in the newness of life. The believer follows him through this route.

By denying the flesh and trusting in Christ, he goes to the cross, as it were. He is crucified with Christ, and yet lives in Christ a new creature. This is the very plan of the Gospel.

Chapter 5

The Exodus Of Israel

The exodus of Israel out of Egypt was probably the greatest event in the history of that nation. The account is found in Exodus chapters 13 to 18. This was the first phase of the deliverance of Israel by the power of God.

This stupendous undertaking involved the moving of a community of thousands of persons out of their homes where they had lived for over 400 years, across an uncharted wilderness into a country that was inhabited by hostile warlike tribes. It was during this time that the descendants of Jacob, known as Hebrews in Egypt, became a nation known as Israel.

The great significance of this event is that it demonstrates the deliverance of a soul out of natural living into spiritual living. It shows that a drastic change is necessary: Israel could never have the blessing of God while living in Egypt ("Ye must be born again"). There was no possibility to improve Egypt to make living there acceptable to God (the flesh must be forsaken).

The experiences of the children of Israel as they came out of Egypt on their journey to the promised land reveal much that is useful for understanding the primary experiences of the soul who begins to walk in obedience to God. Before the exodus began, the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt, but they were also at home. Even though conditions may be hard, when a person has never known anything else and counts it to be his home, he is inclined to love it there. The Hebrews would not want to leave the only homes they ever had. But persecution and abuse made them willing to go. Pharaoh knew that although he hated the Hebrews, they were a source of economic benefits to him. He did not want them to leave. But the plagues made him willing.

Immediately after the Passover, the Hebrews started on their departure from Egypt. When Pharaoh saw they were really intending to leave, he changed his mind and pursued them with his soldiers.

God showed Moses how to divide the waters of the Red Sea so the Hebrews could cross over on dry land. When Pharaoh with his army tried to follow, the waters returned and the Egyptians were destroyed.

When the Hebrews had successfully crossed the Red Sea to escape from Egypt, Miriam led the people in singing the triumphant song of Moses.

This dramatic escape was just the beginning of the exodus which began in Egypt but which would end in Canaan forty years later. Marching across the unknown wilderness required guidance which was given by God. A cloud hovered over them in the daytime, and a pillar of fire guided the Hebrews by night. Thus they became a band of pilgrims en route to the promised land.

This is the way the story of Exodus is recorded in the Bible. I am sure as we are thinking about it here, you can feel in your own heart and mind how this pictures the great experience of being brought out of darkness into light, out of the flesh into the spirit, out of death into life. The whole beginning of spiritual experience is a matter of being born again. Now let us go on with the story.

As they traveled the Hebrews were beset by a number of problems due to their circumstances. In these problems we can learn much about spiritual experience.

The first problem was due to having only "bitter water to drink" at Marah. The people complained to Moses and Moses called on God for help. God showed him a shrub which had the effect of making the water drinkable. They were to take just any piece of wood of that shrub and put it in the water, and then they could drink it. They were not led to good water at once, but they were shown how the bitter water could be changed into drinkable water. Later they were guided to Elim where there were ten wells of water and seventy palm trees.

The second problem was lack of food. When the children of Israel had come out from Egypt, they brought with them bread that they had, even the dough that they had in the kneading troughs. When they were out on their journey, they soon ate the food which they had. When the bread that they had brought

with them was gone, the people were hungry. Again they complained to Moses. He again went to God in prayer. God sent manna and quails for food. This manna continued to come down from heaven each morning, all during the forty years of the Exodus. It appeared on the ground at daybreak. Each family was to gather enough manna for a day at the time.

The third problem they encountered was a lack of water. Again the people complained, and again Moses turned to God in prayer. God told Moses to strike a certain rock, from which water gushed forth to fill their needs.

The fourth problem was caused by an enemy, the hostile tribe of Amalek, who cut off the stragglers among the Hebrews. As they were crossing the desert and their way would be long and wearisome, there would be some folks straggling behind. Hostile enemies pursuing Israel, lurking in the distance, would cut off the weak ones, the stragglers. Moses directed Joshua to lead their soldiers into battle with Amalek while he, Moses, went up on the mount to pray.

In direct fighting, Amalek could defeat Joshua. We ought to stop and think about that. Amalek was the very essence of evil. He represents the flesh. He was fighting with Joshua, who in this case represents the Spirit, the people of God. If a person were asked the question, "In a straight fight between good and evil who would win?" he could easily think that because this is in the Bible, and because are talking about the worship of God, he ought to say that good would win. But that would not be true: that would not be realistic. In direct fighting between good and evil in this world, the evil has the advantage, and the evil can win. In direct fighting, Amalek could defeat Joshua. Joshua was a good soldier, an excellent commander, but in a straight direct fight with Amalek, he would be defeated. While Moses prayed on the mount, Joshua would win. But Moses' "hands were heavy" and in weariness Moses stopped praying, with the result that Amalek was winning in the battle. Aaron and Hur came to help Moses by holding up his hands. So Joshua won a notable victory. Thus Israel learned the important truth that victory over evil is possible through united intercessory prayer.

The fifth problem was caused by human limitation. There were so many details to be handled that leaders had to be chosen to lead smaller groups under the general oversight of Moses. By delegating his authority to deputy leaders the many aspects of living in the camp could receive proper attention. So human limitation was overcome by group organization.

These problems came up in the first two months of their journey in the desert. In a very real sense, people who are seeking to walk in faith, trusting in God, can learn much by studying these events which happened to Israel. During this time in their coming out from the country of Egypt, Israel learned several definite things.

First, their deliverance began when Pharaoh and his army were destroyed. There needs to be a sharp, definite, real break at the very beginning in getting away from evil, and getting away from this world.

In the second place, their travel was guided by God Himself by the cloud in the daytime and the fire at night.

Third, their bitter experiences could be made bearable by God. Just because a soul is obeying God does not mean that everything will be sweet. There will be bitter water to drink, but that bitter water can be made palatable.

Fourth, their necessary food was supplied by God.

Fifth, the water they needed to drink was also supplied by God.

Sixth, victory over enemies was possible through united intercessory prayer.

Seventh, the limitations of human weakness can be overcome by the organization of manpower.

In all this salvation, guidance, provision and victory are available through the living God!

Chapter 6

At Mount Sinai

In the book of Leviticus, we have these words:

For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy (Leviticus 11:44- 45).

The revelation went on to say that they were to make a difference between the clean and the unclean. This emphasizes a very important aspect in the message of the Bible. In the exodus, as Israel was coming out from the land of Egypt to go to the land of Canaan, they arrived in the third month after the Passover at Mount Sinai. Here they encamped for some time to receive special revelation from God. The story of what happened there is told in the latter part of Exodus and in the book of Leviticus.

In Exodus chapters 19 to 40 is the account of Moses spending forty days on the mount, where he received the Ten Words on tablets of stone, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the ritual of worship in which Israel could draw nigh to God. During the time Moses was on the mount, the "mixed multitude" impatiently urged Aaron to make the golden calf, which they then worshipped in heathen fashion. When Moses came down from the mount he judged Aaron for his part in this sin, and then publicly judged the people. He emphasized the meaning of their conduct by smashing upon the rocks the tablets of stone upon which the Ten Words had been written by the finger of God. Then he called for a showdown between those who would serve God and those who preferred the golden calf. In the ensuing conflict, three thousand people were killed.

Then Moses returned to the top of the mount to spend another forty days in communion with God. During this time he confessed Israel's sin to God, and made intercession for the people. The Ten Words by which Israel could know their sin were again put on tablets of stone. In His grace God revealed the pattern of the tabernacle with its furniture, and the regulations governing the service of the Levites who were to lead in observance of the ritual of worship. The problem was the sins of the people which had broken fellowship with the holy God. But in the tabernacle God provided a way whereby a sinner could come acceptably to worship and to have communion with Him. This way was shown in the structure and the furniture of the tabernacle. The priests were instructed as to the part they were to perform in leading sinful worshippers into the presence of God.

Every detail in the building of the tabernacle was carefully revealed to Moses on the mount, who supervised its construction exactly as revealed. The clothing of the priests was also prescribed in detail, as was the procedure by which the priests were to be ordained to their tasks. The implications of the Ten Words were set forth in judgments of practical situations, which were recorded to serve as a guide for the supervision of personal conduct among the people. All this comprised the latter part of the book of Exodus, chapters 19 to 40.

Being reconciled to God, the people needed to worship God. This is something that you and I should keep in mind. It is a wonderful thing that Christ Jesus died for us and reconciled us to God as our Father; but it is an important thing that we should then continue to have fellowship with Him. Salvation does not mean that when we are saved we have been so affected that in ourselves we are going to be so different that from then on we will go on and do the right thing. No. It means that now we have been so related to God and so attached to the Lord Jesus Christ and so indwelt by His Holy Spirit that as we yield ourselves to Him we can walk in His ways. For this we need to continue to have fellowship with Him.

The tabernacle was designed in such a way that the worshipper would be reminded of certain facts by the very furniture that was there. The ritual of worship was also to reveal certain truths which the worshipper would need to keep his faith sound and effectual. All this is described in the book of Leviticus.

That may seem heavy reading for many of us but it is very important. As we read it we should note how careful the Word is to instruct the worshipper just how he should do what is required that he might be acceptable to God.

Leviticus begins with the description of different sacrifices that were to be offered. We do well to remember that each sacrifice is like a parable, and in an objective way it accents one aspect of truth. Since no one sacrifice could possibly depict the whole work of Christ, several different ones were employed to give the broad meaning of Christ's death on behalf of sinners.

The plan of salvation not only includes reconciliation between the sinner and God, and reveals that the sins of man will be carried away; but it also includes the sanctification of the worshipper. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." This is the will of God. God intends to dwell in the midst of His people, and if He is going to do that, the lives of His people must be clean and sanctified.

The children of Israel had lived 400 years among pagan Egyptians. Their living habits and their manner of life would be inclined to be naturally carnal and unclean. Specific instructions as to how things should be done were revealed for the guidance of the people. That exact obedience was required was emphasized in the death of Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron who offered "strange fire unto the Lord." Aaron was not permitted to mourn their death. The popular effect of this judgment and discipline was guarded in this way, that it might be kept strong.

Rules and regulations, touching all aspects of life, were set forth in the book of Leviticus to establish the concept of "clean and unclean." Sanitary regulations as set out there have been recognized in modern times by modern scientists as being amazingly sound. Moral regulations protected the home and the family interests, even as they would to this day. The setting forth of a calendar of religious observances helped to build up the concept of God as being involved with His people in a special way.

Believers who live in New Testament times and go by New Testament principles may find these specific regulations in the book of Leviticus very arbitrary. It should be kept in mind that there was no public, godly culture at that time. In contemporary experiences of believers the Holy Spirit moves the person to act in obedience to the will of God. We need to keep in mind that those people who were brought out of Egypt on their way to Canaan had no such surrounding circumstances as we have today. They needed to be told specifically, exactly, what to do. They did not have the indwelling guidance of the Holy Spirit of God that believers today have. For this reason, we can realize that there was an importance in giving them exact instructions. No one has ever been able to demonstrate that these rules, which are set out so specifically in the book of Leviticus, can be violated with immunity. What I mean to say is that if anybody today were to break anyone of those regulations he would find out that what he had done was not good. They are amazingly relevant to actual life situations even today.

So at Mount Sinai Israel was gathered that they might learn something of the significance and the importance of fellowship with God. They were to learn that the matter of coming into the presence of God is very important. Just being minded to come is not enough. Being minded to come is good, but the worshipper needs to be humble enough to come God's way. God's way is so organized, so arranged, that when the soul does come to God, that soul is led away from his own situation and comes having in mind what God has done to make it possible for him to be there acceptably.

Chapter 7

Kadesh Barnea

For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end (Hebrews 3:14).

I am going to be reading to you out of the book of Hebrews. This is a comment in the New Testament upon that portion of the Old Testament that we are now studying. This event that I want to bring to your attention is the occasion when the children of Israel had come up to the land of Canaan and could have gone in. Let me bring this portion to your attention:

While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it (Hebrews 3:15-4:1).

This is what we read in the book of Hebrews as the interpretation of this event which I now want to bring to your attention.

Israel's prolonged stay at Mount Sinai was very important. But even after they had been there, they were still in the desert on their way to the promised land. At Mount Sinai they received instruction to fit them for living in the land of promise. They also received practical instruction for the remainder of their journey through the wilderness. The book of Numbers tells the story of what happened in the desert after they left Mount Sinai.

As the children of Israel continued their journey, they were organized in tribes who were assigned definite places in the arrangement, in the location, in their camp. The tabernacle was put in the center of the camp, the twelve tribes arranged in groups of three stationed north, south, east and west. The order of march was also specified. The procedure for directing the movements of Israel was carefully outlined.

To these delivered, instructed, orderly people, Moses gave the command "Go in and possess." They appointed one from each tribe to spy out the land. These spies brought back reports about the wonderful fertility of the land, but also of the formidable military strength of the inhabitants. Israel was at Kadesh Barnea when the spies returned.

When the people heard of the difficulties they would face if they dared to enter the land, they were filled with misgiving and fear, and decided not to go forward. Joshua and Caleb brought a minority report. They admitted the difficulties that had been pointed out, but in faith they urged "Our God shall fight for us. We are well able to take the land."

But the people accepted the majority report, and turned back. When Moses directed them then to return to the desert, they did not want to do that. They undertook to enter into the land in their own strength and they were defeated. The account of this event is found in Numbers, chapters 1 to 14. Each of the twelve tribes was identified and assigned a definite place in the arrangements for making camp. The tribe of Levi was assigned to the duty of caring for the tabernacle and all that pertained to the worship ritual. The Levites were not to own any land in Canaan; they were to live off the tithes of the other twelve tribes.

When the tabernacle had been constructed, the priests had been consecrated, and all was ready, the journey to Canaan was resumed. As they journeyed, the people complained and this displeased the Lord. The Lord manifested His displeasure by sending fire which destroyed some of them. "And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched" (Numbers 11:2).

Then the people complained about the food. Eating the manna was not very appetizing to men who had feasted on the highly spiced foods of the Egyptians. Their complaining about the food caused the anger of the Lord to kindle greatly and we read "Moses was also displeased." First Moses complained to God that

he had been given this task of leading this rebellious people, saying, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me" (Numbers 11:14). Moses was directed to bring seventy elders to God, that God might take of the spirit which was upon Moses and put it on the seventy, that they might share the burden of leadership. Moses was then to promise Israel that they would have meat to eat for a whole month. A strong wind brought an abundance of quails which covered the camp. But even as they were eating the quail, they were stricken by a plague. And, of course, in the midst of that distress, they called unto Moses. Moses called unto God and the plague was stayed.

The next thing we read is that Miriam and Aaron complained against Moses because he had married an Ethiopian. The Lord in anger struck Miriam with leprosy. Upon Aaron's request Moses prayed for Miriam and she was cleansed. But we may all take note of this: Israel made no progress on their journey until Miriam was restored to her place.

Israel had now been brought to the edge of Canaan. Moses sent a representative from each tribe, twelve spies to scout the land. They were to report on the quality of the land, and on the conditions which would be met when Israel entered. After forty days they returned to report that the land was wondrously fertile, but the conditions were impossible. There were high walled cities, and of course the children of Israel had no equipment with which to batter down stone walls. They were just slaves that had come away from Egypt and had spent their time in the desert. They did not have any of the equipment that would be necessary for battering down walls. The soldiers defending the country were like giants.

When the spies made their report the people were distressed "and the people wept that night." The next day they complained to Moses for ever starting out on this journey. They indicated that they would much rather have stayed in Egypt and died there, than to be dying out in the wilderness. They wanted to return to Egypt. But two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, reminded the people that God was with them. The Lord would fight for them and with His help they would be well able to conquer. But the people had no faith to accept the challenge that had been given by Joshua and Caleb. They accepted the advice of the ten spies who said it was impossible. So it became a classic instance where the people of God failed to go on and possess what was theirs. They failed to achieve what was potential. There is such a thing as stopping short: these people quit before they were through. Why did they quit? Because they had no faith. The New Testament says "they I entered not in because of unbelief."

God then proposed to Moses that He would destroy these rebellious people, and make out of Moses a greater nation. Can you feel the greatness of that temptation? Moses could become the head man, the father of a whole nation that God would make to serve Him: but Moses had greater things in mind. Moses was not about to yield to something that would aggrandize him, would make him big. He thought of the effect it would have on the people outside, so Moses interceded for Israel, not because Israel was worth it but because God was worth it. Moses pointed out that it would be to the glory of God for God to achieve what he had promised to do. Everybody knew that God had started out to deliver the children of Israel and to bring them into the land of Canaan. Moses pointed out that if God stopped now and destroyed them, it would mean that God could not do that which He had set out to do. He urged the Lord not to turn His back on Israel but to bring Israel through, pointing out it would be to the glory of God to achieve what He had promised to do. God heard Moses' prayer but ruled that Israel must wander about in the desert until all that generation, except Joshua and Caleb, should die. Their children could then enter the promised land.

The main message of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament is based on this event in the Old Testament. It is important for believers any time that they should continue in their obedience to God until they have entered the promises of God.

Chapter 8

Wanderings In The Desert

After the children of Israel failed at Kadesh Barnea to go forward into the land of Canaan, they entered into a time of disciplining. They had arrived at Kadesh Barnea with the opportunity of completing their journey in two years from the time they left Egypt. But they spent the next thirty-eight years in fruitless wanderings in the desert. They were not forsaken by God, for the manna continued to fall every morning, and from time to time they were helped in their difficulties. But they were under the heavy hand of God's discipline. The account of their wanderings is written in the book of Numbers, chapters 14 to 36.

When Moses told the people that they must return to the desert, they protested that they did not want to do that, and would rather go forward into the land. But Moses warned them not to try it. He said, "Go not up, for the Lord is not among you." Disregarding this warning, they "presumed to go," but they were defeated and had to flee in confusion. Later, Moses talking about it said "they fled as a man does when bees chase a man." Thus they reluctantly entered upon thirty-eight years of frustration and death.

Even though they were not to enter the land for another generation, the laws which had been revealed to Moses were to be kept as they journeyed. Transgression of the law was punished by death. A number of malcontents who disobeyed, led by Korah, openly rebelled against the authority of Moses and Aaron. They complained saying "You take too much on you." When they showed themselves to be stubborn in their rebellion, God destroyed them by letting the earth open up and swallow them. When the people complained that this judgment was too harsh, God sent a plague among them. Again, Moses acted quickly to pray to God to stop the plague.

Though they were as yet forbidden to enter the land, God continued to reveal to Moses instructions to guide their conduct after they eventually would get there. And so while they were in the desert they received instructions that they would put aside, as it were, and keep in hand so that when they came into the land, they would be able to do the right thing. Thus they were being reminded that God's promise would be kept, and they would be finally in the promised land.

Sometime after this as they were wandering around in the desert, there came a time when there was no water to drink. Again the people complained against Moses for bringing them on this journey. They said it would have been better to stay in Egypt and to die there. Moses and Aaron waited upon God in prayer. They were told that Moses should take his rod and speak to the rock "before their eyes," and water would come forth.

At this point Moses committed the one sin in his leadership that is the flaw in his performance. Instead of speaking to the rock as he had been instructed, Moses spoke roughly to the people, calling them "ye rebels," and smote the rock twice. This is obviously the sort of act that a man would take who is irritated, impatient. If one speaks about Moses losing his temper, this would be one time when he lost it. The water gushed forth as God promised it would. But because of this act of disobedience, Moses was deprived of the prospect of leading Israel into the land. Later he prayed to God that this judgment might be set aside, but his prayer was denied.

We should all remember this sort of thing. Simply because we belong to God, we believe in Him, we obey Him, we serve Him, does not give us the privilege of acting impatiently or in anger. However, Moses was allowed to go to the top of the mountain and see the land in the distance. Many times people hearing about that feel sympathy for Moses: they feel like criticizing this judgment and agreeing that it was too severe. Moses never one time complained. It never caused Moses to feel he had been improperly dealt with. There is no doubt about it, as far as Moses was concerned he knew the justice of the judgment.

When the people came to the border of Edom, they asked permission to pass through, promising to pay Edom for any damage or loss that might result. When Edom refused passage, Israel turned back and went another way. But when King Arad the Canaanite came out to fight with Israel, "the Lord hearkened unto

the voice of Israel" and enabled them to destroy the Canaanites who were opposing them. If you see a difference in this, and it is there, you might take note that the people of Edom were actually descendants of Moab, who was a descendant of Esau. In that sense they were kinfolk to the people of Israel; so the word was "Don't fight with them." But when the Canaanites came out to stop them and actually attacked them, the Lord led Moses to resist their attack and to destroy them in battle.

In time the people again became "discouraged because of the way," and complained to Moses. Now the Lord sent "fiery serpents" who bit the people so that many died. Then the people came to Moses, as they had been doing before, confessing their sins and asking for relief. God told Moses to make a serpent of brass, spoken of in the New Testament as a "brazen serpent," and put it up on a pole. When anyone bit by a serpent would "behold the serpent of brass, he lived." (John 3:14-15).

As the children of Israel continued their journey they came to the land of the Amorites, and sought permission to pass through there. Sihon the king of the Amorites not only refused, but attacked with his soldiers. Israel was helped by God to destroy Sihon. Soon they came to Bashan and had a similar experience. Og the king of Bashan attacked Israel and he was destroyed.

Next Israel came to the border of Moab. Balak the king was afraid of them because of what had happened to Sihon and Og. He sent for Balaam to come and curse Israel. When given money, Balaam came but could not curse Israel. God would not let him do that. When he undertook to curse Israel, he actually pronounced a blessing upon them.

The Moabites did not fight against Israel in battle, but they seduced them in friendship. Having become friendly with them, they led Israel into the worship of heathen gods, and into their own pagan immoralities. Phinehas, a grandson of Aaron, in an act of violence precipitated war between Israel and Moab. This was the only way to escape disaster. We should remember that when we get to the place where we are getting friendly with the world and friendly with worldly people, we begin to do what they do. Oftentimes the only way we can get free is by making an actual, open break that results in broken friendship. That is the only way to do it.

Toward the end of their wanderings, the children of Israel were officially numbered again and plans were laid out for their procedure upon entering the land. Further instructions also were given to guide acts of worship, and to observe feasts after they got into the land.

In the war that followed with Midian, Israel destroyed the enemy. As they approached the river Jordan beyond which lay Canaan, Reuben and Gad asked Moses for permission to occupy the land in the desert which had belonged to the three kings whom the Israelites had destroyed. These were King Arad the Canaanite, and Sihon the king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan. Each controlled a certain section of the country east of the river Jordan and now that Israel had destroyed them, that land was in the possession of Israel. Reuben and Gad asked Moses for permission to settle there before they went over the river. This was a request for special privilege. Moses granted this on condition that their able-bodied men would go with the other ten tribes to conquer the land, and stay with them until that was accomplished. They were to take their place at the forefront of the army. Equity demands that a person can have special privilege if he will undertake special responsibility.

Just before entering the land, Moses instructed the people to set aside certain cities of refuge which would serve as a haven for anyone who had done wrong.

Far from being a barren, uneventful period in the history of God's people, this time of their wanderings was actually a time of rich significance. There is revealed here truth of much importance. A soul may be delivered from past sins and have evidence of God's past care, but yet may need discipline before he is ready to live with God.

Chapter 9

Entering The Land

Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel (Joshua 1:2).

These are the words with which God called Joshua to stand up and take the responsibility of leadership after the death of Moses.

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses (Joshua 1:3).

Toward the end of that passage we read:

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth (Joshua 1:6-8).

Thus God instructed Joshua before he began his responsibility.

The final stage of the exodus is recorded in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. The significance of this phase of the history of Israel is not only in the fact that the nation now had a home of their own, but also that the people were now to live in a new relationship with God. Moses had been the leader from the time the children of Jacob (Israel) as Hebrews were slaves in Egypt until they were organized as the twelve tribes of Israel and approached the river Jordan from the East to enter the land of Canaan.

Because of his sin in striking the rock instead of speaking to it, as he had been commanded to do, Moses was denied the privilege of leading Israel across the Jordan. But he did serve in preparing the people to enter, by making three long speeches to the people in farewell fashion.

These are recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. This book needs to be studied carefully to see what Moses emphasized to these who were now to enter the land. Moses began by reviewing their history over the past forty years, which was the time of the exodus. He pointed out the great achievements of that first generation who with the help of God had come out of the land of Egypt. They had crossed the Red Sea and had traveled across the desert.

Moses carefully recounted to this young generation what happened at Mount Sinai, especially in the giving of the law as the Ten Words. He gave careful instruction as to how the families should teach their children about God and His law. He emphasized that they could expect the continuing favor of God, if they obeyed the law and the statutes as these had been given.

Moses pointed out that there were some people who were kin to the Israelites, and he commanded that the Israelites should avoid strife with these. But there were pagans with pagan ideas with whom they would come into contact, and Israel was to resist these openly. Under no circumstances were they to have any fraternal relations with these.

Moses warned the people to avoid the peril of becoming proud or vain because they were now prosperous. He reminded them of their record and of their tendency to turn away from God. He told them in so many words that God did not choose them because they were many, since they were not many compared to other peoples on the face of the earth. God did not choose them because they were good, because they were not good. God did not choose them because they were faithful, because they had failed God many times. But God chose them in His grace and mercy. If they would now carefully obey the law which God had given them, God would bless them.

By way of emphasizing the importance of obedience to the law Moses arranged the tribes so that six tribes were on each side of a great valley. It was arranged that the laws would be read aloud to the people

and the six tribes on Mount Gerizim would pronounce blessing. Then transgressions of the law would be spelled out and the six tribes on Mount Ebal would pronounce the curses. In this way the people were instructed in the ways of God.

All that is written in the book of Deuteronomy was given to Israel before they crossed the Jordan, so that they might be ready to occupy the land they have the blessing of God.

Joshua had been serving under Moses as the leader of their soldiers. He had also been with Moses in spiritual leadership. He accompanied Moses to the top of Mount Sinai. Moses was told to place Joshua in charge of the whole movement of the exodus. Then Joshua was given direct words of commission and encouragement from God Himself. He was promised that God would magnify him in the eyes of the people: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee."

Joshua sent two spies into Jericho to scout the situation and then commanded the people to sanctify themselves in preparation for the crossing of the Jordan. Although the river was in flood, the waters were opened for Israel to cross. Joshua commanded the priests with the ark to go first and to stand still when they got to the middle of the river and stay there with the ark until all the people had passed over. They were to stand there with the ark until all the people had passed over.

The first action of Israel after they had entered the land was to be circumcised. This ceremony had been omitted in the desert because of their wanderings. Some incidents in their conquest of the land have important lessons for us. Jericho was captured because the walls fell down. Israel was defeated at Ai because of sin in the camp. After the wrongdoer had been judged, Israel went on to victory over Ai. Joshua was tricked into making a treaty with Gibeon, but otherwise continued his conquest of the land with victory after victory.

When Joshua realized the total conquest would take more time than he had, he called the leaders of the tribes together and divided the whole country to the several tribes by lot. Two and a half tribes settled on the east side of Jordan and the remaining nine and a half tribes occupied the land of Canaan.

Reuben and Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh built an altar on their side of the river, to the east of Jordan. This aroused opposition from the tribes who had settled in Canaan, because they feared it would result in division of Israel. They did not want that to take place.

Before his death, Joshua addressed all Israel by way of reporting on his ministry. He reminded the people of their dependence upon God, and warned them against any sort of compromise with pagan ideas. It is an interesting thing that these leaders, Moses in the first place and Joshua afterwards, were always very much aware of the human tendency of the people to go after human ideas which the pagans around them had. When we look from this distance it would seem to us that of course the children of Israel would not follow the pagans, but at that time where they were living, these pagans were neighbors. All these people lived near each other and they were all human beings. It was a tendency among the people of God to relax their scruples, and go along with the other humans around them. Joshua feared they would be reduced to accept pagan customs. He challenged the people to remain true to God that they might be blessed. It was in this connection that Joshua gave utterance to these famous words after he had made his address and reviewed their history, pointing out their dangers:

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Chapter 10

The Judges

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

When you read those words you would almost think that one of us had written them. Look at them again: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

We will be thinking together now of that period of Israel's history that could well be called "the Judges."

After the children of Israel settled in the land of Canaan, they lived under tribal government, with the nation being held together by their common history and their faith in the God of Abraham and Moses. In times of distress some man sent from God would become prominent. He would appear first in one tribe, then over some area of the people as a whole; from whence he would direct the common affairs as a judge. This period lasted about four hundred years, during which time at least thirteen judges of record served from time to time. The account of the events in this period which are recorded in Scripture is found in the books of Judges and Ruth.

When the land was divided among the twelve tribes, there were still pockets of resistance where some Canaanites refused to concede their lands to the Israelites. Each tribe thus had the task of subduing all the enemy within its borders. In the face of stubborn resistance on the part of these remnants of the Canaanites, the tribes individually compromised short of complete victory. One tribe after another permitted Canaanites to continue on their land. The Israelites had been commanded to destroy all the Canaanites. In compromising to permit some to stay in the land, they disobeyed and displeased God.

Because of their disobedience, God told Israel that He would not drive out the Canaanites before them any further, but that He would allow the Canaanites to increase and prosper among them until these Canaanites would become a real threat to Israel itself.

Soon the pattern of events began to develop. The Israelites would become friendly with the Canaanites living among them, intermarry with them, and begin to adopt their pagan ways. We read:

And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashteroth. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them (Judges 2:13-14).

That is the way it reads. In their distress, they cried unto God for deliverance. God would hear their cry and send a judge, who would bring the people back to God. Then God would give them victory over their enemies, and the land would have peace. This would last as long as the judge lived.

The time of the Judges is not an inspiring history. Each judge doubtless honored the law of God and used it to judge Israel. But each succeeding generation after that judge fell in with the pagans and practiced pagan customs. The general tone of life in Israel became more and more ungodly. Still the judges appeared as bright stars in the dark night of Israel's waywardness.

Not many details are given of the events of these 400 years when they lived without a king, but some of these details are worthy of note. Deborah is notable because she was a woman and yet was a judge. Evidently she was competent to act as judge, but it is important to note that when Israel went to war, Deborah insisted that Barak lead the army.

At a time when the fortunes of Israel were very low, God sent an angel to call Gideon to undertake the leadership in a revolt against Midian. When Gideon struck the first blow at the ruling class, the Midianites, many of the Israelites joined him so that he soon had an army of some 30,000 following him in revolt against the Midianite government. In a famous pitched battle against the Midianites, God led Gideon to reduce the size of his army from 30,000 to 300 men. Then by showing Gideon the strategy to use, God helped him to win a notable victory. When the people wanted to make Gideon king, he refused.

Sometime later when the fortunes of Israel were again at a low ebb, Jephthah became judge. He was a

mighty warrior and did much to reestablish Israel as a strong nation. Upon one occasion when he had led his forces to a great victory, he made a foolish vow. He vowed to sacrifice to God in thanksgiving the first person or thing in his possessions, which he would see upon his return home in triumph. It turned out to be his daughter. When his daughter ran to greet him Jephthah was greatly distressed. But his daughter was a believing woman, and she encouraged her father to keep his vow. He sacrificed his daughter in celebration of his great victory.

After a series of lesser men as judges, there was born in Israel a young man who early became a great champion among the people of Israel and their neighbors. Samson was a man of great strength and courage. There are stories recorded of the remarkable things that he did, feats of strength and bravery which caused the Philistines to fear what he might do against them. Samson became involved with a Philistine woman by the name of Delilah. She is a classic example of a person who will betray another. She betrayed Samson to her own people. They put out his eyes and made him a slave. They brought him blind and bound into an arena to make sport of him. Samson putting his trust in God, succeeded in wrecking the grandstand in which the people were sitting, and so caused the death of many Philistines.

After the death of Samson, matters grew worse in Israel. Crude acts of violence and immorality showed a general breakdown of morale. The record points out several times that this was because there was no king in Israel. One might well wonder what a king would have done. A king would be responsible to coordinate the activities of the people. There were three classes of leaders under God: prophets, priests and kings. The prophet was a person who came unto the people and told the people what God wanted them to know. The priest was a person who went to God and brought before God a sinning people and interceded for them, and brought these sinning people into fellowship with God by practicing his faith. The king had his function among the people. He was to coordinate them. When there is a large number of people someone is needed to guide them and to rule over them. This had been done by various leaders but if there were a king there would be a position that was hereditary. This would promote some stability. The royal family would be in charge. Without some central government a loose condition of lawlessness seemed to prevail over the whole country. In the latter chapters in the book of Judges, there is the record of some of the really awful things that were done in Israel: among people who knew God, but who were lost. They did not know which way they were going.

The book of Ruth comes after the book of Judges and is a welcome relief from violence, deceit and sin. Ruth was a Moabitess who had married into one of the families of Judah and her career was marked by a wonderful loyalty to Naomi who was her mother-in-law. That is one of the sweetest, one of the strongest stories in the Bible. Though she was a Moabitess, she became one of the ancestors of David and so as you know that would mean also of Jesus of Nazareth.

Throughout this whole period of the Judges, the faithfulness of God is seen. He was blessing and keeping Israel according to His promise to Abraham. I do not need to point out to you they did not deserve it, but He kept them. You and I can take great comfort from that. Just think of it. When you put your trust in God and He has laid hold upon you, He will see you through. You may not do as you want to do. You may not be what you ought to be. You may have times when you are downright foolish, but just as surely as you continue to stay with God and believe in God, He will bring you through. One truth seems to be very evident in this time of the Judges. Persons who believe in God may be delivered from enemies by the power of God, yet they still need to control themselves that they might have the full blessing of God.

Chapter 11

Samuel, Saul and David

The last judge was Samuel. Before he died, he anointed first Saul to be king, and then, when Saul failed, he anointed David under whom the kingdom was established. The story of these times is written in I and II Samuel.

Samuel was born in answer to prayer. Hannah had asked for a son and promised to give him to God's service. When he was only a child Hannah brought him to Eli, the Chief Priest, to be trained for service.

When Eli was set aside, Samuel was called into his place to serve. He served there with dedicated faithfulness. In a time of crisis with the Philistines, Samuel judged the people according to the law and led them into revival that brought victory over their enemies.

When Samuel became old the people requested a king. Samuel warned against this arrangement, pointing out that God was their king and that a human king might oppress them. But the people were insistent. They wanted a king like the other nations around about them. Then God told Samuel to grant them their request, and to find them a king. He told Samuel to instruct that king in how to do; and urged Samuel to guide him in every way possible.

Samuel humbly went out and found Saul whom he anointed to become king. In a clash with the Ammonites, Saul led Israel to a great victory. As he gave up the leadership of the nation, Samuel reminded Israel of the risk they took when they chose to have a human king, but then in obedience to God's guidance, he crowned Saul as king. Saul must have been a great man to see. He stood head and shoulders above the crowd, a great strong warrior. Saul began his career in humility, and had the strong support of the people. But as he became established as king, winning more and more victories, he became vain and proud. When Samuel tarried at a time when the army had been mustered to go to war, Saul became impatient and took it on himself to offer sacrifices to God in Samuel's place. He was doing this on the eve of battle. Israel won that battle but afterwards Samuel came to Saul to announce to him that he had been rejected as king. By presuming to take the place of Samuel, and acting as a priest when he was not authorized to do so, Saul had forfeited his relationship with God.

However, Saul continued his victorious military campaign against neighboring nations, with ever increasing pride and vanity. When he was commissioned by the Lord to destroy Amalek utterly, he saved some of the sheep and some of the cattle for himself, and spared Agag, king of the Amalekites. Samuel confronted him when he returned from battle with rebuke from the Lord, saying those famous words: "To obey is better than sacrifice." Samuel then pronounced Saul's doom.

After this Samuel proceeded to find and anoint David as the future king. David was a shepherd lad, too young to be in the army, at home tending his father's sheep when Samuel found him. In the course of battle, David slew Goliath, the champion of the Philistines and became famous in all Israel. As a servant of King Saul, David became a friend of Saul's son, Jonathan. The character of Jonathan is to be admired. Here was one man that did not have to be king to act kingly. He knew that David would take his place, but he was David's friend and he supported him. Saul's jealousy of David grew until David fled for his life from the court to escape death. For some time David was a fugitive, sought by Saul, but drawing support from a growing company of followers.

Saul continued to drift further away from God until he could not receive any guidance in his affairs. In desperation and fear, Saul sought the witch at Endor to learn what he should do in battle. In the following battle, Saul was wounded and then committed suicide.

David was crowned king over Judah but the majority of Israel continued to support the son of Saul. Civil war lasted for seven years with David gradually becoming stronger and stronger. Finally he was crowned king of all Israel.

David showed his godly character in his humility and his obedience to God's guidance. While he had

been a fugitive hiding from Saul, he had opportunities to kill Saul several times, but he refused to harm the Lord's anointed. When Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle making it possible for David to ascend to the throne, David honored them in giving them public tribute. On one occasion when David was going to punish Nabal for abusing some of David's followers, David was advised by Abigail not to do this because it would be beneath the dignity of a man who would one day rule Israel. David heeded this advice and did not go on with his plan to act in vengeance, though he was at that time only a fugitive. In all his conduct David walked in the ways of God and established his throne with integrity, courage and humility.

On one occasion when his army was in the field, David tarried in Jerusalem, and fell in love with Bathsheba. David used his authority as Commander-in-Chief to direct the plan of battle in such a way that Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba, was killed, so that his wife could marry David.

Nathan the prophet confronted David with this sin. David repented and was forgiven, but he was told that the child would die and "that the sword would never depart from his house."

When David realized how God had blessed him, David wanted to build a temple in which to honor and to worship God. Because of his bloody career as a man of battle, he was not permitted to do that; but he was allowed to assemble the material with which his son, Solomon, could build the temple. But God gave David a covenant, promising him that one of his seed should become King of Kings, and Lord of all. This was duly fulfilled in the coming of Christ, who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, of the house of David.

Trouble in David's family occurred when one of his sons, Amnon, ravished his sister, Tamar, and was then killed by the soldiers of another son, Absalom.

Absalom was a popular young man and began a secret plan to gain the throne by recruiting personal supporters. In a time when David was out of the city, Absalom seized the throne and moved to kill David. By artful management, David escaped and fled. He gathered his loyal supporters and in due time engaged the forces of Absalom in battle. When Absalom was killed, David was heartbroken. But he yielded to the advice of his commander-in-chief, Joab, and applied himself publicly to the duties of his office.

As the end of his life drew near, David designated Solomon to be his successor. David had been "the sweet psalmist" of Israel and wrote many of the Psalms. He was the greatest king Israel ever had.

It is true that the sin of David with Bathsheba is the one blotch on his record. As a matter of fact, many people reading the Bible overlook the fact that the Scripture indicates that David was a man who walked in all the ways of God save in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. It is one of those things that must not be overlooked that as great as David was, I suppose, generally speaking, more people remember his sin with Bathsheba than any other one thing. Yet when you consider David, you must remember he was a man who could win the loyalty of great men. David's great men were a company of courageous, able, strong persons reported in the Bible. They were such as would not be found anywhere else. David bound them to him with the bonds of friendship. He was that kind of a man. He was a good man and God blessed him.

Chapter 12

The Kings

In the days of Saul and David, Israel developed a kingdom form of government. As David grew old, the question of succession came to the foreground. Who was to follow him as king? Absalom, his son, tried to usurp the throne while his father was still living. He had been defeated and destroyed. Now, later, another son, Adonijah, conspired to seize the throne. When Nathan the prophet warned David about this threat, David arranged to have Solomon designated as his successor.

The Lord gave Solomon in a dream the opportunity to ask for any blessing to help him rule. Solomon asked for wisdom. This pleased the Lord who promised riches and honor also. The story of this is found in two sets of books: I and II Kings and I and II Chronicles.

These are two parallel accounts of the history of those days and yet the two accounts are not the same. You will find some incidents in one that you do not find in the other, and yet there is no contradiction. As it is read through and is carefully studied, no contradiction is to be found. There is no real explanation that I know of as to why there should be these two accounts. Generally speaking, I think it is held that I and II Chronicles was the record that was kept in the temple by the priest. Whereas, I and II Kings was the record that was kept in the king's court. This may or may not be true. In any case, you will be reading parallel accounts, slightly different versions of various incidents, all of which will be enriching to you as you study.

Solomon was a man of peace. In his benevolent rule the nation grew strong and he was on peaceful terms with neighboring nations. His wisdom became famous, just as the city became known all over that part of the world. In carrying out David's plan, Solomon built a magnificent temple in which to worship God. He arranged a national feast of dedication and his prayer to God on that occasion is a classic utterance of worship. God blessed Solomon with peace and prosperity.

Then the Scripture has a record that is really sad. We read: "But king Solomon loved many strange women" (I Kings 11:1). The Bible gives a plain report of the king's foolishness.

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father (I Kings 11:4).

That is the way it reads. God had given Solomon peace. But now God was displeased, and we read God raised up enemies from outside and from among his own people. One of Solomon's leading critics was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. When he had become known as opposed to the king, Jeroboam fled to Egypt to avoid execution.

Rehoboam, a son of Solomon, succeeded to the throne and when a committee of the citizens led by Jeroboam waited on the king to petition that he would ease the tax burdens of the people, the young king followed the advice of his own age group and harshly rejected the reasonable demands of the citizens. The disappointed protesters rebelled against Rehoboam and withdrew their support. Later these rebelling tribes made Jeroboam king. All Israel followed Jeroboam except Judah who remained loyal to the house of David.

In this way the event occurred which divided the nation. Ten tribes in the north called themselves Israel and made Samaria their capital city. Two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) in the south called themselves Judah and continued to have Jerusalem as their capital city. Israel had more people and more money, but they did not have the temple nor the service of the Levites. Jeroboam, who was the king of the north, instituted an order of priests of lesser persons to lead in religious practices. He built an altar in Bethel where sacrifices were offered to God as a substitute for the prescribed worship that was to be held in the temple at Jerusalem. This was a political maneuver by Jeroboam to keep his people from returning to Jerusalem and the house of David. He felt that if they went down there to worship, it would be so easy for

them to go back in under the rule of the son of David. Thus for a number of generations the nation was divided between Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Though they all claimed the promises of the God of Abraham, Israel in Samaria fell into grievous idolatrous practices, while Judah in Jerusalem remained generally more faithful to the God of Abraham and to the Law of Moses. In succeeding generations all the kings of Judah with one exception were godly men. They may have erred at times; they were not perfect. But they were men who feared God. Whereas, all the kings of Israel without exception were uniformly evil, ungodly men.

An outstanding king of Judah was Jehosaphat, who "walked in the first ways of his father David." By the way, an unusual description of this king's record is to be found in the Bible.

And the Lord was with Jehosaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehosaphat presents; and he had riches and honor in abundance. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah (II Chronicles 17:3-6).

Jehosaphat had one weakness. He would associate with the powerful Ahab, king of Israel. He planned a joint military campaign with Ahab against Syria. The prophet Micaiah warned against this, and the campaign ended in defeat. But the two families of the royal house of Judah and the royal house of Israel continued to fraternize and to intermarry.

Ahab was king of Israel and married Jezebel who was a worshipper of Baal. To please his wife, Ahab built an altar to Baal in Samaria giving this pagan religion official status as being acceptable. These were dark days for Israel because the king had tolerated Baal worship in the public life.

God sent the great prophet Elijah to protest. In the conflict between Ahab and Elijah, the country was distressed by a prolonged drought of three and one half years. Elijah challenged Ahab to bring the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel for a public confrontation. In the famous incident Elijah was shown to be the true prophet of the true God. Jezebel tried to kill Elijah but by God's providence he escaped.

When Elijah ended his ministry, he was taken into heaven in a chariot, and his mantle fell on Elisha the Tishbite. Elisha continued the ministry of testimony to the God of Israel.

Jehu the son of Nimshi was anointed by Elisha to become the king of Israel. Jehu was a violent man who killed the king of Israel, killed all the sons of Ahab, killed Jezebel and killed all the worshippers of Baal. By this vicious blood bath the worship of Baal in Israel was broken. The scriptural record says in II Kings, chapter 10, verse 28: "Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel."

Many times we wonder whether or not those who testify to the truth should ever act in judgment over against error. The fact of the matter is that the Scripture indicates that this should actually be done. And on occasion the only way in which to remove error is by some drastic source of amputation. That is the only way in which to do it. One can feel this as one studies and as you go along in this portion of the history of God's people and you think about the record as it is set forth in Scripture of the great events in the Bible and you study these, it will come to your mind over and over again how weak these men were. How wayward these men were! Yes, even the good ones. It will come to your mind how wicked many men were. Yes. How gracious God was! Yes. How it was true all the way through that anyone of them that turned to God was acceptable. We can learn much from this.

Chapter 13

The Divided Nation

Despite the ministry of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha in Israel and the godly kings in Judah, the spiritual and national life of the two nations became steadily more evil. The northern nation, Israel, quickly deteriorated to the point where there was no more hope. God raised up Assyria to conquer Israel and to deport the people as captives to other parts of that empire. The history of this destruction of Israel and the several generations of the nation of Judah before that nation was also conquered is told in II Kings chapter 17, verses 33 to the end, and in II Chronicles chapters 28 to 36.

When Assyria deported the Israelites, they brought other captive people to live in the land of Israel. But these newcomers were not successful in raising crops so some of the Israelite farmers were brought back to show the people how to farm. Thus the country was filled with a mixture of some Israelitish farmers and some strangers. In time these intermarried and their descendants were the Samaritans who were partly pagan and partly of the stock of Israel. It is said of them,

They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence (II Kings 17:33).

We also read:

And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them (II Kings 18:11-12).

That is the end of the sad story of the northern kingdom, Israel. After the northern kingdom had been conquered by the Assyrians, Hezekiah became king of Judah and it is written of him:

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did (II Kings 18:3).

As a matter of fact, he destroyed all marks of idolatry in Judah. It is written:

And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not (II Kings 18:7).

The kingdom, the reign, the government of Hezekiah was greatly blessed. At that time, the Assyrians under Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem. They had invaded the land and had besieged Samaria. They destroyed the city of Samaria and in their course they came over to Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, what prompted them to besiege Jerusalem was the fact that Hezekiah had stopped paying tribute. Led by the word of God, Hezekiah had declared himself free from the king of Assyria, with the result that the Assyrians came to besiege Jerusalem. They sent a letter to Hezekiah demanding immediate unconditional surrender. Hezekiah took that letter into the temple, spread it before the Lord, and prayed for God's help. As a matter of record, in the night that followed, a plague struck the Assyrian army. Sennacherib went back to Assyria, where shortly afterwards he was assassinated.

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live (II Kings 20:1).

The story is well known that Hezekiah prayed God to spare him. We read that he turned his face to the wall and wept. God sent word through Isaiah to Hezekiah that God would give Hezekiah fifteen more years of life. As a matter of fact, as it turned out, this was not such a great blessing.

During this time, Hezekiah acted foolishly. His fine record as a king was marred by his foolish conduct in these last years of his life. During this time, Manasseh was born; and Manasseh was the most wicked

king Judah ever had. When one looks at it from this point of view, and we are able to have this hindsight, it is an easy thing to see how wise Hezekiah would have been if he had just let God have His way. But Hezekiah prayed God to spare him, and God heard his prayer and gave him fifteen more years of life. As a sign that this extension of the king's life was truly from God, the shadow of the sundial went backward ten degrees. This was an astonishing thing to everybody.

It became widely known, a famous sign, and strangers came into the community, into that part of the country to see the sundial whose shadow went backwards ten degrees. On one occasion when such strangers came, Hezekiah in pride showed them all the wealth stored in the Lord's house and that was in his possession. Later Isaiah came asking "Who were those men? What did you show them?" When Hezekiah told Isaiah they were strangers and he had shown them his wealth, the prophet told Hezekiah these strangers were actually spies from Babylon, and now Babylon would come and despoil Judah of all this wealth he had so proudly displayed.

In the book of Chronicles we read that Hezekiah's heart was proud because God had heard his prayer for longer life. What a tragic truth is here! Here is a case of a man who believed in God and had a great answer to prayer, and then was filled with spiritual pride and actually acted foolishly. As a consequence of this action Hezekiah suffered. By the way some of you will think of yourself with a rather wry amusement when you read that Hezekiah heard that these enemies would come, and he was told that because he had been such a faithful man, they would not come in his lifetime, he tried to take some comfort from the fact that there would be peace in his time. But that enemy came afterward and carried out everything as Isaiah had warned him it would happen.

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. In his youth he did evil. He rebuilt pagan altars and reinstated pagan worship of heathen gods that Hezekiah had wiped out. So we read, "So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel" (II Chronicles 33:9). God raised up Assyria who captured Manasseh and tied him with thorns and took him to Babylon as a prisoner. Manasseh humbled himself as a prisoner, repented before God and was restored to Jerusalem. The latter days of his reign were godly, but he could not undo all the evil he had done.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign.

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left (II Chronicles 34:2).

He destroyed pagan worship wherever it was found. When they were cleansing the debris in the temple, they found an old copy of the law of Moses. They brought it to Josiah who ordered it to be read and obeyed. Josiah led the nation to solemnly celebrate the passover according to the commandments of Moses. He was just a young man but he led the nation in a real revival under God.

Then Josiah unwisely went to war with Egypt, and was killed in battle, while still just a young man. This was a great misfortune to Judah. After him a number of men in succession became king, but Judah could not be spared. When the king Zedekiah "humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar . . . Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen," there was no more remedy. Judah was doomed. You read about that in II Chronicles chapter 36, verses 15 to 21. It is a straightforward indictment of the kind of living that Judah was practicing.

And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he

gave them all into his hand (II Chronicles 36:15-17).

That is the record in Scripture. They were condemned to be in captivity "three score and ten years", being the time they had neglected Sabbath observance.

Thus the story of the nation of Israel comes to this inglorious end. Both Israel, the northern nation, and Judah, the southern nation, were destroyed. Israel was permanently wiped out, and Judah was temporarily to be taken captive and to be eventually, seventy years later, led back home by Ezra, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel.

Chapter 14

The Restoration

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:3).

These were the words contained in the proclamation by Cyrus of Persia when he opened the way for the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon.

The history of Israel, the people of God, had been marked by a steady decline in morale and in spiritual blessing, following the time of David. The nation had been divided into the large northern nation of Israel, and the smaller southern nation of Judah. Israel had declined till there was no remedy and had been destroyed by Assyria. Later Judah had also been conquered by Babylon. Jerusalem had been sacked and the temple burned, while the Jews were deported in captivity to Babylon. However, God had promised that the people would be brought into their own land. The story of this restoration is told in Daniel, chapter 9; and in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

Daniel was a captive in Babylon, where he had become an important government servant. When he read in the prophecy of Jeremiah that the captivity was to last seventy years, and noted that the time had passed, Daniel prayed to God that He should honor His word and release His people.

At that time Persia conquered Babylon and instituted a new imperial policy. The Persians allowed the national groups, the ethnic groups, to return to their native lands within the empire. Thus Cyrus issued a proclamation that any Israelite who wanted to return to Judea could do so with government approval. Many did not want to return, but some did. Even some who retained their loyalty to the northern tribes joined in the company of Jews who returned to rebuild Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra tells about the rebuilding of the temple. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged the people to proceed with this venture. When the foundations were completed there was a time of great rejoicing in the city. The younger people were overjoyed that the temple would finally be built. But the older people remembered the magnificence of Solomon's temple and when they saw how small and meager this new temple would be in comparison, they wept. And so the streets resounded with shouting in joy, and weeping in sorrow, as the celebration went on.

Enemies of the Jews tried to stop the work by sending false rumors to the Persian government about the plan of the Jews to rebel, but research in the government archives by the Persian government revealed that official sanction had been given to this venture. God blessed the people, and eventually the work was completed.

In the course of returning to Jerusalem to resume their habitation there, some of the Jews intermarried with some of their pagan neighbors. When this was reported to Ezra, he was heartsick with distress. He poured out his soul in repentant confession to God and asked for more grace for his people. Encouraged by some earnest believers in God, Ezra led in repentant correction of their mistakes in living.

Nehemiah tells about rebuilding the walls of the city that it might regain its standing among other nations. Nehemiah was in the palace service of the king. When he heard of the dilapidated condition of the walls of Jerusalem, he wanted to do something about it. Apparently the walls and the gates were in ruins. He secured permission from the king to return to Jerusalem that he might help in rebuilding the walls.

Nehemiah followed a practical intelligent program, and inspired a large number of dedicated people to unite in a diligent effort to rebuild the walls. Once again enemies opposed this work from time to time with artful hindrances, but Nehemiah prayerfully persisted. He armed his workmen to watch vigilantly lest any raid hinder the work. He urged the people to work from dawn till dusk, and he was successful.

In all this period of restoration, this coming back to Jerusalem, the truth was being made manifest that God would keep His promise to Abraham and His covenant with David, despite the sin of His people.

This truth is shown over and over again in the Old Testament. God made certain promises of what was to happen. As it actually worked out, the people did not do what they were supposed to do, but always there was revealed the resources of God's grace. He was able to overcome their failure and to bring to pass the very thing which He had promised. When Moses was leading the people through the wilderness, and the people were so disobedient to God that God had proposed to Moses that He would destroy the people and make out of Moses a new nation that would be obedient to Him, Moses prayed to God that God should not do this. Such an action would reflect on His integrity and His power. He had said He would bring His people through, and so Moses prayed that He should bring His people through into the land as He had said. God shows how this can be done. Those actual people who were at the brink of Canaan and could have entered at the time when they were at Kadesh Barnea, that particular generation, did not make it. They did not go on through, but God brought the next generation into the land. Always there is the fact that while sin may bring about death, God can overcome this because God can raise the dead.

Israel had been so disobedient that God had destroyed both the northern nation, Israel, and the southern nation, Judah. But in a later generation, God brought those people back to Jerusalem to continue with the working out of His plan. Always it has been true that God is able to raise the dead. Out of chaos and confusion, He is able to bring forth that which He has planned by His power and in His grace.

When word was brought to Nehemiah of some who had selfishly served their own interests in this whole venture, Nehemiah challenged them to do the right thing. When the walls were built and the temple had been completed, Nehemiah arranged for a public reading of the law that the people would know how they should do. Ezra read the law to the people assembled in a great company, "despite a great rain."

Esther was a young Jewess maiden who had been chosen to be queen. Her uncle, Mordecai, was a well known public person. He provoked the jealousy of Haman, one of the king's advisors, who contrived to get a court order signed that would have made it the action of the government on a certain day to kill all the Jews. Mordecai urged Esther to intervene by going to the king with a personal plea. "Who knoweth but that thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther obeyed the word from Mordecai and risked her life by approaching the king without having been invited, saying, "If I perish, I perish." The king ordered that the Jews should be permitted to arm themselves in self defense, and also ordered that Haman should be put to death.

The book of Esther is an interesting book from several points of view. One of the interesting things about it is that the name of God does not appear in that book. He is referred to but He is never mentioned by name and this brings to our minds that the material that is prepared there, the actual record as written in the book of Esther, was probably written at the time when the Jewish people were in captivity. They did not wish to attract any unfavorable attention from the authorities by referring to a God whom the Persians did not honor. In any case, that is the way in which it reads. There is no doubt about what happened and to this day among the Jewish people, the name of Esther is greatly honored. The time of their deliverance from Persia under those circumstances is commemorated by a holiday season, a festival in which the deliverance of the Jews is celebrated.

Chapter 15

The Incarnation

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ tells the world of the greatest event that ever occurred: when the Creator, Almighty God Himself, came into this world as a Man. He came as the Babe of Bethlehem. There were predictions of His coming in the Old Testament, even as early as Genesis 3:5. I think by common consent Bible scholars and students will commonly feel this is the first indication of the coming of a Savior, when we read that the seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent. That phrase "seed of the woman" is a very unusual phrase. Throughout literature far and wide that phrase is not used among men except to refer to Jesus of Nazareth.

In the book of Deuteronomy there is the record of what was revealed to Moses:

And the Lord said unto me . . . I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth: and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him (Deuteronomy 18:17-19).

That is the way God put it. All through the history of Israel, it was remembered that there was a promise that had been made to Moses that there would be a prophet like unto Moses, taken out from among the people who would speak the words of God; and that any man's eternal destiny depended upon the way he acted toward that message when he got it.

In Isaiah, there is a very commonly known passage that is taken by common consent among evangelical people to refer to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah reports these words:

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son (Isaiah 7:14).

The story of the Virgin Birth is of course incredible to natural man. But there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the biblical account. This was the teaching of the apostles as reflected in the Apostles' Creed. This was the faith of the early church as seen in the Creeds. Every attempt to evade this plain witness of Scripture is made in the interest of ignorance or unbelief. That it was a miracle is beyond question. Mary expressed the natural problem when she asked Gabriel: "How can this be?" Gabriel gave the eternal answer when he said "With God nothing is impossible."

The Son of God became incarnate in the form of man, "made in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Portraits of Jesus of Nazareth may be taken as the conceptions of the artists. When the artist is a good man, the portrait will probably be a good portrait. If he is a kind man, a holy man, a decent man, these things will be reflected. But of course the artist does not know. Representations of Jesus of Nazareth in plays, in movies, in books of fiction can be very misleading. At their very best, they are human imagination.

In providence, the Holy Spirit did not inspire any Scripture that describes Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing is written about His appearance, about His clothing. Apparently, He lived much the same as other people did. When Judas betrayed Him to the soldiers, he did not describe Him as being peculiar in appearance but rather pointed Him out by going to Him, and greeting Him with a kiss.

Jesus of Nazareth became hungry, thirsty, tired just as other humans did. And yet He was not exactly the same as other men. He had lived in eternity with the Father. His coming was His own choice. Some people will say He came and took a body, and in that respect He is just like you are. No, not quite. No one has ever dreamed that I lived before. No one has ever had it in mind that I had any dealings with God before I was born. But Jesus of Nazareth had dealt with the Father before He was born.

The full meaning of the incarnation is found in the message of the Bible as a whole. Paul tells us that "in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son." It was in the plan of God that the Savior should come from among men. The Scripture says that the Son of God took on Him the nature of Abraham that He might experience death and triumph over it, and that He "might destroy him that had the power of death, even the devil."

Also having lived within the physical limits of a man, He can be touched with all the feelings of our infirmities. Believers are encouraged to expect sympathy and understanding from one who lived even as they have lived.

Though He was equal with the Father, the Son laid aside His glory and "was found in fashion as a man." He could become weary and found rest in sleep. On the cross He could say "I thirst."

The Roman soldiers did not force Him to the cross. He went willingly. He told Peter He could have had twelve legions of angels to help Him, if He had wanted them, but the one thing He wanted was to do His Father's will!

Jesus of Nazareth seems never to have developed what we think of as an "ego" in His personality. There is no reference to any human interests on His part as such. "I do all things to please my Father." That covers all His human activities. "I do all things to please my Father." That is all. "The Son can do nothing of himself . . . My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." That is the way Jesus of Nazareth put it.

It is true that Jesus of Nazareth performed amazing works of wonder, but He was always careful to point out that these miracles were the works of God. Though He had no striking characteristic by which He could be distinguished, He could say to Philip "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

Chapter 16

The Kingdom Of God

When Adam was created he was to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. Thus having "dominion over" was to be the most significant characteristic of man. Because man had a certain freedom of choice, his life would depend on how he controlled the situations he faced. When sin entered, man began to exercise his control to please himself, and in his own ego-interest man sought to extend his dominion in such ways as to incur harm to himself and to others. Because each man had his own domain, his kingdom, these kingdoms came into conflict; so that men fought with men, each coveting the possessions of the other. This condition of sin infected every man's life, that is every man's kingdom.

During the history of Israel, the concept of "the king" was developed., While kings warred with each other life was marred. Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon had a strange vision about affairs in his kingdom in which, he saw an unhewn stone from heaven falling on the kingdoms of men, and then growing till it filled the earth. Daniel interpreted this to mean that God in heaven would act in the affairs of men by establishing here on earth the Kingdom of God. Like the stone in the vision, made without hands, so God would send into this world the Messiah who would establish a new order, the Kingdom of God.

Abraham had looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker was God. When the governments of Israel and Judah were destroyed, the prophets looked for the coming of Messiah, who would deliver the people of God. He would be the King, the King of Kings, of the seed of David, who would establish the Kingdom of God on the earth to God's honor and glory.

We are studying along and looking at the events that are recorded in the Bible and in the course of our study we have just now come to this great event that I am speaking of, namely, the Kingdom of God.

When John the Baptist preached he said "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus of Nazareth preached the same message, but He went on to point out "Ye must be born again" to be able to enter that kingdom.

Jesus of Nazareth was in His incarnation a living, walking demonstration of the Kingdom of God. I suppose many of us might wonder what would the Kingdom of God look like. One hears from time to time of people who talk about wanting to build the Kingdom of God. Actually, so far as the Scripture is concerned, the Kingdom of God was demonstrated in Jesus of Nazareth. The King of God on earth would be man living, walking in obedience to the will of God. God would be King. Man would be obedient to Him. Jesus of Nazareth did this perfectly. It is written in Psalm 40:

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart (Psalm 40:6-8).

These became the very words of Jesus of Nazareth. The Son of God took the body that was prepared for Him in Mary, and in it He absolutely obeyed His heavenly Father. His walk, His deeds, His words, His dying for sinners was the perfect will of God. As Jesus of Nazareth moved among men, He was humble. "I am meek and lowly in heart." "I am among you as He that serveth." He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister: and to give his life a ransom for many." Here we see actually lived out in this world, demonstrated before us clearly the Kingdom of God – God dwelling in and controlling the man.

The life that Jesus Christ manifested was definitely "not of this world." It was necessary that He die. The body He used while in this world to establish contact with His believers must die. He needed to go to Calvary, and then to be raised from the dead in newness of life never to die again, living in the light of God's presence and on the throne forever.

Jesus of Nazareth taught His disciples "the Kingdom of God is within you." He told Pilate His Kingdom was not of this world: if it had been His servants would have fought to protect Him when He

was arrested. "But, now my kingdom is not from hence."

Paul taught "for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). All of these references bring to our mind the great truth that the Kingdom of God was actually being demonstrated, manifested, in the living of Jesus of Nazareth on the face of the earth.

Just now the Kingdom of God on earth is in the hidden phase. Just as David, while fleeing from Saul to save his life, was actually the true king of Israel, already anointed; but still in obscurity, so even now Jesus of Nazareth is in obscurity, ignored and oftentimes rejected and denied but He really is the King of Kings and Lord of all. Believers in Him honor Him as such. They bow down before Him in their hearts and He sits on the throne in their hearts and from there He controls their conduct. You will say to me "But many believers are not that perfect. They do not live that way." I know. It is very imperfectly shown in the world outside. I realize that. It is a far cry so far as our conduct is concerned from the inward purposes that we have in our heart. The truth of the matter is that for people who are believers, in their hearts, in their own inner consciousness, where faith in the Lord Jesus Christ responds to His living presence, it is clear in there. It is bright in there. One day the time will come when the Kingdom of God which is within you will be openly demonstrated and all the world will see.

It is possible for men to enter the Kingdom of God but not in their natural condition. While men are here in this world, during the seventy-odd years they live in this world, it is possible for them to enter into the Kingdom of God but not in their natural condition. They must be born again. The Lord Jesus in speaking about these things said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." Paul says plainly "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." Human nature simply cannot do it. "Ye must be born again." The born again person is now a child of God, and God the Father gives His Holy Spirit into the heart of the regenerated man so that he is moved from within by the Holy Spirit to look up to, to come to, to call upon God as his Father, saying, "Abba, Father."

In this blessed relationship with God, the living Christ is "the Captain of their salvation." The Holy Spirit is Comforter, Teacher and Guide. The believer can do the will of God in Christ, by Christ, through Christ. Achievement of acceptable conduct is possible in Him, through Him, and by Him. I hope that these things as I am presenting them to you do not come in too thick to be able to grasp them. I am hoping that each one of you will be able to follow through and realize that we have actually been given a privilege by the Gospel to enter into a relationship with God where God actually works in the soul. That is what is meant by the Kingdom of God. The response in the heart of a believer is in love. That love towards God activates itself, shows itself in obedience. The performance is righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

Just now the Kingdom of God is within you. One day it will be openly manifested. When the Lord was here, He one time revealed His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. That was always true, but was not always seen. When He comes again in the clouds of glory with ten thousands of His saints at His return, the Kingdom will be openly manifested to the glory of God. We cannot help but pray that all our loved ones and friends, and many, many people will respond to the Gospel and receive the Lord Jesus Christ that they might enter into the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 17

Calvary And The Resurrection

We are continuing in our study of events in the Bible. From the heart of the Old Testament comes a passage that describes one of these great events.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors {Isaiah 53}.

This is the prophet's version of that tragic event: the world's darkest hour, eternity's brightest moment – the cruel death of Jesus of Nazareth on Calvary's cross for the sins of the world.

The idea of a substitutionary sacrifice of some innocent living creature on behalf of the sins of man has been pictured in the Old Testament ritual of worship. God was revealed as holy, of purer eyes than to behold evil – the law of God was final. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" , but the love of God found a way!

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor , that ye through his poverty might be rich (II Corinthians 8:9).

On the occasion of the Passover the Hebrews had learned that they could be saved by the blood of the lamb. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13).

When John the Baptist looked on Him as He walked, he said "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

When Peter confessed "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus of Nazareth told His disciples He must be put to death and then rise from the dead.

When the Roman soldiers arrested Him, and Peter wanted to defend Him with his sword, Jesus of Nazareth stopped Peter: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels" (Matthew 26:53)? On another occasion He told His disciples "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to take it again" (John 10:17-18).

The death of Jesus of Nazareth was not an unfortunate or tragic interruption of His work or His career. He said Himself, "To this end came I forth." "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

The Roman empire ruled over the country of Judea at the time of Jesus of Nazareth, but it was their policy to delegate the handling of local affairs over to local courts. Thus the Jews in Jerusalem had their council which controlled the life of the Jews. However, these local courts did not have the power to inflict

capital punishment. Only the Romans had the authority to put a man to death.

The rulers of the Jews wanted Jesus of Nazareth to be put to death. But this would be possible only if He were tried and convicted in a Roman court. Jesus of Nazareth was first brought before the Jewish council and declared guilty of blasphemy; in which case the penalty prescribed in Moses' law was death. But they were not free to carry out this sentence because of Roman rule. They then brought Jesus of Nazareth into the Roman court and accused Him of treason, saying that He claimed to be a king, whereas they had no king but Caesar. Treason was a capital crime; the penalty was death.

Despite false accusations and inhuman treatment, Jesus of Nazareth standing in Pilate's court, answered not a word, at which Pilate marvelled. When the governor asked Him if He was really a King, Jesus of Nazareth replied that He was, but that His kingdom was not of this world. Pilate tried to avoid passing judgment, for he felt in his own heart that this man was not guilty of anything wrong. When he saw that he could not change public opinion, and it looked as though matters would get worse, he yielded to the popular demand of the mob and sentenced Jesus of Nazareth to be crucified. When He had died, Joseph of Arimathea went boldly into the presence of Pilate and requested that he might take the body and bury it in his own tomb.

"Up from the grave He arose – in mighty triumph over His foes" is the way we sing it and when Easter time comes every year, we celebrate it. The Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The record in Scripture is that on the first day of the week, the women found the grave was open and the body was gone. They had come there to embalm Him for the permanent burial. He was gone. They told the disciples. Peter and John came to check and they went into the grave and found this was true. Angels were there to tell the wondering disciples that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead. Later Jesus Himself revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene. You will remember that occasion when she was in the garden and she looked up and not recognizing Him supposed Him to be the gardener and asked where the gardener had put His body that she might carry Him away and how Jesus of Nazareth spoke just one word. He called her by her name, "Miriam," and how she fell at His feet to worship Him. Later that day, He revealed Himself on the way to Emmaus to two of the disheartened disciples. As they were walking along the risen Jesus of Nazareth came to them and said "Why are you so sad?" They asked Him, "Are you a stranger? Don't you know what has been going on around here?" He asked them, "What things?" They told Him of Jesus of Nazareth, the man who went about doing good, and how He had been crucified, and how today the third day when they went to get His body to embalm it, that He was gone. As He was walking along with them, He asked them "Why don't you believe the Old Testament prophecy? How can you be so slow of heart and not believe that, that Christ Himself should suffer and in that suffering He would accomplish the will of God?" As He talked with them, they drew nigh to the place where they lived. He made as though He would have gone further. I have always appreciated this part of the story. They constrained Him by saying "Abide with us for it is toward evening, the day is far spent." And He came in and then sitting at the table, when He broke the bread and blessed it, they recognized Him. Their eyes were opened and they saw it was the Lord. He vanished from their sight.

Immediately the two disciples got up and hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others that Jesus indeed was alive because they had seen Him. While they were speaking He appeared in the Upper Room, and showed to the astonished disciples that He was really alive from the dead. Eight days later He appeared again and convinced the doubting Thomas that the resurrection of His body was really true.

For the space of forty days, He appeared from time to time convincing the disciples that the resurrection was real, showing Himself to be alive by many infallible proofs. It is a very interesting thing that of the four Gospel writers, Luke is generally understood to have been a doctor. It is an interesting thing also that the book of Luke has the most careful story of the virgin birth and the most careful record of the reality of the resurrection. The very two things that you would expect a doctor to have difficulty with, but Luke points these out very clearly and so the whole world is given to know that Jesus of

Nazareth was raised from the dead by the power of God.

Chapter 18

Ascension and Pentecost

In a series of studies in which we are studying the major events of the Bible, why should we now go on to consider the present ministry of Christ? There is a very simple, practical answer. The present ministry of Christ Jesus is being exercised on behalf of believers here in this world. John wrote in his epistle: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). This means to say that right now while the believer is walking in this world, if the believer should stumble into something he should not do or if he should leave undone something he should have done, so that he is guilty of what you would call sin and which he understands is sin, he has an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

This is the simple record in the book of Acts. We shall be considering two closely related events in the first two chapters of the book of Acts. They are so significant that each of them would be worthy of the full time, but we will take them together and note them very carefully. Each of these events involves both earth and heaven. The Old Testament speaks of God as a Person, and records dealings that occurred between the invisible God in heaven and man who was made of the dust of the ground. Not much is recorded which refers to heaven as a place.

In Genesis 5:24 the record is "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." In Deuteronomy 34:6 it is written that when Moses died his body was disposed of by the Lord "but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day." When Elijah was to be taken out of this life the record in II Kings 2:11 is "and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." That is the way it reads. When Elisha and his servant were in what was an apparently hopeless situation, it is written:

And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha (II Kings 6:17).

During His earthly ministry Jesus of Nazareth once manifested His glory to a chosen few of His disciples while on the Mount of Transfiguration. On that occasion Moses and Elijah were seen by Peter, James and John to be in conversation with Jesus of Nazareth.

The event I want to note now is called the Ascension of the Lord Jesus. This event is mentioned in two passages, both written we think by Luke. In Luke chapter 24, verses 50 to 53 and in Acts, chapter 1, verses 9 to 12. Apparently as you read these records, you will see there was not much to be described.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen (Luke 24:50-53).

That is the way the book of Luke closes. You hear about the disciples; you think you understand that. They were human beings here on earth and Jesus of Nazareth was walking with them. You understand that. But now while He blessed them, He was taken up from them into heaven and a cloud took Him out of their sight. They went back to Jerusalem worshipping Him with great joy. That is the story. How was He taken up into heaven? There is no mention of that. When it says "they worshipped Him," they probably fell to their knees. "And returned to Jerusalem with great joy." Why would they have joy? I will tell you one thing I think. He is alive! And they are not through with Him yet.

If all He was going to do was to go to heaven to be with the Father, we could ask this question, why

wait until now, until that particular occasion? Why not go at night? Or why not go when He was invisible? He was not visible to the disciples every moment of those forty days. He appeared and disappeared. On one of those occasions when He disappeared, why didn't He go to heaven then? One thing seems sure. He, the Lord Jesus Christ, wanted them, the disciples, to see Him go! That was the fact of the matter. He wanted them to see Him go.

He made a definite promise that those who accepted Him as Savior and Lord would be with Him in the days to come and the, ascension certifies the reality of heaven.

This event underlines several important facts. I have touched on them back and forth.

Jesus Christ is alive.

Jesus Christ is in heaven.

Heaven is real.

I, as a believer, am supposed to know this and to have it in mind.

Associated with this, only ten days later, was another amazing event: Pentecost. These events happened in this world, but only to certain people, not to everybody, only to believers. There is no report that the disciples reported these events to everybody else. We have no report of that. The ascension occurred in broad daylight, but primarily in the sight of believers. Pentecost was known to the whole city of Jerusalem because of what happened. The story is found in Acts, chapter 1.

We have referred to the ascension as amazing, wonderful; and it was. When the body of Jesus Christ was "taken up" into heaven, there was a promise demonstrated about the future of any believer. I keep going back and forth over this, and I have the same kind of feeling even when I am writing to you as I often have when I am preaching about it, a sort of sense of futility. It seems almost hopeless to tell this to people and have them grasp it, but that is what I need to do. I need to tell you what it is, and God will have to give you the grace to believe it. In Pentecost the event is basically that God came down to earth to dwell in the hearts of believers, and He really does.

After the ascension, the disciples came back to Jerusalem where they waited ten days for the promise of the Father, which was to have the Holy Spirit within them.

It is worthy to notice in passing that these persons who were involved at Pentecost were specially prepared. We should not think this could happen to anyone. Wait a minute! It may be true in one sense that it could happen to anybody, but not anybody as he is, by himself; not in the sense of everybody as a human being. No. Listen to this: those disciples who gathered together on the Day of Pentecost with one mind were first of all converted people, every single one of them. They were convinced people. You know what they were convinced about? They were convinced that Jesus of Nazareth actually rose from the dead. I mean His body was actually, really, corporally, present with them. They could put their fingers into His wounds. They could handle Him and see that a spirit did not have flesh and bones as He had. Mind you, He took fish and ate it before them, so that they would know, as much as any human being could know anything, He was actually, really alive. He did this for the space of forty days "with many infallible proofs."

Then again, they were commissioned people. These people had been told that when they received the promise of the Father they would go to the end of the earth. In the first chapter of The Acts, toward the end of the chapter, you will see these were corrected people. There was something about them not as it should have been, and Peter led them in getting it straightened out. Thus four things were true about these people. They were converted, convinced, commissioned, corrected; and they met "all with one accord in one place."

The simple account that follows should be carefully noted:

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2).

This was not a wind, but the sound "as of a rushing mighty wind."

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them (Acts 2:3).

Not fire, but "like as of fire." We say "fiery tongues." They were probably something like lightning.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4).

That is the language, and that is the record.

This was, of course, known, heard, witnessed by the multitude who were in Jerusalem from many countries. Those people were astonished to hear the disciples speak of the works of God in their own languages, which they could understand.

Some skeptics explain this away even in those days by saying the disciples had been drinking too much wine, but Peter rose up to say that this was not the case. We may note he did not protest against the insult implied in the inference. Humbly, he pointed out:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:16-17).

The event of Pentecost has great importance because in this event, the Holy Spirit of God came to dwell in the hearts of believers. Many various interpretations of Pentecost are given even to this day but it should be remembered that in them all, this is the event that has meaning only for those who believe the Gospel. If any of you should be tempted to discuss this with anybody, ask yourself: Do I believe it? Then let me say to you fairly and truthfully: brother, if you do not believe it, you cannot see it. And if you are reasonably smart, you will keep quiet because what you do not know you cannot talk about intelligently.

May the Lord grant that we will remember the marvelous truth of the reality of heaven as well as earth, the connection between the two, and that the Lord Jesus Christ went from earth to heaven, and that the Holy Spirit came from heaven to earth.

Chapter 19

Present Ministry Of Christ

In a series of studies of the major events of the Bible, why should we now go on to consider the present ministry of Christ? There is a very simple, practical answer. The present ministry of Christ Jesus is being exercised now on behalf of believers here in this world!

John wrote in his epistle:

And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (I John 2:1).

That means to say that right now while the believer is walking in this world, if the believer should fall into something he should not do, or leave undone something he should have done; so that he is guilty of sin he has an Advocate. Right now he has an Advocate. You who are reading these words and thinking about them, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have an Advocate with the Father right now: Jesus Christ the Righteous.

In God's plan of creation as recorded in the Bible and as seen in the creation itself, man is dependent upon help from outside himself. Man, as he is created, needs to be taught so that he can know. A baby is born into this world without knowing anything. There may be inclinations to this or that, but the baby has to learn everything. In fact, it must learn to talk. It must learn the words.

Man needs to be reconciled to God, so that God can deal with him, and so that he can deal with God. He does not know what to do. He needs to be directed in his living if he is walking with God and obeying God so that he may be successful in living to the glory of God.

For this reason, God gave some men special capacities to help others. Such capacities are called "gifts" in the Bible. God gave some believing men gifts to help other believing men. In this way He sent prophets who would teach the Word of God to the people. He sent priests who would guide souls to be reconciled to God. He sent kings who would coordinate the activities of the believer to some desired end.

But the purpose of all such arrangements that we have a record of in the Bible was to prepare the opportunity for His Son in Himself to function in all three aspects:

Christ Jesus is the Prophet presenting the Word of God.

Christ Jesus is the High Priest interceding with God for His people.

Christ Jesus is the King of Kings who will bring all into loving obedience to His heavenly Father.

In the incarnation, the Word of God became flesh.

In the ascension the Son of Man became heaven's High Priest.

In the return of Christ He will come to be King of Kings and Lord of all.

The actual event we will now consider, we call "The Present Ministry of Christ." Are we not considering events in the Scripture, the events of the Bible? Then why bring this in? Because it is an event, a very real event, and it affects people living in this world now.

The disciples saw Christ Jesus "taken up" into heaven. Stephen while living in this world, and standing before the Jewish Council saw Christ Jesus standing at the right hand of God's throne. Saul on the road to Damascus met Christ Jesus in face to face confrontation. But the clearest description of what He is doing now is to be found in the book of Hebrews.

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore. Now of the things which we have spoken

this is the sum: we have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Hebrews 7:24-8:1).

If one wonders why more has not been written to describe exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing now in heaven, one should remember the situation there cannot be described in our earthly terms. Paul wrote of "a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Corinthians 12:3-4). I am inclined to think that that word that is translated "lawful" could well be understood as "possible." Human beings just simply could not describe nor understand what is actually happening now in the presence of God. They do not have adequate language. Even so the Scriptures present much that can help us.

One thing runs through our minds all the time from Scripture. God always has us in mind. When we consider what He said to Jeremiah, we will have to say, He knows us before we were born; He knows us all the way through as we live and He knows what the outcome will be. Job could say "But he knoweth the way I take" (Job 23:10).

I am sure that some of you when you were little children in Sunday School learned the verse: "Thou God seest me." This was the blessed truth for Hagar when she was cast out from her home and was dying from thirst in the desert. There she heard the words "What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad." God always has us in mind.

Another truth is to be felt there. The Lord prays for us. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). Something of what He does for us is to be seen in the way He prayed for Peter.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren (Luke 22:31-32).

What strikes my heart when I read these words is this thought: the Lord Jesus knew what would happen before Peter knew anything about it, and before it ever happened. He told him, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." We are reminded of Job: how Satan had said to God, "If you let me have Job, I will show you that he is just a phony. I will show you that he is just superficial. I will put the test to him and he will cave in." You remember the story the way it worked out. So the Lord was saying to Peter, "Satan would like to have you that he might sift you as wheat." That means that Satan wanted to put Peter in a mill, and shake him down and fan him through with a strong wind to blow the chaff out, so as to separate the wheat from the chaff. Satan wanted to show that Peter in such a test would show up that he was nothing but chaff. This would demonstrate that there was nothing really substantial about Peter.

While I have been thinking through all that with you, I wonder if any of you who are following my comments in reading this have had any such experience. Has it ever been true in your own experience that you have on occasion felt you were being shaken down and being tested in the very most severe fashion, as if to find out whether or not your faith was real. Such can happen because Satan makes a certain insinuation about everyone of you, if you profess to believe in Christ. He will say about you that you have not got it. You do not really believe. You are not strong enough, you are just putting on. You will give in. All this means that Almighty God will permit you on occasion be put to the test. You can always remember that you will never be tested above what you are able to bear.

When that testing time comes, your living Lord, Jesus Christ, in the presence of God knows about it before it comes to pass, and prays for you "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." The turn of thought in that whole account is at the word "but". "But I have prayed for thee." Satan has desired to have you, and using popular language, will try to "show you up." "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." The turn is at the word "but". And it is a real turn around. Not because of Peter, not because Peter

was that good, not because Peter was that strong, not because Peter was that wise, no! But because of the Lord! "I have prayed for you. I will take care of you."

For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15).

He knows! He cares! He watches! He prays for us, for each one, for you, for me. He appears in the presence of God for us offering His blood in expiation of our sins, our blunders, our faults, our wrong doings, and waits before God for His approval and His acceptance that we might be blessed.

The source of true joy and peace and power and strength is the living God, praying for us.

"I have a Savior, He is pleading in glory; and O, that my Savior were your Savior, too."

Chapter 20

The Return Of The Lord

This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

We have been thinking together concerning events in the Bible. This is our last study at this point and we are thinking in terms now of the return of the Lord.

The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this world. Jesus of Nazareth talked about the coming of the Son of Man in connection with His discussion of matters pertaining to the end of this world. There can be no question that He taught that the world will come to an end and the Lord Jesus Christ will return in person. The meaning of this event can be gathered from an overview of what the Bible teaches.

The Bible deals with the relationship between man and God, that is between earth and heaven, between time and eternity. The message is hard to grasp. It is hard to think, to conceive. It is hard to talk about and to report, because it includes both these aspects. The most important aspects are such as are true in heaven, where things are infinite and eternal. We simply do not have the words to describe that. But some things are to be clearly seen. This we will now turn to.

God made man in His own image of the dust of the earth, that man should have fellowship with God. This was not our idea. This is not some good man's notion. This is not some social scientist's program for the betterment of mankind. This is revealed in Scripture that God made man in His own image of the dust of the earth that man should have fellowship with God. If someone were to say "Well, I never thought of that." Then this is a good time to begin thinking on the subject. So far as we are concerned, this is the only world we know. This is the only life we have been in and when we turn to the Bible, we are given to understand that we did not happen here by accident. God created the heavens and the earth, and God made man and intended that man should have fellowship with Him. But God is holy, and "of purer eyes than to behold evil." Man, who was made of dust and free to choose his course, sinned, and thus became unworthy to have such fellowship with God.

But "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Salvation is now possible in Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ. Coming to God through Jesus Christ means death in the natural, and new life in the spiritual. The salvation work of Christ is more than for believers, it means also a great blessing for all creation. And all the way through and in every aspect of this, it is true that the natural must die that the spiritual may live.

Abraham was promised salvation. He did not receive it fully in his time, yet Jesus of Nazareth speaking of Abraham said concerning Himself: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). David was promised that his throne should be forever, and that one of his flesh would sit on it. He that sat on the throne of David would be King of Kings and Lord of Lords forever.

The prophets began to preach the glories of Christ's Kingdom which would one day be manifested and be everlasting. But there was confusion in what the prophets said, confusion in the minds of the readers. Some of the prophets said that Messiah would suffer unto death as we read in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." Others said He would reign in glory as is reported in Isaiah, chapter 11. Some scholars in studying this seeming contradiction where Messiah would both suffer unto death and reign unto glory felt that there would be two Messiahs. There would be one that came to die, the Lamb of God: and there would be one that would come to rule as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

As the end of His earthly ministry drew nigh, Jesus of Nazareth began to teach that He would return.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:3).

In the 24th chapter of Matthew, He added four parables to emphasize this event: the Unfaithful Servant, Ten Virgins, Talents, Sheep and Goats. You will find as you look in Matthew, chapter 24, such words as this:

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh (Matthew 24:44).

On the occasion of His ascension into heaven, the angels gave a clear unmistakable promise:

This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

There is no question about what that means.

Paul in his teaching left no doubt as to what he expected. For instance we read:

For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night (I Thessalonians 5:2).

In that connection when you are reading in I Thessalonians you might look at this passage which is a remarkable passage about this whole matter:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

There is no doubt about it. He is coming again!

The whole world will know. "Every eye shall see Him." Paul wrote to Timothy about the Lord Jesus Christ "at whose coming, at whose appearing, He shall judge the quick and the dead."

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness (II Peter 3:3-11).

This is the way Peter put it. He went on to say:

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (II Peter 3:12- 13).

This is a tremendous line of thought. Anyone of us can humbly bow down our hearts before this truth realizing that there is so much we do not know. We are all aware of the fact that this is one of those aspects of the future which is variously interpreted by various people. The Lord Jesus Himself said about

this: "Take heed that no man deceive you." But despite all the differences of opinion and all of the various points of view, the facts remain bold and clear, He will come here. He is coming to this world. This world will not last forever. We will not last forever either. There is something up in front for believers, those who put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There can be no doubt that so far as the Scriptures are concerned that it is made perfectly clear in the Bible that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back in person.

This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

In the second place, the time of His coming is unknown. The Lord Himself said:

Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come (Matthew 24:42).

And again when the disciples asked him about the time of His return, He told them:

It is not for you to know the times or the seasons (Acts 1:7).

The time of His coming is unknown and Paul tells us further that His coming will be unexpected. In various other parts of Scripture we are told it will be "like a thief in the night."

Also we will have in mind He will come to His own, "in like manner as ye have seen Him go." You might have in mind about the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, it happened from this world. He was standing on the earth in His body when the disciples saw Him and while He was talking with them and was blessing them He was taken up from them. They saw Him go with their own eyes. "In like manner" they are to see Him come makes one think that the people who will come to know it first will be His people. He will be coming to them.

Then again, He will come in glory. We read:

When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that ; believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

The fact is clear that what is ahead is the breaking of the day. It will be the dawn of the eternal presence of God. We are moving from this dark world into the glory of His presence, which will be manifested upon His return.